

THE BELGIAN HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



# INVESTIGATION COMMITTEE TERRORIST ATTACKS

22 MARCH 2016

SUMMARY OF  
THE ACTIVITIES AND RECOMMANDATIONS





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## **22 March 2016: the unthinkable happened**

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On 22 March 2016, amid the hustle and bustle of the morning rush hour, Belgium became the target of two terrorist attacks, one at Zaventem national airport, and one in the Maelbeek underground station in Brussels.

Two bombs exploded at 07:58 AM in the departures hall of Brussels Zaventem Airport, one shortly after the other. A third unexploded bomb was later recovered. The explosive devices resulted in 12 fatalities (plus the two perpetrators). Nearly a hundred persons were injured.

It soon became clear that these were suicide attacks. That was also stated by the federal public prosecutor's office. Two perpetrators died in the explosions, the third was able to escape from the airport and was arrested in April.

A little more than an hour after the attacks at Zaventem, at 09:11 AM, there was a subterranean explosion near the underground station, which is located in the busy Rue de la Loi, Brussels, between the European Parliament and the Belgian Parliament. A bomb was detonated in an underground car and killed 20 people (plus the perpetrator). More than a hundred others were injured.

A week later, the number of fatalities rose to 32 (plus the three perpetrators), of whom 17 were Belgians and 15 were foreigners. The number of injured climbed to 340 people.

The same day, the terrorist group IS claimed responsibility for the attacks. It was later established that the perpetrators who belonged to IS were returnees from Syria, and belonged to the same terrorist cell that had committed the Paris attacks in November 2015.



## Security measures and commemorations

The **threat level** in Belgium was soon increased to level 4, (which is) the highest level. The airport was closed immediately. The same happened with the Brussels underground network; the rest of the public transport network was also stopped. The nearby buildings of the European Commission were closed, as were many other offices in the Rue de la Loi.

Three days of national **mourning** were declared. In the days and weeks after the attacks, commemorations were organised at different locations. A solemn memorial was held on Thursday, 24 March at the Palace of the Nation, where in addition to representatives of the various governments and parliaments of the country, King Philippe and Queen Mathilde were present.



*In addition to the Prime Minister and the Presidents of the House of Representatives and the Senate, King Philippe and Queen Mathilde attended the formal commemoration held two days after the attacks.*

## The House of representatives reacted with an investigation committee

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In the Belgian Parliament, all Committee meetings from Tuesday 22 and Wednesday 23 March were cancelled. The **plenary sitting of Thursday, 24 March, however**, was held. President Siegfried Bracke began listing all the international expressions of sympathy received by Belgium following the attacks. This was followed by a serene exchange of views about the attacks, in which the leaders of the various political formations all expressed their disgust about this mindless violence, expressed their condolences to the victims and their relatives, praised the courage of the first responders, but also raised a series of critical questions to the government. In his reply, prime minister Charles Michel talked about “one of the darkest days in the history of the country”. At that time, the prime minister had already promised that every effort would be made to clarify the background and the circumstances of the terrorist acts in order to better protect the population.

On 11 April 2016, the main political formations in the House of representatives drafted a common proposal on the establishment of a parliamentary **investigation committee** (DOC 54 1752/001). Days later, the Justice committee adopted this proposal unanimously on 14 April, so that it could be examined and adopted by the plenary of the House.

Only the initiating parties were represented in the investigation committee. Mr. Patrick Dewael was asked to take on the difficult task of committee president. He had already suggested in the (social) media that Parliament had to fully play its supervisory role in the counter-terrorism dossier and that the best way for it to do so was in the context of a parliamentary investigation committee.

### What is a parliamentary investigation committee ?

Under Article 56 of the Constitution, the House of representatives has “the right to investigation”. In order to exercise this right, it can set up a parliamentary investigation committee. The composition of such a committee, the investigation period within which it should report, and its mission must be defined in the proposal.

To carry out its mission, such a committee has a wide range of powers and possibilities: hearing and confronting witnesses, on-the-spot observations, setting up international contacts, examining judicial

and administrative dossiers, and getting assistance from experts. If the investigation committee meets behind closed doors, the members are bound to secrecy.

At the end of its investigation the committee delivers a **report**. That report is public and must include the conclusions of the research work and comments about responsibilities and recommendations to adapt legislation. This report is then discussed in plenary session, where the House of representatives can decide whether or not to align with the report. [*The Federal Parliament. Marc Van der Hulst and Koen Muylle*, INNI Publishers Heule, 2017]

### Tasks and guidance of the investigation committee on the Terrorist Attacks

Four **experts** would ultimately assist the **investigation committee**: Paul Martens, emeritus president of the Constitutional Court, Michaël Dantinne, professor at the University of Liège, Willy Bruggeman, professor at the Benelux University Centre (B.U.C.) and Chairman of the Federal Police Council, and Dirk Van Daele, professor at the University of Leuven.

The investigation committee was given the **task of** making “a chronological and historical reconstruction of all the facts which led to the attacks of 22 March 2016; analysing the first response to the victims; ensuring that all the relevant departments had worked in an adequate manner to deal with a terrorist threat; analysing the root causes of the development of radicalism; analysing the evolution of the existing national system of criminal law and its application in the framework of the fight against terrorism.” It was explicitly stated that the investigation committee should not attempt to act as a substitute for the judiciary’s investigations.

### Chronology of activities

The investigation committee took on its mission on 14 April 2016 and met for the last time on 23 October 2017. The date chosen for the end of the work of the investigation committee was originally 22 March 2017 - exactly one year after the attacks - but because of the enormous amount of work, that deadline had to be postponed.

When contemplating its tasks, it was not surprising that the work of the inquiry committee fell into **three main parts: emergency response and victims, security architecture, and radicalism**. That is reflected in the four interim reports. By not waiting for approval of

the final report and by formulating regular interim conclusions and recommendations, the latter could be implemented faster. In other words, it was then possible to implement measures more rapidly in order to improve the assistance to the victims, the functioning of police and intelligence services, as well as the services which are active in the fight against terrorism and radicalism.

#### **Four interim reports and a follow-up committee**

The **first interim report ‘Emergency response’** (DOC 54 1752/006) was submitted already on 3 August 2016. This is the investigation into the first responder services and the emergency planning.

A **second interim report ‘Assistance to the victims’** (DOC 54 1752/007) is closely linked. The recommendations are the result of the legitimate requests that the representatives of the victims expressed during subsequent hearings. This report was submitted on 4 May 2017.

The **third interim report ‘Security Architecture’** (DOC 54 1752/008) is the most substantial one. It was submitted on 15 June 2017, formulating findings and recommendations on the operation, regulations and procedures of the various security services (police, judiciary, intelligence services, and others).

Finally, on 23 October 2017, a **fourth and final interim report ‘Radicalism’** (DOC 54 1752/009) was issued, in which the investigation committee purposefully limited itself to those forms of violent radicalism that are directly linked to the attacks of March 2016, in this case Islam-related radicalism. The investigation committee unanimously adopted all recommendations from each report.

At the end of its work, the investigation committee concluded that terrorist threats constantly evolve and that continued vigilance is required. Attention should also be paid to the implementation of the recommendations. Therefore the investigation committee recommended the creation of a **follow-up committee**. This recommendation, too, was then unanimously adopted.

## A lively plenary debate on the final report

On **26 October 2017**, the **plenary assembly** of the House of representatives held a long and in-depth debate on these four interim reports (DOC 54 plen192). Just about everyone was full of praise for the work of the investigation committee. However, a few smaller parties, which were not represented in the investigation committee, were somewhat more critical.

As the last speaker, committee president Patrick Dewael pointed out that with this report, which received the support of the majority and the opposition, Parliament had given a strong signal that it is united in the fight against terrorism. Shortly after the attacks, some in Belgium and abroad labelled Belgium as a *failed state*. Months of hard work in the investigation committee made it clear that this is a heavily exaggerated image. Most things were and are well oiled; there's just sand in the gears here and there, according to Mr Dewael's expression. The recommendations of the investigation committee are focused on removing that sand from the gears.

## Premier Michel expresses the commitment of the government

Prime Minister Michel also agreed that a self-respecting, law-abiding state must provide a democratic answer when facing an act of terror, and that is what the committee has done. He gave a short summary of how the government has responded in the areas investigated.

## Emergency response

The government immediately tried to improve the emergency plans and to extend them to the terrorist threat. It took initiatives to reduce the risk in airports and other public places, and also to improve communications between the emergency services.

## Assistance to victims

Measures were taken to assist all the victims and the survivors individually. That work has been continued in an inter-federal task force.



*On the square in front of the Parliament, the Prime Minister, Charles Michel, addressed the Nation with a message of encouragement and reassurance.*

## **Security Architecture**

The government carried out reforms to improve the cooperation among police services, the judiciary system, and security services. In order to detect terrorist threats more rapidly and, if possible, to avert them, the capacity and, to the extent possible, the financial resources of the police services, information services, the Centre for threat analysis, and the Crisis Centre have been increased as well, their operations have been improved, and special investigation methods have been made possible.

## **Radicalism**

The government initially invested in the prevention of radicalisation, which implied an intensified cooperation with the regions.

When universal values are under threat, democracy must stand firm. According to the prime minister, the report of the investigation committee therefore combines tolerance and determination. He

undertook to step up efforts “in order for freedom, security, democracy and love to triumph over hatred”.

After that, the motion, which was submitted by the initiators of the investigation committee, representing a confirmation of the recommendations, were approved with 127 against 5 and 2 abstentions (DOC 54 5 plen193).



## EMERGENCY RESPONSE AND VICTIM ASSISTANCE: FIRST RESPONDERS

*The attacks of 22 March 2016 have caused incommensurable human suffering. It is not surprising that the investigation committee wanted to prioritize how the rescue efforts were conducted on that fateful day and the following days and what assistance the victims, survivors, and aid workers were entitled to.*

Exactly one month after the attacks, the investigation committee **visited Zaventem airport and Maelbeek underground station**, where they were able to talk informally with staff members and other direct witnesses. On that occasion they naturally also expressed their condolences to the victims.

Two months later, the investigation committee went on a **mission to Paris**. The French capital had been previously hit on 7 January 2015 (the editors of weekly *Charlie Hebdo*) and again on 13 November 2015 (in the Bataclan concert hall and at the Stade de France football stadium) by terrorist attacks that were linked to a radical form of Islam. In Paris they had an informative conversation with the French investigation committee. During that conversation, the three research orientations of the Belgian committee were tackled: emergency response and assistance to victims, police services and security, and radicalisation.

Between 9 May and 6 July 2016, the investigation committee held a dozen hearings on emergency planning and on the operation of the emergency services. On 3 August, its interim report, containing many recommendations, was ready. On 18 October 2017, after the other reports - on security and radicalisation - were finalised, this interim report was unanimously approved by all members of the investigation committee. The plenary session of the House of representatives adopted all of the recommendations on 26 October to vote its approval to the whole.

### High praise for the efforts of the emergency services

The investigation committee was full of praise for the professionalism and commitment of all emergency services. They had to work under unprecedented conditions: there was the risk of a follow-up attack and they were confronted with downright shocking scenes. Without prejudice to the commitment of the solidary involvement of the first responders, the committee pointed out a number of areas for





*Accompanied by the President of the House of Representatives, Siegfried Bracke, the entire inquiry committee went to the Maelbeek underground station, the site of the second attack on 22nd March.*

improvement. Without pointing a finger at people or organisations, these considerations were intended to improve the functioning of the emergency response as soon as possible. Indeed, the terrorist threat did not disappear after 22 March 2016.

### **Adapting emergency planning to terrorist attacks**

In Belgium, there are general and specific **emergency and intervention plans**. Emergency plans are coordinated in a first phase at the municipal level, then by the governor at the provincial level, and finally by the minister of Home Affairs at the federal level. Such emergency and intervention plans, which should be integrated into one coherent and global set of regulations, must be general enough, but they must contain specific sections with very practical and specific measures depending on the type of disaster (not only terror attacks but also chemical, biological and nuclear incidents).

Emergency and intervention services are divided into **geographical areas**, which do not always favour cross-border collaboration, as shown on 22 March, when the emergency services in Brussels and Flemish Brabant were unprepared to collaborate. This collaboration must therefore be better organised and implemented.

In many plans the element of terrorism was also absent, which was not really consistent with the increased threat level of 3 or 4. That is the reason why already on 1 May 2016 - a little more than a month after the attacks - a Royal Decree was issued for the establishment of a **national emergency plan for the management of terrorist hostage-taking or attacks**. According to this Decree, the governors of the provinces are now required to draft a provincial emergency plan to combat terrorism. This is a good opportunity to evaluate the existing emergency and intervention plans and also to adapt them to the regulations.

