

Contemporary Terrorist Threats to the Security of Central Europe

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Main points:

- Contemporary terrorism in Central Europe will take the form of attacks undertaken by people who have lived in this region for several years and were to be integrated into the society, and thus were not subject to police surveillance.
- Countries in Central Europe are as exposed to the threat of terrorism as much as the French Republic, Great Britain or Ukraine.
- The lack of a single definition of terrorism leads to the lack of international consensus on the determination of potential terrorist threats.

Introduction

Bearing in mind contemporary threats to internal and national security, it is important to determine the phenomenon we are forced to struggle with. Terrorism is a form of fighting used for more than 2000 years and it is characterized by a sudden action aimed at causing the destabilization of the attacked entity. Its transformation and development have caused it to be the greatest threat to state security today. It has a substantial impact on the functioning of governments, organizations and societies, causing global disintegration, and it currently cannot be stopped or controlled by any of the entities appointed for that purpose. Despite the fact that almost all countries in the world struggle with various forms of terrorism, the actual and rational method of stopping it, and eliminating its expansion to other countries, has not yet been found.

Central Europe is defined in various ways depending on the context and structure of the undertaken research. It involves a cultural region, traditionally including countries between France and Russia. Based on the analysis of the sources, nowadays this region includes: Austria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Liechtenstein, Poland, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia and Switzerland¹. Due to cross-border threats, the cooperation of the aforementioned countries is very important to maintain the required level of security in the region.

The terrorist attacks of September 11th, 2001 changed the perception of terrorism. An anthropologist, Scott Atran, pointed out that “probably never in the history of human conflicts

¹ Kogan, Irena: Delayed Transition: Education and Labor Market Entry in Serbia. In: Kogan Irena/Noelke Clemens/Gebel Michael (Eds.): Making the transition. Education and labor market entry in Central and Eastern Europe. 2011. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2011, pp. 141-165.
Transcarpathia: Perephiral Region at the “Centre of Europe” (Google eBook), Region State and Identity in Central and Eastern Europe. Routledge 2013, p. 155.

has such a small number of people, with such small possibilities and means, frightened so many”². The phenomenon of terrorism requires states to remain vigilant on a regular basis and involve many entities. Terrorism can take different forms in France, Poland, Austria and Ukraine.

Contemporary terrorist threats

The concept of modern terrorism, mainly perceived as religious terrorism, is primarily associated with the activities of radical Muslim groups. The shock of the inhabitants of Europe mainly results from the violence of attacks and determination in their conduct, both in the USA and in the European Union. The innovative techniques in carrying out attacks and planting bombs have been associated with the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan so far. Now they have become a phenomenon which is more and more common in Western Europe. The global reach of terrorist organizations and their ability to conduct simultaneous attacks is also a fact³. Gradually, since the London attacks in 2004, we have been witnesses to an increase in the number of terrorist attacks in the European territory.⁴ The attacks in 2015-2017 were particularly bloody, with seven major terrorist attacks in France alone.⁵ The context of an increase in terrorist threats following the 2001 attacks in the United States is clearly visible. The development of terrorism has had a particularly negative impact on the situation in Europe, and therefore in the European Union, currently forming the greatest threat to international security.⁶

Depending on the conducted investigation (findings of international security organizations, requests of the national prosecutor’s office, scientist research, as well as using the statements announced by terrorist organizations⁷), it is concluded that in the 21st century (in countries such as Austria, Belgium, Finland, France, Greece, Georgia, Spain, the Netherlands, Germany,

² Atran, S.: Talking to the Enemy: Religion, Brotherhood, and the (Un) Making of Terrorists. New York 2011, p. 14.

³ Pfeifer, Joseph W.: International Anti-Terrorism Preparedness. FDNY Foundation. New York 2018, pp. 22-25.

⁴ Wejkszner, A.: Ewolucja terroryzmu motywowanego ideologią religijną na przykładzie salafickiego ruchu globalnego dżihadu. Poznań, pp. 303-305.

⁵ Éireann Raidió Teilifís: Timeline - Terror attacks in Europe. 17.08.2017.

⁶ Immenkamp B./Sguelo, G./Voronova S./Dobрева, A.: The fight against terrorism. EU policies - Delivering for citizens. June 2019, p. 3.

