Opening remarks in the European Parliament by First Vice-President Timmermans on the adoption of the European Agenda on Security

Strasbourg, 28 April 2015

All European citizens should have the right to live their lives in safe, secure and tolerant societies. But we are painfully aware that there are constant and evolving threats to our internal security. The recent terrorist attacks in Brussels, Paris and Copenhagen shocked us all. Europeans were united in their response to terror: we will fight terrorism jointly and we will stand firm in defending European values, freedoms and the rule of law.

Instability in Europe's neighbourhood, and radicalisation in our societies at home, mean that the terrorist threat is real and present.

Organized crime groups continue their illicit activities and will find ways to exploit evolving technologies, changes in the economy and societal developments to make money by robbing law-abiding communities – by the trafficking of people, drugs or firearms, or facilitating illegal migration or any number of cross-border criminal activities.

The internet and e-commerce offer huge advantages for Europeans as individuals and for our companies, but is also a new playground for cybercriminals.

And these criminal activities increasingly feed each other – a terrorist cyber-attack on critical infrastructure, firearms trafficking that provides weapons for criminals, drugs money that ends up financing terrorism. Dirty money is the fuel that keeps all these criminal activities going.

These criminal and terrorist networks also operate very effectively across borders. So whilst national security remains primarily a matter for Member States, there is clear added value in European cooperation to address the nexus between these criminal activities.

Today we present a European Security Agenda, which updates and renews the former Internal Security Strategy. And I call on this House and on Member States to sign up to it and share it as our Agenda for working better together on security. Because in this area no single European country is able to effectively tackle the challenges on its own.

Over the past decade the EU (with the help of this House) has put in place a European security framework: for information exchange, for operational cooperation, for pooling of knowledge and expertise, for better coordination including via European agencies such as Europol and Eurojust. A framework that complements and enhances the essential work that national authorities do every day, and helps them to be more effective in fighting cross-border crime and terrorism.

There have been numerous success stories. In 2014, operation Archimedes brought thousands of police officers from several Member States together in a joint one-week exercise which delivered impressive results: 1150 criminals arrested, out of them 90 human traffickers and 170 facilitators to illegal immigration, 1 million euros in cash seized, and tons of various types of drugs seized. This is just one example of what can be achieved when law enforcement follows a multi-disciplinary and multi-national approach.

But our analysis suggests that Member States are still underusing this framework for coordination, information exchange and cooperation. There is still mistrust and reticence to cooperate even more closely by using the tools in place to the full. We need to change the culture and modus operandi of our law enforcement community.

So the most important message of the Agenda is that together, we need to make an effort to be more effective in providing security to our citizens. The Lisbon Treaty has given us the right basis, bringing this area to the normal Treaty structure and giving this House the responsibility – which you are effectively seizing – to co-decide legislation and exercise democratic scrutiny in this area.

Working better together means also in full compliance with fundamental rights, and respecting the principles of necessity and proportionality.

Our Agenda is very concrete and detailed on what needs to be done. As this House has suggested in its resolution of the future Internal Security Strategy, the focus is on the better use or sharpening of the existing instruments before proposing new ones.
First, we have a number of ongoing legislative proposals that need to be agreed by the co-legislators as soon as possible – the reform of Europol, Eurojust, Cepol; as well as data protection reform and without forgetting EU PNR and PNR sharing agreements with third countries.

Second, we have identified a number of legislative instruments that need to be reviewed. Our 2008 terrorism framework decision which currently does not cover foreign fighters. Our firearms directive which the ongoing evaluation shows is clearly not stringent enough – it is unacceptable that a Kalashnikov can be bought easily on the internet. We also need to update our main legal tool in fighting fraud and counterfeiting non-cash means of payment, which dates back to 2001, to today's reality in financial payments, virtual money included.

If we want to be ahead of fast-evolving environmental crimes we will need to have a fresh look at the legislative framework on sanctions. The exploratory work as requested by co-legislators on the non-conviction based confiscation of criminal acquired property will also continue. The existing criminal records sharing data base needs to be improved to also cover third country nationals who have committed crime in Europe.

Third, the Agenda will require extra effort from the full national and European law enforcement community to transform it into operational reality. We need more sharing of data; effective operational cooperation; additional trust-building measures. In particular we should develop judicial cooperation to complement law enforcement cooperation. The existing European agencies need to be sufficiently equipped and work together more closely. The Commission will align the available financial resources to the priorities of the Agenda.

Whilst this framework is of course suited to tackling all sorts of threats to internal security, given today's challenges we need to focus our attention on the three challenges I have mentioned – terrorism, organised crime and cybercrime. The challenges are not new, but they have become more varied and complex. We need to do better. Our existing law enforcement tools and cooperation methods are not sufficient. We need to do better.

Both the European Parliament and the national parliaments will be part of the monitoring process of the implementation of the Agenda. We are proposing a twice yearly discussion with this House on the implementation of the Agenda. Such a regular joint stock-taking will allow us to be more forward looking and easily adaptable to evolving situations.

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