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After Brussels, We Must Be Vigilant of Our Liberty as Well as Our Security

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It did not take long for the Eurosceptic Right to bend the tragic attacks on Brussels to its own advantage. Here in Britain, UKIP leader Nigel Farage came under fire from multiple sources after he referred to the Belgian capital as the 'jihadi capital of Europe' and the Schengen Agreement, which has eradicated border-checks between most EU and some non-EU countries, as facilitating the 'free movement of terrorists'. Despite their protestations of horror, in private Farage and his counterparts must be rubbing their hands in glee – with each new terror attack, their support base only grows.

People across Europe are mortified at what has taken place in Brussels, and the fear of future attacks is palpable everywhere. (On the night of Tuesday 22 March, London's *Evening Standard* ran with the headline 'Brussels' 7/7', referencing the very similar attacks perpetrated by al-Qaeda in the British capital on 7 July 2005, the day after the city won the bid for the 2012 Olympic Games.) As after both the *Charlie Hebdo* and November attacks in Paris last year, the outpouring of international sympathy and solidarity has been heartening to see. Yet, fundamentally, the explosions in Brussels airport and Maelbeek metro station have changed nothing. Europe must still traverse the same course between Scylla and Charybdis in its internal security.

The Scylla option is the one cheered on by the radical Right, and perhaps the most instinctive to national governments susceptible to media pressure – to swiftly repatriate all internal security powers away from the EU institutions. This route has the seductive allure of an ideal time gone by, where nation-states were fully in control of their own destinies and able to quash security threats on their own soil, but it is a fantasy. It is true that free movement within Schengen is free movement for everyone, including those with violent intent, but that does not mean the converse will help prevent further attacks. As Britain's European Commissioner Jonathan Hill has reminded us, the 7/7 attacks on London were perpetrated not by interlopers from the Middle East but British Muslims who had been radicalised remotely, in a country outside the Schengen Area. The loss of free movement would (needless to say) be a drastic blow to the EU, and entirely ineffective in combatting the gravitational pull of Islamism.

The Charybdis option is less likely, but perhaps a greater threat to European society: the steamrollering of civil liberties in the rush for closer intergovernmental collaboration between security services. It may well be that such a concerted effort is necessary – it would seem so, if European integration is to deepen further than its current confederal state – but we should be very wary of any such ostensibly easy solutions at times like this. Over the last century, Europe has learnt the hard way that matters concerning state security and civil liberties must be handled with utmost caution, most recently in the mass surveillance scandal centred on the US National Security Agency, and public panic in the wake of a terrorist attack is not a foundation conducive to disinterested debate. It is telling that, in an article published the day after the Brussels attacks, the former head of the British secret service MI6 identified the European Convention on Human Rights as an inhibition to the UK's security and called for withdrawal from it alongside a Brexit vote on 23 June.

French President François Hollande – who has seen more than his share of extreme security situations during his time in office – was right to call for European solidarity and greater collaboration on 22 March. The reversion to national politics at a time like this is not an option, but neither should we forget recent history and rush through EU legislation to empower an unaccountable international network of state security services. The days and weeks ahead will be challenging, but with our grief we must also remain vigilant – vigilant in the time-honoured knowledge that the enemy of our enemy is not necessarily our friend.