



The Crime-Terror Nexus in Poland

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- The objective of this working paper is to present an overview of links between crime and terrorism (the crime-terror nexus) in Poland, highlight potential risks, and make a series of recommendations for how such risks can be mitigated.
 - It is part of a Europe-wide survey that will produce similar papers for all 28 member states of the European Union. In doing so, the aim is to generate a more holistic understanding of threats from crime and terrorism, and promote new and innovative ways of tackling them.
 - Although organised crime groups are present and active in the Poland, there is barely any terrorist activity, which means that direct links between crime and terrorism do not exist.
 - We believe that the government and other actors should be alert and keep monitoring the situation in order to ensure that such links do not emerge in the future.
 - Our recommendations include action on terrorist financing, information sharing, illicit trafficking, and collaboration between security agencies as well as between government and non-government actors.
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1 Introduction

Poland has gone through significant changes over the past three decades. While most of these changes, such as the transformation towards democracy and a market economy as well as the entry into NATO and the European Union, are widely seen as successful, they have also provided “bad actors” with potential opportunities to establish themselves.

The objective of this working paper is to present an overview of crime and terrorism in Poland, as well as potential links between the two. Our aim is to highlight potential risks and make recommendations for how such risks can be mitigated. It is part of a Europe-wide survey that will produce similar papers for all 28 member states of the European Union. In doing so, the aim is to generate a more holistic understanding of threats from crime and terrorism, and promote new and innovative ways of tackling them.

The paper’s empirical basis is a survey of open sources, including relevant government and inter-governmental reports, academic research, court documents, newspaper articles, as well as interviews with practitioners and subject matter experts. The research took place between April and June 2018, and was carried out by a team of Polish and British researchers.¹

Although organised crime groups are active in Poland, there is barely any terrorist activity, which means that direct links between crime and terrorism do not exist. However, we believe that the government and other actors should be alert and keep monitoring the situation in order to ensure that such links do not emerge in the future.

Our recommendations include actions on monitoring, terrorist financing, illicit trafficking, information sharing, and collaboration between security agencies as well as between government and non-government actors.

The paper starts with overviews of organised crime and terrorism in Poland, before exploring potential links between terrorism and crime. It concludes with a series of recommendations for policymakers and practitioners.

¹ The authors of this report are Peter R. Neumann and Rajan Basra. We wish to thank Dominika Adamaszek and Mikolaj Gatkiewicz for their research support. We are also grateful to all interviewees, whether named or anonymous.

Box 1: What is the Crime-Terror Nexus?

The concept of the crime-terror nexus emerged in the early 1990s, following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of globalisation. Amidst shifting geopolitics and the birth of the information age, analysts noticed that terrorist and insurgent groups were increasingly adapting criminal modus operandi to further their aims.

Since then, scholars have identified *three types of crime-terror nexus: institutional, organisational, and social.*

Institutional

One of the pioneers was Tamara Makarenko.² On her “crime-terror continuum”, she identified three types of institutional linkages between criminal and terrorist groups:

- At one end, criminal and terrorist groups engaged in *co-operation*, either in limited, transaction-based alliances, or in more sophisticated coalitions.
- Nearing the middle, *convergence* indicated when groups adapted skills belonging to the other, resulting in “hybrid criminal-terrorist groups”.
- At the other end was *transformation*, in which a group had completely transformed into the other by way of a shift in motivation.

Among the most prominent examples have been the Taliban, which have at times depended on Afghanistan’s heroin production; the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces’ (FARC) involvement in their country’s narcotics industry; and the smuggling of petrol and counterfeit goods by the Irish Republican Army (IRA).

Organisational

Writing at the same time as Makarenko, Letizia Paoli focused on the structural and organisational similarities between youth gangs and terrorist groups, which she categorised as “clannish” organisations:³

- They were involved in illegal activity, including violence;
- They required members’ “absolute commitment”;
- They offered *emotional benefits*, such as status, “brotherhood”, identity, and belonging.

continues...

² Tamara Makarenko, “The Crime-Terror Continuum: Tracing the Interplay between Transnational Organised Crime and Terrorism”, *Global Crime*, Vol 6, No 1, 2004, pp.129-145.

³ Letizia Paoli, “The Paradoxes of Organized Crime”, *Crime, Law, and Social Change*, Vol 37, No 1, 2002, pp.51-97.

In Paoli's view, drawing sharp distinctions between actors based on their stated aims – criminal versus political – could be misleading, because the distinctions might be blurred and “goals [could] change”.

As an example, she cited white supremacist gangs in the United States, which recruited their membership according to ideological principles and professed to have a political programme but were heavily involved in “ordinary” crime.

