

Terrorism debate: “The threat seems to be increasing in the EU and further afield”

As terrorists continue to strike across the globe, MEPs discussed the best way to tackle the increasing threat. During the debate on Thursday morning speakers stressed the importance of exchanging information as well as the need to strengthen border controls and called on member states to step up collaboration.

Dutch Foreign Minister Bert Koenders, speaking on behalf of the Council, said: “Judging from recent events the terrorist threat seems to be increasing in the European Union, but also in its vicinity and further afield.”

Cooperation

Member states need to work together with each other and countries outside the EU in order to fight terrorism, many speakers stressed.

Koenders said information sharing and operational cooperation were top priorities for the Council and cited the provisional agreement on [passenger name records](#) (PNR) as an example: “The agreement on the European Union PNR directive will support police and intelligence agencies in tracking down possible terrorists and criminals by accessing travel details of passengers.”

Dimitris Avramopoulos, the commissioner for migration and home affairs, said: “[Member states] need to trust each other more, share more information between themselves and also with Europol. The threats we face are common, our approaches to the threats need to be common too. This is not a competition; we reinforce each other if we cooperate.”

Jan Philipp Albrecht (Greens/EFA, Germany) called on member states to take their responsibility: “It was members states who blocked many measures to set common standards in the area of criminal proceedings of cooperation on organised crime and terrorism, especially on information sharing between institutions and authorities of the member states and Europol or other agencies on the European level. And it is still not working.”

This was echoed by Avramopoulos: “On a personal basis I can tell you I’m not happy with the cooperation so far. Unfortunately most of the member states keep the best of the information for themselves.”

Angel Dzhambazki (ECR, Bulgaria) highlighted the role played by countries outside the EU: "Unfortunately terrorist organisations have been underestimated, radicalisation has been underestimated and actually multiculturalism has failed and unfortunately many countries continue with rather reckless policies towards countries such as Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Qatar that sponsor terrorist organisations. It's time to put an end to this."

Migration

The issue of [migration](#) proved a contentious issue during the debate. Over the past year an unprecedented number of migrants made their way to Europe leading many countries to temporarily reintroduce border controls within the Schengen zone. Some fear terrorists could make use of the migration crisis to slip into Europe.

Elissavet Vozemberg-Vrionidi (EPP, Greece) warned against conflating migration with terrorism: "These two phenomena certainly can't be linked."

Steven Woolfe (EFDD, UK) made a distinction between economic migrants and asylum seekers: "The majority of migrants are economic migrants; the vast majority of asylum seekers are genuinely people fleeing terrorism." He also spoke out against having open borders.

Vicky Maeijer (ENF, Netherlands) stressed the importance of border controls:

"If you want to protect Europeans then it's time that we accept that the only solution is to close our national borders and sending back all the so-called asylum seekers."

Lampros Fountoulis, a non-attached member from Greece, said: "European countries allowed terrorism onto the streets of Europe. (...) We are seeing racism and all sorts of other phenomena. We need sensible ways to tackle terrorists."

Need for balanced measures

Although MEPs spoke out in favour of measures to tackle terrorism, several warned these needed to be fair and balanced.

Birgit Sippel (S&D, Germany) said a European-wide definition of terrorist acts and other crime was needed: "Fair procedures must always be guaranteed, so that cases don't fall because of insufficient proof. We need to prevent and prosecute."

Petr Ježek (ALDE, Czech Republic) called for measures to promote our external and internal security, but stressed: "Of course these measures should be effective but not excessive," he said.

Inês Cristina Zuber (GUE/NGL, Portugal) warned that measures adopted to fight terrorism could undermine freedom. "They are part and parcel of militarisation and war which lead to racism and xenophobia," she said, arguing for an end to interference in sovereign states, which she said was one of the causes of terrorism.

Find out more

[Video of the debate](#)

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MEPs debated the increasing threat of terrorism in plenary on 21 January