

FROM CRIMINALS TO TERRORISTS AND BACK?

QUARTERLY REPORT 2018 GREECE



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Quarterly Report: Greece

Eleni Fotou¹

The most well-known ISIS terrorist atrocities in Europe, including the 2015 Paris and 2016 Brussels attacks, saw individuals who in the past had been involved in organized crime and illegal trade graduate into the ranks of the world's most successful terrorist organisation. **It is now widely assumed that Europe's terrorists are no longer radicals first and foremost but criminals who turned to political violence at some stage throughout their ordinary crime careers.** Thus, a threat emanating from the "crime-terror nexus" hangs over Europe. GLOBSEC, an independent, non-partisan, non-governmental organisation which aims to shape the global debate on foreign and security policy, responded to this threat by developing a research and advocacy project aimed at addressing the "crime-terror nexus" in Europe. **Our project titled *From Criminals to Terrorists and Back?* will:²**

1. **collect, collate and analyse data on terrorism convicts from 11 EU countries (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, the UK)** with the highest number of arrests for terrorism offences. We will investigate whether these individuals had prior criminal connections, and if so, whether a specific connection to illegal trade is a precursor to terrorism, and to what extent this trade funds terrorism. In short, we will check whether crime-terror nexus exists and how strong it truly is.
2. **disseminate project findings at high profile GLOBSEC Strategic Forums (GLOBSEC Bratislava Forum, TATRA Summit, Chateau Bela conferences) and other internationally acclaimed gatherings** which attract decision makers, experts, private sector and law enforcement representatives, while also incorporating their expert level feedback into our work.
3. **help shape and strengthen the European counter-terrorism efforts by providing tailor made solutions on combating crime-terror nexus and terrorist financing via education and awareness, and advocacy efforts involving decision makers and security stakeholders in the 11 targeted countries.** This line of activity directly links the project to the widely acclaimed work of the GLOBSEC Intelligence Reform Initiative (GIRI), led by Sec. Michael Chertoff, which is involved in developing and promoting more effective transatlantic counter-terrorism solutions.

1. Bottom Line

In Greece, where terrorism offenses do not follow the current European radicalisation trends, thus being one of the outliers, the links between crime and terror are more clearly evident³. Furthermore, the arrestees that have been analysed so far in this project are either Greek citizens or persons with legal permanent residency in the country. Contrary to most global terror

¹ Forensic Psychologist, Institute for the Prevention and Treatment of Violence and the Promotion of Gender Equality "VIA-STOP".

² The project is funded under PMI IMPACT, a global grant initiative of Philip Morris International to support projects against illegal trade. GLOBSEC is fully independent in implementing the project and has editorial responsibility for all views and opinions expressed herein.

³ M. Bossis, "The Mysteries of Terrorism and Political Violence in Greece" in M. van Leeuwen (ed.), *Confronting Terrorism*, pp. 129-145, Kluwer Law International.

trends, religion is not a radicalising factor in Greek terrorism. Following historical precedent, **the current active terrorist groups have a far-left, or even nihilist ideology.**

The European mass-migration crisis especially affected the country, which responded to the largest number of refugees since World War II⁴ and saw an unprecedented flow of more than 1 million refugees arriving in the country in under a year. Despite the large number of refugees flowing through Greece in 2015, and in the data processed so far, **no jihadis were arrested in Greece in 2015**⁵. As stated in the Kick-off Report, so far no significant issues have risen with radicalisation, either in the migrant community or the country's own Muslim community.

The data analysed so far clearly depict a crime-terror nexus in Greece, with more than 75% of the examined arrestees having served prison time for offenses that are unrelated to terrorism or participation in organised crime. The most frequent offenses present were theft and robbery charges, ranging from misdemeanour to felony offenses. Another phenomenon that could be observed is the fact that Korydallos Prison seems to be the hub where the offenders arrested for the first time for terrorism offenses were recruited. Moreover, the convicts recruited had specific skillsets that could aid the financing of a terrorist organisation. Finally, women seem to have a more active role, expressed through manifestos and radicalised speech and linked with convicted offenders for terrorism acts either through conjugal or familial bonds.

2. Introduction and Background

Although the link between terrorism and crime is well researched in cases of groups such as Daesh (Islamic State) and Al Qaeda⁶ most publications explore the link between jihadi or Islamic terrorism and crime. This is not the case in Greece. By eliminating the variables pertaining to religious ideology, the crime-terror link is still very much in existence, but the underlying causes for the criminal to transfer his delinquent behaviour towards terrorism has to be sought elsewhere.

