Why the Brussels Attacks Call for More Europe

As every European, I am deeply shocked about the Brussels terror attacks that struck at the heart of Europe last Tuesday. This first major attack on European ground in 2016 and one of the sadly already numerous attacks worldwide this year has affected me all the more, as it's not so long ago that I lived and worked there myself.

After I heard the devastating news my first reaction was to contact the people I know in Brussels and to find out if they are safe and unharmed. Luckily that was the case. Then I remembered the last time I took a tube in Maelbeek metro station. It was the last day of my internship in Brussels in summer 2014 and the sun was shining. That the place I have been so many times has become the site of a terrorist attack feels strange and surreal. How strange and surreal must it feel to be in Brussels these days?

Then I remembered 7 July 2005. I was in London with a friend. We were sightseeing in the city centre. Exiting a museum we immediately sensed that there was something wrong, but we could not quite grasp what. Suddenly we realised that all the red buses in Oxford Street were empty and the streets were full of people walking. It was the day Islamist terrorists had bombed the Underground and then a double-decker bus in Tavistock Square. I will never forget that day, as I suppose no one who was in Brussels on Tuesday will forget 22 March 2016. Events like that stay imprinted in people's minds; they will forever be a part of the collective memory of Belgium and the whole of Europe.

Right now we are torn between many, often contradictory feelings: fear, sorrow, anger or even hatred. Still, even though we are appalled by these atrocities, we should not lose our nerve, because that is exactly what the terrorists are after: to divide and weaken us, to create chaos and provoke hasty reactions. Europe's response should be firm, but we should not overreact, we should not follow our first impulse or reflex.

In London in 2005 when trying to get back to a friend's home, we finally dared to climb on a bus, carefully screening every passenger, especially when looking non-European and carrying a backpack. At the same time I was angry at myself for doing that. After a few stops I calmed down a bit and decided not to give in to this, as I wanted to go on with my life as normally as possible. And that, I think, is the conclusion we should draw from what has happened: instead of using this latest tragedy for political games (Shame on you, Mr Farage!), we should hold together and refuse to abandon our freedom and our way(s) of life.

At a time like this, we Europeans need to make the right choices for our future. I do not feel equipped to propose a 'solution' myself, but I strongly recommend reading the recent article by Professor Sven Biscop published directly after the Brussels attacks. In my humble opinion Biscop's analysis is as sharp and thoughtful as necessary and possible at this moment.