When the threat level reaches 3 or 4, all emergency and first responder services must systematically be informed and put in a heightened

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*Patrick Dewael, President of the investigation committee, thanks the police and the other rescue services for their commitment during the day of the attacks.*



state of alert. That increased threat level does not automatically mean that the **federal phase of the emergency plan** has been announced. Such a declaration must be a political decision, even in the event of a terrorist attack. The decision must be taken quickly and clearly communicated.

At any level (municipal, state, federal), the operational authority of the most suitable entity should be established. The role of all stakeholders - fire brigade, medical services, police, and military personnel - must be clearly defined. In order to promote cooperation in crisis situations, there must be more joint exercises.

### **After the spontaneous effort, a good operational organisation**

As previously mentioned, the deployment of all emergency services was significant on 22 March. There was also spontaneous reinforcement. Such spontaneous solidarity is of great importance in the first reflex phase after a crisis situation of such magnitude, since under these chaotic circumstances, it takes a while before all structures and resources can be used efficiently.

The start-up of coordination at the national level on 22 March took some time. The first explosion at Zaventem airport took place at 07:58 AM, the explosion in the underground station at Maelbeek followed at 09:10 AM. It wasn't until 08:45 AM that the coordinating unit for threat analysis OCAD (which will be discussed further in this brochure) announced threat level 4 for the whole territory. The federal phase of the crisis management was announced at 09:03 AM. Only then did the crisis unit start to operate.

Under such circumstances, it is vital that there is a **unity of command**. This is the only way to ensure that, at all levels, security and emergency services run smoothly and adequately coordinate with the judicial authorities. In case of terrorist attacks, the recommended approach is to hand off leadership to the police.

The fact that the federal phase has been declared does not detract from the fact that the governors of the provinces remain responsible for policy coordination within their province. But in the event of a coordinated action at federal level, the crisis centres and operation units in the municipalities and provinces should fully operate in support of the **federal Crisis centre**. Upscaling and downscaling are therefore important procedures that should be better implemented.

## The special situation of an international airport

The special **emergency and intervention plan** for Zaventem national airport did not include a section dedicated to terrorism. This must be amended as soon as possible. The plan should include a traffic flow section, so that aid and intervention services can smoothly arrive and depart, and that clearly establishes how other traffic flows (e.g. passengers) are organised.

Also, the evacuation plans for such a major airport should regularly be updated and rehearsed. The international character of the airport implies that the summary sheet of the plans should be available in several languages, and certainly also in English.

When 'normal' life resumes at the airport, a balance between security and economic activity must be found. We can learn from initiatives in and around airports in other countries.

## The special situation of an underground station

After the attacks in Madrid and London, **emergency plans for the underground stations** were developed by the government and by the Brussels public transport company MIVB/STIB. The federal phase was declared at 09:03 AM; seven minutes later the explosion at Maelbeek station took place. After the explosion at Zaventem airport, vigilance had been increased. The question arises as to whether the underground should have been preventively closed and, in particular, whether this decision should have been better communicated.

## Good cooperation between emergency centres and customised medical intervention plans

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**Emergency centres** play a central role in crisis situations such as that of 22 March 2016. The geographical distribution per province should not hamper the overall co-ordination. In each province, the various emergency centres (the emergency numbers 100, 101 and 112) should be consolidated at one single physical location. They should also execute drills together. There should also be good digital connections between all 112 centres, and they should all use the same technical platform. The operators of the 112 centres should have a 'terrorist attack' tab. Thus, investment in technical resources and software will be necessary.

The intervention plans in use on 22 March had no separate terrorism section. Here useful lessons from the French example can be drawn.

Although the **maximum medical intervention plan** (Maxi-MIP) was still under development at the time of the attacks, the 100/112-emergency centre in Leuven (Flemish Brabant province) had already been operating in the spirit of that plan. This plan, adapted to the experience that was gained on 22 March, should be rapidly implemented.

On the day in question, each provincial emergency centre had data on the ambulances and hospital beds available in the province, but there is also a need for a comprehensive and accurate federal overview of available resources.

A federal digital monitoring system (following the French example, where each victim gets a bracelet with a unique barcode) should make it possible to register and monitor the victims in real time during the entire chain of care. Emergency services should be better equipped to stabilise injuries of this nature (amputation, etc.) directly on the spot.

At strategic locations defined in advance, there must be sufficient reserve capacity ready to act quickly in the event of a new attack, in the form of medical teams.

### Using hospitals optimally

In all hospitals, remarkable performances were delivered on the day of the attacks and the days after. However, the allocation of the injured to hospitals via the above-mentioned general technical platform can be better managed, so that no single hospital is underutilised.

The Military Hospital of Neder-over-Heembeek was of great value for emergency aid in this very extensive and serious incident, notably due to its geographical location.

## **Crisis Centre: information that circulates smoothly and decisions that are implemented**

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*The following is a brief outline of the operation of the **Crisis Centre of the government**. There are a number of points of concern relating to organisation, decision-making, and monitoring the implementation of decisions. The recommendations that follow are then applied to the specific case of the Brussels underground.*

### **The management unit of the Crisis Centre takes control**

The **Co-ordination and Crisis Centre of the government** is the central point of contact of the government that collects, analyses and disseminates urgent information 24/7. Drills in which a terrorist attack was simulated had shown that there was a need for a central management unit and decentralised operational units. These findings were brought together in the **national emergency plan for terrorism of 1 May 2016**. This plan was thus not yet in force on the day of the attacks.

On 22 March, the Crisis Centre organised a **coordination** meeting immediately after the explosion had been reported at 08:06 AM. The participants arrived in a staggered fashion. Within ten minutes the most essential decisions had been taken: evacuation of the airport, increased security measures at regional airports and for large train stations, increased vigilance for the tram and bus companies, briefing of police and military reinforcement, increased vigilance for nuclear power stations, ports, and critical companies, evacuation and shutdown of the entire Brussels underground network.

The minister of the Interior proclaimed the **federal (= national) phase of the emergency planning** at 09:03 AM. According to the investigation committee, the way the official proclamation is made must be laid down by law, so that all services involved in crisis management are immediately informed.

At that time the management unit is automatically **activated within the Crisis Centre**. The national emergency terrorism plan of 1 May 2016 placed this unit under the joint leadership of the Director-General of the Crisis Centre and the federal prosecutor. All kinds of persons involved will be invited to take part in the discussions: federal ministers along with services that provide useful preventive or reactive measures. The minister-presidents of the regional and community governments are now officially part of the management unit,

since a federal emergency obviously also concerns the regions and communities. Such discussions should take place via videoconference or digital communications channels.

### The OCAD advises, the Crisis Centre decides

There is a **clear difference in powers between the Crisis Centre**. The OCAD is the Coordinating Unit for Threat Analysis and is chaired by the ministers of Justice and Home Affairs. The OCAD may make suggestions for protective measures, but it has no decision-making power. The Crisis Centre analyses a particular crisis situation and the associated risks to decide on that basis.

However, due to the Terrorism emergency plan, threat analysis and emergency planning were more closely geared to one another. So, it was determined that the threat level set by the OCAD to 4 at least triggers a pre-alarm phase to reduce or eliminate the threat via the appropriate measures. During this phase, the Crisis Centre will always organise a coordination meeting.

### The situation on 22 March 2016: phased decision-making

Even after the proclamation of the federal phase, the governors remain responsible for command coordination within their province (in Brussels it's the minister-president who is responsible), in which they operate in accordance with the instructions of the Home Secretary. They in turn command the mayors of the municipalities. The emergency terrorism plan of 1 May 2016 optimised the streamlining between these three levels.

On 22 March, it appeared that in the event of a terrorist attack, an **emergency procedure is necessary**, in which the director-general of the Crisis Centre and the federal attorney can immediately make all urgent decisions. In the meantime, a digital online log should also be used, in which the events and decisions are constantly kept up to date.

In principle, there is no direct communication from the Crisis Centre. A phased system is used: the management unit takes a decision and its implementation is the responsibility of the minister in charge, who then shares the decisions with the services under him.

In order not to lose time and avoid misunderstandings, the investigation committee recommends that the management unit take its decisions by consensus. If that is not possible, for reasons of efficiency, the prime minister must be able to make quick decisions, which are



binding for all ministers and services that are or should be involved in the crisis.

### A direct flow of information

When the federal phase of the emergency plan is proclaimed, the **information unit of the Crisis Centre** is activated. It shall provide information to the public. This has been possible for some time via the alert tool BE-Alert, which enables people to be informed quickly and clearly via telephone, e-mail, and social media. It is not the responsibility of this unit to inform the services involved in the execution of the decisions.

The investigation committee recommends that the operational translation of the decisions be implemented directly, and therefore no longer via the phased system. **The management unit must therefore be reinforced with a communication and follow-up platform.** This platform has four missions: direct communication of the management unit decisions to the services that must implement them; coordination of their decisions and their implementation; permanent follow-up to check whether the decisions have been implemented; and ordering noncompliant services to implement the decisions without delay.

### Close follow-up of the implementation of the decisions

The investigation committee determined that the Crisis Centre did not adequately supervise the actual and adequate implementation of its decisions. A systematic follow-up of the decisions is essential. The follow-up platform is here to provide some relief. **The communication platform directly shares the decisions of the management unit with all the actors who should implement the decisions:** transport companies, nuclear power stations, schools, etc. The intermediate link of administrations and ministries is thus eliminated.

The ***Incidents and Crisis Management System***, which is being introduced, can contribute to improving the flow of information even further. It is a secure real-time Internet platform that informs all the services involved in crisis management about the implementation of the measures that the Crisis Centre imposes. It can be embedded in the communication and follow-up platform proposed by the investigation committee. It should also display a real-time overview of the available capacity of the different disciplines.



## **A case study: evacuation and shutdown of the Underground network**

The events in the Brussels underground on 22 March 2016 are a good **case study** to illustrate the above findings and recommendations. The evacuation and shutdown of underground and railway stations after a terrorist attack do not occur automatically, not even in case of threat level 4 and/or the federal phase of an emergency. A governor and a mayor, 'in order to prevent disasters' and to maintain 'public order' can decide the shutdown of a station. Ultimately, the decision must reach the railway police, thus not through a phased system.

Meanwhile, the internal emergency plan of the MIVB/STIB was already adapted on 24 May 2016 so that the Crisis Centre can communicate the decision to evacuate the underground network to the MIVB directly via a senior official in Brussels.

Therefore, the investigation committee once again calls for direct communication from the management unit to all the departments concerned, through the proposed communication and follow-up platform. The rules governing the shutdown of public transportation must be clear: who has the power to decide and how is that decision directly communicated?

## **Communication flowing more smoothly**

*On 22 March 2016, significant communication problems were identified both in the Crisis Centre and on the ASTRID and mobile networks. As communications at the Crisis Centre have already been abundantly covered above, we will cover only the recommendations regarding the ASTRID network and the various mobile operators in this section.*

### **An improved ASTRID network for emergency services**

The ASTRID network is the sole operator for the communication system for all Belgian emergency services (police, fire brigade, medical services). In all, 70,000 people are using it. The network is based on the European TETRA technology.

On 22 March 2016, the network was quickly saturated, due to technical failures as well as incorrect use by the persons involved (the use of the devices is not easy).

It is recommended to continue using ASTRID as a multidisciplinary communication platform for emergency services, and to expand the

capacity of the ASTRID radio, to make it more user-friendly (also hands-free), to structure the communication groups differently, to provide more training for the users, and to search for digital alternatives within ASTRID. It is also extremely important that in case of disasters such as that of 22 March, ASTRID be immediately informed of the measures taken and their possible impact on communication.

### **An increased transmission capacity for mobile network operators**

The three Belgian operators of mobile networks (Base, Orange and Proximus) had to face network congestion due to the large number of people (victims, relatives, first responders, workers, citizens) who started communicating intensively, all at the same time. The low radiation norms in Brussels have made the problem worse. The investigation committee asks whether Brussels should continue to advocate separate norms in times of crisis.

*BE Alert* was not yet operational on 22 March.

The management centres of the emergency services are working with the Proximus network. The 112 calls to the emergency services have priority on that network, which does not apply to the other emergency numbers 100 and 101. That needs to change. In addition to the emergency numbers, the key actors of the crisis management cell must also get priority. And we must raise the public's awareness of central emergency numbers. At the same time, the providers should also rely more on other digital communication channels such as SMS text messages, e-mail, WhatsApp, and social media.

In the event of a serious crisis, an immediate increase in transmission capacity is necessary. Additional masts should be well distributed regionally. Mobile antennas should be placed quickly on the spot or using escorts, or they can even be equipped as priority vehicles.

In the meantime, we must work toward a system of national roaming according to the Swedish model in crisis situations, in which solidarity between the providers ensures that the network does not reach saturation.



