

REVIEWS

2021

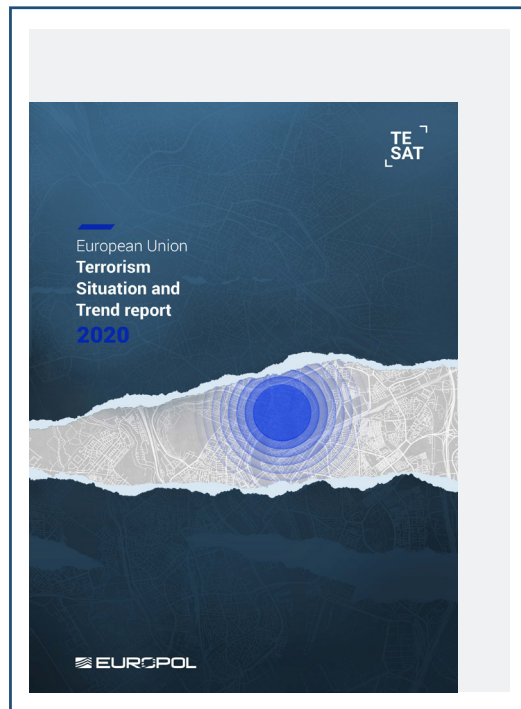


الائتلاف العسكري لمحاربة الإرهاب  
ISLAMIC MILITARY COUNTER TERRORISM COALITION



INTERNATIONAL REPORTS

# TERRORISM SITUATION AND TREND IN EUROPEAN UNION 2020



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## TERRORISM SITUATION AND TREND IN EUROPEAN UNION 2020

**EUROPOL** has issued its annual report TERRORISM SITUATION AND TREND IN EUROPEAN UNION 2020, which was first published in 2007, including monitoring and analysis of terrorist threats faced by European Union countries in 2019 and potential trends. The Report revealed a decrease in the number of deaths and injuries in terrorist operations in the European Union. Ten people were killed while 27 people were injured in 2019, compared to 13 killed and 46 injured in 2018. The number of terrorist attacks decreased from 129 in 2018 to 119 in 13 EU countries in 2019. The number of detainees for terrorism cases decreased from 1,056 in 2018 to 1,004 in 2019.



## Decrease

The decrease in the number of terrorist attacks and the number of victims is driven by the continued decrease in ethnic and separatist terrorist attacks. The number of these attacks was 57 in 2019, vis-à-vis 83 attacks in 2018 while 137 in 2017. However, the Report stressed that terrorism in EU is still a constant threat given the large number of terrorist attacks that the competent authorities in EU have successfully thwarted, making up 14 attacks in 2019, vis-à-vis 16 attacks in 2018.

In light of the data and statistics available, the Report stressed that the continued threat to both religious and far-right terrorism clearly shows that the challenges are difficult for the EU countries, and much is yet to be done. The deterioration of the organizational structures of ISIS has not announced its demise; the lone wolves alongside small cells - self-extremism as named by the report – is considered a serious threat to the EU countries, and it is not linked organizationally and administratively to ISIS, and the ISIS leaders called them to operate freely, utilizing modern technology and networking. Commenting on the death of the ISIS leader, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi in 2019, many EU countries believed that the change in leadership would not change much of the ISIS threat to the EU countries in the short term.

The Report explicitly explained the continued impact of the situation in conflict areas outside Europe on the situation of terrorism in the EU countries, at a time when ISIS lost its last stronghold in Syria, it started operating in clandestine rebel groups, ubiquitous in vast and scattered areas in Iraq, Syria, the East Middle East, Africa and Asia.

The situation of ethnic or separatist terrorism continued as it was in previous years. The number of ethnic and separatist attacks in EU exceeded the number of other terrorist attacks in 2019, as separatists or ethnic groups carried out 57 attacks, while jihadist terrorist attacks were only 21, far-right attacks 26, and far-left attacks 6, making Ethnic separatist groups the largest terrorist groups in Europe.

