



Passengers at Sofia airport in Bulgaria are monitored for the Mexican flu. *Photo Reuters*

## **EU to monitor deviant behaviour in anti-terrorism fight**

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**The EU is funding ambitious programmes to monitor human behaviour in the fight against crime and terrorism. Some people are afraid this will turn us all into suspects.**

By Wilmer Heck

Say you are a frequent flier and you check in faster than most people. A network of advanced cameras at the airport can measure your speed and alert the control room. The system knows terrorists tend to be nervous and almost never stop for coffee. This makes a speedy traveller a suspicious traveller.

You may also want to think twice about using the airport bathroom more than once. There is a good chance you will be picked out for an extensive security check.

These are some of the things being studied by an EU-funded project for detecting suspicious behaviour, Adabts (Automatic Detection of Abnormal Behaviour and Threats in Crowded Spaces.)

### **Putting security cameras to use**

"We monitor all deviant behaviour," says Maarten Hogervorst of TNO Defence and Security, an independent Dutch research institute. The Adabts project, in which TNO is a partner, is only one among hundreds of

security projects under the umbrella of the EU research programme Security. The programme has a budget of 1.4 billion euros until 2013.

Following the terrorist attacks in the US in 2001 and in Europe in 2004 and 2005, Brussels saw the development of new technologies as crucial to the fight against terrorism. It also worried American companies might corner the market for security technology.

Hogervorst is funded by the EU to investigate how the ever growing number of security cameras in inner cities, airports and football stadiums can be put to a better use.

For now security personnel still manually switches between



cameras to determine who deserves extra attention. The

more cameras the less effective

this is. It would be much easier if the cameras themselves could determine what is suspicious and automatically show only those images to the people in the control room.

"We define what constitutes suspicious behaviour through interviews with security staff and we develop software accordingly," says Hogervorst. "If security staff thinks someone moving rapidly through a crowd is suspicious, then that's the kind of images they're going to get."

There are a lot more criteria to determine what is suspicious and what is not, but TNO doesn't want them publicised for obvious security reasons.

### 'Orwellian goals'

Adabts is not just geared towards terrorism, but also towards crime and riots. In the future, cameras will be set to detect wild arm movements, screaming or the sound of breaking glass in order to dispatch police more quickly to the scene of a mugging or a break-in.

Critics argue the defence and security industry has been given a lot of influence in developing Europe's new security strategy. "Brussels simply asked the industry: What can you guys come up with?" says Ben Hayes, a researcher at the Transnational Institute, a progressive research group.

Hayes has just published a report, *NeoConOpticon*, about a number of security projects he says have Orwellian goals. They will lead to a European surveillance system that may be lucrative for the industry, he says, but will make every citizen a potential suspect.

He means projects like the one TNO is currently working on: using radar to detect a person's heartbeat from a distance to determine if he or she is nervous. "Because a terrorist is nervous as hell," says Frank Kooi, another TNO researcher at Soesterberg.

Thermal cameras can discover if someone has a cold nose, another sign of nervousness. Kooi: "The beauty is that terrorists can't hide these kind of characteristics."

Much of the research is still in the initial phase, "but it has enormous potential," says Kooi. "The main reason why thermal cameras are not being used on a massive scale is the cost. But they are bound to get cheaper in the future."

### Loss of innocence

For airports the ultimate goal of this new technology is to be able to scan

all passengers without them even knowing. The advantage to the passengers is that they would no longer have to wait in line for the security checkpoints.

Brussels has anticipated criticism by also funding research into the effect of the Security programme on privacy. One such programme is HIDE: Homeland Security, Biometric Identification & Personal Detection Ethics. Privacy expert Irma van der Ploeg is a partner in HIDE. She calls Hayes' report "extremely valuable".

Van der Ploeg is afraid people will become more and more conscious of the surveillance and adapt their behaviour accordingly. "Society is at risk of losing its innocence. Before you know it we will all behave the same just so we are not seen as suspicious."

Van der Ploeg is sceptical about the impact of the privacy projects within the Security framework. "We analyse the technology and their possible impact. This results in an ethical and often quite critical assessment. But it doesn't seem to make much a difference."

Both Hayes and Van der Ploeg are convinced many of the projects that are now at the experimental stage will eventually find their way into people's lives. "A lot of it is going to trickle down," says Van der Ploeg.

Defence expert Ko Colijn is not so sure. He says the alarming tone of Hayes' report is "a bit exaggerated". Colijn points out that the EU does not have the authority to create a "well-oiled Orwellian society" even if it wanted to. It will be up to the individual member states to decide what is implemented. "Many projects will fall by the leeway."

Van der Ploeg: "If only 20 percent of these programmes are implemented it is enough reason to be concerned." She agrees with Colijn however that a lot will depend on whether any future terrorist attacks occur in Europe. "If that happens it immediately creates a momentum for these kinds of initiatives."

## Background

### Column



Between the giant and the pygmy: who will be EU president? asks J.L. Heldring.

### Neighbours



The heart of the Westerschelde debate: trade and the raison d'état.

### Discussion



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