

# THE STRUGGLE AGAINST ISLAMIST TERRORISM: FRANCO-GERMAN AND EUROPEAN RESPONSES

Yves Bertoncini | *Director, Jacques Delors Institute*



The first session of the Think Tanks Tandem initiative<sup>1</sup> was held at the abbey of the Vaux-de-Cernay close to Paris on 8-9 July 2016. It was attended by some forty representatives of German and French think tanks as well as by German, French and European authorities. The first round table addressed the issue of migration policy, while the second round table was devoted to the struggle against Islamist terrorism. This second round table was introduced by Kristina Eichhorst, crisis and conflict management coordinator with the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, and by Yves Bertoncini, director of the Jacques Delors Institute, and began with an address from Gilles de Kerchove, EU coordinator for the struggle against terrorism. Numerous German and French speakers intervened (see the list in the Appendix): this synthesis endeavours to present the main analyses and guidelines resulting from the exchange of French and German views, identifying the points both of divergence and of convergence that emerged.

## 1. A common terrorist threat, albeit less concrete in Germany than in France

While the Germans and the French have a different perception of the massive influx of refugees in 2015, the same cannot be said of Islamist terrorism which they both perceive as a common threat that needs to be countered.

This threat comes in three main shapes: the organisations known as “Da’ish” and “Al-Qa’ida” and those in the “caliphate’s” territory astride Iraq and Syria; radicalised youngsters in both Germany and France who are especially active on the social media; and youngsters who travel to Syria and Iraq, who need to be fought in that area and for whose potential return we need to prepare. The expression of this multi-faceted threat also benefits from such diverse aggravating factors as the development of “failed states” in our immediate neighbourhood, the existence of state violence which fuels jihadist “vocations”, and technological innovations which facilitate encrypted communication and the miniaturisation of weaponry.

The French have been hit very hard by Islamist terrorism, against which they have triggered massive mobilisation on the political, diplomatic, and military

levels, also by attacking that terrorism at source, i. e. in the Middle East. The Germans have not been hit by such bloody attacks on their soil<sup>2</sup>, but they feel a spontaneous sense of solidarity with the French, a solidarity that is fuelled by the idea that they too could become the victims of such attacks. Yet it is by no means certain that the Germans have totally grasped the nature of what is happening in France, or that they can feel as closely concerned by Islamist terrorism, until attacks of the same kind take place on their own soil. Right now they are more heavily focused on preventing the internal, domestic threat than on intervening against the external threat, which seems on the other hand to be the priority for France.

While Islamist terrorism is perceived as a threat targeting Europe, quite apart from Germany and France, a gap was noted between the European people’s demand for security and the tools at the EU’s disposal. The CFSP has made it possible to put in place tools for managing crises outside Europe, but at this juncture it is also a matter of countering an internal threat; national authorities frequently act on the spur of events and on an emotional register, whereas European response and decision-making timing is by its very nature much more sluggish; the

Europeanisation of responses to the challenge of transnational terrorism demands both EU action and bilateral cooperation, although it is not always easy to distinguish between the two.

All in all, the differences in perception and reaction between Germany, France and the EU as a whole do not appear to be such as to obstruct broad collective mobilisation, given that Islamist terrorism is seen as clearly a common threat.



## 2. Internal and external military responses: two countries with a slight disjunction

The struggle against Islamist terrorism translates into internal and external military responses that prompt a kind of disjunction between Germany and France, a disjunction which the round table made it possible to gauge while also helping to narrow the gap.

### 2.1. Military responses on our soil and compliance with the rule-of-law

In response to German questions, it was pointed out that the adoption of a “state of emergency” and recourse to the Army on French soil was being implemented in the context of the rule-of-law. “Operation Sentinel”, in particular, has entrusted the Army with the mission to protect sensitive sites, yet without the authority to act or to intervene, and it is not going to last forever, including from the Army viewpoint.

It was pointed out that even though military-style means are used by the terrorists, it is necessary to avoid countering those terrorists solely on that terrain. France is *de facto* putting up a multi-faceted response but that response may be perceived on occasion as being exclusively military, especially because the French authorities often accompany it with bellicose rhetoric. This situation appears even more paradoxical if we consider that Germany and

France both marked their distance from the essentially military response that the United States put in the field after the 0911 attacks and with regard to the drift perceived in the sphere of public freedoms and of the rule-of-law state.

