

# Reactions to the Paris attacks in the EU: fundamental rights considerations

## FRA Paper

The events that took place in France and Belgium in January 2015 had tremendous impact across the European Union (EU) and beyond. How EU Member States react to these events in the short-, medium- and long term has major implications for the safeguard of the fundamental rights of all those who live in the EU.

In the immediate aftermath of the events in Paris, the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) collected responses across Europe,<sup>1</sup> focusing on Jewish and Muslim community organisations, political leaders, civil society and the media. The current paper provides an overview of this material and should be regarded as a snapshot of a rapidly changing situation.

The attack on the *Charlie Hebdo* offices on 7 January 2015 that left 12 people dead framed the initial debate on the necessity of protecting the right to freedom of expression. However, the subsequent murder of four Jewish people in a kosher supermarket and the deadly shooting of a police officer in Paris, as well as the suspected attack on police in Belgium added other dimensions to political, media and civilian responses across the EU.

All of these events nonetheless had one aspect in common, which led to a reframing of the interpretation of the issues at stake: the perpetrators were young, Muslim, EU citizens with an immigrant background, who have been radicalised at home. The main focus of attention therefore shifted from issues of freedom of expression to preventing violent radicalisation and countering terrorism, as demonstrated by the raft of measures proposed in France on

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<sup>1</sup> FRA's national level research network, Franet, provided the information.

21 January, with other EU Member States following suit. It is in this context that a discussion of fundamental rights, which are among the EU's founding values, becomes particularly relevant.

There are numerous fundamental rights issues raised by the events in France and Belgium and responses to them, including the right to human dignity (Article 1 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the EU), freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 10), and freedom of expression and information (Article 11). They are furthermore closely related to issues of surveillance and civil liberties, community cohesion and marginalisation, and migrant integration and social inclusion.

## Reactions

### Community level

The attacks in Paris had a profound impact on both Jewish and Muslim communities throughout the EU. Community and religious leaders were united in their condemnation of the attacks, highlighting their barbarity and distancing themselves from the concept that they were carried out in the name of religion. Representatives of Buddhist, Christian, Jewish and Muslim organisations in France met together at the Paris Great Mosque and released the following statement: *"We, the leaders of worship in France here today [...] are unanimous in defending the values of the Republic, freedom, equality, fraternity, and especially freedom of expression. We are committed to continuing this process of sharing, dialogue and fraternity."* Similar reactions from religious organisations and sometimes also those representing migrants were noted in Austria, Bulgaria, Finland, Germany, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Romania and Slovakia.

The identities of the perpetrators and victims of the attacks greatly affected Jewish and Muslim communities in France and elsewhere, with community leaders expressing grave concerns over the safety of Jews and Muslims. Increased fear and feelings of insecurity among Muslim communities were reported in the majority of EU Member States. Jewish communities in several Member States increased their security measures, with some schools closed and appeals made to the police for enhanced protection.

In the United Kingdom, safety concerns among the Jewish community were heightened in the days following the attacks in Paris. The **Community Security Trust**, an organisation working for the security of Jews in the UK, received an unprecedented number of calls expressing concern about safety. Drills teaching children to hide under their desks in the event of a terrorist attack were carried out



in Jewish primary schools in north London. In a television interview, a former Chief Rabbi said that some British Jews were questioning the advisability of going to synagogue, and that anxiety among British Jews was the highest he had ever met.

In Belgium, Jewish schools in Brussels and Antwerp cancelled all classes for two days due to security considerations. On 18 January, Jewish schools in Antwerp opened again under the protection of heavily armed military staff. In the Netherlands, one orthodox Jewish school remained closed for a day on 16 January in reaction to the police operation in Belgium the day before. In the Czech Republic, Denmark and Finland, Jewish communities asked police for increased security measures. The Jewish community in Sweden increased its security threat level after being subjected to several threats.

Mosques began to receive police protection in several Member States, as has been the case with synagogues for many years. In some places, community leaders asked Muslims to be particularly cautious due to an increased risk of becoming a victim of hate crime. The **French Council of the Muslim Faith** recorded a 110 % increase in reported Islamophobic incidents between January 2014 and January 2015. In the United Kingdom, eight Muslim-owned businesses were attacked with guns and hammers in Birmingham between 10 and 12 January.

