1445th meeting, 5 October 2022
10 Legal questions

10.2 Council of Europe Committee on Counter-Terrorism (CDCT)
b. Report on Emerging Terrorist Threats in Europe

Item to be considered by the GR-J at its meeting on 28 September 2022

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[1] This document has been classified restricted until examination by the Committee of Ministers.

Contents

1. Executive Summary

The landscape of terror threats in Europe has shifted in the last few years, prompted by the territorial decline of ISIL(Daesh) in Iraq and Syria, and the spread of Al Qaeda and ISIL-linked groups throughout the Middle East and sub-Saharan Africa and the reshaping of affiliated groups. The number of successful deadly attacks by ISIL(Daesh) in Europe has declined consistently since 2017. The threat of attacks inspired by the group's ideology, however, has not disappeared. The beheading of a school teacher outside a school on the outskirts of Paris in October 2020, followed days later by an attack on a church in the southern French city of Nice, and a series of shootings in Vienna in November 2020 has served as a reminder of the continued threat of inspired attacks carried out by lone actors.

The Taliban takeover in Afghanistan mid-August 2021, followed by a deadly attack of ISIL K at Kabul airport late August, risks changing this paradigm, although it is believed to be too soon to reliably assess the implications (Europol, 2021). Concerns have nonetheless been raised in various quarters, and several public calls have been made to ensure that Afghan territory is not used to threaten or attack any country, to shelter or train terrorists, or to plan or to finance terrorist acts (UN SC, 2021, EC, 2021).

Simultaneously, Europe has seen a rise in violent attacks resulting in casualties fuelled by violent far-right ideologies, including white supremacy. Following the lone-actor attack on a mosque in Christchurch, New Zealand, in March 2019 by an Australian white supremacist, Europe experienced a series of violent attacks inspired by violent far-right ideologies, from the Baerum mosque attack in Norway in August 2019 and the shooting in a synagogue in Halle, Germany in October 2019 to the murder of a local politician Dr Walter Lübcke in Wolfhagen in June 2019 and the attack on two shisha bars in the German town of Hanau in February 2020. These attacks have highlighted the internationalisation of violent far-right terror threats through transnational connections, ideological inspiration and social-media facilitated international online extremist ecosystems.

The year 2020 has introduced new dynamics in relation to terror threats and terrorist activity. The Covid-19 pandemic has created unexpected disruption worldwide, including prolonged nationwide and localised lockdowns. It has affected terrorists' ability to carry out conventional attacks while providing new opportunities for online recruitment and incitement. Violent far-right groups have ramped up propaganda and recruitment efforts online across the ideological spectrum, mobilising crisis narratives and offering violent solutions.

Covid-19 may have disrupted the momentum behind established threats, but has also acted as an accelerator of emerging challenges. The use of technology by terrorists, a long-standing area of concern, has become more central during the pandemic. Violent extremists and terrorists, who have been described as 'early adopters' of new technologies, have been adept at exploiting the opportunities presented by social media and online platforms to recruit members, coordinate and fund their activities and carry out attacks. Following Christchurch, which became the first live-streamed terror incident, attackers have sought to broadcast their attacks live, highlighting the intersection between online and offline tactics in the execution of attacks.

With increasing removal of violating content from mainstream social media platforms, fringe alternative technology ('alt-tech') platforms and encrypted messaging applications channels (e.g. Telegram, Signal, WhatsApp) have become a haven for violent extremists and terrorists, and these have led to the emergence of loose transnational networks which can fuel both wider terrorist activity and individual acts of terror. Largely unregulated, these platforms face crackdowns from authorities after large terror attacks, but re-emerge in new guises. Violent extremist networks have increasingly moved to alternative platforms, with the long-term implications for counter-terrorism efforts as yet remaining unclear.

Emergent violent extremist ideologies, which intersect with violent far-right extremism conducive to terrorism, have fuelled lethal attacks, including conspiracy theories and extreme misogyny. The pandemic in particular has brought attention to the nexus between conspiracy theories and violent extremism conducive to terrorism, and the potential of fringe conspiratorial belief to fuel attacks. Looking ahead, these challenges will likely continue to grow in importance, as we see the long-term impact of Covid-19 on economic uncertainty, societal polarisation and geopolitical uncertainty, providing rich opportunities for violent extremists to pose supremacist solutions, with profound implications for public safety and social cohesion.

Key findings

- The pattern of post-organisational terrorism in Europe has accelerated. While terrorist groups remain active, ISIL(Daesh) and Al-Qaeda have shifted their operational capabilities to areas of conflict outside of the European continent, striking European interests and infrastructure such as in some regions of Africa and Asia. While the number of successful attacks directed by ISIL(Daesh) has fallen in Europe since 2017, the threat of ISIL(Daesh) inspired attacks is still considered high across many Council of Europe members.

- Far-right terrorism is a growing threat across a number of member States, and is considered the fastest growing threat in many European countries. A number of European countries have been struck by lethal attacks inspired by violent far-right ideology in recent years, a pattern which has accelerated since 2019.

- The threat of far-right terrorism has become increasingly transnational. Violent far-right extremist networks have established global connections in both online and offline contexts, highlighting the need for international responses to the threat, and making solely nationally-focused responses insufficient in addressing the problem, learning lessons from initiatives such as the Global Coalition against ISIL(Daesh). The recruitment, coordination and attacks of violent far-right extremists and terrorists have shown high levels of international co-operation.

- The number of lethal far-left attacks has declined significantly in Europe. The threat of far-left and ethnonationalist terrorism remains relevant to a number of jurisdictions, but is to a large extent domestic rather than transnational in nature.

- Terrorists are leveraging new technologies in their recruitment, planning, financing and execution of attacks, from social media and communication platforms to fintech and technologically sophisticated weapons (e.g. drones). Mainstream technology companies' crackdown on terrorist activities on their platforms has led to a migration of violent extremist and terrorist networks to a variety of less regulated and constantly evolving social media platforms, encrypted messaging applications and forums, making terrorists potentially more difficult to track.

- The growing proportion of lone actor attacks in Europe resulted in attacks that are frequently 'low cost', take aim at soft targets and use easily procurable weapons. Tactics deployed in terror attacks in Europe in recent years have been varied but are mostly characterised by low sophistication and the use of easily procurable weapons such as melee weapons, vehicles and home-made explosives. Online technologies and social media are increasingly leveraged in the execution of attacks themselves, with perpetrators livestreaming their attacks and incorporating elements of gaming in their activities.

- New and emerging crises are actively exploited by terrorists across the ideological spectrum. Violent extremist far-right groups and networks have sought to use the pandemic to recruit and encourage attacks in Europe, while ISIL(Daesh) and Al Qaeda also initially used it to further their ideological agenda.

- Emergent violent extremist ideologies have the potential to drive terrorist activity. Terrorism driven by extreme misogyny, conspiracy theories and violent anti-institutional beliefs, has become a growing area of concern and has inspired attacks in Europe.

- The current situation in Afghanistan and possible impact on Europe needs to be monitored closely.

2. Introduction

2.1 Background

Activity 3.4 of the Council of Europe Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2018-2022) envisages conduct of a comprehensive study on emerging terrorist threats aimed at informing the Council of Europe and its members of areas in need of future attention. To that end, the Council of Europe Committee on Counter-Terrorism (CDCT) has set up a Working Group on Emerging Terrorist Threats tasked with conducting such a study, with support of an independent academic expert (CDCT-ETT). During its first meeting on 26-27 January 2021, the CDCT-ETT agreed on the outline of the study report and issues to be addressed through it and tasked the independent expert, Ms Cecile Simmons from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, to produce a preliminary draft of the study report, pursuant to the methodology elaborated below. From thereon, the group met four more times producing the draft text that was discussed and adopted by the CDCT in May 2022, at its 8th Plenary session.

2.2 Objectives

This report seeks to provide a broad overview of emerging terror threats in Europe spanning terrorist structures, tactics and ideologies. The analysis aims to cover a wide range of States and capture primarily transnational threats, while zooming in on state-specific trends where possible. Due to the breadth of the topic and the study's focus on emerging trends, the report only covers attacks and threats which have manifested since 2015 and does not cover prior historical trends, although references are made to pre-2015 years for contextual purposes. For the same reasons, the report does not discuss in detail different counter-terrorism efforts taken on the national, supranational and international level to date, but rather takes them into consideration when formulating the recommendations for future actions. Countries which are relevant to the discussion of particular threats are selected based on a combination of the following criteria: a) the number of terror attacks and foiled attempts reported by the country and by open-source databases; b) an assessment of the level of threat posed by terrorist actors; c) the country's reported level of terrorist threat; and d) publicly available evidence.

Based on shared findings across jurisdictions, the report concludes with recommendations to Council of Europe members, governmental and intergovernmental institutions, private sector actors and civil society organisations on how to address emerging terror threats in the region.

2.3 Methodology

The report is based on the Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) methodology and summarises existing literature on emerging terrorist threats in Europe from a range of disciplines, providing an up-to-date overview of the state of play of terrorist threats in Europe. This study is based on the examination of over 200 pieces of evidence in English and French, additionally drawing from sources originally published in other languages but made available in translation by the Council of Europe's members and data provided by them. Sources examined through the REA method are selected based on the following criteria: time of publication,[2] relevance to the topic examined[3], geographical scope[4] and academic rigour.[5] Relevant material was selected by entering search terms into Google Scholar search engine's advanced filter functions. A two-round screening of results led to a final corpus of sources. Additional academic studies, books and publications released prior to 2015 and covering historical terrorist threats are used to provide background context and for definitional purposes. The desk review is complemented with additional selected studies and news reports in instances where the search terms did not yield sufficient results.

Terrorist threats are constantly evolving and terrorist groups and individual attackers have become adept at adapting their tactics to bypass law enforcement, counter-terrorism policies and governmental efforts at curbing their activities. Terrorists are also one step ahead in harnessing the latest available technologies to carry out their activities under the radar. As a result, many emerging threats have not been extensively covered by academic literature. In order to capture trends which may not have been fully covered by academic literature, the desk-based research is complemented by a series of non-attributable interviews with experts from the field of counter-terrorism, intelligence, law enforcement and cyber-security. Interviews

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[2] The documents selected through REA were limited to work published since 2015.
[3] Only material that relevant to the study of terror threats was included.
[4] Only material covering at least one Council of Europe member State was included.
[5] Peer-reviewed material was privileged.

were conducted over the phone with participants from the UK, Denmark, Belgium and the Netherlands. Due to practical reasons and the sensitivity of the topic covered in this study, the interviews were conducted in an 'on background' and off-the-record capacity, ensuring that interviewees remain anonymous.

Lastly, the report also reflects the findings of the CDCT-ETT members concerning the changes in the terrorist threat landscape in and beyond their respective jurisdiction.

2.4 Study Overview

The first section provides an overview of the structures of terrorist activity across the ideological spectrum, covering terrorist groups, loose networks and lone actors, examining the partial overlap between them. While banned terrorist groups continue to be active in Europe, terror threats have increasingly manifested in recent years in attacks carried out by lone actors with few or no links to established groups but rather embedded in broader online and offline violent extremist communities.

In the second section, a literature review of terrorist tactics is presented, spanning recruitment, coordination and communication as well as modes of action. The chapter covers multiple tactics, including the interplay between online and offline tactics and the way new technologies are harnessed for multiple purposes, from recruitment to the execution of attacks.

The third section examines emerging crises and violent extremist ideologies. While some of the ideologies which have motivated terrorist activity in Europe today have a long history, ideologies reinvent themselves to adapt to changing political, social and economic realities. The last few years have also seen the rise in emerging ideologies and beliefs, including conspiratorial and misogynistic beliefs, which have fuelled terrorist activity and are likely to continue to do so. The chapter highlights, in particular, the role of the Covid-19 pandemic in fuelling these ideologies.

The conclusion summarises key findings and provides a set of recommendations to the Council of Europe members, government, inter-government, industry and civil society actors and on how to proceed with effectively addressing the emerging terror threats.

2.5 Terminology

Terrorism: While there are national and regional definitions of terrorism, there is currently no internationally agreed institutional definition of terrorism. This study understands terrorism as referring to acts covered by the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism (CETS No. 196). (Council of Europe, 2005) and its Additional Protocol, including acts prohibited under the United Nations counter-terrorism conventions, as well as those that criminalise, among others, taking part in an association or group for the purpose of terrorism, receiving terrorist training, travelling abroad for the purposes of terrorism and financing or organising travel for this purpose.

Violent Extremism Conducive to Terrorism: There is no universally acknowledged definition of violent extremism. The challenges of defining violent extremism have been frequently highlighted (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights). In Resolution 2178 (2014), the UN Security Council establishes a direct connection between violent extremism and terrorism and calls for measures to prevent 'violent extremism which can be conducive to terrorism.' This report uses Institute for Strategic Dialogue's (ISD) own 'social identity' definition of extremism, closely based on J.M Berger's definition of violent extremism conducive to terrorism as 'the belief that an in-group's success or survival can never be separated from the need for hostile action against an out-group' (J.M Berger, 2018) and the extent to which this belief feeds terrorist activity.

Terrorist groups: At the international and European levels, the UN Security Council and the European Union have published lists of designated terrorists and terrorist groups which are subject to sanctions. Individual governments have their own lists of terrorist organisations. These lists, however, are limited in their comprehensiveness, and in particular fail to capture the threat of a range of violent far-right terrorist groups. Further, terrorist activity is increasingly manifesting the rigid structures of organised terrorist groups and takes the form of loose network, small-cell and lone actor activity, which may or may not have connections to banned terrorist groups. When examining terrorist groups, this study focuses on groups banned or restricted in several jurisdictions.

Lone Actors/Small cells: This report relies on two definitions of lone actors. One is the Council of Europe definition provided for in the Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)6 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on terrorists acting alone whereby a terrorist acting alone is understood to mean 'any individual who prepares or commits a terrorist offence as defined by Article 1 of the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism (CETS No. 196) a) without participating in, or being incited, instructed, supported by or otherwise linked to a terrorist association or group; or b) while acting alone in the preparation or commission of the terrorist offence is nevertheless incited, instructed, supported by or otherwise linked to a terrorist association or group, including through the internet'. More broadly, lone terrorism is understood as 'the threat or use of violence by a single perpetrator (or small cell), not acting out of purely personal-material reasons, with the aim of influencing a wider audience, and who acts without any direct support in the planning, preparation and execution of the attack, and whose decision to act is not directed by any group or other individuals (although possibly inspired by others)", as defined by the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI)'.

Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs): This report relies on the definition provided in UN Security Council Resolution 2178 (2014), which defines FTFs as 'individuals who travel to a State other than their State of residence or nationality for the purpose of the perpetration, planning or preparation of, or participation in, terrorist acts or the providing or receiving of terrorist training, including in connection with armed conflict'.

Radicalisation for the purpose of terrorism: For the purposes of this report, radicalisation is understood to mean 'the process through which an individual comes to adopt the view that the use of violence and terrorism to further a political or ideological cause or obtain a political or ideological aim is necessary and morally justifiable', as defined in the Council of Europe Recommendation CM/Rec(2021)7 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on measures aimed at protecting children against radicalisation for the purpose of terrorism.