## Prosecution of Terrorism Suspects

The number of defendants in twelve EU countries was 521, of whom 520 were convicted, and only one

defendant was acquitted. The largest convictions were in France (105 convicts), Spain (97 convicts), and Belgium (91 convicts), although many individuals convicted of terrorism in 2019 had previously been convicted of terrorist operations or other crimes in the same EU Member State or abroad.

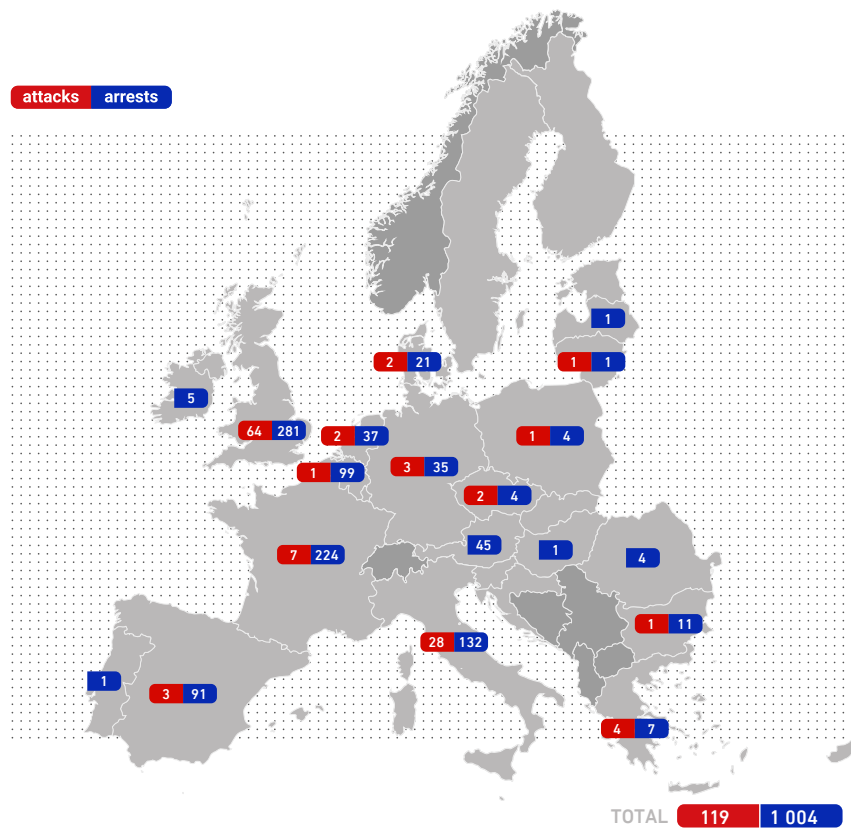
Like the past few years, most convictions in the EU member states (362 convictions) are related to religious terrorism; most of them are linked to terrorist groups that were active in Syria at that time and committed horrendous crimes, especially ISIS, Ahrar Al-Sham, and Jund Al-Sham, as well as other parties linked to the Taliban or the Mujahideen Youth Movement.

Many of the trials involved women and minors who joined ISIS in both Iraq and Syria. The key charges levelled against them include the recruitment of terrorists, glorification of terrorism, threatening to commit terrorist acts, incitement to terrorism, self-training for terrorist purposes, financing terrorism, and insulting the victims of terrorism alongside charges of committing terrorist acts, manufacturing possessing and using explosives, and using other weapons, forging documents, theft, and other crimes.

According to the Report, the convictions related to ethno-nationalist and separatist terrorism ranked second in size; most of these convictions were in Spain for crimes linked to ETA.

The average prison sentence for terrorism offenses in EU in 2019 amounted to six years; one year less than it was in 2018, knowing that this average was five years in 2016-2017. The lowest prison sentence ordered by courts in the EU member states in 2019 was one month, while the highest sentence was life imprisonment. Of good note, some sentences for terrorist crimes were issued in absentia by some defendants, and some sentences issued in 2019 were final and non-appealable, and appeals were filed against other sentences.