Social

In a recent study of jihadist recruitment in Europe, Rajan Basra and Peter R. Neumann highlighted not the convergence of criminals and terrorists as groups or organisations but of their social networks, environments, or milieus.⁴ Rather than formalised collaboration or even transformation, they found that criminal and terrorist groups recruited from sociologically similar pools of people, creating (often unintended) synergies and overlaps.

This “new” crime-terror nexus had four facets:

- It affected processes of *radicalisation*, because involvement in terrorism could offer redemption and legitimise crime.
- It highlighted the *role of prisons* as environments for radicalisation and networking among criminals and extremists.
- It emphasised the *development of skills and experiences* that could be useful for terrorists, particularly access to weapons, forged documents, and the familiarity with violence.
- It facilitated the *financing* of terrorism, especially through petty crime.

Despite differences in approach and perspective, the *three types of nexus – institutional, organisational, and social* – are not mutually exclusive. Taken together, they provide the analytical framework of the Crime Terror Nexus Project.

⁴ Rajan Basra and Peter R. Neumann, “Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus”, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol 10, No 6, 2016, pp.25-40.

2 Organised crime

Since the revolutions of 1989 and Poland's transformation from socialism to democracy, its joining of NATO and the European Union, the changes in the country have been significant – and mostly positive. However, this has also provided “bad actors” such as organised criminals with opportunities to establish themselves.⁵

This section provides an overview of the organised crime scene in Poland, covering the groups involved, their activities, and the locations in which they operate.

Groups

Organised crime has had a long presence in Poland. While there were groups active as far back as the 1970s, organised crime took off in the early 1990s, following the collapse of communism and the transition to democracy.⁶ Groups sought to capitalise on the opening of borders, initially getting involved in the trafficking of stolen vehicles and drugs.⁷ The country's two most famous groups, *Pruszków* and *Wołomin* – named after the towns from where they originated – evolved into large and well-organised groups, competing for influence in the 1990s. Both were involved in a wide portfolio of crimes – ranging from extortion and counterfeiting currency, to drug production and trafficking – before their leadership was arrested in the early 2000s.⁸

The post-communist years also had an international dimension. Not only did Polish groups create links with international drug traffickers,⁹ but foreign crime groups established a presence in the country. This was especially the case with Russian groups, who were initially involved in extorting shopkeepers as well as prostitution (and human trafficking), before expanding to drug trafficking, and weapons smuggling.¹⁰

According to the Polish Central Investigative Bureau (*Centralne Biuro Śledczego Policji*) there were 858 organised crime groups operating in 2017, involving 7,113 individuals.¹¹ This number has remained consistent

5 Article 258 of the Polish Penal Code differentiates between a criminal gang (*związek przestępczy*) – a disciplined and structured group designed to operate for a long period of time – and a criminal group (*zorganizowana grupa przestępcza*) – which has a looser organisational structure, and is not necessarily engaged in long-term activity. Both need to include at least three members whose objective is an unlawful activity.

6 Michał A. Domański, “Przestępczość Zorganizowana w RP po 1989 roku”, *Securitologia*, No 2, 2013.

7 Jacek Bil, “Przestępczość zorganizowana w ujęciu historycznym oraz jej ewaluacja” *Kultura Bezpieczeństwa*, No 20, Kraków, 2015, p.104.

8 Rafał Pasztelański, “Pruszków’ reaktywacja, czyli bossowie zatrzymani za fikcyjny eksport kawy”, *TVP Info*, 1 February 2017.

9 Jacek Bil, “Przestępczość zorganizowana w ujęciu historycznym oraz jej ewaluacja” *Kultura Bezpieczeństwa*, No 20, Kraków, 2015.

10 Ibid.

11 *Sprawozdanie z działalności Biura Śledczego Policji za 2017 rok* [Annual Report of Polish Central Investigative Bureau for 2017], Centralne Biuro Śledczego Policji [Polish Central Investigative Bureau], 2018, p.1.

over recent years – with an estimated 874 groups in 2016, and 812 in 2015 – though the reasons behind the slight variations are unknown.¹² What these figures do not show, however, is the longevity of crime groups; it is unknown how much “churn” there is within the total number each year.

