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The Double-Edged Sword of Democracy: How Democracy Promotion Is Used in the European Union's Prevention of Terrorism in the Southern Mediterranean

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Abstract: Terrorism is a horror haunting the world. Different approaches are used to fight terrorism internationally, focusing on security as well as social policy. On policy-level, the European Union poses democracy promotion as one social policy approach to prevent terrorism. Democracy is supposed to create resilient societies, resistant to terrorism. However, research on whether democracy prevents terrorism is inconclusive. Indeed, insufficient democratisation may spur terrorism. To unravel how the EU uses democracy promotion to prevent terrorism in the southern Mediterranean is therefore crucial. Based on interviews with EU representatives, this article concludes that the EU's external action does not reflect the policy documents' focus on democracy promotion in preventing terrorism. While respondents regard democracy promotion as important in preventing terrorism, it is not prioritised. Instead, terrorism prevention is largely securitised, following the lead of Mediterranean partner states. Research warns that such securitisation, coupled with insufficient democratisation, risk causing instead of preventing terrorism.

Keywords: terrorism prevention, democracy promotion, resilience, the European Union, the Southern Mediterranean

“We live in times of existential crisis, within and beyond the European Union. Our Union is under threat.”

European Union Global Strategy, 2016

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Introduction

As part of its 2016 Global Strategy, the European Union (EU) vows to fight terrorism with roots in the southern Mediterranean seen as threatening European security.¹ The EU addresses the risk of terrorism in different ways, using security as well as social policy approaches, both regarded as vital for success.² One social policy approach is to promote democracy which is seen as making states and societies more resilient, and less prone to fostering terrorism. Strengthening democracy and thus resilience, the EU argues, would help weed out the root causes of terrorism in the southern Mediterranean.³ However, research on whether democracy prevents terrorism is inconclusive.⁴ Importantly, research cautions that fighting terrorism is difficult, even risking the possibility of causing the very terrorism it is intended to prevent. The EU is wary of this, emphasising that its policies should not exacerbate division.

After laying out the EU's policy on preventing terrorism by promoting democracy and resilience, this article examines the foundations of this policy claim. Finding that research in the field is indecisive and that the argument itself may have major pitfalls, as insufficient democratisation might breed rather than prevent terrorism, the article proceeds to outline what research *does* point out is vital to prevent terrorism, making for an analysis of to what extent such essential elements are considered as the policy to prevent terrorism by democracy promotion is put into practice in Brussels. Analysing how EU representatives directly involved turn the policy into external action, it is shown that while democracy is regarded as generally important, it is not seen as sufficient to prevent terrorism and is not prioritised. Resilience is hardly mentioned at all. Furthermore, while these interviewees do acknowledge aspects regarded as essential to the prevention of terrorism in their work, such as the risk of unintended consequences and the need for contextualisation of policies and for social policy approaches, the vital importance of not subordinating social policy approaches to security policy concerns, emphasised in research and in policy, is of less consequence in practice. Instead, security concerns win out, in line with the priorities of the Mediterranean partner states. Such securitisation coupled with insufficient democratisation risks exacerbating terrorism, rather than preventing it.

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2 How to define "terrorism" is a much-discussed matter. Here, the EU's own definition of terrorism is accepted: "According to EU law, terrorist offences are acts committed with the aim of: seriously intimidating a population, unduly compelling a government or international organisation to perform or abstain from performing any act, seriously destabilising or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or an international organisation" (Council of the European Union 2017). In the interviews, interviewees often interchangeably use terrorism and violent extremism, largely equating them.

3 The EU refers to the Middle East and North Africa as the southern Mediterranean region.

4 E.g. Gaibulloev *et al.* 2017; Magen 2018; Schumacher and Schraeder 2021.

This analysis is of interest both academically and politically. The EU's external work in fighting terrorism has become increasingly focused in literature, as the EU has carved out a space for itself as a partner to the member states in this fight, but a lot of particularly theoretically informed work remains to be done.⁵ Given the inconclusive nature of the literature on the relationship between democracy and terrorism prevention, and the internationally widely supported global democratisation project, more research is needed on the role of democracy promotion in the fight on terrorism.⁶ Addressing these aspects, this article aims at furthering the understanding of how EU promotion of democracy and resilience is used to prevent terrorism in the southern Mediterranean.

The EU's Policy on Preventing Terrorism by Promoting Democracy and Resilience

To meet the threat of terrorism it perceives in the southern Mediterranean, the EU's co-ordination of its anti-terrorism work has steadily increased both internally and externally. Even if foreign policy remains a member state competence and the member states largely handle the action against terrorism abroad, the EU has strived for efficiency, by bringing together the competences it presides over, linking its internal and external instruments, coordinating its efforts with the member states, and mainstreaming anti-terrorism in its external action.⁷ Such efforts are facilitated by the 2007 Lisbon Treaty, making for stronger EU competence in the fight against terrorism.

The EU sets out to combat terrorism globally in four approaches. In 2005, the European Union Counter-Terrorism Strategy laid down the strategic tools of Prevent, Protect, Pursue and Respond, heavily modelled on the British approach, to fight terrorism.⁸ In 2020, these tools were modified into Anticipate, Prevent, Protect and Respond.⁹

5 Monar 2015; Kaunert and Léonard 2021; MacKenzie and Kaunert 2021.

6 Gaibulloev *et al.* 2017, 519; Magén 2018, 114; Schumacher and Schraeder 2021, 218.

7 Wolff 2017; Council of the European Union 2005a, 8.

8 Prevent: To prevent people turning to terrorism by tackling the factors or root causes which can lead to radicalisation and recruitment, in Europe and internationally. Protect: To protect citizens and infrastructure and reduce our vulnerability to attack, including through improved security of borders, transport and critical infrastructure. Pursue: To pursue and investigate terrorists across our borders and globally; to impede planning, travel and communications; to disrupt support networks; cut off funding and access to attack materials, and bring terrorists to justice. Respond: To prepare ourselves, in the spirit of solidarity, to manage and minimise the consequences of a terrorist attack, by improving capabilities to deal with: the aftermath; the co-ordination of the response; and the needs of victims (Council of the European Union 2005a, 3).

9 These "pillars" address the need to better anticipate existing and emerging threats in Europe, to prevent attacks from occurring, by addressing and better countering radicalisation and extremist ideologies, to effectively protect Europeans by continuing to reduce vulnerabilities and to respond to attacks when they do occur by making the most of the operational support EU Agencies (European Commission 2020, 2).

