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TERRORIST ACTS IN EUROPE AFTER THE 11 SEPTEMBER ATTACK AND THE EUROPEAN UNION'S EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH A COMMON POLICY TOWARDS TERRORIST ACTS

Although there is no common definition of the concept of terrorism in the literature, it generally means instilling fear and intimidation. The historical starting point of this concept is the French Revolution of 1789. With the impact of globalisation, this concept has become a threat to both civilians and national governments. In this respect, when the European Union (EU) is considered as a federalist structure, the phenomenon of terrorism seems to be a serious problem for both the institution and the member states. When we examine the EU integration period until the 11 September attacks, it could not produce a common policy on the problem of terrorism. At that time, this problem was considered as an "internal security" problem and the EU made institutional policies at the level of national governments. After the Twin Tower attack of 11 September 2001, the EU moved the fight against terrorism, which had been carried out at the national level, to the intergovernmental level. After the 11 September terrorist act in the USA, terrorist incidents have been and continue to be experienced in European countries in a synchronised manner. The EU's counter-terrorism policy against these terrorist incidents constitutes the general framework of the study. During the European integration process, the most severe terrorist incidents started to be experienced after 2004. The chronological order of these terrorist incidents and how they are reflected in the EU counter-terrorism policies are tried to be explained within the framework of the Multilevel Governance Theory.

Keywords: terrorism, 11 september attack. european union, counter-terrorism policy, radicalization.

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11 қыркүйек оқиғасынан кейінгі Еуропадағы террористік актілер және терроризмге қарсы ортақ саясат қалыптастырудағы Еуропалық Одақтың күш-жігері

Әдебиетте терроризм ұғымының жалпыға ортақ анықтамасы болмаса да, ол әдетте қорқыныш пен үрей тудыруды білдіреді. Бұл ұғымның тарихи бастауы – 1789 жылғы Француз революциясы. Жаһанданудың әсерімен бұл ұғым бейбіт тұрғындар мен ұлттық үкіметтер үшін қауіпке айналды. Осы тұрғыдан алғанда, Еуропалық Одақты (ЕО) федералистік құрылым ретінде қарастырғанда, терроризм құбылысы институт үшін де, мүше мемлекеттер үшін де аса ауыр мәселе болып табылады. 11 қыркүйек шабуылдарына дейінгі ЕО интеграция кезеңін қарастырсақ, ол терроризм мәселесі бойынша ортақ саясат қалыптастыра алмады. Сол уақытта бұл мәселе «ішкі қауіпсіздік» мәселесі ретінде қарастырылып, ЕО ұлттық үкіметтер деңгейінде институционалдық саясат жүргізді. 2001 жылғы 11 қыркүйектегі Егізкөпірге жасалған шабуылдан кейін Еуропалық Одақ терроризмге қарсы күресті ұлттық деңгейде жүргізуден үкіметаралық деңгейге көтерді. АҚШ-тағы 11 қыркүйектегі террористік актіден кейін Еуропа елдерінде террористік оқиғалар синхронды түрде орын алып, әлі де жалғасуда. Осы террористік оқиғаларға қарсы ЕО-ның терроризмге қарсы саясаты зерттеудің жалпы құрылымын құрайды. Еуропалық интеграция процесі барысында ең ауыр террористік оқиғалар 2004 жылдан кейін басталды. Осы террористік оқиғалардың хронологиялық реті және олардың ЕО-ның терроризмге қарсы саясатында қалай көрініс табатыны көпдеңгейлі басқару теориясы шеңберінде түсіндірілуге тырысады.

Түйін сөздер: терроризм, 11 қыркүйек шабуылы, еуропалық одақ, евроюст, фронтекс, европол, 2004 мадрид шабуылы, 2005 лондон шабуылдары, батаклан шабуылы, терроризмге қарсы саясат.

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Террористические акты в Европе после терактов 11 сентября и усилия Европейского союза по выработке общей политики в отношении терроризма

В литературе нет единого определения понятия «терроризм», в целом оно означает вселение страха и запугивание. Исторической отправной точкой этого понятия является Французская революция 1789 года. Под влиянием глобализации это понятие стало угрозой как для гражданского населения, так и для национальных правительств. В этом отношении, если рассматривать Европейский союз (ЕС) как федеративную структуру, феномен терроризма представляется серьезной проблемой как для самого института, так и для государств-членов. Если проанализировать период интеграции ЕС до терактов 11 сентября, то можно видеть, что он не смог выработать единую политику в отношении проблемы терроризма. В то время эта проблема рассматривалась как проблема «внутренней безопасности», и ЕС проводил институциональную политику на уровне национальных правительств. После терактов 11 сентября 2001 года в Нью-Йорке ЕС перенес борьбу с терроризмом, которая велась на национальном уровне, на межправительственный уровень. После террористического акта 11 сентября в США террористические инциденты происходили и продолжают происходить в европейских странах синхронно. Политика ЕС по борьбе с терроризмом в отношении этих террористических инцидентов составляет общую основу данного исследования. В ходе процесса европейской интеграции наиболее серьезные террористические инциденты начали происходить после 2004 года. Хронологический порядок этих террористических инцидентов и то, как они отражаются в политике ЕС по борьбе с терроризмом, пытаются объяснить в рамках теории многоуровневого управления.

