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NOTE

From: EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator
To: Delegations
Subject: EU action to counter left-wing and anarchist violent extremism and terrorism: Discussion paper

Violence motivated by left-wing and anarchist extremism remains a problem in parts of the European Union. For a long time, the threat of left-wing and anarchist violent extremism was stable at a low level, but there are early indications that it has been increasing in some EU Member States during the current health crisis.

Should the EU therefore include a specific initiative to combat left-wing and anarchist violent extremism and terrorism in its policies on counter-terrorism and the prevention of radicalisation? This paper highlights some aspects of the problem in order to inform discussion in the Terrorism Working Party (TWP) on that question.

The group may determine that left-wing and anarchist violent extremism and terrorism are already adequately covered by the EU's comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy. If TWP decides that the issue warrants greater attention, a number of specific actions could be considered, some of which could be combined with ongoing work on right-wing violent extremism. This could include initiatives to combat the spread of hate speech and disinformation online and to map and address the potential threat posed by non-Jihadist Europeans fighting in Syria.

INTRODUCTION

In the 1970s and 1980s, several countries in Western Europe faced a wave of terrorist attacks perpetrated by left-wing terrorist groups, such as the Red Army Faction (RAF) in Germany, the Red Brigades in Italy and *Action directe* in France. These groups were disbanded in the late 1980s and the 1990s, following the demise of communist regimes in Europe. Yet, although the main terrorist threat now comes from Jihadist terrorists, left-wing and anarchist violent extremism and terrorism has never completely disappeared.

The European Union's CT and CVE strategy, as well as its Directive 2017/541 on combating terrorism, cover all forms of terrorism. However, since 9/11, EU counter-terrorism action and policies have mostly looked at Jihadist terrorism, the most serious threat. Furthermore, following a spate of violent attacks carried out by right-wing violent extremists, the Justice and Home Affairs Council has agreed a series of actions against right-wing violent extremism and terrorism¹ and the Foreign Affairs Council has referenced 'far-right terrorism' in the context of wider action against 'politically motivated terrorism'.²

Jihadist terrorism is pre-eminently transnational, whereas right-wing violent extremists increasingly interact across borders. This lends additional urgency to an EU-wide focus on these forms of terrorism.³ Yet left-wing and anarchist extremists, whose ideology is explicitly internationalist, have long been known to cooperate across borders as well.⁴

In deciding whether the EU currently needs to launch a specific initiative on left-wing and anarchist violent extremism and terrorism, the following points need to be considered:

- *The extent of the problem across Europe.* Is the problem of left-wing and anarchist violent extremism and terrorism so acute or pervasive that it necessitates specific action, bearing in mind that all forms of terrorism are covered by the EU counter-terrorism framework?

¹ https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/41015/st12837-en19_both-days_edited.pdf

² <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/44446/st08868-en20.pdf>. There has been debate in the run-up to the October 2019 JHA Council on the appropriate terminology. The US term 'racially and ethnically motivated violent extremism' (REMVE) would cause confusion with the type of terrorism perpetrated in Europe by organisations such as ETA or the IRA.

³ Ethno-nationalist and separatist terrorism, on the other hand, has an inherently national or regional focus, even if separatist terrorists sometimes operate beyond national borders to prepare and carry out specific attacks.

⁴ See for instance Europol TE-SAT 2017, 43; Europol TE-SAT 2020, p. 61.

- *Outlook.* Are there indications that the threat from left-wing and anarchist violent extremism would grow if the EU does not agree on specific cooperation to counter it?
- *Added value and feasibility of specific EU projects focusing on left-wing violent extremism.* Could useful EU projects be envisaged to complement existing policies focusing on all forms of violent extremism and terrorism?
- *Political messaging.* Would it be appropriate to launch a dedicated initiative to prevent and counter left-wing and anarchist violent extremism and terrorism because the Union has already adopted one on right-wing violent extremism and terrorism? Or could such an initiative dilute the fight against forms of terrorism that currently project a greater threat?

This paper does not take a stance on these points. It aims to highlight certain aspects of the problem in order to inform discussion in TWP, and it suggests possible directions for joint action. The paper covers both fully-fledged terrorism and lower-level violence motivated by left-wing and anarchist extremism. Its analysis is predominantly drawn from EU INTCEN and Europol reporting.

Nor does this paper presuppose a value judgement on left-wing political views or a rejection of activism as such. Abrasive and even shocking forms of activism as well as loud protests are part of a vibrant democracy.