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*One year to the day, after the attacks at Zaventem and Maelbeek, a 20 m long memorial was inaugurated on the Schuman square, in Brussels, in memory of the victims : "Injured but always standing straight against the inconceivable."*

## SUPPORT FOR AND RECOGNITION OF VICTIMS

*In its first interim report of 3 August 2016, the investigation committee had already issued a series of recommendations on the first response and assistance for the victims of terrorist attacks, their identification, the provision of information and follow-up at the medical, psychological, administrative and legal levels.*

### Identification and initial care

As mentioned above, the commitment of all first responders deserves enormous praise. However, a number of problems should be reported and addressed.

It is problematic when emergency services from different regions have a different **intervention strategy**: either first aid is provided in an advanced medical post (*stay and stabilise*), or patients are immediately sent to the nearest hospital (*scoop and run*). Coordination between the 112 centres is necessary when working across provincial borders.

The equipment of the emergency services must be adapted to needs in case of acts of terrorism, which cause very specific injuries.

The identification of victims (both injuries and deaths) and drawing up of lists is complicated as hospitals are systematically bound to professional secrecy.

**For the injured, a central registration system** is necessary, in the form of an *ad hoc* federal database, in compliance with privacy rules. At the same time, the provisions on professional secrecy must be revised. That database is also useful for effective psychological, legal, and insurance-based aftercare.

**For the identification of the deceased victims**, the federal public prosecutor's office and the **Disaster Victim Identification Team** have been particularly useful in these difficult circumstances. This procedure can be improved on the basis of experiences from abroad. Here too, the medical world must be convinced to abandon its reluctant attitude.

## Aftercare for victims and traumatised first responders

If victims feel left to their fate, they are victims all over again. Communication with the victims must be open and tactful, among other things by organizing regular information sessions. An information campaign can encourage victims and survivors to come forth if they need assistance.

Aid to victims does not stop after a few days. Victims and their families also have the right to **long-term** medical, psychological, legal, and administrative follow-up.

Previous disasters have taught us that a memorial ceremony is very important for the victims, as a comforting and grief processing tool. That must be an integral part of the procedure.

We must also not forget the emergency services themselves. Helping in this type of disaster is often very shocking and traumatizing. First responders need appropriate psychological support.

## Rethinking the victim issue

The victim issue was again discussed on 18 January 2017, after a first victims' association had been announced. That day, the committee heard the victims and survivors of the attacks. On this occasion, the victims expressed their disappointment about the "little" that had happened in the months after 22 March 2016. The investigation committee listened to the **victims' associations** and victims in an informal setting.

Meanwhile, on 8 March 2017, the government submitted a **bill for the recognition and compensation scheme for victims of acts of terrorism** (DOC 54 2334/001). This bill is about national solidarity, reimbursement of assistance costs, and recovery benefits. The discussion around that bill was postponed because we wanted to take into account the recommendations of this investigation committee.

The investigation committee has requested extensive information from the committee for financial aid to the victims of deliberate acts of violence and from the professional insurers' association. The French report "La structuration de la politique d'aide aux victimes" (issued in February 2017) offered fascinating insights on the situation in the different countries which have previously been subject to such attacks. In France, the victims of the Paris and Nice attacks were

quickly able to turn to a compensation fund. That fund paid out compensation almost immediately and then obtained the corresponding amounts from the insurance companies.

### **Basic principles of victim support**

All this resulted in a second report, in which first the **basic principles of victim support** were established: rapid recognition of the victims and their status; immediate granting of financial support; the organisation of a proactive, individual, comprehensive (administrative, psycho-social, legal, financial) and long-term support; and equal treatment for all victims, regardless of their nationality or place of residence.

### **State of affairs in Belgian and European law**

Already on 31 May 2016, two months after the attacks, additional funds were granted to the **Committee for financial assistance to victims of deliberate acts of violence and occasional first responders**. The amounts for victims of terrorism were increased.

The Royal Decree of 16 February 2017 also included measures in favour of terror victims. The aid was extended to foreigners who live in Belgium, as well as to Belgians and foreigners residing in Belgium who are the victims of an attack abroad, even if the victims have not filed a complaint or if they haven't filed as a civil party.

**Europe**, too, has drawn up a number of directives for the protection of victims of criminal offenses.

Directive 2004/80/EC stresses that since citizens can travel to another Member State, they must be protected in the same way as nationals of that Member State.

Directive 2012/29 reiterates that victims must be recognised and treated in a non-discriminatory manner.

Finally, Directive 2017/541 states that services for victims must respect confidentiality, be free of charge, and easily accessible. Emotional and psychological support as well as legal aid are specifically mentioned in this Directive.

## Bill 54/2334 and the inter-federal task force

This **law of national solidarity**, which was adopted by the House of representatives in July 2017 states, among other objectives, that the State would pay an additional compensation, on top of what the insurance companies and the committee for financial assistance to victims and occasional first responders already pay in case of deliberate acts of violence. In its report, the investigation committee was hoping that the new law would contain no unjustified difference in the treatment of Belgian victims and others.

The fragmentation of powers and authorities certainly does not work in favour of the victims. Examples of countries that have faced attacks (France, Germany, Israel, Spain, Norway) demonstrate that a centralised authority is necessary. Therefore, an **inter-federal task force**, as proposed by the President of the investigation committee, was set up with a view to enhancing coherence. In the task force, all federal government agencies and institutions were represented alongside victims' associations.

*What specific (technical) and more general (strategic) issues, have been considered by this task force? A list of its tasks can be found below. Based on the law on national solidarity, the investigation committee has formulated observations and alternative recommendations.*

### One-stop-shop and reference person

In order for assistance to be effective and humane, the investigation committee recommends setting up a **one-stop-shop**, which should be permanently accessible, with sufficient equipment and human resources and working in collaboration with the aforementioned committee on financial aid. Each victim should also have a **reference person** who can help him/her with red tape.

### Psychological assistance and other recognition measures

**Recognition of a victim is more than material aid.** People are psychologically upset in the months after an attack and need to be properly taken care of. A single statute and a victim card that can be presented to any authority can significantly help. Psychological assistance to victims as well as to staff and first responders suffering from post-traumatic effects must receive sufficient attention. Recognition of victims also implies that they are actually involved in the preparation of meetings and commemorations.

## Optimizing the work of victims' associations and the victims' unit

If the assistance to victims is too slow and too cumbersome, these people become victims a second time, leading to frustration and stress. People have a tendency to shut themselves away in their solitude. The **two victims' associations** which were founded must therefore be recognised and supported administratively, and financially. These associations are encouraged to speak to victims, in order to organise meetings between victims, and to take part in workshops.

If we let the **victims' unit**, which was established following the attacks of 22 March 2016 (with the participation of magistrates), work on a permanent basis, so it can then operate in case of terrorist attack, it would offer obvious advantages: the unit could draw up victim lists and make them available to the government and to the recognised victims' associations. In this way, we could appeal to the victims and assist them proactively. It goes without saying that this must be handled carefully and according to the rules of confidentiality.

## Legal Aid, disputes and exclusions

In such complex dossiers, it is often very difficult for victims to know which insurance or authority one can turn to. In a jumble of technical laws and regulations, victims need and have a **right to legal assistance**, even if they are not covered by any specific insurance policy. The Communities, through the justice system, can play a proactive role in the support to victims. For this financial and insurance-related issue as well, the victims should have access to a single point of contact.

The committee of inquiry noted that the (then still in the pipeline) law of national solidarity established a cumbersome unilateral procedure: the victim makes his/her application, if he/she is refused, he/she can appeal to the Council of State. This further increases the victim's confusion. To help people in a spirit of empathy, alternatives like **amicable settlement and reconciliation** efforts would be preferable, such as the French "*Fonds de garantie de victimes d'actes de terrorisme*". And if reconciliation does not work, a dispute settlement is better left to the labour court.

Article 4 of the new bill includes several exclusion provisions. They are quite broad and therefore they concern the victims' associations.



## Victims of a different nationality and Belgian victims of attacks abroad

At Zaventem airport on 22 March 2016, there were victims of nearly 20 different nationalities. This makes the issue of the **system of aid to foreign victims** very sensitive. With its new law, Belgium opted for a system of social security: that is to say that the benefits are limited to victims of Belgian nationality or residents. Foreign victims can, as endorsed by the Council of State, continue to turn to the committee for financial aid. This is consistent with the nature of European Directive 2012/29. In fact, most European countries have an aid scheme where the place where the terrorist act occurred is the only criterion, not the nationality or place of residence of the victim.

In any case, victims of a different nationality should be informed by the Belgian diplomatic services in their country, in a language they understand, of the possibilities to which they are entitled.

The new law explicitly mentions terrorist acts that were committed in Belgium or abroad. **Belgians are regularly victims of terrorist acts abroad.** They must rapidly receive information from the Belgian embassy in that country about the possibilities offered by Belgian law.

## Tax exemptions, one single expert assessment and subrogation

Free public transport or tax exemptions for recovery benefits are small measures that recognise victims in their individuality. The persons concerned must be clearly informed about these measures.

The **exemption from inheritance tax** is a more complex issue. Inheritance is the competence of the regions in Belgium. In France, the exemption has been in place since 2017. The three Belgian regions (Flanders, Wallonia and Brussels) have already taken legislative initiatives, but the Council of State has had objections. Meanwhile, the Walloon Region has adopted a Decree. Victims have problems understanding inflexibility in such an emotional context and the different fiscal approaches of each region. The task force must now analyse the problem, following which the regions will seek a fair and coherent solution.

It is very unpleasant for victims to have to go through several expert assessments. The committee therefore recommends that, as in the French example, a **single expert assessment** would suffice

for all bodies that could provide assistance or benefits. The experts must of course be able to perform their task impartially and with full independence.

It is not up to the committee for financial aid to take the place of the injured parties and to recover assistance from the insurance companies. That must be done by the State itself. The task force, that includes the minister of Justice and Assuralia, will also handle this.

### **Final Recommendation: a fund for rapid compensation**

Countries such as Spain, the United Kingdom, the United States, France and Israel have already faced extensive terrorist attacks. They developed a permanent and comprehensive settlement scheme for victims, well-funded and unconditionally accessible whatever the nationality or place of residence. Following the attacks of 22 March 2016, Belgium realised that there was a legal vacuum in this domain. **The investigation committee recommended that a fund should be set up very quickly so that each victim can be awarded assistance and compensations.** The fund can then recover the amounts due from the insurance companies.

### **Victims want to know whether the work is progressing, in 2018 as well**

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In the plenary House of representatives' meeting of 25 January 2018, questions were asked about the state of affairs in the victims' dossier.

The reason for this was a cry of despair from an association of victims who still often felt let down seven months after the reports of the investigation committee had been approved. The minister of Social Affairs and Health pointed out in her reply that the law establishing a national solidarity status was approved in July 2017. Many recommendations of the investigation committee were included in this law. What was not included in that law is currently under investigation by a task force under the leadership of the minister of Justice.

The government wants to alleviate the worst of the emergency as quickly as possible. The minister also mentioned: the establishment

of a single contact desk, a simplified procedure, medical assessment, and better protection of Belgian victims abroad. But the task force remains active and victims' associations are invited to submit their input.

### **Monitoring Committee and government take the victims' concerns to heart**

The Terrorist Attacks Monitoring Committee - which largely has the same membership as the original Commission of Inquiry - held an instructive exchange of views about the concerns of victims during a hearing on 14 March attended by victims' associations.

Committee Chair Dewael pointed out that the victims in their emotional situation do not care about complex government organisations and inflexible insurance companies.

Mr. Geens, Minister of Justice, outlined the moral duty on the Belgian State to assist the victims as well as possible. The task force is hard at work putting the Commission's recommendations into practice.

### **Considerable improvements can be expected very soon.**

There will be a website that brings together all the information that is useful to victims of terrorist attacks, and the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office has set up a one-stop shop that can go into action very quickly after an attack. A personal case worker will support each victim individually. Attention will also be devoted to foreign victims and Belgian victims of attacks abroad.

The amounts allocated to financial assistance in the context of terrorism - both advance payments and final settlements - are being increased substantially. The Commission for Financial Assistance to Victims of Intentional Acts of Violence will be able to put itself in the victims' shoes, and the law on insurance for terrorism will be radically reformed to improve cover for victims. The Terrorism department of the Commission for Financial Assistance will handle requests for national solidarity and recovery pensions.

Ministers De Block and Vandeput explained these commitments in greater detail and confirmed once again that the government

is taking the recommendations and advice from the victims' associations very seriously. Finally, the government announced that all victims will be invited shortly for an individual discussion of their financial situation.

(A more comprehensive report on this meeting can be found on the House of Representatives website).