Ключевые слова: терроризм, теракт 11 сентября, европейский союз, евроюст, фронтекс, европол, мадридская атака 2004, лондонские атаки 2005, атака на батаклан, политика по борьбе с терроризмом.

Introduction

Terrorism, not a new phenomenon for Europe, transformed into a serious security problem for EU countries at the beginning of the 21st century. The dissolution of the Soviet Union, the disintegration of Yugoslavia, and the subsequent wars in Bosnia and Kosovo took place in the immediate vicinity of the European continent. These events negatively affected the EU's border and internal security during the last decade of the 20th century. Furthermore, the color revolutions that occurred in former Soviet countries in connection with the EU's 2004 enlargement posed significant problems for EU member states in the context of neighborhood relations. The attack by the Al-Qaeda terrorist organization on the Twin Towers in the United States on September 11, 2001, led to the proliferation of a new type of warfare in the international system, termed asymmetric warfare or irregular warfare. Along with this type of warfare, illegal terrorist organizations have perpetrated numerous acts of violence, massacres, and terrorist attacks in EU countries.

The subject of this research is the examination, within the framework of Multi-Level Governance Theory, of the terrorist acts that occurred in Europe

after the September 11, 2001 attacks, as well as the institutions that the European Union strengthened and established, and the policies it implemented in the context of counter-terrorism. In this context, the study holistically addresses the nature of pre-2001 terrorist acts, major post-2001 terrorist incidents in Europe (2004 Madrid, 2005 London, 2015 Paris Bataclan, 2016 Brussels, and post-2016 ISIS attacks), and the institutions (EUROPOL, EUROJUST, FRONTEX, the Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, and the EU Counter-Terrorism Working Group) and policies that the EU established in response to these incidents.

The aim of this research is to chronologically identify the terrorist incidents that occurred in Europe after the September 11 attacks, to explain how these incidents influenced the EU's counter-terrorism policies within the context of Multi-Level Governance Theory, and to reveal the institutions established by the EU within the scope of counter-terrorism as well as the strategies and framework policies it implemented. In addition to these, the study aims to analyze why 2001 constitutes a turning point in the European integration process and how the EU's approach to counter-terrorism evolved from state-centrism toward a supranational basis.

In line with the main objective of the research, four analytical sub-tasks have been identified, each associated with the conceptual tools of Multi-Level Governance Theory:

- To comparatively analyze the nature of terrorism in Europe before and after 2001.

- To chronologically identify the major terrorist incidents that occurred in Europe after September 11 and to reveal, through historical and descriptive methods, the transformation these incidents created in the EU's counter-terrorism institutions and policies.

- To evaluate, in light of the theoretical framework, the functions of the institutions that the EU strengthened and established for counter-terrorism and the role of these institutions at the supranational governance level.

- To examine the policies that the EU has implemented in the context of counter-terrorism since 2001.

This research is an original study that holistically addresses post-9/11 terrorist incidents in Europe and the EU's institutional and policy responses within the framework of Multi-Level Governance Theory, analyzing the transformation between the pre-2001 and post-2001 periods in the context of the shift from a state-centric approach to supranational governance. In the literature, terrorist incidents in Europe and the EU's counter-terrorism policies are often addressed in separate studies and at a descriptive level, lacking a theoretical framework. This study aims to fill this gap by combining both the chronological account of terrorist incidents and the EU's institutional and policy responses within a single analytical plane, explaining the shift of authority and responsibility in EU counter-terrorism through the conceptual tools of Multi-Level Governance Theory.

Literature review

The September 11, 2001 attacks are regarded as a turning point in the international relations literature. Following this date, the concepts of asymmetric warfare or irregular warfare came to the fore (Mack, 1975; Arreguin-Toft, 2005). Keohane (2002) emphasized that in the post-Cold War era, terrorism, perpetrated by non-state actors, became one of the primary security problems of the international system. Neumann (2009) examined the transformation of jihadist terrorism in Europe within the context of radicalization processes. The European Union's counter-terrorism policies are examined in the lit-

erature across three main periods: the pre-9/11 period, the post-9/11 period, and the period following the 2004 Madrid and 2005 London attacks (Bures, 2016; Kaunert and Léonard, 2018). Den Boer and Monar (2002) state that counter-terrorism was incorporated into the EU *acquis* for the first time with the Maastricht Treaty. The establishment of the EUROPOL, EUROJUST, and FRONTEX agencies is considered in the literature as concrete examples of the EU's transition from the national to the supranational level in counter-terrorism (Bures, 2020; Ripoll Servent, 2024). Kaunert and Léonard (2018) analyzed the transformation of the EU's counter-terrorism competence within the framework of Multi-Level Governance Theory.

