



## Parliamentary Update (SEDE Subcommittee) 29 January 2009

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*Following the meeting of the Subcommittee on Security and Defence (SEDE) on 29 January, this update includes coverage of the exchange of views with the Council on the fight against terrorism. It also includes an exchange of views with Ambassador Ivo Šrámek, Czech Presidency, Chair of the Political and Security Committee (PSC) on recent developments in ESDP and with the European Commission on the Gaza strip and the EU response.*

### Exchange of Views with the Council and Commission on the Fight against Terrorism

Gilles de Kerchove, EU Counter-terrorism Coordinator in the Council, spoke about current Council actions in the fight against terrorism. Existing projects include a joint action with Interpol on stolen or lost passports and a long-term strategy on the collection and sharing of information, where de Kerchove believed the European Parliament could play an increasing role. He further noted that an overall vision and a clear definition of the limits of collecting and sharing information were lacking.

Examining the creation of the Internet portal “Check-the-Web” programme,<sup>1</sup> de Kerchove noted the importance of identifying countries which are willing to show leadership in projects, notably to develop Best Practices and ensure their dissemination among Member States. De Kerchove highlighted the importance of limiting the collection of information to the minimum as Member States are bound to feed the database with relevant information on potential suspects.

The EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy<sup>2</sup> includes four strands of work: (i) to prevent people turning to terrorism by tackling the root causes and factors, both in Europe and internationally; (ii) to protect citizens and infrastructures and reduce the EU’s vulnerability to attack; (iii) to pursue and investigate terrorists with the EU and globally and (iv) to respond to manage and minimise the consequences of a terrorist attacks.

Key geographical priorities are the Sahel belt in Africa and Pakistan. According to de Kerchove, the Sahel is likely to have links with Europe for logistical support, as it remains a central spot for drugs trafficking. As the Council is preparing a document on security and development in the region, security risks in the Sahel also include the Touareg rebellion and the slow rise of a more radical Islam. De Kerchove highlighted the need to help Pakistan as it faces major security problems with an insurgency in the East and continued tension between religious groups. As the EU benefits from a positive image, it can play an important role in Pakistan. The Commission will send a mission to assist with police and judicial training to help prevent radicalisation.

Finally, de Kerchove hoped for an increased cooperation with the US on the closing of Guantanamo and on the acceptance and treatment of detainees between the EU and the new US administration. Referring to

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<sup>1</sup> Initiated by the German Presidency and in cooperation with Europol, the programme aims to share resources and information between Member States about websites that they deem are associated with terrorist threats.

<sup>2</sup> The European Union Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Council of the European Union, 14469/4/05 Rev 4, 30 November 2005

previous ESDP actions in the fight against terrorism<sup>3</sup>, De Kerchove concluded by noting the importance of examining possible future areas for action within ESDP to act more strongly against terrorism.

Prompted by the SEDE Chair, Karl von Wogau (EPP-ED) who expressed concern about attendance to terrorist training camps, de Kerchove confirmed that there is a growing number of people attending such camps but explained it was difficult for police forces to act solely on suspicion of terrorism, as strong evidence is needed against suspects. Furthermore, cooperation between terrorists varies from region to region, but the highest threat to European security is related to Al-Qaeda. In response to MEP Giorgios Dimitrakopoulos' (EPP-ED) questions, de Kerchove expanded on the existence of intense intelligence gathering procedures but noted that information sharing is solely the competency of Member States - as outlined in the Treaty of Lisbon which specifies that Member States are responsible for ensuring national security within their territory. De Kerchove noted the extensive work of the French EU Presidency in the field of cybercrime and pointed to the legislative work in progress to make cybercrime a felony.

Pierre Reuland, Interpol's Special Representative to the EU and Vasileios Theofilopoulos, Specialised Officer Terrorism, Interpol's Public Safety and Terrorism Sub-Directorate, presented the framework for Interpol's work in counter-terrorism. Interpol's anti-terrorism program is designed to (i) increase exchange of information on terrorist groups, their members and activities to provide assistance to countries in the identification of terrorists and dismantling networks; (ii) assist member countries in the event of terrorist incidents or investigations through analytical, investigative and database services; and (iii) support member countries in building early detection and counter-terrorism capacity through training and analytical products.