The terrorism phenomenon in Greece has several distinctions from other European nations. **First, there are terrorist groups that have spanned decades in operation, terrorist organisations with numerous attacks** (ELA alone has more than 260 confirmed attacks),

⁴ As reported by the International Organisation for Migration in the IOM DTM data report for 2015 (accessed 10.03.2018).

⁵ For terrorism related offenses and organized crime offenses.

⁶ F. Gaub, & J. Lisiecka, "The crime terrorism nexus", European Union Institute for Security Studies, *Brief Issue 10*, ISBN 978-92-9198-577-7 | ISSN 2315-1110.

ranging from bombings to targeted assassinations⁷. Second, a common element among the groups appears to be a far-left ideology that from the middle of the 2000s seems to shift towards a more anarchist/nihilist theoretical framework⁸. Finally, apart from targeted assassinations, historically and currently, the terrorist attacks are planned in such a manner as to minimize the possibility for human casualty, focusing instead on political targets and persons⁹.

Despite the aforementioned differences, the arrests in 2015 for terrorism offenses in Greece, with regards to the crime-terror nexus have significant similarities with the respective arrests in other European countries. In the 11 countries examined so far, Greece and Ireland are outlier cases, with the arrested individuals straying away from the Jihadi or Islamic terrorism, but the link between crime and terror is still in evidence.¹⁰ Primarily, the recruitment of criminals with specific skillsets (especially in armed robberies) seems to be a common element. Individuals with careers in organised crime (extortion, abduction) are also quite in demand by the terrorist groups. Second, similar to other European countries, the prison setting in Greece is the primary location where the radicalisation of these criminals takes place. And finally, there is evidence of convicted terrorists reverting to clear criminal acts, when opportunity presents itself, either within the prison walls or outside, with political motives taking a back seat to the individual financial gain.

3. Future aspirations based on current results

At this point, 20 arrestees have been examined, which amounts to 80% of the arrests in 2015 in Greece. The expected number of available profiles that will be completed by the conclusion of the project is approximately 30. The examined cases so far were highly publicized, with numerous open sources available from which to draw information. In addition, the large number of various sources offers the possibility for more in-depth analysis of the profiles, as more inferences can be derived from perceived personality traits, criminal and non-criminal behaviour, and the individual's publicized life, even from their own personal blogs in some instances. The remainder of the profiles to be examined pertain to lesser-known cases or outlier individuals that have no ties to the major terrorist groups currently active in Greece. Although there are fewer sources of insight into the motives of these individuals, there is also the opportunity they will diversify the results obtained up to this point.

⁷ Bossis, *op. cit.*

⁸ E. Symeonidou-Kastanidou, "Organised Crime and Terrorism", Sakkoulas Ed, Athens.

⁹ G. Galanis, S. Galani, Stavroula, "Terrorism: A new form of War", Papazisis ed. (accessed 17.03.2018).

¹⁰ The country focus is one of the main issues of study in this project, as well as the typology of terrorism present, as defined in the "From Criminals to Terrorists and Back Kick off Report" (p.12).

The outlier cases produce in some instances the most interesting results, as in the case of the terrorist group “E”. A group of 5 individuals arrested in September 2015 following two powerful bombings who claimed they were planning four more attacks in a relatively short time. All five individuals had a clean criminal record and led normal lives up to a month before the attacks. The group believed in a conspiracy theory that included the following key concepts: the superiority of Greeks above all other races, that ancient Greeks, led by Aristotle was a species of alien who had come to colonize Earth in a spaceship called “E”, and while rejecting modern religions and all modern gods, they also rejected all nationalist parties and ideology. The group that called themselves “Team E”, met online, through a blog created by the leader that supported the theory. The members of “Team E” met in person a month before the attacks took place and planned survival games in the holy mountain of Ancient Spartans. The group’s leader identified clearly the radicalizing factor as the handling of the political crisis by the Greek government and more specifically the disregard of public sentiment as expressed by the public vote in July 2015. In their manifesto, they justified their actions by using certain articles in the Greek constitution and they swore an oath of fealty to Zeus.¹¹

4. Thematic Analysis

To properly comprehend the arrests occurring in the country, one must first discuss the legal framework. According to Greek criminal law, a person who violates Article 187A is a terrorist. A terrorist group has to have at least three members and must have a structure and a continuous action aimed at committing more felony acts. The law includes any individual who provides any financial aid by any means or resources, materials, equity, property or other, irrespective of whether the means of acquisition were legal or not. By this definition, any family member or associate of a known terrorist who provides, for example, shelter to an escaped terrorist will also be arrested under the terrorist act. This fact can explain certain arrests of individuals with familial ties to known or convicted terrorists. Nonetheless, the data analysed so far point to the existence of a clear crime-terror nexus in the country.