In addition to imprisonment, courts in the EU member states in 2019 ordered other penalties or measures, including treatments in mental health institutions, financial penalties, community service, restrictions on the exercise of certain civil rights, or work in specific sectors such as education, and travel bans, expulsion from national territory, a probationary period specified



### Attacks and arrests in EU Member State in 2019

upon release, and confiscation of assets. In some cases, persons convicted of terrorist offenses have been deprived of the citizenship of the EU member state that convicted them or have been included in national judicial databases of terrorist offenders.

#### Attackers and Weapons

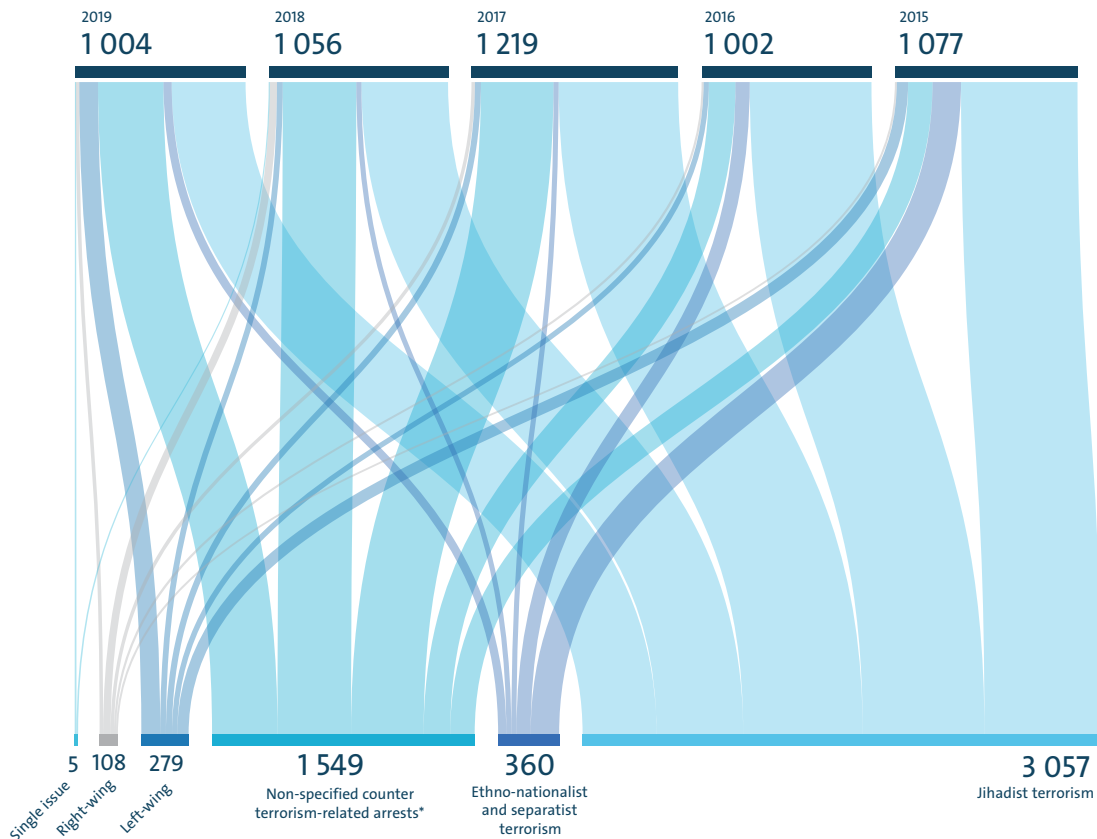
The EU member states see the greater terrorist threat from religious terrorism, and far-right terrorism, is driven by single actors, or small cells, who carry out acts of violence on their own without being instructed by large organizations. Judging by the figures, plots involving many suspects are at greater risk of being thwarted by law enforcement, unlike attacks carried out by lone wolves.

Terrorist and far-right propaganda incites individuals to commit acts of violence independently. The far-right doctrine of leaderless resistance provides a justification for violent actors to commit attacks without group guidance, and far-right organizations on the Internet celebrate lone perpetrators of attacks, calling them “saints” or “martyrs for the cause”; they use such

descriptions to further incite others to engage in similar violent acts.