It was emphasised that the struggle against terrorism in Germany has been based on the police and legal spheres since the 1970s and that it has never led to any military intervention but has been implemented on the basis of a more political and social approach. Even when the presence of refugees and the voicing of threats in a Cologne station recently fuelled a sentiment of anguish and concern in Germany, recourse to armed military patrols in the streets was not taken into consideration despite a White Paper on the issue and debates at the cabinet level.

### 2.2. Military responses outside Europe: differences of form and timing?

The military operations launched in Mali to counter the Islamist offensive were cited as an example of the dissonance between Germany and France. This dissonance reflects the doubts voiced by German grass-roots opinion regarding the impact of the sweeping military operations launched in Afghanistan and in Iraq after 0911, both of which are seen as failures.

Yet at the same time, it was stressed that Germany has boosted its external intervention resources over the past 15 years and that it is aware that the terrorists need to be countered on the military terrain. The German authorities do a great deal more on the external front, with the endorsement of the Bundestag, than French grass-roots opinion is aware of, both in the Sahel and in Iraq and Syria. The supply of arms to the Kurds was presented as a very important decision for the Germans, who are not accustomed to backing one side against the other in external clashes.

It was noted that the two countries’ military operations can be different in nature, with France being more often in the front line and Germany in support, and that it would be useful for both of them to act on both registers to a greater degree, which would imply that German soldiers spend more time on the front line. The aim is also to establish continuity between foreign policy and defence policy at the European level in order to bolster our ability to mobilise forces in a shared context.

The timing of military decision-making was also cited as the source of a potential disjunction between Germany and France. It was pointed out that the despatch of troops or of “battle groups” often demands rapid decision-making capability, in the region of forty-eight hours, and that it is important for European countries’ political and constitutional frameworks to be tailored to cater for this kind of operational emergency.

It was pointed out that the French president is empowered to make the decision to engage on his own, although parliament has to be informed within three days and a vote called four months at the latest after the start of an external military operation, which it theoretically has the power to reject and to cancel. This procedure is out of sequence with what happens in Germany, particularly in connection with the Bundestag’s powers of endorsement.

All in all, the common guidelines contained in the strategic document put together by Jean-Marc Ayrault and Franz-Walter Steinmeier entitled “A Stronger Europe in an Uncertain World”<sup>3</sup> were considered to be encouraging because they testify that a strategic convergence whose practical operational consequences deserve to be adopted.

### **3. Police, legal and intelligence responses: the need for a Copernican revolution**

Effectively combating Islamist terrorism entails formulating more energetic responses in the police, legal and intelligence fields both in a bilateral context and at the European level.

#### **3.1. Extending progress in police and legal cooperation**

The construction of the Schengen area and the deepening of the EU have already made it possible to improve the exchange of information among national police forces. The world of freedom of movement (formerly the first pillar) and the world of security (formerly the third pillar) are currently starting to merge and to transform the management of the EU’s internal and external borders. It is now a matter of extending that transformation on the basis of a broad and decompartmentalised vision of the struggle against internal radicalisation, of the protection of the Schengen area’s external borders, and of cooperation with neighbouring countries.

Yet having said that, it is not easy to make progress in the context of a European treaty which highlights the fact that member states are the entities chiefly responsible for internal security and the sole competent authorities in the field of national security; and indeed the concept of a “security union” promoted by the Juncker Commission, for instance, has encountered opposition in several member states.

Affording priority to a pragmatic way forward demands that we make better use of, and improve the coordination of, such existing European tools as Europol, Eurojust, the Eurodac fingerprint database and the Frontex agency, but also the tools of Interpol and the “Club de Berne” antiterrorist forum. A more comprehensive political steering of all the European efforts in the field of police and legal cooperation should also foster greater consistency between the work done by the Justice and Home Affairs Council and the Standing Committee on Operational Cooperation on Internal Security (COSI).

Cooperation in the police sphere also needs to be strengthened with the EU’s neighbouring countries, including with those that need to rebuild their capability for action in the wake of the Arab spring. Yet the Europeans have to guard against affording priority to partnerships in the counterterrorism field with countries whose repressive excesses fuel radicalisation and extremism.