## SECURITY AS A FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT

*When on 22 March 2016, Belgium became the target of terrorist attacks, the feeling of security of all Belgians came under attack as well. Can we still be safe and carefree in public places, many people have asked themselves. That is the basic question that the investigation committee asked, and that's what they have also translated into a number of legal and organisational questions. Can intelligence and police services detect such fanatical criminals? Is criminal law in a position to protect our most fundamental right to life?*

Over the last decade, terrorism related to radical Islam has been responsible for thousands of victims, both in the Middle East and in the West, especially in countries that are part of the international coalition against ISIS. The investigation committee wanted to verify whether Belgium had the services and resources available to effectively protect citizens against this terrorist threat. Where they found shortcomings, they made strong recommendations to improve the operation of security services.

### Belgium's security architecture in nine themes

The investigation committee examined all aspects of the Belgian security architecture and grouped them into nine thematic chapters. They detected dysfunctions in the security chain, sand in the gears, as committee President Patrick Dewael called it, resulting in missed opportunities to prevent the attacks. All the cogs of the security system must form a well-oiled machine. The investigation committee is looking for these grains of sand and offers numerous recommendations as to how that sand can be removed from the machine.

### Belgium is not a *failed state*

The investigation committee has shown that Belgium is not a *failed state* and that the way our country was depicted in the international press after the attacks was far too one-sided. In the 2000s, and certainly after the attacks in New York on 11 September 2001, Belgium took many concrete measures to combat terrorism and radicalism. In this context, the OCAD was founded, a government body that evaluates the terrorist threat on an ongoing basis.

**Local police forces** are responsible for basic police activities, and especially the neighbourhood work and intervention services that are

essential for the early detection of problems associated with radicalisation and possible terrorist activities.

Within the **judicial police**, five specialised directorates are working on terrorism investigations. The Terro unit of the federal judicial police focuses on the centralised mapping of terrorism and makes recommendations in terms of coordinating measures.

The fight against terrorism is also a priority for the department of **Justice**. For prisoners who have been sentenced for acts of terrorism, the penal courts apply different criteria in relation to detention, electronic surveillance, parole or provisional release.

Belgium is pushing Europe towards more operational cooperation and information exchange. The investigation committee noted that Belgium was one of the best pupils in the class in the field of **international information-sharing** within the framework of Europol, Eurojust and Interpol.

Belgium's security architecture is solid and does not need to be redesigned. However, the committee discovered dysfunctions in the security chain that contributed to the fact that the attacks of 22 March 2016 were not thwarted.

### **The salient points in the recommendations of the investigation committee**

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- The various government and security services were still working excessively in parallel. They must become a single, well-oiled security machine in which each part has a clearly-defined function.
- Relevant information should flow smoothly from one policy level to another, from one government administration to the next one. Information flows should also be smooth between the international counterparts of Belgian services. In this way, security services must identify potential terrorists at an early stage, and be able to consult quickly and define priorities in a flexible manner.
- Radicalism and terrorism must be addressed in a comprehensive manner. Repression and prosecution are, of course, crucial, but sufficient attention must also be paid to proactive action and prevention.

- Various security units need more resources and more people. In certain parts of the machine, economies of scale and increased cooperation are recommended, because geographical and operational fragmentation are potential obstacles for proper functioning.
- European and international cooperation need to be intensified. Belgium hopes for an amendment to the European Treaties, so that a European intelligence service can be established. Meanwhile, Belgium can intensify its cooperation with like-minded member states in Europol's Counter-terrorism Group.
- The proliferation of (international and national) rules and procedures should be limited because it threatens to make the lack of coherence in policy even worse.
- The government must ensure that the measures against terrorism and radicalisation in no way erode the values on which our democracy is built.

## Imaging and threat analysis

Different services and structures are responsible for imaging and threat analysis in the field of radicalisation and terrorism. They occur at each government level, from the federal state to the smallest municipality.

- **The National Security Council (NVR)**

The National Security Council elaborates general intelligence and security policies, **coordinates** and defines the priorities. The NVR is also responsible for coordinating the fight against the financing of terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Moreover, the NVR also defines policy on the protection of sensitive information and must ensure that information between the various intelligence and security services is exchanged correctly.

The NVR is chaired by the prime minister and is composed of the vice-prime ministers and the ministers of Justice, Defence, Home Affairs and Foreign Affairs.

- **The Coordination and Crisis Centre of the Government (CGCCR)**

The Crisis Centre of the government takes action in the event of a crisis on Belgian territory or abroad if these events may have an impact on Belgium. The centre takes precautionary and protective measures. It is responsible for the coordination of the various police and intelligence services to monitor a possible threat, and to take the necessary security measures. The Crisis Centre prepares a risk analysis and proposes measures to the Home Secretary on that basis, who then decides whether or not to take a final decision in consultation with the Security Council.

The Crisis Centre ensures a general surveillance service for the government. It constantly collects and analyses information within its competence and passes them on to the persons and services responsible for security. Essentially, in case of attacks like the one on 22 March 2016, the Centre is the **central point** where all the information from police, intelligence and security services and justice is exchanged.

- **The Intelligence Services**

Belgium has two intelligence services: the **security of the State (VSSE)** and the **General Information and Security Service (ADIV)**. The VSSE is a civilian intelligence service under the authority of the minister of Justice; the ADIV is a military intelligence service under the authority of the minister of Defence.

Both intelligence services collect and analyse information about potential or actual threats to the security of the Belgian State. The analyses and information are delivered to other government departments, which have the power to respond to the threats. In contrast to existing offensive foreign security services, the VSSE and the ADIV must be regarded as defensive services that are not competent to take measures by themselves.

The investigation committee calls for more staff and more resources for both intelligence services as well as an **extension of their powers**.

- **The Financial Information Processing Unit (CFI)**

This financial information processing unit provides an important contribution to the fight against the financing of terrorism. Banks and financial institutions have to report suspicious transactions to this



unit, along with notaries, bailiffs, accountants, auditors and lawyers. The reporting and use of these reports have proved so important that the investigation committee wants to strengthen this unit and involve it more actively in the fight against terrorism.

- **Coordinating Unit for Threat Analysis (OCAD)**

The Coordinating Unit for Threat Analysis analyses and makes strategic assessments of terrorist and extremist threats against Belgium. Its work is mainly based on information it gets from other services such as the security services, the police, the immigration department and Foreign Affairs. The OCAD determines the threat level and suggests which measures should be implemented in case of increased threat. The threat assessments are intended for the various political, administrative and judicial authorities that bear responsibility in the field of security. They must take the appropriate measures to avert a detected threat.

The OCAD is under the authority of the ministers of Justice and Home Affairs. It is not an intelligence service, it has no operational powers and it is not, as is the case in some other countries, integrated into another security service.

The investigation committee considers it important for the OCAD to be able to continue to perform threat analyses in total independence. It calls for a general **crossroads database**, through which the OCAD should have access to all information about terrorism and extremism. This database should be equipped with a flagging system which, for each person or body included in the Crossroads Database, shall immediately indicate what service has already taken action and what that action (actually) involved. The OCAD should manage that system. The existing common database integrates the additional information provided by the various services.

- **Task forces and security units**

At the federal level, the **National Task Force (NTF)** is the strategic and policy body that establishes the action plan against Radicalism (the so-called Plan R). It operates under the leadership of the OCAD, and is responsible for the continuous monitoring of the Plan R.

At local level, there are **local task forces (LTF)**. They monitor radicalised groups and individuals and take measures to reduce the impact of these people.

The **local integral security unit (LIVC)** operates at the municipal level. This is a municipal consultation platform that brings together all relevant partners who can play a role in the concrete follow-up of individuals and/or groups. Early detection is key and, above all, a rapid response to the monitoring process can make the difference. The investigation committee recommends to all municipalities to set up such a unit.

## No more compartmental thinking

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*The investigation committee has found that all these institutions within the Belgian security architecture have a clear right to exist, but that the machine grinds to a halt if these services need to share information and cooperate.*

**Working in compartments must be eliminated as much as possible.** Bulkheads, silos or phased decision-making act like sand in the gears. For this reason, it is recommended that the Crisis Centre, the OCAD and the Taskforce be housed together and that their staff be given the same status. Their information management and their communication systems must be coordinated. Methods for imaging and threat analysis must be developed and applied coherently for all services, and for all terrorist crimes.

The OCAD must be fully independent in making the **threat analysis** and determining the threat level. The latter must be carried out on the basis of fixed criteria. The investigation committee is therefore not in favour of annexing the Crisis Centre to the OCAD.

For **risk analyses**, the individual governments and services continue to be in charge. The criteria and assessment methods used should be professionalised and harmonised.

The **security measures** that the authorities take in a specific risk or threat analysis must be standardised as much as possible. This can be on the basis of a pick list of possible measures.

There must be clear agreements on the **communication** of measures between services and authorities. In particular, there should be much better communication between the national and the local task forces and local security units. The investigation committee calls for a legislative basis for communication and for harmonised operational rules.

Another important point concerns the appropriate amount of communication aimed at the population. The intention is to avoid continuously generating panic.

## Strengthening Information Management

The approach of Islamic extremism, radicalisation and terrorism implies that the **security services have an excellent information position**. In order to gain a better understanding of this, the investigation committee studied concrete cases through hearings. These cases were selected on the basis of, among other things, the reports from the P Committee, the standing committee that supervises the police services on behalf of the Parliament in Belgium, and from the COC, the Control Body on police information.

In recent years, Belgium has made great efforts to strengthen information management. The services themselves are aware of the importance of a good information position.

However, the investigation committee found that the security services had a lot of concrete information in the run-up to 22 March, but that it was insufficiently leveraged to identify the threat in time. The investigation committee has found no unwillingness to cooperate, but here and there an island mentality was observed. It has thoroughly analysed where and why it went wrong.

### From pure information gathering to sharing information

The biggest shortcoming is the **lack of an information-sharing culture within and between the security services**. Too many bulkheads remain in the way of an integrated information management system. In addition, security services have a fairly weak information position in radical environments and on social media.

The different services have their own databases that are not always interconnected. There is also a proliferation of databases within the police. There are insufficient guarantees that data will reach all relevant services. Guidelines and procedures related to information transfer and information input are not always followed. Some services have too little information; others are flooded with unfiltered information and suffer from *infobesity*. Some information ends up too quickly in the judicial circuit, leading to over-legalisation.

**The investigation committee calls for a change of culture** whereby the principle of “need to know” is replaced by a “need to share”. We have to work on a comprehensive strategy for an **integrated information management system**. This can only work if all security services cooperate loyally with each other.

### **Better information management by police forces**

A lot of time was dedicated to information management by police forces. High-quality information management is essential for the police. The investigation committee found that there are **two fault lines** as a result of the internal organisation of the police: the first one runs between the judicial and the administrative pillars of the police; and the second between the federal and local police. The major police reform of twenty years ago, however, was aimed at working together more smoothly and achieving good information sharing. Unfortunately, in practice, there is no high-performance information architecture, neither in terms of hardware nor in terms of software. The federal and local police work with a different registration system that urgently needs to be merged into a single system. In addition, police services work with various communication systems, registers and tools. There is therefore a need for more cohesion and coordination.

### **The benefits of a crossroads database**

During the work of the investigation committee, it became clear that there is a strong need to be able to verify, while respecting confidentiality and secrecy regulations, which data other services have. If every level in the security chain develops its own system, it would not be possible to maintain an overview for any service. The investigation committee is therefore of the opinion that it is far better to bet on a **crossroads Security database to share data from databases of different services in an integrated and secure manner**. The police, justice sector, the organisation for threat Assessment, the civil and military intelligence services, the directorate-general of Penitentiary Institutions, the Immigration Department and the Financial Information Unit would participate in such a crossroads database. A management body to establish and permanently monitor this crossroads database must be set up immediately. In this way, it will be possible to determine who gets access to the underlying information and under which conditions.

## Providing intelligence services with more scope

Belgium has a long tradition of intelligence services, but a **legal framework regulating** the operation and powers of both intelligence services wasn't set up until the 1990s. An independent parliamentary supervisory body was also set up: the Standing Committee for the Monitoring of Intelligence and Security Services. Intelligence methods have been refined and adjusted along the way, especially after the 2016 attacks.

Cooperation between the two intelligence services, VSSE (civil) and ADIV (military), is regulated by means of a protocol agreement between the ministers of Justice and Defence.

The main mission of both intelligence services is to gather, analyse and process information about any activity that could threaten the security of Belgium and its citizens on its territory.

The investigation committee has established that the **VSSE has made serious efforts since 2001 to identify the threat of Islamic terrorism**. At the end of 2002, this resulted in the so-called Plan M (Mosques), which was later converted into a more comprehensive action plan Radicalism (**Plan R**), which was approved in 2006. The plan contains preventive, proactive and reactive measures. The information flux between all the departments concerned is a central element of this plan.

