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## REVIEW &amp; OUTLOOK

## Europe Faces Its Terrorists

**A**t the trial of the Muslim indicted for Theo van Gogh's murder, prosecutor Frits van Straelen told the court how the accused dreamed of replacing the Dutch government with an Islamic theocracy. "The murder made it clear that terrorism, inspired by an extreme interpretation of Islam, is a reality in our country," Mr. van Straelen said.

*Spain has arrested more than 130 Islamists since 3/11.*

It is a reality not just in the Netherlands. In the last few weeks, police in France, Germany, Spain, Italy and the Netherlands have rounded up dozens of Islamic terrorist suspects. And according to intelligence reports, European security services have since Sep. 11 thwarted a dozen major terrorist attacks in Europe.

Partly due to their geographic proximity to northern Africa, the Spanish seem to be carrying the biggest load. Withdrawing their troops from Iraq after the Madrid train bombings did not buy them any security. Since that fateful decision, security services have foiled Islamist attacks against such high-profile targets as the main criminal court and Real Madrid's Bernabeu soccer stadium, which can hold more than 70,000 people. Last year, the Spanish arrested more than 130 Islamist terrorist suspects. Also last year, terror suspects were arrested in the U.K. and France for planned poison gas attacks.

Intelligence experts believe Europe is targeted for two reasons: ideology and opportunity. Despite the political disagreements some European countries may have with the U.S., the Islamist terrorists still consider Europe part of the hated West. In addition, thanks to what were until recently relatively lax anti-terrorism laws and the relatively large pool of Muslim immigrants, Islamic terrorists can hide and move about much more easily in Europe than in the U.S.

"Europe is kind of a soft target," says Claude Moniquet of the European Strategic Intelligence Center, a Brussels-based think tank. "And recruiting terrorists among Europe's Muslim population has enormous advantages as those with European passports can travel much easier around the world," he adds.

Embarrassment over finding some of their nationals among the terrorists killed by U.S. forces in Iraq has also led governments in Europe to step

up efforts to put an end to the recruitment in their countries of suicide bombers for the jihad in Iraq. After 19-year-old Frenchman Redouane el-Hakim was killed during an American bombardment of

Falluja in July, the French began an investigation that led Wednesday to the arrest of an entire cell of

11 people that was recruiting terrorists for Iraq.

Earlier this month, the Germans arrested 15 terrorist suspects and last weekend caught two alleged al Qaeda members accused of plotting a suicide attack in Iraq. One of the accused is also suspected of having planned to obtain 48 grams of enriched uranium from Luxembourg. According to news reports, Germany plans to take advantage of a new law to expel over 100 Islamists.

Expelling foreigners who pose a terrorist threat is also being considered in other countries. But this option is increasingly difficult to apply as more and more of the threats are home-grown. Mr. Van Gogh's accused killer, Mohammed Bouyeri, as well as most of his 12 colleagues charged in the Netherlands with planning the murder of politicians, were Dutch citizens.

In Britain, the Law Lords recently threw out a law, passed just after September 11, that allowed indefinite detention of foreigners considered a terrorist threat who refused to leave the country. In reaction, the government announced it will change the law, giving it sweeping powers to impose house arrest on terrorist suspects, regardless of nationality.

All in all, the news coming from Europe is encouraging, although some still think they can play politics with terrorists. On Tuesday an Italian judge, Clementina Forleo, acquitted three North Africans of international terrorism charges for allegedly recruiting suicide bombers for Iraq, ruling the men were guerrillas, not terrorists.

Italians, who had just buried their 20th compatriot killed in Iraq, were not amused. Even members of the center-left opposition were shocked. Stefano Dambrosio, Italy's best-known antiterrorism prosecutor, condemned the ruling, saying suicide bombings "must always be considered terrorism."

"Clementina go home" read the English headline of a front-page editorial in La Stampa. It really seems that Europe is waking up.