


The new face of terrorist threat in the European Union. Analysis of the EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2024 (TE-SAT) and other sources

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Abstract

This article focuses on the issue of the terrorist threat in the European Union in 2023. The starting point for the analysis is Europol's latest report entitled *TE-SAT. European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2024*, and other sources. The analysis covers both the substantive aspect of the threat (from ethno-national and separatist, far-left and anarchist, jihadists and far-right groups) and the quantitative aspect (indicating the number of terrorist incidents and the number of people involved in particular types of terrorist activity). In 2023, as many as 120 terrorist attacks were reported in the EU, including 98 completed, 9 failed and 13 foiled. This compares with 18 attacks in 2021 and 28 in 2022. In 2023 there was over a fourfold increase in the number of attacks compared to the previous year. The attacks occurred in 7 EU countries: France – 80, Italy – 30, Germany and Spain – 3 each, Belgium – 2, Greece and Luxembourg – 1 each. In 2023, a total of 426 people were arrested for terrorism and in 2022 – 380. The highest number of arrests in 2023 was in Spain, France, Belgium, and Germany – over 50 in each of them. It means that terrorism poses a serious threat to the security of the EU in a vertical dimension (concerning

the number of attacks and accused of terrorism), a horizontal dimension (relating to the diverse tactics and strategies of the perpetrators), and a behavioral dimension (analysing different motivations and profiles of terrorists).

Keywords

terrorism, European Union, security, Europol

Introduction

The re-escalation of the terrorist threat, which is occurring in the 2020s in various parts of the world, and the accompanying phenomena are unfortunately not always recognised and countermeasures are not adequately implemented. This is illustrated by the results of a report on threats to the modern world, which was published ahead of the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos (20–24 January 2025). This cyclically published survey shows that the vast majority of the more than 900 respondents (business, political and scientific leaders) believe that terrorism¹ is not a significant threat in the next 12 months, the next 2 years or the next decade². State-based armed conflict ranked first among responses regarding threats in 2025 with 23%. This choice was explained by respondents, among other things, by the highest level of global polarisation since the end of the Cold War³. They further stressed that the number of wars has increased over the past decade. This is also pointed out by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), according to whose findings as many as 52 countries experienced armed conflict

¹ On defining the concept of terrorism, see, for example: S. Wojciechowski, *The Hybridity of Terrorism: Understanding Contemporary Terrorism*, Berlin 2013; *The Routledge Companion to Terrorism Studies. New Perspectives and Topics*, M. Abrahms (ed.), London 2024; K. Maniszewska, *Towards a New Definition of Terrorism: Challenges and Perspectives in a Shifting Paradigm*, series: Contributions to Security and Defence Studies, Cham 2024. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-58719-1>.

² *The Global Risks Report 2025. 20th Edition. Insight Report*, World Economic Forum, https://reports.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Global_Risks_Report_2025.pdf [accessed: 6 II 2025].

³ *Ibid.*, pp. 7–8.

in 2023⁴. This was followed by extreme weather events (14% of responses) and geoeconomic confrontation (8%). In addition, misinformation and disinformation (7%) and societal polarisation (6%) were mentioned in the top five. Disinformation, extreme weather events, escalation of hostilities, polarisation of societies and cyber warfare were identified as the biggest threats in the next two years. The responses regarding perceptions of dangers over the decade were slightly different. Here, the first 4 of the 5 dominant categories related to various environmental issues, while the last one related to misrepresentation and disinformation. Unlike some earlier reports⁵, nowhere was terrorism indicated. This is all the more surprising given that it has been escalating to varying degrees in different parts of the world⁶, including Africa, the Middle East and the European Union, as will be discussed later in this article.

Furthermore, according to the Bertelsmann Foundation 2024 survey of more than 26 000 respondents in the 27 EU Member States and the UK, terrorist attacks are the second (21% of indications) biggest threat to peace in Europe, after the lack of effective border protection (25%). This was followed by major cyber attacks (19%), attack by a foreign power (18%) and organised crime (17%)⁷.

The starting point of the analysis carried out in this article is the hypothesis that terrorism poses a serious threat to the security of EU Member States and their populations both vertically (concerning the number of attacks and people accused of terrorism), horizontally

⁴ R. Gowan, *Overview, 2. Trends in armed conflicts*, in: *SIPRI Yearbook 2024*, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, <https://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2024/02> [accessed: 5 II 2025].