The term 'left-wing and anarchist violent extremism' encompasses a wide range of political movements, and is understood here as a violent struggle to replace our democratic system of governance and capitalist economic system with either a communist or socialist system or a form of anarchist self-government. Anarchism, an anti-authoritarian ideology, is often viewed as a sub-category of left-wing violent extremism, although many anarchists view their objectives as fundamentally at odds with ideologies that propagate a strong role for a future Marxist state.⁵ While most left-wing violent extremists in the 1970s and 1980s were Marxists, they currently most often self-identify as anarchists. In some cases, their ideology is a blend of Marxism and anarchism.⁶

⁵ Cf. Europol TE-SAT 2019, p. 79; see also <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/a-profile-of-the-informal-anarchist-federation-in-italy/>, quoting the “Open Letter to the Anarchist and Anti-Authoritarian Movement” in which the establishment of the Federazione Anarchica Informale (FAI) was announced.

⁶ Some separatist terrorist groups inside and outside Europe do not just pursue secession but also claim to espouse a left-wing ideology. This paper treats these groups as a separate category, excluding them from its scope.

Left-wing and anarchist violent extremists traditionally claim to fight 'state repression', 'militarism', 'colonialism' and 'fascism'. In recent years, they have begun to focus more on animal rights and environmental causes, including certain infrastructural projects, and on government policies that curtail irregular migration. Solidarity with like-minded prisoners is a central element in much of the propaganda disseminated by violent anarchist groups in Europe. The EU Directive on Combating Terrorism (2017/541) offers an EU-wide definition of terrorist offences. Nevertheless, national legislation remains widely divergent, with some Member States using CT legislation to prosecute offences that would not be regarded as terrorism in others.⁷

THE EXTENT OF THE PROBLEM IN EUROPE

The EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator's discussion paper on *right-wing* violent extremism and terrorism⁸ and the JHA Council's statement on the same subject⁹ stress the challenges in collecting statistics on the extent of the problem. A similar challenge exists with regard to left-wing violent extremism. However, Europol's TE-SAT reports and EU INTCEN suggest that the number of left-wing terrorist attacks is higher than the number of violent incidents motivated by Jihadism or right-wing extremism and lower than the number of ethno-nationalist and separatist attacks (if the United Kingdom is included in the figures). At the same time, according to these sources, left-wing and anarchist violent extremism and terrorism is on average far less lethal than either Jihadism or right-wing violent extremism and terrorism.¹⁰ Information on concluded court proceedings for terrorist offences transmitted to Eurojust based on Council Decision 2005/671/JHA shows that convictions and acquittals for left-wing and anarchist terrorism-related offences (a total of 48) were the second most prevalent type (after Jihadist terrorism) in the EU in 2020 (these convictions and acquittals may concern acts committed in previous years). Such proceedings were concluded in Austria, Germany, Greece and Italy.

⁷ For instance, the German penal code implies that terrorism can only be committed by a structured organisation, excluding acts perpetrated by lone actors without any link to a group (see https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/englisch_stgb/englisch_stgb.html). For an overview of the ways in which Member States have transposed the Directive into national legislation, see 11424/20 (30 September 2020). A further report on implementation of the Directive is forthcoming.

⁸ 11756/19+ADD1+COR 1.

⁹ 12837/19: outcome of the JHA-Council of 7-8 October 2019. See also Council Conclusions on Internal Security and European Police Partnership (13083/1/20 REV 1) and 12590/20: Violent right-wing extremism: state of play.

¹⁰ For further details see Annex.

Terrorist incidents motivated by left-wing and anarchist extremism are concentrated in Italy, Greece and (to a lesser extent) Spain.¹¹ In addition, in December 2020 the French authorities broke up a left-wing extremist group that was preparing a violent attack.¹² A range of left-wing and anarchist extremists groups are responsible for terrorist incidents.

In EU INTCEN's view, the two main terrorist groups in the EU in the category of left-wing and anarchist extremism are the *Federazione Anarchica Informale / Fronte Rivoluzionario Internazionale* (FAI/FRI, Informal Anarchist Federation / International Revolutionary Front) in Italy and the *Συνωμοσία των Πυρήνων της Φωτιάς* (Conspiracy of the Cells of Fire [CCF]) in Greece. According to INTCEN, the CCF and FAI continue to pose a higher threat than other left-wing and anarchist violent extremist groups and have the intent and capability to carry out low-level attacks. Moreover, according to a Member State, their actions tend to influence other activists in different countries who subsequently reproduce attacks.

