Mid-term review of the Stockholm Programme

2013/2024(INI) - 02/04/2014 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 367 votes to 85 with 29 abstentions, a resolution on the mid-term review of the Stockholm Programme.

The Stockholm Programme and the Treaty of Lisbon: recalling that the Treaty of Lisbon and the recognition of the legally binding force of the Charter of Fundamental Rights had strengthened the constitutional basis for the EU institutions Members considered that that **opt-outs or special regimes should be removed**. They requested that the Commission and the Council Presidency **better fulfil their obligation to inform Parliament 'immediately and fully at all stages of the procedure' leading to the conclusion of international agreements**. Taking the view that the extension of the use of the ordinary legislative procedure had made law-making more legitimate and brought it closer to the people, Parliament believed that in a future Treaty revision the remaining exceptions to the use of the ordinary legislative procedure should be removed.

With regard to the European elections, Parliament noted that, **even in the absence of an agreement on a uniform electoral procedure for the European Parliament elections**, electoral systems were gradually becoming more similar, in particular as a result of the establishment of political parties and political foundations at EU level. It encouraged more transparent procedures for the nomination of candidates, which guaranteed their independence. It also felt that a reform of the electoral procedure would be required in the future in order to enhance Parliament's legitimacy and effectiveness in accordance with the principles laid down in the Treaties.

Evaluation of the Stockholm Programme and its implementation

With regard to fundamental rights, Parliament recalled the positions adopted by Parliament on the establishment of a new EU rule of law framework to **strengthen the Union's capacity to address the 'Copenhagen dilemma'** – a situation in which the Union set high standards for candidate countries but lacked functional tools for the existing Member States whose aim must be to secure compliance by all Member States with the common values enshrined in Article 2 TEU with a view to continuity of the ' Copenhagen criteria' , as repeatedly requested by Parliament. In an amendment adopted in plenary, Parliament welcomed, in this regard the Commission communication entitled 'A new EU Framework to strengthen the Rule of Law' and looks forward to cooperating with the Commission on the effective implementation of the framework. It stressed, however, that a **regular assessment of Member States' compliance with the fundamental values of the EU** as set out in Article 2 TEU remained necessary and recalled that the FRA, judicial networks and other independent expertise bodies should also contribute to the assessment of threats to the rule of law.

Members also discussed the following: (i) the lack of progress on the implementation of the national Roma integration strategies; (ii) the need for the Council to adopt the proposal for an antidiscrimination directive; (iii) the timely transposition of Directive 2011/99/EU on the European protection order and Directive 2011/36/EU on trafficking in human beings; (iv) more checks and balances be put in place on the protection of data, and action taken in relation to surveillance threatening the internal security of the EU; (v) the need for an accountability mechanism aimed at strengthening the capacity of the EU and of its Member States to prevent, investigate and redress human rights violations at EU level, in particular those committed in the context of the alleged transportation and illegal detention of prisoners in European countries by the CIA; (vi) the accession of the Union to the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

With regard to judicial cooperation in civil and criminal matters, Parliament noted that only three pieces of legislation in this field had been adopted so far, namely the Brussels I recast, the Successions Regulation, and the Rome III Regulation, of which only the third was applicable today. It considered that **mutual recognition required that citizens and legal professionals** trust one another's legal institutions. They stressed the need for the establishment of common standards and an understanding of other legal systems for underpinning mutual recognition and trust but felt that this exchange should not detract from the value of national legal traditions.

Parliament called on the Commission, following repeated requests from Parliament, to issue a proposal – adopting an all-encompassing approach – for a regulation on the mutual recognition of the effects of all civil status documents in the EU, in order to eliminate discriminatory legal and administrative barriers for both male and female citizens and their families who wish to exercise their right to free movement. It reiterated its call for the adoption of a European code of private international law.

The resolution recommended improvements in the **area of procedural rights of suspects and accused persons** in criminal proceedings as well as better implementation of the European Arrest Warrant. It welcomed the proposal for a Council regulation on the establishment of the European Public Prosecutor's Office and on Eurojust.

With regard to **Internal Security Strategy (ISS),** Parliament noted the progress made in the EU in the battle against international organized crime. It stressed, however, that further progress need to be made in the fight against terrorism (violent radicalization) and recalled that Parliament was now a fully fledged institutional actor in the field of security policies and was therefore **entitled to participate actively in determining the features and priorities of the ISS** and in evaluating those instruments and monitoring them.

Noting that the current 'landscape' of the different instruments, channels and tools for European law enforcement information exchange was complicated and scattered, leading to inefficient use of the instruments available, Parliament called for a vision of how to optimise law enforcement data-sharing in the EU. At the same time, it rejected the concept of predictive policing without an initial suspicion, and called on the Commission to repeal the Data Retention Directive.

On the issue of borders and visas, Members firmly rejected all attempts to limit the free movement of people, which were not in line with the acquis. They acknowledged that the Schengen area was unique and took the view that long-term reflection on its further development was necessary. The Schengen external borders should in the future be guarded with the support of **European border guards** whose training includes human rights standards. Parliament welcomed the reform of the mandate of Frontex and the agreement on Eurosur and also welcomed the new rules on the surveillance of sea borders with which saving the lives of migrants as well as respect for the human rights of migrants and asylum-seekers, including the principle of non-refoulement, had also become priorities.

It called on the Commission to further improve existing visa facilitation agreements between the Union and its eastern neighbours.

With regard to **asylum and migration**, Parliament called for greater transparency, requiring each Member State to report annually on the progress of each specific minority group in matters of labour market integration and equality policy impacts. It called particularly for an 'annual trend report' reflecting the comparable indicators on social cohesion, including EU-wide monitoring of the situation of newcomers, long-term residents, naturalised migrants and the children of migrants, so as to measure progress in social inclusion policies over time.

Members regretted the continuing and systematic practice of detaining migrants in **detention centres** . They believed that, in the context of the Dublin system, the possibility of suspending transfers to

Member States under significant pressure should be considered in the future. They expressed deep concern about the fate of third-country nationals and stateless persons readmitted under EU readmission agreements.

On the external dimension of the area of freedom, security and justice, Parliament pointed out that the European Union and the Member States should continue to integrate immigration into development cooperation. It stressed the need to encourage voluntary return policies. It wanted an approach to migration policy that was more based on human rights and recalled the **extraterritorial application** of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Methods, tools and processes: Parliament proposed a systematic, objective and independent ex-post evaluation of legislation and its implementation, which should also assess the continuing need for legislation in this area. Pointing out, in particular, the importance of conducting impact assessments, Parliament welcomed the initiative of the Commission in drawing up the EU Justice Scoreboard. It stressed the need for European judicial culture and EU judicial training for all legal professionals.

Next steps: Parliament was of the opinion that guidance, coherence and benchmarks for the area of freedom, security and justice were necessary and that **such objectives requireda proper programming to be prepared** in the spirit of the Treaty of Lisbon in a joint exercise between the Parliament, the Council and the Commission.