

Commission: Counter-Terrorism Agenda

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News

On 9 December 2020, the European Commission published a [Communication on the Counter-Terrorism Agenda of the EU](#). It sets out a four-pillar strategy to anticipate, prevent, protect, and respond to terrorist threats.

(1) *Anticipation of terrorist threats*

The strategy underlines the importance of the following:

- Strategic intelligence;
- Threat assessment;
- Targeted risk assessments;
- Early detection capacities;
- Modern detection technologies and AI solutions;
- Structural integration of foresight in the development of counter-terrorism policies.

To achieve these aims the Commission sets out various key actions to develop and finance measures. Furthermore, Member States are urged to provide the EU Intelligence Analysis Centre (EU INTCEN) with the necessary resources and high-quality input.

(2) *Prevention*

There is a strong need to act in the following areas:

- Countering extremist ideologies online;
- Supporting local actors to build more resilient communities;
- Countering radicalisation in prisons;
- Improving rehabilitation and reintegration of radicalised inmates and terrorist offenders
- Consolidating knowledge and support as regards radicalisation, victims of terrorism, lone actors, etc.

The Commission plans various measures to this end, such as a proposal on a Digital Service Act and setting up an EU Knowledge Hub for the prevention of radicalisation. Member States shall be provided with guidance on best practices, including guidance on foreign terrorist fighters and their family members. In addition, the Commission urges the European Parliament and Council to adopt the pending Regulation addressing the dissemination of terrorist content online.

(3) *Protection*

The Commission outlines the following priorities:

- Protecting the public in public spaces;

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- Supporting cities in their efforts to provide urban security;
- Improving the resilience of critical infrastructure;
- Developing measures to reinforce border security;
- Denying terrorists the means to attack.

To achieve these aims, the Commission sets out, *inter alia*, the following key actions:

- Proposal for a Schengen Strategy in 2021;
- Proposal for an EU Pledge on Urban Security and Resilience in order to prevent and counter radicalisation and to reduce vulnerabilities in public spaces;
- Proposal for measures to enhance the resilience of critical infrastructure;
- Proposal for the revision of the Advance Passenger Information Directive (“API Directive”).

Additionally, EU Member States are urged to take action as follows:

- Swiftly address gaps and shortcomings in the implementation of relevant legislation;
- Ensure systematic checks of all travellers against relevant databases at the external borders;
- Issue alerts in the Schengen Information System (SIS) on suspected foreign terrorist fighters;
- Roll out the fingerprint search functionality in the SIS Automated Fingerprint Identification System;
- Swiftly implement the Entry-Exit System (EES), the European Travel Information Authorisation System (ETIAS), and the European Criminal Records Information System for Third Country Nationals (ECRIS-TCN) and allow for the interoperability of these large-scale IT systems
- Strengthen chemical and bio-security.

(4) *Response to terrorist attacks*

The Commission sees a key role for Europol and its European Counter-Terrorism Centre (ECTC); therefore, the Communication was accompanied by a proposal on the revision of Europol’s mandate (→ separate news item under “Europol”). The Commission further stresses the need to strengthen law enforcement cooperation and information exchange. Improved support for investigations and prosecutions as well as victims of terrorism must be achieved. Hence, the Commission plans various measures, e.g.:

- Revision of the Prüm Decisions;
- Creation of a network of counter-terrorism financial investigators to improve cross-border financial investigations;
- Support for Member States to use battlefield information in order to identify, detect, and prosecute returning foreign terrorists fighters;
- Proposal for a mandate to negotiate a cooperation agreement between the EU and Interpol;
- Enhanced support for victims of terrorism, including through the EU Centre of Expertise for Victims of Terrorism.

The European Parliament and Council are urged to adopt the e-evidence proposals to ensure speedy and reliable access to e-evidence for authorities.

Lastly, the Counter-Terrorism Agenda sets out measures to reinforce international cooperation across all of these four pillars by further strengthening the EU’s external counter-terrorism engagement. The focus is on the Western Balkans, North Africa and the Middle East, the Sahel region, the Horn of Africa, other African countries where terrorist activities are increasing, and on key Asian regions. The Commission and the High

Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy envisage various measures to step up international counter-terrorism cooperation, such as:

- Enhanced cooperation with Western Balkan partners in the area of firearms;
- Negotiation of international agreements with Southern Neighbourhood countries in order to exchange personal data with Europol;
- Reinforced engagement with international organisations;
- Enhanced strategic and operational cooperation with the above-mentioned regions in Africa and Asia.

The European Parliament and Council are urged to authorise the opening of negotiations with Southern Neighbourhood countries to allow cooperation with Eurojust.

To pursue the implementation of the Counter-Terrorism Agenda, the Commission will appoint its own Counter-Terrorism Coordinator. He/she will be mandated with coordination of the various aspects of EU policy and funding in the area of counter-terrorism within the Commission, including cooperation and coordination with the Member States. This coordinator shall collaborate intensively with the Council's EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, with the relevant EU agencies, and with the European Parliament.

The new Counter-Terrorism Agenda was announced as part of the EU's Security Union Strategy, which was presented by the Commission in July 2020 (→ [eucrim 2/2020, 71-72](#)). It brings together existing and new strands of work in a combined approach towards combatting terrorism.

Several NGOs voiced concerns over the new plans (→ [Statewatch website](#)). They criticised that the proposed actions would provoke discrimination, a marginalisation of fundamental rights, and an expansion of surveillance.

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