Furthermore, EU territory is used by the Marxist-Leninist *Devrimci Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi* (DHKP-C, Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front) as a logistical base to support operations in Turkey. The risk of DHKP-C attacks in the EU itself is at a low level.¹³

Both the November 2020 and April 2021 EU threat assessment and policy recommendations in the field of counter-terrorism, based on Europol and EU INTCEN reporting, state: "The threat stemming from violent left-wing and anarchist extremism (VLWAE) is still considered low but increasing, due to the fact that more Member States have been affected in 2020. The protests against government regulations to contain the COVID-19 pandemic attracted extremists from various ideological backgrounds."¹⁴ Thus, the threat of violent left-wing and anarchist extremism is not limited to a number of southern Member States, even if terrorist attacks have not recently taken place elsewhere in the EU. The latest threat assessment also links the evolution of violent left-wing and anarchist extremism (as well as violent right-wing extremism) to the pandemic and its socio-economic consequences.¹⁵

¹¹ Europol TE-SAT 2020, p. 60.

¹² https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/terrorisme-djihadistes/lutte-contre-le-terrorisme-ce-que-l-on-sait-de-l-arrestation-d-un-groupe-d-ultra-gauche_4216939.html

¹³ Europol, TE-SAT 2020, p. 60.

¹⁴ 12866/20 (16 November 2020), 7171/2/21 REV 2 (21 April 2021).

¹⁵ 7171/2/21 REV 2 (21 April 2021).

PERPETRATORS, ATTACK METHODOLOGIES AND TARGETS

Targets of left-wing and anarchist terrorists are (perceived) political opponents (e.g. the offices of right-wing political groups), journalists, representatives of the state (notably the police and the judiciary), banks and major businesses.¹⁶ They often use simple improvised explosive devices (notably including letter and parcel bombs), and arson or firebombing (Molotov cocktails and gas cylinders) to carry out their attacks.¹⁷ Explosive materials are mostly acquired on the open market.

Violent anarchists frequently commit terrorist attacks to mark their support for “imprisoned comrades”, either in their own country or abroad. Incendiary devices placed at ATMs in Spain in 2019 were claimed to be in solidarity with anarchist prisoners.¹⁸ The same applies to a recent spate of attacks claimed by anarchist groups in Greece.¹⁹

Activities of left-wing and anarchist terrorists are currently mostly financed by means such as donations and funds raised on the internet and at concerts and gatherings. In the past they sometimes engaged in serious crime (e.g. robberies of banks and supermarkets).²⁰

Let-wing and anarchist extremists frequently identify with named groups or organisations that define themselves as loose networks of autonomous cells.²¹ In most cases they claim responsibility for their attacks by publishing declarations online.²²

¹⁶ See for instance Europol TE-SAT 2019, 56 and https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/Jones_EuropeTerrorism_WEB%20FINAL.pdf?QujAgipQZ97O7HifLbNHKTSWAWHUBJY8, p. 10.

¹⁷ Europol TE-SAT 2019, p. 14, pp. 56-58; Europol TE-SAT 2017, p. 15, p. 42.

¹⁸ Europol TE-SAT 2020, p. 60.

¹⁹ <https://www.skai.gr/news/greece/mparaz-epitheseon-stin-attiki-ti-nyxta-pano-apo-300-epitheseis-logo-koufontina>

²⁰ Europol TE-SAT 2018, p. 12.

²¹ <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/GTI-2019web.pdf>, 49.

Greek groups are notorious for discarding their name after a series of attacks and then reemerging under another name. Left-wing extremist terrorist groups often claim attacks on behalf of certain 'brigades', often named after a killed or imprisoned comrade.

²² Europol TE-SAT 2020, p. 58.

Short of *terrorism*, the threat of non-terrorist *violence* motivated by left-wing and anarchist extremism appears to be an enduring problem in parts of the EU, not limited to some Mediterranean Member States.²³ A method commonly employed by left-wing and anarchist violent extremists is incendiary action. They particularly target means of communication and cars, either randomly chosen or belonging to a governmental body or business that they despise. In parts of Europe, they also seek confrontations with right-wing extremist protesters, thus causing or aggravating violations of public order. In Germany, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV) also observes a growing preparedness to attack politicians and private businesses.²⁴

Occasions used as a pretext to commit serious violations of public order and acts of violence are inter-governmental summits (such as the G20 in Hamburg in 2017)²⁵ and protests against major infrastructure projects.²⁶ Peaceful protests are sometimes exploited by left-wing violent extremists to create chaos and engage in violent confrontations with the authorities.²⁷ Now and again, left-wing activists sometimes use the tactic of 'black blocs', (ad hoc gatherings of violent demonstrators wearing black clothing, as well as masks and helmets) to attack businesses and the police. In France, left-wing and anarchist violent extremists have latched onto the anti-government movement of the 'yellow vests' and contributed to a descent into violence in certain protests.²⁸

²³ In its TE-SAT 2019, p. 55, Europol reported that the number of anarchist extremists appeared to have remained stable. In her introduction to the TE-SAT 2020, Europol Director Catherine De Bolle writes: "In left-wing and anarchist extremist circles the readiness to use violence [...] seems to be growing."

