

# **AN OVERVIEW OF THE COUNTER TERRORISM UNIT ACTIVITIES - January 2004**

## **Introduction**

The fight against terrorism has been given top priority at the highest political levels of the European Union (EU). Globalization and political developments have shown that internationalization of terrorism has increased and is able to endanger the very foundations of world peace. The ruthlessness and conspiracy of terrorist networks combined with their ability to operate across international borders demands a most serious response from law enforcement authorities and a high level of co-operation. Europol's Counter Terrorism Unit is prepared to play a key role within the European Union and focuses on a European view of terrorism which will orientate its services according to the needs of the EU and its Member States, covering operational analysis as well as strategic aspects.

## **Terrorism - current Threats and Tendencies**

The EU and its Member States are affected by internal and external threats. Not in every part of Europe are those threats of the same character or do they reach the same level. However due to the fact that it is possible to travel without border control in large parts of Europe every Member State can be affected by terrorist activities other than attacks.

There are various domestic terrorist groups, mainly characterized by separatist movements which pose an internal threat to some Member States. Such phenomena which have a varying impact on the other Member States can be

found in France, Spain and Northern Ireland.

An increase of the threat caused by Left-wing and Right-wing terrorists and related extremist groups (i.e. Anarchism and crimes in furtherance of animal rights and environmentalism) is, at the moment, rather unlikely. Activities of single persons with corresponding ideologies cannot be discounted. With the dismantling of the Greek left-wing terrorist group "November 17" one of the most active Left-Wing Terrorist Group in Europe has been neutralized in 2002.

International foreign terrorist groups, for the moment mainly Islamic extremist terrorists, pose the external threat for the EU and its Member States. It is not only the Member States that are affected by the current threat from Islamic extremist terrorist groups, mainly linked to al Qaeda, but also European and Western interests outside the EU are targeted by such groups.

Despite military action in Afghanistan and the disruption of a number of Islamic extremist terrorist cells worldwide, al Qaeda and linked organizations remain a dynamic and potent terrorist force. Although al Qaeda has not carried out a terrorist attack within the European Union, it has targeted and attacked European and Western interests abroad.

The changing and evolving nature of terrorism demands a permanent high level of vigilance and alertness within the intelligence and law enforcement community.

## **Europol's Counter Terrorism Efforts**

According to the Convention Europol is also mandated to combat terrorism and illicit trafficking of nuclear materials

and radiological sources as well as arms, ammunition and explosives and crimes related to these phenomena.

To fulfill the tasks as given in the mandate, Europol has combined its activities in a Counter Terrorism Program (CTP) and a Counter Proliferation Program (CPP) and developed supporting programs like the Networking Program, the Preparedness Program and a Training and Education Program.

### **Counter Terrorism Program (CTP)**

To combat terrorism successfully a lot of different measures have to be taken. Europol is focusing on the European picture and is monitoring developments in the mandated areas, is analyzing gathered information from strategic and operational aspects, is undertaking threat and risk assessments and based on their results carrying out awareness activities. If requested Europol will support operational investigations in the Member States by various means.

Some forms of extremism are also covered by the CTP if this extremism has violent tendencies and is targeting European political or economic interests.

### **Counter Proliferation Program (CPP)**

This program covers all forms of illicit trafficking namely nuclear material, strong radiological sources, arms, ammunition and explosives as well as weapons of mass destruction and related precursors.

Also in this mandated area Europol is carrying out the above mentioned activities and is focusing on the European perspective.

### **Networking Program (NP)**

The basis for an efficient co-operation in counter terrorism and other state security areas is reliability and trust amongst the co-operating partners. This program aims to establish regular contacts and a sound relationship with experts in the Counter Terrorism and Counter Proliferation units of the Member States as well as in Third States and International Organizations.

### **Preparedness Program (PP)**

The creation of a Counter Terrorism Task Force as a reaction to the 11 September attacks in the US has shown how difficult it is to respond adequately by a multi lateral and multi agency approach. Europol has learned and will develop a methodology for joint teams and prepare the infrastructure for future task forces.

### **Training and Education Program (TEP)**

To guarantee such an effective response it is not enough to develop a methodology but training has also to be offered to law enforcement and intelligence officers to enable them to work together in a multi cultural environment and to be open to other institutional approaches.

### **Outlook**

Terrorism and in particular Islamic extremist terrorism will remain a major threat to Europe's security for the foreseeable future. But also other forms of terrorism and extremism have to be taken into account and monitored. The same applies to all forms of illicit trafficking. Therefore decision makers on the political level and in law enforcement agencies have to ensure that the counter terrorism

efforts are adequately funded and resourced.

Europol has reacted and enhanced its permanent counter terrorism structure and capabilities. Together with the Member States helpful operational projects are developed and carried out and an accompanying evaluation of the work guarantees a high standard.

This co-operation with and among all competent authorities in the fight against terrorism is seen as the proper and effective answer to the current terrorist threats.