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What Europe can do after the attacks of 13 November – and what it shouldn't

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What Europe can do after the attacks of 13 November – and what it shouldn't

Bonn, 18 November 2015. As understandable – and predictable – as the intensification of French air strikes against “Islamic State” (IS) in response to the Paris attacks of 13 November may be, they also play into the hands of the Islamists. Europe and the West as a whole should aim at achieving a values-based, sustainable and comprehensive security policy for the Middle East and the Arab region. Western governments are mistaken if they believe that the IS jihadists can be prevented from carrying out further terror acts by an intensification of the bombing campaign. Conversely, the extremists are also wrong in thinking that they can force the West to cease its interventions in the Middle East by attacking civilians. Of course, it is also clear that, in view of the perfidious and cowardly nature of such attacks, we wish to and indeed must respond with unity and resoluteness – anything else would be fatal. Yet, the escalation in violence serves the purpose of the Islamic terrorists and fits in seamlessly with their zero-sum logic, drawing ever more actors into a bloody conflict which, according to the IS chief ideologists, will result in Armageddon and the end of the world. The West can only lose here, since ending the war in Syria – and therefore the acute refugee crisis – can only be achieved around the negotiating table. Following the recent round of international talks in Vienna on the Syrian crisis there may be grounds for cautious optimism.

European global strategy – for a defensive battle?

There is a need, more urgent than ever, for a European strategy that is based not on a short-term, defensive response but a comprehensive and sustainable security policy. This also needs to acknowledge aspects of long-term, regional development as a condition for stability, social justice and democracy. The strategy process initiated by EU High Representative Mogherini in June 2015 risks being hijacked by a debate focused on defence, and driven by fear, resentment and narrow concepts of security. On 18 November the EU Commission also presented the Review of the European neighbourhood policy. It is to be feared that that which is hailed as a “more pragmatic approach” will merely respond to the failures of the past with a watering down of ambitions and goals. In contrast, considerable spending will go on restricting and counteracting the current refugee and migration movements. After the Valletta Summit the EU heads of state and government were criticized for “bribing” Turkey with € 3 billion to take in refugees, whilst just € 1.9 billion remained

for the new Africa fund to improve stability and address root causes of irregular migration flows.

At present, there is a risk of the EU Global Strategy being unduly dominated by defence policy. In conjunction with upgraded powers of security services, police, justice and border protection authorities, a false picture of security is generated, whereas this raft of measures also constitutes a significant risk to civil rights and freedoms. The defence industry has no doubt been waiting for this golden opportunity: having firstly profited handsomely from the export of weapons to the warring parties, there is now also a dividend (or jackpot) in the form of increased procurement and restocking of defence budgets within Europe itself. What is more, also our credibility suffers from the arms deals, because European values become a difficult sell elsewhere in world if we do not take them seriously ourselves. We merely strengthen the arguments of the extremists with such double standards. However, what IS fears the most, according to insiders, are precisely those scenes in which thousands upon thousands of refugees were welcomed by European citizens. Ultimately, restricting our horizon to disciplining and punishing represents a double defeat to both external and internal enemies of the European idea, whereas the benefits in the struggle against terrorism are doubtful.

Security and justice and freedom

If we let fear and a fortress mentality determine our policy choices, then the Islamists have won more than just a battle, gaining unauthorised access to Europe's core values and self-conception. This would be similarly as catastrophic – and equally as unacceptable – as allowing right-wing extremists to make central societal decisions on our behalf, for example regarding asylum issues. And this is, by the way, the only thing that the refugee crisis and terror issue have in common: it is irresponsible in both cases to leave the field to hate preachers and scare mongers. All other mixing of the debate should be viewed as negligent – if not malicious.

We need a holistic view of peace, taking account of security and development in equal measure. This means in-depth analysis and efforts to address the real, underlying and deeper-seated problems, such as grievances rooted in poverty, inequality and oppression. Otherwise we will no longer be able to sustainably protect and preserve the Europe that we desire for ourselves in a world that is becoming ever more tightly interlinked.