Crime groups in Poland are largely *homogenous* in terms of nationality and ethnicity: the vast majority of these groups are comprised of Polish nationals. This broadly reflects the composition of Polish society. In 2017, 86 per cent of the total groups were Polish, with 13 per cent classified as “international” (meaning mixed nationalities).¹³ Foreign groups – including Russians – accounted for just 1 per cent of groups. This has also remained consistent in recent years: 85 per cent were Polish in 2016, and 89 per cent in 2015.¹⁴

Organised crime in Poland is characterised by *specialisation* in one criminal activity, in contrast to the situation elsewhere in Europe, with most groups involved in either *drug trafficking* (39 per cent of all crime groups), or *economic crimes* such as VAT fraud and money laundering (36 per cent of the total).¹⁵ Meanwhile, only 9 per cent of groups are “multi-criminal organisations”, suggesting that they have relatively stable income streams.¹⁶

There are substantial crossovers with the licit economy; *money laundering* underpins criminal activities. Polish authorities estimate that only 16 per cent of crime groups were focused on *exclusively* illicit activity in 2017, demonstrating just how much criminals seek to take advantage of semi-legitimate businesses and other economic sectors.¹⁷

Crime groups are not bound by their point of origin. Groups have been known to operate on a city-specific, regional, nationwide, or transnational level.¹⁸ The nature of some activity – such as drug trafficking – means a transnational dimension is ever-present, while smaller groups have a tendency to restrict their activity to their “home” territory. Yet even these smaller groups can operate on a nationwide basis.

Activities and Locations

Organised crime in Poland covers a range of transitory crimes, reflecting the country’s position on the border of the EU and Schengen zone. They centre on drug trafficking (and production), economic crimes, as well as human trafficking, all of which are facilitated by corruption and money laundering.¹⁹

12 *Sprawozdanie z działalności Biura Śledczego Policji za 2015 rok [Annual Report of Polish Central Investigative Bureau for 2015]*, Centralne Biuro Śledczego Policji [Polish Central Investigative Bureau], 2016, p.1; *Sprawozdanie z działalności Biura Śledczego Policji za 2016 rok [Annual Report of Polish Central Investigative Bureau for 2016]*, Centralne Biuro Śledczego Policji [Polish Central Investigative Bureau], 2017, p.1.

13 *Sprawozdanie z działalności Biura Śledczego Policji za 2017 rok*, p.1.

14 The annual breakdowns are as follows: in 2015, 725 were Polish and 83 international; in 2016, 739 Polish and 126 international; and in 2017, 737 Polish and 113 international. Figures from the Polish Central Investigative Bureau’s annual reports, listed above.

15 *Sprawozdanie z działalności Biura Śledczego Policji za 2017 rok*, p.1.

16 *Ibid.*

17 *Ibid.*

18 “Sześć CBS o polskiej mafii: Nie ma capo di tutti capi”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 16 March 2015.

19 Data comes from *Annual Reports of Police Central Investigative Bureau (Centralne Biuro Śledcze Policji)*, available at: <http://www.cbsp.policja.pl/cbs/do-pobrania/raporty-z-dzialalnosci/9890,Raporty-z-dzialalnosci.html>. See also, Anna Marczyk, “Główne Rodzaje Przeszłości Zorganizowanej”, *Security Economy & Law*, Vol 2, 2013, p.94.

The gamut of *illicit drugs* is trafficked through Poland. Seizure amounts – which are often used as a proxy estimate of the distinct drug markets – vary from year to year, though marijuana, hashish, amphetamines, and ecstasy (MDMA) appear to be trafficked en masse.²⁰ Aside from such long-standing drugs, new psychoactive substances such as 4CMC (also known as Clephedrone) have emerged, which means the drug trade is continuously evolving.²¹

Legitimate businesses are used by criminals in the drug trade, in order to purchase precursor chemicals for synthetic drug production.²² Polish authorities regularly uncover conversion facilities that process precursor chemicals such as APAAN (alpha-phenylacetonitrile) into BMK (benzylmethylketone), which is an essential ingredient in amphetamines.²³

Alongside drug *importation*, there is also a substantial level of drug *production* in the country. Organised crime groups operating from Poland and Lithuania are involved in producing amphetamines and methamphetamines, which are then supplied to the Nordic countries.²⁴ Poland is also involved in the opioid market, producing heroin – known as *kompot*, named after a popular dessert – from poppy straws.²⁵ And marijuana is grown in the country, with police regularly discovering plantations.²⁶

Economic crimes, particularly VAT fraud, offer enormous profits. One of the largest tax frauds involved an oil importation ring, active between 2013 and 2015, that defrauded the state of approximately 800 million PLN (roughly €180m). The Chief of the Polish Central Investigative Bureau, Igor Parfieniuk, stated that groups are increasingly shifting to this type of activity, which offers high rewards while risking relatively low custodial sentences.²⁷

Organised crime groups can commit tax fraud in two general ways. First, they underpay their tax, by establishing legitimate, short-lived businesses that “disappear” after only a few weeks, as well as by understating their tax declarations. Second, they fraudulently claim tax returns. This is achieved by bewildering the state with fake documentation for phony companies – with phony invoices supporting their claim – despite having never paid any initial tax to the state.²⁸

Throughout the years, Poland has been a source, destination, and transit country for *human trafficking*, whether for labour or sexual exploitation. Women and children from Eastern Europe – particularly Bulgaria, Romania, and Ukraine – are trafficked via Poland to destination countries in Western Europe and Scandinavia. Victims can also come from further afield, with the greatest number of foreign human trafficking victims

20 *Sprawozdanie z działalności Biura Śledczego Policji za 2017 rok*, pp.7-8.

