

**Measures to eliminate international terrorism – Belgian contribution.**

Belgium fully cooperates in the fight against terrorism in many international fora, at global and regional level. Belgium participates in EU, NATO, OSCE and Council of Europe counterterrorism efforts, is a member of the advisory board of the UN Counterterrorism Center and fully supports the UN Action Plan to Prevent Violent Extremism. Furthermore, our country has been an active contributor of Europol and Interpol databases and EU-wide information sharing. Belgium is also a member of the New York 'like-minded' group concerning the Counter-terrorism UN sanctions regime. Furthermore, Belgium is an active member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS and participates in all of its working groups.

In 2007 Belgium published its first Action Plan against Radicalization (Plan R), which has been updated in 2016. The terrorist attacks in Brussels on March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2016, were a turning point in the Belgian approach to eliminate international terrorism. In the aftermath of these attacks, the Belgian authorities strengthened the legal, institutional and operational framework to combat terrorism, while maintaining a holistic approach in preventing and countering the phenomenon. The Federal Government introduced a package of 30 counterterrorism measures since 2015. In 2017, a new set of 28 measures in the field of security, several of which are particularly relevant in the fight against terrorism, were announced. Regarding new developments in the Belgian national legal framework, Belgium has restricted the detention of magazines which now can only be possessed by legal owners of the matching firearm. New legal clarifications have also been adopted regarding the transaction for firearms online, it is now forbidden to buy and sell firearms on the internet.

Since June 2020, following a new Royal Decree, deactivated firearms are subject to a declaration requirement to facilitate their tracing. Gunsmiths and arms dealers must also report suspicious transactions to the local police.

3D printed firearms also represent an emerging challenge for law enforcement. The Belgian legislation includes provisions that criminalize the attempt of illicit manufacturing. Therefore, individuals caught in possession of the files used for the 3D printing of a firearm can be prosecuted even if they did not successfully produce one.

Other measures include, among others, the increase of border controls on airports and in international train stations, the enhancement of the information position of the intelligence services abroad, increased identity card security thanks to the use of biometric data and the strengthening of cyber security by installing a call center and conducting a national awareness campaign.

In 2021 Belgium introduced the Strategic Note Extremism and Terrorism (Strategy T.E.R.) which replaced Plan R and aims to contain terrorism, extremism and the radicalization process in society. Where Plan R was focused on repressive and security measures, the Strategy T.E.R. guarantees a multidisciplinary approach which involves a multitude of Belgian actors on the national, regional and local level. The Strategy T.E.R. offers an individual tailor-made approach, along the following guideline: 'socio-preventive' where possible, 'repressive' where needed. The Strategy T.E.R. covers all types of ideologies. The information exchange tool for this T.E.R. Strategy is the Common Database. This database allows all services involved in

the fight against terrorism to exchange information on priority entities listed under different statuses. The criteria for these statuses (Foreign terrorist fighters, homegrown terrorist fighters, Hate propagandists, Potentially violent extremists, Persons convicted of terrorism) are strictly legally determined. A sui generis law outlining the operation of this database as well as its criteria was adopted by the Belgian Parliament on March 21, 2024.

As part of this multidisciplinary approach, local Integrated Security Cells (LISC) must be established in each municipality. As this level is closest to the citizen, the LISCs are the best suited platforms not only to prevent but also to provide a reintegration path for the more problematic cases. These platforms, under the mayor's presidency of the , consist of relevant socio-preventive services to ensure follow-up of the concerned individual, as well as a representative of the local police to link with security monitoring when necessary. It's also worth noting that particular attention is paid to the issue of minors, whether they are listed in the Common Database or are children returning from jihadist areas. Finally, efforts are also underway to establish this type of platform in prisons to prepare for the release of concerned detainees.

The judicial approach has been significantly strengthened: the terrorist offences have been extended and further specified, intelligence and investigation methods further developed, initiatives were taken to improve information sharing, the financial and human resources available of security services have been bolstered and repressive and administrative measures were reinforced. Some of the measures taken include: the increase of border controls on airports and in international train stations, the enhancement of the information position of the intelligence services abroad, increased identity card security of the security of identity cards thanks to the use of biometric data, making travelling abroad for terrorist reasons a terrorist offence - in line with UN Resolution 2178 and 2396 -, increasing the options for revoking the Belgian nationality of people with double nationality, a change of the consular code to allow refusal, withdrawal or invalidation of passports for people considered as threatening the public order or national security, the adoption of a new PNR law including air travel, travel by boat, train and bus, an improvement of the investigation methods related to Internet and electronic- and tele-communications, strict legislation for cryptocurrencies, an extension of the criminalization of incitement to terrorism and recruitment to terrorism. Furthermore, tailored measures have been developed for minors involved in terrorist offences, including those returning from conflict zones, which emphasize the principle of the best interests of the child. There were up to 414 judicial convictions for terrorist offences between 2018 and 2023. More than 264 individuals have been included in the national terrorism list, resulting in asset freezing.

First-line prevention units were set up in the most affected municipalities, to monitor and respond to cases of radicalization. Regional teams and 'mobile teams' were also created to facilitate the exchange of good practices between municipalities, while multidisciplinary support centers were launched to help citizens confronted with radicalization. Furthermore, countering the foreign terrorist fighter threat through prison de-radicalization is a top priority, additionally funding has been increased for radicalization-related counseling in prisons. Belgium has begun training imams who work with prisoners to recognize signs of radicalization to violence, and to identify possible recruiters. Efforts are underway in some prisons to isolate radicalized prisoners to prevent the spread of violent extremist views. Both regional and local

public and non-governmental initiatives exist to attempt to reintegrate returned foreign terrorist fighters and their families into Belgian society, as well as national programs and a federally supported network of de-radicalization specialists that work with foreign terrorist fighters.

At the international level, Belgium is actively engaged on the various resolutions and initiatives pertaining to the respect of Human Rights in the fight against terrorism, particularly at the Human Rights Council, of which Belgium is currently a member, and at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Committee of the UN General Assembly. Belgium actively supports the mandate of the UN Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while Countering Terrorism. Respect for human rights, such as the freedom of expression, while countering terrorism, is of paramount importance to Belgium.

In 2019 Belgium joined the Call for Christchurch, a platform that brings together stakeholders from governments and the internet service provider sector. In 2022 the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (UNCTED) paid a working visit to Belgium and gave a positive assessment of the country's progress in preventing and combating terrorism. During its recent term on the Security Council (2019-2020), Belgium advocated for every UN member state to participate in this type of assessment exercise, which is crucial for the proper implementation and monitoring of UN resolutions. On 15 November 2023 Belgium presented in New-York before the CT Committee of the UNSC the progress it has made with regard to implementing the UNCTED recommendations to enhance its CT efforts.