⁵ See, e.g.: *The Global Risks Report 2021. 16th Edition. Insight Report*, World Economic Forum, https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_The_Global_Risks_Report_2021.pdf [accessed: 7 II 2025]; *The Global Risks Report 2022. 17th Edition. Insight Report*, World Economic Forum, https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_The_Global_Risks_Report_2022.pdf [accessed: 12 V 2025].

⁶ See, e.g.: R. Gunaratna, *Global Terrorism Threat Forecast 2025*, “RSIS Commentary” 2025, no. 002; *Security Council debates growing terrorism threat in Africa*, United Nations, 21 I 2025, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2025/01/1159246> [accessed: 8 II 2025].

⁷ I. Hoffmann, C.E. De Vries, *Old Habits Die Hard – Member States Report. Part II: Remaking the Transatlantic Partnership: Public Opinion in the EU and seven Member States*, Eupinions, 20 XI 2024, <https://eupinions.eu/de/text/old-habits-die-hard-member-states-report> [accessed: 15 III 2025].

(referring to the varying tactics and strategies of the perpetrators) and behaviourally (analysing the motivation and profile of terrorists)⁸.

Terrorist threat in the context of the situation in Africa, the Middle East and the war in Ukraine

Europol's *TE-SAT. European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2024*⁹ not only presented the extent and nature of the threat in the EU, but also the related broader context, including the war in Ukraine, the situation in the Middle East or the escalation of terrorism in Africa. The latter aspect was also highlighted in the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) report¹⁰. It indicated that in the first half of 2024 alone, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and its affiliated groups carried out 788 attacks worldwide, of which as many as 536 occurred in Africa. This is alluded to in information provided to the United Nations Security Council by the African Union Commissioner for Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) Bankole Adeoye. They show that Africa is currently the area most threatened by terrorism. In 2024, there were more than 3400 terrorist attacks there, with almost 14 000 deaths. This is particularly true in sub-Saharan Africa, where 59% of the world's terrorist deaths occurred. The spread of Al-Qaeda and ISIS from Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso to West African coastal states such as Nigeria, Benin, Togo, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire has resulted in a 250% increase in attacks relative to 2022–2024. UN Security Council Deputy Secretary-General Amina Mohammed commented: *Africa tragically remains the epicentre of global terrorism*¹¹. Deteriorating economic, social and political conditions there, resulting in, among other things, mass migration or armed conflicts, are factors that contribute to

⁸ On the causes of terrorism, see in more detail: S. Wojciechowski, *Reasons of Contemporary Terrorism. An Analysis of Main Determinants*, in: *Radicalism and Terrorism in the 21st Century. Implications for Security*, A. Sroka, F. Castro-Rial Garrone, R.D. Torres Kumbrián (eds.), Frankfurt am Main 2017.

⁹ Europol, *TE-SAT. European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2024*, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/cms/sites/default/files/documents/TE-SAT%202024.pdf> [accessed: 9 II 2025].

¹⁰ U.S. Africa Command *Civilian Casualty Assessment Report; 2nd Quarter, FY2024*, <https://www.africom.mil/what-we-do/airstrikes/civilian-harm-report/us-africa-command-civilian-casualty-assessment-report-2nd-quarter-fy2024> [accessed: 14 IV 2025].

¹¹ *Security Council debates growing terrorism...*

the growing terrorist threat in Africa. All this destabilises the situation not only in the region, but also outside, including in the EU¹².

The apparent resurgence of ISIS and the accompanying operational-propaganda offensive was commented on by the Head of the United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT), Vladimir Voronkov. He stressed that ISIS and its affiliates have also started to operate outside of Africa – in Syria, Iraq or Afghanistan¹³, which has resulted in a significant increase in the number of attacks and their victims, mainly among civilians¹⁴. This is due in part to the spectacular success of the opposition in Syria, including its Islamist strands also represented by ISIS. Both this and the earlier successes of ISIS in Syria or Iraq and of the Taliban in Afghanistan are being propagandised by fundamentalists.

