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After the Brussels attacks, urgent need to address security failures and step up counter-terrorism co-operation

Report¹

Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy

Rapporteur: Mr Emanuelis ZINGERIS, Lithuania, Group of the European People's Party

Summary

Following the deadly terrorist attacks in Brussels on 22 March 2016, all Council of Europe member States must urgently draw conclusions and make a realistic assessment of possible security gaps.

The report calls for a number of steps to be taken as a matter of priority, at national, European Union and international levels, to address security shortcomings revealed by the Brussels attacks. These measures should ensure much better co-operation and information sharing between the various security and law-enforcement agencies, an effective prevention of radicalisation and an effective fight against this scourge, in particular by promoting an inclusive, civic and secular education, a better integration of “closed” communities into society so that there are no more “no-go zones” in European cities, and a careful study of best practice of countries with extensive counter-terrorism experience.

1. Reference to committee: Decision of the Bureau, Reference 4190 of 18 April 2016.



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A. Draft resolution²

1. The Parliamentary Assembly is horrified by the terrorist attacks at Zaventem Airport and Maelbeek metro station in Brussels on 22 March 2016 in which 32 people were killed and over 300 were injured, 45 of whom remain in hospital with severe injuries. It deplores the loss of innocent lives and expresses sympathy and solidarity with the families of victims and all those who suffered in these inhumane attacks.
2. The Assembly reiterates its strongest condemnation of terrorism in all forms, and recalls its previous resolutions relating to terrorism, in particular [Resolution 2090 \(2016\)](#) “Combating international terrorism while protecting Council of Europe standards and values” and [Resolution 2091 \(2016\)](#) on foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq. In this context, it notes that the barbaric terrorist entity known as “Daesh” has claimed responsibility for the Brussels bombings.
3. Terrorism feeds itself off hatred and intolerance and aims to destroy our political system and the very foundations of democratic societies. It must be confronted with equal resolve wherever it occurs, whatever reasons are put forward to justify it, and whoever it is directed at. Likewise, our solidarity shall be extended to all victims of terrorist acts, whether they occur in a major European city or elsewhere in Europe or the world.
4. The Assembly regrets that, after each new terrorist attack, State leaders are quick to make solemn statements but are reluctant to learn lessons and to take resolute action. The statements are necessary to reaffirm our values but are not enough to protect them and to guarantee security.
5. All Council of Europe member States must urgently draw conclusions from the tragic events in Brussels, which are also due to failures and shortcomings at national, European Union and international levels.
6. The Assembly recalls its [Resolution 2091 \(2016\)](#) and expresses its concern about the continuing supply of foreign fighters from European countries. It notes that, whereas France, Germany and the United Kingdom reportedly supply the highest numbers, Belgium, Denmark and Sweden have the highest *per capita* figures. It also notes with concern that Belgium has become a hub for jihadist recruiting and a safe haven for terrorist activities, which are often carried out in other countries.
7. Due to lack of political guidance to ensure the necessary co-ordination and co-operation amongst various – and at times competing – security and law-enforcement agencies, certain areas in European towns have become “no-go zones” for the police and a breeding ground for radicalised extremists and terrorists.
8. For too long, officials and politicians in Europe have turned a blind eye to the lack of integration and the growing radicalisation among young people, and have ignored or underestimated the scale of the terrorist threat. We must now urgently make a realistic assessment of possible security gaps. Our States are duty-bound to protect the lives of citizens and the fundamental values of democracy. Our societies must be ready to pay a much higher price for security.
9. In the face of ever-growing international terrorist networks, a co-ordinated pan-European response is needed more than ever. As terrorism is an international phenomenon, counter-terrorism efforts must go beyond European boundaries and involve the third countries ready to co-operate, in particular in neighbouring regions.
10. In the light of the above, the Assembly calls on the relevant authorities of the Council of Europe member and observer States, as well as those whose parliaments enjoy partnership for democracy and observer status, and other neighbouring States to ensure:
 - 10.1. at national level:
 - 10.1.1. the highest possible level of communication, information sharing, mandatory co-ordination and co-operation between various law-enforcement agencies, special services and, where applicable, regional and municipal police, including the sharing of relevant databases;
 - 10.1.2. the implementation of effective measures to prevent and combat radicalisation; in this respect, the Assembly stresses the importance of inclusive, civic and secular education and refers to the specific measures in this field put forward in its [Resolution 2091 \(2016\)](#); it also refers to the Council of Europe Action Plan on the fight against violent extremism and

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 19 April 2016.

radicalisation leading to terrorism, which provides support to member States in the designing of appropriate measures in the public sector, in particular in schools and prisons, and on the Internet;

10.1.3. the integration of various “closed” communities into their local neighbourhood with a view to ensuring that there are no “no-go zones” and ghettos where common rules are inapplicable;

10.1.4. that appropriate means are granted to law-enforcement bodies and security and intelligence services to prevent and fight inflammatory rhetoric and hate speech;

10.1.5. that insignia and symbols of internationally recognised terrorist organisations are forbidden;

10.1.6. a careful study of best practice of countries with extensive counter-terrorism experience, in particular as regards the safety of public buildings and transport infrastructure, as well as cyber-security;

10.2. at international level, enhanced, efficient and timely communication, information sharing, co-ordination and co-operation among the relevant law-enforcement agencies, special services and international mechanisms with a view to controlling and, if appropriate, preventing the travel of individuals suspected of belonging to terrorist networks or being involved in terrorist activity;

10.3. at both national and international levels, the widest possible information and experience sharing on the causes, the contributing factors, the development, the action by law-enforcement agencies in dealing with, and the post-crisis management of terrorist attacks in Europe.

