



# TTSRL – Policy Brief

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## KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE COMMISSION AND NATIONAL GOVERNMENTS

1. Expand research on the relation between media coverage and terrorist attacks
2. Refrain from imposing censorship on conventional media
3. Offer more and better information to members of the media

## GUIDELINES FOR THE MEDIA

1. Maintain independence from the government
2. Apply self-regulation to avoid being used as a tool by terrorist groups

### Expanding research

It is still unclear to what extent media coverage of terrorism affects public opinion. It is clear, however, that terrorists count on widespread media attention in the aftermath of attacks. Therefore, mass media outlets are deliberately used as tools to reach certain objectives, including gaining legitimacy, spreading fear among political opponents and gaining sympathy from individuals that terrorists claim to represent.

In addition to these expectations, extensive media coverage may also lead to some important side-effects, which can be both positive and negative. It should be kept in mind that the media have a duty to provide news to the public. Withholding information is not an option, whether the side-effects are positive or negative. However, it is still important to explore the effects of certain outlets on the public. Positive side-effects can be that people with radical ideas who contemplate future engagement in terrorism, may refrain from that, due to the disgust they feel after broad news coverage of the severe suffering terrorism might generate. On the other hand, media coverage might evoke admiration for terrorists in certain radicals, which in the end might inspire them to carry out a similar action. Thus far, these hypotheses do not appear to be supported by conclusive evidence. It is therefore sensible that a thorough research in this field should be encouraged by the Commission and the European national governments.

### Censorship

Censorship of conventional media is neither effective nor desirable. Experiments of this nature in the past have shown that terrorist propaganda distributed through the media was not reduced. One should also keep in mind that the emergence of new media, such as the Internet, has mitigated the traditional power of their conventional counterparts. This means that any restriction





imposed on conventional media is rather useless, since terrorists can spread their message via the world wide web instead. The Internet also provides a genuine treasure trove for radicals who are looking for specific information with regard to terrorist attacks. The idea of banning websites that are directly related to terrorist organizations generally meets little resistance, but we emphasize that such measures are also insufficient since terrorists have less controversial channels to spread their message.

A second problem that arises with censorship is its clash with the principles of democracy where freedom of the press is considered as one of the core-values of liberal democratic societies. As such, curtailing the media would be a direct infringement on the right to freedom of speech, which is enshrined in Article 10 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ECHR).

The Council of Europe has issued an important guideline concerning terrorism and media coverage. This guideline stresses both freedom of speech and the right of the public to be properly informed. Nevertheless, if unambiguous propaganda is disseminated, governments have the right to interfere in the form of censorship. Even then, however, measures should be necessary, proportionate and in accordance with already existing laws.

Although we reject censorship from the side of the government, we do acknowledge the importance of some sort of self-regulation with regard to terrorism-related outlets. Written guidelines by each media organization may reduce the influence of terrorists using the media. However, sanctions against journalists who oppose or neglect these guidelines should be avoided at all costs.

As a conclusion, we recommend a restriction of those media outlets that openly support terrorism, although a total ban will prove to be impossible due to the abundance of alternative sources. Conventional media should not be curtailed at all, since this causes tension with freedom of speech, one of the pillars of a democratic society. The only acceptable measure is a policy of self-regulation by the media organizations themselves.

### **Information supply**

Although members of the media write extensively on terrorism, most journalists still lack in-depth knowledge of the phenomenon. It is therefore recommended that governments organize educational activities for media executives and journalists. Counter-terrorism institutions may play a vital role in this respect. This may result in the following positive outcomes: first, journalists will be better able to analyze and explain terrorist activity, thereby improving the quality of information supplied to the public. This will in turn help to put terrorism in the right perspective and minimize anxiety of the public.

Second, an improvement of information supply will likely lead to more self-regulation. This reduces the urge of governments to impose such regulations on the media themselves. In the end, this will result in adequate analyses of terrorist activity, whereas the spread of fear (often evoked by sensational media coverage) is reduced considerably.





## The TTSRL project

The project entitled Transnational Terrorism, Security and the Rule of Law (TTSRL) is a research project, conducted by a consortium of research institutes for the European Commission in Brussels. The project is part of the 6th framework program specifically that of priority 7 entitled: 'Citizens and Governance in a Knowledge-based Society'. More information about this program can be found [here](#).

### **TTSRL**

Transnational terrorism is one of the most substantial threats to security and the Rule of Law within the European Union. Approaches towards this problem, however, diverge. As Member States implement different policies based on differing basic assumptions, a structured, univocal strategy towards transnational terrorism is absent. Considering the continuing integration within the European Union, a Union-level strategy with regards to terrorism is imperative. In order to support the formulation of such a strategy, this project will study both the conceptual nature of the problems identified here, and the possible measures flowing from these assumptions.

This project will entail the conducting of a structured, well-founded survey into the various response options towards transnational terrorism and the theoretical assumptions on which they are based. A holistic approach has been chosen in which policy-areas specifically dealing with terrorism as well as affected policy-fields are taken into account. In this respect, this project is unique in that it integrates diverse aspects of the issue into one comprehensive and multidisciplinary project.

The TTSRL project proposes to start bridging the gap between the new daunting challenges posed by transnational terrorism and our current conceptual and policy deficiencies. It addresses what we see as the key issues involved: new notions of security and the role played in it by transnational terrorism; the definition and etiology of terrorism; the societal impact of terrorism; its economic impact; and - last but not least - the policy options available to deal with it.

The main added value of the project will lie in the benchmarking of approaches and policy-options in use in the various Member States. Combined with the conceptual underpinnings of this benchmarking exercise, the project will yield insights into the appropriateness and effectiveness of various approaches and measures from a national and a European perspective, the ethical issues related to this field, and cost-benefit considerations.

For more information on the recommendations in this policy brief of the TTSRL project at large, visit our [website](#) or contact the COT:

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