In the Netherlands, examples of reported Islamophobic incidents included verbal aggression in the street against women wearing headscarves, a driver refusing to let a Muslim woman on the bus, and threatening letters sent to mosques or distributed in neighbourhoods where Muslims live. This was also the case in the United Kingdom, where the group **Britain First** started a campaign of 'Christian Patrols' in predominantly Muslim areas. Videos of the patrols were posted on the group's Facebook page alongside the statement "*We do these patrols to ensure that the Muslim extremist gangs have to watch their backs when they try and enforce Sharia Law*".

Other examples of Islamophobic incidents following the Paris attacks included a bomb threat at the main mosque in Gothenburg, Sweden; Muslim women in Denmark reporting headscarves being torn off; and vandalism against Muslim property and bullying at school in Slovakia. In addition, hate e-mails were sent to the Islamic Cultural Centre in Estonia as well as to the Hungarian Islamic Community, and Islamophobic graffiti was noted in Poland and Slovenia. The NGO **Muslims' Rights Belgium** reported that it had received more complaints about discrimination on behalf of Muslims in Brussels since the Paris attacks, including insults online, at work and at school.

## Political level

Political leaders in France, the EU and beyond all denounced the attacks. They demonstrated their unity in the march that took place in Paris on 11 January, in which politicians from across the 28 EU Member States took part. EU policy makers emphasised the need to differentiate between Islam and terrorism, stressing that radicalisation is the result of a complex and individual process that cannot be attributed to any particular religion and underlining the risks inherent in stigmatising Muslims in the EU. Conversely, at the other end of the political spectrum, leaders of extremist, far-right or populist groups across the EU made use of the attacks to arouse anti-Muslim and anti-immigrant sentiment.

Mainstream political parties agreed at a meeting of EU interior ministers after the Paris march on 11 January to act swiftly to address the threat of violent radicalisation, as part of a strategy to prevent further terrorist attacks. On 19 January, EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini said the EU had agreed *"to share intelligence information not only within the European Union but also with other countries around us starting from the Mediterranean and the Arab world, Turkey, Egypt, Gulf countries, North Africa but also looking to Africa and Asia,"* as well as encouraging the European Parliament to reopen the Passenger Name Record (PNR) file. On 21 January, EU Commissioners began discussing how to *"tighten security and prevent terrorism as part of the European Agenda on Security for 2015-2020"*.

Noting an annual increase of 130 % in the number of people in France under surveillance as a potential terrorist threat, French Prime Minister Manuel Valls announced the adoption of a series of counter-terrorism measures on 21 January. As part of the Vigipirate plan (France's national security alert system), 10,500 soldiers are active on French soil to ensure the protection of sensitive infrastructures and public spaces. Over the next three years, 2,680 new jobs will be created exclusively to counter the terrorist threat. A budget of EUR 425 million will be made available, including funds for new equipment for law enforcement agencies. The French PNR system will be operational in September 2015. In addition, a bill on intelligence services will be submitted to parliament in early April. The counter-terrorism judiciary branch will be reinforced, including units to monitor and prevent radicalisation in prisons, which includes increasing the number of imams active in prisons. Sixty million euro will be made available over the next three years to counter radicalisation by addressing juvenile delinquency. A database of those charged with terrorist offences will be created and those people monitored at regular intervals. Greater surveillance of jihadist communication will be carried out, including online, where the cooperation of internet service providers will be sought.

Other EU Member States reacted by adopting or accelerating the adoption of tighter security measures to counter terrorism and to prevent radicalisation. At the above-mentioned meeting on 11 January, the interior ministers of Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden and the United Kingdom said their *“action must continue to be part of a comprehensive approach, based on the fight against radicalisation, notably on the internet, and on the strengthening of resources to thwart the action of the different forms of terrorist networks and notably to hamper their movement.”* To that end, they proposed measures to counter violent radicalisation, committed themselves to greater cooperation in law enforcement matters and trust building with civil society to counter violent extremism, and agreed to implement measures that would facilitate intelligence sharing on terrorist threats, including PNR or detecting and screening travel movements of potential foreign fighters.

