

# Tackling terrorism: local leaders welcome EU plans to invest in cities to protect communities

The President of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) has welcomed a European Union plan to provide funding to build urban defences against terrorist attacks, stressing the role of local authorities in both the prevention and fight against violent radicalisation. Speaking in Brussels, he said that strengthening public protection must go hand-in-hand with tackling social exclusion and warned that proposals to cut EU cohesion policy would therefore undermine these efforts.

President Lambertz was speaking during a conference, '[Building urban defences against terrorism: lessons learned from recent attacks](#)', that took place just 300 metres from the site of one of the terrorist attacks in Brussels on 22 March 2016, the Maalbeek metro station in the heart of the Belgian capital's EU quarter. The conference is one element of the EU's effort to put in place counter-terrorism measures, which includes an initiative to increase the protection of public spaces [launched at the end](#) of last year, led by **Julian King**, the European Commissioner for the Security Union.

[Karl-Heinz Lambertz](#) (BE/PES), the President of the EU's assembly of local and regional politicians, welcomed the decision by the European Commission to dedicate specific measures and EU funds for cities to increase protection of public spaces against terrorism. "Community safety is a priority and, by bringing together every level of government, the EU is taking the right steps to counter terrorism," he said. "We need to cooperate across borders, invest locally to promote social cohesion and ensure that our security services are ready to prevent future attacks. This work starts in our communities."

The fund for cities was promoted by the European Commission at the conference, which was co-organised with and hosted by the CoR. Commissioner King, **Dimitris Avramopoulos**, European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, **Corina Crețu**, European Commissioner for Regional Policy, as well as French Interior Minister **Gérard Collomb** also took the floor.

**President Lambertz** said: "It is welcome that the EU is taking action by working together with our cities to protect our streets. Nevertheless, if we want to prevent future tragedies we need to tackle the root causes of radicalism: social exclusion and a lack of community integration. Cutting EU cohesion policy or diverting precious EU funds away from local authorities' pockets would be dangerous and counterproductive. Cohesion policy is not a cash cow, or a cow to be slaughtered to feed other objectives. It is about investing in shared local problems that need European solutions."

**Corina Crețu**, the European Commissioner for Regional Policy, also addressed

the conference. "There is far more to security than security measures," she said. "Security in our cities has a social dimension: access to quality basic services such as education and healthcare, urban regeneration, community empowerment. Also, I truly believe that solutions will be found by working together at all levels, local, national and European, by exchanging experience and good ideas, and by making our cities truly more inclusive in order to tackle extremism and violence before they take roots in our streets."

[Bart Somers](#) (BE/ALDE), Mayor of Mechelen, winner of the World Mayors Prize in 2017 for his work on social integration, and the CoR's rapporteur on [counter-radicalisation](#) efforts, said: "To counter radicalisation, our Committee advocates a strong line on respecting the rule of law. But local and regional governments also deeply believe in the importance of integration and of upholding fundamental European values. Extremists share a common trait – a sense of alienation. While many others who face social exclusion never become terrorists, they often express their alienation in other ways that harm society, such as rejecting shared values of democracy and the rule of law. A lack of integration is bad for society and potentially dangerous, which is why the EU must act together to invest in social infrastructure."

The CoR is currently drafting a response to the European Commission's action plan to reduce the vulnerability of public spaces. The CoR's rapporteur, [Jean-François Barnier](#) (FR/ALDE), mayor of Chambon-Feugerolles, said: "In its action plan, the European Commission recognises that we need cooperation between local, regional, national and European authorities to protect public spaces better. That is very welcome. The plan is an invitation to politicians and officials to learn from each other. I believe the plan will not just help reduce the number of terrorist attacks, but will also help to prevent radicalisation and promote more inclusive communities."

In a joint statement, the European Committee of the Regions and European Commission welcomed the initiative of EU local leaders to work together to share knowledge, increase cooperation and the improve security of their public spaces. The statement complements a declaration adopted in [Nice](#) in September 2017.

Speakers at the conference included the mayors of Nice, **Christian Estrosi**, and of Manchester, **Andrew Burnham**. Both cities have been the targets of major attacks in the past two years.

#### **Notes to editors:**

- The conference on 'Building urban defences against terrorism: lessons learned from recent attacks' was organised by the European Commission and hosted by the European Committee of the Regions. Over 100 local and regional politicians and municipal officials attended, with speakers from Barcelona, Berlin, London, Nice, Manchester, Marseille, and Stockholm and – from the United States – New York.

- The European Committee of the Regions adopted proposals for counter-radicalisation efforts at the local and regional level in June 2016. The opinion – entitled “ [Combatting Radicalisation and Violent Extremism: Prevention mechanisms at local and regional level](#) ” – was drafted by Bart Somers (BE/ALDE). The CoR decided to present proposals two days after the terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015.
- The CoR is currently drafting recommendations for an “ [Action Plan to support the protection of public spaces](#) ” drawn up by the European Commission. The opinion, whose rapporteur is Jean-François Barnier (FR/ALDE), will be adopted in July 2018.

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