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## NOTE

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From: Presidency  
To: Delegations  
Subject: Violent left-wing extremism and anarchism - discussion paper

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## INTRODUCTION

While jihadism remains the greatest terrorist threat in the European Union, many European countries face growing polarisation and an increasing threat from violent extremists<sup>1</sup>. Already in May 2019, the EU threat assessment in the field of counterterrorism stressed the need to address politically or ideologically motivated violent extremism and terrorism in all its forms, given the increasing polarisation of societies.

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<sup>1</sup> 8372/21 (EU threat assessment in the field of counterterrorism endorsed by COSI in May 2021).

At the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Council on 8 October 2019<sup>2</sup>, ministers agreed on a series of specific actions against violent right-wing extremism and terrorism<sup>3</sup> to address unlawful acts and expressions, in line with the existing EU legislative framework for combating and preventing EU counterterrorism and countering violent extremism which applies to terrorism and violent extremism in all its forms<sup>4</sup>. In June 2020, the Council (Foreign Affairs configuration) adopted Conclusions on EU External Action on Preventing and Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism referring to 'politically motivated terrorism', encompassing both right-wing and left-wing terrorism<sup>5</sup>.

Polarisation and the threat from extremists have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic, which extremist groups across the ideological spectrum have already incorporated into their narratives. The impact of the pandemic on terrorist operations as well as possible attempts by terrorist organisations and violent extremist groups to exploit the current crisis should be taken into account when considering the topic<sup>6</sup>.

The threat of terrorism motivated by violent left-wing and anarchist extremism is present to varying degrees in various parts of the EU. The latest EU threat assessment in the field of counterterrorism, based on Europol and EU INTCEN reporting, states that '*the left-wing and anarchist violent extremist scene [...] increased its activities in the second half of 2020, though no terrorist attacks were carried out*' and '*the threat stemming from a heterogeneous violent left-wing and anarchist extremism (VLWAE) is still considered to be low but increasing, due to the fact that more Member States were affected in 2020*'. Europol's 2021 Terrorism Situation and Trend report<sup>7</sup> issued on 22 June 2021 describes the situation in more detail.

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<sup>2</sup> 12494/19.

<sup>3</sup> 14132/19. For the most recent state of play, see 12590/20.

<sup>4</sup> Such as Directive (EU) 2017/541 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2017 on combating terrorism (OJ L 88, 31.3.2017, p. 6); Code of conduct on countering illegal hate speech online of 31 May 2016 ([https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/code\\_of\\_conduct\\_on\\_countering\\_illegal\\_hate\\_speech\\_online\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/code_of_conduct_on_countering_illegal_hate_speech_online_en.pdf)); Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA of 28 November 2008 on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law (OJ L OJ L 328 of 6.12.2008).

<sup>5</sup> 8868/20.

<sup>6</sup> 9586/21.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-2021-tesat> (see in particular pp. 92-98).

## DISCUSSION

Given the rising threat of violent left-wing and anarchist extremism and terrorism in parts of Europe, the Presidency, taking into account the findings of the April TWP-meeting under the Portuguese Presidency and the Commission's efforts on violent extremism and terrorism, believes it is timely to discuss this issue at the TWP meeting of 7 July 2021. The discussion will be informed by reports from INTCEN, Europol, the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator<sup>8</sup> and presentations by affected Member States.

The objective of the agenda item is to have a further discussion on whether it would be useful to agree specific EU action against violent left-wing and anarchist extremism and terrorism as has been done in relation to violent right-wing extremism, or whether the EU's overall policies against terrorism and violent extremism are sufficient to deal with this problem.

The group is invited to discuss the following questions:

1. Is the problem of violent left-wing and anarchist extremism and terrorism so acute or pervasive that it necessitates specific EU action?
2. Do the problems of reciprocal radicalisation involving right-wing and left-wing violent extremists and of continuing clashes between right-wing and left-wing violent extremists strengthen the case for specific EU action against violent left-wing and anarchist extremism and terrorism to tackle polarisation and to complement existing EU action addressing violent right-wing extremism and terrorism?
3. Would it be appropriate to launch a dedicated initiative to prevent and counter left-wing and anarchist violent extremism and terrorism? Or would such an initiative dilute the fight against forms of terrorism that currently project a greater threat to the Union as a whole?

The Presidency is looking forward to the discussion on 7 July.

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<sup>8</sup> 10101/21 - EU action to counter left-wing and anarchist violent extremism and terrorism: Discussion paper