**Beat: Politics**

# What is ECTC?

**A new resource against terrorism**

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**USPA NEWS -** “Europe is currently facing the most significant terrorist threat in over 10 years,“ said Europol. This organization warns Monday in Amsterdam against new threats from IS. The terrorist organization, said, is preparing news attacks in Europe.

The Paris attacks on 13 November 2015 “indicate a shift towards a clear international dimension of Islamic State to carry out special forces style attacks in the international environment. This and the growing number of foreign fighters are posing new challenges for EU Member States,“ warns Europol. “The threat of further terrorist attacks in Europe remains high. Therefore, there is a great need within the European Union to strengthen our response to terror, to suspected terrorist networks and foreign fighters, and have an improved strategic understanding of threats,“ added.

“EU institutions responded swiftly and strongly to the terrorist attacks of last year and moved to augment the European Union´s capacity to deal with the terrorist threat. As foreseen in the European Agenda on Security put forward by the European Commission, the establishment of the European Counter Terrorism Centre is a major strategic opportunity for the EU to make our collective efforts to fight terrorism more effective. I call on EU Member States to trust and support the European Counter Terrorism Centre to help it succeed in its important mission,“ said Dimitris Avramopoulos, European Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship.

The launch of the ECTC as of January 2016 followed a decision from the EU Justice and Home Affairs Ministers last November. ECTC will be an enhanced central information hub by which the Member States can increase information sharing and operational coordination. “The ECTC will improve the exchange of information between law enforcement agencies. This is the kind of cooperation Europe needs in the fight against organized crime and terrorism,“ said Ard van der Steur, Minister of Security and Justice of the Netherlands, currently holding the presidency of the Council of the EU.

The new ECTC has been set up within the current organizational structure of Europol that is already playing an important part in the European response to terrorist threats. For example, after the Paris attacks Europol assigned up to 60 officers to support the French and Belgian investigations in Taskforce Fraternité. Up to now, significant quantity of information has been received from these two countries, resulting in 800 intelligence leads and more than 1600 leads on suspicious financial transactions.

“Our ambition is for the European Counter Terrorism Centre to become a central information hub in the fight against terrorism in the EU, providing analysis for ongoing investigations and contributing to a coordinated reaction in the event of major terrorist attacks. Europol is grateful for the support of the Member States, the European Parliament and the European Commission in the establishment of the ECTC. It will lie at the heart of a stronger EU standing up to the threat of terrorism,“ said Europol´s Director Rob Wainwright.

Europol has used this trend of increased information sharing to upgrade its counter terrorism capabilities. The aim is to raise trust and awareness among the different counter terrorism authorities in the EU and maximize existing capabilities. By serving as a center of expertise, ECTC will focus on tackling foreign fighters, sharing intelligence and expertise on terrorism financing (TFTP and support by the FIU.net), online terrorist propaganda and extremism (Internet Referral Unit), illegal arms trafficking and international cooperation to increase effectiveness and prevention.

Europol will provide the Member States, and its key partners like Interpol and Eurojust, with new possibilities to ensure the most effective management of counter terrorism intelligence, like upgraded information exchange for sensitive counter terrorism intelligence (CT SIENA and EIS) and the possibility to second experts to the ECTC to support enhanced cross-border investigations, capable of providing quick and comprehensive response to major terrorist incidents in the EU.

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