Area of Freedom, Security and Justice: security at meetings of the European Council and other comparable events

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The committee adopted the own-initiative report by Graham WATSON (ELDR, UK) on security at meetings of the European Council and other comparable events. In the wake of the violent anti-globalisation demonstrations that took place at the European Councils of Nice and Gothenburg in 2000 and the G8 Summit in Genoa in 2001, the report made a number of recommendations to improve political dialogue and protection of fundamental rights and to promote efficient cooperation between the Member States. The committee acknowledged the concerns to which globalisation was giving rise in our societies. The EU must address this issue, for example by making globalisation strategy the main topic to be dealt with in the governance debate and making it a priority of EU interinstitutional information strategy. The committee stressed that citizens must enjoy the right to express their opinions freely and to assemble peacefully. However, it condemned the use of violence to express political and other opinions and said that demonstrations must take place in conditions which did not pose a threat to other citizens' security or property. There was a need for dialogue with the organisers of public demonstrations. There was also a need for comprehensive reform of European judicial and police cooperation instruments and a common legal framework to ensure data protection in justice and home affairs. The committee's recommendations included establishing a European concept of "law and order" laying down common criteria for the definition of public order, to avoid inconsistencies. The report also echoed the Council's demand for a common European handbook for police involved in public demonstrations and said that disproportionate use of force must be avoided. The measures taken to ensure law and order must respect fundamental rights as outlined in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights. In this context, the committee urged the Member States to avoid blocking borders or denying the right to cross borders to those seeking to participate peacefully in legitimate demonstrations; to avoid any new kind of blacklist or new specialised database between Member States other than the SIS and SIRENE databases and ensure that the individuals concerned can rectify information where necessary; and to avoid any discrimination between national and European citizens in the event of arrest or trial. Lastly, it called for citizens' rights to safety to be reinforced by effective action at EU level to combat violent groups or criminal organisations which pursue urban violence in EU territory.