

European passport: standards for security features and biometrics elements

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The committee adopted the report by Carlos COELHO (EPP-ED, PT) broadly approving the proposal under the consultation procedure, subject to a number of amendments aimed at clarifying the purpose of the regulation and upholding citizens' privacy and data protection rights. The main amendments were as follows:

- no central database of EU passports and travel documents containing all EU passport-holders' biometric and other data should be set up, as this would violate the purpose and the principle of proportionality and increase the risk of data being used for purposes other than originally envisaged ("function creep");
- it should be clearly stated in the legal text which authorities will have access to the data, namely, the Member State authorities which are competent to read, store, modify and erase data (i.e. passport-issuing authorities) and authorised bodies entitled to read the data (i.e. border-patrolling authorities). To guarantee the necessary transparency, the committee also proposed that each Member State should maintain a register of these authorities and bodies and that the Commission should maintain an updated on-line register. Moreover, the passport-holder should always be entitled to verify the information, and to rectify or erase it where necessary free of charge;
- the purpose of the regulation should also be made more clear in the legal text: the committee specified that biometric features would be incorporated into passports only for the purpose of verifying the authenticity of the document and the identity of the holder;
- as the technical specifications are of crucial importance for data protection, the committee proposed that experts assessing these specifications from a data-protection viewpoint should be able to take part in the work of the technical committee;
- lastly, MEPs wanted the regulation to come into effect only once the national data protection authorities had adequate investigative powers and resources to enforce the 1995 Data Protection Directive in relation to data collected under the regulation. The deadline for implementing the regulation should therefore be extended to 18 months, rather than one year as originally proposed, after the approval of the technical specifications. The rapporteur hoped that the USA would respect this compromise by extending the deadline beyond 26 October 2005 for holding a biometric passport for visa-free travel.