3. Evolutions of terrorist structures

3.1 ISIL(Daesh), Al-Qaeda and affiliates

3.1.a. The risk of ISIL(Daesh) attacks in Europe after its military defeat in Syria and Iraq

The Islamic State in the Levant (ISIL(Daesh))'s so-called 'caliphate' in Iraq and Syria was all but destroyed in March 2019 when the group lost its last territorial stronghold after being defeated in the city of Baghuz. The group lost control over previously-held territories and most sources of income. On 27 October 2019, ISIL(Daesh) leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi died during a US special forces raid in Syria. Since the loss of its territory, ISIL(Daesh) has retreated into asymmetric operations, conducting both terrorist and insurgency operations in Syria and Iraq. While ISIL(Daesh) has lost its territory and most of its funding, it has maintained operational capabilities in the region, exploiting instability to rebuild its structures. According to the United Nations Security Council 2021 assessments, the group's command and control over its global affiliates has loosened, even though it continues to provide guidance and some financial support. The autonomy of regional affiliates has been further strengthened, especially in West Africa and the Sahel, East and Central Africa, Afghanistan and South Asia. The success of this evolution is deemed an important determinant of the extent of the group's future global impact (UN Security Council, 2021).

ISIL(Daesh) activity continues to drop slightly in Syria and Iraq, but remains at significant levels; in 2020 ISIL(Daesh)-core claimed 1369 (835 in Iraq and 534 in Syria) compared to 1804 in 2019 (916 in Iraq and 888 in Syria). The group also continues to demonstrate its capacity to resurge should conditions become more favourable; with surges in violence around Ramadan, evidence it is increasing activity in central Syria, and increasing terrorism in Baghdad – including a suicide attack that killed 35 people in July 2021 (SiteIntelGroup). The January 2022 attack by ISIL(Daesh) on a prison facility in the city of Hasaka in an effort to free the detained ISIL(Daesh) members represents another example of the group's capability to conduct at least mid-size operations in the region, which could be subsequently used as a powerful propaganda tool by the group. Amid concerns about the humanitarian crisis in camps in North-Eastern part of Syria and varying approaches by international governments to the repatriation of foreign nationals, including women and children, to their home countries, the potential escape of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) from ISIL(Daesh) camps in North-Eastern part of Syria has raised concerns that returnees could increase terror threats in their country of origin (Hoffman & Furlan, 2020). Adverse detention conditions in

camps and make-shift detention centres are impeding efforts at rehabilitation and reintegration and continue to provide a potential support base for ISIL(Daesh).

While ISIL(Daesh) is attempting to expand in many regions of the world, existing evidence suggests that its ability to directly carry out attacks in Europe remains not as high as it used to be, despite being of continuing concern. Territorial losses combined with global military operations against the groups and national counter-terrorism efforts have impacted ISIL(Daesh)'s ability to direct attacks on European soil. Since the wave of terror attacks which hit Europe in 2015-16, the number of successful attacks claimed or inspired by ISIL(Daesh) has consistently declined up until 2019, with an upward trend in completed attacks being registered in 2020. Europol estimates that in 2019 three attacks inspired by ISIL(Daesh) were successfully carried out in the EU, while four failed and 14 were foiled, bringing the total number of incidents to 21 (against 24 in 2018) (Europol, 2020). In 2018, Europe experienced half as many successful attacks as the previous year, although the number of plots remained high. Europe also saw a decrease in deaths from terrorism in 23 countries in 2019. The number of deaths from terrorism and attacks by ISIL(Daesh)'s affiliate in the Caucasus reached a record low in 2019, with four deaths attributed to the group in 2019, as opposed to 20 in 2018 (GTI, 2020). However, the year 2020 witnessed a series of deadly ISIL(Daesh)-inspired, but likely not directed, attacks, including in France and Austria (outlined in greater detail below), a reminder that the group has kept its ability to inspire attacks. The number of completed attacks more than doubled in 2020 with 15 such attacks having been carried out in Europe (10 in the EU, 3 in the UK, and 2 in Switzerland), while only six being foiled (Europol, 2021). While it remains uncertain at this time whether this change can be attributed to the Covid-19 pandemic (Europol, 2021), some authors argue that there is little evidence to support such a conclusion (King and Mullins, 2021).

The threat of attacks linked to Al-Qaeda in Europe has decreased notably in recent years as the group has continued to move away from its strategy of attacking the 'far enemy' and to exploit instability in other regions of the world. Following a string of deadly attacks linked to Al-Qaeda between 2000 and 2010 in Europe, ISIL(Daesh) replaced Al-Qaeda as the main terrorist threat in Europe after 2010. From 2014, nearly all plots and attacks in Europe have been directed or inspired by ISIL(Daesh) while few have been linked to Al-Qaeda, the January 2015 attack on the Charlie Hebdo magazine headquarters in Paris, which was claimed by Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula, being an exception (Hamming, 2017). Despite the lack of notable attacks in Europe linked to Al-Qaeda, the group and its affiliate remain committed to conducting and encouraging attacks in Europe, and are continuing their recruitment and propaganda efforts directed at Europe. During Covid-19, both ISIL(Daesh) and Al-Qaeda have sought to exploit the pandemic to ramp up recruitment and encourage attacks. Some research has also noted that the decline of ISIL(Daesh)'s activities in Europe may encourage Al-Qaeda to ramp up recruitment and seek to challenge ISIL(Daesh)'s dominance on this continent (Celso, 2019). ISIL(Daesh), Al-Qaeda and their affiliates have also shifted some of their operations towards targeting European interests outside of the continent, including by carrying out attacks against European targets in North Africa and the Sahel (Crone, 2017).

The rise to power of the Taliban in 2021 brings the risk that Afghanistan becomes again a safe haven for terrorist organisations. Moreover, there is the risk that a perceived success by radical extremist movements boosts the propaganda of violent extremists on both side of the spectrum, radical extremist movements and far right violent extremists (Goldberg, 2021, Politico, 2021). Drug and arms trafficking might represent considerable source of financing for terrorist groups based in Afghanistan. There is a need to monitor that the new regime breaks ties with Al Qaeda, although the signals given through the formation of the new government do not seem to go in the right direction. ISIL(Daesh) is resurgent in Afghanistan, as demonstrated by attack at the Kabul airport on 26 August 2021 perpetrated by ISIL K, one of its few affiliates that has shown intent to support attacks in Europe.

3.1.b Lone actors and small cells inspired by ISIL(Daesh), Al-Qaeda and affiliates

In recent years, Europe has seen a move from large-scale coordinated and directed attacks, including the November 2015 Paris attacks and the March 2016 Brussels attacks, towards inspired attacks carried out by lone actors and small cells, fuelled by ISIL(Daesh)'s territorial losses and its leadership's diminished ability to direct attacks. ISIL(Daesh)'s encouragement of home-grown attacks found a turning point in September 2014, when then ISIL(Daesh)'s lead spokesman launched a call for attacks against the West (Hegghammer & Nesser, 2015). The idea of 'lone actors', while widely referenced in governmental and academic research, has been contested, with a large body of research showing that 'lone actors,' or individuals preparing and perpetrating an attack alone, may have a range of operational, financial or ideological links with terrorist or violent extremist networks. (Schuurman et.al., 2017).

A 2016 study of lone-actor terrorism across 30 European countries, covering both plots and attacks between 2000 and 2014, identified a very limited number of plots carried out by lone actors (Ellis et. al). From 2016, ISIL(Daesh) claimed a number of attacks in Europe carried out by lone actors through its media outlets. Between 2016 and 2018, ISIL(Daesh) claimed 48 incidents in 12 countries, including 13 in France, seven in Germany, four in the UK and Belgium, two in Spain and Sweden, and one a piece in Austria, Denmark and Finland. Further attacks believed to be inspired by ISIL(Daesh) were not officially claimed by the group, including the attack targeting a Sikh temple in Essen, Germany, in April 2016, and the attack at the Ataturk airport in Türkiye later that year. Following the 2017 London Westminster attack in which the attacker drove a car into pedestrians, ISIL(Daesh) started claiming more attacks (ICCT, 2019). 2020 saw a revival of terrorist activity inspired by ISIL(Daesh) ideology. On 16 October, a radicalised individual beheaded a teacher outside a school on the outskirts of Paris. Days later, an attacker killed one person in a church in Nice. The day before Austria's lockdown on 2 November 2020, a lone gunman opened fire in Vienna's city centre.

The threat of ISIL(Daesh)-inspired attacks continues to be considered as the primary threat in a number of countries most affected by ISIL(Daesh)-related terrorism, although it is considered to be diminishing across a number of countries. The German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution's 2019 report (Verfassungsschutzbericht 2019) noted that the risk of ISIL(Daesh)-related terrorism remained high in the country despite the decline in directed and inspired attacks and the absence of a successful attack linked to the group since August 2017. Following the October 2020 attack, France increased its anti-terrorism protection protocol to its highest level, before reducing the threshold in March 2021. UK government representatives have described ISIL(Daesh) as the 'most significant' terror threat to the country (BBC News, July 2020) while the Dutch government considers ISIL(Daesh), Al-Qaeda and affiliates as the 'main threat' affecting the country (NCTV, 2021).

3.1.c Returning FTFs

European governments have expressed concerns about the threat posed by the return of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) from Syria and Iraq since the beginning of the Syrian civil war. At the height of the conflict in 2015, the UN estimated that more than 40,000 FTFs from over 110 States joined ISIL(Daesh) and Al Qaeda to fight in Iraq and Syria; more than 5,000 from Western Europe and 9,000 from the Russian Federation and the Commonwealth of Independent States. Within Europe, Belgium, France, Germany, and the UK accounted for the majority of FTFs joining ISIL(Daesh) and Al-Qaeda in Iraq and Syria, with Belgium having the highest per-capita FTF contingent (Boutin, et.al, 2016) while Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States accounted for some of the highest numbers of FTFs globally (Nicolson, 2017). Other European countries with high per capita numbers of FTFs have included Austria, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, and Spain (Bakker & de Roy van Zuijdewijn, 2015), as well as Türkiye and the Western Balkans.

In early 2021, UN estimates suggested there were more than 10,000 prisoners in ISIL(Daesh) prisons in North-Eastern Syria. The question of the potential security threat posed by FTFs returning to their country of origin has become more prominent in the context of ongoing turmoil in Iraq and Syria, evidence of prison breakouts, ISIL(Daesh) seeking to rebuild its capabilities, and humanitarian concerns over the fate of the estimated 27,000 children, many of them children of FTFs, stranded in the camps of Al-Hol and Roj in Syria. In January 2021, the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Office described the fate of children in Syrian detention camps as one of the 'most pressing issues in the world today and called for their repatriation in their country of origin. The head of human rights at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) warned that failure to repatriate FTFs and their families could increase the long-term risk of recruitment (OSCE, 2020). In September 2014, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) passed Resolution 2178, followed by Resolution 2396 in December 2017, urging all countries to strengthen their risk assessment procedures and accelerating information sharing to stem the tide of returning foreign fighters. European governments have expressed concerns that repatriated FTFs could come back to their country more trained, skilled and connected than before. The UK's head of MI6 stated that returning FTFs 'are likely to have acquired both the skills and connections that make them potentially very dangerous', concerns which have been echoed by Interpol. In this regard, Türkiye which has a long land border with conflict zones also expresses concerns regarding not only on ISIL(Daesh) affiliated FTFs but also on FTFs linked to other terrorist groups which have been trained and radicalised to violence. Risk Analysis Units in Türkiye's borders have helped curb FTF travel through its territory, however Türkiye considers that these units' activities can be further enhanced with the co-operation of all source countries.

The exact numbers of FTFs who have returned to Europe remain difficult to establish, though European governments have offered a range of estimates. In 2017, 10% of the estimated 9,000 FTFs from Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States were believed to have returned. (Barrett, 2017). In 2019, nearly half of the FTFs from the Western Balkans were believed to have come back (Shtuni, 2019). Estimates from the UK's security services suggested that around 40% of the country's FTFs had returned (De Simone, 2020). The security threat posed by returning FTFs is a subject of debate and has been described as varying across jurisdictions (Hoffman & Furlan, 2020). A 2018 report by the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Executive Directorate (UNCTED) noted that 'historically, relatively few returning FTFs posed a direct threat', noting however that FTFs have been involved in more deadly attacks than home-grown terrorists. (UNCTED, 2018). The March 2016, Brussels attack was the last ISIL(Daesh) direct attack involving returnees in Europe (Renard & Coolsaet, 2020). Research has also noted that many FTFs may be disillusioned with ISIL(Daesh) and not motivated to carry out attacks (Govier & Boutland, 2019; Renard & Coolsaet, 2018). A 2018 study of 230 former European FTFs found that returnees who re-engaged in terrorist activity did so within a year, with the risk of re-engagement diminishing subsequently (Malet & Hayes, 2018).

Amid European governments' concerns about returning FTFs' re-engagement in terrorist activity, the repatriation of FTFs and their families remains a divisive issue, as governments have adopted varied approaches. Countries with high rates of FTFs, including France, Sweden, Germany, Denmark, Belgium and the UK, have adopted tiered approaches to repatriation, prioritising non-combatant women and children (Acheson & Paul, 2020). Government of Finland has, for example, adopted a resolution on the repatriation of the children from the camps in December 2019. Since then, Finland has repatriated two thirds of its nationals in the camps: 23 children and 7 women in total. Jurisdictions including Russia, Türkiye and Kosovo* have adopted large repatriation policies; in April 2019, Kosovo* repatriated 110 individuals to the country (Coleman & Avdimetaj, 2020), more than a quarter of the estimated 400 individuals who left the country. The repatriation of FTFs has security and human rights implications alike, with a number of international conventions, including UN Security Council Resolutions 2178 (2014) and 2396 (2017) imposing legal obligations on governments to develop policies for the prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of returning FTFs (Mehra & Paulussen, 2019).

3.2 Far-right terrorism

3.2.a Definitional challenges & differing assessments of the magnitude of the threat

The threat of terrorism motivated by violent far-right ideology has come to the fore in Western countries in recent years, in particular since the wave of lethal attacks that affected Oceania (Christchurch, New Zealand, March 2019), North America (Poway, United States, April 2019; El Paso, United States, August 2019) and Western Europe (Baerum, Norway, August 2019; Halle, Germany, October 2019; Hanau, Germany, February 2020). In several of these attacks, attackers left behind written documents, sometimes referred to as 'manifestos', calling for the annihilation of non-white and non-European populations. These attacks have highlighted new patterns in far-right terror, including the growing influence of violent far-right transnational online networks, the internationalisation of violent far-right extremism conducive to terrorism and what many experts have called the 'gamification' of terror. While far-right terrorist groups remain active in Europe, violent far-right extremist transnational networks conducive to terrorism and individuals radicalised online, but not necessarily belonging to these networks, represents one of the most serious threats to European security.