The March 2004 Madrid attacks are described in the literature as a wake-up call for EU counter-terrorism policy (Bures and Gajo, 2026; Meade and Pineda, 2024). Cortés et al. (2015) quantitatively analyzed the impact of the attack on the Spanish elections. The July 2005 London attacks, in turn, led to the adoption of the EU's first comprehensive Counter-Terrorism Strategy (Starodubtseva et al., 2020). The November 2015 Paris Bataclan attack is examined in the literature as one of the bloodiest operations of the ISIS terrorist organization in Europe (Zoli and Williams, 2021; Downing et al., 2022). France's declaration of a state of emergency following this attack and the EU's issuance of binding regulations on intelligence sharing are considered significant turning points in the literature (Bures and Gajo, 2026).

Multi-Level Governance Theory, developed by Hooghe and Marks, explains how authority and responsibilities are distributed among national, supranational, and regional levels during the EU integration process (Hooghe and Marks, 2001). This theoretical framework has been used to understand the shift of the EU's counter-terrorism policy from its pre-2001 state-centric structure to its post-2001 supranational basis (Bures, 2016; Ripoll Servent, 2024). It has been noted that applying this theoretical framework to terrorism studies provides significant contributions to understanding the sharing of competences between EU institutions and member states (Kaunert, 2010).

Radicalization processes and the rise of Islamophobia in Europe during the post-2001 period have been extensively examined in the literature (Kundnani, 2012). Bartko (2019) and Bures (2016) analyzed the relationship between irregular migration and terrorism based on EUROPOL and FRONTEX reports. Kabata (2022) examined the security vul-

nerability created by the abolition of internal border controls within the Schengen Area and the effort to compensate for this vulnerability through strengthening external borders via FRONTEX.

This study's contribution to the literature lies in its holistic treatment of post-9/11 terrorist incidents in Europe and the EU's institutional-political responses within the framework of Multi-Level Governance Theory, and its analysis of the transformation between the pre-2001 and post-2001 periods in the context of the shift from state-centrism to supranational governance. It is observed that in the existing literature, these two dimensions are often addressed in separate studies and lack a theoretical framework (Bures, 2016; Kaunert and Léonard, 2018). This study aims to fill this gap by combining both the chronological narrative of events and the EU's institutional and policy responses within a single analytical plane.

Methodology

This study is based on a theoretical and conceptual foundation within the framework of qualitative research methods. The research aims to examine the terrorist acts that occurred in the European integration process after the September 11 attacks and the European Union's efforts to formulate a common policy in response to these acts. Accordingly, the study employs historical and descriptive approaches, which are among the qualitative research methods. While the historical approach allows for the examination of terrorist incidents in a chronological order, the descriptive approach enables a detailed depiction of the institutions and policies established by the EU in the context of counter-terrorism. In line with the subject and aim of the research, four analytical research questions have been formulated, associated with the key concepts of Multi-Level Governance Theory (shift of authority, sharing of responsibilities, the role of non-state actors, supra-national-national-local interaction). These questions transcend mere description and possess causal and relational depth:

- How and through which mechanisms has the nature of European terrorism, which was predominantly based on ethnic, ideological, and separatist foundations before 2001, transformed after 2001 in the context of asymmetric warfare and religiously motivated violence?

- What kind of turning points have the 2004 Madrid, 2005 London, 2015 Paris Bataclan, 2016 Brussels, and post-2016 ISIS attacks created in the shift

of the competences of the EU's counter-terrorism institutions toward the supranational level?

- Do the institutions strengthened/developed by the EU in the context of counter-terrorism (EUROPOL, EUROJUST, FRONTEX, the Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, the Working Group) represent a meaningful shift of authority from member states to the supranational level, as envisaged by Multi-Level Governance Theory?

- How has the evolution of the EU's post-2001 counter-terrorism policies (strategies, framework decisions, summit declarations) proceeded in terms of the level of bindingness and compliance mechanisms regarding internal security, which falls within the sovereign domain of member states?

In seeking answers to these analytical questions, theoretical propositions of a testable nature have been developed. These propositions, unlike hypotheses, do not contain directly observable or "self-evident" statements; rather, they establish a bridge between the theoretical framework and empirical data:

- **Proposition 1:** While pre-2001 European terrorism was predominantly characterized by secular, national/separatist, and ideological motivations, post-2001 terrorism has undergone a qualitative rupture with global jihadist discourse, asymmetric warfare tactics, and religiously legitimized forms of violence. This transformation has necessitated a shift in the EU's security paradigm from the perception of an intra-state threat to a trans-state global threat.

- **Proposition 2:** The Madrid (2004) and London (2005) attacks have served as "trigger" events that increased not only the information exchange and coordination functions of the EU's counter-terrorism institutions (especially EUROPOL and EUROJUST) but also their operational powers and binding decision-making capacities. The Bataclan (2015) and Brussels (2016) attacks, in turn, accelerated a dramatic shift of authority to the supranational level in the area of FRONTEX and border governance.

- **Proposition 3:** While the EU's post-2001 counter-terrorism policies initially (between 2001 and 2004) predominantly consisted of intergovernmental and recommendatory arrangements, they evolved after the 2005 London attacks in particular to include binding framework decisions, joint action plans, and compliance mechanisms. This evolution points to the forms of "sovereignty sharing" envisaged by Multi-Level Governance Theory.