⁷ Cf.: <https://jihadology.net>.

Russia, the United Kingdom, Italy, Sweden, Ukraine), 4 organizations and one informal group have marked their presence in Europe through terrorist attacks or activities of a terrorist nature⁸:

- al-Qaeda (and its different branches),⁹
 - Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant,¹⁰
 - Boko Haram,¹¹
 - the Taliban,¹²
- unidentified group – “lone wolves”¹³ (“self-appointed terrorists”).¹⁴

The four defined above groups together were responsible for 74% of terrorist murders worldwide in 2015.¹⁵ They carried out attacks in 92 countries, and more than a half (55%) of those attacks were in areas affected by war, i.e. Afghanistan, India, Iraq, Nigeria and Pakistan. Majority of the attacks (in terms of their number) took place in Bangladesh, Egypt, the Philippines, Libya and Syria.¹⁶

In 2019, another classification of the deadliest terrorist organizations in the world was made. In 2018, the following four groups were responsible for 9223 killings, accounting for 57.8% of deaths caused by terrorist attacks worldwide:

⁸ Institute for Economics and Peace: Global Terrorism Index 2016 - Measuring and understanding the impact of terrorism. University of Maryland 2016, pp. 13, 38, 42, 43, 44, 52-57. Institute for Economics and Peace: Global Terrorism Index 2017 - Measuring and understanding the impact of terrorism. University of Maryland 2017, pp. 13, 49, 72-78. Institute for Economics and Peace, Global Terrorism Index 2018 - Measuring the impact of terrorism. University of Maryland 2018, pp. 3, 4, 39, 40, 45, 46, 61.

⁹ Stenersen, A.: Thirty Years after its Foundation – Where is al-Qaida going? In: Perspectives on terrorism, Volume 11, Issue 6, December 2017, pp. 1-12.

¹⁰ Galang, M. A.: The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria: Profile and Strategic Assessment. NDCP Policy Brief, 18.04.2015, No. 2, pp. 1-4.

¹¹ Walker A.: What Is Boko Haram. United States Institute of Peace, Special Report 308, June 2012, pp. 1-15.

¹² Sheikh, M. K./Greenwood, M.T.J.: Taliban talks past, present and prospects for the US, Afghanistan and Pakistan. DIIS Report, Copenhagen 2013, pp. 7-22.

¹³ A term meaning someone who prepares and commits violent (terrorist) acts alone, outside of any command structure and without material assistance from any group. He may, however, be influenced or motivated by the ideology and beliefs of some group.

¹⁴ Wejkszner, A.: Samotne wilki kalifatu?: Państwo Islamskie i indywidualny terroryzm dżihadystyczny w Europie Zachodniej. Warsaw 2018.

¹⁵ Institute for Economics and Peace: Global Terrorism Index 2016 - Measuring and understanding the impact of terrorism. University of Maryland 2016, p. 4.

¹⁶ Institute for Economics and Peace: Global Terrorism Index 2017 - Measuring and understanding the impact of terrorism. University of Maryland 2017, p. 4.

1. Khorasan Chapter of the Islamic State¹⁷ – a branch of the Islamic State,¹⁸
2. Boko Haram,
3. the Islamic State (ISIL),
4. the Taliban.¹⁹

According to the Global Terrorism Index, in terms of the impact of terrorism on the functioning of countries in 2018, in the region of Central Europe:²⁰

- Austria took 79th place in the world (89th place in 2017),
- the Czech Republic took 90th place in the world (87th place in 2017),
- Germany took 39th place in the world (40th place in 2017),
- Hungary took 110th place in the world (99th place in 2017),
- Poland took 102nd place in the world (110th place in 2017),
- Serbia took 116th place in the world (125th place in 2017),
- Slovakia took 126th place in the world (114th place in 2017),
- Slovenia took 138th place in the world (138th place in 2017),
- Switzerland took 124th place in the world (112th place in 2017).

It should be emphasized, however, that the ranking does not take into account all terrorist activities (this is only a subjective assessment of American researchers). The above-mentioned assessments are illustrative, indicating that the risk increased between 2017 and 2018.