²⁴ <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/embed/vsbericht-2019-kurzzusammenfassung.pdf>, pp. 21-22 [last accessed on 16 February 2021]; see also

https://www.verfassungsschutzbw.de/site/lfv/get/documents/IV.Dachmandant/Datenquelle/PDF/2020_Aktuell/Verfassungsschutzbericht_BW_2019.pdf, pp. 239-247.

²⁵ See for instance <https://www.tagesschau.de/investigativ/ndr/g20-randale-berliner-linksextremisten-101.html> [last accessed on 16 February 2021].

²⁶ Such as the airport at Notre-Dame-des-Landes in France, the construction of the Milan-Lyon train connection in Italy and the mining project at the Hambach Forest in Germany.

²⁷ See for instance Europol TE-SAT 2017, p. 8, p. 43.

²⁸ For instance, Europol reports that Belgian anarchists and left-wing extremists posed a significant threat to public order, notably during demonstrations of the 'Yellow Vests' (TE-SAT 2020, 61). See also https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2019/07/16/a-l-extreme-gauche-les-libertaires-jouent-l-union_5489868_823448.html

Left-wing violent extremists' preparedness to use violence against law enforcement personnel during street protest appears to have grown in some Member States. The German BfV observes increasing attempts among left-wing violent extremists to radicalise and instrumentalise non-violent left-wing movements, such as groups militating against increases in rent and global warming.²⁹

INTERNET

Left-wing and anarchist violent extremists and terrorists use the internet to spread propaganda, communicate and recruit supporters³⁰ and to post communiqués and claim responsibility for actions and attacks.³¹ In EU INTCEN's view, they also use the internet to raise funds and increasingly engage in 'outing' or 'doxing' campaigns, publishing the identities, addresses and other personal details of (perceived) right-wing extremists and state representatives.

Left-wing and anarchist violent extremists limit their activities on the internet largely to dedicated websites set up by themselves. Some of these sites post contributions from sympathisers in various countries.³² Overall, their use of the internet is somewhat old-fashioned compared to Jihadists, who have set up their own media outfits to disseminate slick propaganda on commercial platforms, and compared to right-wing violent extremists, who use coded language and in-group memes and have managed to appropriate entire, previously politically neutral, web fora.

²⁹ <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/embed/vsbericht-2019-kurzzusammenfassung.pdf>, 23 [last accessed on 16 February 2021].

³⁰ See for instance Europol TE-SAT 2020, p. 23, p. 62.

³¹ For an example concerning the terrorist group Conspiracy of the Cells of Fire, see <https://www.indymedia.org.uk/en/2009/11/441401.html>

³² For instance: Independent Media Centre (indymedia) is a cluster of left-wing and anarchist extremist websites which promote militant action in a large number of EU Member States as well as countries across the world, each managed by a collective of activists. Over the last ten years, the number of indymedia sites has declined, but it remains the most important internet outlet for left-wing and anarchist extremists, including (in some cases) violent ones. Most indymedia sites operate within the limits of the law, but on a small number of occasions indymedia servers have been seized by authorities in democratic countries and indymedia sites shut down due to incitement to crimes. The latest of these was the indymedia site linksunten.indymedia, shut down by the German authorities following the rioting during the G20 summit in Hamburg in 2017, which the site had fomented. See <https://web.archive.org/web/20190806132523/https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/25/world/europe/germany-bans-far-left-antifa-website.html>. On 20 January 2020, the Bundesverwaltungsgericht (federal administrative court) upheld the ban on the site. See <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/de/aktuelles/schlaglicht/schlaglicht-2020-01-bundesverwaltungsgericht-bestaetigt-verbot-der-linksextremistischen-internetplattform-linksunten.indymedia>

When using the internet for communication purposes, left-wing and anarchist violent extremists often encourage security awareness among their supporters,³³ while some refrain from using online communication altogether to avoid scrutiny by the authorities.³⁴

CONSPIRACY THEORIES, DISINFORMATION AND TECHNOPHOBIA

Terrorists and violent extremists of all stripes spread disinformation to justify violence and attract supporters. Jihadist ideology, for example, has grown out of the conspiracy theory of a Western onslaught on Islam. A well-known conspiracy theory often associated with right-wing extremism is QAnon, an elaborate patchwork of sensationalist stories linking global elites and the 'deep state' to the sexual exploitation of children, which has given rise to several violent attacks in the US and is now gaining a foothold in Europe.³⁵ Left-wing extremist conspiracy theories are frequently centred on the idea of a nefarious role played by economic and political elites as well as the police and the military, including the idea that the pharmaceutical industry spreads disease to increase profits, that bankers deliberately planned the financial crisis of 2008, or that large oil companies pay politicians to wage war in the Middle East.³⁶ Left-wing and anarchist violent extremists sometimes allege that prison inmates have been murdered by the authorities. Some left-wing and anarchist violent extremists spread disinformation of an anti-Semitic nature, implying collective responsibility of European Jews for alleged human rights violations perpetrated by Israel.