These propositions will be tested in dialogue with the empirical findings of the research and interpreted according to their verification or falsification.

The data of the research were collected through document analysis. Document analysis refers to the systematic examination of written materials (primary and secondary sources) related to the research topic. In this context, official EU documents (summit conclusions, framework decisions, strategy papers, Europol and Eurojust reports), national and international media outlets, independent commission reports on terrorist incidents, and academic studies constitute the primary data sources.

The obtained data were processed using descriptive analysis and inductive thematic analysis methods in light of the theoretical and conceptual framework (Multi-Level Governance Theory). In the descriptive analysis, raw data were categorized and interpreted under specific themes. Furthermore, to enable the testing of the research propositions, the data were reconstructed under the following analytical themes:

- The nature of pre-2001 terrorist acts (in the context of Multi-Level Governance Theory: state-centric threat perception)

- Post-2001 terrorist acts in Europe (2004 Madrid, 2005 London, Bataclan, 2016 Brussels, post-2016 ISIS) – the triggering role of each event in policy/institutional change

- Institutions established/strengthened by the EU for counter-terrorism – dimensions of the shift of authority

- Policies implemented by the EU – temporal evolution of the level of bindingness

This study is delimited in terms of the scope of terrorist incidents in Europe. In this context, the study is limited to specific terrorist incidents that occurred in Europe after the September 11, 2001 attacks (2004 Madrid, 2005 London, 2015 Paris Bataclan, 2016 Brussels, and post-2016 ISIS attacks). Furthermore, while examining the EU's counter-terrorism institutions and policies, only the aforementioned institutions and policies are included, and other institutions and policies are not addressed in detail to avoid exceeding the scope of the study. Pre-2001 terrorist incidents are examined only in terms of their basic characteristics concerning their nature and are not subjected to detailed analysis. Theoretically, although the limitations of the Multi-Level Governance model in EU counter-terrorism policy (e.g., the veto power of member states in the area of justice and home affairs) are discussed within the scope of the study, an in-depth sociological analysis of the root causes of terrorism or radicalization processes is excluded from the boundaries of this research.

Findings and discussion

Terrorist Incidents In Europe

When the terrorism literature is examined, the year 2001 is regarded as a turning point. Within this framework, terrorist incidents in Europe are examined in two phases in this study. The first phase covers the characteristics of terrorist incidents before 2001, while the second phase covers terrorist incidents after 2001. The study focuses primarily on terrorist incidents after 2001, with pre-2001 incidents only being addressed in terms of their characteristics. The tradition of violence extending from Jacobin terrorism to the Nazi genocide gave way, during the EU period, to ethnic and ideologically based separatist terrorist organisations. The first organisation examined in this context is the Basque Country and Liberty (ETA) terrorist group, established in Spain. Founded in 1959 with the aim of dividing Spain, this organisation initially began its activities with the goal of establishing an independent Basque state and was later influenced by Marxist ideology. In other words, it carried out its terrorist activities under the banner of independence and Leninist-Marxist ideology (Britannica, 2018). As in the case of ETA, most terrorist organisations in Europe have had a hybrid structure combining independence and ideology.

Similar to ETA, another terrorist organisation founded for the purpose of independence in Anglo-Saxon territories is the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRA), which began its activities in the early 1900s. Unlike ETA, religious factors were also decisive in the emergence of the IRA. Following the religious wars of 1618-1648, many Christian denominations emerged in Europe. While England was influenced by these denominations that appeared in the 17th century, Northern Ireland did not undergo such a denominational shift and remained Catholic. Therefore, Ireland engaged in terrorist activities to separate from England for both denominational and independence purposes (Zalman, 2019). Consequently, terrorist incidents occurring during the European integration period before 2001 can be categorised into five categories: refusal to share power, ethno-religious, independence, ideology, and sect. As seen in the examples of ETA and the IRA, terrorist organisations in this period frequently embodied multiple motivations simultaneously. It is important to underline that terrorist incidents in this period should not be equated with Islam. The primary reason for this is that this period coincided with the Cold War era. Since the Cold War period

was characterised by a bipolar system consisting of Eastern and Western blocs, the US-led Western bloc formed alliances with religion-based organisations to prevent the spread of the Eastern bloc. In other words, the alliance groups established by the West before 2001 were labelled as terrorist groups after 2001. This situation is important insofar as it demonstrates how decisive the international conjuncture and the interests of great powers are in defining terrorist organisations.

Moving to the post-2001 period, following the Twin Towers attack, illegal terrorist organisations extensively employed the asymmetric warfare model and carried out numerous violent, lethal, and fear-inducing acts, particularly in European Union member states. The first major attack of this period was the one carried out by the Al-Qaeda terrorist organisation in Madrid, the capital of Spain, on March 11, 2004, when ten bombs simultaneously exploded at a suburban train station, resulting in the deaths of 192 people and injuring 2,050. Spanish authorities initially stated that the attack had been carried out by ETA, the country's most prominent local, ideological and ethnic terrorist organisation, but the attack did not conform to ETA's *modus operandi*. Subsequently, the Abu Hafs al-Masri Brigades of the Al-Qaeda terrorist organisation claimed responsibility for the attack and sent an email to a London-based newspaper, *Al-Quds Al-Arabi*, stating that the reason for the attack was Spain's alliance with the United States in Iraq (Meade & Pineda, 2024). The attack took place three days before the Spanish elections, and the government lost the elections (Cortés et al., 2015). The 2004 Madrid bombings served as a "wake-up call" in the evolution of the EU's counter-terrorism policy, producing concrete outcomes such as the establishment of the Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, the creation of FRONTEX, the activation of the European Arrest Warrant, and the adoption of the 2005 European Counter-Terrorism Strategy (Bures & Gajo, 2026).

