

# Debate on Broadening Prüm Data Exchange Network



Thomas Wahl

News

[Euractiv](#) and [Statewatch](#) reported that MEPs discussed plans to reform police cooperation tools, based on the Prüm legal framework, with independent experts at a meeting on 22 September 2020. A next-generation Prüm (dubbed “Prüm.ng”) is currently being discussed in Council working groups. The aim is to further enhance the information exchange between police authorities, in particular by remedying existing shortcomings and including other forms of data exchange, mainly facial images. Currently, the Prüm decisions allow the exchange of fingerprints, DNA (on a hit/no-hit basis), and vehicle owner registration data (direct access via the [EUCARIS](#) system).

The experts at the EP meeting voiced concern over the extension to facial images. They criticised that the current technology will lead to “false positives” and to biases in algorithms that may entail discriminatory treatment of ethnic minorities; furthermore, uniform standards and transparency are lacking. Many MEPs also took a critical position towards the plans to build up a police facial image database in the EU. They argued that the extension idea is not acceptable as long as problems with the quality of data persist and warned that – given the situation in certain EU countries – the extension may be a playing field for abuses, such as capturing facial images from political opponents. It was advocated that, first, a more in-depth, fact-based assessment of the potential ramifications of the new system should be carried out before going ahead with the expansion concept. Other MEPs were more favourable towards a necessary modernisation of the Prüm framework.

*Background:* Discussions on reform of the Prüm decisions – the major tool for EU police cooperation between national authorities – were triggered by respective [Council conclusions in July 2018](#). They dealt with implementation of the Prüm decisions ten years after their adoption. The conclusions outlined possible future improvements, in particular integrating further data workflows into the Prüm legal framework. The Council was called on to revise Decision 2008/615/JHA and Decision 2008/616/JHA “with a view to broadening the scope of the Decisions and, to that end, to updating the necessary technical and legal requirements.” Europol is also to become a partner in the Prüm network. Subsequently, the Council set up focus groups and discussed possible revisions in the Working Party on Information Exchange and Data Protection (DAPIX). Their work not only deals with the more expansive use of current data categories and the extension to facial recognition technology but also deals with possible use of the network infrastructure for national ID, passport, and other document registers. The focus groups successively presented reports on their discussions of the topics.

Meanwhile, the Commission mandated the consultancy firm [Deloitte](#) with a [feasibility study](#). The [final report](#) – together with an [advanced technical report](#) and a [cost-benefit analysis](#) – was tabled in May 2020. The

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study identified, analysed, and proposed improvement opportunities for the Prüm framework in the following areas:

- Improving automated data exchange;
- Streamlining and improving the efficiency of the follow-up procedure;
- Introducing new data categories;
- Introducing a new IT architecture;
- Exploring the possibility of linking Prüm to other information systems and to interoperability solutions;
- Integrating other stakeholders.

In parallel, the EP LIBE Committee also commissioned a study that assessed future developments regarding Prüm and Directive 2004/82/EC on the collection and transmission of advance passenger information (“API Directive”). The September 2020 [study report](#) – written by *Dr. Niovi Vavoula*, Queen Mary University of London – is more critical than the Deloitte report and provides a series of policy recommendations on implementation of the Prüm Decisions at the national level, possible ways forward with a view to establishing the next-generation Prüm, and the potential for opening up the Prüm framework to the United Kingdom and third countries, particularly the Western Balkans.

NGOs are campaigning for a ban of biometric mass surveillance, such as facial recognition, throughout the EU. Given that biometric processing technologies, which are highly intrusive and rights-violating, are quietly becoming ubiquitous in public spaces, EDRi and other [civil society organisations have called on](#) the European Commission, the European Parliament, and Member States to ensure that such technologies are comprehensively banned in both law and practice. The accompanying [policy paper](#) with detailed explanations was issued on 13 May 2020.

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