#### **3.2. Picking up the challenge of European cooperation on the intelligence front**

Cooperation in the intelligence sphere appears to be the key operational issue for combating Islamist terrorism, but also a major political challenge which needs to be picked up. This, because it demands the sharing of information and thus, by extension, also of power; because the European countries appear to be clinging to an intelligence ethos that is a hang-over from the Cold War; and because various different national legal systems coexist, particularly in the field of data protection.

The Germans take a critical view of the powers of police authorities and intelligence services, primarily for historical reasons if we consider that the “Gestapo” combined both police and intelligence functions. Respect for private life appears to be a particularly sensitive issue in a country that has been subjected to fully two dictatorial regimes

(Nazism and communism). And the developments in the “Snowden affair” and the revelation of the NSA’s *modus operandi* have simply heightened German grass-roots opinion’s reservations.

At the European level, it is both remarkable and regrettable that it should have taken so many years to adopt the Passenger Name Record (PNR) on account of the debates around the balance between security and freedom, but also on account of the mechanism’s binding nature for each member state. One of the key issues is guaranteeing that the same data protection standards are applied at the European and international levels in order to bolster the mutual trust which is crucial to any exchange of information.

In organisational terms, it is a matter of forging a greater convergence in the rationales underlying counterespionage and counterterrorism tools, starting with the notion that we are talking about a struggle against criminals and that it is thus possible and desirable to share as much information as possible, including with the Russians and the Iranians. A change of paradigm needs to kick in with regard to counterespionage practices inherited from the Cold War in order for us to be able to move on from the craftsman’s era to the industrial age in the field of intelligence exchange.

Given that sharing intelligence is proving difficult at the Community level on account of the lack of trust among member states, it does not seem possible to envisage promoting the creation of a European FBI in the short term, but what does seem possible is to strengthen bilateral and multilateral coordination in the intelligence field.



## 4. The importance of social and political responses in Germany and in France

The struggle against Islamist terrorism demands social and political responses both in Germany and in France. It is not a matter of arguing that terrorism’s “social” or political causes can justify it in any way, but of addressing those factors that foster the practical implementation of terrorist plans, while taking care to avoid all *a priori* association of terrorism with Islam or with Arabs.

### 4.1. Expanding the integration effort

It was stressed that “Salaphists” are often the best “social workers” and that it is thus up to the public authorities not to leave them a free playing field by ensuring effective integration into our two countries’ societies.

The report produced by Jean-Marc Ayrault and Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer<sup>4</sup> on integration in our societies was cited as a yardstick in connection both with its analysis and with the guidelines that it sets out, including with regard to the exchange of best practices between Germany and France. The hope was voiced that the “Franco-German integration council” it mentions may be rapidly set up and that it will be broadly open to civil society and to think tanks.

It was also considered desirable that national and European policies are developed in the fields of culture, sports and employment and that the European Commission will launch more ambitious programmes in those areas. In particular, it was suggested that a “virtual Erasmus” programme be developed to network 1 million young Europeans and 1 million young Arabs.

### 4.2. Bolstering the struggle against radicalisation

The presence of the roughly 10,000 radicalised youngsters in France was mentioned and of the same number in Germany, as was the difficulty in curbing the wish for action in the first person on the part of youngsters who are promised a better life in the Islamic caliphate over the Internet.

The struggle against radicalisation has made a little progress recently with the introduction of

freephone numbers and requests to Internet service providers to block extremist rhetoric. The report drafted by Jean-Marc Ayrault and Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer contains numerous useful proposals in that connection.

The struggle against radicalisation needs to target both the parents and the children impacted by the slide into jihadism. And given that that slide is not only of a religious nature but also, indeed largely, of a psychological nature, the struggle must also be conducted in the light of Italy's experience with mafiosi or Sweden's experience in tackling young far-right extremists.

Given that Islamist terrorists cannot all just be killed in military theatres, the fate in store for radicalised individuals returning from the Iraq and Syria region sparked questions and aroused considerable concern. It was stressed that we must avoid falling once again into the error made after the first Afghan war, when the jihadists were allowed to disperse and to form a kind of "jihadist international". Thus it is a matter of enrolling them in observation and deradicalisation programmes which need to be developed and implemented in areas specifically set aside for the purpose.

#### 4.3. Clarifying the place of Islam in Europe

**Participants** addressed the question of "European Islam", considering it a complex issue.

It was stressed that the debate on Islam is now a very divided affair in Germany, with the Alternative für Deutschland (AFD) party claiming that Islam is not German, a position in tune with the stance that appears to enjoy majority support in the countries of central and Eastern Europe.