There is no internationally acknowledged list of far-right terrorist groups and no universally recognised definition of far-right terrorism and violent far-right extremism, while some governments have also adopted alternative terminologies such as 'Racially or Ethnically Motivated Terrorism'. Definitions therefore vary across geographies and sometimes within government departments in specific jurisdictions. Further, governments have separate definitions of terrorism and hate crime. Violent far-right-motivated attacks are often prosecuted as hate crimes while attacks claimed by ISIL(Daesh) or Al-Qaeda are prosecuted as terrorism. The partial overlap between hate crime, violent far-right extremism and far-right terror complicates the understanding of far-right terrorism, with hate crimes sharing a number of characteristics with terrorism (Koehler, 2016). Researchers have also noted that the concept of 'extreme-right violence' covers a broader range of attacks than 'extreme-right terrorism' (Bjørgo & Ravndal, 2019). While attacks linked to ISIL(Daesh) are prosecuted as terrorism, far-right attacks are more likely to be considered as hate crimes. Thus, the far-right supporter who targeted a mosque in the French town of Bayonne in October 2019 was

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* All references to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

charged with attempted murder and arson, while the ISIL(Daesh)-inspired individual who carried out an attack in a church in Normandy in July 2016 was prosecuted for terrorism. Assessments of the number of violent far-right attacks can therefore vary significantly between government reporting and academic research.

There have been attempts at defining far-right terrorism in academic research, with most definitions pointing to its ideological fragmentation and various manifestations. The Institute for Economics and Peace defines the far-right as 'a political ideology that is centred on one or more of the following elements: strident nationalism (usually racial or exclusivist in some fashion), fascism, racism, anti-Semitism, anti-immigration, chauvinism, nativism, and xenophobia.' Researchers have described far-right terrorism 'a label of convenience that lumps together various causes' (Byman, 2019) and a 'family of ideologies.' Political scientist Cas Mudde has shown that definitions of the far-right typically include a number of features, often in combination, including nationalism, racism, xenophobia, anti-democracy and strong-state advocacy and authoritarianism (Mudde, 2000). Following Bjørgo and Ravndal the extreme right (or far-right) can be distinguished from the radical right by its rejection of democracy and the promotion of violence, as well as its adherence to ethnic or racial nationalism (Bjørgo & Ravndal, 2019). Violent far-right extremism conducive to terrorism and far-right terrorism are therefore best understood as an umbrella term for a diverse sub-set of beliefs.

The threat of far-right terrorism has become a growing concern for law enforcement across parts of Europe. In 2019, the GTI recorded a 320% increase in far-right terrorist incidents in the West (defined as encompassing North America, Western Europe and Oceania), the majority of attacks not affiliated with specific groups; the US was the most affected country globally, followed by Germany and the UK in Europe. An analysis of more than 2,200 attacks in Europe by the Centre for Strategic & International Studies between 2009 and 2020 concluded that far-right terrorism represented 21.8% of terrorism fatalities in Europe as opposed to 69.3% of fatalities caused by attacks perpetrated by ISIL(Daesh), Al-Qaeda and affiliates, noting however that the number of attacks by violent far-right actors are on the rise. The countries with the highest per capita frequency of incidents involving the violent far-right in Europe include Sweden, Greece, the UK, Finland and Germany. Europol's SAT report recorded only six attacks and plots in the EU in 2019, while a study by the University of Oslo recorded four fatal and 112 severe, but non-fatal, violent far right attacks in Western Europe in 2019 (Ravndal et.al, 2020), noting that 2019 represented the highest watermark in far-right motivated terrorism in Europe since the 1990s.

Far-right terrorism is considered the fastest growing threat across a number of European countries. In October 2019, the head of UK's domestic security services said that while attacks by ISIL(Daesh), Al-Qaeda and affiliates still accounted for the majority of terrorist plots, terrorist plots by violent far-right extremists accounted for nearly 30% of all foiled plots since 2017. The 2020 report of the German Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Verfassungsschutzbericht 2020) described violent far-right extremism as the major threat for the country's security. The 2019 report noted that the number of far-right extremists in the country rose by over 8,000 compared to previous years, an increase partly motivated by the inclusion of the Flügel (or 'Wing'), a group within the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party. In 2020, the number of far-right extremists rose again by over 1,200 compared to the previous year. Government representatives in a number of countries, including the Netherlands and Belgium, consider the terrorist threat posed by violent far-right extremists as the fastest growing threat (Interview, May 2021). Sweden's 2019 Security Yearbook emphasized the 'increasing risk that individuals inspired by [violent far-right extremism] will carry out attacks' while Finland's security agency noted an uptick in the violent far-right extremism conducive to terrorism (Yleisradio Oy, 2020).

3.2.b. Lone actor and small-cell terrorism inspired by violent far-right ideology

The wave of violent far-right attacks perpetrated in the West since 2019 has been carried out primarily by individuals acting alone, embedded in online communities and with no known or very loose connections to existing groups. While lone actor terrorism has been associated with attacks inspired by ISIL(Daesh), Al-Qaeda and affiliates, a significant proportion of lone actor attacks are perpetrated by individuals motivated by violent far-right ideology. While far-right terrorist groups have been active in Europe for decades, far-right terrorism has seen a growing move towards post-organisational activity and lone actor attack, a trend which partly finds its roots in the notion of 'leaderless resistance'. A Cold War-era term, the notion was revived by American white supremacist Louis Beam in a manifesto published in 1983, in which he defined 'leaderless

resistance' as a mode of action where 'all individuals and groups operate independently of each other, and never report to a central headquarters or single leader for direction or instruction, as would those who belong to a typical pyramid organization.'

While definitions of far-right terrorism and reporting processes make the exact number of violent far-right attacks, including lone actor attacks, difficult to establish, existing evidence shows the majority of attacks are carried out by lone actors and small cells. A review of 36 lone actor attacks in Western Europe between 2015 and 2016 concluded that 11% were motivated by violent far-right ideology (Khazaeli Jah & Khoshnood 2019). Lone actors were responsible for all four fatal violent far-right attacks in Western Europe in 2019, and for one third of non-fatal attacks (Ravndal et.al. 2020). In Germany, far-right terror attacks and severe violent attacks motivated by violent far-right ideology between 2011 and 2018 were predominantly carried out by individuals with no known previous ties to violent far-right extremist groups (Koehler, 2018). The Halle, Hanau and Baerum attackers can all be considered as 'lone actors'. Norway's two most deadly attacks in the last two decades were perpetrated by lone attackers. However, while violent far-right lone actors prepare and carry out attacks alone, many were inspired by others (e.g. the Christchurch attacker) and embedded in national or transnational extremist online cultures and/or offline networks. Some perpetrators acting alone have also been seen to be affiliated to organised groups such as CasaPound in Italy (Gattinara et al., 2018).

Small cell and lone actors have been involved in a number of publicly-reported foiled attacks. In November 2018, six individuals who were part of a small cell were arrested for plotting an attack against French president Emmanuel Macron. In 2020, a small-cell network of 12 individuals was arrested for planning attacks on Muslims, migrants and political figures in Germany. Foiled attacks by lone actors and small cells have been reported in Visegrad and Baltic countries. Poland's Internal Security Agency charged two individuals with planning an attack on a mosque in the country (Serwis Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej). An attack by a Neo-Nazi sympathiser was foiled by the Lithuania anti-terror police in 2019, while Latvia's State Security Service (VDD) announced it had foiled an attack by an individual who was inspired by the actions of Norwegian lone actor Anders Behring Breivik. While these countries have been little affected by terror threats in recent years, in particular ISIL(Daesh) and Al-Qaeda-related threats, foiled attacks since 2019 have highlighted the risk of future successful attacks. The internationalisation of violent far-right networks across Europe has widened the geographical scope of the threat, lowering the barrier to entry for individuals to engage in acts of extremist violence.

3.2.c. The internationalisation of violent far-right extremism conducive to terrorism

Contrasting with historically domestic violent far-right groups, violent far-right extremism conducive to terrorism has embraced international alliances and linkages, in the last few years and leveraged social media and online platforms, which have allowed loose international networks to emerge online as umbrellas for a wide range of violent extremist beliefs. Recent attackers have mentioned terrorists in other countries as sources of inspiration and a justification for their actions. While this trend pre-dates the 2019-20 wave of attack - Norwegian terrorist Anders Breivik, who killed 77 people in 2011 mentioned other attackers - the trend became more prominent with the Christchurch attack, whose perpetrator published a 'manifesto' referencing the 'great replacement' conspiracy theory, which has been adopted by far-right movements, including the pan-European white nationalist 'Generation Identity' movement (banned by France). Less than a year later, the Hanau attacker posted a YouTube video in English to reach an international audience.

A growing body of research has documented how violent far-right groups banned in certain jurisdictions have established transnational alliances spanning several countries or continents. The international neo-Nazi Feuerkrieg Division, which is reported to be based in Estonia, has inspired attempted attacks in several countries, while the US-birthed neo-Nazi network Atomwaffen Division has branches in several European countries, including Germany, the UK and some Baltic States. The Nordic Resistance Movement operates with branches in Sweden, Norway, Finland, Denmark and Iceland (Bjørgo, 2019). The transnational anti-Muslim group Soldiers of Odin has since 2016 established branches in Scandinavian countries as well as in Canada, and the violent neo-Nazi group Combat 18, which originated in the UK, is active in multiple European countries and in North America. Spanish violent far-right groups have established links with other groups in Southern Europe, including Golden Dawn in Greece and CasaPound in Italy (Álvarez-Benavides, 2019). Violent far-right groups across Europe have also established alliances with violent white supremacist groups in the US (The Soufan Center, 2019).

The internationalisation of violent far-right groups and networks has gone hand in hand with the emergence of hubs for FTFs brought together by violent far-right ideology, notably in Ukraine. While the question of FTFs joining ISIL(Daesh) and Al-Qaeda has been the object of extensive study, the travel of FTFs to conflict zones in Ukraine has been less documented. Over 1,500 fighters from over 50 countries, including white supremacists and neo-Nazis from Western Europe and North America have travelled to Ukraine to fight in the conflict. (Rękawek, 2017). This trend has raised concerns that individuals who joined the Ukrainian conflict and gained combat skills could carry out attacks in their country after their return; in 2016, a French national was arrested at the Polish-Ukrainian border with explosives and weapons; he had planned to carry out attacks on bridges, motorways, a mosque, and a synagogue during the UEFA European football tournament (BBC News, 2016).

3.2.d. The threat of organised far-right terrorist groups and organisations

The string of violent far-right attacks that started with Christchurch have highlighted the blurring between domestic and international terrorism and the role of lone actors with no or loose connections to known extremist or terrorist movements in fuelling far-right terrorism. This trend has made the historical understanding of far-right terrorism as a domestic phenomenon driven by organised terrorist groups less relevant. Contrary to ISIL(Daesh), Al-Qaeda and their affiliates, violent far-right groups have been reluctant to claim attacks in Europe. In Germany, the country with the highest number of lethal violent far-right attacks on the continent, incidents claimed by violent far-right groups have been very rare, as groups have sought to dissociate themselves from attacks and see claiming attacks as impractical (Koehler, 2020). The Nordic Resistance Movement has made death threats and organised violent actions while 'balancing on the border of illegality' (Bjorgo & Ravndal, 2020). Following the murder in the UK of Labour MP Jo Cox in June 2016, most violent far-right groups sought to distance themselves from the attack; National Action, which praised the attacker on social media and adopted the attacker's statement in court following his arrest as its slogan, became the first violent far-right organisation to be banned by the UK government under the 2000 Terrorism Act (Macklin, 2018).

Despite the prominence of lone actor attacks, organised violent far-right groups and affiliated members have retained the ability to carry out violent attacks; in Greece, four attacks were linked to organised violent far-right groups and their affiliates in 2019, three of which were attributed to Golden Dawn. Organised groups have also been behind a large portion of attacks in Italy and Spain (Ravndal et al., 2020). Countries such as Germany and the UK have seen a combination of lone actor and organised group violence (Gattinara, et al, 2018). In the absence of an international list of designated violent far-right groups, European countries have adopted varying policies in relation to banning and imposing sanctions on violent far-right groups. Groups with transnational branches are banned in some jurisdictions, but not in others, where they may nonetheless see their activities curtailed. Combat 18, not considered a terror group under UK law, was banned as a right-wing extremist group by Germany in 2020, with France announcing its decision to disband the group (BBC News, 2020). The UK-originating neo-Nazi group Blood & Honour has been banned in several countries, including Germany, Spain and the Russian Federation. In April 2021, the UK added the transnational Attomwaffen Division to its list of banned terrorist groups (UK Government). In late 2020, the Finnish Supreme Court banned the Nordic Resistance Movement and the affiliated association Pohjoinen Perinne ry (Northern Tradition) (Sallamaa & Kotonen, 2020).

In addition to Combat 18 and Blood & Honour, Germany has banned a number of violent far-right groups since 2018, including neo-Nazi groups Nordadler (Northern Eagles) and Sturmbrigade 44 (also known as Wolfsbrigade 44), while the state of Bremen outlawed neo-Nazi group Phalanx 18. In March 2020, the German government also banned one club (including one affiliated club) linked to the Reichsbürger ('Reich Citizens'). While some of the groups involved in attacks have been active for years, emerging groups Nordkreuz ('Northern Cross'), Nationalist Socialist Knights of the Ku-Klux-Klan in Germany and Breizh Firm in France were formed more recently (Ravndal et al., 2020). Violent far-right groups are also responding to bans by changing their identities, re-forming under new names or otherwise attempting to circumvent bans (even though, in some States like Germany, the formation of substitute organisations is punishable). Faced with threats of being banned in Finland over the last few years, the Nordic Resistance Movement attempted to reform under new names and organise events under the banner of closely affiliated groups, such as Soldiers of Odin (Bjørgo and Ravndal, 2020). In February 2020, the UK formally banned System Resistance Network, recognising it as an alias of formerly banned National Action (Staton & Warrell, 2020).

3.3. Ethno-nationalist and separatist terrorism

In a number of countries in Europe, ethno-nationalist and separatist terrorist groups that used to pose a major terrorist threat historically have reduced their activities significantly. In Spain and France, activities of separatist terrorist groups have declined notably in recent years. Spain's Euskadi ta Askatasuna (ETA, 'Basque Fatherland and Liberty') dissolved in 2018. In 2019, Spain classified one violent incident involving a separatist group as terrorism. According to Europol, Resistência Galega ('Galician Resistance') remained the only active terrorist group in Spain but has not carried out any attack since 2014 (Europol, 2020). French Corsican terrorist groups have abandoned violent action.

The UK remains the country most affected by ethno-nationalist and separatist terrorism in Western Europe. In 2019, Irish Violent Dissident Republican (VDR) groups accounted for all but one of the terrorist incidents recorded as ethno-nationalist or separatist in EU member States by Europol, with the UK government recording 55 such incidents (Europol, 2020). As of 2021, the UK government's list of terrorist organisations includes 14 Northern Irish organisations in Northern Ireland. The Real IRA (renamed New IRA) has been the most active and lethal dissident group since the end of the Troubles, and has been responsible for the deaths of police officers and civilians as well as several attempted bombings. In June 2019, the group claimed responsibility for placing a bomb under a police car (BBC News, 2019). Four incidents linked to Irish VDR groups in 2019 were directed at national security targets (Europol, 2020). Despite being responsible for the highest number of terrorist incidents in the UK, the number of lethal attacks by Irish VDR groups has diminished in the last few years. Tactical adaptations by the New IRA and the need to retain a support base have made lethal attacks less practical (Morrison, 2020). The threat of Irish VDR groups is considered by UK officials as a persistent but diminishing threat (Interview, May 2021). The revival of violent riots in Northern Ireland in March and April 2021 has, however, highlighted the potential risk of an uptick in violence in the region.

