

**Conference: Standards for Victims of
Terrorism,
Tilburg, 11 March 2008**

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*Speech by Mr. Stefano Signore, Member of Cabinet of Commissioner Franco Frattini
from DG Justice, Freedom and Security, European Commission*

Today is the fourth European Day for the victims of terrorism. It seems hard to imagine that the horrific scenes that all of us witnessed on that day in Madrid are already four years ago. We remember very well these scenes - the shock, the horror that such an awful attack could take place here in Europe. Not long after, in July 2005, we were once again confronted with terrible images – this time of the bombings in London.

We should consider ourselves lucky that since then no further large-scale attacks have taken place on European soil. We have also to keep in mind, however, that a number of attacks have been foiled before they could occur, thanks to the increased co-operation between Member States and police bodies.

In any case, this does not mean that all terrorist attacks are prevented. Only last Friday, just before Spanish national elections, the socialist party councillor Isaías Carrasco was murdered. I would like to express our horror at this cold blooded calculated murder and our admiration for a brave man that believed in democracy and risked his life for it.

Within the EU, we have decided to establish this day as the EU day for the victims of terrorism because we must continue to remember and honour those who have lost their lives in terrorist events in Europe and elsewhere in the world. We use this opportunity to once again express our continued and deep solidarity with all victims of terrorist attacks. We remember that we are united with the families and loved ones of the victims, and we recall our joint commitment to assist them whenever and wherever we can. Especially, today we would like to offer our deepest sympathy to the family of Isaías Carrasco.

This day should also be used to demonstrate our unwavering support for the democratic values and human rights that we share across Europe. No terrorist act can

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ever undermine our common belief in these rights and principles. Our societies will not tolerate the terrorist activities of those who seek to undermine these values. We must continue to take all the necessary steps to bring those who engage in or support terrorist acts to justice. All this work can and must be taken forward in line with the fundamental rights. Otherwise, we would only be undermining the fundamental values that we seek to protect.

We need to continue to support the victims of terrorism. Even if we know that there can never be an adequate compensation for those who suffered a terrorist attack and for their relatives, the European Union intends to contribute, to the extent possible, to alleviate and protect them.

From a legal point of view, important steps have been taken to take especial care of the situation of the victims of crime in general.

First of all, the Framework Decision on the standing of victims in criminal proceedings. This FD was adopted in 2001 to afford victims the best legal protection and defence of their interests, irrespective of the Member State in which they find themselves. The Framework Decision also contains provisions on affording victims assistance before and after criminal proceedings, so as to alleviate the effects of the crime.

Later on, the Framework Decision on combating terrorism of 2002 underlined the protection to the relatives of the victims, referring explicitly to the assistance for the victims' families.

Further progress has been made in 2004 by the Directive of 29 April 2004 relating to compensation to crime victims. The Directive makes provision for fair and appropriate state compensation for the victims of crime and facilitates access to state compensation in situations where the crime took place in a Member State other than the victim's country of residence. It is an instrument rather limited in scope, which is nonetheless important since it aims to avoid any discrimination between EU citizens which are victims of the same crime.

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Besides harmonising national rules, the European Union has demonstrated its support for the victims of terrorism through financial assistance. In particular, the Commission has co-funded numerous projects intended to help victims and their relatives as well as to promote solidarity among European citizens.

Between 2004 and 2006, almost 5 million Euros were awarded by the Commission to such projects.

To demonstrate our continued support, under the 2007 Criminal Justice Programme, a further 2 million Euro will be awarded very soon to support victims of terrorist attacks.

Numerous projects, fully in line with the EU policy on aid and protection to victims of terrorism, have already benefited from the financial support of the Commission. Their high quality remains without doubt the common dominator.

Some were managed by associations of victims, others by NGOs, in some cases by public bodies: they all accomplished important tasks: promoting support and solidarity with the victims in areas where national terrorism is still present; providing social and educational support for the victims; improving the psycho-social response of the security forces, developing volunteer training programmes to support victims of terrorist attacks and many more.

I could continue for a long while but let us focus on "Developing standards for assistance to victims of terrorism". I would like to stress that we are very proud of contributing to this project and I feel personally grateful and honoured to take part in this conference today.

The conference touches on key issues: access to justice, compensation, psycho-social assistance... The Commission believes that victims as well as their families need to have access to specific professional help to get back to a situation as similar as possible to their daily lives before the terrorist attack.

