

(Traduction de courtoisie)

Dear Mr. President,

The horrific attacks perpetrated in Paris on 13 November rocked France and all of Europe. Today, the threat of terrorism hangs heavy over the continent, as is apparent to us all. Each State is responsible for taking all necessary measures to protect its citizens. But it is also essential that Europe as a whole is fully mobilized.

Let us be under no illusions: by cowardly murdering innocent people, the terrorists seek to attack all Europeans, what we represent, our values, our freedom, democracy, tolerance, the role of women in our societies, the energy of young people - in short, it is an attack on who we are. It is because we represent everything that they are not that the terrorists attacked us in the name of a barbaric and murderous ideology. We must therefore be able to show them that by attacking us, all they achieved was to increase our resolve and the strength of our convictions. And we must show this by taking all necessary measures to effectively and resolutely combat terrorism.

Given its central place in the life of the European Union, the European Parliament naturally has an essential role to play in this regard, to show Europe's ability to face the tragic events which have once again befallen our continent.

In the current context, it is vital that by the end of the year we adopt the text on the creation of an EU Passenger Name Record (PNR). This is an essential tool to ensure that potential terrorists are effectively traced when they travel to or within the EU.

In addition, it is of the utmost importance that the EU PNR system is fully operational and effective. To this end, we must ensure, in particular, the following main points: the obligatory inclusion of inter-European flights, which will help further foil the terrorists' strategies to avoid detection; a period of one year before data is masked, and four years before it is destroyed; and the inclusion in the record of serious national offences (not just transnational offences). These measures are supported by all Member States, who all face the same issues, as it was clearly outlined in the conclusions adopted by the Justice and Home Affairs Council of 20 November 2015.

If we do not include these points in the text, this tool will be devoid of its effective scope, which will weaken our collective ability to prevent further terrorist attacks.

I know that the European Parliament, and in particular the group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats therein, has voiced reservations about the text as regards compliance with fundamental freedoms and personal data protection.

Being of the same political persuasion as yourselves, I fully understand your concerns, which are legitimate, and France is mobilized to ensure the swift adoption of the entire data protection package which is being negotiated.

Within the framework of the PNR, it is therefore important to strike the right balance between operational effectiveness and respect for fundamental freedoms. Solutions have been put forward in recent months to provide the necessary guarantees. They must serve as a foundation in order to quickly reach a compromise. For example, I am thinking of the role which could be given to data protection officers within national units, who will be responsible for collecting and processing PNR data.

I am therefore convinced that with the help of the European Commission, co-legislators can quickly work together to finally reach an agreement on this long-awaited text.

Of course, adopting this text cannot be Europe's only response. Other significant measures must also be quickly adopted, such as revising the Firearms Directive which the Commission has just put forward. Another measure is strengthening the European Union's external borders, which is essential in order to maintain the Schengen area. This essential *acquis* is now under very real threat.

But the prompt adoption of the EU PNR, which has now been under discussion for almost seven years, would be a strong symbolic gesture, showing our joint ability to mobilize as Europeans and to provide the security and protection which our citizens legitimately expect from us.

And in truth, if we cannot do this, there can be no justification in the view of our public opinions. I therefore fear that certain Member States will have no alternative but to use intergovernmental channels. This is not what I want because I have faith in the Community method, but you will agree that protecting citizens must take precedence over these concerns.

So while reiterating France's entire willingness to work towards a balanced compromise which respects each party's position, I would like to request that you work on adopting this essential counter-terrorism text by the end of the year. It is in our collective interest to protect the citizens of Europe whom you represent in the European Parliament and to keep the European project, to which the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats is so deeply attached, on track.

Yours sincerely,

Manuel VALLS