For example, in Austria, two attacks of a terrorist nature were recorded in 2016-2019. On the March 1st and 7th, 2018, two knife attacks took place in Vienna. The first was committed by a man of an Afghan origin, who wounded four people²¹. In the second attack, which took place in front of the Iranian embassy, the terrorist was killed. The perpetrator was a 26-year-old

¹⁷ The Islamic State Khorasan (IS-K) is a branch of the Islamic State in Central Asia, and its origins date back to 2015. The Islamic State announced its expansion in the Khorasan region, which historically covers modern Iran, Central Asia, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

¹⁸ Center for Strategic & International Studies: Islamic State Khorasan (IS-K), <https://www.csis.org/programs/transnational-threats-project/terrorism-backgrounders/islamic-state-khorasan-k>, accessed on 13.12.2019.

¹⁹ Institute for Economics and Peace: Global Terrorism Index 2019 - Measuring the impact of terrorism. University of Maryland 2019, pp. 15-17.

²⁰ Own study based on: Institute for Economics and Peace: Global Terrorism Index 2018 - Measuring the impact of terrorism. Sydney 2018 and Institute for Economics and Peace: Global Terrorism Index 2017 - Measuring the impact of terrorism. Sydney 2017.

²¹ Simon, D./ Murphy, Paul P.: 4 people stabbed in Vienna. CNN, 7 March 2018.

Austrian of Egyptian origin. Authorities said he sympathized with radical Islamist ideology, but the exact motive was subject to further investigation.²²

Dominik Kobulnický (taking the name of Abdul Rahman), who is of Slovak origin, was arrested in December 2019 in the Czech Republic. He stored chemicals to manufacture explosives. Videos with the representatives of ISIS were found on his computer and he was promoting fascination with Islam and symbols of ISIS and the Caucasian Emirate online. In mid-November 2019, he was sentenced to 6.5 years of imprisonment for undertaking hazardous actions, not for preparing a terrorist attack. During the trial, the accused confessed to considering carrying out a terrorist attack in 2015, its target being a bus station in Presov (Prešov). It is at the same time the first Slovakian citizen and an Islam believer who was sentenced to prison for activities with the characteristics of terrorism.²³ The Czech Republic is also struggling with internal terrorism (for more information, see the analysis: <https://ine.org.pl/contemporary-terrorist-threats-in-the-czech-republic/>).

In connection with the development of terrorist threats, Polish security services also took action. In May 2015, the Internal Security Agency reported about observing around 200 people (mostly Chechens) and detaining 3 people due to the nature of their activity in Europe. They were suspected of raising funds for terrorist activities and belonging to international criminal groups.

Migration in the context of terrorist threats

Since 2013, between 1.5 and 2 million of immigrants have arrived in the European Union annually (1.4 million in 2013 and 2 million in 2016²⁴). This means that there is a need to provide secure conditions not only to the EU countries, but also to the arriving people. This is connected with the need for proper and effective border management. If, within the open European Union, deprived of internal borders (the Schengen area), which currently encompasses 26 countries and nearly 550 million inhabitants, it is not possible to verify and define the tasks and needs concerning migrants, there is a huge threat to the security and

²² Francois Murphy, Vienna knife attacker had radical Islamist sympathies. In: Austria says, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-austria-attack/vienna-knife-attacker-had-radical-islamist-sympathies-austria-says-idUSKCN1GPIE4>, accessed on 13.03.2018.

²³ The Slovak Spectator, First Slovak Islamist jailed in Prague. In: Czechia says: <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/22263222/the-first-slovak-islamist-jailed-in-prague.html>, accessed on 30.01.2020.

²⁴ Eurostat, Migration and migrant population statistics. https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Migration_and_migrant_population_statistics, accessed on 22.11.2018.

international integrity of Europe. Preventive actions must take into account both the rights of immigrants and the rights of the EU citizens²⁵. It is necessary to stop illegal migration and eliminate international criminal groups involved in this practice. The external borders of the EU are the last bastion in the coordination and verification of the in-flowing population. Only systematic and careful selection will guarantee proper preparation of both parties — migrants and the EU member states — for a long-term cooperation²⁶.

