Belgium Vows Extremism Crackdown, Boosts Security Forces

November 19, 2015

By Lorne Cook | AP

The Washington Post

https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/belgium-vows-extremism-crackdown-boosts-security-forces/2015/11/19/3e51176a-8eab-11e5-934c-a369c80822c2\_story.html

Belgium’s prime minister on Thursday called for changes to the country’s constitution to combat extremists, and promised hundreds of millions of euros to boost the security forces.

Addressing the federal parliament as security forces were conducting raids around the capital Brussels, Charles Michel pledged to use changes to the constitution to extend preventive detention times for suspects from 24 hours to 72 hours.

He also affirmed that Belgium would move forward alone on a system of airline passenger information sharing that European Union nations have been incapable of agreeing in four years.

“The risk before us is the collapse of the entire European project if we don’t take our responsibilities,” he told the lawmakers.

“All democratic forces have to work together to strengthen our security,” he said.

Michel said 400 million euros ($427 million) would be earmarked to boost the security forces, and said special attention would be paid to eradicating messages of hate inspiring young people to fight in places like Syria and Iraq, or back at home later in Europe.

“For jihadis who return, their place is in prison,” said Michel.

He dismissed criticism of Belgian police, saying they had provided vital information that led to a major police raid in the northern Paris suburb of Saint Denis on Wednesday.

Some 500 people are on Belgium’s list of “radicalized” people, and about 30 people are known to have traveled to Syria as potential foreign fighters in the Molenbeek neighborhood, a major source of extremists.

Michel said he would introduce a system for people considered a threat that would “impose the wearing of an electronic bracelet.”

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