This article focuses on the prevention of terrorism. Democracy promotion is a social policy approach aimed at preventing the rise of violent extremism and terrorism, while security policy approaches are more intent on stopping such, once developed. “Prevent” aims at preventing persons turning to terrorism by addressing factors or root causes that risk leading to radicalisation and recruitment in Europe and internationally.¹⁰

The preventive approach is developed in the Revised EU Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism (2014) document, stating that governments will work together with communities, civil society and non-governmental organisations as well as with the private sector to meet the challenge posed by radicalisation and recruitment to terrorism.¹¹ In this work, the upholding of full respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms is emphasised. It is pointed out that violations of these risk leading to distress and may in themselves cause increased radicalisation and terrorism recruitment.¹² Other factors listed as possibly leading to radicalisation and recruitment into terrorism include inequality, marginalisation, social exclusion and difficulty in accessing good quality education.

The EU focuses on counteracting such factors in its work on the prevention of terrorism internally and externally. In its external actions, outside of Europe, the EU vows to keep promoting good governance, rule of law, human rights, democracy, education, economic development, as well as security sector reform and stability through political dialogues and assistance programmes.¹³ Correspondingly, the EU Global Strategy emphasises – with clear reference to democracy – that it is critical that the EU lives up to its own values, internally as well as externally, as this is the best way of preventing violent extremism.¹⁴

One major avenue open to the EU for the prevention of violent extremism and terrorism is thus to promote democracy – one of the EU’s founding values that is also to be advanced globally, as laid down in the Lisbon Treaty (2007). Strengthening democracy and the values attached to it, the EU argues, would help weed out the root causes of terrorism and make societies resilient to violent extremism.¹⁵

Islamist terrorism is focused in this respect, especially in the early EU policy against terrorism. The 2005 EU Counter Terrorist Strategy particularly targets radicalisation and terrorist recruitment to groups such as al-Qaida and groups inspired by it.¹⁶ Propaganda

10 Council of the European Union 2005a, 3.

11 Council of the European Union 2014, 5.

12 *Ibid.*, 6.

13 Council of the European Union 2014, 6; cp. Council of the European Union 2005a, 9.

14 European Union 2016, 21.

15 Cp. Council of the European Union 2005a, 9; Council of the European Union 2005b; Council of the European Union 2014, 6; European Union 2016, 21; European Commission 2020, 2, 24.

16 Council of the European Union 2005a, 7.

portraying conflicts world-wide as alleged evidence of a battle between the West and Islam is identified by the EU as the core problem in the most recent wave of terrorism.¹⁷

Also the EU Strategy of Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism (2005) singles out the Islamist terrorist threat, identifying four goals to counter Islamist terrorism: (1) disrupting actions, (2) countering Islamist propaganda by empowering representatives of moderate Islam and altering views among Muslims on European and Western policies as well as countering distorted views on Islam and Muslims, and staying clear of connecting Islam and terrorism, (3) furthering security, justice, democracy and widespread prospects in Europe, as well as governance, human rights and democracy, and education, economic prosperity and conflict-resolution beyond Europe, and (4) understanding and responding suitably, taking perceptions of Muslims and others into consideration, as well as experiences, and forming a European perspective on the issue.¹⁸

The focus on Islamist terrorism is also highlighted by the Council when addressing its 2020 Conclusions on EU External Action on Preventing and Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism to the EU delegations. Here, the Council calls for a further reinforced focus on violent extremist Islamist ideology and increased dialogue on the issue with, among others, relevant third countries. In doing so, the Council emphasises that democracy, the rule of law and good governance are vital to the breeding of positive narratives and non-violent, effective ways to address different political, social and other grievances. It also encourages the invitation of interested partners, inside as well as outside of the EU, to participate in this engagement.¹⁹ The 2020 Counter-terrorism Agenda establishes that the Council calls for an increase in the EU's external activities to counter terrorism in the Western Balkans, North Africa and the Middle East, as well as in part of Africa and Asia.²⁰

The EU has long worked to promote democracy abroad, not least in the southern Mediterranean, and it continues to do so, even if many shortcomings in this effort have been pointed out by research – and acknowledged by the EU.²¹ Democracy promotion is thus also posed as key in fighting Islamist terrorism in the southern Mediterranean. Resilience is another concept strongly focused by the EU. In the EU's Global Strategy, resilience is regarded as a way to address insecurities in societies, and it is closely linked to democracy.²² The EU Global Strategy states that it is of benefit to EU citizens to strengthen resilience of states and societies to the east and the south. Resilient societies, marked by democracy, institutional trust and sustainable development, form the core of resilient states. Resilience is defined as a state's and a society's capacity to reform, and by doing so to endure and recover from crises, whether internal or external. Resilient states are regarded

17 Council of the European Union 2005a, 8; cp. also Bakker 2015, 291.

18 Council of the European Union 2005b, 3–6; cp. also Bakker 2015, 292–3.

19 Council of the European Union 2020, 9.

20 European Commission 2020, 22.

21 Council of the European Union 2021, 4; Jonasson 2013.

22 European Union 2016, 23–24.

as secure states, and security is seen as vital for prosperity and democracy, but prosperity and democracy are also vital for security.²³ Security (also in relation to terrorism) and democracy are thus closely intertwined in a resilient state, according to the EU, vowing to work for such resilience beyond its borders.

The EU is aware that fighting terrorism is difficult and risks a dangerous backlash. The 2005 Counter Terrorism Strategy states that the EU needs to make sure that mainstream opinion wins out over extremist ideas, through working with civil society and religious groups rebuffing extremist and terrorist ideas exhorting violence. It further underlines that the EU must get better at communicating its own message, to alter views on European and national policies. Not least, it is emphasised that “(w)e must also ensure that our own policies do not exacerbate division.”²⁴

To sum up, democracy is regarded in EU policy documents as a way of ensuring stable and resilient societies resistant to terrorism. Furthermore, along common Western reasoning, democracy in the southern Mediterranean would root out Islamist terrorism (*Jihadism*), generally regarded as diametrically opposed to aspects of democracy, like freedom of speech, religion, assembly, as well as freedom to vote and to disagree.²⁵ While democracy and resilience often are referred to in EU policy documents as key to preventing terrorism, little discussion is however provided substantiating this claim. At the same time, the academic literature on how to prevent terrorism has largely been directed elsewhere, primarily focusing on individual rather than contextual factors.²⁶ Democracy is not pinpointed in this literature as preventative of terrorism, more than at a general level, as providing a fundamental bulwark against terrorism. Indeed, the literature on whether democracy prevents terrorism is inconclusive.

How to Prevent Terrorism: Theoretical Considerations on What Makes for Success

Does Democracy and Resilience Prevent Terrorism?