Training imams was also seen as a key issue, as were the links forged between places of worship and non-European countries. But at the same time, it was stressed that it is not the state's job to engage in exegesis regarding the nature of Islam because that is a topic for the experts.

Thus it is not necessarily a matter of organising Islam in Europe but of stressing that a calm and democratic Islam does exist in our countries, that it is culturally in tune with European societies, and that it is clearly distinct from Islamist terrorism. It is also

a matter of stressing that the Muslim world is pluralist, that it is prey itself to an internal war between Sunni and Shi'a, and that Islam is thus not the same thing everywhere.

The example was mentioned of the "Islam Konferenz", which was created in Germany ten years ago, as was the new forum for dialogue set up by the government in France. While the proposal for Franco-German talks on the organisation of Islam has not been picked up by the national authorities, several of the partners in attendance said that they are prepared to organise initiatives on the topic.

In view of all the above, the wish was voiced to strongly develop the teaching and study of Arabic by analogy with the increase in the training of Germanists in France after the Franco-German war of 1870. This intensive training in Arabic should help to foster mutual understanding between the Europeans and the Arabs, quite apart from the goal of recruiting people capable of deciphering the jihadists' messages. It was pointed out that there is currently no course in Arabic for beginners at the Sorbonne (only for native speakers), and that this is a gap which it would be a good idea to fill.

## 5. Diplomatic responses to terrorism: a crucial issue

And lastly, the struggle against Islamist terrorism also demands diplomatic responses in the EU's immediate neighbourhood, in the Near East and in sub-Saharan Africa.

### 5.1. Fostering a political process in Syria and in the Near East

The military struggle conducted against Da'ish was felt to be necessary but insufficient on its own. This, on the one hand, because it is far from certain that it is going to be possible to eliminate the organisation's members in their totality, and on the other hand, because Bashar al-Asad's regime, which fuelled Da'ish's growth and expansion, is itself another crucial factor in the Syrian problem.

The underlying political issue in Syria and beyond must be to reassure the Sunnites (Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and so forth), who may consider Da'ish to be the lesser evil by comparison with Bashar

al-Asad, and who are prompted to conduct a proxy war by funding the terrorist players in it.

Sending them clear signals appears to be even more important if we consider that the Sunnites are labouring under the impression that the West has recently tended to side with the Shiites, especially in Iran, in Iraq and in the Gulf, while Egypt's leadership is in a critical condition. In particular, it is worth redefining our partnership with Turkey on the basis of a common Franco-German approach, urging the country to cast aside all ambiguity in its ties with Da'ish.

This adoption of a stance in the clash between the Sunnites and the Shiites must not prevent the Europeans from defending their own interests in the Syrian conflict, just as Russia and the United States are doing, without espousing a mediation rationale that is more properly the realm of the United Nations.

## 5.2. Boosting investments in sub-Saharan Africa

Mali was cited as a good example of a country in which the Europeans have succeeded in conducting efforts in parallel on both the military and political levels. It should encourage the Europeans to engage in sub-Saharan Africa with greater determination

because it is one of the other hotbeds of Islamist radicalisation fuelled in part by Wahabism and an area in which their political presence is far too weak.

One of the priorities is to combine the struggle against poverty in Africa with a strengthening of security, because there can be no development without security. This must prompt the "development community" to agree to mobilise more funding for defense, for internal security and also for intelligence issues. It is the EU's task to help to reappraise sub-Saharan Africa countries' security needs.

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Above and beyond the challenge posed by Islamist terrorism, this round table led to state that the Europeans are coming up against limitations in their ability to master their own fate. This inability is due to their difficulty in analysing and in playing ahead of the terrorist threat, as well as facing migrant crises. It prompted to highlight the need to promote the European Union as a response to the threats coming both from the south and from the east, on the basis of a strategic and political vision capable of imparting a new meaning and a fresh boost to the construction of Europe.

