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PRESS RELEASE

Agency for Fundamental Rights should cover EU action on security and justice

The Committee on Civil Liberties wants to extend the competence of the future European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights to the EU's "third pillar" - that is intergovernmental cooperation on policing, justice, immigration and counter-terrorism issues. MEPs also want Parliament's involvement with the new Agency to be strengthened.

This position was adopted as part of a consultative report by Kinga GÁL (EPP-ED, HU) on the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights approved by the committee on Wednesday with 31 votes in favour, 6 against and no abstentions.

As well as fundamental rights issues in the Member States, the agency should also deal with problems in candidate countries and countries with which a Stabilisation and Association Agreement has been concluded, says the report. It adds that duplication of activities with the Council of Europe can be avoided through mechanisms to ensure complementarity and added value. The Member States should nominate national liaison officers to guarantee good cooperation with the agency.

The committee says that Parliament should be consulted on the five year framework for the agency and on the candidates for the post of Director. The MEPs want not only the Council but also Parliament and the European Commission to be able to draw on the technical expertise of the Agency. The Agency will carry out its tasks as laid out in the framework, but it should also respond to requests from the European Parliament, the Council or the Commission, says the report.

The committee adopted 43 compromise amendments based on discussions held so far between the rapporteur, the Commission and Council - contacts which will continue, notably at the end of September. The Finnish presidency, which has a political goal of having the agency up and running by 1 January 2007, will report on the results of the negotiations to the Council at the end of September at ambassador level and to the Justice and Home Affairs Council on 5 and 6 October. If the three institutions can reach agreement on the scope of the agency's activities, the report should be put to the vote at the 11-12 October parliamentary session in Brussels.

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