

## FOR THE EU THE ISIS BELL TOLLS

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Distracted by the disruptive potential of the EU elections, EU member states leaders could seem blind and deaf to the alarming threat posed by the return of ISIS foreign fighters to the EU.

Since its outbreak in 2011, the fight in the Middle East between ISIS and its enemies has persevered; however, ISIS witnesses a substantial decrease of power as it is being driven out of its traditional strongholds in Iraq and Syria, Mosul and Raqqa. ISIS threatened that it would perpetrate an immediate retaliation by sending back to Europe all the foreign fighters that have joined its ranks against Western troops.

The heads of EU agencies and the EU leaders who take care of facing breeding terrorism reiterated that this risk should not be dismissed. Last October, Europol Director Rob Wainwright declared that Europe stands at a crucial time as ISIS tends to bite back when facing military pressure from the opposite coalition. **Sir Julian King, EU Commissioner for Security, convened that threat of ISIS militants striking in Europe was serious and that although a mass exodus of militants to Europe was very unlikely, the risk should not be underestimated as even a small number of terrorists can cause hard damage.** EU Counter-terrorism coordinator Gilles de Kerchove stated that EU has to be vigilant in the coming years and that an effective response requires a “comprehensive approach and long-term commitment”, with the primary responsibility lying in the hands of the EU Member States.

Unfortunately, the leaders of the EU members are not replying to the call on the terrorism threat made by the EU Institutions. Despite the several issues that currently affect the European Union, notably the economic crisis, Brexit and the refugees' flow that sparked a harsh debate on the arrival of terrorists *via* the migrant routes, **the leaders of EU countries find themselves in a standstill as 2017 is the election year for three of the founding States of the European Union**, which own the potential to shape the future of the Union. Although Dutch elections already passed and substantially confirmed the previous situation, the fact that France is animated by the confrontation of two radically opposed and out-of-the-box candidates and that in Germany the long-term leadership of PM Merkel is seriously challenged by the candidacy of former President of the European Parliament Martin Schulz is leaving the EU leaders with bated breath until the elections will have taken place.

However, as the ISIS bell tolls for the European Union as it seldom did before, the EU Member States should focus on joint coordination and devote their full efforts towards home-bred and external terrorism in order to guarantee the security and safety of their own citizens. To avert the possibility that ISIS will succeed in creating a “Caliphate” in the very heart of Europe, EU governments should follow a two-fold strategy. **On one hand indeed, they should cripple ISIS in the Middle East; on the other hand, they should boost security in Europe by taking comprehensive measures.**

As long as dismantling ISIS in the Middle East is concerned, a massive war campaign is not the unique option because it would kill civilians and would directly lead to a violent retaliation, the EU can aim at wearing out the enemy by affecting its means of self-sufficiency. The EU can indeed push to end buying black oil sold by ISIS: with oil prices already plummeted a long time ago, this will definitely inflict the final blow to ISIS fragile economy. Another front to act upon is to stop the trade of weapons in the Middle East – **EU leaders should strongly advise EU member states not to send weapons neither to the so-called “moderate opposition” such as the Free Syrian Army, because they will easily fall into the hands of the extremists**, nor to countries such as Saudi Arabia which allegedly resell them to ISIS fighters. Green MEP Bodil Valero, EU rapporteur on weapons, has pointed out several times that Eastern European countries have sold weapons that have come into the hands of the extremists and are responsible of fomenting conflicts in the Middle East.

As long as internal policies are concerned, **the EU needs a “Realpolitik” on immigrant fluxes and on the growing radicalization in internal borders by pushing integration policies as a long-term goal.** But on the short-term objectives, EU should impose stricter security at the transport hubs such as airports, main train station and seaports and increase general surveillance at the big events. **The path to be followed is the one set by Belgian Interior Minister Jan Jambon, who travelled to Israel to learn Israeli best practices on security and surveillance while exploring the measures and devices installed at International Airport Ben Gurion in Tel Aviv.**

It is therefore highly recommendable that the other European countries get out of the sleep and seriously address ISIS terrorist threat.

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