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January 26, 2003

**EURODAC IN THE EUROPEAN WAR AGAINST TERROR:
A QUANTUM LEAP OR "MORE OF THE SAME"?**

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AFIS, the European Automated Fingerprints Identification System, was launched on January 15. "Eurodac," as the system is called, will register the fingerprints of asylum applicants over the age of 14 and certain categories of illegal immigrants in the participating countries. The system is now operational in the European Union (EU) countries and also in Norway and Iceland. As of 2004, it will be introduced to the 10 incoming EU member states.

About 10-20% of the 400,000 people who seek asylum in Europe each year do so in more than one country. Eurodac is designed to prevent abuses of the system by these "asylum shoppers." And in response to concerns voiced by civil liberties activists, the European Commission insisted that no information garnered through Eurodac would be relayed to police or other security services. As a result, an independent body has been set up to ensure that data will not be used for purposes beyond those mandated nor forwarded to the applicants' countries of origin. But these very safeguards raise a separate question: will Eurodac become an effective instrument in Europe's campaign against international terror? Can this system contribute to a quantum leap in the resourcefulness demanded by a coordinated war against terror? Or is it just another marginal effort

that will not address the real threat of terror to Europe itself and to the world?

Today, almost a year and a half after September 11, the terror threat appears more ominous than ever. A sense of sobriety has set in regarding the use of Europe as a staging area for terrorist operations outside of Europe. The September 11 attack, the undeniable proof of al-Qaeda involvement, and particularly the unrelenting American pressure, have forced the Europeans to wake up to the concrete threat on their soil.

But even more persuasive is the recent series of terror-related events on European soil. The "Ricin Group" was arrested in London on January 5, 2002 when traces of the lethal poison were found in their flat. In Manchester, the pursuit of three more suspects ended with one policeman dead and four others wounded. The Manchester suspects, like the London group, were of North African origin. Interestingly, the Manchester police were looking for an Algerian who had remained in Britain after his asylum request was rejected but who was also wanted under antiterrorism legislation.

On November 27, 2002, in a Paris suburb, French anti-terrorism police arrested six Algerians and Pakistanis suspected of providing logistical support to Richard Reid, the "shoe-bomber" who intended

Published by TEL AVIV UNIVERSITY

The Jaffee Center for Strategic Studies & The Moshe Dayan Center for Middle Eastern and African Studies
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to blow up a Paris-Miami flight on December 22, 2001. And French counter-espionage agents recently detained six alleged al-Qaida recruits suspected of involvement in the Frankfurt-based plot to bomb the Strasbourg market two years ago. One of the suspects is Sliman Khaflui, 27, a French-Algerian who spent some time in Bosnia and in al-Qaida training camps in Afghanistan.

In Rotterdam, however, a Dutch judge dealt a heavy blow to the credibility of the Dutch secret service by acquitting four suspected al-Qaida operatives on grounds of "insufficient evidence." This is not only a setback for the Dutch services but for the general European effort against terror.

In Greece, the pursuit of members of the Athens-based November 17 radical leftist terror group has taken on new urgency in the wake of September 11. This anti-American, anti-European Union, anti-NATO, and anti-imperialist group has terrorized not only Greece but also the entire continent.

Over the last 12 months, Italian anti-terrorist services have arrested more than 40 suspects, but prosecutors have had only mixed success in winning convictions against al-Qaida members. However, a joint Italian-German investigation did result in the first conviction of al-Qaida members in Europe: last February, four Tunisians were convicted by an Italian court of supplying false documents, breaking immigration laws, and maintaining criminal association with the intent to obtain and transport arms, explosives, and chemicals.

Germany, while not suffering any recent terrorist attacks on its own soil, was targeted indirectly in April 2002 when a Tunisian named Nizar Nawar drove a gas-filled tanker into a synagogue in the Tunisian resort town of Djerba, killing 14 German tourists, one French tourist, and six Tunisians. There is evidence of telephone contacts on the morning of this suicide attack with a member of the al-Qaida high command in Pakistan and with a

man in Germany connected to the al-Qaida Hamburg cell. Of course, this cell and its leader, Mohammad Atta, had previously come under the limelight for their role in the September 11 hijackings and attacks, which also exposed European negligence, in general, and that of Germany, in particular. The German police and other security organizations are now clearly determined to step up their efforts in the war against terrorism. There are currently more than 100 people under investigation for terrorism in Germany. Five al-Qaida suspects are on trial in Frankfurt for plotting to blowup a market in Strasbourg, France.

One can see the first fruits of European cooperation among law enforcement and security organizations against a complex web of Islamic extremist networks that is far wider than just the al-Qaida operation. Overall, though, countering the threat of terrorism calls for a much more elaborate system than that currently functioning in Europe. In some cases, the careful use of intelligence, better coordinated and applied than in the past, will suffice. But with 25 members of the EU and their individual agencies, restrictions, and regulations, Europe will have to make a supreme effort to change and streamline its judicial systems. One outstanding hurdle it faces regards the safeguarding of human rights, a doctrine embedded in the (western) European consciousness. In this context, the constraints that were applied to the Eurodac system do not leave much leeway for its use as an effective tool in the war against terror.

Fighting international terrorism requires broadening the European strategic vision. The challenges include creating the wherewithal to participate in battles outside the continent as well as improving the capability of a well-coordinated multi-layered internal European effort. One small step in this direction could be Eurodac, but only if its potential as a viable tool in the intensifying war against terrorism is appreciated and utilized.