

Commission guide: Terrorism and migration response 'essential' to overall EU success

Written by James O'Brien on 5 February 2015 in Feature
Feature

The response to terrorist events and combating people trafficking are among the top priorities for Dimitris Avramopoulos.



In light of the Charlie Hebdo attack in Paris in January, there has been a renewed focus on internal security issues, in particular regarding Europe's response. However, the EU "is not starting from scratch" in addressing this, says Dimitris Avramopoulos. The commissioner highlights that the EU's counter-terrorism strategy has been "in place for a decade and is a success" but the time has come "to rethink our approach to internal security". He says, "we will do it calmly, with reflection and determination." The former Greek national defence minister notes that, "the commission already announced its intention to develop a European agenda on security for the period 2015-2020" prior to events in Paris. The commissioner says, "in light of the latest developments, all our efforts will be focused on presenting a new agenda to protect our citizens, society, values and rights". He believes efforts to combat terrorism and counter radicalisation should involve "improving our preparedness and response capacity, enhancing strategic and operational cooperation and the exchange of

information between law enforcement, judicial authorities, EU agencies, and other relevant stakeholders".

Migration is another commission flagship initiative - one of its 10 priorities - and Avramopoulos wants to approach this delicate issue in a more comprehensive way. The Greek commissioner emphasises that "when we talk about migration we are not just talking about managing irregular migration". "We want to give a new push to legal migration and make the EU an attractive place for talent but also to have a clear common framework for all categories of economic migrants. We also want to maximise the talents and skills of migrants already present in our societies." Avramopoulos wants to see "better implementation" of the common European asylum system (CAES) and says that the commission is "already working hard on how to tackle the global phenomenon of human smuggling to avoid the loss of more lives and crack down on smugglers".

"All our efforts will be focused on presenting a new agenda to protect our citizens, society, values and rights"

The former Greek foreign minister believes his role as commissioner "is very important as my portfolio deals with many cross-cutting issues". He outlines that the portfolio does not just involve working across policy areas such as foreign affairs, development, employment and justice, but also sees him cooperate with member states, the parliament, third countries and other stakeholders. "Making these policy areas work will impact our society as a whole, and are essential to our overall success", Avramopoulos says. "The new commission structure is one of collaboration", stresses the former mayor of Athens. He cites his working relationship with first vice-president Frans Timmermans, EU foreign affairs chief Federica Mogherini, justice, consumers and gender equality commissioner Věra Jourová and employment, social affairs, skills and labour mobility commissioner Marianne Thyssen in this regard. The fight against terrorism is an area where several commissioners contribute from different angles and "we are all working hard to improve the synergy in our respective fields of work and we are pulling in the same direction", says Avramopoulos.

In his role, the Greek commissioner sees the parliament as "a truly equal partner" and is "absolutely committed to working closely together in order to make substantial progress on a number of issues". He adds that, "In the framework of this collaboration, we will focus on those areas where the EU can really make a difference, while always respecting fully the fundamental rights of citizens." An example of this was January's plenary debate where "a very constructive discussion" on terrorism was held with the chair of parliament's civil liberties, justice and home affairs committee and many MEPs. "I think it's very clear that we want to have a strong partnership and to move forward together on several key issues", says Avramopoulos.

"The fight against smuggling will be a key component of the European agenda on migration"

The plight of migrants arriving from war zones in the Middle East and victims of human trafficking aboard cargo ships has been the subject of much scrutiny in recent years. The Greek official says "the fight against smuggling will be a key component of the European agenda on migration" and he outlines that the EU has "started working intensely with countries of origin and transit, notably in Africa and Turkey". €6m has been made available to countries in the Horn of Africa "not only to support and facilitate the fight against smugglers and traffickers, but also to improve the provision for direct assistance to migrants, refugees and asylum seekers", the commissioner outlines. He also

points out that the EU "is the largest donor for humanitarian and other aid in Syria and in the neighbouring countries", amounting to over €3bn. The commissioner is pleased that discussions on "the formulation of a fair distribution key for resettlement and relocation" with member states are now underway. However, "our work isn't over yet and I continue to call on member states to increase the number of resettlement places for refugees in Europe", says Avramopoulos.

Dimitris Avramopoulos is European migration, home affairs and citizenship commissioner

About the author

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