

Europol's Internet Referral Unit to combat terrorist and violent extremist propaganda

The Hague, the Netherlands
1 July 2015

On 1 July 2015 Europol launched the European Union Internet Referral Unit (EU IRU) to combat terrorist propaganda and related violent extremist activities on the internet.

Terrorists' use of the internet and social media has increased significantly in the recent years. Jihadist groups, in particular, have demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of how social networks operate. They have launched well-organised, concerted social media campaigns to recruit followers and to promote or glorify acts of terrorism or violent extremism.



To tackle this phenomenon, European Union (EU) Member States decided to implement a coherent and coordinated European prevention approach. On 12 March 2015, the Justice and Home Affairs Council of the European Union mandated Europol to establish a dedicated unit aimed at reducing the level and impact of terrorist and violent extremist propaganda on the internet. The European Union Internet Referral Unit at Europol will identify and refer relevant online content towards concerned internet service providers and support Member States with operational and strategic analysis.

This new capability will draw upon existing trusted relationships with law enforcement authorities across the EU and beyond, the private sector and the on-site Europol Liaison Officers' network. It will rely on available secure communication channels and databases, as well as Europol's unique, robust data protection and confidentiality arrangements.

Dimitris Avramopoulos, Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, said that "The recent terrorist attacks in France, Tunisia and Kuwait have shown once again how important it is to combat terrorist threats with determination. The establishment of the EU Internet Referral Unit is one of the first deliverables of the European Agenda on Security. It will provide operational support to Member States on how to tackle more effectively the challenges of detecting and removing the increasing volume of terrorist material on the internet and in social media. The launch of this important initiative is the result of our common efforts. The success of this initiative will depend on the continued good cooperation and contributions from all stakeholders".

Rihards Kozlovskis, Minister for the Interior of Latvia and chairman of the Justice and Home Affairs Council of Ministers agreed that "the recent events demonstrated that one of the top priorities on our agenda is to counter violent extremism in order to contain the growth of online content produced by terrorists." He said "I am glad that Europol managed to respond to the initiative developed during the Latvian Presidency, and set up the EU IRU on such short notice to bring expertise and technical support to countries facing violent online content. I believe the new unit will boost our common efforts and act as a European Centre of Excellence for coordination, sharing of information, support and analysis".

The European Union Counter Terrorism Coordinator Gilles de Kerchove said that "the terrorist groups which challenge our security are exploiting the internet and social media to promote their cause and to secure new recruits. It is vital that the EU responds in a coordinated manner to this threat. I am delighted that Europol will be hosting the EU Internet Referral Unit. By working closely with industry, the unit can make a key contribution to reducing the volume of terrorist material which is available online".

Rob Wainwright, Director of Europol, said that "Europol has cooperated closely with the EU Member States and European Commission to develop this new capability, aimed at reducing terrorist and extremist online propaganda. We have also built a constructive new partnership with relevant social media and other private companies. Together we will deliver a determined response to this problem affecting the safety and liberty of the internet".

Up to approximately 15 Europol officials and experts from national authorities in the EU will form the first phase of the IRU team. This will grow in number and capability over the next year, reaching full maturity by July 2016. The full impact of the IRU, however, will be delivered by leveraging the combined resources of social media partners and national expert contact points due to be established in all Member States, working as a concerted community through the EU IRU at Europol.

Tags: [Europol](#) [Terrorism](#)

Source URL: <https://www.europol.europa.eu/content/europol%E2%80%99s-internet-referral-unit-combat-terrorist-and-violent-extremist-propaganda>