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Moreover, it is important to stress the need for long term assistance. Although covering the immediate needs of the victims following a terrorist attack is essential, this should only represent a first step of a continuing process of aid and protection.

When the media no longer report on a terrorist attack and society starts getting over the shock, those directly affected by the attack have to recover from the most dramatic experience that could be imagined. The serious physical and psychological consequences of such events need continued professional attention. Legal advice should also be available to facilitate the access to public aid schemes and adequate compensation. Therefore, an adequate and wide range of services should be available to cover the needs of the victims and their families in the long term.

Today conference is a perfect occasion to recall that important progress has been made, but also that further efforts remain to be made. Aid and protection to the victims of terrorism and their families require our continuous attention and deserves our strongest commitment.

The development of standards for the assistance of the victims of terrorism in the European Union is certainly a task of utmost importance. The Commission has high expectations for the work developed under this project. The findings of the project should actually constitute highly valuable information for academics, practitioners and policy-makers which may use them as guidelines ensuring sustainability. The dissemination of the results should therefore be as widespread as possible and benefit associations of victims of terrorism across Europe.

The promotion of high quality projects will continue to be at the heart of the EU policy for the aid and protection of the victims of terrorism. However, the 2007 Criminal Justice Programme envisages additional action. The creation of a Network of Associations of Victims of Terrorism is foreseen, with a budget of 200,000 Euro.

This Network will aim at better understanding the needs of the victims of terrorism and further ensuring appropriate protection and aid. It will develop the representation

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of victims' interests at European Union level and will also contribute to developing trans-national cooperation between associations of victims of terrorism and allow them to defend their interests in the European Union with stronger voice.

An open call for tenders has just been launched the 8th March for the creation of this Network and, taking advantage of this conference, I would like to encourage participation. Our aim is the creation of a wide Network where all associations of victims of terrorism and other organisations with a special focus on the support to victims of terrorism may be represented.

We believe that the creation of the Network has a great potential and trust the associations and organisations concerned to exploit its possibilities.

These financial contributions are important, but they are only part of what we can do together to try to prevent terrorist acts from happening and bringing those involved in them to justice. Just last November, the Commission has proposed a comprehensive set of counter-terrorist actions.

These include an EU Action Plan on the security of explosives, a proposal for a European policy on passenger name records, and a proposal for the amendment of the Framework Decision on terrorism to deal with public provocation, training and recruitment of terrorists.

Attacks such as the Madrid bombings were carried out using commercially available explosives. More can be done to prevent the use of such explosives, chemical precursors and detonators by terrorists. Under impulsion of the Commission, a group of experts investigated the issue and recommended a list of 47 measures now endorsed by the Commission in the form of an action plan tackling the different angles of the issue. The action plan is intended to enhance the security of explosives, calling, among others, for the establishment of rapid alert systems on lost and stolen explosives and suspicious transactions.

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The conception and planning of terrorist attacks involves travelling by air. Members of radical groups fly to meet and obtain both guidance and training abroad. Providing law enforcement agencies in the EU the possibility of obtaining advance passenger information and analyzing it is an important tool to detect terrorist travel and disrupt future plots. For this reason the Commission has also proposed a so-called PNR policy, which will allow law enforcement organisations access to such data.

The use of the Internet for terrorist purposes constitutes a growing concern. Terrorist networks rely on the Internet to build support, recruit members and provide for instructions and online manuals for training or planning of attacks. The proposal for the amendment of the Framework Decision on combating terrorism should make it easier for us to deal with terrorists' use of the internet, including preventing of the dissemination of bomb making expertise and on-line recruitment for terrorist acts.

Also, the Commission is currently working on a new policy initiative in the area of violent radicalisation. We hope to be able to identify best practices from the experiences of the Member States, and from the studies we commissioned on this topic. We should be able to build on that to further enhance our understanding of this complex phenomenon, and it should also allow us to provide meaningful recommendations to the Member States as well as regional and local authorities. This work should be completed this summer.

But even as we continue to try to understand what drives the people who are involved in terrorist activities, so that we can counter their twisted ideologies or abusive interpretation of the religion in whose name they claim to act, we remain convinced that there can never be a justification for terrorist acts.

We also know that all of our efforts are never enough to offer real compensation to those whose families have been torn apart by terrorist acts. We can only hope that we can make a meaningful contribution and that we can offer them some assistance in their difficult situation. And we aim to honour them through our joint remembrance as we do today. Remembrance is a moral and civil duty for each of us.