We should also remember that terrorist groups and individuals are good at assimilating and living their lives in other societies. They head to liberal countries, such as France²⁷ or the UK, where everyday life, active participation in social life and raising children do not pose a problem for them.²⁸ They become a part of a larger group, receive support and transfer their ideologies into foreign territories. They create their own “city within the city”. Many years of such activities mean that they become a focal point which draws attention to itself and forces authorities to take decisive actions. One of the methods are police interventions in districts (ghettos) dominated or inhabited by followers of one religion.²⁹ In addition to legal work, many of them engage in money laundering³⁰, drug and human trafficking or pimping and prostitution.³¹

Due to contemporary threats and unrestrained global development, we can distinguish a potential determinant which may affect the activation of terrorist communities in Europe. That is why it is so important to take actions against recruitment conducted in countries which are directly attacked by their own residents. They are children of immigrants who arrived several years before. Such terrorism may now be encountered in the territory of Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Belgium, France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Slovakia, the

²⁵ Apap, J./Radjenovic, A./Dobrova, A.: EU policies – Delivering for citizens: The migration issue. European Parliament. March 2019, pp. 1–11.

²⁶ Szczerba-Zawada, A.: Polityka migracyjna Unii Europejskiej jako determinant bezpieczeństwa państw członkowskich UE. In: Bezpieczeństwo narodowe Polski: zagrożenia i determinanty zmian. Scientific editor: Chabasińska A./Czachór, Z. Warsaw 2016, p. 86.

²⁷ Driggers, S.: Les Banlieues de France: how a failure of integration has led to the spread of extremism. <http://georgiapoliticalreview.com/les-banlieues-de-france-how-a-failure-of-integration-has-led-to-the-spread-of-extremism/>, accessed on 13.12.2019.

²⁸ Malik Kenan: Assimilation’s Failure, Terrorism’s Rise. In: The New York Times, 6.07.2011.

²⁹ Schram, J./Fredericks, B.: Muslim ghettos in Europe are breeding grounds for terror. In: New York Post, 22.03.2016.

³⁰ de Galhau, F. V.: Money laundering and the financing of terrorism: in the face of heightened risks, our fight is being stepped up. Banque de France, 26.06.2019, <https://acpr.banque-france.fr/en/intervention/money-laundering-and-financing-terrorism-face-heightened-risks-our-fight-being-stepped-up>, accessed on 1.12.2019.

³¹ Peltier, E.: Crack Cocaine Makes a Paris Neighborhood ‘Hell’ for Users and Residents.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-austria-attack/vienna-knife-attacker-had-radical-islamist-sympathies-austria-says-idUSKCN1GPIE4>, accessed on 28.12.2019.

Czech Republic, Slovenia or Serbia.

This is also associated with the development of a pejorative nature of participation in social life in a given country by creating negative and, later, terrorist behavior. Stigmatizing the followers of Islam,³² associating them with negative social groups, pathologies, as well as media activities all mean that many young people begin to become indoctrinated, profess their faith more strongly, decide to entrust their lives to a religious guide and often travel to their country of origin.³³ They become young jihadists because of the social barriers society has created over the years, with which young people cannot cope. They adopt a model of a self-confident, determined terrorist, convinced of the righteousness of their faith. It would also be valuable to take such activities into account in the future analyses of the radicalization process.

Contemporary terrorist threats in the region

Terrorists who will want to attack Central Europe in the future will probably come from orthodox Islamic organizations, they will be rebels who currently live in the Middle East and eastern Ukraine, and people who become radical in their own ideology, which also includes the anti-Muslim ideology.³⁴ However, we should not overrule the option that terrorist activities will also be undertaken by people who live in large cities, such as Berlin or Vienna, and have nothing to do with the presented ideology so far. The present experience shows significant activation of terrorists who take action on their own, who are referred to as “lone wolves”, or who operate within the framework of “home-grown terrorism” (people who become terrorists are usually those brought up in a given country, orthodox believers in some ideology. They become extremely radical and they carry out attacks in the territory of the state where they have been citizens since birth, or where they have lived for several years)³⁵. An attack in France can serve as an excellent example. On March 23rd, 2018, in Carcassonne, in the south of the country, a terrorist killed 4 people and seriously injured another 15.³⁶ He was a citizen of the

³² Macron warning on stigmatising Muslims amid France veil row. BBC News, 17.10.2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-50079997>, accessed on 9.12.2019.