Ethno-nationalist and separatist terrorism remains a present threat in Türkiye where the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its affiliates continue to carry out attacks. Between 1984 and 2016, the Global Terrorism Database recorded 2,025 incidents attributed to the PKK. Since July 2015 and the breakdown of the ceasefire between the Turkish government and the PKK, terrorist activity by the PKK and violence in south-eastern Türkiye and large cities has increased. Between July 2015 and February 2021, over 1,280 security force personnel were killed in attacks and clashes (International Crisis Group, 2021). Reports have also shown that the PKK has carried out fundraising and recruitment activities and has received logistical support from individuals based in EU member States (Europol, 2020).

3.4. Far-left terrorism

The last few decades have been marked by a steady decrease in violent far-left terror attacks. According to the GTI, while 93% of politically-motivated attacks in the West between 1970 and 1980 could be attributed to the violent far-left and were carried out by small-cell revolutionary Marxist and anarchist groups, far-left terrorism declined significantly from the mid-1980s onwards (GTI, 2020) Following the trend observed in attacks motivated by ISIL(Daesh), Al-Qaeda and affiliates and violent far-right ideology, recent attacks inspired by violent far-left ideology are more likely to be carried out by individuals rather than organised groups, with less than half of terror attacks motivated by violent far-left since 2010 being attributed to a group. The lethality of violent far-left attacks has also decreased substantially. In 2019, Europol recorded 26 terror attacks motivated by violent far-left and anarchist ideology, all carried out in Spain, Italy or Greece, none of them resulting in casualties. Anarchist groups, in particular, have been active in Italy and Greece and have been responsible for attacks. In 2017, the Greek anarchist group Conspiracy of Fire Cells claimed responsibility for sending 10 bomb parcels to a variety of European political representatives, institutions and companies, resulting in one injury (BBC News, 2017).

The threat of far-left terrorism and violent far-left extremism across Europe is considered low compared to other types of terrorist activities, with a few countries nonetheless reporting a resurgence of violent far-left activity and foiled attacks. In France, seven individuals allegedly belonging to a violent far-left group were arrested in Paris on suspicions of planning an attack against security forces in 2020 (France Info 2020), with French authorities alerting against a risk of a revival in far-left terrorism. In Germany, the Office for the Protection of the Constitution recorded a 2,8% increase in the number of offenses motivated by violent far-left extremism in 2020 (Verfassungsschutzbericht 2019), noting however an increase of 34,3 % in violent offenses from 921 to 1.237, with five attempted homicides. None of these incidents were classified as

terrorism. Türkiye remains concerned with regard to far-left terrorists having travelled to Syria for combat purposes which now pose a greater threat due to their battlefield experience and the risk of being further radicalized to violence (Europol, 2020 & 2021).

4. Tactics

4.1 Radicalisation and Recruitment

4.1.a. Diversification of targets of radicalisation and recruitment

Terrorism has long been simplistically presented by media and policy makers as a phenomenon primarily affecting men, despite the long involvement of women in terrorist organisations, from the PKK to historical far-left terror movements. This understanding has ignored the role of women and children in terrorist activity, the terrorist groups and networks' attempts at recruiting them, and the role played by parents in involvement and indoctrination of children to terrorism. With global terrorism databases not recording the gender of terrorist perpetrators, the number of women involved in terror attacks is difficult to establish. Researchers have noted that women have historically been involved primarily in supportive and non-combatant roles (Pearson & Winterbotham, 2017). The role of women as terrorist recruiters and targets of recruitment, however, has come to growing attention in recent years. Reports have investigated the role of women in ISIL(Daesh), Al-Qaeda and affiliates and in violent far-right groups. Inter-governmental organisations have increasingly recognised the need for a gendered perspective in preventing violent extremism conducive to terrorism. 2019 OSCE report stated that 'for P/CVERLT strategies, policies and programmes to be most effective, gender analyses are required.' (OSCE, 2019).

A 2018, the ICSR study showed that 13% of ISIL(Daesh) or affiliates' FTFs were women, with Russia and France providing the highest contingent of women travelling to Iraq and Syria in Europe (Cook & Vale, 2018) in absolute numbers, while countries including the Netherlands and Croatia included high numbers of women in FTFs proportionally. In 2016, the Council of Europe identified three main roles for women under ISIL(Daesh)'s so called 'caliphate': necessary agents of State building, recruiters, and potential militants. Women featured prominently in ISIL(Daesh) recruitment material (Ingram, 2017), both as a target audience and as producers of propaganda material. (Europol, 2019). While ISIL(Daesh) initially excluded women from combatant roles, the group shifted its position as it sustained military losses, releasing a video in February 2018 featuring a woman in a combatant role for the first time. Women have also played roles in attacks inspired by ISIL(Daesh) in Europe, through different types of structures, including women-only cells, family cells, or individual women perpetrating attacks (Cook & Vale, 2018). Prominent cases of terrorist attempts involving women include the Notre-Dame bombing attempt in September 2016 in Paris, led by a five-women cell. Between 2014 and 2018, 33 different plots linked to ISIL(Daesh) across France, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, and the UK involved women (Simcox, 2018). A 2019 UNCTED report also noted that women account for 4% of FTF returnees and are more likely to be recruited online than men (UNCTED Trends Report, 2019).

While women were historically under-represented in violent far-right groups, attempts at recruiting them have become more prominent. Mirroring ISIL(Daesh)'s recruitment campaigns, violent far-right extremist groups have attempted to target women with online campaigns to broaden their appeal, sometimes co-opting the language of feminism. Generation Identity ran social media campaigns aimed at women, including the #120dB under the motto 'women defend ourselves' and presenting Muslims as rapists (Ebner & Davey, 2019). There is growing evidence that violent far-right extremists are using women to advance their cause and bolster their recruitment campaigns. Groups such as the English Defence League (EDL) have attempted to embrace a rhetoric of gender equality in order to recruit women to anti-Muslim views (Miller-Idris and Pilkington, 2017). Women in the Nordic Resistance Movement in Sweden have been targeted with recruitment campaigns and are playing an active role as producers of content and 'online influencers' for recruiting other women into the group (Askanius, 2021).

Terrorist groups across the world have historically recruited and used children to carry out attacks. More recently, terrorist groups have used online gaming, messaging, use of conspiracy theories, and online friending/grooming to recruit children. In Europe, groups such as the Real IRA recruited teenagers in the 1990s (Wilson, 2000). During its so called 'caliphate', ISIL(Daesh) attempted to recruit and use children in the territory it controlled for purposes of carrying out attacks, and depicted children in propaganda videos (Vale, 2018). The group also publicised its ability to recruit children, either travelling alone or accompanied. During the so called 'caliphate', estimates suggest children represented 9-12% of the global contingent of FTFs who travelled to Iraq and Syria (Cook & Vale, 2018) as ISIL(Daesh)-affiliated networks targeted children in recruitment across Europe (Vicente, 2020). Violent far-right extremist groups or networks tend to engage in political disruption, infiltration of larger protests, and marketing and sale of internet merchandise. Violent far-right extremist groups are increasingly targeting children and teenagers online through the dissemination of propaganda material. In the UK, the recently created British Hand group, believed to be led by a 15-year-old as of 2020, threatened to carry out attacks against Muslims and migrants and to procure weapons by infiltrating the army. The Estonian leader of the small international neo-Nazi group Feuerkrieg Division was reported to be 13 years old in 2020 (BBC News, 2020). The British leader of the same organisation became the youngest person to be sentenced for terrorist offenses in the UK in February 2021, having reportedly downloaded bomb-making material at the age of 13, and having used online platforms to recruit new members (BBC News, 2021). Türkiye stresses that PKK and its affiliates have also long been employing the tactic of recruiting children forcefully and in violation of international law (HRW, 2018). Children's recruitment by terrorist actors has been recognised as a violation of children's rights and children's role as victims of exploitation and grooming as well as the need to implement appropriate safeguarding measures has been emphasized by numerous organisations, including UNODC (UNODC, 2017).

4.1.b. The role of prisons in terrorist radicalisation and recruitment

The role of prisons in terrorist recruitment and extremist radicalisation conducive to terrorism in Europe has been the subject of extensive academic study over the last few years (Basra, et al, 2016; Hamm, 2013). Prisons have been described by multiple reports as 'universities of terrorism' and a place of intersection between terrorism and criminal networks, providing fertile ground for prisoners previously not convicted of terrorism charges to be recruited into terrorist activity. While the term of 'radicalisation' remains contested, with some research highlighting that radicalisation does not necessarily equate to terrorist activity, many of the attackers involved in lethal attacks in Europe spent time in prison and developed their ideological beliefs there. Two of the three attackers who carried out the 2015 Charlie Hebdo attack met an Al-Qaeda recruiter in prison, while two of the suicide bombers in the 2016 Brussels attacks had spent time in Belgian prisons for non-terrorism related offenses. A 2016 study of 79 European FTFs who had joined ISIL(Daesh), Al-Qaeda and affiliated groups found that 57% had been incarcerated prior to becoming radicalised and 31% had radicalised in prisons although the radicalisation process continued after their release (Basra, et al, 2016).

A review of prison radicalisation in 10 European countries (Belgium, Denmark, England & Wales, France, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain and Sweden) noted that in 2020 there were 'more inmates convicted of terrorism-related offences than at any point since the turn of the millennium', half of whom are in French prisons, with the number of offenders monitored because of suspicions of radicalisation being estimated to be at least 3,000. The high number of detainees has increased the risk of attacks in prisons, with five terror attacks and 22 attempts recorded between 2015 and 2020. The predicted release (and potential early release) of individuals convicted of terrorist offenses in Europe over the next few years has raised concerns over the potential impact on terror threats, while recent attacks by lone actors with previous prison convictions have brought this question into the limelight. Two attacks in London, in November 2019 (London Bridge) and February 2020 (Streatham), and more recently the Vienna shootings in November 2020, involved attackers with prior convictions. The London Bridge attacker stabbed two people to death a year after his release from prison, while the Streatham attacker attempted to carry out an attack 10 days after leaving prison. The Vienna attacker was sentenced to 22 months in prison in April 2019 in Austria (Mehra & Coleman, 2020).

Reducing terrorist recidivism has been identified as a key area of priority for the United Nations. The risk of terrorist recidivism, however, remains contested; a Belgian study found that fewer than 5% of offenders re-engaged in terrorist activity after their release (Renard, 2020). Nonetheless, the risk of terrorist recidivism and terrorist recruitment in prisons remains a concern across many European countries. Following the London Bridge and Streatham attacks and reports of attacks on prison officers, the UK independent terror watchdog launched an inquiry into the management of convicted terrorists in British prisons (O'Gara, 2021).

France, which counts the highest number of individuals convicted of terrorism, identified prisons as a space of continued ideological radicalisation for inmates previously not convicted of terrorist offences, and highlighted pressures on the prison administrative system (Sénat, 2020). As more women are convicted for terrorism, there is a need for the development of a gender perspective in reintegration and rehabilitation policies within the penitentiary agencies of States (Basra and Neumann, 2020). Other countries, including Spain, recorded a high percentage of non-terrorism related offenders experiencing radicalisation in prisons (Europol, 2020).

4.1.c. Offline hotbeds for radicalisation and recruitment

A large body of research has evidenced the role of multiple spaces as hotbeds of radicalisation and recruitment. A 2007 report by King's College London on radicalisation and recruitment pathways in Europe to Al-Qaeda and affiliates, noted that offline radicalisation and recruitment spaces fall into two categories: places of congregation and places of vulnerability. While places of congregation included locations such as religious meeting places, cafes or gyms, places of vulnerability included places such as prisons and welfare centres. Research has documented how offline spaces and networks have played a role in the radicalisation and recruitment of Europe's deadliest attackers. Countries with established violent extremist networks since the 1990s, including the UK, France, Belgium, and Germany, provided the bulk of European FTFs who left for Iraq and Syria. At the height of ISIL(Daesh)'s so called 'caliphate', one of the main radicalisation and recruitment platforms for the group in Europe was the transnational Sharia4 network, which originated in the UK with the al-Muhajiroun movement, and established branches across Europe, including Sharia4Belgium, Sharia4Holland, Sharia4Spain, Sharia4Denmark (Kaldet til Islam), Sharia4Finland, Sharia4Italy, Sharia4France (Forsane Alizza), Millatu Ibrahim (Germany) and The Prophet's Umma (Norway) (Pantucci, 2015).

Local terrorist cells connected to specific towns, offline networks and recruiters have been involved in many of the deadliest attacks carried out in Europe in recent years. They range from the cell that carried out the Barcelona and Cambrils attack in 2017, of which all but one member was connected to the same religious community led by the attack's mastermind (Pérez Colomé et.al, 2017), to the Belgian-based Zerkani network, from which Abdelhamid Abaaoud, who is thought to have led the group that carried out the November 2015 Paris attacks and March 2016 Brussels attack, originated, to the Abu Walaa network in Germany, from which the 2016 Berlin Christmas market attacker hailed (Heil, 2016). The latter network used sporting and recreational activities for radicalisation and recruitment purposes (Van Vierlden, 2016). Post so called 'caliphate', and against the backdrop of a move towards inspired rather than directed attacks, the relevance of offline spaces for recruitment by groups has been called into question and growing attention has focused on online radicalisation and the use of social media, online platforms and communication applications, especially during the Covid-19 crisis.

Offline radicalisation and recruitment spaces have also been central to far-right terrorist recruitment. Violent far-right extremist and terrorist groups' radicalisation and recruitment among the military and law enforcement has become a subject of concern for several European governments. Germany's security services launched 550 internal investigations into some of their staff over concerns of plots to attack immigrants and politicians (Pancevski, 2019). In June 2019, it was reported that the group Nordkreuz has compiled a list of possible targets with 25,000 names, having recruited members among police officers, military personnel and a police unit involved in anti-terrorist activity. However, there were no indications for the formation of a criminal or even terrorist organisation according to ss. 129, 129a of the German Criminal Code (StGB) and the investigation regarding the offense of preparation of a serious violent offence endangering the State (s. 89a StGB) was terminated due to lack of sufficient suspicion. In 2018, a UK army veteran was sentenced to eight years in prison for his participation in National Action. Cases of radicalisation and recruitment among law enforcement personnel have also been identified in France (Assemblée Nationale (France), 2019). A confidential Europol report cited by European media sources reported that violent far-right groups are targeting their recruitment efforts at the police and the military to acquire weapons and combat skills.

Concerts and demonstrations have been shown to play a key role in violent far-right extremist radicalisation and recruitment. Concerts and music events, in particular, are regarded by violent far-right groups as a way to interact with new individuals and recruit new members. In Germany, the number of far-right concerts have increased since 2015 (Koehler, 2018). In 2018, over 1,000 neo-Nazi and white supremacist sympathisers from different countries gathered in the eastern German town of Ostritz to attend a far-right festival, held in honour of Adolf Hitler's birthday, pointing to the role of offline events in transnational recruitment. Sports activities and events, including Mixed Martial Arts (MMA) events, have also been

identified as a recruitment ground for violent far-right groups, prompting the German local government to ban such a gathering in 2019. Other offline methods of recruitment which have been documented include organising a wide range of offline meetings and events as well as leafleting, tactics that have been adopted by groups such as Generation Identity (McNeill-Wilson, 2020).

