

Italian community supports

Social Security Treaty

Italian welfare organisations, known as Patronati, have spoken out strongly in support of a new Social Security Agreement with Italy. The Agreement has been considered by the Joint Standing Committee on Treaties.

The Social Security Agreement will provide welfare protection for people who move between the two countries, benefiting about 41,000 former Italian residents now living in Australia and 15,000 former Australian residents now living in Italy.

The Agreement is expected to facilitate the payment of \$A166m in pension payments from Italy into Australia and \$A48m from Australia into Italy.

Patronati were consulted at key stages during the development of the Agreement and the Director of Co.As.It. (a community based assistance organisation) urged the Treaties Committee to ensure the speedy ratification of the Agreement.

The Treaties Committee has responded by recommending that the Agreement be implemented immediately.

In presenting the Committee's recommendation to Parliament on 5 June 2000, the Committee Chairman, Andrew Thomson (Member for Wentworth, New South Wales), remarked that Agreements like this highlight the importance of treaty making.

"Treaties are not about handing over sovereignty, they are about cooperating with other nations to ensure that the interests of our respective communities are protected and advanced," Mr Thomson said.

Keeping tabs on Australia's spies

Should Australia's spies be less secretive? This is the question being asked by the Joint Parliamentary Committee on the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) in its inquiry into ASIO's public reporting activities.

The Attorney-General has asked the ASIO Committee to look at the nature, scope and appropriateness of the way ASIO reports its activities to the Australian public.

The mission of ASIO is to protect Australia and its people from threats to security. 'Security' includes politically motivated violence, group violence, sabotage, attacks on Australia's defence system, espionage and acts of foreign interference. ASIO itself cannot make arrests, cancel visas or take any other such actions against people, but it provides advice to police and government agencies about people or groups considered to be a threat.

The nature of ASIO's work means that it cannot be fully in the public eye. However, the organisation produces a censored annual report, tabled in Parliament, and a number of public information brochures. Some information on ASIO is also available in the annual report of the Inspector-General of Security and Intelligence, in portfolio budget statements and through the Senate Estimates process.

ASIO files that are more than 30 years old and that have been cleared for release are available at the National Archives of Australia. In addition, ASIO is developing an Internet site.

The ASIO Committee will look at how ASIO's reporting compares to that of other government agencies, and to other intelligence organisations in Australia and overseas. The Committee will look at whether more information should be made available to the public and what form that information could take.

The inquiry arises out of the Committee's review last year of the ASIO Legislation Amendment Bill, in which the Committee noted arguments in some submissions that the Australian public's confidence in ASIO might be enhanced through more open reporting practices.

Submissions to the inquiry are welcome. The Committee is planning public hearings in July and hopes to table its report in the Spring sittings of Parliament.

For more information on the inquiry

Visit : www.apf.gov.au/house/committee/pjcasio

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