The EU does not elaborate on the foundations for the assumption that the promotion of democracy and resilience prevents terrorism. Based on how the policy is laid out, it can be assumed that the argument is that terrorism would be prevented if democracy and resilience grew stronger, because of the capacity of democratic institutions to open more peaceful avenues for discontent, making for wider distribution of rights and opportunities, social justice and services, focusing on women’s rights and better education and similar consequences regarded as pre-emptive of terrorism. The claim that the promotion of

23 European Union 2016, 23–24.

24 Council of the European Union 2005a, 8.

25 Skoczylis 2017, 121.

26 Stephens *et al.* 2021.

democracy and resilience prevents terrorism is very powerful and is found at the basis of the fight on terrorism in many states. However, how substantiated is it? Given that severe risks of unintended consequences and even counterproductive effects are associated with the prevention of terrorism, substantiation of any policies is essential.

The literature on whether democracy prevents terrorism is diverse and points in different directions: empirically as well as theoretically. It was long argued that democracy breeds terrorism, because freedom of association and movement, the protection of rule of law and restrained security as well as freedom of mobilisation, speech and press, and officials susceptible to public pressure and favourable institutional arrangements make fertile ground for terrorists.²⁷ This conventional view from the 1980s was later, in the mid-1990s, opposed by those arguing that democracy instead prevents terrorism, as the political inclusiveness, participation and openness of democracies allow for protection of civil liberties and peaceful, public expression of grievances that can be properly addressed and redressed through democratic institutions and the rule of law, undermining clout for violent terrorist groups.²⁸ More recently, from roughly 2005 onwards, many point out that there seems to be an inverted U-shaped relation between democracy and terrorism. Weakly democratic states seem more prone to breeding terrorism, while entrenched democracies and autocracies do not to a similar extent. Most terrorist attacks take place in partially democratic countries, while fewer occur in autocracies and, especially, full democracies.²⁹ Intermediately democratic countries, displaying some authoritarian and some democratic features, provide favourable avenues to pursue terrorist activities, while failing both in moderating and co-opting dissatisfied popular segments and in coercively keeping such under control, and thus present ideal conditions for terrorism.³⁰ It is pointed out that this should be taken into consideration when promoting democracy, as countries in transition to democracy are particularly likely to breed terrorism.³¹

Using democracy promotion to prevent terrorism is thus far from straightforward. One associated risk is that while consolidated democracies traditionally have been characterised by stability and security, which ostensibly prevents terrorism, the *process* of democratisation is generally unstable and insecure.³² Indeed, political instability brought by democratisation, with quick political change often marred by policy failures, is shown to give rise to terrorism.³³ The rise of the Islamic State (*Daesh*) due to internal turmoil in Syria and Iraq serves as a stark example in this regard. A process of democratisation, unleashing the wrath of those hitherto aggrieved without institutionalised ways of chan-

27 Gaibullov *et al.* 2017, 492–494; Magen 2018, 113–114.

28 Gaibullov *et al.* 2017, 493–494; Magen 2018, 114, 116; Schumacher and Schraeder 2021, 200.

29 Gaibullov *et al.* 2017; Magen 2018; Schumacher and Schraeder 2021.

30 Gaibullov *et al.* 2017, 497; Magen 2018, 114, 116; Schumacher and Schraeder 2021, 213–214, 218.

31 Gaibullov *et al.* 2017, 519; Magen 2018, 114; Schumacher and Schraeder 2021, 218.

32 Alizada *et al.* 2022, 8.

33 Schumacher and Schraeder 2021, 217–218.

nelling or addressing their demands, might rather provoke than prevent the emergence of terrorism, at least in the short run.

Another potential risk in using democracy promotion to fight terrorism is related to conceptual confusion. Research shows that different partners attach very different meanings to “democracy” – something which may aggravate tension.³⁴ In the local context, the EU’s efforts might be read as a(nother) way of exerting control by promoting Western, liberal values, in stark opposition to local values. Such polarisation may lead to further anger towards “the West”, indeed instigating terrorism – the very outcome that the EU wants to avoid.

Additionally, the concept of resilience and its relationship with democracy remains unclear. Tocci, who largely penned the Global Strategy, explicates how resilience is used by the EU.³⁵ Pointing to the delicate balancing act resilience is expected to perform in furthering both the EU’s normative agenda and ensuring stability, Tocci argues that the concept encompasses both and thus overcomes the divide, even if the implementation of resilience has met with problems, not least due to the EU’s policy silos and the fact that resilience means a lot of different things to different people.³⁶ Even if Tocci heavily emphasises that resilience does not prioritise security over democracy, instead seeing them as mutually reinforcing, she admits that the concept has been securitised at times.³⁷ This securitisation, both of resilience as well as of the EU’s normative agenda – particularly in relation to the southern Mediterranean – and the risks associated with that, are repeatedly pointed out by analysts.³⁸

The claim that the promotion of democracy and resilience prevents terrorism is thus contested in literature and certain risks are potentially involved. Therefore, it is important to examine how this EU policy is put into practice. It is also of interest to find out to what extent the EU’s external action is framed by considerations emphasised in literature as important in preventing terrorism. Such considerations are outlined next.

Requirements for Success in Preventing Terrorism: The Need for Contextualisation and for Focusing Also on Social Policy Approaches, Steering Clear of Securitisation

Research shows that it is hard to find evidence on what policies are successful in fighting terrorism.³⁹ Indeed, it is even difficult to define what success means; the uncertainty of the

34 Pace 2011; Jonasson 2013.

35 Tocci 2020.

36 Tocci 2020, 182, 191; cp. Stephens *et al.* 2021.

37 Tocci 2020, 186–187, 192.

38 Petrova and Delcour 2020; Dandashly 2018.

39 Ranstorp 2016.

end state leads to vague policy goals.⁴⁰ If success means that no terrorist activity ever takes place, target countries will be involved in an eternal fight against terrorism.⁴¹

At a general level, literature outlines two different approaches, addressing the fight on terrorism – as all crime – in sequence: “soft” social policy approaches, aiming at the prevention of terrorism or violent extremism (PVE) and “hard” security policy approaches aiming at countering terrorism or violent extremism (CVE).⁴² Both approaches are regarded as equally important in fighting terrorism.

The literature points out that to be successful, the approaches to fighting terrorism need to be contextualised and they need to focus also on social policy approaches, steering clear of securitisation. If not, efforts to prevent terrorism might instead cause it.