Right-wing and left-wing violent extremist disinformation online has proliferated since the start of the health crisis.³⁷ Left-wing and anarchist violent extremists are highly critical of corona apps promoted by governments, claiming that their real purpose is to control the population rather than to halt the spread of the virus.

³³ See for instance the tips on <https://plagueandfire.noblogs.org/how-to-contribute/> [accessed on 16 February 2021].

³⁴ Europol TE-SAT 2020, p. 24.

³⁵ https://www.vice.com/en_us/article/pkym3k/qanon-conspiracy-has-gone-global, <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-qanon-conspiracy-theory-a-security-threat-in-the-making/>, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/04/opinion/qanon-conspiracy-theory-arg.html?action=click&module=Opinion&pgtype=Homepage>, https://www.lemonde.fr/pixels/article/2020/10/14/en-france-la-mouvance-conspirationniste-qanon-gagne-des-adeptes_6055916_4408996.html

³⁶ Examples derived from this paper: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/193590867.pdf>. See also <http://eprints.lse.ac.uk/61732/1/blogs.lse.ac.uk-Voters%20on%20the%20extreme%20left%20and%20right%20are%20far%20more%20likely%20to%20believe%20in%20conspiracy%20theories.pdf>

³⁷ See for instance our paper "Terrorism in times of corona - the development of the terrorist threat as a result of the Covid-19 crisis", EU Council 7838/1/20 REV 1 (14 May 2020).

Individuals of diverging ideological persuasions, motivated mostly by conspiracy theories or inspired by previous incidents of arson and the related media coverage, including anarchist extremists, have vandalised and burned telecommunications infrastructure and other technological systems in several European countries as part of their struggle against the authorities.

Many anarchists are highly sceptical of new technology, virulently opposing any form of technical innovation. Some anarchist violent extremists transgress the boundaries of democratic debate by spreading pure disinformation and promoting violent action to subvert projects.

The EU has agreed a set of actions to counter disinformation, including an Action Plan against Disinformation,³⁸ a Code of Practice for internet platforms³⁹ and steps to enhance strategic communication. The EEAS Stratcom East Task Force has detected and exposed more than 12 000 disinformation cases from pro-Kremlin sources on the [EUvsDisinfo website](#). A Rapid Alert System was established in 2019 to connect disinformation experts from EU institutions and Member States, and to facilitate the sharing of analysis and best practice between governments.⁴⁰ To address disinformation and reinforce resilience in the context of the coronavirus crisis, the EEAS and the Commission issued a joint communication in June 2020.⁴¹

TRANSNATIONAL CONTACTS AND FOREIGN FIGHTERS

Violent left-wing and anarchist extremists espouse a transnational ideology and frequently express solidarity with allies in other countries. For instance, the FAI, based in Italy, is known to have contacts with similar groups in Greece and has claimed attacks outside Italy.⁴²

Europol assesses that there are links between French anarchist activists and the FAI and CCF in Italy and Greece, respectively, and reports that violent left-wing extremist groups in Denmark, Sweden and Norway cooperate with like-minded groups elsewhere in Europe.⁴³

The International Revolutionary Front (FRI), linked to the FAI in Italy, includes sympathisers in Chile, Spain and Greece.⁴⁴ Expressions of solidarity with like-minded prisoners abroad are a staple of violent anarchist propaganda.

³⁸ https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/action_plan_against_disinformation.pdf

³⁹ <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/news/code-practice-disinformation>

⁴⁰ https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/ras_factsheet_march_2019_0.pdf

⁴¹ <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX:52020JC0008>

⁴² <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/a-profile-of-the-informal-anarchist-federation-in-italy/>

⁴³ Europol TE-SAT 2020, p.61.

Solidarity with the left-leaning militias in northern Syria is of great importance to many left-wing violent extremists in Europe. In line with their views, the self-proclaimed autonomous region set up by the Kurds is avowedly secular, feminist and based on the principle of self-administration. Ties between European left-wing extremists and Kurdish organisations have recently been growing stronger. Non-Kurdish left-wing and anarchist extremists have joined Kurdish activists during protests.⁴⁵

Some (but not all) Western volunteers who have joined the YPG, a Kurdish group fighting Da'esh in Syria, are driven by left-wing extremist ideological convictions.⁴⁶

Since the EU does not consider the YPG a terrorist organisation, volunteers joining this group as armed fighters are not viewed as foreign terrorist fighters and therefore not prosecuted in most EU countries.⁴⁷ The fact that many of them deny any participation in actual combat further complicates the possibility of prosecuting them.

