



**Gilles De Kerchove, EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator:
“Jihadi attacks reveal EU failure of imagination”**

[Appointed as EU CTC in 2007](#), Gilles De Kerchove gave a stimulating speech last Thursday at the European University Institute in Florence on the challenges of Counter-Terrorism at the European level. Citizens have strong expectations towards the EU’s ability to provide security, Renaud Dehousse, EUI president, recalls in his introduction. Well-aware that EU legitimacy is at stake, De Kerchove detailed his vision of the terrorist threat and outlined some policy propositions to achieve a better EU security strategy.

Terrorism has now taken many different faces. Jihadi *modus operandi* has so far ranged from hitman-like assassinations of symbolic targets (Charlie Hebdo) to undifferentiated and blind attacks (Paris and Nice). This evolving threat is “a *primary concern*”, said Gilles De Kerchove, acknowledging that jihadi attacks can either be “*ideologically motivated and self-elaborated*” or orchestrated by “*figures such as that of Rachid Kassim*” or Abu Muhamad al-Adnani – two ISIS members actively spreading propaganda and recruiting on European soil.

The fact that terrorists present themselves in a variety of profiles is an evolving and shapeless threat that is even more difficult to manage. In about “80% of all cases, *perpetrators had links with the criminal sphere*”, he stated. However, many have merely taken advantage of an ultra-mediated and powerfully visible jihadi narrative in order to justify their disappointing existence – what De Kerchove describes as a “*from zero to hero*” logic.

In the MENA region, concerns are raised about the propitious environment of failed states and armed conflicts for jihadi radicalization. In a context of limited statehood and contested orders, key regional players such as Iran and Saudi Arabia tend to choose local proxies through a Sunni-versus-Shi’a grid, and are thus bolstering a “*sectarian war*” conducive to radicalization. At the same time, a radical Salafi version of Islam has systematically replaced traditional Islamic practices in post-Revolution countries – raising the question of a possible connection between radical Salafism and Jihadism.

Confronted with all these challenges, the EU has “*made much progress*”, De Kerchove assured. “*President Tusk is determined to invest much more into internal security*”.

However, EU member states still have to “*improve the sharing of data*” between themselves, while also protecting privacy. “*We need both to connect the dots*” – that is

increased data sharing – and to relieve our “*failure of imagination*” – meaning sharper data analysis.

Whether EU member states will be able to overcome the mistrust climate that De Kerchove described as a “*Cold War mindset*”, by feeding and using the existing databases (Schengen Information System, Visa IS, Europol, Eurodac, etc) more, and ensuring their “*inter-operability*”, will prove critical in answering the legitimacy crisis that the EU faces. In any event, Gilles de Kerchove has demonstrated his determination to convince EU member states to favour cooperation over bilateral agreements, and to build “*international trust*” through “*counter-terrorism partnerships*”, among others in the MENA region.