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## A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE ON INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM

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Formulating a European perspective on international terrorism in 2010 is a difficult undertaking for various reasons. Initially, simply because – as all surveys illustrate – the citizens of the member states of the European Union don't all perceive terrorism as a threat to the same degree. In states that have been directly affected by the activities of terrorist organizations (such as Spain and the UK), the awareness of public opinion with respect to the threats emanating from international terrorism for these states is far greater than in those states that have so far been unscathed by such attacks, be it due to luck or through the efforts of police and the secret service organizations. Thus the first problem is that terror is not perceived as a threat to the same degree everywhere.

In addition – and this is where the second problem lies – one can only speak of a European perspective on international terrorism with reservations, if you mean by this the perspective of the European Union. To date, the EU has not yet become a uniformly acting player with state or statelike characteristics in the areas of justice and domestic policy as well as the area of foreign and security policy. And this fact is not without consequences for a uniform counter-terrorism policy of the Union. The instruments with which such a policy could be pursued range across all areas of the EU. They concern both domestic and foreign policy and both aspects need to be considered in order to operate a coherent counter-terrorism policy. But since the area of foreign policy and wide swathes of domestic and judicial policy will remain in the hands of the national states for the foreseeable future, the Union will achieve no more than a coordinated counter-terrorism policy at best. It is likely that the national and the European counter-terrorism policies

working alongside and sometimes also against one another will remain a core feature of the European perspective on international terrorism for some time to come.

A third and – in comparison to the first two problems for analyzing European perspectives – far greater problem for the European states is that the terrorist threat to them has changed over time. While it was mainly the activities of Al Qaeda that were perceived as a threat by governments and populations back in 2001, today it is the threat from within, from self-radicalizing young (mostly) men from a Muslim immigrant background as well as from converts. Consequently, the domestic policy perspective of the fight against international terrorism is playing an increasingly larger role than was the case immediately after 2001, when international terrorism was perceived primarily as a challenge for foreign policy.

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Against the background of these three analytical caveats, this article wants to examine the question as to what the European perspective on international terrorism is, which problems the Europeans are encountering in fighting it, and which additional measures the Europeans (meaning the EU) can take to better protect their citizens and fight terrorist groupings more effectively.

## **EUROPEAN COUNTER-TERRORISM MEASURES SINCE 9/11**

Until the devastating attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the efforts by member states to better coordinate counter-terrorism measures only had moderate success. Although agreements were made to improve the exchange of information regarding bank transfers and bank account details, the implementation of the measures was sluggish. Similarly, the introduction of Eurojust, a system to improve extradition procedures and joint criminal prosecutions, in 2001 before the attacks was only implemented sluggishly.<sup>1</sup> It required the external shock for drastic measures to be taken. A central feature in this context is no doubt the European Arrest Warrant, which the EU

1 | Cf. Paul Wilkinson, *International Terrorism: The Changing Threat and the EU's Response* (Paris: 2005).

states agreed on in 2002. This was intended to streamline the procedure for transferring criminals from one member state to another that had previously been complicated, laborious and lengthy. The European Arrest Warrant is based on the simple principle that the EU member states accept each other's jurisdiction. However, it became apparent immediately after the agreement that the ratification process was proving difficult in some member states, because giving up part of what was originally state sovereignty in this area was very difficult to envisage for some member states.

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A second external shock, the attacks in Madrid in March 2004, produced a comprehensive catalog of measures, the Plan of Action to Combat Terrorism. This envisaged that the Union had to intensify its efforts in the fight against terrorism in the following areas:

- creating an international framework for the fight against terrorism;
- denying terrorists access to financial and other economic means;
- improving the capabilities of EU bodies and institutions so that they could make a contribution to the fight against terrorism side by side with the member states;
- paying greater attention to the security of critical infrastructure and transport routes;
- establishing a more effective border regime within the Union;
- improving cross-border civil defense cooperation in order to be able to respond more effectively in the event of possible attacks (especially any involving biological and/or chemical agents);
- enabling partner states to make their own independent contribution to the fight against terrorism, and
- taking comprehensive measures to combat the causes of terrorism.