11. At European Union level, the Assembly underlines the need for an ambitious European security strategy, including better exchange of information between intelligence services and a closer co-operation between police and judicial authorities. In this respect, the Assembly:

11.1. welcomes the recent European Parliament approval of the Passenger Name Record (PNR), which it called for in [Resolution 2031 \(2015\)](#) on terrorist attacks in Paris: together for a democratic response, and invites all actors involved to study ways of extending the application of the PNR to countries which are not European Union members;

11.2. calls for a common European intelligence unit.

12. The Assembly recognises that there is currently a lack of co-operation, co-ordination and sharing of best practice among parliamentarians in the oversight of defence and security policy and urges parliaments of member States to consider ways and means of tackling this problem, including the possibility of re-establishing an inter-parliamentary body to fill the void in this field.

13. In addition, the Assembly refers to the proposals contained in its [Resolution 2090 \(2016\)](#) “Combating international terrorism while protecting Council of Europe standards and values” and [Resolution 2091 \(2016\)](#) on foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq, which remain of utmost relevance, and again calls on the relevant authorities of the Council of Europe member and observer States, as well as those whose parliaments enjoy partnership for democracy and observer status, and other neighbouring States, to implement them as a matter of priority.

B. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Emanuelis Zingeris, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. On 22 March 2016, 32 innocent people were killed and around 340 were injured by the brutal terrorist attacks at Zaventem airport and Maelbeek metro station in Brussels, for which the terrorist entity known as “Islamic State” (Daesh) has claimed responsibility. Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel called the attacks “a black moment” for the country and urged his fellow citizens to stay united in their response. The Belgian Government declared three days of national mourning.
2. *Daesh* has a dedicated external operations structure, mainly in Syria and Iraq, which has been planning and carrying out mass-casualty attacks around the world over the past few years. The Brussels attacks followed a shocking wave of attacks in Europe since January 2015. In January, gunmen killed 17 people at the office of *Charlie Hebdo* magazine and at a Jewish supermarket in Paris; on 14 January, an active terrorist cell was eliminated in Verviers (Belgium); in February, two people were shot dead at a synagogue and café in Copenhagen; in August, an attack was prevented on a Thalys high-speed train en route from Amsterdam to Paris; and in November, 130 people were killed and many more were injured in a series of concerted attacks in Paris.
3. Hundreds of people all over the world continue to fall victim to jihadists almost every day. Suicide bombers have killed civilians over the last few months in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Egypt, Iraq, the Ivory Coast, Kuwait, Lebanon, Nigeria, Pakistan, the Russian Federation, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Somalia, Tunisia and Turkey. In Africa, women and children are kidnapped and enslaved.
4. The present report will focus on the most recent attacks in Brussels, not only for the brutal and shocking violence inflicted on innocent people at the heart of Europe, but also because, according to the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (King’s College, London), Belgium accommodates the highest number of foreign fighters and potential terrorists per capita in Europe.
5. The Assembly has dealt with terrorism-related issues on many occasions over the past few years. At the January 2016 part-session, the Assembly debated the issues of Combating international terrorism while protecting Council of Europe standards and values ([Resolution 2090](#)) and Foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq ([Resolution 2091](#)). The proposals contained in those resolutions remain fully relevant today.

2. The facts

6. Belgium has struggled with Islamist groups for years and some 500 of its citizens have been lured into fighting for Daesh in Syria and Iraq. Several towns have housed Islamist cells, the most active being in Brussels, and in particular in Molenbeek, one of the 19 municipalities of Brussels-Capital where several of the bombers and gunmen who targeted Paris in November 2015 had been living. The main suspect, Salah Abdeslam, returned to Belgium the day after the Paris attacks.
7. A number of European governments, France in particular, deployed police and intelligence service resources to Belgium to support the ensuing investigation, which resulted in the arrest of Salah Abdeslam, in Molenbeek, on 18 March 2016, just four days before the Brussels terrorist bombings of 22 March 2016.
8. Salah Abdeslam was able to hide for over four months with the help of a substantial network of criminal friends.
9. According to investigators, the Daesh Belgian cell was preparing further attacks timed for Easter 2016 that were originally intended for France, and decided, after the arrest of Salah Abdeslam, to shift target and attack Brussels instead.
10. Police have conducted several raids across Brussels since the attacks. On 8 April 2016, Mohamed Abrini, the key remaining suspect in November 2015’s Paris terror attacks, was also arrested. Reportedly, Abrini was likely to be the “man in the hat” seen on videos before the blasts in the Brussels airport departure hall. He allegedly participated in both the Paris and Brussels attacks as part of a jihadi network that crossed multiple borders on several occasions.