In Europe, on the other hand, jihadist activity quadrupled between October 2023 and early 2025, as Peter Neumann, a terrorism expert from King's College London, points out¹⁵. In Spain, for example, 81 suspected jihadists were arrested in 2024, including 25 in Catalonia. The number of people arrested on suspicion of jihadist activity increased in the country for the second year in a row and reached levels not seen since the terrorist attacks in Madrid in March 2004.

EU countries with a higher terrorist risk include those already frequently attacked, such as France, Italy, Spain or Germany, as well as others, such as Poland. Although the Europol report indicated no attempted attacks in Poland and only 1 arrest due to terrorist activity, this case is important, inter alia due to Poland's involvement in Ukraine. The increased level of this risk is also largely influenced by the accumulation of threats from both state terrorism inspired, for example, by Russia, Belarus or Iran, and non-state terrorism, which takes different forms: ethno-nationalist

¹² See e.g.: S. Wojciechowski, P. Osiewicz, *Zrozumieć współczesny terroryzm* (Eng. Understanding contemporary terrorism), Warszawa 2017.

¹³ S. Wojciechowski, *History Repeats Itself. The Issue of Terrorism and Afghanistan on the Twentieth Anniversary of the 9/11 Attacks*, "Przegląd Strategiczny" 2021, no. 14, pp. 9–22. <https://doi.org/10.14746/ps.2021.1.1.1>.

¹⁴ *Nineteenth report of the Secretary-General on the threat posed by ISIL (Da'esh) to international peace and security and the range of United Nations efforts in support of Member States in countering the threat*, United Nations Security Council, 31 VII 2024, <https://docs.un.org/en/S/2024/583> [accessed: 6 II 2025].

¹⁵ M. Auermann, F. Piatov, *Der IS-Terror ist zurück!*, Bild, 3 I 2025, <https://www.bild.de/politik/ausland-und-internationales/top-experte-warnt-in-bild-der-is-terror-ist-zurueck-677687610195b908c1898f69> [accessed: 13 IV 2025].

and separatist, extreme left-wing and anarchist, Islamist, extreme right-wing. The increase in the terrorist threat in selected EU countries is also indicated by the *Global Terrorism Index 2025* published by the Institute for Economics & Peace. It shows that in 2024, the number of terrorist incidents in Europe doubled from the figures in the previous report – there were 67 incidents. These mainly affected 6 countries: Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands, Denmark, Switzerland and Germany. For some EU Member States, the terrorist threat score (Global Terrorism Index) also increased. The highest ranking – 27th – was for Germany, up 13 places from the previous report. This is followed by Greece in 36th place (down 1 place), the Czech Republic in 39th place (down 6 places), France in 40th place (down 2 places), Poland in 47th place (up 33 places) and Sweden in 50th place (up 22 places)¹⁶.

Terrorist threat in the European Union in 2023 – analysis of the TE-SAT report

For the EU, one of the most important sources of information on the terrorist threat is Europol's annual *TE-SAT European Union Situation and Trend Report*. Its analysed version, published in December 2024, deals with data for 2023 and was prepared in cooperation with EU Member States and other partners involved in counter-terrorism. The report, with an introduction by Europol's Executive Director Catherine De Bolle, analyses the key trends currently affecting the phenomenon of terrorism. It provides information on, inter alia, attacks carried out, failed and foiled, the number of people arrested for terrorist activities, and ongoing legal proceedings. Different types of terrorism are covered, such as ethno-nationalist and separatist, left-wing and anarchist, jihadist and right-wing.

In 2023, as many as 120 terrorist attacks were recorded in the EU, including 98 carried out, 9 failed and 13 foiled. This compares to 18 attacks in 2021 and 28 in 2022, so there was a more than fourfold increase in 2023 compared to the previous year. These figures show that terrorism is an increasingly serious security threat to EU Member States.

¹⁶ *Global Terrorism Index 2025*, Institute for Economics & Peace, <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Global-Terrorism-Index-2025.pdf> [accessed: 4 V 2025].

