**Europol Launches Unit to Combat ISIS' Social Media 'Terrorist Ecosystem'**

THE HAGUE, Netherlands — A cross-border policing unit has been created to combat ISIS supporters online and "take the oxygen from the way in which they use the Internet," its director told NBC News.

The [European Union Internet Referral Unit (EU IRU)](http://www.nbcnews.com/tech/social-media/european-police-take-isis-social-media-propaganda-n379581) was launched by law enforcement body Europol on Wednesday. It is aiming to "take back control of the Internet" from ISIS' increasingly-prolific supporters on Twitter and other social networks.

In an interview with NBC News, Europol Director Rob Wainwright described the group's online presence as a "terrorist ecosystem" of tens of thousands of accounts that were run by "masterminds of propaganda."

Speaking at Europol's headquarters in the Hague, Wainwright said the EU IRU was "determined to … track this content and remove it, take it off the Internet so that we can all enjoy the Internet as a safe and free part of our lives."

Since [ISIS emerged last year](http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/isis-anniversary-year-caliphate-was-declared-n381621), its online supporters have [utilized social media far more effectively](http://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/iraq-turmoil/why-isis-social-media-campaign-even-more-brutal-most-n132321) than other extremist group before them.

They have become renowned for posting polished videos of training camps and grisly executions, while setting up Twitter accounts faster than authorities have been able to delete them.

Social media has also been key in the extremists' ability to reach out to young people and recruit them, with the number of its foreign fighters from Western Europe believed to be as high as 5,000.

"The way in which ISIS is manipulating the Internet, and social media platforms in particular, has been a key part of their terrorist threat," Wainwright said.

"It's a big challenge and we have to be smart, " he added. "We've got to use our intelligence capability to direct the attention against the most prolific user accounts."

Tackling the extremist threat online would take more than playing a "simple numbers game," Wainwright added. Officials needed to "begin to understand how…ISIS is manipulating the Internet so that we can remove those people that are really responsible for sustaining this community."

The EU RIU will be made up of 15 officials and experts from various authorities across the European Union. They will attempt to scour the Internet to identify ISIS' ringleaders, before referring them to Internet service providers and E.U. member states.

"I think we are trying to take the oxygen from the way in which they use the Internet," Wainwright added. "We're determined that we will answer that challenge and still be successful."