At this point, 20 profiles have been completed. **Most of the arrestees are male (84%), with prior convictions (62%), ranging from petty larceny, to felony offenses. Most arrests occurred after a period of surveillance by anti-terrorism police, and the majority of the individuals were**

¹¹ See Zougla.gr, “Συνέλαβαν «μέλη» της... Ομάδας Έψιλον”, 25 October 2015, <http://www.zougla.gr/greece/article/mistiria-epi8esi-me-ekriktika-sto-agalma-tou-paleologou-me-ipografi-omadas-epsilon> (accessed 07.01.2018), News247, Θα σκότωνε κόσμο η ομάδα 'E' των Δωδεκαθεϊστών, 26 October 2015, <http://news247.gr/eidiseis/koinonia/eglima/ta-skotwne-kosmo-h-omada-e-twn-dwdekatheistwn.3739193.html> (accessed 20.12.2017), <https://epsilon.wordpress.com/> (accessed 21.12.2017).

arrested in a group (76%). Only a small minority of the arrestees had a prior conviction or involvement with illicit trade (10%), and the substance traded was tobacco.

4.1. Prior crime

From the data analysed to this point, a trend emerges highlighting a link between arrests and theft, larceny or robberies. From the profiles examined so far, 75% of the arrested males had a conviction for one of these offences. **The trend of appropriating resources by illegal means for either personal gain or for ideological purposes should be examined further, as it could perhaps depict a personality trait that points to a moral laxity in the property of others, and this exactly could be a trait that is sought by the recruiters.** Although illicit trade involvement is present in a few cases (10%) , it is highly probably that the actual percentage is much higher, but is undocumented in open media sources, either because more severe charges are highlighted, or because the acquisition of evidentiary proof to that offense is much harder.

4.2. Gender

Although the majority of the arrestees were male (84%), women appear to have a more active role in terrorist organisations than in previous decades. Most women had familial ties with known terrorists and had established visitation with them in prison where the incarcerated terrorists were serving their sentences. Another interesting element is that women seem to have achieved higher education levels than males, by at least three academic years.

4.3. Radicalising Ideology

Another observable trend is in ideology, with 84% of the individuals analysed exposed to far-left ideology, which includes a heavy nihilistic and anarchist theoretical framework. **The exposure to the radicalising far-left ideology occurred in prison, while exposure to other ideology occurred online. Prior to radicalisation, in some cases, the arrestees had participated in protests organised by anarchist or leftist groups.** The Greek financial crisis seems to have exacerbated the feelings of an unjust society, as all terrorist groups actively reference both the manner by which the crisis has been handled by Greek elected officials, as well as the political response from other European States and the IMF. This is a link that is recommended for further exploration and analysis.

4.5. Prison Hub

As mentioned above, prison has served functionally as a hub for radicalisation. It is noteworthy that only 5% of the arrestees had a prior conviction for terrorism while 37% had prior convictions for organised crime-related offenses and 26% had prior convictions in other offenses that were less severe in nature, ranging from petty crime to misdemeanours. From

most open media sources, the arrestees claim that radicalisation took place in a specific prison in Greece: Korydallos. This is the largest prison in Greece, housing at times more than 1,000 prisoners, and is located in central Athens. It is not a maximum-security prison, rather an institution where apprehended individuals are awaiting trial and where members of the largest terrorist organisation in Greece, November 17, are residing, while certain members of S.P.F. are serving their time in Domokos prison. From the individuals who have been examined so far, of all the males who had served time in the past, their incarceration took place in one of these two prisons, and radicalisation took place within the prison walls, as evidenced both from open sources and the arrestees themselves. Moreover, specific individuals can be identified that are the true verified connection that ultimately created the crime and terror nexus.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The most noteworthy fact that can be derived from the data at this point is that the crime-terror nexus exists also in cases where there is no jihadi or extreme Islamic radicalisation. Rather, the profiles that have been examined so far, point to a person who would pass unnoticed in most European cities, who actively chooses a career in crime that ultimately brings him close (or inside) terrorism, and sails the line between common crime and terror. Although Greece represents an outlier case, there are distinct opportunities for exploration of the crime-terror nexus, as there is a plethora of resources that have documented extensively the lives of the 2015 arrestees, both during the arresting incident and their past life history. There are certain trends that have appeared in the examined profiles that are worth further exploration, such as the link between theft and terrorism, gender, and, most importantly, the role of prison in the communication of terrorist and common criminals.