1. The European Union is going through an existential crisis calling for a reinforced mobilisation of participants of the public debate in Germany and France. A process of work meetings called "Think Tanks Tandem" was launched, bringing together the main German and French think tanks who are active in the field of European issues. They use their expert capacities and freedom of analysis and tone to clarify and dissipate tensions which can impede the proper functioning of the "Franco-German engine" and contribute to the relaunch of European construction in 2017.
2. This round table took place before the terrorist attacks in Germany in the summer of 2016, and also before the latest attacks in France.
3. Jean-Marc Ayrault and Frank-Walter Steinmeier, « Une Europe forte dans un monde incertain », 27 June 2016.
4. Report of Mr. Jean-Marc Ayrault and Mrs. Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer to promote integration within our societies, presented to the President of the French Republic and the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany during the 18th Council of Franco-German ministers, Metz, 7 April 2016.



## APPENDIX - LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

- **Alexander Abel**, Adviser, cabinet of the Minister of State for Europe Michael Roth, Auswärtiges Amt
- **Élisabeth Ardaillon-Poirier**, Principal Adviser, EPSC (European Political Strategy Centre)
- **Katharina Barié**, Project Manager, Bertelsmann Stiftung
- **Alice Baudry**, Project Manager, Institut Montaigne
- **Yves Bertoncini**, Director, Institut Jacques Delors
- **Laurent Bigorgne**, Director, Institut Montaigne
- **Amandine Clavaud**, Project Manager Europe, Fondation Jean Jaurès
- **Stefan Dehnert**, Director of the Paris office, Friedrich Ebert Stiftung
- **Stefan Delfs**, Adviser, Planungsstab, Auswärtiges Amt
- **Claire Demonchy**, Deputy Chief of staff, cabinet of the Minister of state for European affairs, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development
- **Harlem Désir**, Minister of state for European affairs, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development
- **Mathilde Durand**, Project Manager Germany and editor, Jacques Delors Institute
- **Kristina Eichhorst**, Coordinator for crisis and Conflict Management, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung
- **Gilles Finchelstein**, Director, Fondation Jean Jaurès
- **Joschka Fischer**, Former Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs and Former Vice-Chancellor
- **Clémentine Forissier**, Editor in chief, Contexte
- **Fabian Forni**, Chief of staff, cabinet of the Minister of state for European affairs, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development
- **Sarah Fröb**, Director of European affairs, magazine Paris-Berlin
- **Nino Galetti**, Director of the Paris office, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung
- **Marcel Grignard**, President, Confrontations Europe
- **Jean-Paul Guihaumé**, Deputy Director for Germany and Alps and Adriatic regions, European Union Department, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development
- **Julie Hamann**, Project manager France/Franco-German relations, DGAP
- **Isabelle Jégouzo**, Head of the Representation, Representation of the European Commission in Paris
- **Pascale Joannin**, General director, Fondation Robert Schuman
- **Gilles de Kerchove**, EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator
- **Guillaume Klossa**, Founding President, EuropaNova
- **Nicole Koenig**, Research Fellow, Jacques Delors Institut – Berlin
- **Martin Koopmann**, Executive Director, Genshagen Stiftung
- **Manuel Lafont Rapnouil**, Director, ECFR Paris
- **Maxime Lefebvre**, Ambassador in charge of a mission, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development
- **Christophe Leonzi**, Deputy Director, European Union Department, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development
- **Pierre Lévy**, Director, European Union Department, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development
- **Anne Macey**, General Delegate, Confrontations Europe
- **Nikolaus Meyer-Landrut**, Ambassador of the Federal Republic of Germany in France
- **Lena Morozova**, Development Director, EuropaNova
- **Sven Mossler**, Former Deputy General Secretary for Franco-German Cooperation, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development
- **Marc-Olivier Padis**, Study Director, Terra Nova
- **Yves Pascouau**, Associate Research Fellow, Jacques Delors Institute
- **Jean-Christophe Ploquin**, Editor in chief, La Croix
- **Philipp Sälthoff**, Senior Project Manager, Das Progressive Zentrum
- **Stéphane Saurel**, Cabinet Director of the Minister of state for European affairs, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development
- **Stefan Seidendorf**, Deputy Director, Franco-German Institute in Ludwigsburg
- **Nicolas Séjour**, Former Adviser for speeches, studies and prospects by the Minister of state for European affairs, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development
- **Hans Stark**, Director, Cerfa (Ifri)
- **Justin Vaisse**, Director of the Centre for Analysis, Planning and Strategy, French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development
- **Daniela Vincenti**, Editor of chief, EurActiv.com

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