



**COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION**



Brussels, 17 April 2013
8570/13
(OR. en)
PRESSE 152

Atlas common challenge 2013: "All together to protect you!"

The EU Counter Terrorism coordinator, **Gilles de Kerchove**, made the following statement on the occasion of the Europe-wide anti terrorism exercise taking place in the framework of the Atlas Network.

"I strongly welcome the initiative "Atlas common challenge 2013" that is now underway. This initiative is the largest anti-terrorism simulation exercise to take place in Europe, and is being carried out by the special intervention units of several Member States. The exercise consists of simultaneous simulated terrorist attacks on buildings and various transport services (trains, buses, ships) in nine European countries (Sweden, Ireland, Latvia, Spain, Belgium, Italy, Austria, Slovakia and Romania). A large number of hostages will be taken in the attacks and common rescue activities will be rehearsed.

I have supported the Atlas idea since I came into office in 2007. I have regularly stressed the importance of Atlas in my annual reporting to the Ministers of Justice and Home Affairs and to the European Council. I think this is a key area in which the EU can provide support for operational cooperation between the Member States in facing and reacting to a large scale terrorist attack.

In Europe we continue to face a serious terrorist threat. It remains essential to strengthen our immediate response structures, such as special forces. Practical cooperation, joint exercises and training prove that we are working closely together to better protect EU citizens in case of a terrorist attack.

P R E S S

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I would like to express my full support for the activities of the network and to thank in particular its Presidency, the German GSC 9, for all the work they have done in organising this exercise.

I am confident that the EU will draw definitive lessons from this challenging project."

Background

The Atlas Network is an association consisting of the special police units of the 27 states of the European Union established in each Member State to counter terrorism and criminal acts. The goal of Atlas is to improve cooperation among the police units and to enhance skills by training and exchange of best practices. On a regular basis meetings and joint exercises are conducted among the units.

[Council Decision 2008/617/JHA](#) on the improvement of cooperation between the special intervention units of the EU-MS in crisis situations provides a legal basis for the ATLAS-Network of Special Forces with the ultimate goal of dealing effectively with all possible kinds of specific or large-scale crisis situations involving (with highest likelihood) a criminal offence or resulting from acts of terrorism and requiring special intervention. The Council Decision enables Member States to request the assistance of another member state in such crises.
