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**MINISTER: DENMARK'S SECURITY OPT-OUT 'PROBLEMATIC' AFTER BRUSSELS ATTACKS**

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Denmarks Minister for Justice Søren Pind worries that his country will increasingly miss out on important information that could prevent terror attacks, after EU ministers yesterday (24 March) agreed to step up the information sharing between intelligence services.

Since Denmark voted to keep its opt-out on justice and home affairs in December 2015, the country has been negotiating a special deal for a continued Europol cooperation, but this deal is likely to keep the Scandinavian country out of the most essential parts of the anti-terrorism fight.

The EU has so many things on its plate right now that the fact that one country has problems related to the legal construction and doesnt want to be part of the things it is being offered makes it a really difficult thing, Pind told the news agency Ritzau after the meeting.

The EUs response to terror attacks has been to promise a strengthened cooperation in the area of security, not least under Europol, the EUs law enforcement agency.

Yesterday, EU justice ministers agreed to set up a team of national counter-terrorism experts to strengthen Europol as a response to the attacks in Brussels on Tuesday that killed 31 and injured more than 300.

The team is meant to support the EUs law enforcement authorities in investigating current terrorist threats and will draw on Eupols law enforcement capabilities to monitor the threat from foreign fighters, among other things.

After 17 years of being a member of Europol, the Denmark was told that they would get kicked out of the EUs common police cooperation unless it got rid of its justice and home affairs opt-out, which the country has had since 1993.

But an overwhelming majority of Danes voted against further EU integration in the referendum on 3 December. Political commentators said the vote should be interpreted more as a protest against the EU and the Danish government, and not seen as an unwillingness to remain part of Europol.

After the outcome of the referendum, Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker told the Danish government it would be legally impossible for Denmark to continue being a full member of Europol and that even a special arrangement would be difficult to set up.

## Weakened position

The Danish justice minister believes that the attacks in Brussels will eventually make Denmark's position in the negotiations with the EU even weaker.

Denmark isn't Belgium. Our situation is different and we handle the situation in our neighbourhoods differently than what we see in Belgium. But I can't deny that our situation will become more difficult, Pind said.

The authorities need some of the information which other European countries have access to – at the same speed as they have. The thing is that we increasingly will be put in a situation where this is not the case for us, he added.

Ahead of the special counter-terrorism meeting on Thursday, Guy Verhofstadt, the leader of the liberal ALDE group in the European Parliament, urged heads of state and government to create a real European intelligence capacity, which should be able to gather intelligence and set up EU-wide operations.

To refute the idea of a European intelligence agency on the grounds of national sovereignty is as absurd as it is dangerous. Security has to prevail over sovereignty, Verhofstadt stated.

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