

# EU-GRASP Policy Brief



Changing Multilateralism: the EU as a Global-Regional Actor in Security and Peace, or EU-GRASP, is a European Union (EU) funded project under the 7th Framework Programme (FP7).

EU-GRASP aims to contribute to the articulation of the present and future role of the EU as a global and regional actor in security and peace.

Therefore, EU-GRASP is aimed at studying the processes, means and opportunities for the EU to achieve effective multilateralism despite myriad challenges.



## The EU and Terrorism

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### Executive Summary

Terrorism has been bitterly experienced in Europe for many decades, and has come to frame so much of world politics in the years since 9/11. But an examination of a variety of cases – over Hamas and in Egypt, with the PKK, in Afghanistan, and in Chechnya, indicates a variation in European policy, but too great a reliance on the mode of securitising the relevant issue. Such an approach has been less than ideal; and in its place, there needs to be a thorough review of policy and practice in the field of terrorism, and a move towards the politicisation of these issues.

## Introduction

From detailed studies of EU policies over terrorism towards and over Hamas, Egypt, the PKK, in Afghanistan and Chechnya, the clear conclusion is that there is an urgent need for a review of EU policy in the area of terrorism. The approach developed since 9/11 has, after a decade, a track record of failure in a large number of areas, but this is perhaps most apparent in the contemporary explosion of revolutionary demands for greater democracy and freedom throughout the Middle East and North Africa. The EU has emphasised stability; the people of those regions have spoken and acted with determination and bravery demanding a different value to dominate their lives.

## Background

There is no objective requirement to construct a political issue as a security one; but once that work is undertaken, it has important and often immediate security implications at the level of practice, in policy and in the implications of that policy for everyday lives.

There are a variety of means through which the EU frames a policy in a particular fashion, as with any political actor. Of course at the most obvious level, there are collective and personal interests in play, and then there are the behaviours by key individuals that lead to particular outcomes. But this is the superstructure of the framing of an issue. The deeper set of issues concerns, in the case of the EU, a variety of different pressures. Undoubtedly – as we have seen in the case of Iran – there are historical or, to phrase this more appropriately, genealogical discursive

structures which lead to the appropriation of particular tropes and expectations as short hand ways of shaping understanding. Those work at a meta-level (which is to say, on a 'European' or indeed even on a 'Western' basis), but also within national discourses, shaped as so many are in Europe by a range of post-colonial heritages and practices.

If there are interest and behavioural explanations of the framing of an issue, and also genealogical possibilities, there are also two other important drivers. The first is the role of the Other; and perhaps above all in the issues of terrorism, of the United States. America plays an important role in the construction of Europe, as a partner, friend, but also of a different pole of power. Clearly the framing of an issue in terms of terrorism can be shaped by the attitudes and behaviours, observable and imputed, of the United States. Finally, if there are drivers from the Other (and increasingly of course this is not only the United States, but also other poles such as Russia, China and India), there is the important issue of the Self. It is from the adoption of certain values as contributing to the core of European (Union)-ness that so much policy framing comes. Europe as a normative power, as a force for the good, as a democratic and rights based endeavour that can be beneficial to the world – such values and expectations (although sometimes obvious in their contradiction) that shape issues in security terms.

## Critique of the existing policies:

There are four central difficulties with existing policy.

First, the emphasis on democratic values has led to an abhorrence of violence used for political means. Therefore those actors whose relationship with violence is seen to be too close – Hamas, the PKK – are deemed to be inappropriate partners, to be in a sense anti-democratic and thereby anti-European. This inevitably means that despite all intentions of mediation and even handedness, there is an inevitable taking of sides. One clear and obvious example has been that of the PLO/ Palestinian Authority over Hamas. The democratic claims of Hamas – whether electorally or in terms of being an embodiment of large sections of popular opinion – cannot be seen other than through the security lens. This, of course, means that it is impossible to show great flexibility – how can one be flexible about one's core values? – and so diplomatic positions ossify. Even if there is evidence that there is scope for change – for example, of the popularity of Hamas, its flexibility in position taking on coming to power, or of the corruption levels in the Palestinian Authority – it is exceptionally hard for the EU to change its course because the issue has been securitised so deeply in its framing. And yet for other actors, the EU seems to be acting in a contradictory manner. In discussions about asylum within the EU, for many Russians, the EU has chosen to support Chechen terrorists over the demands for stability in the Russian Federation. And so when in response to the terrorist attack

on the Chechen Parliament in October 2010, the EU declares the need for greater cooperation with Russia over international terrorism, this carries little weight in Moscow. Indeed, the very phrase „international terrorism“ seems to offer the prospect that some of the violence in Chechnya is potentially legitimate, that it is only the violent Islamist inspired terrorist groups in which the EU is interested.

Second, what is very important in the understanding of contemporary EU political possibilities is the way in which issues became seen through terrorism, and by which terrorism became securitised to the highest level. This was not done „to“ the EU; it was an EU discursive choice. That is to say, it was the EU that chose to insert itself into a „war on terror“ narrative (though of course struggling to find other ways of describing it) post-9/11, through describing the attacks on the United States in collective terms. Al Qaeda did not attack America; it attacked „our“ values and institutions, and thereby it was not the case that Al Qaeda was anti-American – rather it was and is an anti-democratic institution. This was not an inevitable choice: but constructing the conflict in such ways inevitably spread the zone of conflict to Europe.