The criticality of contextualisation is emphasised by Matchett, who states that different things work in different places.⁴³ Research shows that programmes to fight terrorism are most efficient when they are tailored specifically to local contexts and communal concerns.⁴⁴ Contextualisation is thus seen as key in fighting terrorism.⁴⁵

Further, the literature emphasises that the fight on terrorism has been susceptible to securitisation, defined as “the process wherein a social issue ... is transformed into a security issue”.⁴⁶ In relation to the Muslim world, Aly *et al.* point out that the “war on terror” – the globally dominating US official counter-terrorism response to the 9/11 attacks – was set in a securitised, military, hard power frame, targeting primarily Islamist violent extremism.⁴⁷ In many ways, this overriding security focus is not surprising. Terrorism is a severe threat to our security and needs to be treated as such. Perceived efficiency is an issue here. Aly *et al.* point out that advocates of hard power argue that hard power is the most effective way of reaching the desired results, especially regarding rogue states, as opposed to the more diffuse, long-term results of approaches focusing on social change.⁴⁸

However, history shows that the hard, security focused approach has not succeeded in eradicating international Islamist terrorism. To counter insurgency, an approach integrating politics, economics and security is needed.⁴⁹ While the military capacity of al-Qaida

40 Nalbandov 2017, 108.

41 *Ibid.*, 109; cp. Jacobs 2017.

42 Aly *et al.* 2015; Nalbandov 2017, 92, 108; cp. also Stephens *et al.* 2021.

43 Matchett 2017, 40.

44 Kessels and Nemr 2016, 8.

45 Feddes and Gallucci 2015.

46 Smith *et al.* 2019, 154. Cp. *e.g.* O'Donnell 2016; Taylor 2020; Abbas 2019; Mattsson and Säljö 2018; Sjøen 2020; Kessels and Nemr 2016.

47 Aly *et al.* 2015, 6; cp. also *e.g.* Matchett 2017; Nalbandov 2017.

48 Aly *et al.* 2015, 5.

49 Matchett 2017, 43–44.

was (temporarily?) curbed in the “war on terror”, its ideology was not. This has cast doubts on the whether it is wise to employ a conventional, “hard” military response against an unconventional enemy, who is regenerated by its capacity to make use of “soft” strategies of influence and mobilisation.⁵⁰ Indeed, employing hard power without balancing it with an effective soft power strategy has led to the unintended consequence of an increased rather than reduced number of Islamist terrorists in places like Iraq, and a wide-spread perception in the Muslim world that the war on terror is a war on Islam, making many Muslims, not generally inclined to the use of violence, perceive *jihad* as a call to defend Islam also by violent means.⁵¹ This perception has also severely undermined the chances for Western soft power influence in the Muslim world.⁵²

The contextual intricacies and the risk of securitisation make it vital to tread carefully in fighting terrorism. Experience shows that if framed wrongly, antiterrorism policies risk leading to unintended consequences.⁵³ Indeed, it is essential that interventions attempting to modify human behaviour like radicalisation and violent extremism do not actually do more harm than good. Experience from crime prevention shows that there is a risk that policies exacerbate and amplify the very problem that they intend to prevent.⁵⁴ Especially in cases of terrorists with abstract cognitive frames of reference such as *Jihadists*, Nalbandov points out that terrorism resembles a virus: once extinguished in one place, it continuously adapts itself to new environments and draws strength from unsuccessful means of controlling it.⁵⁵ In devising approaches to prevent terrorism, it is thus vital to consider the risk of counterproductive effects.

To fight terrorism, research points out that both soft, social policy approaches, targeting societal roots of terrorism, and hard, security focused approaches are needed in a cohesive agenda, and that soft approaches need particular focus as they are often subordinated and succumb to securitisation.⁵⁶ In this literature, democracy is not emphasised among, nor specifically related to, social policy approaches to prevent terrorism, more than at a very general level, as providing a foundational safeguard against terrorism. It is, however, emphasised that approaches need to be contextualised, and that unless context and social policy approaches are taken into consideration, the prevention of terrorism might end up causing it.

50 Aly *et al.* 2015, 6; cp. Nalbandov 2017, 109.

51 Aly *et al.* 2015, 6–7.

52 *Ibid.*, 6.

53 Turley 2009. Cp. Abbas 2019; Taylor 2020; Stephens *et al.* 2021.

54 Cherney 2016.

55 Nalbandov 2017, 108; cp. also Jacobs 2017.

56 In the fight against terrorism, hard measures encompass target hardening, military intervention, intelligence and punitive measures, whereas soft measure are proactive, addressing root causes and support for terrorism, including measures focusing on de-radicalisation and development, education, conflict management, community empowerment and counter narratives (Aly *et al.* 2015, 5).

Analysing the EU's Delicate Balancing Act of Preventing Terrorism by Democracy Promotion and Resilience in the Southern Mediterranean

Based on the outline of the EU's policy as well as on considerations from the literature on the relationship between democracy and terrorism and on what is needed to prevent terrorism, the time has come to address to what extent those EU representatives responsible regard the promotion of democracy as vital when turning policy into external action on terrorism. I also analyse to what extent respondents consider the need for contextualisation, what social policy approaches are employed, whether those are related to democracy, and if they steer clear of securitising the terrorism prevention, thus aiming at avoiding the risk that the prevention of terrorism ends up causing it.

Perspectives of EU Representatives Involved in the Prevention of Terrorism in the Southern Mediterranean

In Brussels, different EU units play different roles in the EU's external action on terrorism. To cover a range of perspectives on these issues, representatives from different units were interviewed for this study: The Counter-Terrorism Division at the European External Action Service (EEAS), the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) at the Commission, the EEAS country desk officer as well as the Commission desk officer of one of the southern Mediterranean countries with most cooperation with the EU in the fight on terrorism. All interviewees requested anonymity.⁵⁷

The interviews reveal that in some ways, the problems associated with preventing terrorism by promoting democracy and resilience in literature are acknowledged as the EU policy is turned into external action to prevent terrorism in the southern Mediterranean. While democracy is regarded as important, it is not seen as a sufficiently effective tool in the prevention of terrorism and the risks for unintended consequences are recognised in this context. Further, the need for social policy approaches and contextualisation, and for terrorism prevention to come from within, is recognised. The EU's fight on terrorism is, however, primarily set in a security policy framework as opposed to a social policy framework, following the lead of the Mediterranean partner-states, something that also applies to the concept of resilience. At the end of the day, the EU's external action on terrorism is impinged upon by intergovernmental realities.