21 *Sprawozdanie z działalności Biura Śledczego Policji za 2017 rok*, p.8.

22 *EU Drug Markets Report*, European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), 2016, p.126.

23 *Ibid.*

24 *Ibid.*, p.116.

25 *Ibid.*, p.82.

26 *Sprawozdanie z działalności Biura Śledczego Policji za 2017 rok*, p.7.

27 Mariusz Jąłoszewski, Piotr Machajski, „Szef CBS o polskiej mafii: Nie ma capo di tutti capi”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 16 March 2015.

28 “Marcin Horała: wyludzenia VAT to kradzież w biały dzień”, *Polskie Radio*, 1 June 2018; see also “Ten sam granulat był przewożony do kolejnych firm, aby wyludzić podatek VAT”, *Raporty policji*, 7 September 2017.

coming from Ukraine, Armenia, Pakistan, India, and Vietnam.²⁹ Children – particularly from the Roma community – are also recruited for forced begging in Poland.³⁰

The scale of the crime is difficult to gauge, as victims are often afraid to press charges due to fear and shame. There does exist a national institution aimed at helping victims – the National Centre for Intervention and Consultation (*Krajowe Centrum Interwencyjno-Konsultacyjne*) – which was involved in 187 individual cases in 2017. Almost half of those cases were Polish.³¹ The authorities, meanwhile, made 83 charges for human trafficking offences in 2017.³²

It is likely that the scale of human trafficking is much greater, given Poland's position on the frontier of the EU and the Schengen zone. Indeed, since joining the EU, the Polish Border Guard noted increased levels of human trafficking across the Ukrainian border.³³

This is related to the issue of *illegal border crossings*. The Polish-Ukrainian frontier is both the largest and busiest EU-non-EU border within Europe.³⁴ This presents a huge challenge for authorities; particularly as *fraudulent documents* are frequently used to facilitate crossings. Indeed, the Polish-Ukrainian border has the highest reported number of fraudulent documents among all EU land borders.³⁵ Curiously, Vietnamese citizens were responsible for more than a third of detected illegal crossings in 2017, though the largest ethnic group were Ukrainians.³⁶

In summary, Poland has experienced a range of organised criminal activities, though – as will be shown in the following section – the linkages between these activities and terrorism are limited.

29 "Niewolnictwo to nie przeżytek! W Polsce handel żywym towarem ma się świetnie", *Kryminalna Polska*, 1 June 2018.

30 *2017 Trafficking in Persons Report*, US Department of State, 2017.

31 *Handel ludźmi w Polsce. Raport za 2017*, Handel Ludźmi, 2018, p.29.

32 *Ibid.*, p.31.

33 "Niewolnictwo to nie przeżytek! W Polsce handel żywym towarem ma się świetnie", *Kryminalna Polska*, 1 June 2018.

34 *Risk Analysis for 2018*, Frontex Risk Analysis Unit, 2018, p.18; *Eastern Partnership Annual Risk Analysis 2017*, Frontex, July 2017, p.11.

35 "Document fraud is a key challenge in Border Guard. Frontex is on the case", Frontex, 26 April 2018.

36 *Risk Analysis for 2018*, Frontex Risk Analysis Unit, 2018, p.19.

3 Terrorism

Europe has witnessed a wave of jihadist terrorist attacks in recent years, ranging from coordinated bombings to vehicle-ramming and knife attacks, that have left hundreds killed and many more injured.³⁷ In contrast to its experiences with organised crime, Poland has not had much exposure to terrorism.

Jihadism

Poland has a virtually non-existent jihadist scene, and there have been no jihadist attacks in the country.³⁸ While thousands of European “foreign fighters” have joined jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq, Poland has only been minimally affected. There have been at least 20 foreign fighters from Poland; this number includes those Polish nationals that were only involved in extremist networks once they moved to other countries in Europe.³⁹ It is unknown how large the wider pool of sympathisers or supporters is, though in 2015 the Polish Security Services were following 200 individuals suspected of having jihadist leanings.⁴⁰

The country has, however, been affected by the flow of foreign fighters, who have used Poland as a transit point. Jihadists from other European countries – and even further afield – have seen Poland as a seemingly inconspicuous and relatively accessible point for their journeys by air *and* land.