Noteworthy is the large disproportion between the number of attacks carried out and foiled in 2023. This year, attacks involved 7 EU countries: France – 80, Italy – 30, Germany and Spain – 3 each, Belgium – 2, Greece and Luxembourg – 1 each. More than 90% of the cases therefore involved two countries – France and Italy. They also registered the highest number of attacks carried out, 72 and 23 respectively, with the remainder occurring in Belgium, Germany and Spain – 1 each. Unsuccessful attacks occurred in Italy – 7 and Greece and Spain – 1 each. In contrast, 8 attacks were foiled on French territory, 2 in Germany and 1 each in Belgium, Luxembourg and Spain. Most terrorist acts targeted critical infrastructure – 15 incidents, with the remainder targeting, among others, private companies – 7, civilians – 4 and police officers – 3. The most common form of attack was arson – 20, the others indicated: bombings – 8, destruction of property – 6, knife attacks – 6 and firearms – 5.

The phenomenon of terrorism in Europol reports is also considered in terms of the rate of people arrested on account of terrorist activities or prosecutions in this regard. For example, in 2023, law enforcement authorities in EU Member States arrested 426 people accused of terrorism-related offences. This compares to 380 in 2022 (Figure 1). The highest number of such cases was in 2023 in Spain, France, Belgium and Germany – more than 50 in each of these countries. However, there was a decrease in the number of court convictions, reported by Eurojust, with 358 convictions in 2023 compared to 427 in 2022. Court proceedings concluded in 2023 led to 290 convictions and 68 acquittals in 14 EU countries¹⁷.

Terrorist attacks have long been carried out using a variety of means, from the use of a knife or a car through the use of firearms, explosives and even the so-called dirty bomb, to drone or cyber attacks. A significant increase has also been observed in the online acquisition of training materials, instructions on tactics and strategies for carrying out attacks, information on the manufacture of 3D-printed weapons, the military use of drones, the acquisition of firearms or explosives, and even the possibility of possessing chemical weapons. This includes people with different peeps and ideological affiliations that are difficult to attribute to a single trend, such as Islamist or far-right. Added to this is the issue of the use of artificial intelligence by terrorists or their sympathisers. The internet and cyber technologies, which are readily used by young people, remain an important

¹⁷ Europol, *TE-SAT. European Union Terrorism Situation...*, p. 15.

tool used, for example, for propaganda, recruitment or fundraising purposes. They are also used to influence radicalisation and promote hate speech. This generates serious consequences, including the carrying out of attacks by increasingly younger attackers. During Christmas 2024, for example, German police arrested a 15-year-old terrorist who was planning an attack on a church in Berlin. The increasingly strong links within the triad: terrorist/terrorists – criminal groups – secret services of countries hostile to the EU should also be highlighted.

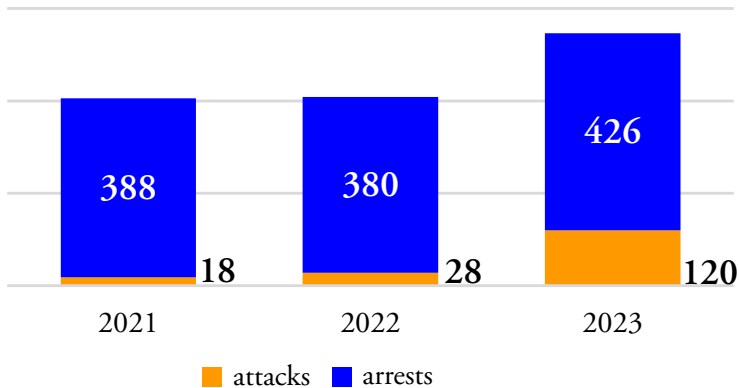


Figure 1. Number of terrorist attacks carried out, failed or foiled and persons arrested for terrorist activities in the European Union between 2021 and 2023.

Source: Europol, *TE-SAT. European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2024*, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/cms/sites/default/files/documents/TE-SAT%202024.pdf>, p. 11 [accessed: 9 II 2025].

The statistics confirm that terrorism remains a complex threat, encompassing different ideologies, forms or methods of action. The Europol report underlines that the phenomenon of terrorism in the EU stems from a variety of premises and does not have, as is still quite often erroneously believed, only an Islamist background (Table 1).