It can be noted that interviewees often interchangeably use the concepts terrorism and violent extremism, with a preference for the latter, but that these largely are equated. Interviewees further use the concepts prevention of violent extremism (PVE) and countering of violent extremism (CVE) interchangeably, and sometimes also refer to the conglomerate term P/CVE, not distinguishing between preventative and countering measures. All the interviews were however clearly set in the context of the prevention, not the countering, of terrorism and are interpreted accordingly.

⁵⁷ The interviews took place in Brussels in May, 2019.

Democracy as an Important but Not Prioritised Tool in Preventing Terrorism, the Risks for Unintended Consequences and the Scant Importance of Resilience

The interviewees regard democracy as important, but far from sufficient, in the prevention of terrorism. It is pointed out that while democracy is the foundation for terrorism-prevention, socio-economic development and security have to be prioritised to prevent terrorism.

Democracy is considered important in preventing terrorism because of its association of goods like the rule of law, lack of corruption, independent media, judicial systems and central banks, all regarded as vital for terrorism prevention.⁵⁸ Rather than democracy, it is however outcomes related to socio-economic development that are generally regarded as preventing terrorism by the respondents. The primary focus is on the socio-economic roots of radicalisation, targeting those most vulnerable and areas least developed, addressing PVE indirectly.⁵⁹ Indeed, it is pointed out that every high-level political meeting ends up focusing on the economic aspects, as the economic situation is seen as the precondition for the political stability sought.⁶⁰

The risk for unintended consequences of democracy as noted in literature, potentially increasing rather than preventing risks of terrorism, is also recognized by the respondents. For instance, it is pointed out that free speech and freedom of organisation sometimes build on detrimental definitions of democracy, which may lead to polarisation and possibly radicalisation, which risks tipping into violent extremism and terrorism. In democratic societies marked by open debate, opposite extremist poles may trigger each other; far-right extremists may trigger *Jihadi* extremists and vice versa.⁶¹ Indeed, the online radicalisation of many terrorists in the southern Mediterranean by the European diaspora, for instance through radicalising translations of the Quran facilitated by the high levels of freedom of speech in Europe, is seen as a major failure for the EU.⁶² In the southern Mediterranean context, the irony of Tunisia is not lost on the respondents. Tunisia is the most democratic country in the Muslim Mediterranean and also relatively secular. Still, it is without competition the country that has seen most terrorist fighters joining *Daesh*. This indicates that there are other reasons for turning to *Jihadism* than a lack of democracy at home; the monthly wages offered by *Daesh* might for instance have proved attractive to fairly well-educated, but unemployed, young people.⁶³ That many Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) also come from the EU further underscores that democracy is not sufficient to prevent terrorism, something noted by the EU and southern Mediterranean leaders alike.

58 The senior counter-terrorism expert.

59 EC country desk officer.

60 EEAS country desk officer.

61 Senior counter-terrorism expert.

62 Senior counter-terrorism expert.

63 Senior counter-terrorism expert.

In line with the literature pointing to the threshold effects of democracy on terrorism-prevention, and thus acknowledging the potential unintended consequences of democracy promotion, respondents point out that even if democracy might breed stability and security in the long run, it might not do so in the short run.⁶⁴ Indeed, while democracy promotion is still important to the EU, it is admitted that this focus has generally decreased with the 2015 Review of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and the 2016 EU Global Strategy, because the risks of possibly tumultuous and disruptive democratic transitions, as witnessed both during the “Arab Spring” and, indeed, in the EU itself.⁶⁵ The EU identifies the gap in the local social contract, the local resentment against the government mainly linked to economic hardship, as the main problem, making this the EU’s focus.⁶⁶

That security – and, by extension, terrorism – looming large on the EU agenda in the southern Mediterranean is clear, as witnessed by all respondents. While the EU generally argues that democracy breeds stability and security, democracy is, however, not always considered as the main route thereto. Even if the EU only fosters action to fight terrorism that it thinks fits with a democratic system, the considerations involved are related to the real political constraints.⁶⁷ While democracy is thus important in preventing terrorism, democracy does not solve everything, according to the respondents. Democracy is regarded as only *one* factor that prevents terrorism. Contrary to the EU policy documents, which portray democracy promotion as vital in preventing terrorism, the Brussels discourse is thus more in tune with the unsettled debate on whether democracy actually prevents terrorism, especially in the near term, as countries transitioning to democracy seem particularly likely to breed terrorism. A discussion on a more long term, substantial support to democratisation, leading to consolidated democracies less likely to breed terrorism, is notably absent from discourse.

Is supporting resilience then a way for the EU to prevent terrorism in the southern Mediterranean? As we saw, resilience is heavily emphasised – particularly in the EU Global Strategy – as a way to make for safe, democratic societies, resistant to terrorism. Given this heavy emphasis in policy, it is interesting to note that resilience is curiously absent from the discourse of the interviewees. Indeed, none of them mentioned resilience voluntarily. When prompted, they initially shied away from the concept, quite strongly arguing that they had little to do with it, but then discussed it mainly within a security policy framework, particularly with reference to the EU’s work of upholding stability. One respondent refers to resilience as an inclusive notion in economic terms, including the ability to continue with life in the face of great inconveniences, like challenging migration flows, worsened by the local economic hardship and lack of democracy.⁶⁸ Admitting that

64 EEAS country desk officer.

65 EEAS country desk officer, EC country desk officer.

66 EC country desk officer.

67 IcSP EC official.

68 EEAS country desk officer.

resilience is used in a different way in the Global Strategy, and indeed differently in different parts of the EU in a confusing way, another respondent also asserts that resilience is used mainly in relation to coping with migratory pressures, focusing on the capacities of individuals and societies to support themselves, without relating it to democracy.⁶⁹ A third respondent underlines that while the EU's work on the ground fits and is structured by the Global Strategy, its filtering into projects is very subtle, and the approach to resilience is thus very indirect. It is pointed out that resilience is not a term frequently discussed in EU external action – an intervention to prevent terrorism is not framed as a way to strengthen resilience, but as a targeted intervention. Any indirect benefits, such as resilience, are understood or implied.⁷⁰ While resilience thus is much hailed in EU policy, the respondents largely disown the concept. When prompted to discuss resilience, the discourse is largely securitised in a way pinpointed as precarious by literature and the concept is not related to democracy.

The Need for Contextualisation, for Terrorism Prevention to Come from Within and for Social Policy Approaches

All interviewees point out that the decision to become a terrorist always has individual reasons. Becoming a terrorist is never only down to the context in the country of the terrorist *in spe*. However, context matters. Some contextual factors are seen as more likely to breed terrorists than other, a poor socio-economic situation being a particular case in point. The importance of contextual factors makes flexibility and adaptability key in all activities to prevent and counter terrorism, respondents point out – generalisations are not possible.⁷¹ The respondents also underline the need to work “from within” to prevent terrorism, not least emphasising the importance of social policy approaches related to religion and imams, but also focusing on women and teachers. While contextualisation and social policy approaches are regarded as important by respondents in the work to prevent terrorism, echoing recommendations in literature, such social policy approaches are not related to democracy by respondents. Furthermore, as we will see, these social policy approaches are also largely subordinated to security policy concerns.