Third, this decision to insert itself into the conflict brought into profile the way that framing takes place with reference to the driver of the Other in understanding security governance. ‘Solidarity’ with the United States – on value grounds – was of course an identity claim. Therefore, in the framing choices made about terrorism from September 2001, ‘international terrorism’ was bound to be elevated to the

the highest form of securitisation. But not only that; solidarity implied a power relationship with the United States that promised some measure of equality. But the normative danger is that the Americans might not understand solidarity in that way, act largely unilaterally, and allow Europe to be portrayed as subserviently following and not sharing. These were exactly the political battles of 2003 within Europe in the run up to, and conduct of, the Iraq War, and they were choices and divisions brought onto Europe by Europe itself. Being held jointly responsible with the Bush Administration for American actions has been the fate of Europe in the eyes of many actors throughout the world. Europe's ability to act has been constrained by the choice of a policy of solidarity in the sense in which it has been deployed. Yet with a frame in which terrorism has been fully securitised, there is a requirement on the EU to lead. How can the EU not lead in an area in which its very existence has been called into question? „Solidarity“ seemed to imply some joint leadership; but there was no real scope for that under the Bush Administration, and arguably, little in terms of substance has changed with the Obama Administration. For Europe, this puts two discursive logics into direct confrontation over terrorism: integration, and transatlantic solidarity.

Fourth, the way in which an issue is framed leads to the way in which governance structures are established; therefore the nature of security governance in relation to terrorism has depended upon the way in which the issue has been framed. Practice follows: in the proscription of the PKK as a terrorist

organisation with which the EU cannot engage, in the emphasis on Security Sector Reform over other developmental tactics, and the emphasis on maintaining a legal framework seen in the stress on pressing the Palestinian Authority, for example, to arrest Islamic Jihad activists. Importantly, shaping policy fields through a securitised terrorism discourse has seriously limited the emancipatory potential of the EU's own development policy.

What this adds up to is a political reality with regards to terrorism of a Europe that is marginalised and sidelined; whether that be in relation to the Israeli Palestinian Conflict; or in relation to policy in Afghanistan, where the EU has little role, and representations/ tropes of Taliban led futures, or narcostate outcomes, dominate over those of peaceful democratic structures emerging in the country.

## Policy Recommendation:

So what policy issues arise from this analysis in terms of alternative routes for EU policy? One aspect is clearly to debate the desecuritisation of terrorism. That is not to ignore terrorism; it is to adjust the frame, to argue that although terrorist attacks can of course be deadly, they are not existential threats to Europe. From such a reframing, security governance practices can be different. Development policy can be freed from the securitised terrorism lens, and debated for its ability to emancipate people in the world. Smaller scale counter terrorism policies – a focus on tighter constraints on small arms and light weapons in the Caucasus for example, with Chechnya and surrounding areas providing a strong training ground

for bomb making. Emphasis on counter narcotics policy not as an adjunct to counter terrorism policy, but as an area of importance in its own right, leading potentially to greater democratic, developmental, and emancipatory outcomes.

Perhaps, above all, the desecuritisation of terrorism offers a route out of policy dilemmas that currently seem irresolvable. For example, in Turkey, listing the PKK as a terrorist organisation – when terrorism is seen in existential terms – requires both the EU and Turkey to see relations in Kurdistan in securitised terms. Medium term solutions that may revolve around desecuritisng the PKK seem impossible to reach under such circumstances. The securitisation of terrorism has seen the reconstruction of many forms of security governance – democracy promotion, development assistance, even cooperation in the Mediterranean and with Central Asia – as security first issues. And this has deepened the emphasis on stability. Not until 2009 did the EU comment on the demand to remove the state of emergency in Mubarak's Egypt; and then only very lightly. And yet, by early 2011, it was clear that this was a core demand of a huge number of people in the country. In the Middle East, North Africa, Central Asia, the securitisation of terrorism has led to EU external policy being seen increasingly through thicker and thicker security lenses, and the consequent emphasis on stability has, in countries like Egypt, seen an increasing erosion of rights, until the revolution. EU policy and framing of terrorism has in all those parts of the world just described, opened space for more, and not less, violations of human rights.

It is time, ten years after 9/11, for a fundamental reappraisal of the securitisation of terrorism in EU security governance.

## Conclusion:

It is ten years since the violence of 9/11, ample time to review how policy over terrorism around the world has operated for the EU. And for Europe, policy has been less than ideal. This Policy Brief has put forward some ideas for trying to move terrorism from the realm of the securitised to that of the political. While it remains focuses on security, the only solution is military victory; and that seems a difficult option to select in and of itself, but particularly given declining European appetite for such action, and indeed declining defence budgets. Moving the debate to the political realm does not require an abdication of moral and political resource. It is clear that some in terrorist organisations have committed acts of extreme violence; worthy of prosecution through national courts, or through the International Court. But the circumstances that remain are ones that need to be engaged politically. And in that realm, in many parts of the world, the EU has invaluable resources to bring to bear.