3. Security failures and calls for better information and intelligence sharing

11. An outpouring of deepest sympathy and condolences to the families of the victims and to the Government of Belgium, as well as to all governments whose citizens were killed in these attacks, came from all around the world. At the same time, many political leaders and citizens alike stressed the need to intensify regional and international efforts to overcome terrorism and violent extremism, and to better share information and intelligence.

12. Several Belgian and international analysts have also pointed to the dysfunction of the Brussels-Capital Region, with its 19 “communes” and 6 police forces. Many have pointed to an alarming lack of political co-ordination, co-operation and control that has resulted in numerous “no-go zones” for law enforcement. Security lapses at Belgium's airports were even identified by European Union inspectors in 2015. Accusations that the Belgian transport minister, Ms Jacqueline Galant, ignored those reports, led to her resignation on 15 April 2016.

13. Ongoing radicalisation and failed integration affects many Council of Europe member States.

14. On 6 April 2016, Belgian Prime Minister Charles Michel acknowledged failures in security over the attacks but dismissed suggestions that Belgium was a “failed State” or that it should reverse the political decentralisation which, according to critics, let the militants evade detection due to poor co-ordination among police forces. He added that Belgium had convicted more than 100 people on terrorism charges in 2015 and prevented major attacks. He also pointed out that Islamist militants succeeded in carrying out attacks in France, the United States, Great Britain, Spain and elsewhere, and said that Belgium had been a pioneer in pushing for greater international co-ordination of intelligence, including the creation of a European investigation agency, a sort of “European CIA”. Few other governments share this idea for the time being, while most back greater co-operation.

15. On 14 April 2016, the European Parliament overwhelmingly backed an EU directive regulating the use of Passenger Name Records (PNR) data in the European Union for the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of terrorist offences and serious crimes. Our Assembly has repeatedly called on our colleagues in the European Parliament to speed up the procedure. The proposal now needs to be formally approved by the European Council and EU member States will have two years to transpose it into their national laws.³

16. In January 2016, the European Counter Terrorism Centre was created within Europol, to improve intelligence exchange within law-enforcement agencies.⁴

17. The Foreign Terrorist Fighter (FTF) programme within INTERPOL also presents an opportunity for countries to share intelligence on the foreign fighter threat.⁵

18. Analysts have also highlighted the urgent need to further integrate the work done by domestic law-enforcement and intelligence agencies with that of their foreign and military intelligence services, to create greater cohesion internally and hopefully better-quality intelligence. A situation such as that in Belgium, where co-ordination is weak, clearly needs improving. Better intelligence sharing is of limited use if insufficient usable intelligence is being produced internally.⁶

19. At Council of Europe level, two major initiatives have been developed in order to step up counter-terrorism co-operation: the drafting of an additional Protocol to the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism aimed at addressing the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters (CETS No. 217), and the adoption of the Action Plan on the fight against violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism, to be implemented in 2015-2017. I refer to the report of Mr Van der Maelen⁷ for more information about these two initiatives which, if properly implemented, may help in addressing at least some causes which led to the Brussels attacks.

3. www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/news-room/20160407IPR21775/Parliament-backs-EU-directive-on-use-of-Passenger-Name-Records-%28PNR%29.

4. <https://www.europol.europa.eu/content/ectc>.

5. www.interpol.int/Crime-areas/Terrorism/Foreign-terrorist-fighters.

6. <http://foreignpolicy.com/2016/04/14/europe-stop-trying-to-mak-brussels-paris-bombings/>.

7. Doc. 13937.

4. Conclusions

20. The bombings in Brussels on 22 March are not the first and, unfortunately, are not likely to be the last terrorist attacks in Europe. It is unacceptable that, after each new attack, State leaders are quick to make solemn statements but are too often reluctant to learn lessons and take resolute action. The statements are necessary to reaffirm our values but are not enough to protect them and to guarantee security.

21. All Council of Europe member States must urgently draw conclusions from the tragic wave of attacks since January 2015 which is a result of many failures in the functioning of police and security forces, in the assessment of terrorist threats, as well as in prevention and integration policies, and in international counter-terrorism co-operation.

22. These problems are, to a varying extent, relevant for many Council of Europe member States. It is essential to be aware of the scale of the threat and to make a realistic assessment of possible security gaps. Our States are duty-bound to protect the lives of citizens and the fundamental values of democracy. Our societies must be ready to pay a much higher price for security.

23. A series of steps must be taken as a matter of priority, both at national and international levels, to address security shortcomings revealed by the tragic wave of attacks since January 2015. Those measures should ensure a much better co-operation and information sharing between various security and law-enforcement agencies, an effective prevention and fight against radicalisation, in particular by promoting inclusive, civic and secular education, a better integration of “closed” communities into society so that there are no more “no go” areas in European cities, and a careful study of best practice of countries with extensive counter-terrorism experience.

24. In the face of vast international terrorist networks, a co-ordinated pan-European response is needed more than ever. As terrorism respects no borders, counter-terrorism efforts must go beyond European boundaries and involve the third countries ready to co-operate, in particular in the neighbouring regions.