There exists the possibility that “returnee” foreign fighters from the Middle East would return to Europe via Poland. The authorities are aware of this, especially regarding the Polish-Ukrainian border,⁴¹ and have warned that the country could be a “reserve target” for jihadists travelling from “high-risk countries”.⁴² Last year a Chechen foreign fighter was detained in the country, charged with participation in a foreign military organisation and illegal possession of weapons and ammunition.⁴³ The threat level, meanwhile, has been set at “zero” on a four-point scale.⁴⁴

37 We define terrorism as symbolic acts of politically motivated violence. See Peter R. Neumann and M.L.R. Smith, *The Strategy of Terrorism* (London: Routledge, 2008), p.8.

38 Interview with Dr Piotr Chlebowicz, lecturer in the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice in University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, 10 June 2018.

39 “Dużo łatwiej zradykalizować się osobie wierzącej niż ateście”, *TVP Info*, 2 February 2017.

40 “Werbunek do Państwa Islamskiego. Jak Polacy zostają terrorystami ISIS?”, *Newsweek*, 25 November 2015.

41 *TESAT 2017*, Europol, 2018, p.27.

42 “Poland Adopts National Counter-Terrorism Programme”, *Defence24*, 10 December 2014.

43 *Ibid*, p.26.

44 “Narodowy Program Antyterrorystyczny na lata 2015-2019”, *Monitor Polski*, p.11.

Despite the lack of attacks in Poland, there have been several notable jihadist-related events over the past few years:

- **2015:** Dawid Ł., a Polish foreign fighter, is arrested in Norway and sent to Poland. He had travelled to Syria in 2014, joining the militant group Harakat Fajr Szam al-Islamijja, where he was joined with a 19-year-old Polish girl who had also converted. He is currently awaiting sentencing in Poland for his activities with the militant group.⁴⁵
- **June 2015:** Jacek S., a Polish national who had travelled to Syria and Iraq in the spring of 2015, detonates a suicide bomb during an Islamic State (IS) assault on an oil refinery in Baiji, Iraq, killing 11 people and wounding 27 more. He had been living in Germany since 2005, and had converted to Islam there in 2014.⁴⁶
- **September 2015:** Polish citizen Adam al-N. began a prison sentence in Jordan, after being arrested after fighting with Islamic State in Syria. He was born in Germany to a Polish mother and a Palestinian father (and also holds Jordanian citizenship),⁴⁷ and travelled to Syria in October 2012. He initially joined Ahrar al-Sham, and then Jabhat al-Nusra, before becoming a member of Islamic State.⁴⁸
- **July 2016:** Sinan Al-Haboubi, a 48-year-old man from Iraq, was arrested in the city of Łódź. Police found traces of the explosives TNT and penthrite on his suitcase's wheels. Prosecutors dropped the charges against Al-Haboubi due to a lack of evidence.⁴⁹
- **September 2016:** Mourad Taleb was arrested in Rybnik, accused of being an Islamic State member and of helping Abdelhamid Abaaoud, who helped plan and execute the November 2015 Paris attacks. Taleb was allegedly responsible for scouting locations and routes throughout Europe, thus assisting Abaaoud's preparations for the Paris attacks.⁵⁰ Taleb is also accused of trafficking drugs from the Czech Republic to Poland, as well as possession of fraudulent documents.⁵¹
- **March 2017:** A jihadist fighter by the name of Abu Khattab al-Polandi (believed to be Jakub Jakus) detonated a suicide bomb in Aleppo, Syria.⁵² Jakus was born in Sandomierz, a small town in eastern Poland, and converted to Islam whilst attending a Catholic high school in the city of Lublin.⁵³ He became involved in the Norwegian jihadist organisation *Profetens Ummah* after moving to Norway,⁵⁴ before travelling to Syria in June 2013 and joining Islamic State.⁵⁵

45 "Pierwszy taki proces w Polsce. Oskarżony o islamski terroryzm w łódzkim sądzie", *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 7 November 2017.

46 "Pierwszy Polski terrorysta-samobójca. Zginął za Państwo Islamskie", *Newsweek*, 12 August 2015.

47 "Zatrzymany w Jordanii Polak to walczący po stronie ISIS Polak Adam al-N.", *Newsweek*, 24 March 2017.

48 Ryszard Machnikowski and Arkadiusz Legieć, "The Favored Conflicts of Foreign Fighters From Central Europe", *The Jamestown Foundation, Terrorism Monitor*, Vol 15, No 19, 2017.

49 "10 miesięcy w areszcie a teraz deportacja. Przez 'przezroczyście życie' i pyłek na bagażu", *TVN24*, 17 May 2017.

50 "Mourad T. nie przyznał się do przynależności do ISIS", *Gazeta Prawna*, 3 April 2018; "Ze lijkjen studenten op citytrip, maar ze zitten in de cel als verkenners van IS", *Het Laatste Nieuws*, 19 March 2018; and

Guy Van Vlierden, "Following the Facebook trail of Abdelhamid Abaaoud's scouts", 19 March 2018, available at: <https://emmejihad.wordpress.com/2018/03/19/following-the-facebook-trail-of-abdelhamid-abaaouds-scouts/>.