### An information position that is still weak, despite efforts

The VSSE has been devoting attention to the phenomenon of Islamic terrorism for more than twenty years, and it has provided reports to successive governments on concrete phenomena and threats, including Sharia4Belgium. The VSSE has regularly faced social and political disinterest. Both the current and the previous administrator stated unambiguously to the investigation committee that the danger of extremist associations in our country was underestimated.

Prior to the 2016 attacks, the **information position of the intelligence services**, despite the many efforts, proved **too weak** to detect the terrorist plans, to reverse the threat and to thwart the attacks.

The investigation committee has come to the conclusion that this is due to understaffing and underfunding of the security services; legal and procedural thresholds; an island mentality in which information

is insufficiently exchanged; and a list of priorities that is too long. These are not purely Belgian problems; foreign intelligence services are also struggling with these same shortcomings.

**The investigation committee wants to eliminate these shortcomings by urging the government to take a number of concrete measures:**

- **The information position of both intelligence services needs to be improved.**

The intelligence services prefer to work with **human intelligence**, which is also the strength of the services. In the very closed radical Islamic community, it is very difficult to recruit human sources. That is why the investigation committee wants to give the intelligence services extra tools with which to work in that community.

The services must be able to set up long-term **covert investigations**. They could pay such informants with more financial means. An agent must be able to easily acquire a false identity, without having to be linked to a legal person.

Certain methods (e.g. **telephone taps**) that could only be applied to Belgian territory until the attacks should now also be an option if the target is outside the country.

Systematic and **structured communications** between the intelligence services and the police must be developed. This is the only way crucial information can always end up in all relevant services so that there can be a total approach to Islamic terrorism.

**Access to the communication channels of potential terrorists** must be optimised. At European and international levels, we must plead for access to encrypted communication applications such as WhatsApp. The exploitation of information on social media must also be professionalised.

- **The National Strategic Plan for Intelligence must be completed as soon as possible within the National Security Council.**

For optimal organisation and operation, the intelligence services must be managed together on the basis of a strategic plan (and thus a global vision). This can be done by an **intense synergy between the VSSE and ADIV**. The heads of both services must coordinate their actions. The division of tasks between the two services should be

more clearly defined. The two services won't be merged, but the current ad hoc collaboration must be replaced by enforceable and formal partnerships. There is no need for a joint database, but both databases must be linked to the recommended crossroads database. Furthermore, the investigation committee pleads for the creation of a common platform to coordinate the strategy together, to exchange information, technical resources and personnel, and to draw up a joint priority list and action plans. This platform should also allow the joint use of translation capacity and social media intelligence. According to the investigation committee, it could also be useful to house the services together.

- The VSSE must not only gather information but **also be able to act disruptively** towards persons and entities in order to reduce their potential to harm. Examples are the withdrawal of an operating or residence permit. Although the intelligence services must gather information in an early phase about radicalizing individuals, criminalisation of radicalisation itself is not on the agenda.
- Staff training and information technology at the VSSE must be considerably improved. According to the investigation committee, it is absolutely necessary to give the intelligence service a **substantially higher budget**, comparable to that of equivalent services in comparable countries.
- The investigation committee also points out that the **over-legalisation issue needs to be addressed**. Until the attacks, in case of (strongly suspected) criminal offenses, the investigation was immediately withdrawn from the VSSE and passed on to the judicial authorities. As a result, they were overloaded and often had to abandon a dossier because of a lack of capacity or inculpatory elements. If this is to the benefit of the dossier, then the investigation of the intelligence services should from now on take precedence over time and the judicial authorities must then exercise restraint.
- **Cooperation of the intelligence services with other security services must be reinforced**. The federal judicial police (FGP) of Brussels has established an Intelligence Fusion Cell, in which detectives systematically exchange information with liaison officers

from the intelligence services and the OCAD. This is a best practice that the four other FGPs who specialise in terrorism should adopt. A joint information position could be established through a weekly consultation. The **Financial Information Processing Unit**, which conducts the investigation into suspect financial streams, must also be involved in this consultation. This unit must also be strengthened and better involved in the fight against terror. In this way, **five Joint Intelligence Centres** should be created, where information is exchanged, a joint analysis is prepared, and a common priority list is determined.

- The intelligence services must have **flexible human resources management**, because current recruitment procedures are too cumbersome. They should be looking for civilian personnel with a suitable specialised profile. The diversity of society must be reflected in the recruitment of migrant employees. There is a great need for staff that is proficient in the languages spoken by the terrorists. It should be possible to deploy personnel flexibly and to second staff from one department to another on a temporary basis. If the employees of the VSSE, the OCAD and the civilian staff of the ADIV are given the same statute, this will contribute to increasing mobility between the services.

## **Investigation and prosecution by the police and the public prosecutor's office**

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*The investigation committee also examined the role in the fight against terrorism of the federal police, the local police, the federal prosecutor's office and the five specialised judicial boards. Here, too, the architecture is right, and that it is mainly a cultural shift that is needed.*

The investigation and prosecution of terror suspects is a task of the federal judicial police and the federal public prosecutor's office. With the current deployment of personnel and resources, this task cannot be performed adequately. The investigation committee has proven this conclusively by analysing the dossier of the Abdeslam brothers.

Another point of attention is the distribution of staff between services and the handling of seized documents. Unambiguous and efficient procedures must be developed for all investigative activities that are uniformly applied by all services.



Human resources are crucial for the detection of terrorist crimes. That is why the Belgian government is working on a **statutory scheme for civil infiltration and repentant terrorists**. The committee of inquiry points to the necessary balance between effective detection and the protection of the fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens.

To counter the recurrent press leaks, the investigation committee points to the Defence and Security Media Advisory Committee in the United Kingdom. This committee consists of representatives of the police, intelligence services, and journalists. It issues, by consensus, guidelines on the dissemination of security-related information.

For every actor in the investigation and prosecution policy, the investigation committee has formulated recommendations that can speed up the operation of this section of the security machine.

**The investigation committee proposes a number of amendments to improve the functioning of the federal police:**

- **A more hierarchical organisation at the top** of the federal police. The role of the commissioner-general should be reinforced. The consensus model remains the starting point, but in the absence of consensus with the director of the administrative and/or judicial police, it is the commissioner-general who decides. The judicial officers must act in accordance with his binding instructions and are under his direct supervision. The federal police must also abandon the rigid and structural boundary between the administrative and judicial police to be able to evolve toward a more integrated operation. There must be a clear chain of command with the commissioner-general in an undisputed position at the top of the chain.
- The federal police must **involve the minister of Justice and the board of attorneys-general more closely** in the daily management and in important decisions.
- At the time of the attacks, only 11,000 of the 13,500 positions in the staff of the federal police were filled. That **staff must be completed** with due attention to specific profiles and an active diversity policy. This is important because staff need to be in touch with all communities in Belgium and also because the presence

of agents from minority groups can positively influence the image of the police within these communities. The staff should be uniformly distributed within the federal police, taking into account the workload in the various sectors.

- **Working at the federal police must be attractive.** The inquiry committee therefore believes that personnel statute, the remuneration and premium system must be reviewed. The aim is to harmonise, to make certain functions more attractive, and to promote staff mobility within the police. Equipment should be easier to purchase.

**The investigation committee proposes a number of changes that can optimise the operation of the federal judicial police:**

Within the federal judicial police, five specialised and decentralised judicial departments (the so-called Terro-FGPs) are active as well as nine other FGPs. In addition, the service/DJSOC Terro also works on terrorism investigations.

**Five specialised Terro-FGPs**

The investigation committee wants to keep these current management structures, but their operation must be optimised. It advocates the same research culture and strategy within the five Terro-FGPs. A certain degree of specialisation in a particular terrorist phenomenon may help to achieve efficiency gains. Each Terro-FGP must expand its information position and support the others. The above-mentioned Intelligence Fusion Unit of the Brussels FGP must also be set up in the four other FGPs, to obtain five Joint Intelligence Centres.

The **federal prosecutor**, as the head of the public **prosecutor's office**, must be able to issue **binding guidelines** to the five Terro-FGPs. The **director general** of the judicial police must ensure **unity of command** in investigations in which several FGPs are involved. The federal prosecutor or the investigating magistrate should be given the opportunity to appoint one senior police officer to coordinate the operations.

The Brussels FGP was forced to develop a list of 'red' dossiers, which they were not able to look into because there was no capacity to handle the dossiers. The investigation committee finds this unacceptable. Capacity must be at a minimum sufficient to handle all dossiers.

## Nine other FGPs

The nine other FGPs in other districts can also conduct terror investigations.

## DJSOC/Terro Service

This service of the federal judicial police is responsible for the **imaging of terrorism and organised crime**. At the time of the attacks, DJSOC/Terro was a service in an existential crisis. Internal restructuring, a shrinking workforce and a lack of guidance in combination with an increasing number of reports of terrorist threats led to the failure of the service to coordinate and support the five Terro-FGPs. This was taken up by the federal prosecutor's office.

The investigation committee judges that the entire service, on the basis of eight criteria, must be **reorganised in such a way** that it can really add value to the fourteen FGPs. DJSOC must remain in charge of carrying out strategic analyses, taking into account developments in the field of terrorism. DJSOC must be responsible for conducting tactical analyses in collaboration with the FGPs. DJSOC must guarantee the policy support of the commissioner-general and the two directors-general of the federal police. DJSOC must continue to act as a central point of contact for administrative and judicial authorities, on the one hand, and as a national contact point for foreign partners and Europol on the other.

## **The investigation committee proposes a number of amendments to optimise the operation of the federal public prosecutor's office:**

The federal public prosecutor's office is responsible for **prosecution in terrorism dossiers**. The public prosecutor's office itself does not have investigative capacity and the investigation committee wants to keep it that way. **The prosecutor's office will therefore continue to appeal to investigators of the FGPs**. The investigative capacity reserved for the federal prosecutor's office is organised in three concentric circles: the first circle contains the investigators of the Terro-FGPs, the second one the other FGPs, the third and outer circle contains the investigative services of larger local corps.

- **The scope of that search capacity will be determined periodically.** For instance, extra capacity can be allocated during peak periods. This is necessary because not all terrorism dossiers were handled with the necessary care before the attacks and because other serious crime files threatened to be buried under them.

- **Priorities must be set in an extremely responsible manner.** If information exchange takes place in the Joint Intelligence Centres, which should ensure a joint information position, priorities can be set in a responsible manner in the **Joint Decision Centres**. This should prevent dossiers from being dismissed by the federal public prosecutor's office due to a lack of capacity.
- **The federal prosecutor's office should only dismiss a terrorism case with a thorough justification.** The public prosecutor's office must inform the other security services of that dismissal. A dismissal is no reason for other security services to stop working on the dossier. The follow-up of radicalised persons must also be systematically put on the agenda of the local task force after a dismissal.

### **Sentence execution in a context of terror and radicalism**

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*The investigation committee has examined research statistics on the number of cases opened and the number of terrorism convictions. It also addressed the conditional releases granted by the sentencing courts. Between 2008 and 2016, there were 75 verdicts in Belgium regarding terrorism-related crimes.*

The Belgian **sentencing** courts are courts that, since 2007, have been tasked to watch over the execution of the sentences pronounced by the courts and tribunals. They decide whether or not to grant limited detention, electronic supervision, parole and provisional release.

To better monitor prisoners convicted in the context of terrorism or radicalisation, **the investigation committee recommends that a number of aspects involving the execution of sentences be tightened up:**

- The **sentence of the sentencing court** about conditional release and individual special conditions **must be more fully justified** if it deviates from the advice of the prison director or the public prosecution service.
- Prisoners benefitting from parole, who have been sentenced for acts of terrorism or for whom there are indications that they are radicalised, are subject to **a travel ban**, unless the sentencing court grants a motivated approval. In that case, every trip abroad must be notified to the judicial assistant.

Furthermore, the investigation committee believes that the **control of radicalised individuals during and after sentencing must be stepped up** by taking a number of concrete measures:

- Prison directors must have access to the OCAD list of Syrian fighters for the purpose of visitor **screening**. In addition, State Security can report to the prison management that there are indications that a visitor shows signs of radicalisation. The same applies to visited detainees. To facilitate information exchange, a security clearance can be granted to the prison directors. If there are indications that a prisoner is undergoing radicalisation, or if a visitor is known as radicalised, then the prison management must conduct a screening in case of a visit.
- The investigation committee recommends that a **strict deadline** must be set **between the violation of the conditions and the revocation of the conditional release**. An international arrest warrant must be issued quickly for anyone who is on the run. The **FAST team** (Fugitive and Asset Search Team) is responsible, among other things, for identifying internationally-signalled persons. This unit must be significantly strengthened and must be able to use special detection methods. In addition, staff training in courts and the public prosecutor's office must be adapted. The minister of Justice must issue binding guidelines on the detection of convicts who violate the terms of their parole.
- The hearings of the investigation committee showed that the exchange of information between the sentencing court and the security and intelligence services, the federal prosecutor's office, and the OCAD about the radicalisation of a convict is not well-organised. This data exchange has often been inadequate because a lot of information about terrorism has been classified. Without this information, the **sentencing court** cannot actually make a judgement and therefore the investigation committee pleads to **nevertheless share sensitive information about the radicalisation of a convict with the sentencing court, but through a special procedure** in which the contradictory nature of the procedure and the rights of defence can be easily reconciled with the sensitivity of the information.