Just like Europeans who have joined Jihadist groups, left-wing and anarchist violent extremist fighters in Syria acquire or strengthen combat skills, which could in principle be used in terrorist activities in Europe.⁴⁸ The leader of the left-wing extremist group broken up in France in December 2020 had fought on the Kurdish side in the conflict in Syria.⁴⁹

⁴⁴ Europol TE-SAT 2020, p. 59.

⁴⁵ Europol TE-SAT 2019, p. 54.

⁴⁶ Europol TE-SAT 2019, p. 58. Precise figures are unknown. See also: New York Times, *U.K. Arrests Man Who Sent £150 to Son Fighting With Kurds in Syria* (27 December 2019), <https://www.france24.com/fr/20180220-syrie-turquie-kurdes-afrin-occidentaux-ultra-gauche-france-ypg-notre-dame-landes>, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/16/us/american-civilian-volunteers-syria-.html>, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/europe/life-after-fighting-isis-the-western-volunteers-who-came-home-1.958934>, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-syria-soldiers-kurds-ypg-turkey-britain-a8793081.html>, <https://www.ypgrojava.org/International-volunteers-join-mass-mobilization-to-defend-Afrin>

⁴⁷ <https://www.france24.com/fr/20180221-syrie-afrin-kurdes-litigieuse-question-retour-combattants-francais-partie2>

⁴⁸ See for instance: <http://eleftherostypos.gr/ellada/102835-apokalypsi-e-t-exagoyme-anarxikoys-mexri-kai-sto-koyrdistan/>, <https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/the-threat-from-western-volunteers-in-kurdish-groups>

⁴⁹ https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/terrorisme-djihadistes/lutte-contre-le-terrorisme-ce-que-l-on-sait-de-l-arrestation-d-un-groupe-d-ultra-gauche_4216939.html

POSSIBLE WAY FORWARD

If TWP concludes that dedicated EU action is needed to address the problem of left-wing and anarchist violent extremism and terrorism, then it could consider each of the ideas listed below. These are meant as a series of suggestions whose merits are to be assessed separately.

Mapping the problem

1. The Commission could be invited to cooperate with academic researchers and to fund research projects on violent left-wing extremism and anarchism. Such projects could include studies on the background of present-day left-wing and anarchist violent extremists and the factors underlying their radicalisation, comparing for example factors leading to left-wing and right-wing violent radicalisation, as well as the phenomenon of 'reciprocal radicalisation'; research into the ways in which conspiracy theories and technophobia fuel various forms of violent action and terrorism, including those linked to anarchism and left-wing extremism; and research into the risks associated with the non-Jihadist foreign fighter phenomenon, focusing on Europeans who have joined Kurdish militias in Syria as well as Europeans who have joined militias fighting in Ukraine.
2. Following the conclusions of the October 2019 JHA Council, the EU has taken steps to ensure better collection of statistics on right-wing extremist violence and terrorism. The Union could consider expanding this effort to include violent acts motivated by left-wing and anarchist violent extremism, or, as appropriate, supplementing it with dedicated projects on left-wing and anarchist violent extremism and terrorism. Europol, Eurojust and the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) could be asked to contribute to such projects. Specifically, the Council could request the FRA to report on hate crimes motivated by left-wing and anarchist violent extremism (e.g. violence against Jewish citizens) in addition to those arising from other motivations.
3. The ongoing work to map national legal and policy frameworks on right-wing violent extremism and terrorism could be complemented with a similar exercise regarding left-wing and anarchist violent extremism and terrorism.

In the same vein, ongoing work on addressing the challenges of investigating and prosecuting right-wing violent extremists and terrorists could also be expanded or supplemented with work on left-wing and anarchist violent extremists and terrorists, with the support of Eurojust.⁵⁰

4. The Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) could be invited to step up activities on left-wing and anarchist violent extremism, supplementing work on right-wing violent extremist radicalisation.
5. EU INTCEN could be asked to draft a report on Europeans who have joined armed groups in northern Syria which fight Da'esh. They could shed light on numbers, motivations for their support for these groups, their activities in Syria, and the possible security threat some of them may pose upon their return to Europe.

Sharing of good practices and operational cooperation

6. The Commission could support sharing of good practices between Member States, for instance with regard to prevention of left-wing and anarchist violent radicalisation, containment of violence in the context of demonstrations, and protection of infrastructure against acts of violence and sabotage, including police stations, offices of political parties and infrastructural projects. Member States could develop and (if possible) share experiences on approaches to preventing and addressing left-wing violent extremism and terrorism, including policies on left-wing extremist prison inmates as well as programmes against violent radicalisation and exit programmes.⁵¹
7. EU JHA agencies could include left-wing and anarchist violent extremism and terrorism in their work programmes. Europol and EU INTCEN could each be invited to intensify their exchange with Member States on attack strategies and methodologies used by left-wing and anarchist violent extremists, and to continue sharing assessments on the threat they pose.

