

# **Cooperation between the special intervention units of the Member States in crisis situations. Initiative Austria**

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This Council paper involves an Austrian initiative with a view to adopting a Council Decision on the improvement of cooperation between the special intervention units of the Member States of the EU.

Following the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the special units of all EU law enforcement authorities initiated cooperation activities under the umbrella of the Police Chiefs Task Force (PCTF). The so-called "ATLAS network" has since 2001 conducted various seminars, studies, exchange of materials and common exercises (included a secured communication network currently under development at Europol).

The goal of the ATLAS network is to bring each counter-terrorism unit to the highest possible level of professionalism by the realisation of a structural and intense mutual cooperation. The exchange of information and the promotion of mutual assistance in order better to coordinate EU activities in the field of counter-terrorism are also important goals for ATLAS.

Terrorist events that occurred in the last few years have clearly demonstrated the need for good cooperation between the special intervention units at EU level. Indeed, no Member State can pretend that it has all means, resources and expertise at its disposal to deal with every large scale situation that requires special intervention. The option of requesting the assistance of another Member State might therefore prove to be of crucial importance both from a qualitative and quantitative point of view.

In the margins of the PCTF meeting of 11 and 12 October 2004 there was a demonstration of a large scale exercise involving units from Belgium, France, the Netherlands, Germany and Sweden. On this occasion, the question arose whether the appropriate legislative framework existed if such an operation should ever take place in reality.

On subsequent occasions, the importance of establishing a legal framework was stressed by several Member States, and the G6 agreed in March 2006 on developing joint support teams to offer operational assistance in case of serious terrorist attacks. These expert teams or liaison officers will provide on-site support to an attacked country on its request.

The Austrian initiative involves the following: large scale crisis situations require interventions by specialised units. Requesting the assistance of another Member State might therefore be of crucial importance. Therefore, the draft Council Decision sets out basic rules, including civil and penal liability, in order to provide a legal framework where Member States agree to use this possibility of requesting and providing assistance. The framework will simplify and speed up the capacities of EU Member States in case of a crisis situation in order to ensure the best possible level of aid for the Member State concerned.