FONDATION ROBERT SCHUMAN

POLICY PAPER

European issues
n°438
26th June 2017

How to Counter the New Terrorism?

In a context in which we face a unique, unprecedented threat, the European Union has real added value to provide. It has to continue using the many tools already at its disposal and which are used the most by the Member States; and it has to act more in the field of prevention where it should continue to perfect its response.[1]

AN UNPRECEDENTED THREAT

At present we are facing an unprecedented threat. According to Europol estimates there are now more than 5,000 young European "fighters" who have left to fight in the jihad in Syria and Iraq. This is a considerable number (even though recently there has been a clear downward trend in departures) Many of these young people are being brainwashed and are undergoing sophisticated military training. Some of those who have already returned from these zones of conflict have been involved in attacks perpetrated in Europe. Others still have to return. There is also a reserve of people – whose number is difficult to quantify – who do not go abroad, but who are radical-ising and remain in Europe.

The task is complicated by the variety of profiles that we face: powerful, structured networks, controlling territories, and leading cells in Europe from Raqqa; those we call "lone wolves", whether they are commanded from Mosul or Raqqa by people like Rashid Qassim, via coded apps like Telegram, who suggest targets or their modus operandi to them; and those who are "inspired" by the propaganda of terrorist organisations. Finally, there are the psychologi-cally weak (the killer in Nice for example) or the mentally ill.

The internet clearly plays a central role in this "new terrorism". We are in a different world far from the videos of Al Zawahiri and attempts by extremist groups to use channels like Al Jazeera. Daesh has become a master in the art of using a whole range of modern communication tools.

As for the nature of targets, these have changed. After having first selected "symbolic" targets, we now note renewed interest on the part of the terror-ists in "soft" targets, notably tourist infrastructure in Egypt, Tunisia,Turkey as well as in Europe (restaurants, airports) in Paris or Brussels. The new mass migratory flows, notably those caused by the fighting in Syria and Iraq, can be exploited by terrorists to infiltrate Europe, as demonstrated by the attacks in Paris and Brussels.

Of course we must not forget that above all Syrian refugees have fled ter-rorism and state brutality in Syria, and that these people need protection. The corresponding terrorism and radicalisation of the far right in Europe must, for their part, be countered with the same force as Islamist terrorism.

The "returnees" who might come back to Europe following the withdrawal of Daesh will be seasoned and familiar with techniques such as car bombs and even potentially the use of chemical weapons and drones. Hence the need for Europe to have a common policy regarding its citizens returning from war zones.

However, we cannot be sure at the present time that most of them will return to Europe. It is possible that Libya or other areas of instability will attract DAESH fighters or that they will remain in pockets of resistance in Syria and Iraq. So it is important to focus attention on failed and failing states where most terrorist attacks are taking place.

Moreover, the prominence of Daesh should not blind us to the fact that there are other groups which are as potentially as dangerous, in particular al- Qaeda, with its Syrian branch – Jabhat Fateh al- Sham. In

1. The opinions expressed are those of the author alone and in no way are they those of the Council of the European Union.

the long term the goals of these various groups are comparable, even though the analysis of their short term methods may differ.

This should encourage us to take a closer look at the role of ideology played in these groups.

Although the threat to Europe has increased, the European Union and its Member States have reduced their vulnerability. Member State security ser-vices have foiled an impressive number of attacks in Europe.

WHAT SHOULD THE EUROPEAN UNION DO?

The European Union can provide real added value with the skills it already has in support of the Member States. Recent surveys reveal that most Europeans support the EU being more active in terms of security, and in the fight to counter terrorism.

The appointment of Julian King as European Commissioner for the Security Union is a positive development. Indeed Europe has to invest more in domestic security in order to win back the confidence of its citizens.

At present the European Union is working in three different areas, as defined by the heads of State and government after the attacks that struck Paris in January 2015[2]:

– The enforcement aspect (security, justice, borders, financing of terrorism).

– The preventive aspect, with emphasis placed on the prevention of radicalisation as well as the launch of a range of actions offered by education and youth policies.

– The external aspects. As requested by the Foreign Affairs Council on 9th December 2015[3], Federica Mogherini, High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Vice- President of the European Commission made it a priority to assist the countries on the southern shores of the Union. Together the EU is developing a coherent, comprehensive European offer in terms of counter- terrorism, specifically designed for each of the countries which are most exposed. Tunisia, which faces a particular challenge from returning foreign fighters, must for example rebuild its security apparatus whilst imple-menting an effective strategy to counter terrorism. This is in the direct interest of Europe so that Tunisia can achieve a "return to internal security".