In Spain, a law against terrorism that would provide for a different criminal treatment of ‘jihadism’ is being considered, while Belgium announced 12 measures against radicalisation and terrorism, including the adoption of a broader definition of terrorist offences, stronger penalties, revising plans to counter radicalisation and reforming the intelligence and security services. Bulgaria is due to discuss amendments to its Criminal Code to introduce tougher sanctions against terrorists and reinforce security measures at the Bulgarian-Turkish border, including extending the fence at the Bulgarian-Turkish border to 110km from its current 30km, as well as stricter checks on EU citizens at entry and exit.

Tackling the issue of foreign fighters also figures prominently in responses by Member States. In Denmark, proposals to improve border control and impose sanctions against those travelling to Syria to join the jihadists are being debated in parliament. In Germany, the government passed a bill amending the Passport Act and the ID Card Act, with the express purpose of preventing foreign fighters from leaving the country. In the Netherlands, the ruling party proposed measures to prevent radicalised Dutch Muslims fighting in Syria from committing attacks in the Netherlands. These include detaining returning jihadist fighters, equipping police with more powerful arms and trying jihadist fighters according to military law.

In Hungary, the leaders of the political parties represented in parliament have decided on the establishment of an anti-terrorism forum. In addition, the Fidesz party said it may be necessary to broaden the authority of governmental organisations and law enforcement agencies in deciding who is permitted to enter Hungary or be expelled from the country.

A number of Member States have also called for the reopening of discussions at EU level on the reintroduction of the Data Retention Directive (2006/24/EC).

At the meeting of interior ministers on 11 January, the Austrian Minister asked for follow-up in the absence of the data retention legislation declared invalid by the Court of Justice of the EU in 2014. Similarly, in Germany, the Christian Democratic and Christian Union parties as well as representatives from the security authorities called for an initiative to reintroduce the measures contained in the Directive. Chancellor Angela Merkel explicitly supported calls for data retention measures in an address to parliament, and called for the rapid drafting of a revised Directive by the European Commission.

In the Czech Republic, the government passed an amendment to the act on security services, banks, saving and credit cooperative. This authorises the intelligence services to obtain information from the banking sector hitherto considered private under the principle of bank secrecy and information about phone numbers from telecommunication companies if there is any suspicion of organised crime or terrorist funding.

In the United Kingdom, the Prime Minister pledged to legislate on internet surveillance powers, allowing intelligence agencies to break into encrypted communication by suspected terrorists. He urged social media companies such as Twitter and Facebook to cooperate more closely with intelligence agencies.

A number of Member States increased the budgetary resources and equipment of the police and national intelligence services. In Austria, the government decided on a security package of EUR 260-290 million. These funds will be used to fight cybercrime as well as for additional police equipment. Similarly, the Danish government allocated additional funds to the national security and intelligence service.

Only a minority of Member States took the decision to act preventively by combating radicalisation through strengthening community cohesion.

In Sweden, calls were renewed for a national helpline against extremism aimed at, among others, the parents of people planning to join a jihadist movement.

In Poland, a special team was set up within Police Headquarters to analyse the best procedures to follow in the case of terrorist threats in Poland. At the same time, the police force said it planned to strengthen cooperation with Muslim communities.

In Belgium, following a meeting between federal ministers and leaders of the officially recognised religions in the country, the Prime Minister issued a joint appeal by federal ministers and religious organisations for unity, the defence of common values and respect for the separation of Church and State, as well as for freedom of religion and opinion. Federal ministers and religious leaders agreed to



meet at least twice a year and maintain a continuous dialogue with the Minister of Security and Justice.

## Civil society

In a number of Member States, civil society, including community and religious organisations, responded to the Paris attacks with new initiatives. In the Netherlands, the attacks revived a national debate about the radicalisation of young Muslims and the treatment of young Dutch Muslims going to Syria to join the jihadists. In this context, there was considerable interest in an existing initiative by the **Cooperation Association of Dutch Moroccans**, a helpline that allows parents concerned about the radicalisation of their children to call and speak in confidence to specialists on the subject.

In Finland, representatives of the national organisation for cooperation between religions, which brings together representatives from the Jewish, Christian and Muslim communities, held talks with the Minister of Interior on radicalisation, religion and related prejudices. Muslim representatives expressed concerns about being labelled as terrorists or supporters of terrorism because of their religion or origin.