51 Paweł Pawlik, "Mourad T. nie przyznaje się do przynależności do ISIS", *Onet.pl*, 3 April 2018; "Suspected ISIS member charged in Poland", *Radio Poland*, 7 March 2018.

52 "Dżihadysta z Sandomierza zginął w Syrii?", *Newsweek*, 2 March 2017.

53 Ryszard Machnikowski and Arkadiusz Legieć, "The Favored Conflicts of Foreign Fighters From Central Europe", *The Jamestown Foundation, Terrorism Monitor*, Vol 15, No 19, 2017.

54 Ibid.

55 "'Mówił, że jedynie zabił na razie psa.' Dżihadysta z Polski", *TVN24*, 8 September 2016.

- *July 2017*: Dawid D. is arrested in Katowice and accused of contacting IS fighters online and encouraging terrorist attacks.⁵⁶ He was sentenced to 10 months after pleading guilty to “encouraging to commit a terrorist crime”.⁵⁷

Terrorism-related arrests and court proceedings are rare. As per Europol reporting, there were 14 arrests made for jihadist-related activities from 2012 to 2017.⁵⁸

Despite this muted jihadist picture, there is public hostility towards Islam and Poland’s Muslim population. Polling by Pew Research Center has shown the majority of Poles have negative attitudes towards Muslims living in the country,⁵⁹ and Islam is seen as both a symbolic and tangible threat to Polish culture,⁶⁰ even though the Muslim population – numbering between 30-40,000 people – constitutes less than 0.1 per cent of the country’s total population of 38 million.⁶¹ This hostility can occasionally escalate into acts of violence, as seen in Poland’s far-right scene.

Far-Right Extremism

In contrast to Poland’s muted experience with jihadism, there does exist an established far-right extremist movement. Groups such as *Obóz Narodowo-Radykalny* (National-Radical Camp, or ONR) and *Obóz Wielkiej Polski* (Great Poland Camp, or OWP) espouse a combination of nationalist, fascist, racist, anti-Semitic, and anti-Islamic beliefs.⁶²

The Polish authorities have not released estimates of the number of groups or supporters involved, though the far-right has been able to mobilise thousands of supporters in street demonstrations. In 2017, the country’s annual November 11th Independence March in Warsaw drew 60,000 participants, many of whom were from the far-right. Beyond the nationalist and anti-immigration messages, Neo-Nazi and white supremacist slogans were seen in the crowd, calling for an “Islamic Holocaust”.⁶³ One large banner read that “Europe will be white or uninhabited”.⁶⁴ Events like these can result in the normalisation of far-right ideas within Poland’s political mainstream.⁶⁵

56 “Zatrzymano Polaka utrzymującego kontakty z Państwem Islamskim”, *RMF24*, 13 July 2017.

57 “Wyrok dla terrorysty: Dawid D. Namawiał do przeprowadzenia zamachu terrorystycznego. Sąd w Myszkowie skazał go na 10 miesięcy więzienia”, *Dziennik Zachodni*, 20 December 2017.

58 Figures from Europol’s annual *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Reports (TESAT)*, 2013 to 2018. The annual breakdowns are: 2012 (1 arrest); 2013 (0); 2014 (0); 2015 (4); 2016 (5); and 2017 (4).

59 Richard Wike, Bruce Stokes, and Katie Simmons, *Negative views of minorities, refugees common in EU*, Pew Research Center, 2016.

60 Anna Stefaniak, “Postrzeżenie muzułmanów w Polsce: Raport z badania sondażowego”, *Centrum Badań Nad Uprzedzeniami*, 2015, p.16.

61 Katarzyna Górak-Sosnowska, “Islamophobia Without Muslims? The Case of Poland”, *Journal of Muslims in Europe*, Vol 5, Issue 2, 2016, p.193.

62 “Ja wspieram Noworosję”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 30 December 2015; Christian Davies, “More girls, fewer skinheads’: Poland’s far right wrestles with changing image”, *The Guardian*, 18 November 2017.

63 Jason Silverstein, “Poland Nationalist Rally with Neo-Nazi Slogans, calls for ‘Islamic Holocaust’ draws biggest crowd ever”, *Newsweek*, 12 November 2017.

64 “11 listopada. Jeden z największych Marszów Niepodległości w historii. Policja zatrzymała 45 aktywistów Obywateli RP”, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 11 November 2017.

65 Christian Davies, “More girls, fewer skinheads’: Poland’s far right wrestles with changing image”, *The Guardian*, 18 November 2017.

