

EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT



Ole B. Sørensen
MEMBER OF THE EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT

Strasbourg, 19. April 2004

Dear Colleagues,

As the current rapporteur of the European Parliament on the proposals to introduce biometric identifiers into visas, residence permits and EU-passports (references below) I would like to ask for your help and cooperation in assessing these proposals of the Commission.

When I was appointed rapporteur I drafted a working document (reference below) containing a series of questions to which answers would need to be found to properly evaluate the proposals. After conducting a public hearing and after researching the proposals in more depth my preliminary conclusion is that the proposals raise more questions than answers. Consequently, I presented a draft report (reference below) to the civil liberties committee, stressing that I at present do not have the necessary information to propose adoption of the proposals.

I have realised that - although the decision to introduce biometrics into documents is taken at European level - the information allowing for informed decision-making is not available at European level. I had asked among other questions, how many visas, residence permits and EU-passports are counterfeited and how much the proposed solutions will cost.

Neither the Commission nor the Council seem to possess this information. Only with this information, however, would it be possible to conduct a cost-benefit-analysis of the proposals, to see whether the benefits outweigh the costs. In addition, only in this way could the indispensable proportionality analysis be undertaken.

As a Member of the European Parliament I see it as my responsibility to actively search for the answers to the questions I raised. Without these answers the wide-ranging decision to use biometrics at an unprecedented scale is taken more for "philosophical reasons"¹ than justified by known facts.

I have therefore decided to consult with you, in the hope that I may be able to get the answers to the questions I have raised as well as to ask for more research to be conducted by our own in-house specialised departments.

I would be most grateful to receive from you answers, even if only partial, to the following questions:

¹ As the Commission writes to justify its proposal: "However, Member States have emphasised that they would like to see further enhancement of the security standards of the uniform format for visas and travel documents in general. They have made it clear that they are in favour of including biometric identifiers in the visa and the residence permit for third country nationals in order to establish a more reliable link between holder, passport and visa." (COM(2003)558, p.2)

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- In general, what is your position on the proposals of the Commission, amending Regulation (EC) 1683/95 laying down a uniform format for visas and amending Regulation (EC) 1030/2002 and laying down a uniform format for residence permits for third-country nationals (COM(2003)558), and on standards for security features and biometrics in EU citizens' passports (COM(2004)116)? In addition and since the proposals are linked, how do you see the introduction of the Visa Information System (VIS) (COM (2004)99) ?
- Do you have an indication on how many counterfeited visa documents are intercepted at your border crossings ? What is the percentage of these ? Do you have an indication on how many of the visas issued by your country are counterfeited ? What is the percentage of these ? Do you have any figures as regards passports and residence permits ?
- What does your government estimate that the adoption of these proposals (in particular as regards the uniform format for visas and residence permits and the EU passport) would cost (including the storage medium, the enrolment equipment and verification systems for all national border entry points together with additional staff costs) ?
- Following the first report of the Commission on the application of the European data protection directive - which states that national data protection authorities "are currently under-resourced for their wide range of tasks" and "the supervision of the processing of biometrics will increase their workload" - has the budget of your national authority been increased or will it be so in the future ? (see page 6 of COM(2003)558)

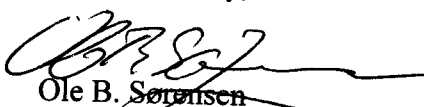
My assistant (Uffe Weest Nielsen: osorensen-assistant@europarl.eu.int), staff from our political group (Anders Rasmussen: arasmussen@europarl.eu.int), staff of the committee secretariat (Katrin Huber: khuber@europarl.eu.int) and myself (osorensen@europarl.eu.int) are available for any questions from your side on this matter.

I understand that it might be difficult to obtain some of the answers from your government. Nevertheless, I am of the opinion that we need this information to fulfil our duty as legislators and politicians and make our own judgement.

In order to allow for a proper assessment of the proposals I have proposed to my colleagues in the European Parliament to postpone the final adoption of Parliament's opinion until after the European elections. The adoption should then take place in the end of September or October.

In order to allow for an evaluation of your answers, I would welcome if you could send me your contributions before 9 July (preferably in either English or French).

Yours sincerely,



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Documentation

My working document can be found in all languages at:

<http://www.europarl.eu.int/meetdocs/committees/libe/20031124/20031124.htm>

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My draft report can be found in all languages at:

<http://www.europarl.eu.int/meetdocs/committees/libe/20040317/LIBE20040317.htm>

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Documents from the public hearing can be found at:

<http://eld.europarl.eu.int/Content/default.asp?pageid=386>

The COM-documents can be found at:

http://www.europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/search/search_lip.html

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