ISIS and Al-Qaeda have long incited their individual supporters to carry out lone attacks. In the beginning, ISIS recruited and directed potential attackers remotely, but due to its reduced ability to communicate with them, ISIS urged its supporters and sympathizers to act, without expecting support and direction from the ISIS leadership. The reward given to them by ISIS was to announce the attackers after their death (ISIS soldiers). In addition, the prospect of becoming a “martyr” – as propagandized – is undoubtedly an additional motivation. As for the weapons used in launching terrorist attacks, explosives were used in 2019 in nearly half of the terrorist attacks, and in the other half primitive weapons were used. It is reported that all terrorist attacks that used bombing were thwarted by the authorities before they became a reality. Unlike in 2018, the EU member states reported no terrorist incidents involving chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear materials in 2019.

The Report reveals that there is little evidence of a



**Arrests by affiliation 2015-2019**

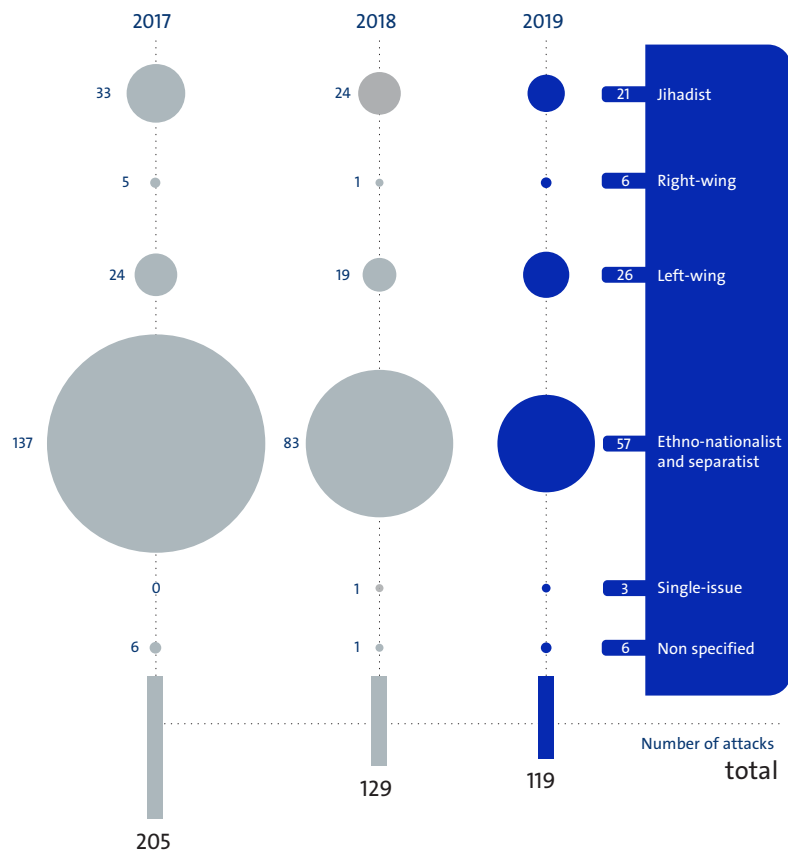
systematic relationship between organized crime and terrorism. Both criminals and terrorists are found in specific marginalized areas, within the same family structures, or in prisons. Here, it is possible to create communication or cooperation based on common interests. It has been observed that criminals are wary of suspected terrorists drawing attention to their criminal activities. Yet the prisons in which extremist terrorists and criminals live together are a source of concern and fear for the authorities. Skilled criminals are among the most important targets of recruitment for such terrorist groups. In turn, such skilled criminals may be attracted to terrorism with the promise of purification and expiation of sins and misdeeds.

### Terrorist Financing

Most of the terrorist attacks carried out in 2019 were carried out by individuals or small cells; these attacks and similar ones do not require much financing. Individual terrorists and small cells have limited financial requirements. They do not require infrastructure maintenance, and their operating costs are low, especially attacks limited to simple methods, such as knife stabbing or vehicle ramming.