⁵⁰ As was done, for example, at the annual CT meeting organised by Eurojust in 2019, in which judicial practitioners discussed challenges linked to left-wing terrorism, including links with organised crime.

⁵¹ Germany has already begun working on the prevention of left-wing violent extremism. See <https://www.bmfsfj.de/bmfsfj/aktuelles/presse/pressemitteilungen/bundesfamilienministerium-startet-modellprojekte-zur-praevention-von-linksextremismus-und-islamischem-extremismus/102634?view=DEFAULT>

Member States could be encouraged to (continue to) use the assistance of Europol and its European Counter-Terrorism Centre (ECTC) to investigate cases of left-wing and anarchist violent extremism and terrorism.

8. In addition, Eurojust could assist Member States in the prosecution of acts of left-wing and anarchist violent extremism and terrorism.

Internet

9. In its threat assessment in the field of counter-terrorism in May 2020, TWP underlines that the capabilities of the EU Internet Referral Unit (IRU) to support Member States' actions to prevent the dissemination of all types of terrorist content should be further developed. It also states that, where appropriate, the IRU could consider focusing on left-wing violent extremism in the future.⁵² The IRU is currently preparing work on right-wing violent extremism in addition to Jihadism, which requires training, hiring of specialised staff and full implementation of automated tools to deal with a high volume of referrals. TWP could ask the IRU to start preparations for future work on left-wing and anarchist violent extremist content as well.
10. In its work on fighting hate speech online, the Commission could pay particular attention not just to hate speech directed against members of minority groups but also to hate speech directed against politicians, civil servants and police personnel.
11. The EU could discuss the practice of 'doxing' with major digital companies in the framework of the EU Internet Forum. Companies could be encouraged to ban 'doxing' in their terms and conditions, and to remove instances of 'doxing' as quickly as possible.

⁵² EU Council 6984/3/20 REV 3, p. 7.

FIGURES ON LEFT-WING AND ANARCHIST VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM IN EUROPE

In its TE-SAT 2021 report, Europol lists 25 terrorist incidents motivated by left-wing extremism in 2020, compared to 14 terrorist incidents motivated by ethno-nationalism and separatism, 14 by Jihadism and 4 by right-wing violent extremism.⁵³ None of the 25 incidents classified as left-wing terrorism caused any injuries, while attacks motivated by Jihadism killed 12 people and injured more than 47 people and terrorist attack in Hanau (Germany) classified as right-wing terrorism killed nine people⁵⁴. Left-wing terrorism remained limited to Italy (24 incidents) and France (one incident).⁵⁵

In the same year, arrests on suspicion of left-wing and anarchist terrorism occurred in five Member States: Italy (24), Greece (14), France (11), Spain (2) and Portugal (1).^{56,57}

Reporting by Europol, as well as EU INTCEN, is crucially important for a qualitative understanding of the problem, and Europol's reports give us useful insights in trends. However, in gauging the number of attacks, the TE-SAT reports are of somewhat limited value.

⁵³ Europol TE-SAT 2021, p.14 <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-2021-tesat>

⁵⁴ Europol TE-SAT 2021, p. 92-93.

⁵⁵ Europol TE-SAT 2021, p. 60, 92-93.

⁵⁶ Europol TE-SAT 2021, p. 60, 99.

⁵⁷ In its TE-SAT 2020 report, Europol lists 26 terrorist incidents motivated by left-wing extremism in 2019 in the EU (then still including the UK), compared to 57 terrorist incidents (all but two in Northern Ireland) motivated by ethno-nationalism and separatism, 21 by Jihadism and 6 by right-wing violent extremism. None of the 26 incidents classified as left-wing terrorism caused any injuries, while attacks motivated by Jihadism killed 10 and injured 26 people. The six completed and foiled attacks with a right-wing violent extremist background caused no deaths and led to the injury of one individual, but Europol did not include the murder of German local politician Walter Lübcke on 2 June 2019 and the shooting in the German city of Halle on 9 October 2019, which killed two people and injured several others, as these had not officially been classified as terrorism by the German authorities. Europol TE-SAT 2019 lists 19 left-wing terrorist incidents, as compared to 83 ethno-nationalist and separatist incidents, 24 Jihadist incidents, one right-wing terrorist incident, one non-specified terrorist incident, and one single-issue terrorist incident.