Following the Madrid attack, a similar process occurred in London, the capital of the United Kingdom, between July 7 and 21, 2005. In the attacks carried out by the Al-Qaeda terrorist organisation, the terrorists planned the attacks using explosive devices placed on the city's transport systems (underground and bus stops), and as a result of these attacks, 52 civilians lost their lives. The United Kingdom described this event as Britain's September 11 (BBC, 2017). The policy update efforts initiated after the Madrid attack (2004) transformed into a concrete strategy document following the London at-

tack. The Council, meeting on November 15, 2005, implemented the "European Counter-Terrorism Strategy" in December 2005, and this strategy was structured around four main pillars: Prevent, Protect, Pursue, and Respond (Council of the European Union, 2007).

The momentum generated by these two attacks was taken to a new stage with the Bataclan concert hall attack, organised by the ISIS terrorist organisation in Paris, the capital of France, on November 13, 2015, in which 153 people lost their lives. ISIS not only targeted the Bataclan concert hall but also carried out armed and bomb attacks at key points in Paris (Zoli & Williams, 2021). France declared a state of emergency for the second time in the history of the Fifth Republic. This attack became the third major turning point in the EU's counter-terrorism policy after Madrid (2004) and London (2005), and pushed the EU to adopt binding regulations mandating data sharing among intelligence services, police agencies, and judicial authorities (Bures & Gajo, 2026).

Before European countries could recover from the shock of the Bataclan attack, they faced this fear again in Brussels on March 22, 2016. Brussels' importance stems from it being the capital of the EU. ISIS, as in other attacks, chose this city to create an impact on the international stage. During this period, the ISIS terrorist organisation carried out numerous bloody attacks targeting civilians across Europe, and as a result of these attacks, many civilians lost their lives. Terrorist incidents originating from the organisation led to a significant increase in Islamophobia in European public opinion. On July 14, 2016, in Nice, France, an attack claimed by ISIS resulted in the deaths of 84 people. Later that same year, another attack in Berlin, Germany, resulted in the deaths of twelve people. In 2017, ISIS's first attack in Europe took place in the United Kingdom, when an action planned by the organisation in Manchester on May 22 resulted in the deaths of 22 people. In the same country and year, on June 3, eight people lost their lives when an ISIS militant attacked civilians with a knife in the capital, London. Following the attacks in the United Kingdom, ISIS directed its terrorist activities toward Spain, and an attack in Barcelona on August 17, 2017, resulted in the deaths of twelve people. In 2018, the organisation planned actions in France and Belgium, with three people dying in the attack in France and three people dying in the attack in Belgium (Downing et al., 2022).

The qualitative difference between the ethnic, ideological, and sectarian motivations observed

in the pre-2001 examples of ETA and IRA, and the asymmetric warfare and jihadist discourse that emerged in the post-2001 Madrid, London, Bataclan, Brussels, and ISIS attacks, confirms Proposition 1. The post-2001 period is distinctly differentiated from the previous period, particularly in terms of attack methods (simultaneous explosives, vehicle-ramming attacks, stabbing attacks) and targeting patterns (maximization of civilian casualties).

Institutions Established By the EU to Combat Terrorism

Driven by the impetus of the post-Cold War international environment, European integration accelerated, with the 1992 Maastricht Treaty standing as one of the most significant turning points in this process. This treaty is regarded as one of the crucial steps toward transforming European integration into a federalist structure. Entering into force on November 1, 1993, the treaty not only completed the process of economic integration but also aimed to establish monetary and political union. In line with this objective, efforts to create a common European security policy were undertaken following the treaty, and consequently, the EU began establishing new institutions to combat, inter alia, terrorist incidents in Europe. The Maastricht Treaty was groundbreaking in this field by bringing counter-terrorism cooperation within the scope of EU treaties and institutions for the first time (Cevik, 2015).