The sources of financing for terrorist attacks are different, including legitimate sources, or illegitimate sources. Belgium has observed that cells in Europe finance themselves in part through petty crimes, such as theft and extortion. In Ireland, DR groups have traditionally financed themselves by criminal activities, trafficking, and smuggling. Donations make up another source of terrorist financing across EU, especially for the far-right. Far-right extremists continued to use a mixture of traditional and innovative methods to fund their activities in 2019, including the collection of membership fees in far-right groups from members, the collection of donations from supporters and sympathizers through bank accounts in cash, during concerts, or, rarely, the production and distribution of propaganda materials. There are online stores that sell clothes that contain far-right graphics and slogans, which are a source of funding for Blood & Honor, according to the Belgian government.

Virtual currencies facilitate terrorist financing operations in EU. Belgium has observed that such currencies can be used to purchase on illegal “darknet” trading platforms, such as buying fake documents or airline tickets, which



### Terrorist attacks in EU from 2017 to 2019

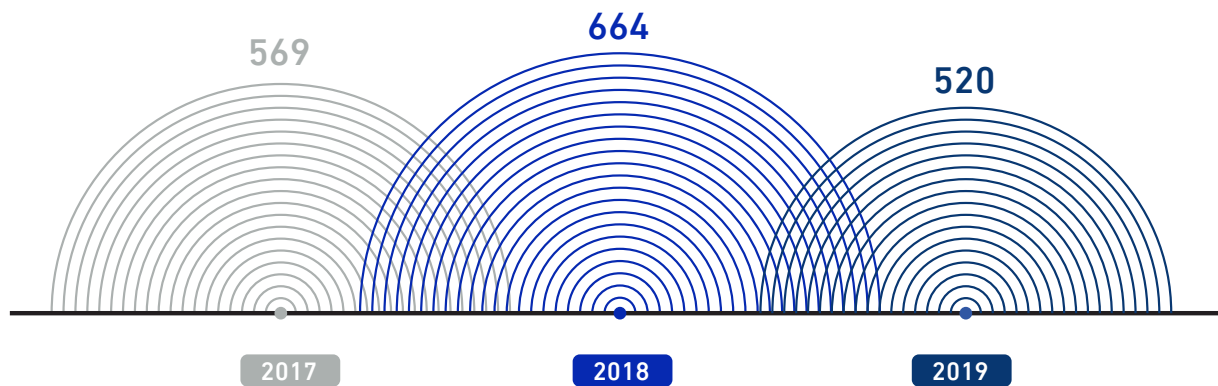
are typical for isolated influencers, or small cells that lack connections in existing physical markets.

As for terrorist organizations operating outside Europe, funds collected in Europe are funneled to them in different ways, including bank transfers by terrorists, corporate structures, commercial transactions, and remittances. Hezbollah, a notoriously terrorist organization, whose military wing has been listed by EU as a terrorist organization, is suspected of smuggling diamonds and narcotics, money laundering, and hiding behind common trade, by sending capital to Lebanon through the banking system, or the physical transfer of cash via commercial aviation. Investigations find it difficult to prove that the funds collected were directed to the military wing of the said organization.

The Report indicates a clear decrease in the financing of terrorist groups outside Europe in 2019, vis-à-vis previous years, likely due to the decrease in the chances of transferring funds to ISIS. However, avenues for obtaining funds under the cover of legitimate businesses or charities, or campaigns to raise funds and transfer

funds to terrorist groups are widespread in extremist communities in Europe.

Foreign terrorist fighters in conflict areas continued their attempts to solicit and pool financial support from people in Europe for their operations, or to arrange for their return to their respective EU countries. In this regard, Spain reported two cases in which funds were transferred to finance the return of foreign terrorist fighters and their families to Europe. In May 2019, the Spanish security forces arrested a 43-year-old Syrian citizen on suspicion of being a member of the financial apparatus of ISIS, transferring money collected from terrorist sympathizers to Syria. Equally important, a 71-year-old Spanish citizen of Iraqi decent was arrested in November 2019 on charges of sending money to ensure the return of terrorists from conflict areas to Europe and communicating with ISIS terrorist intermediaries who were able to send and receive money from quite a few Arab and European countries by bank transfers. The Netherlands referred to initiatives in 2019 to collect donations on the instant messaging platform