The Lisbon Treaty enshrines a commitment to strengthening the Union's skills in certain areas of the so- called area of "Justice and Internal Affairs." This includes internal security, whilst acknowledging that "national security" remains the sole responsibility of the Member States. The adoption of instru-ments such as the European Union's Trivial File Transfer Protocol – TFTP with the USA and even the European "Passenger Name Record" (PNR) Directive which touches on the field of intelligence, marks an important development in the Union's role.

THE CHALLENGES TO RISE TO IN ORDER TO BE MORE EFFECTIVE

Firstly we have to improve the collation and sharing of analysis and infor-mation. This was the lesson learnt by the then US Administration in the wake of the 9/11 attacks.

Europol's potential can also be developed. The agency has proved its use-fulness for example with the "Fraternity" task force, implemented after the Paris attacks. It has grown powerful in the area of counter terrorism, notably with the creation of the European Counter- Terrorism Centre and the joint investigation liaison teams; as well as the European Union Internet Referral Unit (IRU), responsible for tracking terrorist web content and violent extremism online. Europol's TFTP has also provided a significant number of leads.

The need for information exchange between the intelligence community and the law enforcement services was recalled by the European Commission in its communication dated 14th September 2016 regarding the implementa-tion of the Security Union[4].

2. *A detailed description of action taken by the EU is to be found in the report by the EU's Coordinator for the fight to counter- terrorism dated 4th March 2016 (6785/16)*

3. *Foreign Affairs Council 9th February 2015*

4. *Communication "Enhancing security in a world of mobility: improved information exchange in the fight against terrorism and stronger external borders" 14th September 2016 COM (2016) 602 final.*

Electronic information systems must also be made more effective and their use made simpler. It is not enough just to improve the functioning of the key databases (Schengen Information System, Europol, Internpol, Eurodac, VIS etc.). These also have to be fed with information and used effectively, a responsibility which falls to Member States. Some Member States provide the system with information without using it enough or vice versa. But again major progress has been made over the last few months, notably regarding the Schengen Information System.

As the Commission said in its April 2016 communication, it is vital that such information systems are interoperable. A panel of high level experts on information systems and interoperability is undertaking a major project at the moment[5].

The European Union's external border is a key point for collation of infor-mation on movements to and from the Schengen area. A great deal of progress has been made. We should remember that when Frontex was created, the agency that collated a significant amount of data had been given no compe-tence in terms of security. The same applied to Eurodac. Recent developments are moving in the right direction, underlined by the creation of a new coast and border guard. This will be able to make risk analyses, including in respect of terrorism. An obligatory assessment of the Member States' vulnerabilities will be established in order to monitor their ability to rise to present or future risks. If, during a vulnerability test, shortfalls in the functioning of a Member State's border management system are identified, the Member State in ques-tion will have to take corrective steps. In emergency situations that threaten the functioning of the Schengen area, Frontex will be able to intervene.

Systematic checks undertaken to counter "internal" dangers on the external border are also affecting citizens who benefit from free movement. The ongoing review of the Schengen border code will lead to a major step forward in this regard.

The introduction of a European information and travel authorisation system, ETIAS (equivalent to the American ESTA) will be another useful tool. This will enable us to know in advance who is entering the European Union. The European Commission has prepared a draft bill in this direction.

The European Commission's plan of action regarding the fight against the financing of terrorism is a good tool which will be developed to combat the trafficking of cultural goods used for this purpose.

Access to data online is a subject in its own right since increasingly ter-rorists are using encrypted applications, of which the best known one is Telegram. The European Union also has to ensure better access to fingerprints that play a major role in investigations and criminal procedures regarding foreign fighters

Being more active on the web, both in terms of communication and pre-vention, is also vital. Internet companies must help us to detect and eliminate extremist, violent content as well as to work with us in the promotion of effective counter narratives.

This is why we must invest massively in prevention. A great deal can be done to support the work of first line players (social workers, teachers, civil society, local associations), through networks such as the EU's Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN). The development of education, sports, youth poli-cies, and the promotion of a virtual exchange programme with countries in the southern Mediterranean and the Middle East, are also key. I would be the first to say that enforcement measures alone will be counter-productive.

Finally as Daesh's power wanes, a coherent policy on the part of the European Union in terms of the "returnees" is required. We must not repeat the mistakes made during the war in Afghanistan. Rehabilitation programmes are being implemented and thought is being given to alternatives to prison sentences. Indeed in many cases it could be a mistake to prosecute returnees, since prison is a major incubator of radicalisation (in some cases there will also be the problem of a lack evidence). On the contrary we must try to dif-ferentiate cases, comprehending the danger each individual represents and developing a graduated response.

