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Facing terrorism: a year of mobilization at the CNRS

After the Paris and Nice attacks, the CNRS endeavored to commit research resources to the fight against terrorism. We take a look back on a year of action that included a call for projects with an overwhelming response rate (the initial findings of which will be shared on 28 November 2016), a series of thematic workshops, and a vast project on memory.

On 18 November 2015, Alain Fuchs, the President of the CNRS, addressed the academic community with “a call for proposals on all subjects relating to the issues facing our societies following the terrorist attacks and their consequences, in order to pave the way to new – social, technical and digital – solutions”.¹ It was, he said, an invitation “to fill unoccupied territory, answer questions that intersect several disciplinary fields, and exploit participatory techniques and the expertise of all”. The number of responses – exceeding 300 in total – testifies to researchers’ determination to grapple with these issues. Of these proposals, 66 actions (research projects, “thematic schools” and workshops) have received over €800,000 in financial support from the CNRS. The call for proposals saw the mobilization of all disciplines – the humanities and social sciences first and foremost, of course – but also chemistry, computer science, mathematics and biology.

On 28 November, a day-long feedback session at the CNRS headquarters will enable those leading these projects to present the advancement of their research. The initial findings of around forty ongoing projects will be presented, in fields as varied as the chemical neutralization of explosives, the trajectories of “radicalized” young people, generalizations about and discriminations against Muslims, data mining, victim trauma, attacks on archaeological heritage, Internet propaganda and the role of fiction (television and cinema). The conference will be attended by researchers from the selected projects and all those who responded to Alain Fuchs’ call.

After the events of January 2015, the CNRS, alongside the Alliance Athéna and the Conference of University Presidents (CPU), had organized a day of collective and public reflection in the wake of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks.² The will to encourage dialogue between researchers from various disciplines, public decision-makers, the intelligence and security services, the justice system and education, only intensified in 2016. This has now translated into the development of projects directly associating the research sector and actors on the ground (for example, police officers and archaeologists working together to combat antiquities trafficking) and the implementation of long-term collaborative ventures between the CNRS and ministries (Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Justice, Ministry for Families, etc.) as well as the local government authorities and administrations that also responded to the CNRS call (such as the Directorate of Military Intelligence).

¹ Read Alain Fuchs’ letter in full (in French): http://www2.cnrs.fr/sites/communique/fichier/appel_alain_fuchs.pdf

² « L’après-Charlie » : *intégrisme et terrorisme. l’éclairage de la recherche française en sciences humaines et sociales*, press release published on 23 April 2015



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There have already been opportunities for the researchers who responded to the call to meet one another and form a new and essential scientific community on security issues. These include the “Radicalizations” thematic school and workshops organized at the CNRS headquarters on the “Origin of radicalizations”, “The careers of terror” and “The impact of the attacks”.

In parallel, the CNRS, alongside the National Institute of Health and Medical Research (Inserm) and héSam Université, launched the “13-Novembre” (November 13th) program last spring. Its aim is to study how individual and collective memories of the attacks form, evolve and interact. By the end of the month, the number of filmed testimonies should reach the one thousand mark, and three other series of interviews will be conducted with the same volunteers over the next ten years.³

To document the diversity and progress of this research, *CNRS News* has just launched a blog entitled “[In the face of terrorism, research in action](#)” (in French). Articles, videos, interviews and audio content will shed light on the actions supported by the “Attacks–Research” (“Attentats-Recherche”) call for projects. Click here to read the very first articles (in French): “[The book of condolence of the 11th arrondissement](#)” and “[Improving crisis negotiations](#)”.

To find out more: click here to see [all content](#) on terrorism, the phenomena of radicalization, secularism and the place of religions published in *CNRS le journal* since the January 2015 attacks.

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³ To find out more, read the press release published on 17 June 2016: [A novel research program on traumatic memories](#)