And a third external shock, the attacks in London (July 2005), resulted in further, even more comprehensive measures in the areas of data retention, improved exchange of secret service information, improved monitoring of charitable organizations that are suspected of funding

terrorist activities. The British EU presidency, under which all these measures were approved, made clear that EU contributions for the fight against terrorism should be used to help strengthen the UN convention on combating terrorism that was approved back in January 2003.

A further central aspect that was pursued under the British presidency in 2005 and whose implementation is still not satisfactory today concerns stronger collaboration and a more intensive exchange of information between the secret service organizations of the member states. Here, the forces within Europe that promote stronger collaboration come up against obstacles, because first of all, secret service organizations fear that other secret service organizations might divulge secrets and that sources might be revealed if information is exchanged between the organizations. For this reason, the existing collaboration between the national secret service organizations and EUROPOL must also be considered rather sluggish and difficult. To find a way out of this malaise, the Union set up a European situation and analysis center (SitCen) at the suggestion of the then High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Javier Solana, that is located at the General Secretariat of the EU Council and whose tasks were outlined as follows by the Federal Minister for European and International Affairs of Austria, Dr Ursula Plassnik, as follows in January 2007:<sup>2</sup>

- "Around the clock" monitoring of crisis regions and
- early detection of potential political or armed conflicts as well as threats and risks emanating from phenomena such as international terrorism and organized crime;
- creation of political-strategic analyses as a basis for decision-making relating to measures by the EU.

In order to improve measures in the area of joint domestic and judicial policy and better coordinate them between EU members, the "Future Group", an informal body set up by the former Federal Minister of the Interior Wolfgang Schäuble and the former Vice President of the European Commission and Commissioner for Justice and Home Affairs Franco Frattini that was to develop ideas for better

2 | Cf. [http://www.parlament.gv.at/PG/DE/XXIII/AB/AB\\_00705/fnameorig\\_081677.html](http://www.parlament.gv.at/PG/DE/XXIII/AB/AB_00705/fnameorig_081677.html) (accessed June 6, 2010)

cooperation in the area of judicial and domestic policy, recommended the following in its final report<sup>3</sup>:

In the area of police cooperation:

- strengthening and improving cooperation between national police authorities by setting up joint police and border defense centers, increased use of joint investigation teams, and simpler procedures and authorizations for the activities of police personnel on the territory of a different member state;
- further strengthening of the European police authority EUROPOL that is to develop into the central technical competence center for all European police authorities;
- intensification of the collection and exchange of information between experts at Europol and national police authorities through a new network of experts;
- centralization of the technical administration and management of databases;
- European standardization of video surveillance techniques, internet telephony and unmanned drones for police use.

In the area of prevention and counter-terrorism (but also organized crime) it recommended:

- the development of further measures against use of the Internet by terrorists and the continued monitoring of the Internet, since it was a place of recruitment and radicalization of future terrorists;
- at the same time more active use of the media and the Internet for de-radicalization, through increased use of counterinformation;
- the introduction of new and more flexible measures for identifying and monitoring terror suspects;
- the setting up of networked national counter-terror centers in all member states, in which police and secret service authorities would collaborate and exchange information, with information that is relevant to the security of all member states being exchanged throughout Europe without jeopardizing the credibility of national security

3 | Cf. Report of the Informal High Level Advisory Group on the Future of European Home Affairs Policy („The Future Group“), Freedom, Security, Privacy – European Home Affairs in an open world, June 2008, accessible at: [www.statewatch.org/news/2008/jul/eu-futures-jha-report.pdf](http://www.statewatch.org/news/2008/jul/eu-futures-jha-report.pdf) (accessed on June 2, 2010).

authorities for the security authorities of other states. The Joint Situation Centre (SitCen) is to play a major or central role in this.

Many of the initiatives mentioned in the report have been adopted by the heads of state or heads of government and embodied in the so-called Stockholm Programme of the EU that is to be implemented by 2014.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, you can see first of all that whenever it is confronted by extreme challenges regarded as equally serious by all (or nearly all) member states in the threat they pose, the Union is capable of taking fundamental measures intended to enhance the security of its population.

