

EP hearing on the fight against terrorism and the challenges for EU internal security

SESSION III: Policy instruments in the fight against terrorism -are we up to the challenge?

Brussels, 14 April 2015

Dear Mr Chair and Vice Chairs, Members of the European Parliament, dear all,

Allow me first to thank you for the opportunity to address you today. On behalf of EuroCOP, the European Confederation of Police, I am grateful for the invitation to participate in this debate and to share some practical examples of the current challenges European police officers are facing in the fight against terrorism. But, most importantly, I hope to emphasise what Europe's law enforcement officers need most to tackle the new security threats and to guarantee the safety and security of European citizens.

My name is Anna Nellberg-Dennis and I am the President of the European Confederation of Police. EuroCOP represents the interests of almost half a million police officers in 25 EU Member States, dealing with issues which range from police cooperation across borders to a safer working environment for police officers on the street.

Since EuroCOP's creation in 2002 we have been fighting to promote four key goals:

1. Internal Security in Europe
2. Safety for the Police
3. A Social Europe for the Police
4. Solidarity and Network building

As the guardians of safe societies, police officers across Europe put themselves at risk on a daily basis in the course of their duties protecting citizens from threats and preventing crime. As the speakers before me have highlighted, the terrorist attacks earlier this year are a tragic reminder of the changing nature of the security threats facing European countries. Moreover, we are increasingly concerned by rising trend in targeted attacks on police officers in Europe.

It is important to remember that, as we have seen with the incidents earlier this year, it is the police officers on our streets who run towards terrorist attacks when all others are running away. Europe's police officers play a crucial role on the frontline of the fight against



terrorism and it is therefore essential that they are provided with the appropriate support, training and resources needed to carry out their duties.

Police budgets have reached critically low levels during the recent economic crisis and Europe's already overstretched police forces are now facing the overwhelming task of protecting citizens from terrorist organizations and unknown, lone individuals bent on destroying the society and values Europe has built.

In the face of these new challenges, it would be reasonable to expect an adjustment in police budgets to ensure that police officers have the skills and equipment to tackle the fight against terrorism, and yet police budgets have been cut for several years.

So what does this mean in practice? Lower police budgets means that there is less money available for the equipment police officers need. This may result in failure to maintain their current equipment but in the worst cases, uniforms, weapons, ammunition, computers vehicles, even fuel for police fleets can no longer be replaced or supplied. All of these are basic items that are essential before police officers can even begin thinking about combatting the terrorist threat in Europe. But unfortunately, I've seen situations where officers have had to subsidise the cost of their own protective vests - this is not how we keep Europe safe.

Training has also been reduced significantly for police officers despite the need for them to expand their skills to fight new terrorist threats. To protect our police officers on the street, it is vital that they have the skill sets to overcome the security challenges we face in Europe today.

Now I am not here to discuss the different austerity measures in EU Member States but I do want to highlight that these measures not only have an impact on national security but upon the EU's internal security as a whole. Let me give you one example. In Spain, the Guardia Civil will see a 40% cut in trained members of its GEDEX units (Deactivation of Explosives Special Unit). This means that there is less capacity to trace and deactivate explosive devices used by terrorists, such as car bombs, grenade and letter bombs in Spain, one of the gateways to Europe.

As we all know, terrorist threats often do not occur in isolation and crimes do not stop at the borders. While the extent of austerity measures varies widely across the EU, the EU's open borders mean that decreases in one Member State's internal security will have a knock-on effect on the security of the wider region. Although I recognize that budget cuts and austerity measures are national competences, it is important that we review these measures and assess the potential impact on the EU internal security.



Which brings me to another crucial point that I would like to address:

We need to further enhance cross-border police cooperation. What we are currently seeing is that the differences between EU Member State capacity and processes hamper enhanced police cooperation in the EU. For example, in preventing or investigating terrorist incidents, obtaining relevant information from across EU Member States, quickly, and at the time when it is needed is essential. While existing cross-border information exchange is functioning reasonably well, there is still significant room for improvement regarding efficiency, co-ordination and standardisation. Systems should for instance be able to be easily integrated within national processes and IT infrastructures, and the development of existing tools, enhancing their efficiency, should take priority over the development of new tools. Improving cross-border information exchange is not an end in itself. The purpose is to be able to tackle terrorism more efficiently. For this purpose, information sharing has to become quicker and needs to be delivered in a more comprehensive way at the European level.

So how can the EU's policy instruments better support Europe's police officers in the fight against terrorism? Well, as I'm sure my fellow panellists will acknowledge, it is essential for there to be joined up thinking upon Europe's political, law enforcement and legal strategies for tackling counter terrorism. But what I want to highlight most today, from a police officer's perspective, is what Europe's law enforcement officers need most in the fight against terrorism:

- Recognition by EU and national policymakers, that new internal security policy frameworks ensure that police officers are provided with the adequate resources, training and equipment to fight terrorism. Moving Europe closer to a common culture for law enforcement. This should for instance be reflected in the European Agenda on Security and supported by a number of concrete proposed measures or best practices, in areas such as training, information-sharing, implementation of laws etc.

Unfortunately, I am well aware that we can never preclude situations of extreme violence and police officers undertake the risks of their job knowingly. However, it is important to acknowledge the role of the men and women in Europe's police forces who are facing this changing European security environment head on, and ensure that they can face these new challenges cooperatively, successfully and safely.

I close by answering the question raised in the title of this panel – Yes, our police officers ARE up to the challenge of fighting terrorism. We just need our drive and determination to be matched by the resources and political support in order to win this fight.

I would therefore like to thank you very much for your attention and I am looking forward to your questions and/or comments. Thank you!