

Interview with António Vitorino: the reforms of the Treaty in the field of home affairs (Lisbon, 24 October 2007)

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[Miriam Mateus] At the Commission, you were responsible for justice and internal affairs. What is going to change in that area with the new Treaty? Do you think that the European Union will have more resources for fighting organised crime as well?

[António Vitorino] I think that there are two substantive changes. The first is greater clarification of the legal bases which the Treaties allow the EU bodies to use in combating terrorism, organised crime, drug trafficking, people trafficking, police cooperation and the development of a common European asylum system, and an immigration policy focusing not only on regulating migration flows but also on integrating immigrants into European host societies. In other words, new, clearer and more precise legal bases that give the EU institutions greater scope for intervention. And also the introduction of the qualified majority principle, i.e. the possibility, in a number of issues, of taking European decisions in this area of justice and internal affairs by qualified majority.

It's true that there are derogations, from which the United Kingdom, in particular, has benefited, such as a right to opt out, giving the system a more variable geometry which is more complex to interpret. However, the essence of the Constitutional Treaty's innovations in this area — which is, moreover, an area that citizens see as a priority, which reflects their concerns, and in which Europe can and should do more — the essence of those changes has been maintained in the Treaty of Lisbon.