One point that needs particular consideration regards the efforts made by the EU since 2001 to enable non-EU states, especially in Africa and in the Arab world, to develop capabilities of fighting terrorism themselves through various aid programs. This is based on the realization that Europe can only remain safe in the long term if progress is made in the fight against terrorism in those regions. The EU cannot intervene in all places where terrorist cells operate in order to combat the danger to Europe "on the ground" so to speak. It therefore needs partners that are in a position to implement this on behalf of the EU.<sup>5</sup>

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However, seen from a perspective of democratic theory, what the Union does by pursuing this policy is to help stabilize the authoritarian regimes in the states neighboring the Union. In view of the explicit policy of the EU to foster the democratization of these states through its neighborhood policy (ENP) as well as its multilateral and regional programs, it seems paradoxical on the face of it that money and political efforts have been expended since 2001 to assist the internal security bodies and security services of these states to crack down more effectively on terrorist organizations in these states, since both the police and the security services in these states are also used

4 | Cf. [http://ec.europa.eu/justice\\_home/news/intro/doc/stockholm\\_program\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/news/intro/doc/stockholm_program_en.pdf) (accessed on June 2, 2010).

5 | Cf. [http://ec.europa.eu/justice\\_home/news/intro/doc/com\\_2005\\_491\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice_home/news/intro/doc/com_2005_491_en.pdf) (accessed on June 2, 2010).

by their respective governments to persecute opposition movements. As far as the foreign policy of the EU is concerned, the balance between security and freedom has without doubt shifted in the direction of security.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the old discussion as to whether foreign relations between the European states and developing countries should be focusing more on the stability of the existing governments or on the gradual democratization of these states has initially placed the aspect of the stabilization of the governments into the foreground.

We have now outlined the three pillars of the European counter-terrorism policy. To summarize, these are: a) improved collaboration of the judicial bodies of the EU members for combating terrorist activities; b) strengthening of partner states in order to facilitate combating terrorists "on the ground" (capacity building), and c) improved cooperation between the secret service organizations.

Since 2009, no further fundamental counter-terrorism measures have been taken, and this is due to two factors.

For one, there have not been any major terrorist activities in Europe since the attacks in London with the result that large parts of the population now have a lower threat perception. With the financial and economic crisis engulfing Europe in 2009, the threat perceptions of

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European societies have undergone a fundamental shift. For large parts of the population, it is no longer external but internal (mostly social and economic) threat scenarios that dominate, and there is consequently little willingness to invest even more money into the combat against terrorism.

Furthermore, the packages of measures put forward by the Brussels bodies were not unproblematic, nor were they uncontroversial. Since 9/11, efforts have been made to increase public safety mainly through the use of mass surveillance systems. In the process, the balance between

6 | Cf. Otto Depenheuer, *Selbstbehauptung des Rechtsstaates* (Paderborn: 2007).

civil rights and public safety has shifted to favor the latter.<sup>7</sup> In spite of this general trend, there are differences to be observed throughout Europe regarding the acceptance of security measures within society. Different perceptions of identical safety measures throw up questions in this context. While measures to obtain personal data are perceived as an unacceptable infringement of civil rights and trigger debates about freedom and security in Germany, a measure as far-reaching as the central population register with extensive information about all citizens could be implemented virtually without objections in Denmark back in 1968. While the terahertz scanner ("nude scanner") created public outrage in Germany and was rejected by the federal government, similar devices have been in use in the Netherlands and in Switzerland for years. The varied response by different European societies to video surveillance matters also illustrates the above-mentioned disparities in a special way. The UK with its liberal tradition has the densest network of surveillance cameras in Europe (approx. 40,000), yet most of British society seems to have come to accept the CCTV systems.<sup>8</sup> By contrast, displeasure about the relatively small number of CCTV cameras is enormous in Greece, a country that had been a dictatorship only a few decades ago. 110 cameras have been destroyed irreparably by activists for instance, which means that the police now only have 88 operable cameras left.<sup>9</sup> These examples indicate that you can already see differences in the acceptance of security measures within

