

COMMUNICATION

**from the European Affairs Committee of the Federal Council
to the European Commission, the Council and the European Parliament
pursuant to Article 23 f (4) of the Austrian Constitutional Act
8 March 2016**

COM(2015) 625 final

Proposal for a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on combating terrorism and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/475/JHA on combating terrorism

Acts of terrorism constitute one of the most serious violations of the universal values of human dignity, freedom, equality and solidarity, the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and one of the most serious attacks on the principles of democracy and the rule of law on which the European Union is founded.

After the attacks in Paris, it is particularly important to have adequate tools in place that are suited, on the one hand, to address the threats confronting the EU and, on the other hand, to preserve our society and its values.

More coherent, comprehensive and aligned national criminal law provisions are necessary across the EU to be able to effectively prevent and prosecute criminal acts of foreign terrorist fighters and to respond in an appropriate manner to increased cross-border practical and legal challenges.

The Austrian Federal Council regards the protection of victims in this context as a matter of crucial importance and therefore supports the proposals submitted by the Commission. We share the Commission's opinion that victims of terrorism require protection, support and assistance in a form that responds to their specific needs. The Austrian Federal Council supports the measures proposed in this area, but wishes to point out that the issue of witness protection is missing in the considerations submitted by the Commission. The Federal Council therefore calls upon the European Commission to establish an adequate

witness protection programme for witnesses of terrorist acts.

Article 11 of the Directive addresses the issue of terrorist financing. This article requires Member States to criminalise the provision of funds that are used to commit terrorist offences and offences related to terrorist groups or terrorist activities.

In this context, the Austrian Federal Council wishes to underline that the theft of cultural goods, which constitute an important source of finance for terrorist organisations, is another urgent issue that needs to be included in the Commission's considerations.