### Number of convictions and acquittals for terrorist offences in 2017, 2018 and 2019

Telegram to support the female relatives of fighters and their children from ISIS, who live in detention camps run by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) in Syria in 2019. Denmark observed that terrorist groups in Iraq and Syria remained the primary recipient of terrorist financing from individuals residing in Denmark. However, the volume of funding decreased vis-à-vis previous years, and it is likely that this decrease is due to the low chances of transferring funds to ISIS, as ISIS is increasingly losing control on territory, and due to the relatively small number of individuals who are still in conflict areas and who have ties to Denmark. In this regard, the Report concludes that people in Denmark are not necessarily less inclined to finance extremist terrorist groups abroad.

The Report draws a defining line between the financing of major terrorist organizations and structures, and the financing of lone wolves and small cells; it considers that the former needs huge sums of money to orchestrate and perpetrate terrorist attacks and maintain infrastructure, recruitment, propaganda, employment, and capacity building (training and indoctrination, salaries, financial compensation for relatives, and logistics); while the latter is less funded and expensive.

### Virtual Battlefields

The momentum of the official media of ISIS declined in terms of size, content, impact, and speed of response, following the loss of control over territory, media production facilities, and the ISIS work teams. However, the ISIS central media production has not completely disappeared. The bulk of the ISIS official bulletins includes short allegations from the AMAQ News Agency

and video reports. In addition, ISIS widely disseminated its newsletter in Arabic, "Al-Naba," on a weekly basis throughout the year. The leadership's statements, especially those made by the ISIS leader, Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi alongside his spokesman, continued to slip into reality under the slogan of Al-Furqan Media Production.

In 2019, the ISIS propaganda, including the two audio messages of Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi in April and September, highlighted the statement: [setbacks do not indicate defeat] and [Allah rewards those who remain committed, especially in times of vulnerability and adversity]. The Report reveals that the use of social media and various Internet platforms has other important goals. The dissemination of terrorist content, the glorification of terrorist organizations, and incitement to commit terrorist acts are issues that the national courts of the EU member states dealt with in 2019 in terrorist cases.

The Internet remained the preferred tool for leftist terrorists, anarchists, and violent extremists to drum up for awareness-raising, propaganda, and recruitment activities. It was noted that the leftist terrorist and extremist groups show a high level of security awareness; the associated members use clean mobile phones and encrypted applications to communicate. The Czech government stated that far-left extremists and anarchists use their own infrastructure, such as www.riseup.net, ESPIV and NOBLOGS. It is said that some groups deliberately adopt primitive methods, avoiding all computer or phone communication, alongside using cars or GPS in their movements. Far-right members use the Internet in marketing and promotion of their



extremist rhetoric; they use it in satire and insinuation to manipulate political opponents and to avoid personal responsibility for hate speech and incitement to violence.

## Conflict Areas

The number of returnees from conflict areas to the EU countries remained very low in 2019, and travel restrictions to and from conflict areas in neighboring countries had a significant impact on the ability of foreign terrorist fighters to return without assistance from national authorities. For example, in 2019, six adults returned to the Netherlands, all of whom reported themselves to the authorities in Turkey and to the Dutch diplomatic bodies, and then all of them were arrested at Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam. Despite the seriousness of the monitoring and law enforcement measures for returnees in the EU member states, this did not prevent Belgium from expressing its concerns about the threat of undetected returnees; as returnees from Syria can take unexpected routes, relying on illegal immigration channels and using forged documents, allowing secret entry into the Schengen area.

However, there is no evidence of the systematic use of irregular migration by terrorist organizations, and it appears that the main motivation for the facilitators is financial gain. Of good note, foreign terrorist fighters joining ISIS and other organizations have been stripped of their original identity documents by terrorist organizations, and all the documents collected were placed in a common fund that can be used to send ISIS agents to Europe.

The issue of returning women and minors is another concern recognized by several EU Member States. Many of the women who traveled to conflict areas were not just wives and mothers, and due to the difference in national legislation, many of them were prosecuted for crimes such as providing support to ISIS in some European countries.