Table 1. Number of terrorist attacks carried out, failed or foiled in the EU in 2023 by motivation of the attackers.

| COUNTRY/ terrorism type | JIHADIST | RIGHT-WING | LEFT-WING AND ANARCHIST | ETHNO-NATIONALIST AND SEPARATIST | OTHER | TOTAL |
|-------------------------------|----------|------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Belgium | 2 | | | | | 2 |
| France | 8 | 1 | | 70 | 1 | 80 |
| Germany | 3 | | | | | 3 |
| Greece | | | 1 | | | 1 |
| Italy | | | 30 | | | 30 |
| Luxembourg | | 1 | | | | 1 |
| Spain | 1 | | 1 | | 1 | 3 |
| TOTAL | 14 | 2 | 32 | 70 | 2 | 120 |

Source: Europol, *TE-SAT: European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2024*, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/cms/sites/default/files/documents/TE-SAT%202024.pdf>, p. 62 [accessed: 9 II 2025]. Changes have been made in the form of translation and graphic design – editor’s note.

The report also mentions 2 incidents where the motivation of the assassins was not indicated. One of these was the shooting of a Spanish politician in Madrid on 9 November 2023 by an unidentified perpetrator. The reasons for his act are also unknown¹⁸. This act should be considered purely criminal, as recognising something as an act of terrorism requires knowing the real motives of the perpetrator.

Ethno-nationalist and separatist terrorism

By far the greatest terrorist activity was undertaken in 2023 by terrorists motivated by ethno-nationalist and separatist ideology¹⁹. During this period, 70 terrorist attacks of this nature were reported, all carried out in Corsica, France. Thirty-four, or almost half, occurred on the night of 8–9 October. The affiliation of those arrested in connection with terrorism motivated by ethno-nationalist and separatist ideology included the following terrorist organisations: the Corsican Fronte di Liberazione Naziunale Corsu (FLNC) and Ghjuventù clandestina Corsa (GcC), the Irish Dissident Republican, the Kurdish Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê (PKK) and the Basque Euskadi ta Askatasuna (ETA). Detentions and arrests of those suspected of terrorist activity have also occurred in Italy, Sweden, Germany and Greece. Among the charges brought against those arrested were participation in terrorist plots, possession of weapons, financing of terrorism and recruitment as well as promotion of terrorist activity²⁰.

Extreme left-wing and anarchist terrorism

Extreme left-wing²¹ and anarchist groups were significantly more active in the EU in 2023 compared to jihadist and far-right groups.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 55.

¹⁹ The Europol report's characterisation of ethno-nationalist and separatist terrorist groups indicates that these groups appeal to nationalism or ethnic or religious affiliation as part of a political agenda. The aim of these groups is to create their own territory by separating from an already existing state or annexing the separated territory to another state. See: *ibid.*, p. 51.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 51–52.

²¹ In the Europol report, terrorism by extreme left-wing groups (left-wing terrorism) is understood as the use of violence to provoke a violent Marxist-Leninist revolution against the democratic state with the aim of establishing socialism, communism or a classless society. Anarchist terrorism, on the other hand, aims to destroy the current model of political power and replace it with an anti-discriminatory and anti-capitalist model that promotes equality, freedom and social justice. See: *ibid.*, p. 43.

Their members were responsible for 32 terrorist incidents, 23 of which resulted in the carrying out of terrorist attacks. All of them were carried out in Italy. It was also mainly in this country that the attacks were foiled – 7, and in Greece and Spain – 1 each. According to figures published by the anarchists themselves, most of the attacks were carried out as a gesture of solidarity with the Informal Anarchist Federation/ International Revolutionary Front (IAF/FAI) members imprisoned by the Italian authorities. The anarchist attack in Spain was also in support of those imprisoned in Italy. The modus operandi of the attackers did not differ from that of previous years and included the use of improvised explosive devices (IED), which were detonated near mobile phone masts or other infrastructure of telecommunications and energy companies, as well as arson or physical destruction of mainly real estate. The attacks were justified with anti-capitalist slogans (criticism of the increasingly powerful role of corporations in the Italian economy), anti-state and anti-war (including opposition to NATO)²², criticism of the growing techno-industrial domination of modern powers (state and non-state), the worsening economic situation (including rising inflation), the rise in popularity of neo-fascist groups, disrespect for worker' and migrants' rights as well as the climate crisis and increasing repression by state structures. In view of this, it is not surprising that state officials, including police officers and members of the judiciary, were also targets of attacks. The Italian authorities only managed to arrest 10 people from this very active terrorist group. The others were arrested in Spain – 1, Germany – 1 and Greece – 2. They were mostly men between the ages of 27 and 75. There was also 1 woman arrested²³. Some of those detained were affiliated with the Turkish DHKP-C (The Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/ Front, Turkish: Devrimci Halk Kurtulus Partisi-Cephesi)²⁴. Terrorists associated with leftist and anarchist ideology obtained funds for their activities in a manner similar to the previously discussed groups, i.e. using both legal and illegal sources.

