European powers implement police state measures in wake of Charlie Hebdo attack

Ulrich Rippert
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Governments throughout Europe have responded to the attacks on *Charlie Hebdo* in France by moving quickly to push through a raft of anti-democratic measures. They are exploiting the shock and confusion generated by the event in Paris to take actions that have long been prepared, but that have so far encountered resistance.

Immediately after the attacks, the police presence at airports, in front of embassies, government buildings, newspaper offices and public places was reinforced by thousands of security forces in European capitals and major cities.

Heavily armed and camouflaged military troops have been deployed throughout Paris and elsewhere in France, including at the Eiffel Tower and in all public places. Parts of the city resemble a war zone.

On Monday, the Ministry of Defence in Paris announced the deployment of 10,000 troops to maintain peace and order and protect public buildings. In addition, the government has provided 4,700 police officers and gendarmes to guard Jewish schools and synagogues that are considered particularly vulnerable.

After a cabinet meeting on Monday, Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian spoke of a permanent threat. Prime Minister Manuel Valls promised more money for the secret services and more effective surveillance.

At a security summit last weekend in Brussels, the European powers agreed that a European-wide passenger data system must be adopted as soon as possible. Airlines will be obliged to retain the records of their passengers for up to five years. US General Michael Hayden, the former director of the CIA and chief of the NSA, also took part in the meeting. Hayden has been responsible for implementing and expanding much of the illegal and unconstitutional spying programs developed in the United States.

Individual countries throughout Europe are planning their own measures. In Germany, Chancellor Angela Merkel (Christian Democratic Union, CDU) has called for better international intelligence cooperation.

Interior Minister Thomas de Maizière (CDU) stressed on Monday that one of the most important measures in Germany was the deployment of more intelligence staff for the monitoring of Islamic fundamentalist groups. For this, funding would have to be significantly increased, he said.

De Maizière and others have called for the reintroduction of data warehousing. In 2010, the Supreme Court ruled that the mass storage of telephone, e-mail and internet traffic data of all users for several months, without any grounds of suspicion, was legally questionable.

Last year, the European Court of Justice ruled that such monitoring and collection of personal data was illegal. It explained that the storage of communications could not abrogate professional secrets, including those of journalists. Now, in the name of defending the freedom of the press, the German ruling class is pushing to rapidly implement these anti-democratic measures.

Also on Monday, Justice Minister Heiko Maas (Social Democratic Party, SPD) said that individuals accused of traveling to participate in terrorist activity will face even harsher punishment. Up to now, only those attending a terrorist camp in order to prepare an attack could be punished. In the future, it will be a criminal offence to travel abroad with the intention of participating in attacks or to train as a terrorist. It will make no difference whether the accused individual actually arrives at the terrorist camp.

According to political weekly *Die Zeit* domestic

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political affairs spokesman Burkhard Lischka (SPD) complained that there are cases in which someone expressed their intentions in a letter or on a social network, but could not be prosecuted. In the future, these individuals could be detained in Germany or abroad.

The Minister of Justice also wants to create a specific criminal offence of financing terrorism. Donations of all sizes supposedly aimed at supporting terrorist activities would be punishable. In the US, such laws have been broadly applied and used to target groups that are not directly connected to any Islamic fundamentalist organizations.

Later this week, the government in Germany will consider a bill that provides for the withdrawal of identity cards from "potential attackers." It is already possible to withdraw a suspect's passport under certain conditions.

In Britain, Prime Minister David Cameron has announced a drastic expansion of Internet surveillance. He wants to ban encryption programmes and news services like WhatsApp.

Cameron said that there must be no "means of communication" that "we cannot read." Previous governments have hesitated in taking such steps, Cameron said, but they are necessary so that, "in extremis," any communication could be obtained with a signed warrant from the Home Secretary.

The "Snoopers Charter", as these proposals came to be known when they were first introduced, failed to pass parliament in 2012. They would require communications companies to retain details of their entire communication traffic for twelve months. Any person who communicates using encryption or sends encrypted files would be required to provide government officials access to cryptographically-protected information. Those refusing to hand over their password could face up to two years in prison.

The Italian government under Prime Minister Matteo Renzi (PD, Democratic Party) has also announced a significant expansion of state powers. Interior Minister Angelino Alfano has announced that he will introduce a bill in the Council of Ministers that will enable the police to withdraw the passport of any terrorism suspect.

In addition, Alfano will provide the police and judiciary with extraordinary powers that will allow increased Internet surveillance. The government is planning to shut down suspicious websites. Internet service providers must cooperate in the future, to "track messages in the network that contribute to radicalization," Alfano said. The government would prohibit providers "from accepting websites that incite terrorist behavior."

The main purpose of this coordinated offensive by the European powers is not the fight against an alleged "Islamist threat." The ruling elites are increasingly turning the continent into a police state as popular resistance against the European Union and its policies is growing. The military employed in the streets of Paris, the building up of the intelligence apparatus and the assault on democratic rights are directed above all at the growing opposition in the European working class to austerity at home and unending war abroad.

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