## Ethnic and Separatist Terrorism

The number of attacks by ethnic terrorists and separatists continued to decline for the second year in a row, from 83 in 2018 to 57 in 2019. Like previous years, six the EU member states reported 48 arrests, mostly in Spain (25), France (13) and the United Kingdom (10), vis-à-vis terrorist attacks last year. The IRA was still

considered a real threat in Northern Ireland. Separatist terrorist activity in Spain remained at low levels in 2019, and despite claims by ETA regarding disarmament, the authorities discovered two caches of weapons and explosives.

The PKK continued to use EU territory for propaganda, recruitment, fundraising and logistical support activities. Suspected members of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) were arrested in Germany for serious criminal offenses in Sri Lanka.

## Right and Left Terrorism

The number of far-right attacks in Europe is higher than it was in 2018. Six terrorist attacks were reported completed or thwarted in 2019. Groups of far-right-extremists orchestrating to commit violence were arrested in the EU member states in 2019.

Many of them communicated in closed private groups via the Internet. It is reported that many EU countries have shown the emergence of far-right paramilitary groups on the pretext of the inability of the state to protect the population from the perceived threat from Islam and immigration.

Far-right extremists use websites, online discussion forums, and fake news sites to drum up for their beliefs and ideologies. Despite efforts to detect and remove white supremacist content, major social media platforms remain important drivers of the spread of far-right extremism across Europe.

As for far-left terrorism, the EU member states reported 26 far-left and anarchist terrorist attacks in 2019, like the level of 2016 and 2017, after a decline in 2018. All attacks took place in Greece, Italy, and Spain. The number of arrests among leftist groups has increased significantly vis-à-vis previous years; 34 detainees in 2018, vis-à-vis 36 in 2017, bringing the number of detainees to 111 in 2019.

Most arrests were related to violent demonstrations and confrontations with security forces in Italy. In addition, far-left extremists and violent anarchists remain a real threat to public order in several EU member states; support for the Kurdish population in Syria has remained a major theme, and far-left extremists and anarchists are believed to have travelled to join Kurdish armed groups fighting in north-eastern Syria.

## Jihadist Terrorism

In 2019, the EU member countries sustained seven attacks carried out by religious / jihadist terrorism, and law enforcement authorities thwarted fourteen attacks, killing 10 people, which is less than the number of deaths from the attacks of 2018 (13 deaths). As for the ability of law enforcement officials to thwart this type of terrorist attacks, the Report distinguishes between thwarting attacks in the preparation stage and thwarting other attacks in the implementation stage. The Report cites examples and facts that occurred in this context. In February of 2019, the Dutch security forces arrested a 48-year-old man on suspicion of plotting a terrorist act, and a firearm and ammunition were found in his possession, believed to be a supporter of ISIS. On November 25, two Dutch and Iranian men, aged 20 and 34, were arrested in Zoetermeer and The Hague (Netherlands) on suspicion that they were planning an imminent attack; the suspects were planning to receive training in preparing improvised explosive devices, and to carry out an attack, using suicide vests and car bombs, in December in the Netherlands.

The level of these terrorist activities in the EU member countries varied in 2019. For example, Austria observed that there is a clear decrease in terrorist activities, despite the arrest of 43 people on charges of religious terrorism, but there are no indications of a decrease in terrorist activity in other countries within EU. Spain observed an increase in the number of dismantled terrorist cells amounting to seven cells in 2019, vis-à-vis five cells in 2018, and an increase in the average number of arrested individuals.

Most attacks using primitive weapons and firearms were carried out by lone wolves, not by terrorist groups. However, they often maintain relationships in loose networks, or small, disorganized cells. It has been observed that some individuals or small groups are self-extremist on the Internet. Two attempts to join terrorist groups were reported to the authorities, but they were thwarted by the EU member states in 2019. In a similar vein, a few individuals were reported to have returned from conflict areas, and the return of others undetected cannot be ruled out.

The situation in conflict areas outside Europe continued to affect the terrorism situation in Europe, as hundreds

of European citizens remained associated with ISIS in Iraq and Syria. The religious terrorism landscape in Europe consists of networks not connected to each other, and the activities in which individuals and terrorist networks engage are often aimed at facilitating terrorism, directly or indirectly, through financing and recruitment. Such networks lack a common and clear strategic plan. There are few influential leaders with unique distinct personalities, and only few people who are an inspiring driving energy, forced by various factors to reorient themselves. Denmark estimated that support for ISIS and Al-Qaeda in extremist circles decreased significantly in 2019.

