

European leaders lay out fresh plans to fight religious extremism

The leaders of France, Austria, Germany and the EU on Tuesday discussed Europe's response to terrorism after a spate of deadly Islamic extremist attacks.

French President Emmanuel Macron and Austrian Chancellor Sebastian Kurz met in Paris after both of their countries have lost lives to Islamic extremist attackers in recent weeks.

The two leaders then held a video conference with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, and European Council President Charles Michel to discuss collective anti-terrorism strategy.

Von der Leyen stressed on the importance of prevention, including a better integration of people and on the protection of external borders.

Michel mentioned the need to properly train imams and protecting the freedom of conscience and religion.

The meeting comes a week after a man who officials said had tried to join the Islamic State group shot four people to death in Vienna.

The shooting has strengthened calls in Austria for a crackdown on Islamic extremism.

In France last month, an Islamic extremist killed three people in a church in the French city of Nice, and another extremist beheaded a teacher near Paris because he had shown his students cartoons of Islam's prophet for a discussion about freedom of expression.

As a result of the attacks, Macron last week proposed tighter controls on the EU's external borders, more coordinated policing inside the bloc's border-free zone, and changes to EU migration policy.

"Every security flaw, concerning the external border of the EU or within any country is a security risk for every member state and our intelligence systems too. The use of legal tools is essential also and we will discuss this in December," the

French premier said.

While Macron wants to focus his strategy on Schengen reform, Michel wants to put a common EU strategy on the table, to crack down on foreign funding for religious organizations, and to also help imams promote Islam in a way that respects EU ideals.

“How can we enhance the training of imams in Europe? How can we be sure that the liberty of consciousness and religious freedom, which are a crucial issue in Europe, are being protected? What can we do to guarantee these values without any compromise?” Michel said.

But he is also calling for the creation of a European institute to train imams to fight extremist ideology, which Salah Echallaoui, vice president of the Muslim Executive of Belgium, says is not enough.

“If we limit the fight against radicalism only to the training of imams, and therefore just the religious aspect, I think we will begin to lose the fight against radicalism,” he said.

“All the experts say that radicalism has many different roots and causes and in order to fight all of this, we must work within all these areas.

“We are ready to work on the religious aspect because it is our responsibility, but it is not enough.”

Source: <http://www.garnertedarmstrong.org/wp-admin/post-new.php>

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