Only fairly recently has it been realised that perpetrators of terrorist crimes were former perpetrators of common law offenses who had not shown any prior signs of radicalisation. Occasionally, radicalised individuals practice *taquiya*, a dissimulation strategy in Islam, in which they consciously camouflage themselves in the 'pack of infidels' before proceeding to action. All actors and in particular in prisons should be aware of this, to be able to detect subtle signs of radicalisation.

- **The monitoring of individuals on parole must be more effective** through better and faster information handling and exchange by the various actors involved in the execution of the sentence - such as the justice houses, the public prosecutor's office and the local police zones. The public prosecutor should have a co-ordinating role. To this end, the investigation committee recommends the creation of a crossroads database. This should enable proactive action and permit faster intervention when conditions are violated.
- Those convicted of terrorism who are ultimately released, as well as other convicts who are released and show signs of radicalisation, must be subject to **control and supervision measures**. The local police must be informed in due time about the release of a person who has served his full sentence and who is classified as radicalised by the State Security. The local task force must then discuss proactive measures
- **Judges** must receive extra training in their curriculum on the phenomenon of radicalisation.

### **Administrative action and prevention in the municipalities**

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*Administrative action by local police and local authorities is crucial in the context of prevention and follow-up. It must therefore be professionalised and strengthened. The administrative and judicial authorities need to **work together better**, just as there should be better cooperation between the federal government and the police on the one hand and the local government and police on the other.*

Mayors indicate that the **flow of information is insufficient**, while they are expected to guarantee security on their territory.

The focus of the **local police** is often on repressive actions, and as a result, important tasks such as **neighbourhood work** are under threat of getting less attention. The Canal Plan and the local integral security units (LIVC) are good examples of interdisciplinary cooperation between judicial and administrative services and this on different levels.

**In order to better equip the local authorities, so that they can optimally contribute to guaranteeing security, the investigation committee made a number of recommendations:**

- Every municipality or police zone should have a **local integral security unit (LIVC)**
- **The information position of administrative authorities should improve.** First of all, the exchange of information between public prosecution authorities and municipal administrations should be more intensive. This can be achieved, for example, by introducing strictly-defined access to judicial information (such as criminal records) for mayors. The administrative component of the General National Database (ANG) of the police must be anchored further. It must then be accessible for local police officers working on certain dossiers, via the crossroads database to be created. Through a single storage system, it should be possible to share police data with judicial and administrative authorities. The committee of inquiry would prefer a separate law on security information.
- There is a need for a **clear policy architecture**, in which the role of the federal government, the regions, the communities, and the local authorities are clearly indicated.
- After the attacks, the high **security level 3** was maintained for a relatively long time. The measures to be able to maintain this must be evaluated and lessons must be learned.
- The so-called HYCAP system is due for renewal. This system provides for **reserve manpower for the federal police who can assist local police zones** for administrative tasks. To make this solidarity possible again, the reserve must be brought up and maintained at the federal police. Governments should act with

restraint when it comes to requesting assistance from other zones, because otherwise day-to-day neighbourhood operations could be compromised. It is up to the Crisis Centre and the local authorities to manage this balance.

- **The administrative police in the municipalities must be strengthened.** The local police have an important role to play in the fight against terrorism. It must fully utilise its privileged information position on the site. Neighbourhood work should not be underestimated as a source of information about radicalisation, for example, and needs to be upgraded, partly by making the role of local police officer more attractive. The information from the local police zones must smoothly find its way to parent structures, but the information must also flow the other way around. Police zones should receive clearer guidelines on proactive action with regard to radicalised persons. This can be based on good practices that are then professionalised and generalised.
- For the assessment of **public contracts**, it is useful to examine the Dutch Bibob legislation. Public procurement can be refused or withdrawn if there is a serious risk of criminal activities.
- The limited scale of a number of local police zones sometimes impedes optimal functioning. It is appropriate to further encourage **voluntary mergers and associations between police zones**.
- A **more active diversity policy within the police** is needed. Police officers of foreign origin often have valuable knowledge, expertise, and access to certain sources.
- The detection of abnormally high consumption of electricity, gas or water can be a sign of clandestine shelters for persons suspected of terrorist attacks. **Police requests for consumption data from utility companies** in the context of an ongoing investigation should be regulated by law.
- The investigation committee calls for the further implementation of the many **initiatives to improve security at airports**.



Security must always take precedence over economic interests. A reinforced Directorate-General for Civil Aviation of the Federal Public Service Mobility must take all initiatives to improve aviation security. The identified problems must be resolved before the next inspection by the European authority. This also requires more intensive consultation with the staff. The internal security intelligence should be further professionalised. The Federal Department of Mobility must be responsible for the presentation of badges, and no longer the Brussels Airport Company (BIAC) itself. All airport inspectors must be controlled by the government.

## International cooperation is essential

*The Belgian intelligence services are well aware of the fact that the **international cooperation with foreign intelligence services is crucial in the fight against terrorism**. That is why the investigation committee also has valuable recommendations on this subject:*

- The investigation committee recommended that **specific and exceptional information methods also be authorised abroad**. This was made possible by the law of 30 March 2017. For example, Belgian investigators can now continue to listen to the telephone conversations of a terror suspect after the Belgian border has been crossed.
- It must be clarified under which **conditions classified information** obtained from foreign intelligence services may be passed on to police, judicial or other government services. It is currently unclear whether the permission requested from the foreign service applies to all services or only to one specific service.
- The State Security Department maintains contact with 88 similar services in 74 countries. Since September 2016, the bilateral cooperation has been clearly organised. For instance, the service cooperates intensively with the **European Counter Terrorism Group (CTG)**, which prepares, analyses and facilitates operational cooperation. Since 2016 the *need to share* principle applies. The research committee recommends strengthening this partnership. In order to achieve a full-fledged European intelligence

service, European treaties must be amended and, in anticipation of this, the CTG must take up that role.

- After the Paris attacks, the realisation that cooperation is essential resulted in the reciprocal **detachment of liaison officers** to the French and Belgian intelligence services. That has promoted the exchange of information. It is a good practice that deserves to be followed. For example, in order to improve the information position at home and abroad, the State Security department could also dispatch liaison officers to Belgian embassies in countries with which there is a need to work closely together in the fight against terror. These liaison officers ensure a rapid flow of information.
- The case of the expulsion of El Bakraoui by Turkey has made it painfully clear: this person arrived at Schiphol before the notification that he was to be expelled. **Better cooperation is thus needed with Turkey**, and with the Turkish police in particular. The investigation committee recommends that the liaison officer should no longer be stationed in Istanbul but at the Belgian embassy in Ankara. Currently, Turkey regards expulsions as consular information. The liaison officer plays a crucial role in the detection of Syrian fighters. Because this is a difficult task, the liaison officer must be supported with more staff or by a second liaison officer.
- **All Belgian liaison officers must be given access to the general database of the Belgian police.** Cooperation should be formalised. There must also be clear guidelines on how the cases of a liaison officer are handled when he/she goes on vacation.
- The committee also asks that the existing guidelines and agreements on the cooperation between liaison officers be implemented within the **Benelux**.
- **Police Services need to work more closely together across national borders.** Cross-border operations or joint operations should be better coordinated. This is done best within the European Counter Terrorism Group. The police services must of

course rigorously adhere to the procedures and rules applicable within the information systems.

- **Foreign signalling must be better monitored** by the federal and local police and by the justice system. If someone suddenly violates the conditions of his/her conditional release, this can be particularly relevant information that must quickly be forwarded to the security services and the police.

### Further improving international cooperation to counter criticism

Finally, the investigation committee examined the **criticism of the French investigation committee** on the approach in Belgium. It was set up after the Paris attacks on 13 November 2015. In its report, the French investigation committee uttered sharp criticism on the Belgian action in Verviers, on the lack of information exchange between Belgium and France on Salah Abdeslam and on the way in which the Belgian police reported Abdeslam in the Schengen Information System (SIS). An analysis by the Belgian parliamentary investigation committee showed, however, that **Belgium had complied with all the rules**. The services were not negligent and did not make any fundamental mistakes.

According to the French investigation committee, the intervention in Verviers was rushed on 15 January 2015 and compromised the arrest of Abdel Hamid Abaaoud (Belgian citizen who carried out the attacks in Paris on 13 November 2015) in Athens. However, the Belgian investigation committee noted that a postponement of the intervention in Verviers was not an option, as the terrorist cell was about to make an attack. Moreover, thorough consultation took place between the Belgian and Greek police prior to the intervention.

With regard to the checking of Salah Abdeslam (French suspect of the Paris attacks) by the French gendarmerie in Cambrai on 14 November 2015, and to the role played by the Directorate of International Police Cooperation (CGI), the investigation committee considers that the latter responded very attentively to the information transmitted by France.

The investigation committee also studied the controversial **role of the Belgian liaison officer in Ankara**. Ibrahim El Bakraoui (Belgian suicide bomber at Zaventem), who was released on parole, was arrested on 11 June 2015 by the Turkish police in Gaziantep, a city on

the Turkish-Syrian border. Immediately after the attacks in our country, Turkish president Erdogan declared that Belgium had not acted on the information communicated by Turkey about his expulsion.

The investigation committee concluded that the approach of the liaison officer must be assessed in the light of a combination of factors, including the **difficult police cooperation between Belgium and Turkey**. Such cooperation must be improved. Certainly the manner in which Turkey expels persons who may be involved in terrorism creates undue security risks that have to be reduced through cooperation. The investigation committee found that the **liaison officer had respected the applicable rules** and that it is rather the Belgian DJSOC / Terro that did not react swiftly enough.

## RADICALISM: A LOGICAL DEFINITION OF THE SCOPE OF THE INVESTIGATION

*The third report of the investigation committee deals with radicalism. In order to be able to form a picture of the rise and growth of violent radicalism, a phenomenon closely related to the attacks of 22 March 2016, the investigation committee heard experts from the academic world and actors from various domains over the course of nearly thirty meetings: execution of sentences, services, integration and immigration, local policy, new technologies and media, education.*

It must be recalled that the struggle against radicalisation and the monitoring of individuals on parole touch upon the **cultural and personal prerogatives of the federal entities**. The federal Parliament must thus show some restraint regarding that matter. The investigation committee, however, was of the opinion that it would not be able to perform its duties properly without conducting this investigation into radicalisation. In its recommendations, it could only suggest improvements. The ultimate decision-making power then falls to the governments of the regions and communities.

This research task was not only sensitive, it was also very extensive. That is why the investigation committee deliberately limited itself to those forms of violent radicalism that directly underpinned the attacks of Zaventem airport and Brussels, especially **Islam-related radicalism**. In this context, it does not target any population group. It notes, however, that there is an Islam-related radicalism that is sometimes violent, but thankfully limited to a very small group of Muslims.

### Plan R to counter radicalism and radicalisation

The Belgian federal “Plan R” describes radicalism as “the willingness to accept the ultimate consequence of a way of thinking and to turn it into action”. From this perspective, methods can be used that hamper the functioning of the democratic legal order. **Radicalism is thus an attitude.**

Plan R sees radicalisation as “a process in which an individual or a group of individuals is influenced in such a way that this individual or group of individuals is mentally formed or prepared to commit terrorist attacks.”

## Ideas are not punishable, but incitement to violence is

The investigation committee notes that the causes of (violent) radicalism cannot be found exclusively in religions and ideologies. The share of religion and ideologies in the motivation of an individual or a group varies depending on the case. Radicalism is a necessary but insufficient condition for violent radicalism. The relationship between the two is very complicated.

In a democracy like Belgium, the mere fact of having ideas, regardless of whatever those ideas may be, may not be or become punishable under any circumstances. This is of course different when people encourage terrorism, hatred and violence when spreading radical ideas. Legal options already exist to penalise that incitement, but according to the investigation committee, these options should be used more often.

## Currents in Islam that contribute to radicalism

In Belgium there is currently an almost unique situation involving a type of holy union between the **Muslim Brotherhood** and **Salafism/Wahhabism**. The Muslim Brothers are invited to speak in Salafist associations and Salafists are invited to do likewise in Muslim Brotherhood structures.