In particular, the dire socio-economic needs of the youth in the southern Mediterranean are seen by the respondents as crucial to radicalisation into terrorism, especially when coupled with the radicalising potential of the internet. Unemployment makes a lot of reasonably well-educated young people exposed to terrorist propaganda online, predisposing them to turn violent on the government and society at large when deprived of jobs due to corruption, it is argued. EU support in addressing socio-economic concerns is thus vital to the prevention of terrorism, respondents point out. It is emphasised that the partner country, assisted by the EU, is at the forefront of the new concept of tackling terrorism

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by addressing the root causes, *i.e.* the idea of tackling the dismal socio-economic situation to create opportunities for youth, keeping them out of violent extremism.⁷² By presenting youth with an alternative lifestyle, offering real, visible opportunities, they are less lured by the dark side, it is argued.

The approach to religion provides a particular challenge to the EU in the work on preventing terrorism, according to the respondents. It is pointed out that religion – of which understanding is often rudimentary among terrorists – is not sufficient to turn people to *Jihadi* terrorism; some personal triggers and geographical access are also required.⁷³ Still, it is emphasised that the EU needs to understand that the region is struggling to overcome its religious heritage – legal systems often place personal rights under the jurisdiction of religious courts and the population is largely religious. It is thus important to take religion seriously and to work on people's minds and mentalities to make for changes in values.⁷⁴ However, religion is not only regarded as having a negative influence by respondents; it can also be used constructively. Reference is here made to Jordan's religious approach to prevent violent extremism by the Amman message, which uses the religious educational system to promote the message of a moderate, as opposed to a violent, Islam.⁷⁵ Imams are also regarded by respondents as vital to preventing radicalisation, as imams generally are strongly against *Jihadi* interpretations of Islam, instead preaching the highly civilized Islam they embrace, eagerly counteracting any distortions thereof.⁷⁶ It is pointed out that partner countries relate very differently to radicalising imams, exacting different responses by the EU. While the EU finds little problem with the criminalising of imams inciting terrorism in the Western Balkans, the Egyptian government's politically motivated push against the Muslim Brothers and the Saudi Arabian sponsorship of extremist versions of Islam abroad are regarded as more problematic.⁷⁷

Importantly, the respondents point out that the EU does not work against Islam; the problem is *Jihadi* interpretations thereof. Indeed, the EU does not hesitate to work with Islamists. Even if Islamists are hotly debated in Brussels, they are not necessarily viewed as destructive, but seen as potentially constructive in the prevention of terrorism, even if the Islamists themselves may be less interested in working with the EU.⁷⁸ Respondents further agree that it is important that the Muslims themselves come to terms with *Jihadi* extremism. It is not for uninitiated Europeans to tell Muslims how to live their religion; this is for local imams to spell out, it must come from within.⁷⁹ Thus, local initiatives focusing on the

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religious aspects of anti-terrorism, including the training of imams and school teachers, are regarded as important, even if such efforts are not where EU support is regarded to have most added value, as it might prove counter-productive.⁸⁰ For instance, training on EU labelled Islam is not regarded as the best way to fight terrorism.⁸¹ The EU is wary that approaches may lead to, rather than counteract, radicalisation, especially in relation to religion. Also, the work on presenting an alternative lifestyle needs to be done in a locally rooted way, coming from local imams rather than Western sources, it is argued. If the message comes from the West it might rather radicalise the population.⁸² The EU needs to find a common language with the partner country and to avoid the image that the EU presumes to know best, something that however has been made easier as the EU has proved to be far from perfect itself, not least when it comes to democracy, as pointed out by one interviewee.⁸³ While important, religious aspects are thus difficult for the EU to support. Instead, the EU is seen as having more to offer in other areas in terms of sharing experience and support, like in socio-economic development.

The great importance of women in early detection and thus prevention of terrorism, particularly in relation to the family and children, is emphasised by respondents, even if it is pointed out that women also have been very active in *Daesh*, in recruitment as well as in radicalisation and in committing heinous crimes.⁸⁴ Because women are important in terrorism-prevention, the EU organises education for mothers abroad regarding detection of radicalisation and terrorism. Such education is also held for teachers. It is strongly pointed out that as teachers will encounter radicalisation, they need to know how to approach it.⁸⁵ In this respect, it can be argued that the EU at times securitises the preventative work in schools as it is emphatically pointed out that schools are not only a place to prevent radicalisation, it is also a place for the detection of radicalisation and that teachers detecting radicalisation among pupils need to handle this like the crime it is and not avoid reporting suspicions; this should not be regarded as a case of informing against pupils. Security must be a top priority.⁸⁶ It should be pointed out that the risk that securitisation of education leads to radicalisation and possibly terrorism is amply cited in literature.⁸⁷

While teachers are the focus of the EU, the general educational system is but briefly touched upon by the respondents. The EU shares its expertise regarding curricula reforms to prevent radicalisation to countries that are interested, which far from all are.⁸⁸ General

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education is, however, not dealt with in the partner country. While there are projects of vocational training and ERASMUS exchanges, these projects are targeted to economic, not political goals, and are more of an elite thing, instead of dealing with the more difficult educational groundwork.⁸⁹ There is, however, one education related activity targeting the prevention of terrorism in the partner country, namely EU sponsored university courses on analysing information on the internet, *i.e.* basic criticism of sources and critical thinking.⁹⁰ Even if such an approach risks selection bias, it is pointed out that the same risk of preaching to the converted is true for most work to prevent violent extremism. As universities are identified as a pool for terrorist recruitment in the partner country, the EU saw fit to fund this project, even if this intervention was not founded on a thorough analyses of how to best prevent terrorism.⁹¹

In line with the recommendations from the literature, the respondents point out the importance of social policy approaches to prevent terrorism, by focusing on socio-economic development, religion and imams, and on women and teachers, emphasising that such approaches must be contextualised, taking local and political constraints into consideration. None of these approaches are discussed in relation to democracy. However, focus on such social policy approaches are generally subordinated to security policy approaches, as we will see next.

