

Letter of 23 June 2017 to the President of the House of Representatives from the Minister of Security and Justice and the Minister of Social Affairs and Employment accompanying the 45th edition of the Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands (DTN45)

We are writing to look back at the progress made on counterterrorism policy over the past several months and to reflect on policy developments, on the basis of the 45th edition of the Terrorist Threat Assessment for the Netherlands (DTN45). In addition, we have enclosed a document detailing the status of various outstanding motions and undertakings (appendix 1). A copy of DTN45 is being submitted to the House in parallel with this letter.

Jihadism remains the principal terrorist threat to the Netherlands. As recent attacks have shown, Europe remains a target for jihadist groups. The threat involves a variety of actors (terrorist organisations, transnational networks, small cells and lone actors) which are potentially able to carry out both small- and large-scale attacks. These attacks can be well prepared or amateurish, making use of a variety of methods and with a diverse range of targets. Returning jihadists also continue to pose a threat. Given the growing military pressure on ISIS in Syria and Iraq it is possible that the number of returnees will increase. Jihadist travellers are expected to return gradually. There is also a risk associated with jihadists who have been prevented from leaving the country in the first place or who do not wish to do so.

The terrorist threat is complex and emanates from various quarters. It requires the ongoing implementation of the government's comprehensive approach. As stated in the letter to the House following the attacks in London,¹ the National Counterterrorism Strategy for 2016-2020 provides for this approach. In this regard it is vital to continuously evaluate our approach and its implementation, so as to provide a flexible, effective counterterrorism policy that adapts to how the threat develops. The recent attacks in several countries including the United Kingdom confirm the general threat assessment, which underpins our counterterrorism strategy and approach. These attacks do not provide any new policy insights.

Early identification and follow-up

It is clear from the DTN that the complex jihadist threat represents significant challenges for Western countries. In the Netherlands, the relevant parties have already been working

¹House of Representatives 2016-2017, 29754 no. 421, 19 June 2017.

together closely for some time at national, regional and local level in order to identify signs of extremism and terrorism early on and follow up on these findings. These parties jointly review all available information and intelligence to determine the threat an individual represents. On the basis of this, a decision is made on whether or not to take further action in the form of concrete steps and/or measures. In order to strengthen the legal basis of the multidisciplinary case management structure, the National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism (NCTV); the four largest municipalities;² the police; the Public Prosecution Service; the Child Protection Board; and the Dutch Probation Service have drawn up a model agreement that reflects current practice and complies with data-sharing requirements set out in privacy law. The agreement was recently distributed to the above parties, so that they could use it in multidisciplinary case management. In addition, from early July 2017 professionals involved in multidisciplinary case management will be given access to a private online information portal holding all the relevant documentation they need, such as protocols and factsheets.

The range of instruments for combating terrorism has been expanded as a result of the Counterterrorism (Interim Administrative Measures) Act, which came into force on 1 March 2017. Since then, the authorities have imposed a number of preventive administrative measures. Parallel to this, the authorities continue to pursue a criminal justice approach, with a focus on compiling dossiers to assist with the criminal prosecution of returnees.

Detection and international information sharing

The Netherlands actively works at international level to identify potentially violent extremists and terrorists and their travel movements. Dutch missions in the region around jihadist conflict areas play an important role in this regard. They may be returnees' first point of contact and therefore have an important signalling function. Since late April there has been growing concern about the effect that the deterioration in our bilateral relations with Turkey could have on bilateral counterterrorism cooperation, especially regarding the sharing of police information by Turkey. These concerns have been raised with the Turkish authorities. In Turkey, police liaisons from EU member states are working together more closely than usual. Besides this, there have been enhanced checks on EU nationals at the EU's external borders as of 7 April 2017. Enhanced border controls mean that member states must carry out systematic database checks to ascertain whether an EU national poses a risk to national security and public order.

² Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague and Utrecht.

As part of the non-military component of the Anti-ISIS Coalition, the Netherlands is active in the foreign terrorist fighters (FTF) working group. The group aims to improve international information sharing and coordination, including by way of existing mechanisms and channels such as Europol and Interpol. As a result, Interpol has reported a substantial increase in the number of FTF profiles being shared by countries. Cooperation between European intelligence and security agencies has also been boosted by the creation of a real-time database and an operational platform allowing intelligence officers from agencies connected to the Counter Terrorism Group (CTG) to share and analyse operational data and findings.

The Netherlands keeps working to improve information sharing at both national and international level. EU member states are preparing to implement the Passenger Name Records (PNR) Directive, which will allow them to identify the travel movements of terrorists, serious criminals and their networks. In the Netherlands, the Data Protection Authority's recommendations have now been incorporated into the bill to implement the directive. The bill will now be submitted to the Council of State for an advisory opinion. The Netherlands, Belgium, France, the UK and, more recently, Germany are also looking at how the principles of the directive could be applied to international bus and high-speed train travel. A number of measures relating to counterterrorism set out in the 'Roadmap to enhance information exchange and information management including interoperability solutions' (approved during the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council meeting of 9 and 10 June 2016) have been translated into Commission proposals for enhancing the Schengen Information System (SIS). Negotiations on these proposals are ongoing.

Improving knowledge and expertise

The complex and changing nature of the jihadist threat requires ongoing investment in the knowledge and expertise of relevant partners and first-line professionals from the security and social services sectors. To augment the existing range of training options, the National Government Training Institute for the Prevention of Radicalisation (ROR) has developed two new courses, specifically for professionals working in youth care and mental health services. Significant investments have been made in training, and efforts are being made to ensure high-quality courses. In addition to the wide range of existing CTER³ courses, the police has been working with the Police College to create a two-day and a three-day CTER training course. Implementation began in 2016, and by 2018 more than 31,500 police employees will have received CTER training. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has also expanded 'returnee

³ Counterterrorism, extremism and radicalisation

awareness and identification training' to the most relevant missions in North Africa and Southeast Asia.

The government believes that better links between partners in the security and social services sectors are crucial in combating radicalisation and being able to effectively intervene in radicalisation processes. On 29 May 2017 special rapporteur Naïma Azough submitted her report on preventing extremism and promoting social cohesion to Minister of Education, Culture and Science Jet Bussemaker and State Secretary for Health, Welfare and Sport Martin van Rijn. In light of the report's main findings (a feeling of 'professional loneliness' among partners and the need for more cooperation between the education, youth work and security sectors), the government has decided to establish a knowledge platform for preventing extremism and polarisation in order to support youth workers. The platform will be part of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment's expert unit on social stability.

Extremism, radicalisation and polarisation

The DTN states that the rise in support for far-right groups observed in the 2015-2016 period does not appear to have become a trend. However, right-wing extremist groups have become bolder, for instance as regards provoking confrontation (including violent confrontation) with left-wing extremist groups. Stakeholders can use the current person-specific approach in order to gain a better sense of extremism – including left-wing and right-wing extremism – in their municipalities. It is therefore vital that professionals are equipped with the skills needed to recognise extremism and that solid reporting mechanisms are in place. There are training courses in place to ensure that this is the case.

Conclusion

All forms of violent extremism or terrorism – whether from jihadists or left-wing or right-wing extremists – represent a threat to Dutch society and must be rejected and combated. The organisations involved in combating terrorism are doing their utmost to limit the threat posed. However, the risk of a terrorist attack in the Netherlands cannot be ruled out. The resilience of our society plays a large part in determining whether terrorists succeed in dividing us.