



## **Speech of Commissioner Avramopoulos: Discussions on fighting terrorism at the informal JHA council in Riga**

Riga, 29 January 2015

**Dimitris Avramopoulos, Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship**  
***Press conference at the informal JHA Ministerial meeting***

The recent terrorist attacks in France have challenged our core values and showed how serious the terrorist threat is to Europe. It is a severe and growing threat.

Europe and the whole world have demonstrated solidarity with the French nation.

We have shown our firm determination to defend our values against hatred, violence and intolerance, and to uphold our ideals of freedom of speech and thought, but also, of tolerance and dialogue.

To strengthen our efforts against terrorism we need, first of all, to strengthen existing instruments.

We already have many important tools in place. Now is the time to strengthen them.

This is why today, together with the EU Ministers, we focussed our discussion on four main areas where we can build on existing actions and measures:

### ***1. Prevention of radicalization***

The Commission will put all its efforts to continue to support Member States in preventing and addressing radicalisation and other forms of extremism.

The Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN) is already very active in this field and its future Centre of Excellence will reinforce the effectiveness of on-going projects and actions. Through the RAN, practitioners at the local level can exchange best practices and improve their response to a common challenge in different contexts.

In addition to EU actions, it is vital that Member States work further at national level to tackle illegal content online.

Last year already, we proposed to establish a forum with key players of the internet industry to discuss the challenges posed by online terrorist propaganda, and already organised a ministerial meeting which brought together EU Member States' Ministers of the Interior and senior representatives of Internet Service Providers. We plan to enhance this existing cooperation with the internet industry and to strengthen the commitment of social media platforms in order to reduce illegal content online.

We are now taking this Forum further, by deepening dialogue with EU institutions, Member States, the internet industry and civil society in order to develop concrete workable solutions.

### ***2. Information sharing***

We have discussed how to increase the efficiency of the Schengen Information System (SIS) and how to reinforce cooperation between Europol and other EU agencies and the bodies in charge of evaluating threats.

In fact today, the Commission has adopted new measures that improve the effectiveness of the Schengen Information System for counter-terrorism purposes.

There is a clear urgency to reinforce initiatives aimed at making relevant information available to all concerned law enforcement bodies.

Different stakeholders will have to play an important role in the implementation of the future European Security Agenda, especially Europol.

That is why we need to make sure that an agency such as Europol receives all necessary information from all Member States to deliver its added value in terms of intelligence and threat assessments.

We also need to consider how to strengthen Europol's intelligence analysis capabilities on terrorism and radicalisation-related threats, and further improving the flow of information and assessments between Member States and EU agencies.

### **3. Identification of travel routes of terrorists**

We have to be more proactive in monitoring suspicious movement across borders and to gather information, with a view to detecting suspects, disrupting networks and undermining terrorist attempts.

We have to be able to anticipate and be preventive.

To this aim an EU Passenger Name Record directive (EU PNR) is necessary to enhance substantially the security of all people living in Europe.

Following the recent tragic events, European citizens are expecting us to move forward on this issue.

Let me underline my willingness to work together with the European Parliament and the Council – headed by the Latvian Presidency now – to formulate a legal instrument that is effective and respects fundamental rights.

We also need to monitor the use and effectiveness of the Schengen Border Code and assess any need for improvement.

As I already mentioned, we have strengthened the Schengen Information System. SIS will now be able to reinforce the efforts of Member States to invalidate personal identification documents of persons who may join terrorist groups outside the European Union.

What we are doing now is developing common risk indicators and criteria for entering relevant alerts in the Schengen Information System (SIS).

### **4. Firearms**

Over the past years, serious efforts have been made by the European Commission and the Member States to curb the use of explosives for terrorist attacks.

But the latest terrorist attacks and plots have shown that the use of firearms, and often very heavy firearms, needs more attention.

We have in place legislation on the illicit manufacturing and trafficking and on legally owned civilian firearms. We are currently reviewing the implementation of this existing legislation on firearms and we intend to submit to the European Parliament and the Council a report on the situation and whether any proposals for legislative or non-legislative actions are needed.

Finally, we must ensure greater exchange of information on firearms between Member States and with Europol, Eurojust and Interpol.

### **Conclusion**

Needless to say, I remain determined to support a strong and united response at EU level against terror threats.

We need a balanced approach between security and openness.

Security is essential for our democratic societies. It is a pre-requisite for our citizens' well-being and a pre-requisite for citizens to enjoy their rights. At the same time, we need to make sure that no community feels excluded from our European society.

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*[Introducing the Ministerial lunch on migration and smuggling]*

As part of my portfolio, this year, I will be presenting a European Agenda on Security in May. In addition to that, we are also working to produce a European Agenda on Migration.

Today's informal Council will also offer a good opportunity to discuss the most recent developments in the area of migration and asylum.

During lunch we will hold an informal exchange of views on the management of migratory flows.

We will assess the current situation and identify how our response to the constantly evolving strategies of smugglers could be improved.

I look forward to hearing Member States' views and expectations as we prepare the forthcoming European Agenda on Migration.

SPEECH/15/3900

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