4.1.d. The use of technology in radicalisation and recruitment

While offline actions remain active avenues for radicalisation and recruitment, research has documented the growing role that digital communication technologies play in terrorist radicalisation and recruitment, including most recently during the Covid-19 pandemic. These technologies include, but are not limited to, online discussion platforms (e.g. forums and chat rooms), social media and encrypted communication applications. Contemporary terrorist groups and networks across the ideological spectrum have seen the advantages of using media technologies to further their causes. In *The Call for Global Islamic Resistance*, Al-Qaeda strategist Abu Musab al-Suri predicted that the group's 'informational resistance' against the West would be 'conducted through the use of modern technology of all forms, especially satellite [sic] and the Internet'. Violent far-right groups and networks have also been early adopters of digital technologies. The neo-Nazi movement Stormfront in the US set up a bulletin board system in the early 1990s, turning it into a website in 1995, and a forum with international branches (e.g. 'Stormfront Europe,' 'Stormfront en Français,' and 'Stormfront Italia') (Conway et al., 2019).

Digital technologies have given violent extremists and terrorists greater opportunity to disseminate content and reach potential recruits. The use of digital technologies by ISIL(Daesh), in particular, has been widely documented. In June 2014, as ISIL(Daesh) captured Mosul, the group deployed a social media strategy to amplify its message, having launched the Arabic-language application app Dawn of Glad Tidings, which allowed social media users to connect their accounts to ISIL(Daesh) social media operatives and led to the flooding of Twitter with ISIL(Daesh) messages (Ebner, 2017). At the height of its so called 'caliphate', ISIL(Daesh) used sophisticated digital communication technologies to share its propaganda globally, producing images and video footage in several languages, and running the online magazine *Dabiq* between 2014 and 2016.

In the wake of terrorist attacks in Europe in 2015 and 2016, open social media platforms including Facebook, Twitter, and Google responded to pressure by European governments by stepping up efforts to remove violent extremist and terrorist content from their platforms. More recently, the European Union has passed the Regulation on preventing the dissemination of terrorist content online which, will apply as of June 2022, allowing the authorities of member States to directly request from private companies located anywhere within the European Union to put down terrorist content. There is ample evidence that crackdowns and account take-downs on social media platforms have led violent extremists and terrorist groups to migrate to less (or un)-regulated, more secure, platforms, including anonymous browsers, encrypted email services and encrypted messaging applications. Researchers have described end-to-end encrypted applications such as Telegram and WhatsApp as a 'a particular game changer for the Islamic State and its efforts in the West' (Hughes & Meleagrou-Hitchens, 2017). A 2017 study of 70 ISIL(Daesh)-affiliated Telegram channels concluded that Telegram represented the platform of choice for ISIL(Daesh) sympathisers whose accounts had been taken down by Twitter (Shehabat et al.) noting that one of the key functions of the use of Telegram by ISIL(Daesh) is to recruit and inspire individuals to carry out attacks. A 2019 study by Georgetown University uncovered 636 pro-ISIL (Daesh) Telegram channels that contained English-language content (Clifford & Powell, 2019), noting that Telegram served as a platform for ISIL(Daesh)'s online facilitators, who are responsible for identifying and contacting individuals. The role of anonymous sharing portals such as Sendvid.com, Justepaste.it and Dump.to in generating and sharing content for recruitment purposes has also been emphasized (Shehabat & Mitew, 2018).

In response to the growing use of their platforms by ISIL(Daesh) and governments' pressure, companies such as Telegram have updated their policies in recent years. In 2016, it launched its 'ISIS Watch' channel which aims to delete pro-ISIL(Daesh) public channels and bots. Combined with increased co-operation with law enforcement, it is unclear whether these measures will impact the group's choice to use Telegram in the long term. Following account suspensions, ISIL(Daesh) sympathisers have sought to duplicate accounts on Telegram and other channels (Katz, 2019). The emergence of new, more secure applications could lead to

a partial move away from Telegram and a migration of pro-ISIL(Daesh) presence to other platforms. ISIL(Daesh) has experimented with a range of small platforms, including Baaz, Viber, Kik, Ask.fm, Discord and others, while also considering the use of the decentralised web (DWeb), an alternative to the world wide web, and decentralised applications (DApps) such as Riot (Tech Against Terrorism, 2019).

Meanwhile, supporters of ISIL(Daesh), Al-Qaeda and affiliated groups continue to evade detection on open social media platforms by circumventing platforms' moderation mechanisms, using comments, hijacking existing other users' accounts and masking content to share material while evading detection (Ayad, 2020). Despite tech companies' content moderation, attackers inspired by ISIL(Daesh) continued to access online material: the 2017 Manchester Arena bomber accessed advice on how to make bombing material on YouTube (Hamilton, 2017). ISIL(Daesh) maintains substantial propaganda material online in other forms. In 2020, ISD researchers discovered a digital library of ISIL(Daesh) material, containing over 90,000 items in nine languages, with details of recent attacks such as the Manchester Arena attack (Silva, 2020). The Covid-19 pandemic has also led to renewed attempts by groups such as ISIL(Daesh) and Al-Qaeda to disseminate recruitment and propaganda material online to inspire attacks. Localised lockdowns in Europe have led to growing online mobilisation and attempts and increased attempts at recruitment (See 5.1).

The landscape of violent far-right extremism conducive to terrorism has also been marked by a move from open social media platforms to more secure and less moderated platforms, building transnational online communities in a way that mirrors tactics used by ISIL(Daesh). A growing body of evidence has shown that violent far-right groups are using a range of online platforms to recruit followers and disseminate their ideologies, ranging from social media platforms and forums to encrypted applications and gaming websites, appealing to audiences across different countries. Open social media platforms such as Facebook have been used by transnational white supremacist networks to recruit FTFs in Ukraine. Instagram has been used by violent far-right groups in the UK to recruit new audiences. As of May 2019, Generation Identity maintained 70,000 followers on Twitter and the Finnish-born transnational organisation Soldiers of Odin has used Facebook for propaganda and recruitment purposes (Ekman, 2018).

An ecosystem of alternative and less or unregulated platforms is enabling violent far-right activities. It includes platforms such as Telegram, Gab and Parler, as well as message boards such as 4chan and 8chan (renamed 8kun after being taken down following the Christchurch attack). While open social media platforms are preferred for recruitment and propaganda and alternative platforms are used for in-group communication and strategic planning, there is an interplay between open platforms and encrypted and/or unregulated platforms, with the former being used to direct audiences to the latter via outbound links (Tech Against Terrorism). Violent far-right extremists have used alternative platforms, forums, gaming websites and chats to recruit fellow online users. The neo-Nazi online forum Fascist Forge (a successor to the website Iron March) served as networking and recruitment platform for violent far-right groups and networks across the Atlantic before its dissolution in 2020. Both in the US and UK, users of the website have been prosecuted for terrorist offenses (Dearden, 2020). Telegram, already noted for its use by ISIL(Daesh), has been used by a number of violent far-right groups with branches across Europe, including Attomwaffen and Generation Identity (Davey & Ebner, 2019).

Mainstream social media platforms' crackdown on terrorist activity, and a parallel movement by terrorist actors' towards less regulated online spaces has led to a growing body of research and debate on the benefits and potential adverse consequences of deplatforming. While deplatforming violent extremist and terrorist actors has been shown to limit their reach online (Conway & Macdonald, 2021), the move to a broader range of smaller platforms, which are more difficult to track by law enforcement, has raised concerns about a potential diffusion of violent extremist and terrorist actors' presence online.

Mirroring tactics adopted by ISIL(Daesh), violent far-right extremists and terrorist supporters have also adapted their radicalisation and recruitment procedures to online spaces, incorporating gaming elements in their recruitment procedures, (Ebner, 2020), a process researchers have called 'gamification'. Both ISIL(Daesh) and violent extremist far-right fora use gaming elements to increase engagement, such as giving points and rewards for commenting and posting, and incentivising users to continue engaging with terrorist content. Terrorist and violent extremist groups and networks have also produced video games to support recruitment, including games promoting groups such as Generation Identity, sharing them on platforms such as YouTube, Gab, Telegram and 8chan-related message boards (Fisher-Birch, 2020).

4.2 Financing

4.2.a. The decrease in organisational financing and the move towards self-funded attacks

Countering the Financing of Terrorism (CFT) has been at the forefront of counter-terrorism policies globally. In 1999, the UN adopted the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism in Resolution 54/109 of 9 December 1999, calling on member States to 'take steps to prevent and counteract, through appropriate domestic measures, the financing of terrorists and terrorist organizations, whether such financing is direct or indirect.' In March 2019, the UNSC passed Resolution 2462 to 'Combat, Criminalize Financing of Terrorists, Their Activities'. The terrorist financing landscape has evolved significantly in the last few years, reflecting changes in the nature of terrorist activity. The move towards lone actor and small cell terrorism in Europe, which is largely self-funded, has called into questions traditional approaches to CFT in counter-terrorism policies, while counter-terrorism and military operations against terrorist groups have reduced their ability to raise funds.

According to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), ISIL(Daesh)'s ability to raise funds from oil sales or taxation has diminished significantly as a result of its territorial losses in Iraq and Syria, forcing the group to rely on looting, kidnap for ransom and extortion of individuals and businesses. The group continues, however, to maintain substantial cash reserves (Johnston et.al, 2019). For many years, Al-Qaeda has relied on funds generated by non-profit organisations (NPOs) and individual donations (FATF, 2021) while exploiting formal financial systems to raise and move funds. Core Al-Qaeda funding has consistently diminished over the last few years; by 2010, estimates suggested that Al-Qaeda's core annual budget was under $1 million, while affiliates including Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP) and Al-Shabaab have diversified their funding sources through kidnapping for ransom, extortion and illicit trade (Bauer & Levitt, 2020).

While ISIL(Daesh) and Al-Qaeda's revenue streams have been widely documented, emerging evidence on the funding of far-right terrorism shows that most operations by lone actors and small cells are self-funded (FATF, 2021). However, the groups in the wider movement from which these attackers have emerged use a variety of fundraising methods. In the UK, groups such as National Action have been able to procure weapons and organise rallies, suggesting notable financial revenues, which have been attributed to personal funds, donations and possible international funding (Keatinge et al, 2019). In Italy, groups such as CasaPound and Forza Nuova have secured funding through businesses and trusts (The Soufan Centre, 2019). It has also been noted that violent far-right extremist groups and networks have found a variety of revenue streams, ranging from the production of online content, including advertising and paid-for content, to the use of music and sports events for fundraising. Music events and festivals as well as combat sport events represent notable revenue streams for far-right groups, including through the sale of related merchandise (Johnson, 2020). Before the Covid-19 pandemic, the UK-based neo-Nazi group Blood & Honour organised 15 concerts per year in the country, in addition to selling magazines (Keatinge et. al., 2019), revenue streams which have been temporarily hit by restrictions on gatherings.

The growing trend towards lone actor and small cell terrorism highlights new challenges in disrupting terrorist financing. As large and coordinated attacks have become more difficult to execute, Europe has seen a growing number of attacks carried out by individuals acting alone or in small cells and requiring no operational costs. Research has shown that individuals and small cells rely on a range of funding sources, including personal funds, licit loans and help from relatives and friends, to carry out their activities (Bauer & Levitt, 2020). While ISIL(Daesh) has lost significant sources of income, it continues to use online platforms to inspire local attacks, which can be carried out with minimal funds. The threat is also acute for far-right terrorism, which is largely carried out by lone actors and small cells. While lone actor and small cell terrorism involves few costs, it can benefit from groups' funds and material; MP Jo Cox's killer was revealed to have made purchases from National Alliance, a US-based neo-Nazi organisation (Keatinge, et al, 2019). Lone actors have also maintained financial links to groups. The Christchurch attacker reportedly made a €1,500 donation to the Identitarian movement's Austrian branch in 2018 (Reuters, 2019).

4.2.b. Criminal activities and terrorist financing

Notable attention has also been given to the links between criminal and terrorist activity, in particular in relation to financing. UNSC Resolutions 2462 (2019) and 2482 (2019) recognised that transnational organised crime can fuel terrorist financing. Terrorist groups have been able to generate funds from a range of criminal activities to fund their activities and operations, and the 'crime-terror' nexus has been the subject of decades of research, with reports highlighting that terrorist organisations 'have engaged both directly and indirectly in criminal activities' (Bergema, et al., 2020). A large body of research has documented how ISIL(Daesh) has generated a substantial part of its income from criminal activities, including extortion, kidnapping for ransom, robbery, currency and pharmaceutical counterfeiting, weapons, natural resources, people and cultural artefacts smuggling (Blannin, 2017). It is also believed to be involved in production and sale of amphetamines as another source of revenue. The PKK's European fundraising activities have relied on a range of illicit activities, including extortion, money laundering as well as drugs, weapons, human and other types of trafficking (Orton, 2017; Koseli et al., 2020). Violent far-right groups with transnational connections have also relied on criminal activities to finance operations (The Soufan Center, 2019).

Perpetrators of some of the deadliest ISIL(Daesh)-directed and inspired attacks in Western Europe were involved in criminal activities (Argomaniz & Bermejo, 2019; Basra, et al., 2016). In 2016, around 40% of terrorist plots in Western Europe were partially financed by petty crime, including but not limited to drug dealing, fraud, and burglaries (Basra, et al., 2016). Analyses of the profile of European FTFs during ISIL(Daesh)'s so called 'caliphate' showed that a substantial proportion had prior criminal convictions or were known to authorities for delinquency; in Germany, Federal police figures showed that 66% of FTFs had police records prior to traveling to Syria and Iraq, with figures from the UK showing that proportion to be 47% (Basra & Neumann, 2017) and one third in Spain (García-Calvo, & Reinares, 2016). Research has also documented how ISIL(Daesh) deliberately targeted individuals with prior criminal backgrounds, offering narratives of redemption (Basra, et al., 2016).

4.2.c. Use of new technologies for terrorist financing

As terrorist groups' sources of funding have been hit and as terrorist activity in Europe has moved towards lone actors and small cell structures, the role of technological innovations and FinTech (including virtual currencies) in funding terrorist operations has been the subject of growing concern. The extent to which these technologies are used remains contested, with most studies acknowledging that crypto-currencies present attractive features (e.g. anonymity) for terrorists. A RAND report concluded that 'there is little indication that terrorist organizations are using cryptocurrency in any sort of extensive or systematic way' (Dion-Scwartz, et.al, 2019), while a study commissioned by the European Parliament noted that short-term use of crypto-currencies by terrorists is most likely to 'involve occasional use for specific and limited purposes', noting however that developments in virtual currencies' sophistication could lead to their broader adoption by terrorists.

Outside of Europe, several examples of use of crypto-currencies by terrorists have been documented. In January 2017, Indonesian authorities reported that individuals linked to ISIL(Daesh) had used Bitcoin and online payment platforms including PayPal to finance a terrorist plot in the country. In the US, violent far-right groups are investing in new crypto-currencies such as Monero (Hayden, 2018) while the founder of the neo-Nazi website - The Daily Stormer, Andrew Anglin, described bitcoin as 'the Nazi currency' (Keatinge, et al., 2019). Several media outlets reported connections between the 2015 Paris attacks and the Munich Olympia shooting in July 2016 and crypto-currencies, with the weapons used by the perpetrators linked to vendors on the dark web. The Halle attacker also reported receiving financial support from an individual through cryptocurrency (Wighton, 2020). A number of violent far-right groups, including the Nordic Resistance Movement, have encouraged their followers to make donations in bitcoin on associated websites; there have also been reports of anarchist groups in Italy using crypto-currencies (Europol, 2020).

