

Beat: Politics

European Parliament approve new powers for Europol to fight terrorism

Including data protection

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USPA NEWS - The EU police agency Europol will soon be able to step up efforts to fight terrorism, cybercrime and other criminal offences and respond faster to threats, thanks to new governance rules approved by European Parliament on Wednesday.

The new powers come with strong data protection safeguards and democratic oversight tools. The draft rules, agreed by Parliament and Council negotiators in November last year, will strengthen Europol's mandate to ensure that it is fully equipped to counter the rise in cross-border crimes and terrorist threats, in particular by making it easier for it to set up specialised units to respond immediately to emerging threats. The rules will also include clear rules for existing units or centres such as European Counter Terrorism Center, which started work on January 1 this year.

"The new rules for Europol are a powerful legislative tool that will help to enhance security for European citizens," said Parliament's lead MEP Agustín Díaz de Mera, in the debate ahead of the vote. Europol will in some cases be able to exchange information directly with private entities, such as firms or NGOs, so as to work faster. For example, Europol's Internet Referral Unit could contact a social network provider such as Facebook directly to ask that a web page run by ISIS be deleted, thus halting the spread of terrorist propaganda faster.

To avoid information gaps in the fight against organised crime and terrorism, the new rules make it the duty of EU member states to provide Europol with the data it needs. To encourage information sharing, Europol is to report annually to the European Parliament, the Council, Commission and national parliaments on the information provided by individual member states.

MEPs have ensured that Europol's new powers will go hand in hand with stronger data protection safeguards and parliamentary scrutiny. The European Data Protection Supervisor (EDPS) will monitor Europol's work and there will be a clear complaints procedure for citizens under EU law. Europol's work will also be overseen by a Joint Parliamentary Scrutiny Group, with members from both national parliaments and the European Parliament.

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