

## United Press International

### Analysis: EU chiefs step up terror fight

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BRUSSELS, Belgium, March 25 (UPI) -- Two weeks after almost 200 commuters were killed in central Madrid, European Union leaders made good on their promise to get tough on terrorism Thursday, adopting a raft of measures aimed at stamping out what European Commission President Romano Prodi described as "the greatest threat to the free world since World War II."

At a summit in Brussels that was originally meant to focus on kick-starting Europe's sickly economy, the fight against militants took center stage as EU leaders attempted to forge a common European response to the Madrid bombings.

"The callous and cowardly attacks served as a terrible reminder of the threat posed by terrorism to our society," they said in a statement. "Acts of terrorism are attacks against the values on which the Union is founded."

A year ago, EU leaders were bitterly divided over whether to support the U.S. invasion of Iraq. On Thursday, they put on an uncharacteristic show of unity in a bid to show the rest of the world that Europeans may have had doubts about the Gulf war, but they stand firm in the fight against militants.

"The threat of terrorism affects us all," the

25 leaders said in a joint declaration. "There will be no weakness or compromise of any kind when dealing with terrorists."

Clearly stung by recent U.S. criticism that Europe is soft on terror, EU foreign policy chief Javier Solana wrote in the Financial Times, "Those who detect a new climate of appeasement in Europe towards terrorism are wrong."

As if to prove his point, EU leaders rubber-stamped a package of 57 measures Thursday in the bloc's most robust and far-reaching overhaul of its security policies since the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks against the United States.

The most innovative decision is the appointment of Dutch Liberal Gijs de Vries as the EU's first anti-terror tsar. The 48-year-old parliamentarian appears ideally placed to coordinate the Union's anti-militant activities and to build bridges with the United States. Born in New York, De Vries is a former deputy interior minister of the Netherlands and the country's representative on the body that helped draw up the draft EU constitution.

However, not everyone is happy about creating a new layer of bureaucracy. "The impression I have is one of disorder," said Claude Moniquet, head of the Brussels-based **European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center**. "We risk having yet another body without clearly established powers, and which won't have an international European framework to act in. And that will be a waste of time and money."

One measure agreed to by EU leaders that needs no extra layer of bureaucracy but profoundly changes the bloc's defense commitments is a "solidarity clause" requiring member states to come to each other's aid in the event of an attack. Modeled on Article 5 of NATO's treaty, the clause represents a further step towards a common EU defense policy and has deep implications for neutral countries like

Ireland, Sweden and Austria.

Although EU heads of state stopped short of calling for the creation of a European CIA, as mooted by Belgium and Austria, they adopted a series of measures aimed at boosting intelligence sharing between the 25 states.

There will, in the future, be a Europe-wide database of militants and dangerous criminals; mobile, Internet and fixed-line service providers will be obliged to keep details of calls and messages for a fixed period; all air passengers entering or leaving the EU will be tracked and biometric data will be stored on all passports from next year onwards. In addition, Europol -- the EU's fledgling policy body -- will get extra powers and a European borders' agency will be set up early next year.

Civil liberties groups slammed the moves as having more to do with increasing controls over citizens than fighting terrorism. "Under the guise of tackling terrorism, the EU is planning to bring in a swathe of measures to do with crime and the surveillance of the whole population," said Statewatch editor Tony Bunyan. "After the dreadful loss of life and injuries in Madrid, we need a response that unites Europe rather than divides it."

Development groups are also upset about plans to make EU aid to Third World countries dependent on following the bloc's new strategy against militants. "Aid risks becoming a tool in the war on terror," said Howard Mollett of the British Overseas NGOs for Development.

While some of the measures in the EU action plan are new, many have been touted in previous declarations or have got stuck in the legislative pipeline. For example, the European arrest warrant, which was agreed to just weeks after the 9/11 attacks, has still to find its way onto the statute books of five EU countries. "After Madrid, such delays are unacceptable," Prodi told reporters as EU leaders set an end of June deadline for

the transposition of all outstanding anti-terrorist laws.

Speaking at the end of the first session of the two-day summit in Brussels, Irish Premier Bertie Ahern said, "We in the European Union must ensure that everything that can be done is done to protect our people." In the past, the EU has been strong at drafting anti-terror laws but weak at implementing and enforcing them. After the Madrid atrocities, Europe's citizens will be hoping that the EU matches its high-flown rhetoric with down-to-earth action.

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