It is impossible to determine exactly how widely the ideas of the Muslim Brothers have spread in Belgium. But the influence of Salafism, Wahhabism and Salafi Wahhabism is real and significant.

Certain trends within Islam, such as Salafism and Wahhabism, are conducive to radicalism and possibly violent radicalism. These trends have been present in Belgium for decades. On the one hand, Syrian and Egyptian students who came to Belgium brought along a clearly political Islam, so that a very political apparatus developed around the mosque. On the other hand, there was the rise of Wahhabism, (which is) essentially very strict in the teachings of Islam and (is) especially supported by Saudi Arabia.

Certain **foreign countries** use their diplomatic and financial power to promote these movements through mosques, education and study channels (including Koranic schools and all kinds of education), the publishing sector (books, digital media) and others.

These currents do not necessarily explicitly call for acts of violence, but they are factors that encourage the individual to withdraw from the community. These currents at least demonstrate attitudes and

behaviours that are contrary to the basic principles of Belgian democracy, such as equality between women and men. Because of the clash they cause with the principles and rules of the Belgian State and the functioning of society, these currents can increase feelings of discrimination and segregation, without there necessarily being real discrimination or segregation.

In the light of all these findings, the influence of these movements is often problematic in terms of radicalism and consequently violent radicalism.

### **Promoting a moderate Islam, curtailing radical Islam**

The investigation committee recommends that the government should give more exposure to other, more moderate views of Islam in our society, for example by supporting publishing companies, theatre companies and technological applications, and by supporting stronger initiatives by civil society.

There is a need for a legal framework through which the local and supra-local authorities can receive information from the Coordinating Unit for Threat Analysis on organisations and associations that are active on their territory and which may pose a threat to public order and national security, so that these authorities can protect themselves against this and, if appropriate and possible, take the necessary measures.

The **legal possibilities**, including those related to criminal law, to dissolve associations that disseminate ideas that are contrary to Belgian law should be used more effectively. For example, the law of 30 July 1981 (anti-racism law) and the law of 10 May 2007 (anti-discrimination law) could be invoked more frequently. Through these laws, the fight against hate preachers can also be stepped up.

The investigation committee recommends that governments granting subsidies to associations that could be involved in (violent) radicalism should systematically carry out a security screening, both before and after.

### **Muslim executive, mosques and imams: recognition as a lever to integration**

The investigation committee notes that there is no clear and complete register of the (recognised and non-recognised) mosques and other places of worship on Belgian territory used for Islamic worship.

The regulation regarding the official recognition of mosques is still relatively young. The hearings revealed that this process is difficult. Counting, and thus identifying, active mosques on Belgian territory remains very problematic.

The **recognition of mosques through the Executive of the Muslims of Belgium** (EMB) is a lever for the sustainable integration of Islam into Belgian society and also contributes to more transparency and stricter supervision. Few mosques are currently officially recognised. The recognition procedure itself is one of the causes, but not the only one. For instance, the cost-benefit balance does not sufficiently serve as an incentive to request recognition.

The committee of inquiry sees the recognition of as many mosques as possible a priority action point and recommends that the 2008 co-operation agreement between the federal government and the communities and regions be deepened. For example, security screening could be improved substantially. Local authorities should be systematically involved when it comes to information exchange.

After recognition, a process for the preservation of recognition must be started. Supervision of the places of worship, especially non-recognised ones, must be increased. All mosques should be encouraged to report to the Muslim Executive.

Foreign subsidies are an obstacle to the integration and **control of mosques**. Transparency should become a priority action point when it comes to financing worship (services). Improperly prohibiting mosques, other places of worship and the related associations is not efficient. The investigation committee finds that it pays much more to increase (financial) transparency.

The role, the room for manoeuvre and the efficiency of the **Muslim Executive** raise questions. The functioning of this overarching body must improve. The Executive must become a privileged partner of the authorities if the Muslim community in Belgium wants to better integrate. That presupposes more resources, among other things, to involve them in the prevention of radicalism. On the other hand, there must be a commitment that the Executive will only propagate an Islam that respects the Constitution, values and basic democratic principles. The Executive must also represent the entire Muslim community of Belgium.

The number of recognised **imams** is also far too limited. Despite many efforts, there is still a lot to do in terms of the training of imams



and the supervision of the concrete activities of the imams, Islamic teachers or Islamic advisers in prison. A real study program must be developed for them. They should at least master one of the official languages in Belgium and should be familiar with the basic values and legal principles of Belgium.

Because of the similarities between the question of (violent) radicalism and that of the sects, the investigation committee recommends that the Information and Advice Centre on Harmful Sectarian Organisations (IACSSO) be involved in finding solutions to the issues of the radicalisation process and ideology preachers.

### Unknown is unloved

The various faith communities in our country must meet and get to know each other better. The investigation committee recommends analysing the unique *House of One* in Berlin, where the three major monotheistic religions meet under one roof, and to examine whether such an initiative is also possible in Belgium.

## The case of the Great Mosque of Brussels

In gratitude for the financial support that Saudi King Faisal bin Abdul Aziz had provided in 1967 to the victims of the big fire in the Brussels department store Innovation, Belgian King Baudouin donated an oriental pavilion that would be redesigned into a mosque and cultural centre for the Muslim community in Belgium. In 1969, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and the Belgian Building Agency signed an agreement through which the Islamic and Cultural Centre of Belgium (ICCB) was granted a 99-year lease for the building.

The adaptation of the building to its new function was done at the Saudis' expense. The ambassador of Saudi Arabia is also the chairman of the ICCB. The complex now includes, in addition to a mosque and a school, a research and training centre, dealing not only with Islam, but also the Arabic language.

### The Great Mosque as the bearer of Salafi Wahhabism

The investigation committee paid special attention to this Great Mosque of Brussels (GMB), because the hearings showed that the GMB and the ICCB are an **important symbol for a segment of the Muslim community of Belgium**, that consider this mosque and this centre as a religious authority and a reference point.

The hearings with the official representatives of the GMB / ICCB were very difficult. The investigation committee has also passed on a number of elements for further investigation to the Brussels General Prosecutor.

The investigation committee notes that the GMB and the Centre propagate Salafi Wahhabism. This flow contains catalysts that can play a very significant role in radicalism and violent radicalism. They spread ideas and opinions that are sometimes at odds with the values and principles guaranteed by the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and the Belgian Constitution. Salafi Wahhabism represents a literal interpretation of the sacred texts, is extremely normative in cultural terms and rejects other views on Islam. During the hearing, the director of the ICCB stated that he did not know of the ECHR.

### **No hate preaching, but dubious financing**

On the other hand, the inquiry of the investigation committee did not reveal any indications of sermons or arguments held in the GMB/ICCB that directly called for violence. The committee of inquiry considers it likely that other mosques and associations active on the Belgian territory also promote Salafi Wahhabism.

The hearings clearly show that there are financial links between the GMB/ICCB and the Islamic World League, an NGO that works for the Islamisation of the world and whose ties with Saudi Arabia and Salafi Wahhabism are evident.

### **A Great Mosque without recognition**

The 1969 context has changed in the meantime. The Muslim Executive is now responsible for the practical aspects of Islamic worship and is responsible for the recognition procedure for mosques. The investigation committee noted that the GMB is not an officially recognised mosque and that no application for approval was submitted. Consequently, the Mosque has not signed the accession charter in which it undertakes to act with respect for the Belgian Constitution. The mosque that appeals to the imagination of many Muslims in Belgium is therefore not an officially recognised mosque, and this is because the executives want it that way.

The investigation committee recommends that the Belgian State put **an end to the concession agreement** of 13 June 1969 for reasons of public utility. During the one-year notice period, a new agreement must be concluded with an entity that does take into account the

Muslim Executive and all sensitivities and movements within the Belgian Muslim community and that respects the ECHR and the Belgian Constitution.

This new mosque must of course apply for accreditation. The control and financing of the new mosque can no longer be done from abroad, in particular from the Islamic World League and Saudi Arabia. **From now on, the centre of gravity of the management of the Mosque should lie in Belgium.** The investigation committee is clear: these recommendations must be applied in full, with absolute respect for the freedom of worship, of thought and of association; these are inviolable principles.

The investigation committee suggests that, when these recommendations are made known to those concerned and if they are to be implemented, it is very clearly communicated that these measures, on the one hand, strictly respect the constitutional liberties and, on the other hand, fully respect all individuals of Muslim confession in Belgium.

### New developments in the dossier of the Great Mosque of Brussels

In the meantime, the Centre got a new director and in December 2017, he agreed to submit a request for **accreditation** for the mosque as soon as he had more information about the obligations and benefits of such recognition.

In mid-January 2018, ministers Reynders and Jambon of Foreign and Home Affairs respectively announced that the **concession would be cancelled** and that Belgium would take over the GMB from Saudi Arabia and entrust it to the Muslim Executive, since it represents all trends within Islam. In terms of finance too, total transparency should prevail, and the monitoring committee must watch over this.

### Radicalism in prisons

The research committee notes that the **link between (violent) radicalism and incarceration** is not new. The effect of deprivation of liberty, linked to the codes of a prison community, is a very fertile breeding ground for the emergence or flare-up of radical opinions. Many radicalised perpetrators of terror acts have already spent time in prison. This observation also applies to a number of the perpetrators of the attacks of 22 March 2016.

**Ideas inspired by radical Islam** are increasingly being expressed openly in Belgian prisons. Drug trafficking and similar acts have been dominating relations between detainees for some time, and from now on radical religious ideas are added as an organisational factor.

### No detention without reintegration

Prison sentences are used to (temporarily) neutralise the proven risks of a number of (violently) radical individuals. The goal is their reintegration into society, at the latest after they have served their sentence. This balance must be forcefully pursued, because it is the only guarantee that someone will not commit acts of violence after his punishment.

### Difficult conditions of detention feed radicalisation

As in the Radicalism Action Plan in Prisons, the investigation committee has established that prison conditions are a first risk factor for radicalisation. In recent years, initiatives have been taken to improve detention conditions. However, the problem has not been eliminated. The Belgian State does not meet the relevant European standards.

The investigation committee therefore formulated a number of recommendations. Priority attention should be given to initiatives that improve detention conditions and the supervision of detainees. We must absolutely consider the size, location and organisation of existing and future prisons. The management of prison overcrowding is only one aspect of this.

### Three objectives in special de-radicalisation departments

In the field of (violent) radicalism, Belgium has opted for a gradual detention confinement scheme. The risk is assessed separately for each detainee. Radicalised prisoners are divided into four categories, based on their level of radicalisation. They are accommodated as far as possible in normal prison units. In some penal institutions (Hasselt and Ittre) special Deradex units have been established, intended for leaders, ideologues and recruiters. Five prisons (Andenne, Lantin, Sint-Gillis, Bruges and Ghent) have a satellite team hosting prisoners who require special follow-up.

Three specific objectives were set for **the Deradex departments and the satellite teams**: standardisation, isolation and *disengagement*. Achieving the first goal, however, seems closer than the others.

The **standardisation** target seems best fulfilled, but the research committee has established that standardisation sometimes also involves radicalisation risks, especially when it comes to visiting rights. That is why the investigation committee advocates, in consultation with the prison directors, setting stricter rules for visitor control, without these checks being bothersome or discriminating.

The **isolation** objective has only been partially achieved: a prison is never a completely hermetically sealed institution and the special departments and prisoners have a potentially problematic influence on other departments because of their aura. Without a concrete follow-up program to dissuade the secluded detainees from their ideas, there is a real risk of contagion and increased radicalisation in the rest of the prison.

The least advanced are the programs focusing on **disengagement**. This is also the most complex and difficult objective. There is no approach available whose efficiency is irrefutably established. *Disengagement* is not exclusively a federal competence. Psycho-social counselling and assistance to detainees with a view to their re-insertion are a task of the federal entities.

### Looking for best practices

The investigation committee recommends to systematically subject radicalisation initiatives to an independent evaluation. The cooperation between the federal government and the federal entities must be stepped up and must focus on the search for and generalisation of local best practices. This is part of the task of the national task force.

A few ideas. It is advisable that radicalised prisoners can participate in discussion groups within the prison in which radicalisation experts also participate, with a view to gradual *disengagement*. The training offered within the prison must be expanded. An individual approach is necessary. Radical detainees must also be monitored after their release and a detention plan is required. Small transition houses, focused on *disengagement*, can be a useful intermediate step in the reintegration process.

### Raising the awareness of prison staff regarding radicalisation

The prison staff must be familiarised in their training with the indications of (violent) radicalism. In every prison, a contact person for radicalism must be designated, who centralises and shares information

about radicalisation within the prison. That person would also be responsible for staff training.

