

Beat: Politics

Europol advances in the EU police cooperation and fight terrorism

Will receive new powers

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USPA NEWS - The EU police agency Europol will be able to step up efforts to fight terrorism, cybercrime and other criminal offences and respond faster, thanks to a deal struck by Parliament and Council on new governance rules endorsed by Civil Liberties Committee MEPs.

The new powers come with strong data protection safeguards and democratic oversight. The deal agreed by Parliament and Council on 26 November and backed by a broad majority of Civil Liberties Committee MEPs on Monday (43 to 5 with 4 abstentions), will enhance Europol's mandate to ensure that it is fully equipped to counter the increase in cross-border crimes and terrorist threats. "The new Europol rules are the best answer that we can give to the terrorist threat. In the last month alone, 446 people have been killed. As lawmakers, we have a responsibility to face up to this challenge and act. We owe it to the citizens and to the victims," said Parliament's lead MEP, the Spanish Augustin Diaz de Mera.

The new EU regulation will make it easier for Europol to set up specialised units to respond immediately to emerging terrorist threats and other forms of serious and organised crime. It also includes clear rules for existing units or centers such as the Internet Referral Unit, which ensures the swift removal of websites praising terrorist acts or encouraging EU citizens to join terrorist organizations, and the European Counter Terrorism Center, which officially starts work on January 1, 2016.

Europol will in some cases be able to exchange information directly with private entities such as firms or NGOs, which should enable it to work faster. For example, it will be able to contact social network service provider Facebook directly to ask it to delete a web page run by ISIS or request details of other pages that might be run by the same user, so as to prevent the spread of terrorist propaganda. In order to avoid information gaps in the fight against organized crime and terrorism, the new rules state that member states should provide Europol with the data necessary to fulfill its objectives.

To this end, Europol should also submit an annual report to the European Parliament, the Council, the Commission and national parliaments on the information provided by individual member states, with a view to encouraging further information sharing. MEPs have ensured that Europol's new powers will go hand in hand with increased data protection safeguards and parliamentary scrutiny. The European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS) will be responsible for monitoring Europol's work and there will be a clear complaints procedure under EU law for citizens.

To ensure democratic control, Europol's work will be overseen by a Joint Parliamentary Scrutiny Group with members from both national parliaments and the European Parliament. Parliaments' negotiators also ensured that all information exchange agreements between Europol and third countries will be assessed within five years after the entry into force of the new regulation, to ensure that they comply with data protection rules and EU standards for policing.

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