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Terrorism Centre

“The threat of Violent Left Wing & Anarchist Extremism in the EU”

TWP MEETING , 07 JULY 2021

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Violent Left-Wing & Anarchist Extremism

General remarks

- The presence of and the threat from violent left-wing & anarchist extremists in Europe has long been very diverse and differs significantly per country;
- The VLWAE scene is largely uncharted by the EU MS competent authorities although there are exceptions;
- A general assessment is that the threat stemming from a heterogeneous violent left-wing and anarchist extremism scene at EU level is still considered to be low but increasing, due to the fact that more Member States are being exposed to this kind of violence;
- The pandemic had an effect on all forms of left wing and anarchist extremist activities.
- The high financial damage caused by some attacks is disproportional to the low-tech and low-cost nature of the devices used.

Overview of the situation at EU level

- Mainly considered as a “public order” issue by the EU MS;
- Their activity is consistent with trends observed across the EU:
 - ❖ form unstructured groups operating in and around specific urban areas;
 - ❖ perpetrate small-scale attacks against public and private property;
 - ❖ participate in rallies and protests during which they attempt violent acts;
 - ❖ collect funds for imprisoned like-minded people; and
- They seek participation in high-profile events with extensive media coverage, i.e. the Hamburg G20 Summit in 2017 or the Summit of EU Heads of State and Government in Salzburg in 2018, etc
- International networking

Actors in the Violent Left Wing & Anarchist Extremism scene

Groups: No organisation or group can be considered to pose an imminent threat to the EU's security.

Lone actors: "Lone actor" attacks should be considered uncommon, however they cannot be excluded, especially since the "direct action" principle is inherent to the most violent variants of anarchist ideology.

Insurrectionary anarchism: Calls for a never ending fight against the perceived domination of the State and capitalism or other forms of oppression

Returning Foreign Fighters: Left-wing & anarchist extremists who have returned from the Kurdish-populated areas of north-east Syria (Rojava) having joined Kurdish militias

Manifestation of the threat

The main means used by left-wing & anarchist violent extremists:

- Arson attacks or in some occasions arson campaigns; the improvised incendiary devices (IIDs) are mostly unsophisticated, but even the more sophisticated ones are made of items readily available on the market, not requiring special preparation or specific knowledge;
- Unsophisticated rudimentary improvised explosive devices (IEDs), made of low-cost items readily available on the market;
- Blunt weapons or even bodily force during clashes with the police or RWE group members or sympathisers.
- Vandalism in the form of destruction of property or graffiti

The likelihood of using firearms is assessed as very low.

Targets

Indicative violent left-wing & anarchist extremists targets:

- Right-wing extremists, representatives and premises of right-wing political parties;
- Public and private property, i.e. telecommunications' infrastructure (including 5G antennas), office buildings, real estate agencies, ATMs, vehicles, etc;
- Police personnel and infrastructure;
- Government property;
- Banks and financial institutions;
- National and multinational companies;
- Migration-related private businesses;
- etc...

Financing

No specific information available on how Violent left-wing violent & anarchist extremists finance their activities

- However the low-cost of the components used in the rudimentary improvised incendiary or explosive devices indicate that not much financing is needed
- Propaganda activities are mostly conducted online thus no financial resources are needed

Use of Internet and Internet based applications

- Claim responsibility for their attacks, to spread their propaganda, to “communicate” with like-minded individuals and groups and to recruit new members;
- The online dissemination of propaganda material is gradually replacing the “traditional” means such as pamphlets, magazines or books;
- New “themes” linked to the pandemic are and will likely continue to be in the epicentre of the propaganda;
- To secure their communications, VLWA extremists prefer to use encrypted technological solutions when communicating with each other or browsing the Internet.

Final remarks

- The threat deriving from Violent Left Wing & Anarchist Extremism at EU level can be described as increasing and evolving
- For a holistic approach, contribution from other key stakeholders is crucial
- Is violent extremism an antechamber to terrorism, in the sense that it provides fertile ground for radicalisation and recruitment?

Thank you for your attention

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