Parliamentary questions
14 June 2010

Answer given by Ms Geoghegan-Quinn on behalf of the Commission

1. The mission of HIDE is to set up a platform devoted to ethical and privacy issues of biometrics and personal detection technologies which addresses European and international problems. HIDE elaborates innovative policy solutions for emerging ethical problems in the area of surveillance technologies, especially where collaboration among national and international agencies, communities, businesses, and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) is crucial. HIDE provides a platform for dialogue for stakeholders. The HIDE project started in February 2008 and will end by February 2011. In accordance with its objectives, the project has produced several Ethical Briefs and Policy Forum Reports, on topics such as privacy enhancing technologies(1).

2. HIDE puts a particular focus on biometric identification technologies. The project has regularly produced newsletters with reviews and opinions concerning these technologies(2).

3. The HIDE project, in collaboration with partners from the RISE project (a Seventh Framework Programme (FP7) funded coordination project on biometrics and security ethics with a view to promoting international dialogue on the issue)(3), has produced an authoritative brief on ‘whole body imaging’ technology (‘security scanner’). This brief has been presented at a recent international RISE workshop to the Commissioner responsible for Transport. The workshop took place on 25/26 March 2010. The brief is annexed to this reply, and is sent directly to the Honourable Member and to Parliament’s Secretariat.

The Commission is currently finalising the analysis on the possible introduction of security scanners at EU airports as requested by the Resolution of the European Parliament(4). The Commission considers that security scanners must only be deployed in full compliance with fundamental rights and principles, including health issues, enshrined in European legislation.

4. ‘Biometric Research: Never alone’ is not an organisation. The title refers to an event organised by two partners of the HIDE project, namely: Fraunhofer Institute for Computer Graphics Research IGD, based in Germany, and Sagem Sécurité based in France. The event took place on 25 March 2010 at the premises of the Representation of the State of Hessen of Germany in Brussels. This meeting was organised by these partners to seek potential collaborators for future research projects and to develop new ideas for such research projects. The event is not an event planned under the HIDE project itself and is solely a private initiative of the abovementioned partners. The Commission has no particular view or interpretation of this event. Organisations are free to organise and prepare themselves for any future research in any way they wish. Such events are neither financially supported, nor organised by the Commission.

5. The creation of a network, which includes researchers, companies and NGO’s forms a large part of the workplan of the coordination action HIDE in order to promote dialogue and enable mutual learning among stakeholders. Ethical issues concerning new technologies need to be addressed by all stakeholders. In other words, this is an explicit objective of the project. It is neither an explicit nor a hidden objective to create or extend networks for new potential future research or coordination actions.

(1) The first HIDE periodic report (publishable summary) covering the first 18 months of the project gives a complete overview of all of these activities (http://www.hideproject.org).
(2) More information is available on the website of the project: http://www.hideproject.org
(3) http://www.riseproject.eu/
(4) RSP/2008/2651: Resolution on the impact of aviation security measures and body scanners on human rights, privacy, personal dignity and data protection.