### Improving religious and non-confessional counselling

Radicalisation can be counteracted by offering good religious, spiritual and non-confessional counselling to the detainees who need it. For this, more funds are already being allocated, which means that more religious and secular supervisors could be hired. The quality of the offer could still improve by enhancing the value of these functions, also financially. These people, with their special skills, should certainly be involved in the preparation of prevention and guidance programs. It goes without saying that their role must be regularly evaluated.

### Information exchange about radicalised detainees

Significant progress has been made in recent months in the exchange of information on radicalised detainees between prisons and other services. A real protocol agreement would best formalise this: which leads and information should be shared, how is access to that data regulated, and what are the rules for sharing that data? Among other things, there is the question of how this information can be shared with sentencing courts and justice houses.

On 17 January 2018, the Minister of Justice Koen Geens replied in Parliament that at that moment 237 detainees, convicts, defendants, and internees were being monitored by the State Security and the Extremism cell of the prison system. The State Security Department has identified approximately 210 other detainees for whom there are indications of possible radicalisation, but where a more flexible follow-up is possible.

### A link between radicalism and new technologies

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In order to analyse the obvious relationship between new technologies - including the Internet and social media - and radicalism, the investigation committee held hearings with representatives of the Coordination Unit for Threat Analysis (OCAD) and the Central Directorate for Combating Banditry and Organised crime, and with professors in criminology and political sciences.

These hearings have shown that while new technologies do not play an exclusive **role**, they do play **a central role** in (violent) radicalism. That is why both a preventive and a repressive policy are needed,

both nationally and internationally, with the efforts of government agencies and private players. **Private operators**, after all, possess a large technical know-how that can be very useful in the timely detection of phenomena.

### From self-regulation to formal agreements

To begin with, the government counts on the sense of responsibility of the private operators. They must use an **ethical code** regarding their information traffic. If self-regulation is not enough, **formal agreements** between the government and the private sector must ensure that the new technologies are not misused to promote radicalism. These agreements must actually be concluded at the European level. At the supra-national level, private companies managing social media must impose standards in the fight against radicalisation via new media.

**What should be included in such an agreement?** The country of origin of the message must be systematically mentioned. Security services must be able to access the communication systems in the context of judicial investigations. Users must be able to consciously choose whether or not to orientate themselves to certain results on the basis of their surfing behaviour on the Internet. Anyone searching for sites about radicalism on the net should also see the counter discourse. There should be a liaison officer between each Belgian private operator and the Belgian government, who can remove illegal content and who coordinates with the services that fight against radicalism.

**What if not only self-regulation fails, but if also the formal cooperation agreements are not complied with? Then legal penalties are required.**

**Spreading messages of hate or violence via new technologies** strongly **encourages** radicalism. That is why the investigation committee recommends that all means of detecting and removing such messages should actually be used and that the disseminators should be prosecuted. The legislation on the prohibition of discrimination and the incitement to hatred offers many possibilities for this, which unfortunately are underused. We can also investigate whether the repeated accessing of jihadi sites could be made punishable.

These new communication media are so extensive that only a fraction of the available content can be examined on social networks and the Internet. Moreover, there is a stark contrast between the ease

with which dark content can be published and the possibilities to adequately counter it. That is why the committee of inquiry recommends the development of a platform based on the French model (PHAROS) on which radical content could be reported anonymously. The collected information must be shared widely to avoid any conflicts with the activities of other services.

Police forces are already working on the fight against the misuse of new technologies for criminal purposes. It would be logical to see this battle combined with the fight against abuse for the benefit of radicalisation. Expertise and know-how must be shared to the maximum, human and material resources must be made available as far as possible. A regularly updated list of jihadi websites and associated user accounts would be very useful.

### **Also promoting a different message**

The investigation committee underlined the importance of spreading an alternative counter discourse, through all possible channels. Such a discourse must be carefully constructed, with a positive message that is adapted to the target group. Young people themselves should be involved in the development of such counter-arguments. Other young people who are inclined towards radicalisation will be much more likely to listen.

### **A link between radicalisation and failed integration?**

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The investigation committee wanted to gain an insight into the possible connection between (violent) radicalism on the one hand and various issues such as the reception of migrants, their integration and their work situation on the other hand. The committee also investigated what the organisations and professionals who are active in these areas can undertake to prevent, detect and curb radicalisation risks.

Hearings were held for this purpose with people who are involved on a daily basis with the integration and reception of foreigners, with specialists in discrimination and anti-discrimination initiatives, with representatives of the Public Centres for Social Welfare (OCMW), with the director-general of the Immigration Department (DVZ) and with the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons (CGRS). The following conclusions and recommendations have emerged from these hearings.



## Promoting social and cultural diversity

Flawed social and cultural intermingling and diversity have been identified as possible causes of radicalism. Therefore, the government should support measures that promote social and cultural mix and diversity, both through its own policy and through initiatives from civil society. Dialogue and debate must be encouraged.

People who radicalise tend to let their subjective view take precedence over objective reality. The services that provide reception, integration and work therefore have the task of adjusting that view by offering objective information.

The actors in the reception, integration and work sectors rarely have to deal with hard and proven radicalism, but they should, however, be aware of the phenomenon of radicalisation. That is why the investigation committee recommends that these sectors systematically share knowledge and experiences so that best practices can be generalised. This issue must be included in the cooperation agreement between the federal state and the federal entities.

## Alertness at the reception

The government departments responsible for the reception of foreign nationals rarely mention radicalism, and only a fraction of those reports lead to placement in a closed centre or the withdrawal of refugee status. However, the investigation committee recommended that the Office of the Commissioner General for Refugees and Stateless Persons should have access to classified information from other services regarding a possible risk of radicalism. That risk should also be taken into consideration when choosing the final hosting facility.

**Many newcomers find themselves in a deplorable social and economic situation**, where they are confronted with great uncertainty and often have nothing available to keep themselves busy. This makes them more receptive to radical ideologies. That is why the entire reception chain must organise the lives of the newcomers in such a way that the risks are reduced. The reception structures of the Federal Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers (Fedasil) can rely on properly trained representatives of religious services and non-confessional assistance.

Some newcomers also seem to suffer post-traumatic disorders. For them, contact points should be set up that they can refer to for appropriate assistance during the entire integration process.

There is too little information exchange between reception structures regarding the prevention, detection and control of radicalism. Representatives of Fedasil should therefore be able to participate regularly in the activities of Local Integral Security Cells (LIVCs).

The Public Centres for Social Welfare occupy a central place in the reception and integration system in Belgium. It therefore seems logical that they remain vigilant, to detect signals that point to radicalisation. This presupposes awareness raising, training and, where necessary, action. They could work out a guide on radicalism for their own employees.

### Pooling best practices on integration

A wide variety of factors can form the basis for successful or unsuccessful integration: cultural diversity, social mix, language proficiency, and employment. It is certain that the different federal states approach integration policy in various ways. The cooperation agreement between the federal state and the federal entities will therefore focus on an intense exchange of best practices.

### Work and culture as leverage to integration

Objective or subjective **labour discrimination** seems to play a key role in radicalism. Work is still the best way to integrate and to feel a fully-fledged and socially accepted individual. Discrimination on the labour market must therefore be prevented by all means. Especially in the recruitment of young people, the greatest possible diversity must be sought. A legal framework should be set up for this purpose, which also allows for **practical tests** in companies. Those tests, which are unannounced, are an adequate means of determining whether companies offer every applicant equal opportunities.

The immediate creation of a national human rights institution would be a useful tool in combating discrimination.

All governments must give absolute priority to initiatives relating to **culture**, because a broad cultural awareness leads to a nuanced view of history and reality and to more social involvement. As newcomers become more aware of the values of Belgian democracy, they will also feel (like) more fully-fledged citizens. That is why the investigation committee is calling for a voluntary civil service for young people.

## Take the fight against radicalisation on the street corners and at school

*The investigation committee has conducted a thorough investigation into the local level, which is considered crucial for an effective policy of preventing and combating (violent) radicalism. Education and culture are soft but effective weapons in this struggle. In concrete terms, the investigation committee organised three hearings on these themes: with a panel of mayors, a panel of local de-radicalisation officials and a panel from the world of education. On this basis, the investigation committee formulated a series of recommendations regarding radicalisation prevention in the municipalities and at schools.*

### The importance of the local level

Given the importance of the local level in the prevention and fight against radicalism, the information from the other government levels must be better transferred to the local structures. A successful preventive approach requires good coordination of the actions of all government levels and structures. This approach must not be discriminatory, but must objectively focus on all forms of radicalism, extremist tendencies and political violence, and not merely on Islam-related phenomena.

In all this, the role, the powers, the field of action and the means of action of the **mayors** and municipalities must be clearly defined. This could be done through a manual that is constantly being updated.

The **local police forces** must be professionalised and strengthened so that radicalism can be detected and fought at an early stage. Classic delinquency should not be overlooked, because there is often a clear link between radicalism and petty crime.

Prevention is not only a task for the police services. It is first and foremost supported by the **social workers**, who can more easily penetrate the target groups because they have the necessary credibility. Don't forget also that recruitment sites change quickly. Within local authorities themselves (civil servants, police, street workers) diversity should be intensified, for maximum contact with the target groups and a more faithful reflection of the local population groups. De-radicalisation officials need a clear and uniform statute and guidelines with regard to their precise field of action. First-line workers

must receive training on radical propaganda. They can help young people to critically view unilateral and inflammatory media reports.

The deployment of “mobile teams” that work in a specific sector but over a broad territory seems to be a good practice. Thanks to this specialisation, expertise can be developed to the maximum.

In urban policy, urgent consideration must be given to promoting **social and cultural diversity**. The battle against gentrification, segregation and ghettoisation, should be the cornerstone. This is why local urban development projects should actually encourage citizen participation.

Structural resources are needed for this preventive approach to radicalism. Budgets have indeed increased, but they are still too low and unstable, making it difficult to plan medium and long-term actions. By systematically evaluating actions to prevent radicalism, best practices can be generalised.

An additional prevention effort must go to the families of at-risk youths who, after all, need guidance when they identify a behavioural change in one of their relatives.

### **Education that opens minds instead of narrowing them**

Education is a means of integration and therefore a weapon against radicalisation. Compliance with compulsory education must therefore be followed very strictly. Everyone who works in education should learn to recognise the signs of radicalisation. Control of the learning content of homework schools is necessary, as is regular contact with young people from the traditional educational networks, to help prevent unhealthy developments.

The **basic training of religious** teachers in general, and of Islamic teachers in particular, must be geared to current social issues. More teachers and inspectors are needed to monitor uniform application of the school program if we advocate an education that is in line with the values of the Belgian State.

Of course, freedom of education and religion should not be challenged, but that also applies to the Constitution, human rights and democratic values. The curriculum and the pedagogical resources for the Islamic religion lessons are outdated and must be modernised. Religious lessons should not lead to isolation, but should instead be a road to inclusion.

An education that makes connections with other philosophical, ethical and cultural-historical approaches can counteract polarisation (here), because young people get a much broader horizon. Teach them to look at the world with an open mind, so that they can develop a critical attitude towards all kinds of ideologies and information presented through (social) media.

### **Culture as a way to mutual understanding**

Unknown is unloved. As we expect newcomers to embrace our values and culture, we must also show interest in the culture of the countries of origin and what they contribute to our society. What one knows, one also learns to appreciate and that can only reinforce social solidarity and reduce the cultural gap.

Give young people the opportunity to get involved in cultural and artistic expression, inside and outside the school environment, so that they can express their own identity within Belgian society in a participative and peaceful way. This will give a chance for artists and role models of various origins to grow, and so divert young people from the path of radicalisation.

[Brussels, 21 February 2018]


















On 22 March 2016, Belgium was dealt a cruel blow by two terrorist attacks which appeared to be inspired by a radical and violent interpretation of Islam. A constitutional state is bound to offer a dignified and democratic response even to brutal and cowardly terror.

That is why an investigation committee set up in the House of Representatives after the terrorist attacks, which spent several months seeking answers to the questions about what went wrong and how the country could do better in the future. How do the emergency services function when the unimaginable happens? How does society care for the victims of terrorist acts? How can we best bolster our security services within a democratic framework? How do we prevent people becoming radicalised and committing such atrocities?

The reader will find the answers to those questions in this small brochure published to coincide with the second anniversary of the attacks. The emphasis is placed on the hundreds of recommendations formulated by the cross-party investigation committee. Now it is up to the government, Parliament and the authorities to convert the recommendations into laws, royal decrees and efficient procedures. The Parliament will continue to keep a watchful eye on this process. Because nobody wants to see another 22nd March.

(Dutch and French language versions of this publication are available).