

Democracy and Terrorism: Resilience and Political Responses

Report Presentation & Discussion

Brussels, 14 May 2018

The Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung EU Office gathered Brussels-based stakeholders to present outcomes of the FES case studies "[Democracy and Terrorism – Experiences in Coping with Terror Attacks](#)" published in 2017. The main questions addressed in the report are the following: How should democratic societies respond to terrorist attacks? How can core democratic values be preserved while enhancing national security measures? Which strategies have worked so far in different states across the globe?

Renate Tenbusch, Director of the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung EU Office, welcomed the participants and gave a brief introduction on the importance of finding the right political responses to the challenges of terrorism and extremism.

Sindre Bangstad, Social Anthropologist at KIFO/Norway, continued by presenting his research based on the experiences of Norway. He briefly reminded the audience of the shock following the terror attacks against government headquarters in Oslo and the subsequent massacre of 69 people in a youth summer camp in July, 2011. This attack was committed – despite media speculation about Islamist terrorists – by a Norwegian neo-Nazi sympathizer named Anders Behring Breivik.

Nevertheless, political attention focused on Norwegian Salafists and Islamist foreign fighters rather than right-wing extremists. Only very little legislation targeted right-wing radicals, and some was not even adopted. The attention directed at jihadism was thus disproportional; Bangstad argued

that it is misleading to portray radical Islamist as the greatest threat to the security of Norway.

Birgit Sippel, MEP, followed up by mentioning that the Norwegian case shows how flawed analysis can lead to flawed policies that may even exacerbate radicalisation. For example, a prolonged state of emergency, as in France, would only restrict citizens' freedoms while terrorists find ways to circumvent security measures. Sippel also highlighted the need for more information on root causes and better integration strategies.



From left to right: Angelina Gros-Tchorbadjiyska and Birgit Sippel, MEP

Angelina Gros-Tchorbadjiyska from the European Commission's Task Force Security Union outlined EU-level efforts to address the threat of terrorism in the member states. These include the establishment of a European Commissioner and a Task Force for the Security Union in 2016, as well as several reports. EU competences are limited in this area, as internal security is primarily the responsibility of member states, so this activity is a direct result of

member states' increasing willingness to work together on this issue.

Several other issues were raised in the discussion following the initial statements by the speakers. One is the question of whether to define terrorism as a crime or as something else. Another problem is lacking implementation of EU legislation, as we do not have the right tools to enforce compliance. As the Commission is not keen on penalising member states, it focuses on dialogue and capacity building, with the latter being seen as particularly important. Furthermore, there is a risk that increasing security-related budgets are funded by cuts in socio-economic prevention.