The use of online payment services, crowdfunding platforms and social media has also been connected to the financing of terrorist activity. Crowdfunding websites such as Patreon, GoFundMe, Justgiving or Kickstarter, in addition to mainstream social media platforms and online payment platforms such as PayPal, can be used to solicit donations. Crackdown on violent extremist activity by some platforms has led to the emergence of alternative fundraising platforms favoured by the violent far-right, including the now-banned Hatreon. In 2017, PayPal restricted Generation Identity's account. Companies used in online payments

such as Visa, Stripe and Google Pay are increasingly curtailing card payments via violent far-right websites and platforms, prompting many violent far-right groups and networks to move their efforts towards soliciting small sum peer-to-peer online transactions and transfers.

Amid restrictions to offline activities in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, violent extremists and terrorists are relying more on online fundraising and are likely to seek new ways of raising funds. Recently, the Covid-19 pandemic has raised concerns that violent extremists and terrorists could exploit online vulnerabilities to raise funds. The FATF noted that the pandemic has led to an increase in criminal financial activity, including online scams, which could allow violent extremists and terrorists to extort funds through a variety of online scams, for instance by posing as charities and humanitarian organisations raising funds for Covid-19 relief and using email and text messages to request donations (FATF, 2020). The FATF has also noted that terrorists could also exploit vulnerabilities in business networks to gain access to personal and financial data and use it to carry out transactions.

4.3 Communication, Coordination & Disruption

4.3.a. Online communication and coordination

The use of online platforms by terrorist actors serves a wide range of purposes beyond recruitment and financing. The UNCTED has noted that 'terrorists and terrorist groups exploit the Internet and social media [...] to facilitate a wide range of terrorist activities, including incitement, radicalization, recruitment, training, planning, collection of information, communications, preparation, and financing'. Online technologies have in particular enabled terrorists to communicate, network, coordinate their activities and plan attacks. Research has shown that the coordination and planning of attacks is more likely to take place in closed online channels and groups, as well as encrypted messaging applications. On Facebook, private groups have been shown to be used for coordination and group building while public groups are used for recruitment (Ekman, 2018).

Examples of deadly attacks have evidenced the role of online platforms in the coordination of attacks. The cell that conducted the November 2015 attack in Paris used Telegram to prepare and plan. Further ISIL(Daesh)-inspired or directed attacks were also executed using Telegram, with members in Syria and Iraq sending instructions to attackers via Telegram's secret chat function, including the December 2016 Berlin Christmas market attack and the Reina nightclub attack in Istanbul in 2017. Prominent ISIL(Daesh) virtual planner Rachid Kassim used his Telegram channel to plot 'at least a dozen successful and thwarted plots' in France and to post graphics encouraging the group's supporters to target religious, political and media public figures (Vidino, et al., 2017). In the UK, ISIL(Daesh) recruiters have used encrypted applications to give instructions on how to execute attacks, while non-encrypted social media platforms were used to make contact with recruits (Malik, 2018). The reported use of encrypted applications by lone actor attacks has led to speculation about potential links to wider networks. Following the 2017 Westminster attack, it was for instance reported the perpetrator had used WhatsApp to communicate ahead of the attack (Kelion, 2017).

Violent far-right actors have used online platforms to build transnational connections and decentralised online networks for coordination, communication and exchange of tactics. Far-right groups such as Soldiers of Odin have leveraged online platforms to communicate and network, establishing transnational communities of supporters (Veilleux-LePage & Archambault, 2019). Online platforms are used to share tactics, communicate and plan actions. In the UK, National Action reportedly used encrypted messaging applications to coordinate actions on campuses (Dearden, 2018). Online platforms have also been shown to facilitate inter-groups dynamics; a study focused on far-right violence in Sweden showed that online platforms are used by group members to encourage others and build in-group cohesion (Wahlström & Törnberg, 2019). Attention has increased within the EU fora and elsewhere to violent far right extremism followed by actions such as the first Referral Action Day against right-wing terrorist online propaganda, the ongoing work on a knowledge package composed of violent right-wing extremists groups, symbols and manifestos to support tech companies voluntary content moderation efforts, and development of risk assessment instruments to evaluate the risk posed by violent far right extremists or rising national proscriptions of right-wing extremist groups or organisations.

4.3.b. Reciprocal dynamics

A growing body of research has highlighted the ways in which violent extremist and terrorist groups exploit the actions of opposite groups to rally support for their ideology and feed off each other's rhetoric to escalate violence, particularly in online spaces (Lee & Knott, 2020). A recent literature review by ICSR on the interplay between ISIL(Daesh)-related and violent far-right ideologies have highlighted the complexity of reciprocal dynamics between ideologically opposed entities, noting that while interactions exist, they remain inconsistent (Barnet et.al, 2021). Researchers have documents how violent far-right online communities discuss attacks inspired by ISIL(Daesh) or Al-Qaeda and violence perpetrated by these groups to bolster their agenda (Davey & Ebner, 2017), while ISIL(Daesh) and Al-Qaeda-affiliated networks have been shown to reference anti-Muslim hate crimes and examples of discrimination against Muslim communities in Europe to incite attacks. Far-right groups are imitating the language and communication tactics of ISIL(Daesh) and Al-Qaeda-linked groups and have sought inspiration in the group's propaganda (The Soufan Center, 2019). National Action has for instance called for 'white jihad'. Researchers have also found that despite being ideologically opposed, ISIL(Daesh) and far-right terrorists' use of language through ISIL(Daesh)'s propaganda and violent far-right attackers' so-called 'manifestos' presents a number of commonalities (Buckingham & Alali, 2019).

Groups across the ideological spectrum have been shown to borrow communication and coordination tactics from one another, including in online spaces. Violent far-right and ISIL(Daesh) or Al-Qaeda inspired Russian communities on Vkontakte have been found to adopt similar communication strategies to avoid being taken down (Myagkov, Shchekotin, Chudinov, & Goiko, 2019). In the UK, reports have shown that violent far-right extremists have sought to access ISIL(Daesh) tactical manuals online (Gardner, 2019); transnational violent far-right groups have called on their supporters to emulate the actions of groups including the Taliban and ISIL(Daesh) (Makuch & Lamoureux, 2019). Both ISIL(Daesh) and violent far-right groups have used social media 'armies' to extend the reach of their online recruitment. The far-right online channel Reconquista Germanica ran a 'troll army' of more than 10,000 on the Discord platform, before being taken down in October 2019 (Ebner, 2020), a tactic which mirrors ISIL(Daesh)'s 'online armies'.

4.3.c. False reporting of terrorism

Terrorists have adopted a wide range of communication strategies to support their activities and impact on European societies. Organised terrorist groups have used their media channels to claim attacks globally, sometimes falsely claiming attacks. As ISIL(Daesh) started losing territory in Syria and Iraq and lone actor attacks in Europe and other regions increased, ISIL(Daesh) struggled to ascertain responsibility for a number of violent incidents. A number of attacks were mentioned by ISIL(Daesh) in its propaganda but not officially claimed (ICCT, 2019). The group also falsely claimed a number of attacks and incidents; in October 2017, ISIL(Daesh) took responsibility for a shooting in Las Vegas, a claim that was widely discounted. ISIL(Daesh)'s pattern of claiming attacks in Europe varied widely throughout the so called 'caliphate' as the group adapted its strategy to the growing number of lone actor attacks in Europe. Through its weekly newsletter al-Naba', ISIL(Daesh) reported on a false bomb plot at Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris in September 2017, claiming that a 'security detachment of Islamic State soldiers' planted explosives in the airport, in an attempt to capitalise on the false bomb alarm (ICCT, 2019).

False reporting of terrorist offences, or the deliberate reporting of terrorist offences knowing that the information is false, has been the subject of limited investigation, in particular in relation to terrorist actors. Cases of false reports have emerged throughout Europe in recent years, from the Charing Cross tube station bomb alert in June 2018 (BBC News) to the evacuation of the Eiffel Tower following a false bomb threat in Paris in September 2020 (Breeden, 2020), although links to terrorist actors have not been established. The French Ministry of Justice recorded three cases in 2019 and two in 2020, none of which could be linked to terrorist actors (Council of Europe, CDCT). Some cases of violent far-right and far-left actors falsely making false alerts - the former to threaten minorities and the latter to attack opponents - have been recorded by German authorities (Council of Europe, CDCT). The Russian Federation reported a high number of incidents related to the false reporting of terrorist offences, including threats against critical and social infrastructure such as schools, airports, train stations and healthcare facilities. Over 3,000 individuals have been convicted in relation to these offences in the Russian Federation since 2015, according to figures from the Russian Judiciary (Council of Europe, CDCT).

4.4 Activities

4.4.a. Types of attacks and weapons

The nature of terror attacks in Europe has evolved notably since the 2015-16 ISIL(Daesh) wave of violence. While 2015 and 2016 witnessed large-scale coordinated attacks by ISIL(Daesh), involving several attackers and accomplices, subsequent years have seen a shift towards small-scale attacks perpetrated by lone actors, using a variety of easily procurable weapons such as vehicles, melee weapons and home-made explosives. The move towards the use of easily procurable weapons was the direct result of instructions from ISIL(Daesh) command. In a video released in January 2015, ISIL(Daesh) spokesman Abu Muhammad al-Adnani encouraged attacks with any simple means available, including 'an explosive device, a bullet, a knife, a car, a rock, or even a boot or a fist.' While less common than other types of weapons, the use of firearms has remained a feature of European terrorism due to the greater accessibility of these weapons.

Melee weapons (such as knives, axes, machetes or meat cleavers) became increasingly used in terror attacks in Europe from 2014 onwards. A study of Al-Qaeda and ISIL(Daesh) modus operandi found an increase in the use of knives in terror plots in Europe (31% of plots in 2014-16, up from 13% of plots between 2008 and 2013) (Nesser, et al., 2016). Melee weapons have been used in a multiple of lone actor attacks inspired by ISIL(Daesh) during that period and since, including the attacks in Hanover (2016), at the Louvre museum in Paris (2017), in London Bridge (2017; accompanied by vehicle ramming), Turku, Finland (2017) and more recently at a church in Nice (2020), in Dresden (2020) and in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, France (2020). Axes and meat cleavers have also been used in attacks, including the Würzburg train attack (2017) and the attempted attack on Charlie Hebdo in October 2020 respectively.

The years since 2014 have seen a decline in the use of explosives and a move towards a greater use of firearms by ISIL(Daesh) in directed attacks. A 2017 study of terrorists' use of firearms in Europe found that cross-border smuggling, theft, the conversion of blank-firing guns, and the reactivation of deactivated firearms contributed to the increased availability of firearms to criminals and terrorists (Duquet & Goris, 2018). The January 2015 shootings in Paris, for instance, involved two reactivated automatic rifles and six handguns; attackers' prior criminal background facilitating access to firearms. The use of firearms in attacks carried out in the last few months, including the November 2020 Vienna shooting, have highlighted lone actors' continued ability to access firearms.

While the proportion of attacks using explosives has declined, some of the deadliest attacks in Europe since 2015 have involved bombing and the use of Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), including the November 2015 Paris attacks, the March 2016 Brussels attacks, the Manchester Arena and Parsons Green bombings in 2017, as well as 2015 Ankara train station attack. Further attacks involving explosives included the April 2017 St Petersburg Metro bombing and a bomb being detonated in a supermarket in the same city in December 2017. Home-made explosives have been used in the majority of attacks carried out in Europe using chemicals which can be found in a number of commercialised products. Homemade explosives produced with Triacetone Triperoxide (TATP) were involved in the 2017 Barcelona, Manchester and Parsons Green (UK) attacks (Bryce, 2017) prompting restrictions at the EU level on the commercialisation of certain products. The Moscow supermarket bombing attack in December 2017 was reportedly carried out with a home-made explosive device hidden in a rucksack and placed inside a locker on the premises.

Although not a novel tactic, the use of vehicles in ramming attacks came to growing attention in Europe in 2016 when it was first adopted by ISIL(Daesh) in Europe. The first significant notable attack carried out in Western Europe was executed in Nice in July 2016 by a lone actor who used a truck to ram into a crowd in a pedestrian area, killing 86 people and injuring hundreds, making this one of the deadliest attacks in Europe in the last decade. Following Nice, several attacks directed or inspired by ISIL(Daesh) have relied on rented and hijacked vehicles, including the Berlin Christmas market attack, the Westminster and London Bridge attacks, and the 2017 Stockholm truck attack. A number of attacks have used a combination of weapons, resorting to vehicle ramming alongside shootings, stabbings and bombings, including the 2017 Barcelona attack.

The use of technologically sophisticated weapons such as chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear (CBRN) products, drones or missiles has been notably absent in attacks carried out in Europe, although concerns about the use of CBRN weapons has been connected to a handful of attacks, including the March 2016 Brussels attacks. ISIL(Daesh) built a fleet of small drones, used for a variety of purposes, including

propaganda and demonstrating technological sophistication (Archambault & Veilleux Lepage, 2020). ISIL(Daesh) has also used both chemical weapons and drones in Iraq and Syria to bomb targets. The lack of success in attacks in Europe suggests limited capabilities in carrying out this type of attack. Such attacks cannot be completely ruled out, however. In 2018, an ISIL(Daesh) operative successfully produced a biological agent (ricin) in Cologne, Germany. (BBC News, 2018). Easily accessible commercial drones could be used in attacks. In the UK, an individual suspected of being an ISIL(Daesh) sympathiser was charged with attempting a drone attack by modifying a commercial drone (Dearden, 2020). Drone and missile attacks from both PKK and ISIL(Daesh) targeting Turkish public buildings/officials from neighbouring borders have also been reported (Hambling, 2020).

Reflecting trends observed in relation to ISIL(Daesh), far-right terrorism has relied on simple weapons and attack tactics, easily accessible to small cells and lone actors. In Germany, the violent far-right has used 'mainly small-unit tactics' including improvised explosive and incendiary devices. The German government's 2019 report noted a decrease in targeted arson and assassinations. Lethal far-right attacks in Europe in the last five years have seen the use of firearms (murder of Dr. Walter Lübcke in Wolfhagen, 2019, Halle, 2019 and Hanau, 2020). Knives have been used in a range of suspected violent far-right attacks, such as the Avignon stabbing in France in October 2020 and the Surrey stabbing in August 2019 (BBC News, 2019). Lethal far-right attacks have increasingly involved the use of firearms, while the proportion of lethal attacks using melee weapons has declined (Ravndal, et al., 2020).

The modus operandi of violent far-right motivated lone attacks has underscored the ease of procuring weapons and accessing instructions for fabricating new types of weapons. The Halle shooter used a home-made 3D-printed weapon to perpetrate his attack, while the Hanau attack perpetrator was reported to have belonged to a rifle club for several years and legally owned three weapons. Violent far-right extremists and terrorists' connections to law enforcement or the military can also provide access to sophisticated weapons. Foiled far-right terrorist plots and violent far-right extremist activity have led law enforcement to the discovery of weapons' caches across different countries, including in Italy (Giuffrida, 2019) and Austria (Reuters, 2020) pointing to violent far-right extremist groups and individuals' access to weapons. Cases have also involved weapons procured by violent far-right extremists with connections to the military (Bennhold, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic has also shown how new crises can potentially fuel new types of attacks. Violent far-right extremists have discussed using coronavirus as a biological weapon to target minority communities and security services (The Soufan Centre). While no such attack has successfully materialised in Europe, increased attempts at far-right terrorist recruitment and incitement online, are posing novel threats and risks of weaponizing the virus. While violent far-right groups and terrorists' ability to use sophisticated weapons such as CBRN remains doubtful and no notable successful violent far-right attack in Europe involving CBRN weapons in Europe is known, a small number of violent far-right plots in the US have involved attempts at using radiological, raising the possibility of this type of endeavour in Europe. Violent far-right groups have also experimented with various biological weapons but these experiments have been limited; as an example, a UK-based member of the neo-Nazi Aryan Strike Force group was convicted of producing biological agents in a plot to target Muslim and Jewish communities (Ong & Azman, 2020).