There is often a military aspect to far-right activity. In 2015, Polish nationalists travelled to Russia to train in the use of knives, firearms, and military tactics. The instructors from those camps then established similar training camps in Poland itself, which are attended by members of the far-right.⁶⁶

This street activism can lead to clashes with anti-fascist groups as well as the police. The ONR's main target are left-wing or liberal organisations – particularly the Committee for Defence of Democracy, or KOD – which has involved physical attacks and harassment, as seen in 2016, when members of the ONR attacked KOD members during a funeral of former Home Army (*AK-Armia Krajowa*) soldiers.⁶⁷

It remains to be seen how far the movement will escalate into acts of terrorism. There have been instances of attacks on mosques in Warsaw, which were classified as hate crimes in Poland.⁶⁸ Notable instances have included:

- *November 2012*: Brunon Kwiecień, a 45-year-old Polish citizen, was arrested in Kraków on suspicion of planning to detonate an improvised explosive device (IED) near the Polish parliament, targeting the Polish President and members of the government. He was apparently motivated by the belief that “foreigners” controlled Poland, and thus the political leadership needed to be violently removed. Military and industrial explosives, gun powder, and other materials used to produce IEDs were seized during house searches. Kwiecień was also in possession of illegal firearms, ammunition, ballistic vests, Kevlar helmets as well as counterfeit domestic and foreign license plates. He appears to have used his position as a university lecturer to identify and recruit people holding similar political views.⁶⁹
- *July 2014*: Police arrested 14 members of a far-right group in Białystok, and discovered a cache of firearms, ammunition, amphetamines, marijuana, and anabolic steroids.⁷⁰ The group is alleged to have carried out xenophobic arson attacks in 2013.
- *March 2015*: Police arrested 13 members of the far-right extremist groups Blood & Honour, which included a man plotting an arson attack on a mosque in Gdansk.⁷¹ This was not classified as terrorism in Poland; attacks on places of worship are considered a hate crime in the country.

As per Europol reporting, there were 15 arrests made for far-right terrorism from 2012 to 2017. Of those, 14 took place in 2014, with the one remaining arrest taking place in 2016.⁷² This total excludes the Blood & Honour arrests listed above, as Polish authorities did not classify those arrests as far-right terrorism-related.

66 TESAT 2016, Europol, 2017, p.42.

67 Renata Kim, “Mateusz Kijowski i Radomir Szumelda pobici przez ONR na pogrzebie Inki”, *Newsweek*, 28 August 2016.

68 “Atak na meczet w Warszawie”, *Metro Warszawa*, 27 November 2017. Technically, there is no law in Poland that directly addresses hate crimes, even though the term is widely understood in Polish society. Attacks on mosques are typically prosecuted for offences against religious beliefs and “public insults of places of religious worship”. For more, see *Analiza przestępczości z nienawiści*, Ministerstwo Spraw Wewnętrznych i Administracji, 2016, p.2.

69 TESAT 2013, p.35.

70 TESAT 2015, Europol, 2016, p.4.

71 TESAT 2016, Europol, 2017, p.41.

72 TESAT 2014 and TESAT 2016, Europol.

Just as jihadists have travelled to Syria as *foreign fighters*, so too have members of the far-right travelled to Ukraine. An estimated 17 Poles have travelled to support pro-Russian separatists in the conflict there.⁷³ They included members from National-Radical Camp (ONR) and Great Poland Camp (OWP). This, under Polish law, is illegal, since no Polish citizen can serve in a foreign army or military organization.⁷⁴

Foreign fighters from other countries have also used Poland as a transit point to reach Ukraine. Both the land border and Warsaw Chopin Airport in Warsaw were used by Western European members of the Azov Battalion – a far-right group with neo-Nazi elements – as well as volunteers joining the Chechen unit of the Right Sector paramilitary group.⁷⁵

The far-right also overlaps with *football hooliganism*, where there is a large pool of groups broadly sympathetic to nationalist causes. Their use of far-right and nationalist ideology is seen as a tool sanctioning their violence, rather than as an end goal itself.⁷⁶ These hooligan groups have become involved in organised crime, forming relationships with criminals,⁷⁷ and are involved with the trafficking of drugs and anabolic steroids inside and outside of Poland.⁷⁸ Members have found themselves imprisoned for their activities, and there have been cases of hooligans throwing flares inside prison grounds in solidarity with their jailed members.⁷⁹

While this does not constitute a crime-terror nexus – hooligan gangs, after all, have limited involvement in political violence – this movement does have the potential to grow and further radicalise.

An Absent Crime-Terror Nexus

In Poland there are no overlaps behind criminals and terrorists. Given the minimal presence of terrorist groups, networks, and individuals in the country, there is no crime-terror nexus to speak of. In contrast to the picture in other European countries,⁸⁰ the few Polish jihadists that have emerged have not had known criminal backgrounds.