5. *Communication "Stronger and Smarter Information Systems for Borders and Security" 6th April 2016 COM (2016) 205 final.*

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In conclusion Europe will not be able to act alone. It will only be by working closely with its partners, its neighbours and third countries that it will be able to counter terrorism effectively. This means collaboration with Iraq, the Sahel, and other regions where threats are emerging (Western Balkans, Turkey, South East Asia). The role of Interpol is vital in the exchange of information, together with technical assistance programmes. And the involvement of the EU agencies, including Europol, Eurojust, Frontex, as well as the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL) will be crucial if Europe is to succeed.

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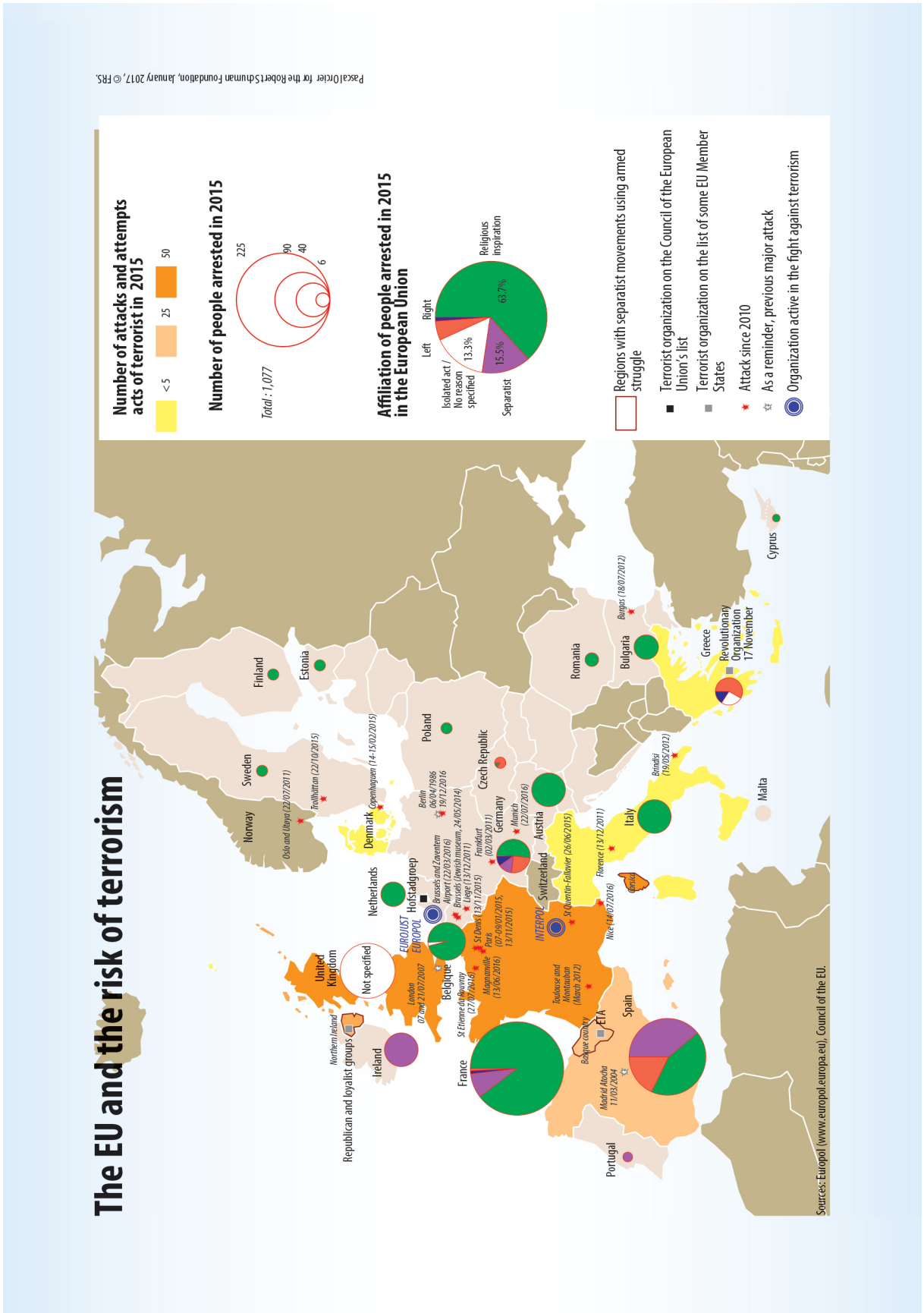

Pascal Drieu for the Robert Schuman Foundation, January 2017, © FRS.