4.4.b. Targets of attacks

While terrorists have conducted attacks on both hard and soft targets, soft or vulnerable targets, including critical infrastructure, have been preferred by terrorist actors across the ideological spectrum for being easily accessible and little protected, allowing attackers to maximise casualties and hit into the heart of societies. Attacks against soft targets, defined by the UNCTED as 'public spaces or other locations that are easily accessible and predominantly civilian in nature, often with limited security measures in place' (UNCTED, Analytical Brief) have been identified as a significant threat by the UNSC, which called in Resolution 2396 (2017) for concerted action by governments to develop mitigation and emergency responses to attacks against soft targets and critical infrastructure. A study of 246 planned and executed attacks in Western Europe between 1994 and 2016 found that soft targets are preferred by groups and lone

actors alike, noting that 88% of attacks had a soft target focus, a proportion which increased notably from 2014 onwards. Commercial airlines were the most often consistently attacked hard target (Hemmingby, 2017). Increased security around hard targets has reduced the likelihood of successful attacks and has further accelerated attacks on soft targets.

Since 2016, terrorists directed and inspired by ISIL(Daesh) have increasingly targeted a broad range of soft targets in urban public spaces, such as pedestrian areas, entertainment venues, airports, and shopping premises. Critical infrastructure and law enforcement personnel have also been targeted. In August 2018, four police officers were injured in an ISIL(Daesh)-claimed attack against law enforcement in Chechnya, which involved a combination of knife attack, attempted suicide bombing and the attempted running over of two officers with a car (Nechepurenko, 2018). The targeting of critical infrastructure remains a significant tactic for terrorists. The March 2016 Brussels attacks in which two teams of ISIL(Daesh) operatives carried out simultaneous attacks at Zaventem airport and at Maelbeek metro, aiming at the country's transport infrastructure. Lone actors directed or inspired by ISIL(Daesh) have also managed to attack targets (e.g. official buildings) with heightened security. In October 2019, an IT employee with security clearance stabbed three colleagues to death in the Paris police headquarters using a ceramic knife that went undetected by metal scanners.

Existing evidence suggests that the threat of terrorist attacks against hard targets remains low amid growing security protocols and protection, including in areas such as civil aviation. While attacks on civil aviation and plane hijackings have a long history in Europe and were the subject of multiple attacks and attempts by Al-Qaeda in the 2000s (Arasly, 2005), increased security around civil aviation has made commercial planes a less attractive target for attacks. Terrorists' adoption of new technologies and more sophisticated explosives could, however, lead to a renewed threat of attacks. Unsecured locations at airports continue to represent a soft target of choice for terrorists, as highlighted by the bomb attacks at Brussels Airport in March 2016. Other examples of foiled attacks targeting airports have been reported; in 2020, for instance, Swiss authorities reported thwarting an ISIL(Daesh)-linked plot to bomb oil depots at Geneva International Airport (Mabillard, 2020).

Far-right terrorists have also widely attacked soft targets, conducting attacks on public spaces and places of worship. Targets of violent far-right attacks can broadly be classified in five groups, following Ravndal et al: ethnic and religious minorities, political opponents, State institutions, sexual minorities, and vulnerable groups (e.g. homeless and disabled groups). In Western Europe, three main victim groups stand out as being most frequently targeted by violent far right perpetrators: immigrants, left-wingers, and homeless people (Bjørgo and Ravndal, 2019). Places associated with the above-mentioned groups, including places of worship, have been at the heart of terror attacks and attempts. In Germany, the Halle attack in October 2019 targeted a synagogue, while the Baerum attack in Norway targeted a mosque. France witnessed a failed attack against a mosque in the southern town of Bayonne a few days after the Halle attack, while a dozen people were arrested in Italy in late November 2019 over alleged plans to blow up a mosque in the Siena province.

Assassinations and targeting of liberal political figures by individuals inspired by violent far-right ideology have been a notable trend in several countries. The assassination of pro-migration politicians, including British MP Jo Cox, German regional politician Walter Lübcke and the Polish mayor of Gdańsk Paweł Adamowicz by individuals suspected of connections to violent far-right ideology have highlighted the threat of ideologically-motivated assassinations. Violent far-right groups including National Action and Atomwaffen Division, which has been declared a terrorist organisation by several governments, have made threats against politicians (Sabbagh, 2019).

4.4.c. The interplay between online and offline tactics in attacks

Recent years have seen a combination of online and offline tactics deployed in terror attacks and the incorporation of online tactics in the execution of attacks. The Christchurch attack in March 2019 in New Zealand marked the first live streamed terror attack globally when the attacker broadcast his shooting on Facebook. Gamification, or the 'use of game design elements within non-game contexts' has become a feature of violent far-right attacks. Following the modus operandi of the Christchurch attack, attackers in El Paso, USA and in Halle broadcast their attack on online platforms. While the Halle attack was watched live

on Twitch by only few people, the video was viewed more than 2,000 times before being removed by the platform. Attackers involved in lethal far-right attacks have been embedded in violent extremist online communities on platforms such as Gab and 8chan (8kun) and online subcultures glorifying violence, where the language and references of gaming abound.

While the use of tactics inspired by gaming in terrorist groups' recruitment and propaganda is not new and has been adopted by ISIL(Daesh), more widespread use of gaming references in decentralised violent online communities, particularly on the violent far-right, is a more recent phenomenon. A European Commission report noted that gamification 'has only recently become part of the extremist 'toolbox'' (Schlegel, L. 2021). There have been some precedents to gamified terror: the perpetrator of the 2011 Norway attack reported training for his attack by playing video games. A year later, in France, the perpetrator of the Toulouse and Montauban shootings filmed his attack with a GoPro camera and posted it online. With the Christchurch, El Paso and Halle attacks, however, the use of online platforms to live broadcast attacks has highlighted new manifestations of the gamification of terrorism, with attackers interacting with online audiences during the attack.

Following attacks, attackers are glorified in online subcultures without being directed by organisations. While some sources state that violent far-right Telegram channels have for instance celebrated the Halle attacker as a 'saint' (Owen, 2019), this was not confirmed in relevant criminal proceedings. That said, various online communities keep virtual scores on the number of victims of far-right attacks, with users expressing the desire to 'beat the score' of previous attackers. This phenomenon is prominent platforms such as 8chan/8kun, gaming platforms such as Discord, social media platforms including Gab and Reddit, and in private chat rooms on encrypted applications such as WhatsApp (Schlegel, 2021) signalling the role of online sub-communities as accelerators of violent extremism conducive to terrorism.

Online attacks by terrorist groups and individuals have also been the subject of investigation. Following ISIL(Daesh)'s territorial decline, concerns have emerged about the group's move to cyberspace and risks that it could launch cyberattacks. Few recorded attempted have involved advanced hacking skills and cyber-terrorism capabilities, with groups resorting to doxing, website defacement and social media account hacking. Hackers linked to ISIL(Daesh) have previously managed to hack web hosts to deface internet sites, hijack hashtags and flood social media with propaganda. In 2014, the United Cyber Caliphate, an online group affiliated with ISIL (Daesh) managed to temporarily take over the social media accounts of the US Military although there was no intrusion into government systems. In April, ISIL(Daesh) launched an attack on French broadcasting channel TV5 Monde (Chrisafis & Gibbs, 2015). ISIL(Daesh) hackers have also published various kill lists and obtained the details and names of government employees (Alexander & Clifford, 2019). Despite these examples, no significant cyber-attack against critical infrastructure in Europe has materialised.

While sophisticated cyber-attacks remain unlikely, the use of online tactics such as doxing, which require limited resources and capabilities, could continue to be used by terrorist sympathisers with technical skills. In March 2019, the FBI arrested a U.S. State of Georgia-based member of the United Cyber Caliphate-affiliated hacking collective which reportedly coordinated the publication of a kill list with fellow ISIL(Daesh)-affiliated hackers in countries including Norway and the Netherlands (Alexander & Clifford, 2019). Violent extremist and terrorist far-right groups and networks have resorted to similar types of online tactics. Supporters of the UK group Britain First have used social media platforms to launch calls for doxing individuals (Nouri, et al., 2019). New and emerging technologies could be harnessed by terrorists across the ideological spectrum. Although much research on the subject remains speculative, Artificial Intelligence (AI)-based technologies such as deep fakes could be used to produce deceptive content aimed at recruiting new members, inciting violence and fuelling attacks as well as intimidation campaigns (Chesney & Citron, 2019). Research has also highlighted the fact that deep fakes could be used to incite violence and support the ideologies of violent extremist and terrorist groups (Ciancaglini et al., 2020).

5. Emerging ideologies & crises

5.1 Exploitation of new crises by terrorists: the Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 crisis has had a deep impact on the global geopolitical and conflict landscape, thereby influencing trends in international terrorism. As the crisis continues to unfold, the long-term effects of the pandemic remain difficult to predict and are only slowly becoming evident. The pandemic has been presented both as a challenge and an opportunity, with the UNCTED noting that the pandemic has presented both short-term opportunities and risks for terrorist actors. While lockdowns and travel restrictions across Europe have impacted terrorists' ability to carry out conventional attacks, societies' increased reliance on the Internet and time spent online has given terrorist groups, networks and individuals new opportunities to recruit new members and use the pandemic to support their ideologies and incite violence by exploiting social anxieties and pressures on infrastructures (UNCTED, 2020). Further, school closures and remote learning has increased the risk that young people could be exposed to terrorist messaging online (UNCTED, 2020). Despite lockdowns, recent attacks in Conflans-Sainte-Honorine, Nice and Vienna have shown that terrorists have been able to exploit windows of opportunity between lockdowns to carry out attacks. The Vienna shooting in particular happened hours before the country was due to enter a new lockdown. The Covid-19 pandemic has also led to aggravated conditions in camps and detention sites in North-Eastern Syria where FTFs and their families are kept. Degrading detention conditions in these camps could serve as a potential avenue for spread of terrorist ideologies and further radicalization.

Terrorist groups and networks have used the pandemic to support their ideologies. Both Al-Qaeda and ISIL(Daesh) initially released formal public statements about the pandemic on their media channels, highlighting the risk of the virus, while seeking to use the pandemic to recruit new members and incite attacks. In statements produced in English, Al-Qaeda has blamed the pandemic on the oppression of Muslims and the decadence of the West and has called for people in the 'Western World' to use their time in lockdown to convert. ISIL(Daesh) has framed the pandemic in various ideological terms as the health situation evolved globally. When the pandemic spread to Europe in the first months of 2020, the group presented the virus as divine punishment for 'Crusader nations' and the virus as 'Soldier of Allah', in statements released in its Al-Naba newsletter. Groups such as Al-Qaeda, ISIL(Daesh) and affiliates in the Middle East including Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) have also sought to underline the shortcomings of democratic States and present themselves as alternative service providers (Ibid.). ISIL(Daesh) initially urged followers not to travel to Europe to commit attacks, calling its followers in Iraq and Syria to free prisoners held in camps instead. The group also encouraged followers in Europe to carry out attacks on weakened infrastructure (Avis, 2020). Overall, however, Al Qaeda and ISIL(Daesh) narrative around the pandemic has waned since the middle of 2020. There have been few, if any, attacks in Europe inspired by ISIL(Daesh) that can be directly linked to the pandemic (King and Mullins, 2021). Al Qaeda and ISIL(Daesh) affiliates across the world have been largely unaffected by the pandemic, with conflicts remaining on their pre-pandemic trajectories.

Violent far-right extremist and terrorist groups, networks and individuals in Europe have blamed the pandemic on migrant and minority communities, Jewish, Muslim, Asian and immigrant communities (Katz, 2020). Violent far-right actors have used and promoted a variety of conspiracy theories (Cruickshank & Rassler, 2020). The strand of violent far-right extremism known as 'accelerationism', which promotes the idea that democracy is a failure and that groups should accelerate its demise by fostering violence and conflict, has used Covid-19 to encourage attacks (ISD, 2020). Violent far-right extremist and terrorist groups in Europe have also used online channels to call for attacks against minorities. In the UK, for instance, the neo-Nazi British National Socialist Movement (BNSM) called for attacks against Jews on Telegram (Ehsan, 2020). Violent far-right extremists have also discussed using Covid-19 as a biological weapon to target law enforcement and non-white communities (The Soufan Center). Calls to use the virus as a weapon against religious and ethnic minorities have appeared on a range of alternative online platforms and messaging applications such as 8chan and Telegram; online users have also encouraged others to carry out conventional attacks (Kruglanski et.al, 2020).

The pandemic has provided fertile ground for attempts at terrorist recruitment online across the ideological spectrum. Since the beginning of the pandemic, worldwide Internet usage has surged significantly, including among young audiences. A UN report concluded that 'a captive audience harbouring anxieties and uncertainties during social distancing potentially provides a fertile ground for radicalisation.' Violent far-right

extremist networks have seen notable growth online during the pandemic and have ramped up recruitment efforts (Comerford, 2020). Attempts by the violent far-right at weaponizing the pandemic have taken place primarily in decentralised transnational online networks, reflecting a broader shift towards a post-organisational modes of activity. White supremacist Telegram channels have seen a growth in users - a channel focusing on Covid-19 messaging grew its user base by 800% in the early days of the pandemic (Perrigo, 2020).

While previous patterns of attacks have shown terrorists' preference for particular types of soft targets, the pandemic has raised concerns that new types of critical infrastructure could be targeted, including hospitals and vaccination centres. While no such attack has manifested in Europe, there have been precedents in other regions. In March 2020, the FBI reportedly prevented a bombing attack on a hospital in the Kansas-City area (BBC News, 2020) plotted by an individual motivated by a combination of conspiratorial and far-right violent beliefs. Europol also cautioned against the risk of cyber-attacks against hospitals, with European countries reporting several such cases, although these were not linked to terrorist motivations (Europol, 2020). Calls for violence against specific minorities and religious communities have also raised concerns about a potential increase in such attacks.

5.2 Violent far-right ideologies

5.2.a. The use of ideological 'manifestos' in far-right terrorism

Far-right terrorism has become a growing concern in many parts of the Europe. As previously described, violent far-right extremism and far-right terrorism have been described in literature as a 'family' or 'umbrella' of ideologies, characterised by racism and hatred towards minorities, xenophobia, islamophobia or anti-Semitism. Perpetrators of several lethal far-right attacks have used documents (sometimes referred to as 'manifestos') to share their ideologies and reference previous attacks such as the one perpetrated by Anders Breivik in 2011. Attackers in Christchurch, El Paso, Poway and Halle have produced such documents, all written in English and expressing white supremacist or neo-Nazi views. While the use of documents has come to growing attention since the Christchurch attack, it had a number of precedents in North America and Europe, including the June 2015 Charleston shooting and the July 2011 Norway attack (Ware, 2020), whose perpetrator produced a 1,516-page manifesto sharing violent far-right extremist beliefs.

