

Detection Technologies, Counter-Terrorism Ethics, and Human Rights (DETECTOR)

After 9/11 and the terrorist bombings in Madrid (11 March 2004) and London (07 July 2005), policing and intelligence activity have increasingly focused on methods of preventing future terrorist attacks, and not just on identifying the perpetrators of offences already committed. Preventive police work includes the use of detection technologies. These range from CCTV camera-surveillance of suspicious behaviour in public places to secret Internet monitoring and data-mining. Such technologies raise ethical and legal issues (notably issues of privacy) that must be confronted against the background of the legal and ethical issues raised by counter-terrorism in general. Legal questions arise about counter-terrorism in general, because recent informal co-operation agreements between European heads of government may conflict with pre-existing legal commitments on the part of the same governments to safeguard freedom of association, freedom of expression and privacy. Again, counter-terrorism is being conceptualized by some government justice ministries as a war, and military activity is subject to fewer human rights guarantees than civilian activity. Just as general legal questions are raised by counter-terrorism, so are general ethical questions. Terrorism requires a rethinking of the relative values of liberty, privacy and security in the global context. Are significant intrusions into privacy justified by the need to save life or to protect democracy? In particular, within what limits is a policy of preventive policing – policing before a crime is committed – justified?

DETECTOR is a three-year Collaborative Research Project under the European Union Framework 7 Security programme to co-ordinate and contribute work on detection technologies, counter-terrorism, ethics and human rights. The partner institutions involved are: Åbo Akademi University (Finland), University of Birmingham as coordinator (UK); Danish Institute for Human Rights; the European University Institute (Italy); the Norwegian Centre for Human Rights; Nottingham University (UK) and the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law, Lund (Sweden).

Professor Martin Scheinin is besides the academically responsible EUI person in the project also the chairperson of the whole project's management committee. This is related to his role as United Nations Special Rapporteur on Counter-Terrorism and Human Rights, as the project will support and advise this mandate.

The project as a whole is worth 1,8 million euro over three years, and brings a full-time Research Assistant (Mr Mathias Vermeulen, LL.M., EMA) to the EUI for a period of two years, starting 1 December 2008.

<http://www.globalethics.bham.ac.uk/projects/index.shtml>