²² Ibid., p. 46.

²³ Ibid., pp. 45–48.

²⁴ Ibid., pp. 47–48.

Jihadist terrorism

In the EU, terrorist activity undertaken by jihadists increased in 2023 compared to the previous year²⁵. On the territory of France, Belgium, Germany and Spain, terrorists with such links carried out or attempted to carry out 14 attacks. As a result, 6 people were killed and 12 injured in them. The modus operandi of the perpetrators included the activity of so-called lone wolves loosely linked to existing terrorist groups²⁶. The perpetrators of the attacks were exclusively men, who killed their victims most often by stabbing. Only once, in the case of an attack in Brussels, firearms were used. The attacks took place in urban areas. The figure also includes 9 terrorist plots that were detected in advance: most in France – 6, as well as in Germany – 2 and Belgium – 1²⁷. An interesting phenomenon is the lack of clear links between the perpetrators and existing terrorist groups. Police services were only able to confirm the link between the bombers and ISIS in 4 cases, and only for 1 did ISIS take full responsibility²⁸. The existence of an extensive jihadist terrorist network within the EU²⁹ can be evidenced by the arrest of 334 people by law enforcement authorities. This number is up 68 from 266 in the previous year. Of those arrested, 133 did not have the nationality of an EU country. The vast majority

²⁵ In the Europol report, jihadism is defined as a radical strand of Salafism (a Sunni Muslim revivalist movement) whose adherents reject modern democracy, arguing that man-made legislation contradicts God's status as the sole lawgiver. Jihadists aim to create an Islamic state governed exclusively by Islamic law (sharia). Unlike other Salafist currents, jihadists legitimise the use of violence by referring to Islamic doctrines of jihad (this term literally means 'striving' or 'effort', but jihadists interpret it as religiously sanctioned war). All those who oppose jihadist interpretations of Islamic law are considered enemies of Islam and therefore become legitimate targets for attack. Some jihadists include Shiites and other Muslims among their enemies. See: Europol, *TE-SAT. European Union Terrorism Situation...*, p. 20. The issue of jihadist terrorism is described in more detail in this article than other types of terrorism in the EU due to the particular impact of such terrorist incidents on law enforcement tasks in recent years.

²⁶ On the subject of lone wolves, see in more detail: A. Wejksznier, *Samotne wilki kalifatu? Państwo Islamskie i indywidualny terroryzm dżihadystyczny w Europie Zachodniej* (Eng. Lone wolves of the caliphate? The Islamic State and individual jihadist terrorism in Western Europe), Warszawa 2018, pp. 27–47.

²⁷ Europol, *TE-SAT. European Union Terrorism Situation...*, p. 20.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ On this subject, see in more detail: A. Wejksznier, *Europejska armia kalifatu. Tom 1. Centrum supersieci* (Eng. The European Army of the Caliphate. Volume 1. The centre of the super-network), Warszawa 2020, pp. 30–48.

of those arrested (276 people) were men. Those arrested were charged with belonging to a terrorist organisation – 30%, planning or carrying out an attack – 14%, financing terrorist activities – 12%³⁰. Court proceedings in 208 cases resulted in convictions. Most of those convicted came from Belgium, France, Germany and Austria. Their terrorist affiliations, if confirmed, included the networks of the 2 largest and competing jihadist terrorist organisations operating on EU territory, i.e. ISIS and Al-Qaeda. Despite the loss of influence by both groups in the Middle East, they were able to increase their presence in Europe. In this case, it is not the expansion of organisational structures, but the popularisation of jihadist ideology that has resulted in the terrorist radicalisation of many young people. Moreover, this process has been shortened and intensified, and its participants are prepared to use violence against civilians³¹. This means the persistence of the threat from individual jihadist terrorism³². Additional threats in the form of jihadist radicalisation in prisons, the low effectiveness of the deradicalisation process and the return of so-called foreign fighters (or foreign terrorist fighters) to EU territory (often using false identity documents) have also not been avoided³³. These processes were reinforced by jihadist propaganda undertaken primarily in the dark web³⁴. Among the most common narrative threads there were the growing oppression of Muslims in Europe, the lack of response to insulting the Quran in Sweden, Denmark or the Netherlands, the glorification of Hamas terrorist activity, especially after the 7 October 2023 attack on Israel, and support for the growing polarisation in the Middle East and the anticipated religious war between Muslims and Jews or representatives of other religious groups. There have been open calls to attack symbolic targets, such as places of worship.

