



The EU's Security Union: A bill of health

by Camino Mortera-Martinez

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The Security Union has helped improve the EU's ability to tackle terrorism, radicalisation, and cyber crime since it was launched three years ago. But if the next European Commission wants to develop the initiative further it will need to face down challenges from increasingly Eurosceptic governments; adapt to new security threats from China and elsewhere; and tackle problems with the Security Union's structure. That is the conclusion of a new Centre for European Reform paper, '[The EU's Security Union: A bill of health](#)', which examines the origins and development of the EU's newest portfolio and suggests what it should focus on in the future.

Bloody terrorist attacks in France and Belgium, coupled with an unprecedented migration crisis, triggered a rapid shift in the EU's focus in 2016. Within a few months, Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker made security a priority, pledging a "Europe that protects." At the forefront of that drive was the creation of the Security Union, a new Commission brief focused on improving co-operation in five areas: data collection and sharing; border controls; terrorism and organised crime; cyber security; and working with third countries on security. British diplomat Julian King was named the first Commissioner for the Security Union, simultaneously satisfying a requirement for the UK to command a Commission department until its exit from the EU.

The EU has made unusually swift progress on boosting security measures, passing a string of laws and improving transparency. The Security Union has also made the bloc more proactive and far-sighted than it used to be in this area. However, it is increasingly facing pushback from Eurosceptic member-states that feel the Commission is encroaching on their sovereign powers. The Security Union's focus on preventive measures also risks undermining the rule of law in the EU. And its somehow improvised institutional structure, which responded to security concerns as much as it did to the need to accommodate Brexit Britain, is also problematic.

Nobody knows exactly where Europe's next security crisis will come from, though migration, disruptive technologies, like Artificial Intelligence and 5G, and China have emerged as potential sources of problems for the EU. The next European administration should make these issues the priority. If the next Commission wants to press on with ambitious security plans for Europe, it will need to design robust and coherent strategies to deal with technology platforms, China and Africa, while also finding a better balance between the safety of European citizens and their civil liberties. The EU should also organise its new security departments according to the new threats, with a clearer division of labour and a rational distribution of portfolios across Commission units and the EU's diplomatic service.

"With Eurosceptic and nativist parties winning more seats in the European Parliament and at the helm of governments in several member-states, the EU will be more difficult to govern. Finding agreements on sensitive areas like security promises to be even trickier. The next set of EU leaders should learn from the successes and failures of the Security Union and design the EU's security plans with greater foresight. Only then will the EU be a credible security provider," said Camino Mortera-Martinez, senior research fellow at the CER and author of the report.

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Note for editors: For further information on the report and to request an interview with Camino Mortera-Martinez, please contact Nick Winning in the CER press office on pressoffice@cer.eu or + 44 (0) 20 7233 1199. Follow us on Twitter [@CER_EU](#) and the author on [@CaminoMortera](#)