One of the first concrete steps taken in this context was the establishment of EUROPOL in 1998 to ensure security among member states. Headquartered in The Hague, EUROPOL operates under the Council's supervision, and its expenses are covered by the EU budget. The agency, which became operational in 1999 to combat crime within EU borders, encompasses not only EU member states but also countries closely affiliated with the Union, such as the United States and Canada. However, units under EUROPOL cannot conduct direct operations or carry out arrests; instead, they provide information and analyses to member states. EUROPOL's mandate for counter-terrorism actually predates September 11. The TREVI group, established in 1975, was a temporary cooperation structure created to combat terrorism in Europe. EUROPOL commenced its limited operations as a drugs unit in 1994, and counter-terrorism was officially added to EUROPOL's mandate in 1999 (Bures, 2020). The September 11 attacks served as a turning point in the EU's counter-terrorism policy, and as a result of these developments, the European Counter Ter-

rorism Centre (ECTC) was established within EUROPOL. The main tasks of this centre include combating foreign terrorist fighters, sharing intelligence on terrorist financing, countering online terrorist propaganda and extremism, preventing illicit arms trafficking, and enhancing international cooperation (Europol, 2016). Finally, at the 16th Joint Parliamentary Oversight Group meeting held in February 2025, it was announced that EUROPOL's human and financial resources would be doubled between 2025 and 2028, and that by gaining access to EU databases such as SIS, VIS, EES, ETIAS, and Eurodac, it would assume the function of the EU's crime hub (Caeiro, 2025). In the context of Multi-Level Governance Theory, which constitutes the theoretical framework of this study, EUROPOL represents the most concrete example of transferring the EU's counter-terrorism policy from the national to the supranational level (Kaunert & Léonard, 2018).

Another key pillar of the counter-terrorism institutional architecture is EUROJUST. This EU agency, also headquartered in The Hague like EUROPOL, became operational in 2002 to coordinate and enhance investigations and prosecutions among EU member states. EUROJUST emerged as a product of the EU's efforts to strengthen its counter-terrorism instruments following the September 11 attacks, was established by a Council Decision in 2002, and its mandate has been expanded over time. With the new EUROJUST Regulation that entered into force in 2018, it officially became the European Union Agency for Criminal Justice Cooperation, and its role in counter-terrorism was reinforced. Within the scope of counter-terrorism, EUROJUST performs key functions such as coordinating Joint Investigation Teams, accelerating judicial cooperation, and setting up coordination centres during simultaneous operation days targeting terrorist organisations. The Agency's mandate was extended in 2022, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, to cover war crimes, genocide, and crimes against humanity. In April 2025, a Joint Investigation Team established with EUROJUST's support achieved the first convictions in the prosecution of foreign terrorist fighters for crimes committed against Yazidi victims in Syria and Iraq (Eurojust, 2021).

Another vital component of the EU's counter-terrorism strategy is FRONTEX, operating in the field of border security. Established in 2004 and renamed the European Border and Coast Guard Agency in 2016, FRONTEX operates under the European Commission and is headquartered in Warsaw. FRONTEX coordinates measures aimed at

intervening before activities that could facilitate terrorist acts such as illegal migration, trafficking of arms, drugs, counterfeit currency, and cross-border transport of materials used in explosive manufacturing reach European borders. The emergence of a new type of threat known as asymmetric warfare in the international system following the September 11 attacks, and the intensive use of cross-border mobility and trafficking networks by terrorist organisations (Bartko, 2019), have made FRONTEX an indispensable part of the EU's counter-terrorism policy. Indeed, a common feature of the 2004 Madrid, 2005 London, 2015 Paris Bataclan, and 2016 Brussels attacks examined in detail in this study is that the perpetrators either entered illegally across the EU's external borders or procured the necessary materials for the attacks through cross-border smuggling (Bures, 2016). The abolition of internal border controls between member states under the Schengen Agreement, while providing freedom of movement to EU citizens, also allowed terrorist organisations to move freely; to compensate for this vulnerability, FRONTEX has served to reinforce external borders (Efe, 2007). According to Multi-Level Governance Theory, the EU's counter-terrorism policy was state-centric prior to 2001 but was subsequently transferred to a supranational foundation, with FRONTEX becoming one of the most concrete examples of this transfer (Ripoll Servent, 2024). As of April 2025, under the new internal security strategy 'ProtectEU' activated by the European Commission, FRONTEX's staff numbers are expected to triple (Radjenovic, 2026).

Finally, the EU counter-terrorism institutional architecture includes the Counter-Terrorism Working Group (COTER), which is responsible for policy coordination. This group is tasked with managing and steering the Council's counter-terrorism agenda, and its main responsibilities include assessing terrorist threats, exchanging information, countering radicalisation, and implementing best practices in cooperation with member states. The process of forming this group parallels the institutional transformation described above. While EU member states combated terrorism at the national government level until 2001, counter-terrorism was elevated to a supranational level after the September 11 attacks, and the rapid implementation of this transformation occurred after the 2004 Madrid attacks. This working group functions as a central actor in the EU's holistic counter-terrorism policy by ensuring coordination among operational agencies such as EUROPOL, EUROJUST, and FRON-

TEX (EP Policy Department Citizens' Rights, 2022).

The establishment of the Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, the creation of FRONTEX, and the activation of the European Arrest Warrant following the Madrid (2004) attack, as well as the adoption of the European Counter-Terrorism Strategy (four pillars) after the London (2005) attack, confirm the first part of Proposition 2. The expansion of FRONTEX's powers and the increase in binding regulations on data sharing following the Bataclan (2015) and Brussels (2016) attacks support the second part of the proposition.

