

New CER working paper

Guarding Europe

By Adam Townsend

The European Union needs to build an effective security framework to stop criminals and terrorists from roaming freely across its internal borders. Guarding Europe analyses what the EU should do to improve its security in the face of international terrorism now that most member-states have removed the border controls between them.

The September 11th 2001 terrorist attacks exposed flaws in the way the United States police and intelligence agencies operated. The US government subsequently concluded that a lack of co-ordination between the many police and intelligence agencies – and the absence of a single body analysing all the pieces of information centrally – were the key reasons why it had failed to prevent the September 11th attacks. Guarding Europe argues that the EU suffers from these weaknesses to a far greater extent.

Guarding Europe explores the vulnerabilities in the EU's internal security; it responds to two questions posed by the removal of internal border controls. What could the EU do to improve security within the area of free movement? What should the EU do to improve control of its external borders?

★ To improve internal security, Guarding Europe shows why the member-states need to create a European Intelligence Centre, which would piece together more accurate assessments of threats to the EU based upon information provided by national security services, law enforcement and intelligence agencies.

★ To improve control of the EU's external borders, the EU should: adopt technologies that make controls more efficient and effective; make border guards intelligence-led; and encourage co-operation with neighbouring countries. The paper highlights the futility of trying to control the EU's borders by building a 'fortress Europe'. The EU also needs a single border guard agency to drive these sorts of reforms and to co-ordinate better the work of the many national border guard services.

There is no doubt many EU citizens are fond of their ability to travel around the Union without border controls. But few policy areas are more sensitive than security. If citizens began to blame the EU for making life easier for terrorists and criminals, the area of free movement – and the EU – could become unpopular very quickly. Worse, if the EU does not improve its internal security, it could be only a matter of time before Europe is agonising over a failure to prevent its own September 11th.

Notes for editors:

1. Adam Townsend is the CER's justice and home affairs research fellow. For further comment, please call 00 44 20 7233 1199

2. This paper can be ordered from the CER website www.cer.org.uk or by contacting kate@cer.org.uk