In Germany, leading representatives of the **Central Committee of German Catholics**, the Protestant Church, the **Central Council of Muslims** and the **Central Council of Jews** published a joint inter-religious statement in the popular tabloid paper *Bild*, rejecting hate and intolerance. Representatives of 13 Muslim and migrant umbrella organisations held a joint press conference in Cologne calling for unity in the face of terrorism and violence and warning against stereotyping on the basis of religious or ethnic background.

In the United Kingdom, the **Muslim Council of Britain** organised an inter-faith solidarity meeting with representatives from the Muslim, Jewish and Christian communities and senior leaders from all faiths who came together to express their inter-faith unity and collectively condemn the Paris attacks and subsequent ethnic divisions.

## Mainstream and social media

Media outlets across the EU condemned the attacks and expressed their support not only for freedom of expression but also for the need to make a clear distinction between Islam and terrorism. Media reports also discussed the limits of freedom of expression, and the notions of respect for religious belief and self-censorship were raised. The attacks triggered a renewed interest in Islam, with numerous media reports about the situation of Muslims in Europe and possible

triggers of radicalisation. In doing so, the mainstream media largely appear to have avoided linking Islam or Muslims directly with terrorism or radicalisation.

The situation on social media was different, where some of the opinions and statements posted were quite extreme. For example, in Denmark, as elsewhere, comments ranged from one end of the spectrum to the other: *“It’s satire. Nothing can defend the terror attacks on Charlie Hebdo. If you’re angry with them, take them to court...”* through to *“So many people are fighting for the right to vilify Muslims and propagate hate. This has nothing to do with freedom of expression.”* In the Czech Republic, debates on social media were framed by two Facebook groups: *We don’t want Islam in the Czech Republic* (5,000 members) and *I don’t mind Czech mosques* (2,272 members). In Finland, anti-immigration sentiments were to be observed across a number of social media platforms. For instance, the **Pegida Suomi** Facebook group, which was set up on 3 January 2015, saw a rapid increase in followers following the Paris attacks. The agenda of Pegida Suomi is similar to Pegida, or **Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the West** in Germany, which was established to stop the perceived Islamisation of the West.

## Conclusion

The information presented in this paper is only a brief summary of responses collected in the direct aftermath of the attacks in Paris on 7 January 2015, but it nonetheless demonstrates the complexity of the issue at hand. FRA will publish a more in-depth analysis of the relevance of fundamental rights to all policy responses to the Paris attacks in the near future.

While it is perfectly legitimate for the EU and its Member States to reconsider their counter-terrorism policies and anti-radicalisation strategies in the wake of January’s events, any policy response must be measured against its potential impact on fundamental rights.





## Further information:

The following FRA publications offer further information on related issues:

- *Embedding fundamental rights in the security agenda*, FRA Focus 01/2015 (2015), <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2015/embedding-fundamental-rights-response-violent-radicalisation>
- *Discrimination and hate crime against Jews in EU Member States: experiences and perceptions of antisemitism* (2013), <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2013/discrimination-and-hate-crime-against-jews-eu-member-states-experiences-and> and the online Survey data explorer at: <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publications-and-resources/data-and-maps/survey-data-explorer-discrimination-and-hate-crime-against>
- *Making hate crime visible in the European Union: acknowledging victims rights* (2012), <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2012/making-hate-crime-visible-european-union-acknowledging-victims-rights>
- *Minorities as victims of crime*, Data in focus report, EU-MIDIS (2012), <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2012/eu-midis-data-focus-report-6-minorities-victims-crime>
- *Police stops and minorities*, Data in focus report, EU-MIDIS (2010), <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2010/eu-midis-data-focus-report-4-police-stops-and-minorities>
- *Experience of discrimination, social marginalisation and violence: a comparative study of Muslim and non-Muslim youth in three EU Member States* (2010), <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2012/experience-discrimination-social-marginalisation-and-violence-comparative-study>
- *Muslims*, Data in focus report, EU-MIDIS (2009), <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2010/eu-midis-data-focus-report-2-muslims>
- *Migrants, minorities and employment – Exclusion and discrimination in the 27 Member States of the European Union (Update 2003-2008)*, <http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2011/migrants-minorities-and-employment-exclusion-and-discrimination-27-member-states>

See also FRA's app of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights at: <http://fra.europa.eu/en/charter4mobile>

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