**Currently, the second key objective of European counter-terrorism policy besides measures to improve internal security against possible terrorist activities is to create stability in Afghanistan.**

- 7 | Executive Summary (German version), "Sicherheit und Recht auf Privatsphäre für Bürger im Digitalzeitalter nach den Anschlägen des 11. September: Zukunftsgerichteter Überblick," European Commission, Joint Research Centre. Institute for Prospective and Technological Studies, 2003. Online at: <http://cybersecurity.jrc.ec.europa.eu/docs/LIBE%20STUDY/LIBE-IPTS%20study%20%20executive%20summary%20german%20version.pdf> (accessed March 25, 2009).
- 8 | Leon Hempel and Eric Töpfer, "CCTV in Europe. Final Report. Working Paper 15. On the threshold to urban panopticon. Analysing the employment of CCTV in European cities and assessing the social and political impacts. 2004," online at: [http://www.urbaneye.net/results/ue\\_wp15.pdf](http://www.urbaneye.net/results/ue_wp15.pdf) (accessed March 25, 2009), p. 42.
- 9 | Lin Freestone, *Fine imposed on Greek police for illegal monitoring*, October 10, 2007. Online at: <http://www.cctvcore.co.uk/10-10-2007-fine-imposed-on-greek-police-for-illegal-monitoring.html> (accessed March 25, 2009).



Europe. The measures taken by the EU or coordinated between its member states to date ignore the fact that the question of acceptance or rejection of implemented security measures should not only be regarded and agreed under the aspect of defending against external threats, but should also consider which socio-cultural factors underlie the acceptance or rejection in the different European societies.

Implementing security measures purposefully and with the consent of a democratic public must therefore not only aim at the development and feasibility of measures, but also concentrate on their likelihood of sustained implementation on the basis of widespread public acceptance.

### **THE EXTERNAL DIMENSION OF THE FIGHT AGAINST INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM: AFGHANISTAN**

Currently, the second key objective of European counter-terrorism policy besides measures to improve internal security against possible terrorist activities is to create stability in Afghanistan. The European states are involved in this endeavor primarily via NATO.

The ISAF mission that has been ongoing since 2002 poses a number of serious problems for the European governments whose troops are involved. These problems originate from the operation on the ground as well as from the "home front", namely the eroding political consensus between democratic parties as well as the rejection of the engagement in Afghanistan by broad swathes of public opinion in the European member states.

As regards the problems related to the operation on the ground, three main problems can be identified at this point in time:

- President Karzai's government is suffering from an increasing erosion of legitimacy in the eyes of the Afghans, especially since the election fraud during the presidential elections in August 2009. Corruption and nepotism as well as involvement in criminal networks are proliferating increasingly throughout the country and

are supported or even led by ministers belonging to the government;<sup>10</sup>

- The Taliban, who have to be considered an anti-Karzai and anti-ISAF coalition (in other words you are not dealing with a homogeneous, monolithic adversary), have not been substantially weakened to date, in spite of several changes in strategy by the coalition. In most provinces, the Taliban have enthroned shadow governors, who often have more power over the development in the province than the governors installed by the government in Kabul;<sup>11</sup>
- To date, the international community in Kabul has not succeeded in adjusting or coordinating its various activities better (both in the military and in the civilian area)<sup>12</sup>. This lack of networking of all the instruments of security policy on the ground keeps causing problems of interference and is also the reason why the rebuilding of civilian facilities in Afghanistan is only happening at a sluggish pace.

These problems, which have existed for years and which increasingly impede the success of the mission in Afghanistan, plus the rising number of military casualties from European nations have increased criticism of the engagement in Afghanistan. On the one hand, fundamental differences between the major democratic parties are now becoming apparent in all European countries with respect to the engagement, and on the other hand (no doubt causing the first), there is an erosion of support by public and published opinion. There is probably no European country now in which the majority of the population is still behind the engagement of their armed forces in Afghanistan.<sup>13</sup>

In view of the decreasing approval of the engagement as well as the lack of progress in Afghanistan, the heads of state and heads of government decided at the London

10 | Cf. Gilles Dorronsoro, *Afghanistan: Searching for Political Agreement* (Washington: 2010).