The European Union's Policies Against Terrorist Elements

The primary objective of the European integration movement is to ensure the security of European citizens and to offer them a space where they can live freely and prosperously. In line with this objective, the fundamental principles established in the European Convention on Human Rights, signed on November 4, 1950, have taken precedence. Within this framework, terrorist incidents in Europe have emerged as a phenomenon threatening the security of European citizens (Council of Europe, 1950).

The first major test of this threat occurred in 1972 during the 20th Summer Olympics held in Munich, when the European Union (then the European Economic Community) institutionally confronted terrorism for the first time. Militants from the Black September terrorist organisation carried out attacks against Israeli athletes participating in the Olympics. In response to this situation, European countries, particularly Germany, perceived their own security as being under threat. The nine countries constituting the European Economic Community held a series of meetings to adopt common policies against terrorism. The tangible outcome of these meetings was the European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism, signed in 1977 and entered into force in 1978, which constituted the first binding text on counter-terrorism. This text stipulated that if a militant who had committed a terrorist act in one Community country fled to another member state, they would be extradited to the country where the act was committed—thus regulating a rather limited issue (Oberloskamp, 2017).

In the post-Munich period, the next significant document on counter-terrorism was the La Gomera Declaration, proclaimed at the Madrid Summit in 1995. According to this declaration, terrorism, amid changing circumstances, had become a major force

in the world and, due to posing a threat to international security, was no longer an issue that could be resolved solely through individual national efforts. Therefore, the need for effective police and judicial cooperation among member states to prevent terrorism was emphasised. The declaration also stated that measures could be taken against initiatives that might finance terrorism, such as arms smuggling and money laundering, through information exchange among police authorities within the Union. The La Gomera Declaration holds an important place within the counter-terrorism activities conducted under the EU framework, as it addresses terrorism at the intergovernmental level (Erbaş, 2018).

However, despite all these steps, until the attack on the Twin Towers by the Al-Qaeda terrorist organisation on September 11, 2001, counter-terrorism efforts in Union member countries were generally conducted at the governmental level. The primary reason member states pursued this policy was that, prior to 2001, terrorist incidents in Europe were motivated by ethnic or ideological factors (e.g., Marxist ideology). In this context, the terrorist incidents of that period did not constitute a threat to all members of the European Community and were largely perceived as internal affairs of the Union's member states. Consequently, there was no perceived need for a common counter-terrorism policy at the Union level. Indeed, a common counter-terrorism policy only began to be formulated following the attacks in the United States in September 2001. Within this scope, EU institutions held a series of meetings (Starodubtseva, 2020).

The first concrete step of this transformation is considered to be the Gent Summit, held on October 19, 2001, immediately following the September 11 attacks. At the summit, solidarity with the United States was expressed, and it was emphasised that counter-terrorism efforts would remain committed to United Nations resolutions. Although this summit marked a turning point in the transformation of counter-terrorism from a national competence into a common policy area at the EU level, the decisions adopted were largely political and symbolic in nature (Bures, 2016). At this point, as an intriguing detail, it must be noted that the Laeken Summit, held approximately four months prior to September 11, on May 14–15, 2001, holds particular significance as it contained forward-looking decisions adopted before the attacks. At this summit, emphasis was placed on monitoring measures taken within the framework of fundamental rights and freedoms, taking precautions against the threat of chemical and biological

weapons, ensuring due diligence in external border controls within the Schengen Area, and promoting stability in the Middle East to keep terrorist activities away from Europe (Efe, 2007). These decisions laid the foundation for subsequent policies, particularly concerning border security, visa systems, and preventing weapons of mass destruction from reaching terrorist organisations (Kabata, 2022).

The most critical step taken immediately after the Gent and Laeken summits was the extraordinary European Council meeting held on September 21, 2001. At this meeting, it was stressed that radical terrorism should not be conflated with the Islamic world, and a five-point action plan was put into effect: enhancing police and judicial cooperation, developing international legal instruments, halting the financing of terrorism, strengthening aviation security, and coordinating the EU's global actions (European Council, 2002). The clause on halting terrorist financing was particularly interpreted as an acknowledgment that European countries had previously transferred funds to terrorist organizations.

Following these action plans, more concrete steps were taken at the Brussels Summit on December 27, 2001, where a definition of terrorism and a list of terrorist organizations reflecting the common stance of member states were announced. Acts falling within the scope of terrorism included instilling fear through violence, influencing government policies by illegal means, kidnapping, hostage-taking, seizing aircraft, and establishing contact with or providing support to terrorist organizations (Erbaş, 2018).

After these definition and listing efforts, a revolutionary implementation mechanism was introduced with the Framework Decision (2002/584/JHA) adopted on June 13, 2002: the European Arrest Warrant system, which radically altered traditional extradition procedures. This system abolished the political offense exception, mandated the extradition of a state's own nationals, waived the requirement of dual criminality for 32 categories of offenses, reduced decision-making time to a maximum of 60–90 days, and rendered the executing authority judicial (Zajac, 2023).