Terrorism Prevention as Mainly Set in a Security Policy Framework, Less in a Social Policy Framework, Based on Intergovernmental Considerations

Even if social policy approaches are thus considered as important by the EU, it stands abundantly clear that the interviewees primarily approach the fight on terrorism from a hard-line, security perspective, generally conflating prevention with the countering of terrorism. Contrary to the recommendations in literature, the fight on terrorism is thus largely securitised. This prioritisation of security largely follows from the fact that this is what the partner states prioritise in cooperation with the EU in fighting terrorism, something that is amply witnessed by the respondents. The interviewees emphasise that partner countries employ their own perspective in fighting terrorism, based on their national sovereignty. The EU can only go as far as its partner accepts in preventing terrorism.

The respondents point out that there are big differences in the EU dialogues with different partner countries, some allowing more preventive work than others. For instance, the Egyptians are keen on discussing hardcore security approaches to terrorism, but not on discussing radicalisation of Egyptian citizens, as they see no such problem – the only problem they see is the Muslim Brotherhood, which is dealt with domestically. However, the Egyptians are very interested in, for example, youth programmes, and the EU uses

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whatever tools available to prevent terrorism. Tunisia, the origin of most FTFs by far, received massive EU support after the 2015 Sousse attacks. Its approach to terrorism is described as a bit muddled, even if it is regarded as really trying. Algeria is not found to be cooperative at all, arguing that it knows best how to deal with terrorism, not finding it appropriate for the EU to tell them what to do. With Morocco, which has quite a few FTFs, the EU has had legal issues relating West Sahara, making for a generally harsh tone, even if this has now changed. Turkey has largely securitised preventive work aimed at advising local CVE coordinators on how to reintegrate and re-socialise returning FTFs, by employing heads of police and intelligence instead of social workers, psychologists and teachers as intended by the EU, thus operating strictly on a security logic.⁹² In Albania, on the other hand, 20 000 teachers are trained by the EU in the detection of radicalisation. It is emphasised that despite these very different approaches, the goal is common to all partners – to prevent terrorism. There is also general agreement that *Daesh* is a common enemy, even if Turkey and Egypt might beg to differ.⁹³

While the different partners thus agree that terrorism is bad, the respondents point out that perceptions on what terrorism is differ widely, as do priorities. This makes working with partner countries to prevent terrorism tricky, according to the respondents, as the same approach cannot be used everywhere. As in all foreign policy, the approach needs to be country specific. It is argued that in some contexts, the prevention of terrorism is carried out within the broader social policy framework of democracy building, in others not. In contexts marked by more institutional and social stability, with some degree of democracy, it is stated that prevention can be more strategic, targeting different levels of education for instance, whereas in countries at war, security and social policy approaches are closely entangled.⁹⁴ However, examples of terrorism prevention carried out in relation to democracy building are not offered by the respondents. Instead, it is pointed out that also with countries such as Jordan, regarded as a stable state dealing reasonably well with the fight on terrorism, things are difficult. Not least the common habit among partner countries to keep changing what ministry is responsible for preventing terrorism – every time starting all-over – complicates the EU cooperation.⁹⁵

The respondents underline that while the EU in different ways tries to make use of social policy approaches to prevent terrorism, these approaches often have to be subordinated to the security concerns of partner states. Security is what is brought up by the partner country in political dialogues, arguing that even if human rights are important, security needs to be prioritised, something that the EU understands, given its own problems in the field.⁹⁶ Still, it is pointed out by the EU that a balance between human rights and security is needed, not least in relation to the freedom of expression and association, as

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little progress in this sense is made in the partner country. While the EU emphasises the importance of democracy and human rights at all levels, positions are diverse on the partner side – while very forthcoming in some cases, it is less so in others. Particularly, the security people are regarded as defensive, staunchly defending their position on security grounds. Even if such meetings might appear fruitless, they are regarded as important as they provide an opportunity for interaction; even if the partners might not change, they will experience that there are different ways of doing things.⁹⁷ Also in other spheres of cooperation, it is clear that security tops social policy approaches. Especially, security related border management is focused on cooperation and gets a lot of EU support, while preventative measures are less prioritised, indeed increasingly so, following the political dialogue between the EU and the partner country.⁹⁸

partner countries thus prioritise security in their policies against terrorism and in their cooperation with the EU, subordinating social policy approaches to prevent terrorism. This focus on security is unavoidable, according to the respondents: For the sake of citizens, security must be built locally in the southern Mediterranean. To do so, the EU and partner states must join forces in focusing on security policy approaches.

The risks involved in such a securitised approach are not much problematised by the interviewees, even if some negative effects of a securitised approach are discussed. For instance, the EU is very aware of the huge problem of radicalisation in prisons. As many terrorists are jailed in the southern Mediterranean, this risks the radicalisation of juveniles sometimes put in the same prisons for minor offences. To avoid this, the EU focuses on rehabilitation and de-programming of terrorists in prisons, ensuring that they do not radicalise others.⁹⁹ It is emphasised that problems are exacerbated by the questionable extent of the rule of law in the handling of terrorists in the region. Measures that partner states regard as effective often overstep boundaries in European eyes, with severe consequences also for innocents, with possibly further radicalising effects. To counter this, the EU uses an approach based on criminal justice, not deviating from EU's basic principles of human rights, focusing on educating police, judges and prosecutors in third countries.¹⁰⁰ In different ways, it is pointed out that the EU tries to alleviate the possible negative effects of hard, security-oriented measures against terrorism by complementing them with softer approaches, like community policing to improve relations with local tribes, as well as reforming courts, the judicial system and prisons, even if such approaches also are securitised at times, as we have seen.¹⁰¹

The strong focus on security makes the relationship between the EU and partner states very delicate, according to the respondents, particularly regarding balancing democracy

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promotion against the prioritised security concerns, not least in relation to civil society. Civil society is often construed as a threat to national security, to be kept under strict surveillance, by the partner countries, while the EU views it as a route to democracy. EU support to civil society – pushing for its rights, trying to maintain space for it and supporting its monitoring of the government to promote internal accountability and democratisation – may therefore heighten tension in the partner country, as the government often argues for the need to restrain the civil society organisations on security grounds. The government might perceive EU funded non-governmental organisations (NGOs) to be part of foreign subversive intervention, leading to governmental opposition detrimental to civil society activists.¹⁰² Furthermore, respondents emphasise that as much as the EU likes to support local NGOs, it too is interested in government control.¹⁰³ Furthermore, it is pointed out that it is extremely difficult to launch social policy programmes labelled as PVE in partner countries. As soon as an activity is labelled PVE it becomes more complex to engage with beneficiaries, due to partner-government concerns. Framing is thus vital: An EU intervention can be framed as related to fighting poverty, facing disenfranchisement and engaging citizens, or as to avoid radicalisation. The results of these different framings can be very different.¹⁰⁴