11 | Cf. CJ Radin, "The military strategy in Afghanistan," in: *The Long War Journal*, accessible at: [http://longwarjournal.org/archives/2010/02/the\\_military\\_strateg.php](http://longwarjournal.org/archives/2010/02/the_military_strateg.php) (accessed June 2, 2010).

12 | Cf. John Hillary, "Building a Failed State?", *The Guardian*, February 14, 2008.

13 | An overview of the diverse surveys is provided by: *The Sydney Morning Herald*, September 10, 2009.

conference of January 28, 2010 to agree milestones for the reconstruction in order to successively pass responsibility for the country to the government in Kabul.<sup>14</sup> This Afghanization of the conflict is being interpreted in public as preparation for a gradual military withdrawal (and has also partly been sold as such by the politicians). According to the prevalent interpretation of the outcome of the conference, European states will start withdrawal of the troops stationed there between the end of 2010 and mid-2011.

The London conference being perceived as the beginning of an exit strategy might lead to two developments, neither of which is likely to increase stability in Afghanistan. For one (and there have already been signs of this apparent in March this year<sup>15</sup>), President Karzai might feel forced to submit to an even stronger dependence on criminal and clientelistic networks to secure his survival once troop withdrawals begin, which will do even more to erode the legitimacy of the Kabul government. And secondly, the coalition troops may lose all influence on the construction of civil society in Afghanistan in view of the impending withdrawal.

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In order to prevent such a development and increase the chances for a withdrawal from a reasonably stable Afghanistan, reputable commentators and academics have recently started to advocate that the coalition troops would have to accept the reality of the situation on the ground. According to this, a dual strategy should be pursued that aims a) to weaken the Taliban militarily to the extent that they are prepared b) to enter into political negotiations on the formation of a government of national unity.<sup>16</sup> In spite

14 | Cf. Afghanistan: The London Conference 28 January 2010 Communiqué, accessible at: <http://centralcontent.fco.gov.uk/central-content/afghanistan-hmg/resources/pdf/conference/Communique-final> (accessed May 2, 2010).

15 | Cf. "Anti-US comments by Afghan President Karzai are 'troubling'," *Washington Post*, February 4, 2010.

16 | Cf. the interviews conducted by the Council on Foreign Relations (New York) on the topic: Six Experts on Negotiating with the Taliban, accessible at: [http://www.cfr.org/publication/18893/six\\_experts\\_on\\_negotiating\\_with\\_the\\_taliban.html](http://www.cfr.org/publication/18893/six_experts_on_negotiating_with_the_taliban.html) (accessed June 2, 2010); deliberations by President Obama on the same topic, at: Obama Ponders Outreach to Elements of Taliban, *New York Times*, March 7, 2010.

of all the imponderables that such a strategy entails<sup>17</sup>, this might represent the beginning of a realistic exit strategy for Afghanistan. However, such a strategy would need to have been prepared with the greatest care at the “home front”. Because opening up to the Taliban would make a nonsense of the reasoning that the European governments kept putting forward to legitimize the engagement in Afghanistan, namely to free the Afghans from rule by the Taliban. Such a change in strategy could be argued for by stating that the regional and international reasons for the engagement in Afghanistan were being given greater prominence. Especially the aspects relating to preventing the return of fundamentalist terror groups to Afghanistan and preventing the collapse of Pakistan would be given far greater importance in such a line of reasoning than they had received in the last few years.

**The lack of a sense of threat also has the effect that large parts of the population now perceive the implemented security measures as an unreasonable intrusion into their private lives.**

The fact that a fundamental change in strategy is required is not in question. Because the public in the different European countries will no longer be prepared to accept the presence of its soldiers at the Hindu Kush if there are no obvious successes on the ground and if the blood toll that European armed forces have to pay continues to increase. And in the course of the massive economic and financial crisis that has had Europe firmly in its grip over the last few months, governments will be finding it ever more difficult to legitimize the high cost of the engagement in Afghanistan.<sup>18</sup> It is therefore probably only a matter of time before the first democratic parties will start to distance themselves from this engagement. But should this happen, the troops in Afghanistan would lose the support of society as a whole for their engagement.

