

## ***The Europol report 2018 on Terrorism in the European Union***

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In recent years, Europe has continued to be the scene of numerous and varied terrorist attacks. The latest report published in June 2018 by [Europol EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report \(TE-SAT\)](#) offers an overview of the nature and volume of terrorism that the EU faced in 2017 providing useful information on terrorist attacks and arrests. The most interesting data emerging from this detailed snapshot of the current terrorist phenomenon is that of a part of the continent still strongly marked by ethno-nationalist tensions and all European countries are interesting from a growing threat from right-wing extremism. In fact, if on the one hand jihadist terrorism continues to be perceived as the main threat, given also the greater impact at the level of damage entities of the attacks committed on European soil in recent years, ethno-nationalist and separatist terrorism is the main cause of more than half of the total attacks recorded in 2017. The TE-SAT reports do not seek to analyse the root causes of terrorism or the impact and effectiveness of counter-terrorism policies but provide a very useful study of the terrorism phenomenon in the EU from a law enforcement perspective collecting qualitative and quantitative data on terrorist offences supplied by Member States. In particular, the 2018 TE-SAT Report consists of a first section dedicated to a general overview of terrorist attacks and trends while the following sections illustrate separately the data relating to the different types of terrorism: jihadist, ethno-nationalist and separatist, left-wing and anarchist, right-wing and single-issue terrorism.

### ***Terrorism in EU: an overview***

A downward trend in terrorist attacks in the EU had been recorded since 2014, which came to an end brusquely in 2017 when attacks almost doubled (205) compared to 2016 (142). In 2017, 205 foiled, failed and completed terrorist attacks occurred in 9 EU Member States. Most of these attacks, 67%, are classified as ethno-nationalist and separatist, while 16% are jihadist, 12% are carried out by left-wing terrorist and the 3% by right-wing terrorist (the 2% is 'not specified'). The countries most affected were the United Kingdom, which experienced the highest number of attacks (1071), followed by France (54), Spain (16), Italy (14), and Greece (8). On the other hand, the number of arrests was a continuation of a downward trend: 1077 in 2015, 1002 in 2016 e 975 in 2017. An interesting fact to note is that the vast majority of individuals arrested in the EU for terrorism-related offences were related to jihadist terrorism: 705 out of 791. In 2017 the majority of arrests (660) were performed on suspicious of participating in activities of a terrorist group, planning, preparing attacks or facilitating terrorism by means of dissemination of propaganda,

recruitment and financing terrorism. In 2017, 565 individuals were convicted or acquitted of terrorist offences in EU and the vast majority of verdicts (352) concerned jihadist terrorism, confirming a trend that started in 2015, and the highest number (114) were rendered in France.

### ***Jihadist terrorism: recent trends***

As can be seen from the above data, the number of classified as Jihadist terrorist attacks in a single year more than doubled, and the two countries most affected were France and the UK. Although the number of attacks (foiled, failed and completed) is low compared to the total number of terrorist attacks registered in the EU, the jihadist terrorism is the category that caused the most casualties, 62 people dead (out of 68) and 819 injured (out of 844). Also with regard to the number of arrests, the jihadist terrorism continued to represent the largest proportion of total arrests for terrorism-related offences in the EU, demonstrating the potential threat that this type of terrorism continues to pose to European countries.

The 2018 TE-SAT Report reports the main aspects concerning jihadist terrorism and its recent evolutions; elements and characteristics of this phenomenon that must be carefully taken into account in order to improve policies against terrorism and in particular those against violent radicalisation. The first characteristic cited concerns the type of attacks that continues to be mainly aimed at indiscriminate killings as well as on eliminating symbols of Western "hedonistic" lifestyle and symbols of authority. A second important aspect concerns the origin of these individuals: the attacks were carried out mainly by "home grown" terrorists, i.e. individuals who have radicalised themselves in their country of residence. Many of these individuals were born and raised in or spent most of their lives in the EU and have often already been signalled by security authorities for illegal activities not related to terrorism. Furthermore, the online propaganda continues to play an important role in recruitment, radicalisation and funding in the EU and in most cases aspiring terrorists have a poor knowledge of Islam, which makes them easier to manipulate. With regard to the organisational aspects the jihadists often act alone or are organized into small groups and they have proven to be able to radicalise without raising suspicion and to prepare attacks while remaining undetected by law enforcement. Another interesting aspect reported is the decrease in sophistication, in the preparation and execution of the jihadist terrorist attack. The most commonly used weapons were explosive devices, firearms and improvised weapons such as knives or vehicles. A last important datum relates to the issue of so-called 'returnees': since 2015, the number of individuals travelling to war zones to join terrorist groups (Syria and Iraq) has decreased significantly, and in 2017, there has

also been a low number of 'returnees' in the EU. But despite the recent crisis of the Islamic State (IS), the terrorist threat in the EU persists because those who leave the IS continue to have extremist positions and to join other groups such as Al-Qaeda.

***Constant threats to the EU: ethno-nationalist and separatist, left-wing and anarchist, right-wing terrorism***

As we have observed in the general overview of the terrorist phenomenon in the European Union, the ethno-nationalist and separatist terrorism continues to be the category which contains more than half of the total terrorist attacks, but it is necessary to specify that it is a phenomenon very circumscribed territorially and in the objectives. The 2018 TE-SAT Report records a more or less constant trend: 180 attacks in 2013, 154 in 2014, 168 in 2015, 84 in 2016 and 137 in 2017 and in the last year they were concentrated mainly in the UK (88), France (42) and Spain (7). While in the English and Spanish cases separatist terrorism continues to be closely linked to the historical internal separatist struggles (Northern Ireland and Basque issues), in the French case it is linked to the action of the Kurdish militants in Europe. The completed separatist attacks were aimed at businesses and critical infrastructure, but also at civilians.

Also with regard to left-wing and anarchist terrorism, the number of attacks in the EU remains more or less constant, with a slight decrease recorded in 2017 (24 attacks) compared to 2016 (27). The countries most involved are Greece, Italy and Spain. The objectives and *modus operandi* of these groups have remained the same over the years: attacks were principally targeted on government and police officials, property and infrastructure, banks and right-wing extremists, with predominantly the use of improvised explosive devices (IEDs). The motivations behind the mobilization continue to be linked to issues related to justice, economy and solidarity with migrants.

Particular attention should be paid to right-wing terrorism, which has increased considerably in the last years, despite the fact that it continues to be a more elusive phenomenon with little media coverage. In 2017 the number of individuals arrested in relation to this kind of offences almost doubled compared to previous years and the vast majority (15) were reported by France: 11 in 2015, 12 in 2016 e 20 in 2017. This category includes groups that adopt a variety of ideologies ranging from the condemnation of the political establishment and the membership of international organisations (e.g. NATO and the EU), to the rejection of asylum policies, migrants and individuals and groups associated with a different racial, ethnic, religious or political background. Particularly in recent years the current expansion of the right-wing extremism is closely related to the migration issue and fomented by the fear of an assumed Islamisation of the Western world. It is therefore a phenomenon which

is still underestimated and which requires greater attention both for its expansion and for its destructive potential: it involves all the EU Member states and it rides on the growing tensions that are affecting European societies.