Recent violent far-right attackers have referenced a number of published works. *The Turner Diaries*, a novel published in 1978, has been cited by perpetrators of over 200 killings since its publication (Berger, 2016). *Siege*, a book published in 1992 by the neo-Nazi James Mason, has provided inspiration for violent far-right extremist movements, in particular those who have embraced accelerationism. Groups such as the Atomwaffen Division have drawn inspiration from the *Siege* (Ware, 2020). These texts have been used to crystallise ideologies and justify attacks. Analyses of the so-called manifestos published ahead of attacks have also highlighted a number of commonalities, including references to a perceived clash of races or civilisations, the use of the defence of 'European' heritage as a justification for attacks, the reference to ongoing political events and the depiction of attacks as self-defense or last resort (Ibid.).

While the ideological references used by perpetrators to justify attacks have been varied, the use of specific ideological rallying points has received growing attention. Like the perpetrators of the Christchurch, Poway and El Paso attacks, the Halle shooter's manifesto heavily featured the 'great replacement' and 'white genocide' conspiracy theories, which claim that white Europeans are being culturally and ethnically eradicated by non-white and non-Christian populations. The 'great replacement' theory, which originated in France, has been adopted by transnational groups such as Generation Identity (Davey & Ebner, 2019). Other common elements include preservation of European culture, references to ongoing political dialogue, and portrait of their actions as self-defence and acts of last resort (Ware, 2020). Beyond the adoption of common ideological references, the use of similar *modus operandi* via the dissemination of English language 'manifestos' and the use of online platforms to broadcast attacks has given rise to a new pattern of violent far-right attacks.

5.2.b. New patterns of copy-cat attacks

The spate of global violent far-right attacks which started with Christchurch has highlighted the emergence of new patterns of copycat attacks, whereby perpetrators of violent far-right attacks reference previous attackers as a source of inspiration, and their 'manifestos' are widely circulated online. The 2011 Norway's attack perpetrator's 'manifesto' has served as an inspiration for a number of violent far-right attacks and attempts globally. The perpetrator of the Christchurch massacre was partly inspired by Breivik, and adopted

similar modus operandi (Veilleux-Lepage et.al., 2020) as did the US Coast Guard Lieutenant Christopher Hasson who planned and failed to execute a mass casualty attack (Berger, 2019) a few weeks before Christchurch. The gunman who opened fire in the Halle synagogue livestreamed his shooting like the Christchurch attacker. Following Christchurch, perpetrators of violent far-right attacks have all announced their attacks online using a range of platforms and messageboards, with the Baerum attacker announcing his attack on the messageboard Endchan and the Halle attacker posting on the image board Meadhall immediately before his attack.

Violent far-right networks and online users supportive of attackers have contributed to widely circulating attackers' manifestos; following the Christchurch attack, users on 8chan widely shared the attacker's violent manifesto. In the hours that followed the attack, the video of Christchurch attack was uploaded to YouTube at a rate of one per second and more than 1.2 million videos of the attack appeared on Facebook (Conway, et al., 2019). Translations of the attacker's manifesto appeared online in at least 15 languages, including French, German and Spanish were shared by violent far-right online networks to attempt to inspire similar attacks. Violent far-right attackers have been referenced by individuals attempting to inspire similar attacks in Europe. In October 2019, two individuals were jailed in the UK for encouraging a Christchurch-style attack online (BBC News, 2019).

5.2.c. The co-option of online subcultures

While acting alone, attackers involved in recent lethal far-right attacks were embedded in loose extremist online communities. Violent far-right networks and individuals in these communities have co-opted youth online subcultures to broaden their appeal and expose new audiences to violent far-right extremist ideology. The Gamergate online harassment campaign was shown to have played a key role in exposing younger audiences to violent far-right ideas (Copeland & Marsden, 2020). Researchers have connected far-right attacks with 'chan culture' (named after the 'chan' message boards), a glorification of violence through memes, humour and satire. Extremist message boards on chan sites have been shown to facilitate an 'in-group' identity around the consumption of violent far-right content, making this content more accessible to young audiences steeped in popular culture (Crawford et al., 2020). Violent extremists' use of humour and satire have allowed them to blur the line between irony and violent messaging (Fielitz & Ahmed, 2021).

5.3 Emergent violent extremist ideologies

This section outlines threats associated with emergent violent extremist challenges. While these threats remain small scale in Europe, they point to potential future challenges in disrupting terrorist activity.

5.3.a. Extreme misogyny

The role of extreme misogynistic beliefs in fuelling violent attacks has been the subject of growing research. Extreme misogynistic online communities are forming part of the so-called 'Manosphere', consisting in a range of sub-communities, including the Men's Rights Activists (MRA), the Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), the Pick-Up-Artists (PUA) and the Involuntary celibates (Incels). In recent years, perpetrators of several terrorist attacks in North America and Europe have subscribed to extreme misogynistic beliefs and were reportedly part of Incel communities online. This includes the Isla Vista attacker in 2014 in the US and the perpetrator of the Toronto van attack in 2018 in Canada. Other attackers have cited the Incels as a source of inspiration, including the attacker of the Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Florida in 2018 and the Tallahassee Hot Yoga studio in Florida in 2019.

While the threat of attacks inspired by extreme misogyny manifested in a series of attacks in North America since 2014, the threat is not absent in Europe. Documents left behind by the Hanau attacker showed he shared a combination of conspiracy theories and racist views. While the attacker's direct affiliation to the Incel movement could not be ascertained, reports have shown that Incel tropes featured prominently in his 'manifesto' (Ware, 2020). Similarly, misogynistic beliefs also appeared in the manifesto of the attacker of the Halle synagogue. In this case, the court convicted the shooter to imprisonment for life for 'murder under specific aggravating circumstances' in relation to one of the murders having found that his misogynistic

attitude met the criteria of an aggravating circumstance warranted under this qualification.[6] Research has also highlighted the nexus between extreme misogyny and other forms of violent far-right beliefs, particularly in online communities (Castillo Díaz & Nahla Valji, 2019).

5.3.b. Conspiracy theories and anti-institutional beliefs

The Covid-19 pandemic has led to an increase in online conspiracy theories and led to concerns that these could fuel terror attacks. The EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator Gilles de Kerchove warned against the 'potential future rise of new forms of terrorism, rooted in conspiracy theories and technophobia; and fuelled by the enduring pandemic' (Jasser, et.al, 2020). The UK's extremism chief expressed concerns that conspiracy theories could lead to terrorist attacks. The Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) in the US declared the QAnon conspiracy theory, which has seen an increase in followership in North America as well as in parts of Europe, including the UK, Germany and France during the pandemic. At least four attacks investigated as terrorism in the US appear to have been motivated by belief in QAnon (Amarasingam & Argentino, 2020), with the spread of QAnon-related content to European audiences raising concerns about similar types of attacks in Europe.

The pandemic has resulted in a growing intersection between conspiracy theories and terrorism (Cruickshank & Rassler, 2020). As the virus spread in Europe and globally, conspiracy theories have circulated online, seeking to offer explanations for the pandemic. A number of conspiracy theories have flourished among violent extremist far-right groups, including conspiracy theories alleging that the virus is a hoax engineered by shadowy elites. Conspiracy theories which partially overlap with but do not directly relate to far-right violent extremism, have also spread during the pandemic. In Europe, particularly in the UK, over 50 incidents of destruction of 5G towers have been recorded by individuals who believe that radiation from 5G towers spread Covid-19. While these incidents were not investigated as terrorism, conspiracy theories have been shown to directly fuel terrorist violence (Amarasingam & Argentino, 2020.).

Perpetrators of recent attacks in Europe have been motivated by a combination of violent far-right ideology and belief in conspiracy theories. The perpetrator of the Halle shooting appeared to have believed in an antisemitic version of the 'great replacement' conspiracy theory (Allington, 2020); the Hanau attacker had expressed belief in several conspiratorial beliefs, including the idea that an unspecified 'secret service' was watching him and that he had uncovered plots orchestrated by governments internationally through mind control techniques (Crawford & Keen, 2020). The pattern of violent far-right attacks in the global West have shown a combination of conspiratorial beliefs and hate. Violent extremist networks and terrorist groups have understood the power of conspiracy theories in advancing their ideologies. Conspiracy theories are likely to continue being a feature of terror attacks, either by being co-opted by groups and networks or by being adopted by lone actors.

There has also been speculation about the potential rise of new types of anti-institutional terrorist activity, including by militia movements, prepper/survivalist groups and sovereign citizens' groups, the labelling of which as terrorist threats remains contested and which have shown overlap with established violent far-right groups and networks. Some countries have reported increased threats from sovereign citizen movements; in Germany, the Reichsbürger movement, whose members do not recognise the legal existence of the post-war German federal republic and which has been tied to violent far-right and neo-Nazi beliefs, has come under growing scrutiny. In 2020, the German government banned the Reichsbürger-affiliated United German Peoples and Tribes group ("Geeinte deutsche Völker und Stämme"). Movements aiming to capture State institutions are also an issue of concern. In this regard Türkiye also faced a coup attempt on 15th July 2016 perpetrated by a movement using the guise of religion aiming to capture the State institutions that resulted in the death of 251 and where 2,000 were wounded.

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[6] The judgment is legally binding in this respect.

6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This report provides a broad overview of contemporary trends in violent extremism conducive to terrorism and terrorism in Europe and other relevant contexts. Reflecting these broad international findings, the section below provides a high-level overview of some of the key policy implications for Council of Europe members, as well as recommendations for government agencies, intergovernmental institutions, private sector actors and civil society organisations on the mitigation of terror threats.

● **Refresh prevention and mitigation approaches in the context of a fast-changing threat landscape of terrorism in Europe and globally.** The study has highlighted the reshaping of terror threats in Europe, notably through the continued threats of ISIL(Daesh)-inspired attacks, the rise in far-right terrorism and the emergence of new types of threats exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. Without prejudice to efforts employed to date in this field, counter-terrorism and prevention responses to terror threats have shown a degree of discrepancy between the efforts invested in combatting ISIL(Daesh), Al-Qaeda and affiliated groups and those invested in tackling other terrorist threats, such as far-right terrorism. For example, there remains a lack of unified international understanding of terror threats fuelled by violent far-right ideologies as well as associated emerging ideologies, with existing international lists of terrorist groups (e.g. UN Designated Terrorist Groups list) failing to capture the threat posed by groups driven by such other ideologies. Counter-terrorism and prevention responses need to take into account this rebalancing of terror threats, as well as continue to revise strategies of prevention, prosecution, rehabilitation, and reintegration as a response to this rebalancing.

● **Develop new response frameworks geared towards mitigating the threat of post-organisational terrorism, in addition to maintaining efforts aimed at combating organised terrorist groups.** As the study has highlighted, terror threats across the ideological spectrum have been marked by a move towards 'post-organisational' structures. While organised groups remain active, terrorist activity is increasingly carried out by individuals with few or no connections to known groups, and embedded in loose transnational violent extremist communities, largely operating online. International counter-terrorism efforts, however, remain geared towards responding to an ISIL(Daesh) and Al-Qaeda organisational-type of threat insufficient for successfully addressing the threat from loose networks. Without undermining the progress made in these areas, national and international legal frameworks and counter-terrorism responses traditionally focused exclusively on risks associated with ISIL(Daesh), Al-Qaeda and affiliated groups need to be updated to take into account the changing manifestations of terrorist activity and violent extremism conducive to terrorism, including the wider online and offline networks, use of propaganda and false or distorted narratives, as well as ideological communities and subcultures which these threats emanate from.

● **Promote international and cross-sectoral responses to emerging terror threats and tactics**. The study has shed light on the increasingly transnational nature of terror threats affecting Europe. Violent extremist and terrorist actors have built alliances across Europe and with peers in other regions. While international co-operation mechanisms for threats relating to ISIL(Daesh), Al-Qaeda and affiliated groups have been put in place, such mechanisms are largely absent when it comes to violent far-right and associated emerging threats. Cross-sectoral co-operation is essential in mitigating emerging terror threats in Europe. The study has evidenced terrorists' adoption of new and emerging technologies, ranging from 'alt-tech' social platforms to crypto-currencies and online payment platforms. The rapid evolution of available technologies has highlighted the need for greater co-operation between governments, established and emerging technological platforms and academic experts to implement mechanisms to mitigate risks fuelled by abuses of emerging technologies. Initiatives such as the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT) have increased cross-sectoral co-operation on the detection and possible removal of illegal terrorist content associated with internationally proscribed groups from public social media platforms. These initiatives, however, are not sufficient to tackle an increasingly diffuse, post-organisational threat emerging from violent extremist actors across the ideological spectrum.

- **Invest in and support online and offline interventions to prevent terrorist recruitment.** The targets of terrorist recruitment have become more diverse, and interventions and prevention programs aimed at stemming terrorist recruitment need to be further enhanced with respect to women and children, in addition to men. Greater focus is needed on Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism conducive to terrorism initiatives targeting youth and adults, including digital citizenship programmes, strategic communications and counter-narratives to terrorism. Examples include the US Department for Homeland Security's Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships, which is developing a Digital Literacy Toolkit that aims to educate the public on understanding and reading digital content with a focus on critical thinking and source judgement, including practical tools to improve safe social media practices. More efforts are also needed to ensure the success of prison radicalisation prevention programmes adopted by different jurisdictions and their expansion to countries with non-existing or nascent programmes. Such efforts would need to reflect on the basic needs, such as adequate staffing and training, as well as more advanced aspects of the programs, such as ongoing evaluation of risk-assessment tools, applied regimes, and linkages of prison and probation.

- **Reassess and adapt rehabilitation and reintegration policies aimed at deradicalization and disengagement.** There is a need for continuing and further develop the preventive work in prisons which includes risk management, risk-assessment, deradicalization and disengagement, rehabilitation and reintegration that in a strategic way work with violent extremist and terrorist offenders, including foreign terrorist fighters belonging to different terrorist groups. This work needs to start already in prisons and continue after release. As prisons shouldn't be drivers of radicalisation to violent extremism and terrorism there is a need to continually assess and adapt prison regimes, prevent overcrowding and train staff. Evaluation of results reached through a number of ongoing efforts could serve to inform new initiatives and identify needed adjustments driven by any changes to the targeted group landscape (e.g. numbers and gender perspective).

- **It is essential to develop a comprehensive approach in the management of returning women and children.** The gender dimension in the management of returning foreign terrorist fighters family members must be further addressed, as well as the identification of gaps and best practices in order to increase the chances of successful reintegration of women and their children. Child returnees must be put in focus as they could need both short and long-term support. Such tailored support could be facilitated by working in multi-agency structures, allowing professionals to share information.

- **Implement mitigation and response strategies to emerging crises.** The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted how terrorist actors across the ideological spectrum are adept at hijacking new and emerging crises to ramp up their activities. While the full long-term impact of Covid-19 remains difficult to assess, the pandemic has fuelled trends which are likely to remain relevant to international terror threats. Counter-terrorism policies need to be more adaptive to minimise the impact of the pandemic (and other emerging threats) and include preventative measures to mitigate the impact of potential future global crises.

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