17 | Cf. Nile Gardiner, “No Negotiations with the Taliban,” <http://www.heritage.org/Research/Commentary/2009/08/No-Negotiation-with-the-Taliban> (accessed June 2, 2010).

18 | Cf. the soon-to-be-published study of the German Institute for Economic Research that puts the cost of the engagement for Germany alone at approx. EUR 3 billion per year. Cf. [http://www.diw.de/de/diw\\_01.c.356843.de/themen\\_nachrichten/afghanistan\\_einsatz\\_jedes\\_weitere\\_jahr\\_kostet\\_deutschland\\_drei\\_milliarden\\_euro.html](http://www.diw.de/de/diw_01.c.356843.de/themen_nachrichten/afghanistan_einsatz_jedes_weitere_jahr_kostet_deutschland_drei_milliarden_euro.html) (accessed June 2, 2010).

## CONCLUSION

The purpose of this article was to present a European perspective on international terrorism. This perspective was examined under two aspects. On the one hand, under the aspect of the measures taken by European states since 9/11 in the area of homeland security, and on the other hand, focusing on the measures taken in consideration of external security against the risks from terrorism (concentrating on the engagement in Afghanistan).

In both cases (the domestic and the external measures), the EU member states see themselves confronted by the problem of legitimization. The majority of the populations in Europe hardly see any need these days to defend the “freedom of every society to choose its path of development)” (Richard Löwenthal) and to accept restrictions of

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their civil rights to this end. The cause of this development does not, as one might think, lie in the measures taken by the European member states but in their success. The fact that there has not been a major attack on European soil since 2005 has increasingly eroded the perception of threat from terrorist activities aimed at European states. The majority of the citizens of the European Union no longer feel under direct threat from international terrorism.

The lack of a sense of threat also has the effect that large parts of the population now perceive the implemented security measures as an unreasonable intrusion into their private lives. At the same time, the coordination of security measures is coming up against social obstacles within the EU. This is because the push for establishing uniform security standards throughout the EU region is countered by the different socio-cultural and historic circumstances of European societies that promote acceptance of security measures in some cases and rejection in others.

As regards the endeavors of European states to achieve security through external measures (in this instance discussed on the basis of the Afghanistan engagement), a similar picture emerges. The idea that in times of de-territorialized threats European security is also being

defended at the Hindu Kush (to paraphrase the former Defense Minister Peter Struck) is no longer shared by the majority of the populations in view of the lack of a direct threat to the European region (which was not the case immediately after the attacks of September 2001). The greater the number of soldiers from European nations killed in Afghanistan the greater the pressure on governments to withdraw troops from this region. Politicians can and will not resist this pressure, since democratic politics is not characterized by long-term interests and strategies but by short-term voting cycles. But if the aim of European politicians is to withdraw from Afghanistan as soon as possible, a change in strategy will be required soon whose first beginnings were outlined in this article.

However, this change in strategy must go hand in hand with governments remembering their original responsibility that entails exercising political leadership and vying for majorities. Without political leadership, it will not be possible to explain to the population that Europe's security might be illusory and that the terrorist threat is still real, even if there have not been any attacks on European soil since 2005. Because without the population's approval of the partly intrusive measures that were taken by the European states since 2001 security will only remain a chimera, since security ultimately also depends on whether those for whom this security is to be established actually view this security as necessary.

A further point that could not be addressed in this article (because it is still too new to be able to assess its implications for the European perspective on international terrorism) is the current financial and economic crisis. In view of the enormous sums that the European governments have paid, and probably will have to pay for the foreseeable future, to safeguard their economies, to save European states from bankruptcy, and to protect the joint currency against speculation in the financial markets, the possibility cannot be excluded that there will hardly be any funds available for security (be it at home or abroad). However, reductions in these areas, which will most likely gain the approval of the respective populations, could damage security within Europe in the long term. The possibility of new attacks could then not be excluded.