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8th European Day in Remembrance of Victims of Terrorism

On 11 March 2012 the European Union commemorates the 8th European Day in Remembrance of Victims of Terrorism¹. There are hundreds of victims of terrorism worldwide every month, most of them the very people on whose behalf the terrorists claim to be fighting. But still media attention and public debate focus too much on the attacker, on terrorist organisations and their criminal aims, and too little on the victims. The daughter of a man killed by right wing terrorists complained recently that she saw the faces of the killers all around, in newspapers and on TV, but nowhere was her father mentioned nor his life documented.

"Despite all our security efforts thousands of people still die from terrorist attacks every year. More has to be done to make the voices of victims heard in public and to devote more attention to victims, their families, friends and relatives and less to the perpetrators", Gilles de Kerchove, EU Counter-terrorism Coordinator said. "More attention has to be given to the victims and their fate. We always have to remember: While public life gets back to normal some time after an attack, there is no normal life anymore for survivors, families of victims, their relatives and friends. The suffering of victims does not stop with the end of the attack."

On 9 March 2012, a conference will take place in Brussels, jointly organised by the European Commission and the European Network of Associations of Victims of Terrorism. It will focus on the role of victims of terrorism in countering violent extremism. It will, for example, analyse the ways in which victims can contribute to reduce future violence and suffering by telling their stories in the media or by meeting personally with sympathisers of violent extremism to confront them with the real consequences of terrorism.

¹ The first European Day in Remembrance of Victims of Terrorism was commemorated on 11 March 2005 at the first anniversary of the Madrid bombings in 2004, when 191 people were killed in attacks on local trains in Madrid. The goal of "victims day" is to pay tribute to all those who suffer the consequences of terrorist attacks in the name of some extremist ideology.

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Gilles de Kerchove, EU Counter-terrorism coordinator: "Victims have indeed an important role to play in the prevention of violent radicalisation and many have already engaged in prevention efforts through public outreach events. As living memory of the consequences of terrorist attacks, victims are best placed to "de-glamorise" and "de-legitimise" the terrorist narrative." In his [conference speech](#), Gilles de Kerchove also touches upon the problems of de-humanisation and isolation of victims, the question of international solidarity with the victims as well as the role of the media vis-à-vis victims and terrorism.

Terrorism in 2011 - deploring atrocities...

With the victims in mind, the EU Counter-terrorism coordinator recalls the grief that terrorism continued to bring to people all over the world, including in Iraq, Pakistan, Yemen, Somalia, Kenya, Nigeria, Algeria, Turkey and many other places. It is estimated that worldwide more than 30.000 people were victims of terrorist attacks, nearly 10.000 died.

In Europe, undoubtedly the most tragic events were the dreadful acts by a right-wing extremist in Norway in July 2011. 77 people were killed and more than 150 injured. Most of the victims were children and young men and women between 14 and 19 years old.

The discovery of a right-wing extremist group in November 2011 was a shock for German society. The group was responsible for several terrorist attacks, including ten murders. The victims include eight citizens with Turkish roots, a Greek man and a German police woman. In February 2012, a commemoration for the victims took place in Berlin.

...welcoming signs of hope and successful operations against terrorism

But 2011 was also the year which brought at least some kind of relief, consolation or hope to many victims of terrorism. In October 2011, the Basque terrorist organisation ETA declared that it was putting a definitive end to its armed activity. This announcement came after an increasing number of successful investigations and arrests by the Spanish and French police forces. ETA's announcement was an overdue step. The EU Counter-terrorism coordinator said in his reaction to the declaration: "I am sorry that it has taken so long to arrive at this point, and deeply regret that terrorism in Spain has caused so many victims. Once again, I would like to pay tribute to the resilience of the ETA victims and the Spanish society as a whole over all those years." (see press statement [15831/11](#))

In May last year, Al Qaeda suffered a serious set-back with the death of Osama Bin Laden (see press statement [9548/11](#)). This was an important event - not least for the victims of the 9/11 attacks in the United States and victims of other attacks carried out or inspired by Al Qaeda. It was a significant step to prevent the spread of terrorism because Osama Bin Laden had become an important source of inspiration for terrorists and their sympathisers.

The commemoration of the 10th anniversary of 9/11 in the autumn of last year was an occasion to take stock and remind ourselves that the suffering of victims does not stop with the end of the attack when the rest of society gets "back to normal". (see [Council conclusions on Counter-terrorism](#) and the op-ed "[10 years - 10 lessons](#)").

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