³⁰ Europol, *TE-SAT. European Union Terrorism Situation...*, p. 23.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

³² See: I.J. Sandboe, M. Obaidi, *Imagined Extremist Communities: The Paradox of the Community-Driven Lone-Actor Terrorist*, "Perspectives on Terrorism" 2023, vol. 17, no. 4, pp. 19–41. <https://doi.org/10.19165/CAQH8148>.

³³ See: A. Wejksznier, *Państwo Islamskie. Narodziny nowego kalifatu?* (Eng. Islamic State. The birth of a new caliphate?), Warszawa 2016, pp. 164–169.

³⁴ Europol, *TE-SAT. European Union Terrorism Situation...*, pp. 27–28.

Extreme right-wing terrorism

Terrorism by far-right groups³⁵ in the EU posed the least threat in 2023, far less than jihadist terrorism. During this period, there was attempted violence motivated by far-right ideology once in France and once in Luxembourg. Such motivation was mainly characterised by individual terrorists not belonging to any known terrorist organisation. A total of 26 people were arrested accused of involvement in terrorist activities motivated by far-right ideology, including 5 in the Netherlands and 4 each in France and Belgium. They were exclusively men, almost always citizens of the country in which they were arrested. Their targets were minorities of all kinds (religious or sexual). Their main weapons of choice were firearms, most of them legally acquired – which was unusual for terrorists motivated by other ideologies – as well as white weapons and IEDs. Police reports indicated that the way to obtain firearms, such as the FGC-9 semi-automatic carbine³⁶, was through the use of modern technologies such as 3D printers³⁷. The popularity of terrorism motivated by far-right ideology can also be seen in the number of people convicted – 35, which increased compared to the previous year. The radicalisation of the views of those with far-right views was influenced by neo-fascist, eco-fascist, racist, anti-Semitic or accelerationist slogans promoted both online and offline. Slogans with a misogynist or incel background were slightly less frequent. It was also characteristic to reinforce the narrative through the use of many

³⁵ The authors of the Europol report understand the term ‘right-wing terrorism’ as the use of violence to transform the contemporary political, social and economic system into an authoritarian model in which democratic values and institutions would be rejected. Right-wing ideologies referring to this model use a violent narrative focused on nationalism, racism, xenophobia or other expressions of intolerance. The basic concept of right-wing extremism is the supremacy of the nation or race. In practice, this means that some element characterising a particular group causes these individuals to consider themselves superior to others and thus have a natural right to dominate the rest of the population. Right-wing extremist ideologies also popularise ideas such as misogyny, hostility towards the LGBTQ+ community and anti-immigration attitudes that oppose the diversity of society and the equal rights of minorities. See: Europol, *TE-SAT. European Union Terrorism Situation...*, p. 34.

³⁶ A weapon designed by a German of Kurdish origin nicknamed JStark. The abbreviation FGC-9 comes from the words “Fuck Gun Control 9 millimeter”. The carbine is powered by 9x19 mm ammunition. See more: P. Juraszek, *Broń z drukarki 3D w Birmie. Zaprojektował ją Niemiec* (Eng. A weapon from a 3D printer in Burma. It was designed by a German), WP Tech, 18 XII 2021, <https://tech.wp.pl/bron-z-drukarki-3d-w-birmie-zaprojektowal-jan-niemiec,6716336908528512a> [accessed: 25 III 2025].

