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European Parliament beefs up border controls

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An improved Schengen Information System should help to step up the EU fight against terrorism, cross-border crime and illegal immigration. This is according to the European Parliament's Civil Liberties Committee, which adopted three regulations to update the Schengen Information System (SIS).

According to the MEPs, all European Union member states should be obliged to swiftly share details of a terrorist act with all other member states. They also agreed on a preventive alert signalling children who are at high risk, for instance from parental abduction. An automatic alert to all national authorities when an entry ban is issued by one member state was also agreed.

“SIS is the biggest, most used, best-implemented database in the area of freedom, security and justice,” said Rapporteur **Carlos Coelho** (EPP, PT). “But we need to prepare it for the future. We want terrorism alerts to be mandatory and supplementary information to be available immediately. We want SIS to help children at risk, namely of parental abduction. We need it to be robust and effective, including at hotspots. SIS can deliver more security to our citizens now, so we also want these changes to be on the ground, at the latest, one year after their approval.”

To help police access SIS information on individual fingerprints found at a crime scene, the MEPs agreed on a new alert system for so-called “unknown wanted persons”. The compulsory sharing of data on fingerprints, palm prints, facial images and DNA with all national law-enforcement authorities was also tabled.

To enforce decisions by a member state on returning an illegally staying non-EU national to his or her country of origin, MEPs also approved an obligation for member states to enter into the SIS all return decisions issued.

Currently, there is no system in place to automatically provide information on return decisions, which are now shared on a voluntary basis.

“In 2016, only 46% of people required to leave the EU were returned to their home countries,” said Rapporteur **Jeroen Lenaers** (EPP, NL). “If we are not able to increase the efficiency with which we are able to enforce returns of persons who do not have the right to stay in the member states, it will be difficult to maintain support among our citizens for the Common European Asylum System.”

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