The respondents emphasise that any approach, like democracy promotion, perceived as threatening to undermine the regime is difficult to implement in the southern Mediterranean, as partner countries would never enter programmes threatening to destabilise themselves. Indeed, it is pointed out that the EU too values stability highly in the southern Mediterranean, particularly against the backdrop of the many failed states. This is witnessed not least by EU support also to non-democratising, autocratic states. Indeed, support to democratisation that may be disruptive has decreased since the “Arab Spring”.¹⁰⁵

Success in the fight on terrorism relies on cooperation with the partner government, according to respondents. While it is far from smooth adapting the EU support to local strategies, it is regarded as easier in some fields than in others, and the prevention of terrorism is seen as particularly difficult, as it is very sensitive. On the one hand, it is pointed out that the EU cannot support hyper secret, opaque government efforts to prevent terrorism.¹⁰⁶ On the other, it is regarded as crucial that the EU does not impose terms, as this might prove counter-productive. Awareness of this risk restrains EU interventions.¹⁰⁷ It is underlined that the EU knows that nothing will be achieved without enthusiastic local cooperation and buy-in; the EU can help partners to go in a certain direction, but it cannot walk the walk for them. It can only provide support if the partner country wants to go in a direction that the EU can support. It is emphasised that there thus is a limit to the EU’s

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external action which is not reflected in the EU's policy rhetoric – the rhetoric always has to go beyond what the EU realistically can do. At the end of the day, the EU's actions are bound by the limits set by the partner states.¹⁰⁸

By subordinating the prevention of terrorism to the security priorities of southern Mediterranean partner states, at the expense of social policy approaches, the EU's external action on terrorism thus largely follows a securitised logic, the risk of which in making for terrorism is pointed out in the literature.

Concluding Analysis

On policy-level, democracy promotion is posed by the EU as a way to prevent the horrors of terrorism in the southern Mediterranean. In practice, democracy promotion is, however, not generally emphasised by the interviewees as vital to the prevention of terrorism. Even if democracy is seen as important to the prevention of terrorism, social policy approaches such as democracy promotion are subordinated to security policy approaches to prevent terrorism. Following the lead of southern Mediterranean partner governments, and against warnings offered in literature, the EU's external action to prevent terrorism is thus largely securitised.

The concept of resilience, much hailed in EU policy documents as a way to reinforce democracy, together forging a bulwark against terrorism, is notably absent from the discourse of the interviewees, who instead largely disown the concept, referring to its fuzziness. When prompted, the respondents discuss resilience along security lines, referring to it as a way to ensure stability and security in politically turbulent times, prioritising such resilience over a politically unstable process of democratisation, in a way quite contrary to the alleged connection between resilience and democracy.

Democracy promotion is thus not at the forefront of the interviewees' discussion in relation to the prevention of terrorism. Even if democracy is regarded as an important foundation in this work, largely because of the perceived positive effects of goods seen as related to democracy, such as the rule of law and a lack of corruption, it is outcomes related primarily to socio-economic development that are regarded as most important in preventing terrorism. Some unintended consequences, and indeed potentially counterproductive effects, of democracy in relation to the prevention of terrorism are also recognised by respondents, like the potentially radicalising effects of the polarisation that democracy may lead to and the extensive freedoms of speech and organisation connected to it. Such radicalisation may turn into terrorism. In this context, respondents refer to the irony of democratic Tunisia and the EU itself, which have produced many terrorist fighters joining *Daesh*, making it clear that democracy in itself does not prevent terrorism. Warnings in literature that especially weak democracy might in fact spur terrorism are

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thus acknowledged by respondents, contrary to policy documents.

In line with the literature, the interviewees emphasise the need for contextualisation and for initiatives to come from within to successfully prevent terrorism, emphasising the importance of women, teachers and imams in this regard. Even if such initiatives could be framed with reference to democracy, respondents rather discuss the local and political constraints related to them and the need for the EU to stay out of certain areas, such as religion.

Despite attempts by the EU to focus on social policy approaches to prevent terrorism, it is clear that this focus largely evaporates in the face of partner state opposition. Indeed, intergovernmental realities totally frame the EU's work with the partner countries on terrorism-prevention. Overall, the EU does not work to prevent terrorism in ways that partner countries do not accept. Partner states primarily fight terrorism by security policy approaches, and regard EU support to social policy approaches with scepticism. Such support becomes sensitive, unless it is phrased in ways not related to the prevention of terrorism. The EU thus follows the lead of partner states, largely securitising terrorism-prevention by subordinating social policy approaches to security concerns, succumbing to the red lines of those partner states, in a development that has accelerated over time, not least since the 2015 Review of the ENP and the 2016 Global Strategy.¹⁰⁹ The literature warns that such securitisation risks causing terrorism rather than preventing it.

On a theoretical note, this analysis gives rise to some general observations regarding the relationship between democracy and terrorism prevention. While democracy in some respects encompasses properties that ought to prevent terrorism, it also includes aspects that may instigate it. As such, democracy might indeed be a double-edged sword in the prevention of terrorism.

As the literature points out, societal factors that prevent terrorism need focus in a field dominated by a focus on individual factors.¹¹⁰ However, this analysis shows that the logistics need to be sorted out before putting too much trust in the preventive properties of democracy. Democracy has often been portrayed as a panacea to the diverse ills of the world. But even if it is easy to defend democracy on its own merits, it may harm democracy to make it to shoulder responsibilities it cannot take. Indeed, placing false hopes may discredit it. Democracy should be supported primarily on its own credentials, not because of whatever dividends it might bring, including the prevention of terrorism.

It is true that democracies often have proved successful in providing outcomes commonly regarded as preventing terrorism, such as well-functioning and inclusive societies

109 Cp. Kaunert and Léonard 2021.

110 Cp. Stephens *et al.* 2021.

with social justice, fair distribution of goods, and low levels of corruption. However, that goes for well-established, consolidated democracies. Democratising countries often fail in these regards, sometimes even more so than authoritarian states – often it gets worse before it gets better.¹¹¹ Consequently, weak democracy proves to be more likely to trigger terrorism than either full democracy or autocracy. Thus, to prevent terrorism in the southern Mediterranean, the EU has a choice. It can either support full democracy, knowing that the way there will be paved with problems, or it can continue succumbing to the priorities of autocratic partner states. This choice should not be difficult, given the EU's foundational values. The EU needs to stand by democracy on its own account.

111 Cp. Alizada *et al.* 2022.

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