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'The role of the EU in dealing with the multi-faceted phenomenon of radicalization and terrorism'

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Terrorism and radicalization rank high on the political agenda of the European Union. The Dutch EU-Presidency hosted a high-level international conference on fighting ISIS in the beginning of January 2016, underlining the importance of a joint EU-approach towards foreign fighters and other terrorism-related topics. The question however remains what exactly the role of the European Union could and should be in dealing with the multi-faceted phenomenon of radicalization and terrorism.

There is a multitude of players within the EU fighting terrorism. They all do so with their own mandate, priorities, powers, tasks and roles. The common thread is that the mandates of the various European organisations, agencies or institutions that fight terrorism, as well as those of the European Counter Terrorism Coordinator, are of a supportive nature. They are there to support member states in their fight against terrorism.

This quote is part of a letter of the Dutch government send to Parliament after the terrorist attacks on Paris of 13 November 2015. In this letter, the government explains the role of European institutions in the fight against terrorism – which has become some kind of ritual after serious terrorist attacks within the European Union. The same holds for raising the question whether or not the European Union should do more, have more powers, more responsibilities, more money, more instruments, *et cetera*. This reaction to attacks like the ones in Paris is understandable. Terrorism is a cross-national if not truly global phenomenon that does not stop at the external border of the EU let alone at the borders between EU member states as a number of recent attacks have clearly shown. This requires cross-border cooperation and the European Union is the logical political entity that can help foster such cooperation. At the same time, there is a risk in calling upon the EU to deal with the current terrorist threat. Quite often, calls upon ‘Brussels’ to do more are based on the idea that the EU would be in a better position to deal with terrorism than individual member states and that the ‘Europeanization’ of the fight against terrorism would lead to more effective counterterrorism policies. This assumption is not based on any evidence. In fact, it seems highly unlikely that a ‘Europeanization’ of counterterrorism will make Europeans more safe from terrorism.

Against this backdrop, the Dutch government would do well to remain firm to its own analysis that various European institutions and the EU are there “to support member states in their fight against terrorism” during its chairmanship of the EU. Hence, its main task in the domain of counterterrorism will be to manage expectations regarding the role of ‘Europe’ or a ‘Europeanization’ of CT policies. To that end, it should list what types of counterterrorism

policies fit best at what level and explain that the EU's main contribution to the fight against terrorism is in facilitating initiatives that help institutions and practitioners at the national and local level. Moreover, the Dutch EU Chairmanship should encounter new European plans and ideas with caution and focus on making better use of existing European structures and institutions that have been developed in the past 15 years, and on improving the implementation of current policies and initiatives. Sometimes, indeed less is more. At the same time, the Dutch Chairmanship should stress the fact that EU member states differ in the way they deal with terrorism and the fact that not all EU member states face the same terrorist threat or at the same level. This means a *one-size-fits-all-approach* is out of the question. It also means that the Dutch Chairmanship will be confronted with the difficult task to manage a 'Europa à la carte' approach.

In this chapter we will focus on five factors that explain the need for a pragmatic, modest and tailor-made approach to counterterrorism at the European level. These factors are: the dynamics of intelligence and security services; the relationship between these services and law enforcement; the convergence of internal and external security; the fragmentation of counterterrorism policies; and the diversity of the terrorist threat in Europe and the different national contexts. These factors are not new; they reflect long-standing contradictions and deficiencies in the EU counterterrorist approach partly related to the undetermined 'end-state' of the European project and partly related to the political sensitivity of security policies. They however also reflect the tension between the administrative-political logic and dynamics of the European Union and the 'logic of practicality' of security professionals.