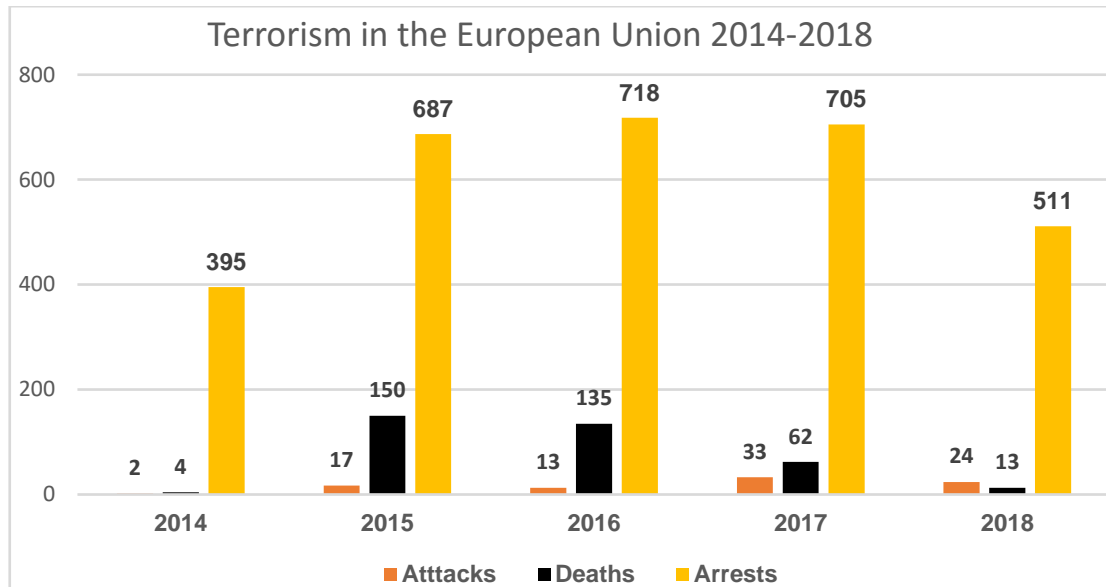
³³ Abdel-Fattah, R.: The stigmatisation of Muslims as 'could-be terrorists' has produced a toxic social order. In: The Guardian, 9.10.2015.

³⁴ Baisse des actes racistes, antisémites et antimusulmans en 2017. In: Le Monde, 1.02.2018.

³⁵ International Institute for Counter-Terrorism: The Paris Black Friday 13/11/2015 Attacks - What do we know? What should we do? Special Report, 15.11.2015, p. 2.

³⁶ Mareschal, E./Piquet, C.: Attaques dans l'Aude: une proche du suspect placée en garde à vue. In: Le Figaro, 24.03.2018.

French Republic and lived there on a permanent basis.³⁷ This type of terrorism is also perceived as a sociological curiosity, where religion dominates the instilled ideologies of the state.³⁸ It is also important to take into account nationalist and right-wing organizations³⁹ which may undertake terrorist acts as well.



Source: Own study based on Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2019, Europol.

As it was repeatedly indicated in reports, the current international situation, as well as the position of Turkey, Iraq, Syria and other Middle East countries, have impact not only on illegal migration, but also on terrorism and extremism. It can be assumed, in connection with the ongoing conflict in Syria, that ISIS fighters or their supporters will keep coming to the European continent. They can pose a threat to security in terms of possible radicalization or preparation to carry out a terrorist attack.

Cross-border security in the European Union is closely related to constant migration, not only from Ukraine, but also from the Balkans and the Middle East⁴⁰. Due to the regulations which were introduced during the migration crisis in 2015, and due to the apparent lack of agreement

³⁷ Louet, S.: Attaques dans l'Aude: Radouane Lakdim était fiché S depuis 2014. In: Le Figaro, 23.03.2018.

³⁸ Speckhard, A.: The Militant Jihad in Europe: Fighting Home Grown Terrorism. Amsterdam 2009, pp. 146-151.

³⁹ Comment l'extrême droite radicale se recompose en France. In: The Conversation.

<https://theconversation.com/comment-lextreme-droite-radicale-se-recompose-en-france-94072>, accessed on 20.12.2019.