Reuland began by stressing the importance of reinforcing data protection rights and Theofilopoulos presented Interpol's I-24/7 network, a secure global police communications system and praised its usefulness in collecting, storing, analysing and exchanging information about suspected individuals and terrorist groups between member countries. He further spoke about a number of regionally-focused Task Force Projects, including Project Nexus in Europe, Project Baobab in Africa and Project Middle-East in the Middle-East organised by Interpol as well as regional workshops on relevant themes, including bioterrorism and cybercrime. Interpol has also designed a firearms program, which aims to assist countries in the identification, tracing and ballistic aspects of regulating firearms.

MEP Janusz Onyszkiewicz (ALDE) asked about EU action to counter the fanatic and emotional teaching of some professors in moderate Islamic states, arguing their teaching is often well-received by students, as the professors are highly respected figures. De Kerchove agreed with MEP Philippe Morillon (ALDE) and MEP Ana Maria Gomes (PSE) who expressed concern about the current situation in the Sahel, and asked which type of cooperation would be optimal for the region.

De Kerchove agreed with Gomes on the security implications for Member States of accepting detainees from Guantanamo but argued it was too early to decide on a possible common position. Prompted by MEP Christoph Konrad (EPP-ED) who asked about the involvement of Russia in Afghanistan and the Caucasus, de Kerchove noted that the EU was already cooperating with Russia on drugs trafficking in Afghanistan.

### **Exchange of views with Ambassador Ivo Šrámek, Czech Presidency, Chair of the PSC**

Ambassador Ivo Šrámek spoke about the recent focus of the Committee on events in the Middle-East, exemplifying the visit organised by the Presidency for the Troika in January 2009 to the Gaza strip, Egypt and Jordan, in which the High Representative for the CFSP Javier Solana and External Relations Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner participated. He noted that the EU contribution will notably take the form of humanitarian relief but will have to take into account Israel's security concerns, which is currently impeding

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<sup>3</sup> Conceptual Framework on the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) dimension of the fight against terrorism.

humanitarian convoys from reaching the victims. EU action will also include steps to counter arms trafficking; reconstruction work; efforts towards intra-Palestinian reconciliation and support to the resumption of the peace process. In the short-term, the opening of crossing points remains a major concern and Šrámek called for an immediate opening of the Rafah crossing point, notably due to urgency in delivering aid.

Prompted by Gomes who raised the question of Palestinian security concerns and proper prosecution of war crimes, Šrámek argued that Palestinian security will be ensured once the ceasefire is enforced and the peace process restarted, further noting that the EU will support the full investigation of war crimes on both sides. Prompted by von Wogau, who asked about possible methods to halt arms smuggling through the tunnels, Šrámek responded that the EU is planning on providing Egypt with technology to identify tunnels which are still operating, as the end of such trafficking constitutes one of the main prerequisites for a ceasefire from the Israeli side.

Šrámek also discussed the launch of the EU's first maritime mission, NAVFOR Atalanta off the coast of Somalia, but argued that a long-term solution must be found on-land and not at-sea, highlighting that the internal political situation in Somalia will have to be addressed. However, he deplored that no country or organisation, including the African Union (AU) had demonstrated enthusiasm to undertake a mission in Somalia. Šrámek pointed out that Croatia, Switzerland and Ukraine were also active participants in the mission, as they had expressed their wish to contribute.

Šrámek concluded with Afghanistan, arguing that the central task is the ongoing process of strengthening the mission and improving coordination between relevant actors. The main short-term objective, however, is to prepare the upcoming election and ensure the security of election observers from the EU.

#### **Exchange of views with the Commission on the Gaza Strip and the EU Response**

The Commission spoke about EU action in the Gaza strip, noting the current ceasefire is extremely fragile as reports of rockets still being fired had been received. The EU had established contacts with the foreign ministers of Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Jordan. Furthermore, the Commission deplored the situation on the ground, arguing the conflict impacts women and children disproportionately as basic goods, including water, are not being supplied to the population.

Priorities in the EU Action Plan include: (i) providing immediate humanitarian assistance; (ii) ensuring the continuous opening of crossing points, as they are vital to ensure staff and humanitarian passage as well as supply of goods; (iii) countering smuggling and arms trafficking activities to ensure the security of Israel and (iv) and resumption of the peace process to lead to a vital Palestinian state. The Commission also expressed concern about the lack of cash in the region, as the banking system had collapsed in part due to Israel's action on restraining movements on bank accounts to prevent Hamas from receiving funds. This shortage has also affected EU assistance as the Commission can not carry out transfers to victims of the conflict.

Prompted by von Wogau, the Commission also expressed its wish to resume the EUBAM mission in Rafah as the mission staff is currently on standby, but pointed to the need for a stable security situation before reopening the mission.

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