When drafting its TE-SAT reports, Europol collects data on the number of terrorist attacks and submits these to Member States for verification. Europol does not, therefore, follow standardised criteria, confounding quantitative analysis. Moreover, TE-SAT does not provide statistics on politically motivated acts of violence that do not meet the criteria for terrorism, as there is no agreed EU-wide definition of such acts.

Fortunately, publicly available datasets can also contribute to our understanding of the extent of the problem. Although these can only be compiled on the basis of open sources, which could entail a selection bias, their definitions are applied internationally and therefore allow a comparison of the threat level across the EU. One of these datasets is the Global Terrorism Index, published by the Institute for Economics and Peace,⁵⁸ largely based on the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) Dataset of the University of Maryland.

The 2019 edition of the Global Terrorism Index attests a surge in 'far-right political terrorism' in the West over the last five years, although other forms of terrorism remain far more common.⁵⁹ Over time, the presence of (mostly low-level) violence motivated by left-wing and anarchist violent extremism appears to be more persistent than that of right-wing extremism, which tends to come in spikes including mass-casualty attacks.⁶⁰ At the same time, terrorism motivated by right-wing violent extremism tends to be more lethal on average than terrorism motivated by left-wing and anarchist violent extremism, with Jihadist terrorism being more lethal, in turn, than terrorism motivated by right-wing violent extremism.⁶¹ Mass-casualty attacks with more than ten casualties perpetrated by left-wing and anarchist violent extremists have not occurred in the West over the last 50 years.⁶²

⁵⁸ The Institute for Economics and Peace is an NGO founded by the Australian ICT entrepreneur and millionaire Steve Killelea.

⁵⁹ <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/GTI-2019web.pdf>, pp.3-5, p.46.

⁶⁰ In the last 50 years, right-wing violent extremists were responsible for twelve attacks which caused more than 10 deaths, whereas left-wing violent extremists never perpetrated any attacks that caused the deaths of more than 8 people. See <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/GTI-2019web.pdf>, pp.46-47.

⁶¹ <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/GTI-2019web.pdf>, p.48, p.51. For a similar conclusion (applied to the EU rather than the West), see Europol TE-SAT 2018, p.4.

⁶² <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/GTI-2019web.pdf>, p. 48.

The Transnational Threats Project of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), an American think tank, has compiled its own database of 2 241 terrorist incidents in Europe between 2009 and 2020, based on a modified version of Jane's Terrorism and Insurgency Events data set.

According to CSIS's analysis, in the period 2009 to 2020, the majority of all incidents in Europe were the result of ethno-nationalist and separatist terrorism, overwhelmingly in Northern Ireland. CSIS observes a clear rise in the number of right-wing violent extremist attacks in the second half of the previous decade, as well as smaller increases in Jihadist and left-wing violent extremist activity. Left-wing violent extremist incidents accounted for a larger proportion than Jihadist incidents, yet far smaller than ethno-nationalist and separatist incidents. Only about 5% of incidents in Europe in the period from 2009 to 2020 resulted from Jihadism.

In contrast, more than two-thirds of deaths resulting from terrorist attacks in Europe were caused by Jihadists, more than 20% by right-wing violent extremists (largely as a result of Anders Breivik's mass-casualty attack in Norway in 2011), almost 7% by ethno-nationalists and separatists, and 2% by left-wing violent extremists.⁶³

In Germany, the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV) estimates the number of 'violence-oriented' left-wing extremists at 9 200 persons. According to the BfV, the number of crimes motivated by left-wing extremism rose by 40% in 2019.⁶⁴

However, the prevalence of non-lethal and non-terrorist violence carried out by left-wing and anarchist violent extremists is uneven across various parts of Europe. According to the Belgian Coordination Unit for Threat Analysis (CUTA), it is currently unlikely that left-wing violent extremists wish to engage in violence against Belgian citizens, although this could change in the medium term.⁶⁵

⁶³ https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/Jones_EuropeTerrorism_WEB%20FINAL.pdf?QujAgipQZ97O7HifLbNHKTSWAWHUBJY8, p. 2, pp. 20-22.

⁶⁴ <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/embed/vsbericht-2019-kurzzusammenfassung.pdf>, pp. 21-22.

⁶⁵ OCAD, "De internationale terroristische dreiging tegen België - een overzicht" (30 March 2020), pp. 12-13.

In the Netherlands, left-wing extremists did not commit any acts of violence in 2019, limiting themselves to acts of civil disobedience.⁶⁶In Sweden, left-wing violent extremists engage in violent crimes and violent confrontations with right-wing extremists and the police, but they do not pose an identified terrorist threat.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ <https://www.aivd.nl/onderwerpen/jaarverslagen/jaarverslag-2019/extremisme>

⁶⁷ <https://www.sakerhetspolisen.se/download/18.49c9bb7116a06cb4125163/1557738683294/NCT-one-year-assessment-2019.pdf>