In 2019, there were few attempts by EU foreign terrorist fighters to travel to conflict zones that were reported to Europol; Austria and Spain each confirmed one case, both of which were thwarted. This is like the decrease in the number of terrorists traveling from Europe since 2016. Iraq and Syria are no longer attractive destinations for those wishing to join ISIS or Al-Qaeda. The military defeat of ISIS has reduced its control over large swaths of territory to small pockets of territory inaccessible to potential foreign terrorist fighters. In addition, there is a lack of funding and infrastructure that previously supported many foreign terrorist fighters who wished to relocate to conflict areas.

## Conclusion

The Report was issued by a European intergovernmental police security organization, and the content revealed the professional technical nature of the information displayed. It was highly objective, accurate and straightforward. It used figures and data. It also identified risks and challenges, relying on judicial and security events and facts, using both statistical and comparative approaches. In short, it is an abstract statistical report.

However, the Report, alongside previously published editions of the associated annual reports issued since 2007, did not research into the reasons, references and explanations for the increase or decrease in numbers, or even stability, year after year. Is this due to the functional scope of Europol? However, even this scope is not thought to prevent or preclude reference, at least, to these reasons and factors. Of course, the Report is not required to monitor, present, or research the causes of terrorism and the factors accounting for

rampant ubiquity; rather, the figures in the end are only indicators of social, political and security realities at the local, regional, and international levels.

In this sense, the Report attributed all the achievements and successes of the EU countries in reducing the risks of religious, ethnic, separatist terrorism and other types of terrorism to the measures that the law enforcement authorities have well adopted. This may be true in general, but terrorist groups and organizations differ in motives, goals, and major issues, putting the numbers in front of the challenge of interpretation and conclusion, while providing outputs or recommendations to be adopted to further reduce the dangers of terrorism in all its manifestations and types.

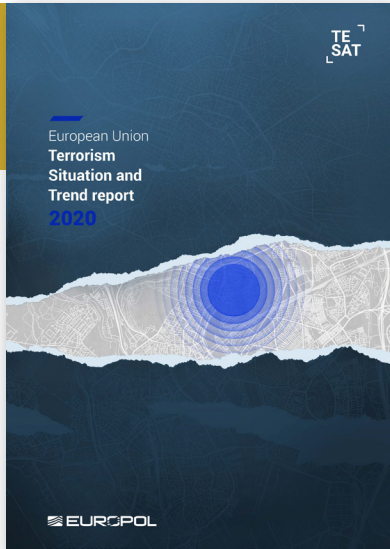
The second issue that could have made the 2020 Report more comprehensive and useful is to shed light on the extent to which some terrorist groups feed on the experiences and collaboration methods with other parties. To what extent, for example, has separatist national terrorism benefited from the operational methods and strategies of recruitment or polarization of religious terrorism, especially those drawn and adopted by ISIS? Since far-right terrorism is described as home-made terrorism, has religious terrorism monitored and

investigated its operational methods and benefited from them? The Report makes a key focus on the Internet, as it is a common aspect that all terrorist organizations dealt with, albeit in varying degrees; this cannot mean that the Report has done its work in this context. A report that presents all the figures that we have presented can further delve into the areas of mutual benefit between terrorist organizations in such a manner as to build on what is required, so that the EU countries benefit from its efforts in the amendments that they can make to their national counterterrorism strategies.

The third important issue for the Report to highlight is the nature of security and judicial cooperation between the EU member states, and the impact of this cooperation in limiting terrorist attacks.

It is of great importance to present and analyze the frameworks of cooperation between EU member countries as a regional organization on the one hand, and regional organizations and non-European countries in the fight against terrorism on the other hand, and the impact of such cooperation, positively or negatively, on the terrorist reality in Europe. The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy has emphasized the importance of bilateral or multilateral counterterrorism cooperation.





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