

EU lawmakers agree air passenger data collection

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Travellers wait for security check at the Charles de Gaulle airport on December 31, 2012 in Roissy

European lawmakers approved Wednesday plans to collect EU passenger data, a measure sought by the United States after years of controversy over how to protect personal information while fighting terrorism and serious crime.

The European Parliament's Civil Liberties Commission passed the Passenger Name Record (PNR) system by a narrow 32 votes to 27, after five years of being blocked by lawmakers.

It also includes limits on access and storage to address concerns that [personal data](#) could be used for other purposes.

Conservative British MEP Timothy Kirkhope who steered the text through the commission said that if finalised the deal would ensure the 28-member European Union (EU) had just one system, not a network of national arrangements.

"With one EU-wide system, we can close the net and ensure high standards of data protection and proportionality are applied right across Europe," Kirkhope said in a statement.

The PNR system will apply to international, not internal EU flights.

Use of any information "must be duly justified and the necessary safeguards must be in place in order to ensure the lawfulness of any storage, analysis, transfer and use of PNR data," the statement said.

It said the authorities must "appoint a data protection officer to monitor [data processing](#) and safeguards (and) ... all processing of PNR data would have to be logged or documented."

On the crucial issue of storage, the text limits this to 30 days for an initial period and then five years—but only after all information which could identify a passenger has been "masked out."

After five years, the PNR data has to be permanently deleted unless it is being used for investigation or prosecution.

Kirkhope said Parliament would now open talks with member states to get a final accord by the end of this year.

The 9/11 terror attacks put passenger data high on the agenda, with Washington pushing the EU to adopt a PNR system to tighten up security.

The two agreed on the exchange of data in 2010 which the European Commission, the EU's executive arm, said offered full [data protection](#) but many MEPs were suspicious and repeatedly held up approval.

Revelations of US intelligence snooping boosted such doubts but recent attacks by Islamist radicals in Europe—notably in Paris in January which killed 17 people—have changed the tone.

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