Similarly, whereas there have been cases of prison radicalisation in the UK, France, Belgium, and Germany, there have been no such cases in Poland. Inmates have converted to Islam in Szczecin prison, though this is not for extremist or spiritual reasons, but rather due to the special – and reportedly better – dietary allowance for Muslim prisoners.⁸¹

73 The date for their travel is estimated between March 2014 and June 2017. The number comes from Arkadiusz Legieć's research: Ryszard Machnikowski and Arkadiusz Legieć, "The Favored Conflicts of Foreign Fighters From Central Europe", *The Jamestown Foundation, Terrorism Monitor*, Vol 15, No 19, 2017; "Mieszkaniec Żywca z Obozu Wielkiej Polski walczy po stronie separatystów w Donbasie. Popiera Rosję", *Polska Times*, 8 December 2014.

74 "Przegląd prasy: śledztwo ws. Polaka walczącego w Donbasie", *TVN24*, 8 December 2014.

75 Kacper Rękawek, "So, it's not the Islamic State after all? The Threat of International Terrorism in Poland," *The Polish Institute of Foreign Affairs (PISM)*, Bulletin No 75 (807), 2015, p.2.

76 Interview with Dr Piotr Chlebowicz, lecturer in the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice in University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, 10 June 2018.

77 "Jak kibole stają się gangsterami", *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 8 March 2011; Piotr Chlebowicz, *Chuligaństwo Stadionowe. Studium Kryminologiczne*, Warszawa: Wolters Kluwer, 2009, pp.138-140.

78 Interview with Dr Piotr Chlebowicz, lecturer in the Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice in University of Warmia and Mazury in Olsztyn, 10 June 2018.

79 Ibid.

80 Rajan Basra and Peter R. Neumann, "Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus", *Perspectives on Terrorism*, Vol 10, No 6, 2016, pp.25-40.

81 "Więźniowie w Szczecinie przechodzą na Islam. Zobacz Dlaczego", *Radio Szczecin*, 17 August 2017.

However, this does not mean that a nexus may not emerge, and we believe it is important for the authorities and other actors to keep monitoring the situation in order to ensure that links between terrorism and crime cannot arise or be exploited in the future. This is especially the case with human trafficking, and Poland's role as a transit state for both criminals and terrorists.

4 Recommendations

This paper has examined potential links between crime and terrorism in Poland. Although organised crime groups are active in the country, there is barely any terrorist activity, which means that direct links between crime and terrorism do not exist. We believe that the government and other actors should be alert and keep monitoring the situation in order to ensure that such links do not emerge in the future.

We recommend the following actions and/or good practices:

1. Effective monitoring

We recommend that authorities continue to periodically review their statistics on organised crime and terrorism, and consciously monitor them for emerging linkages between the two phenomena, especially regarding organised crime and hooliganism, as well as the role of organised crime in human trafficking.

2. Re-thinking radicalisation

Given the partial merging of terrorist and extremist milieus in Europe, core assumptions about radicalisation need to be reconsidered. The behaviour of jihadists with criminal pasts often contradicts the notion that extremism correlates with religious behaviour. Where needed, we recommend that authorities update their checklists, indicators, and training materials in order to reflect changing patterns and profiles.

3. Countering all streams of terrorist financing

Efforts to countering terrorist finance have excessively focused on the international financial system – with meagre results. We recommend that authorities broaden their efforts at countering terrorist finance to include small-scale and petty crime, such as drug dealing, theft, robberies, and the trafficking in goods.

4. Monitoring illicit trafficking

Authorities in Poland should review and strengthen their efforts to monitor the illicit trafficking of humans and goods, especially of the country's eastern borders which are gateways to the EU and Schengen zone.

5. Information sharing

As the lines between terrorism and “ordinary” crime have become increasingly blurred, relevant agencies need to become more effective at sharing relevant information across departments and “disciplines”, as well as forming new “coalition” of individuals and institutions that may not be used to working with each other.

We recommend that governments continue to review existing channels and systems of information exchange, explore creating new partnerships (such as with local authorities, civil society, and the private sector), and make appropriate changes reflecting the new – and multi-dimensional – nature of the threat.



Crime Terror Nexus

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The Crime Terror Nexus is a project that investigates links between crime and terrorism, and identifies better ways to counter them.

Over the course of 18 months, we are documenting links between crime and terrorism across the European Union. Our findings are disseminated through reports, events, and workshops.

We are partnering with officials and local stakeholders to create new and innovative approaches that contribute to countering crime and making our countries safer.

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CONTACT DETAILS

For questions, queries and additional copies of this report, please contact Katie Rothman: katie@crimeterrornexus.com

Registered address: Panta Rhei Research Ltd.,
37a Great Percy Street, London WC1X 9RD, United Kingdom

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