



TURKEY'S COOPERATION WITH EUROPE ON ISIS

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INTRODUCTION

Prior to the March 19 ISIS attack in Istanbul, the German consulate in the city issued a security warning to its citizens in the city based on [intelligence received from Turkish authorities](#). Two days before the bombing, the Deutsche Schule in Istanbul cancelled all classes, again acting on [intelligence from the Turkish authorities](#). The Istanbul Governor's Office responded to both warnings as "sensationalist and untrustworthy news or hearsay" in an attempt to allay citizens' fears, only to be criticized widely after the [attacks](#) took place.

In recent years, purges and counter-purges within Turkey's security and intelligence apparatus have led to mistrust between agencies, thus impairing their ability to process and transfer intelligence. The ignored warnings provided by the Germans (and United States) indicate that intelligence does not travel well between [security institutions](#).

However, it is not only Turkish intelligence organizations that have trust or capacity problems. The recent attacks in Paris and Brussels reveal that both intra-Europe and Europe-Turkey intelligence-sharing is highly problematic and needs to be [substantially improved](#).

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THE PARIS-BRUSSELS ANGLE ON INTELLIGENCE-SHARING

On March 23, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated that the recently arrested Salah Abdelslam had been detained in Gaziantep in July 2015 and was deported to Belgium on [terrorism charges](#). President Erdoğan followed by claiming that “despite our warnings that this person was a foreign terrorist fighter, Belgium could not establish any links with terrorism and released him.” Moreover, after the November 2015 Paris attacks, Turkish authorities claimed that they had warned France about attacker Omar Ismail Mostefai in December 2014 and in June 2015, but [did not hear back](#).

Both cases reveal how vital it is for Europe to cooperate with Turkey on intelligence and criminal data transfer issues. However, criminal data transfers remain a large issue. In the 2013 EU Progress Report, Brussels urged Turkey to pass a law on the protection of personal data – a prerequisite for cooperation with Europol and Eurojust, two EU institutions which handle judicial and police cooperation on crime, criminal surveillance and intelligence.

Formed in 1998 and 2002, respectively, Europol and Eurojust aim to crack down on cross-border criminal networks, and are crucial for Turkey with regard to cooperation against smuggling, drug trafficking and human trafficking. For example, in January 2008, Europol, Eurojust and the Turkish police cooperated in Operation Greensea, cracking down on a Turkish/Chinese smuggling gang trafficking large numbers of Turks of Kurdish origin into the United Kingdom. The authorities arrested 23 people in France, Belgium and the United Kingdom as a [result](#).

Europol/Eurojust cooperation with Turkey is also critical because of the country's status as a key heroin trafficking route from Afghanistan and Pakistan into the [EU](#). On Turkey's end, drug trafficking is a major security issue, as funds from such sources yield substantial revenues for the outlawed [PKK](#). Coordination with these two European institutions is key in order for Ankara to monitor, track and extradite individuals taking part in PKK funding and recruitment operations in Europe. Especially with the intensification of the Syrian Civil War and the increasingly global threat posed by ISIS, such cooperation is more vital than ever.

The sheer number of refugees crossing the Turkish and European borders – and the direct and indirect multiplier effects on existing smuggling and criminal issues in Turkey and the EU – has caused Turkish and European police and justice institutions to work in closer concert. This is why the EU 2013 Progress Report underlined the necessity of a dedicated personal data protection law in Turkey so as to render such cooperation legally possible. Turkey drafted a law in 2014 and sent it to the EU for revisions, only to alter it into a more problematic form with regard to the processing and storage of [sensitive personal data](#). If that draft law ends up being passed by the Turkish parliament, it may be deemed insufficient by the EU, which may do no good in terms of establishing a better intelligence-sharing regime.

A more detailed look at the draft law indicates that Turkey is unwilling to carry out the reforms that such a law requires, and will use the criminal intelligence-sharing policy as a way to force cooperation onto the [EU](#). A highly problematic political position, such a policy may actually impair intelligence cooperation, increasing mutual institutional mistrust.

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CONCLUSION

The most crucial step at hand is to create a new and better intelligence-sharing agreement between the EU and Turkey. This would mean a better personal data protection law for Turkey that eventually becomes the legal basis for faster and better transfer of criminal data. If completed as intended, this will do wonders in leading to an EU-Turkish joint counterterrorism early-warning system.

In a related fashion, European countries also need to undertake substantial improvements to their intelligence agencies both in terms of funding and personnel. The fact that Turkey had warned both France and Belgium about their respective attackers and got no response is a dire warning to both countries' security agencies that they need to improve their capabilities and establish a working line of communications with Turkish authorities.



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