³⁷ Europol, *TE-SAT. European Union Terrorism Situation...*, p. 37.

conspiracy theories, especially the Jewish conspiracy thread³⁸. Participation in terrorist action was intended as a way for right-wing extremists to gain notoriety. Both private and public property was targeted, specific individuals, electoral commissions, opposition party headquarters were attacked, and refugee centres were also set on fire. The far-right terrorists raised funds for their activities by organising weapons training and by accepting contributions, including in cryptocurrencies. Many of them had a criminal past, which made it easier for them to raise funds from illegal sources such as drug and firearms trafficking³⁹.

Summary

1. According to Europol reports, the number of terrorist attacks increased from 18 to 120 incidents between 2021 and 2023.
2. The 2024 Europol report points out that the phenomenon of terrorism in the EU stems from a variety of reasons and is not only Islamist in origin. The different types of terrorist threats cover only a subset of EU Member States. The country where terrorist attacks appeared to be most diverse in terms of the motivation of the attackers was France.
3. Terrorist threats on EU territory in 2023 had a negative impact on both individual and national security in at least 7 Member States. In two of these, France and Italy, this threat was particularly high.
4. The operational and propaganda offensive accompanying the resurgence of ISIS will gradually intensify in different parts of the world. This is due to a number of determinants, including the success of the opposition in Syria, including its Islamist strands. One of the regions at greater risk from Islamist terrorism is the EU. Countries at higher risk include those that have been frequently attacked so far, as well as others, such as Poland.
5. Although this Europol report does not indicate any attempted attacks and only one case of arrest due to terrorist activity

³⁸ Ibid., pp. 38–39.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 41. On the evolution of various forms of modern terrorism, see: M. Ingelevič-Citak, Z. Przyszlak, *Jihadist, Far Right and Far Left Terrorism in Cyberspace. Same Threat and Same Countermeasures?*, “International Comparative Jurisprudence” 2020, vol. 6, no. 2, pp. 154–177. <https://doi.org/10.13165/j.icj.2020.12.005>.

- in Poland, the case of Poland is important due to the accumulation of threats from both state terrorism (inspired, for example, by Russia, Belarus or Iran) and non-state terrorism, taking different forms.
6. An analysis of the political motivation of the terrorist attack perpetrators in the EU indicates that most of them are related to the demands of extremist organisations. Separatist views predominate in this respect, e.g. within the long-standing socio-political conflicts in Corsica or the Basque Country.
 7. An interesting issue is the *modus operandi* of the perpetrators which is similar for most terrorist attacks. This includes the use of the most common tools and techniques, including firearms, knives, explosives or arson.
 8. The European Union needs a new approach to perceiving terrorism and combating it effectively. This is important because of the escalation and evolution of this threat, which includes the possibility for perpetrators to use, *inter alia*, firearms smuggled en masse from the Balkans or Ukraine, as well as modern solutions such as drones, firearms manufactured in 3D technology, artificial intelligence, etc. Also of concern are the increasingly strong links within the triad: terrorist/terrorists – criminal groups – special services of countries hostile to the EU.
 9. Effective countering of the terrorist threat must be achieved not only through in-depth cooperation (intelligence, logistics, legal, political, etc.) between all EU Member States, but also through extended cooperation with NATO and other allies in different parts of the world. The aim is to build multi-faceted resilience in external and internal dimensions. This requires effective prevention of other challenges as well, as identified e.g. in the reports by Mario Draghi⁴⁰ or Sauli Niinistö⁴¹.

⁴⁰ M. Draghi, *The future of European competitiveness*, European Commission, https://commission.europa.eu/document/download/97e481fd-2dc3-412d-be4c-f152a8232961_en?filename=The%20future%20of%20European%20competitiveness%20_%20A%20competitiveness%20strategy%20for%20Europe.pdf [accessed: 4 II 2025].

⁴¹ S. Niinistö, *Safer Together Strengthening Europe's Civilian and Military Preparedness and Readiness*, European Union, 26 XI 2024, <https://civil-protection-knowledge-network.europa.eu/media/safer-together-strengthening-europes-civilian-and-military-preparedness-and-readiness> [accessed: 8 II 2025].

10. Effective implementation of counter-terrorism plans may be threatened by the vested interests of individual EU Member States, the ongoing political crisis in some of them, the rift in transatlantic relations, the lack of financial resources or the increasingly announced economic meltdown.

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