



Remarks of Commissioner Dimitris Avramopoulos at the Press Conference on the Preparation of the 20 November Justice and Home Affairs Council and the Firearms Package

Brussels, 18 November 2015

Ladies and gentlemen, let me once again express my shock, my grief, my abhorrence for the events that have taken place in Paris on Friday.

It is not just France that has been attacked in the core of its values, it is Europe as a whole.

And that is precisely why a united European response is the only way forward.

We decided to speed up things in a matter of days.

Let me also be immediately clear: we are not just reacting to the Paris events.

Our European Agenda on Security, that we adopted already in April, is and remains our basis.

Let me refer to some of the ongoing work on firearms, EU PNR, borders and fighting terrorism.

I want to start by thanking Elzbieta for the excellent cooperation on this file, where I contributed with the security aspects.

It is important for all of us to understand that Elzbieta's package on firearms today needs to be reinforced.

We need more actions to protect our citizens from the harm caused by smuggled Kalashnikovs.

In the coming weeks I will present a Communication, with concrete actions to set out how we will tackle illegal trafficking in firearms and explosives.

This will be on both ongoing and future actions to enhance the fight against illegal trafficking, within the EU and also with third countries.

It will cover issues ranging from the exchange of information to EU operational cooperation and cooperation with third countries, such as the Western Balkans and Middle East.

In the meantime, our EU PNR discussions with European Council and Parliament are ongoing

We are working to reach an agreement before the end of the year.

I am certain that we share with both the European Parliament and the Council the view that we have no time to lose.

There has been a lot of concern around border management and exchange of information.

Let me be crystal clear: we can only have a well-functioning Schengen area of free movement if we have secure external borders.

The Schengen Borders Code already provides all the tools for effective checks at external borders.

Member States must make full use of the Schengen Information System (SIS) to exchange information. They already have to use the Common Risk Indicators concerning Foreign Terrorist Fighters.

We are planning a revision of SIS to facilitate the implementation of travel bans.

I insist: Member States have to put into SIS alerts regarding expulsion, refusal of entry or removal from the territory of a Member State.

As you know, we are now preparing a proposal for a more efficient border management system in the form of a European Border and Coast Guard in December, and a Smart Borders Package in Spring.

On fighting terrorism specifically:

The European Counter Terrorism Centre as part of Europol will launch on 1st of January, and I count on Member States to send their experts in advance so the centre can be operational from day one.

We will also have a proposal for a Directive modifying the existing EU framework on Terrorism by the end of November already.

This will harmonise criminalisation of offences linked to terrorist travel, passive training, financing and facilitation of such travel to address the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters.

We are also finalising our assessment on additional measures that can be taken in combating terrorism financing.

Last but not the least: we cannot only address the symptoms and tools with which terrorists operate. We must annihilate the very reason of their existence.

We must address the root causes of why people radicalise and turn against our societies in the first place – particularly if they are born and bred here.

This is OUR youth that has turned against us.

This is the task of different actors. This is also our task as the European Union, to provide the tools and the right support for all those involved.

The Radicalisation Awareness Network Centre of Excellence is operational since 1 October 2015.

As you have noticed, after the Paris attacks the question of the use of internet for radicalisation is broadly discussed.

This is why I am organising an EU Internet Forum on 3 of December where I am inviting Ministers and CEOs of major Internet companies and other smaller internet actors, to strengthen cooperation between them.

We also have the EU Internet Referral Unit (IRU) in Europol for this, which was designed to reduce the volume of terrorist material online.

Let me conclude with the following thoughts: in times like these, we need to stand with one voice against populism and xenophobia. We must not allow Europe to backtrack.

To those who question our plans to address the refugee crisis I say: it is exactly by fully implementing what we have set out to do –relocation and resettlement, the hotspots, fighting smuggling and improving returns – that we will foster more security, not less.

It is in the organised and planned migration policies such as relocation and resettlement that we have a proper security screening, which doesn't happen if migrants move in a non-organised way.

Let there however be no misunderstanding: those who perpetrated those atrocious crimes in Paris are not refugees. We have a moral and legal duty to protect those in need.

If we start questioning that, if we start fearing the vulnerability of those people, then we give in precisely to the psychosis and hostility that those criminals want to incite. We cannot let this happen.

SPEECH/15/6125