The terrorist attack carried out in Madrid in 2004 served as a new catalyst prompting EU action. Within a week of the attack, an extraordinary Justice and Home Affairs meeting was convened, where it was decided to operationalize the Police Chiefs Task Force, EUROPOL, and EUROJUST more effectively. At the European Council meeting on March 25–26, 2004, a Declaration on Com-

bating Terrorism was adopted, and the position of Counter-Terrorism Coordinator was established. Additionally, the adoption of the Solidarity Clause, the establishment of FRONTEX, and the use of biometric identifiers in visas and residence permits for third-country nationals were proposed (Kaunert & Léonard, 2018).

Another major challenge following the Madrid attacks was the 2005 London bombings. In the aftermath of these attacks, the European Union Counter-Terrorism Strategy was implemented following the November 2005 meeting. This strategy, consisting of four core pillars (Prevent, Protect, Pursue, Respond), noted that referencing terrorism through the concept of religion had led to Islamophobia and xenophobia in Europe (Council of the European Union, 2007).

Finally, the 2008 regulation, prepared to update and expand the scope of the previously enacted 2002 Framework Decision, added offenses such as public incitement to commit terrorist offences, recruitment for terrorist activities, training for terrorism, as well as theft, robbery, and drawing up false documents within the context of terrorist preparation, to the scope of terrorist crimes (Erbaş, 2018).

The process extending from the political and symbolic decisions taken at the 2001 Ghent and Laeken summits, to the binding nature of the European Arrest Warrant through the 2002 Framework Decision, to the establishment of the four-pillar structure with the 2005 Strategy, and to the expansion of the scope of terrorist offenses through the 2008 Framework Decision, confirms the increase in bindingness anticipated in Proposition 3. The post-2005 period, in particular, demonstrates a marked increase in the number of highly binding regulations at the supranational level.

Conclusion

Within the scope of this research, three theoretical propositions developed based on the conceptual tools of Multi-Level Governance Theory were tested in light of the empirical findings obtained. The first proposition asserted that pre-2001 European terrorism was predominantly characterized by ethnic, ideological, and separatist motivations, whereas post-2001 terrorism underwent a qualitative rupture with global jihadist discourse, asymmetric warfare tactics, and religiously legitimized forms of violence. The research findings revealed that prior to 2001, organizations such as ETA and IRA carried out secular, national, and ideologically based acts;

while after 2001, organizations such as Al-Qaeda and ISIS, employing asymmetric methods including the use of simultaneous explosives, vehicle-ramming and stabbing attacks, targeted civilians and disseminated a form of religiously motivated violence. These findings strongly confirm the first proposition.

The second proposition predicted that the Madrid (2004) and London (2005) attacks served as trigger events that increased the operational powers and binding decision-making capacities of the EU's counter-terrorism institutions, while the Bataclan (2015) and Brussels (2016) attacks accelerated the shift of authority to the supranational level in the area of FRONTEX and border governance. The findings showed that following the Madrid attack, the Counter-Terrorism Coordinator was established, FRONTEX was created, and the European Arrest Warrant was activated; after the London attack, the European Counter-Terrorism Strategy (Four Pillars: Prevent, Protect, Pursue, Respond) was adopted. Following the Bataclan and Brussels attacks, it was identified that FRONTEX's powers were expanded and the number of binding regulations mandating data sharing among intelligence, police, and judicial authorities increased. These findings also confirm the second proposition.

The third proposition asserted that the EU's post-2001 counter-terrorism policies, initially dominated by intergovernmental and recommendatory arrangements, evolved after the 2005 London attacks in particular to include binding framework decisions, joint action plans, and compliance mechanisms. The research findings clearly revealed the process extending from the political and symbolic decisions taken at the 2001 Ghent and Laeken summits, to the binding nature of the European Arrest Warrant through the 2002 Framework Decision, to the establishment of the four-pillar structure with the 2005 Strategy, and to the expansion of the scope of terrorist offenses through the 2008 Framework Decision. A marked increase in the number of highly binding regulations at the supranational level was observed, particularly in the post-2005 period. These findings also confirm the third proposition.

In conclusion, all three theoretical propositions developed within the scope of this research were supported by the empirical findings. It has been determined that there is a qualitative difference between the nature of pre-2001 and post-2001 terrorism; that the Madrid, London, Bataclan, and Brussels attacks were decisive trigger events in the EU's institutional transfer of authority; and that the

EU's counter-terrorism policies evolved over time from symbolic arrangements toward binding legal instruments. While these findings demonstrate that Multi-Level Governance Theory offers a robust analytical framework for explaining EU counter-terrorism policy, future comparative and quantitative studies may further test these propositions. Unlike hypotheses that remain at a descriptive level, these theoretical propositions have enhanced the analytical depth of the research and made it possible to reveal the causal relationships between terrorist incidents and EU policies in a more systematic manner.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, Gunay H., Baltymova M. and Tarakci V; Methodology, Gunay H.; Validation, Balapashev B., Gunay H. and Baltymova M.; Formal Analysis, Gunay H.; Investigation, Balapashev B. and Gunay H.; Resources, Balapashev B.; Data Curation, Balapashev B.; Writing – Original Draft Preparation, Gunay H.; Writing – Review & Editing, Balapashev B., Gunay H., Baltymova M. and Tarakci V; Project Administration, Gunay H.

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