⁴⁰ Serdakowski, J.: *Perspektywy rozwoju bezpieczeństwa transgranicznego RP*. In: Rozprawy Społeczne, Biała Podlaska 2015, No. 2 (IX), pp. 28-33.

between Germany, Austria, Hungary and Croatia on the registration and admission of migrants, it is impossible to fully control the inflow of people. The lack of awareness of who crosses the border, illegal migration, as well as repeated use of false documents⁴¹ – all create a certain kind of deadlock, causing a dangerous situation for the society in which a terrorist attack becomes real⁴².

Conclusion

The issue of the contemporary security in Central Europe depends on many external and internal factors which interact with each other. Their multiplicity means that states are obliged to constantly react and adapt to dynamically changing conditions.⁴³ One of the important internal factors is the geopolitical situation, and another is the undertaking of measures aimed at ensuring security within the country. External factors are those which determine international cooperation and establishing alliances, as well as those which directly affect national security in connection with sharing borders with other countries.⁴⁴ Terrorist threats directly affect both internal and external factors.⁴⁵ That is why, for example, Poland and Austria may currently feel anxious about the terrorist threats in the French Republic, the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, leading to increased migration from Eastern Europe, as well as about migration from Africa and the Middle East.⁴⁶ Therefore, the governments of countries in the Central Europe should primarily concentrate on continuously monitoring tensions in their societies and successively responding to them. Apart from that, it is important to take into consideration the process of radicalization, from different directions, which has a huge impact on young people (vide: the French Republic). It will be crucial in maintaining domestic security to monitor people who come to a given country. At the external level, actions taken by citizens in the context of their activity in Africa and Middle East should be analysed. It concerns maintaining contacts, travelling and financial support.

⁴¹ Thorpe, N.: *The Road Before Me Weeps*, Yale University Press, London 2019, p. 132.

⁴² Thorpe, N.: *The Road Before Me Weeps*, Yale University Press, London 2019, pp. 138-141.

⁴³ Rękawek, K.: Człowiek z małą bombą - o terroryzmie i terrorystach. Wołowiec 2017, pp. 181-185.

⁴⁴ Żurawski vel Grajewski, P.: Bezpieczeństwo międzynarodowe. Wymiar militarny. Warsaw 2012, pp. 390-405.

⁴⁵ Brunarska Zuzanna., Lesińska, Magdalena: Migration between the EU, V4 and Eastern Europe: THE present situation and possible future, The perspective of Poland. In: Forecasting migration between the EU, V4 and Eastern Europe impact of visa abolition. Jaroszewicz, M./Lesińska, M. (Eds.): OWS Report, Warsaw 2014, p.88-108.

⁴⁶ Kotyrlo, E.: European migration crisis as an outcome of globalization. In: Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Katowicach, No. 323, Katowice 2017, pp. 77-86.

Terrorist threats emerging in Austria, the Czech Republic or Serbia are similar to those in Poland, Hungary or Slovakia. It should be admitted that countries in Central Europe are not currently terrorists' main targets — definitely not to such an extent as France, Great Britain or Russia. Nevertheless, they are treated as transit countries or places where terrorists find shelter before departing to Western Europe. Apart from that, including threats connected with the radicalization of society and terrorism with the national and extreme right-wing characteristics will constitute an important part of the future anti-terrorism strategy.

It is important to point out that since borders were established between countries, governments face a dilemma.⁴⁷ On the one hand, it is important to ensure the freedom of crossing borders, maintain a high level of security and support foreigners by encouraging them to work in the country. On the other hand, dealing with the problems of illegal migrants, especially in the context of terrorist threats, should be a priority for governments in ensuring the security of its citizens. The terrorist attack in Austria on November 2nd, 2020, proved that combating terrorism in Central Europe must become a priority for countries in the region (in particular: Austria, the Czech Republic, Poland). Moreover, it is high time to address the problem of radicalization of adherents of various religions and ideologies, who will increasingly manifest their beliefs through terrorist activities.

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** As of 3rd November, 2020 Austrian authorities have introduced lockdown due to the Covid-19 pandemic. That is why terrorists decided to carry out their attacks on the last day people were allowed to leave their homes.

⁴⁷ Maksimczuk, A./Sidorowicz, L.: *Ochrona granic i obsługa ruchu granicznego*, Warsaw 2007, pp. 15-21.

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<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-austria-attack/vienna-knife-attacker-had-radical-islamist-sympathies-austria-says-idUSKCN1GP1E4>, accessed on 13.03.2018.
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