

ACTIONS OF THE ISLAMIC STATE (ISIS) IN EUROPE

Tomasz BĄK

University of Information Technology and Management, Rzeszów, Poland
tbak@wsiz.rzeszow.pl

Abstract: *This article contains information on the activities of a terrorist organisation — the Islamic State (ISIS) — in Europe. Organisational structures of this association, as well as principles of its functioning and preparation of terrorist attacks have been described. The paper also presents a quantitative list of the attacks carried out in Europe in recent years. An important element of the article is the description of actions taken against ISIS by individual European countries.*

Keywords: ISIS, terrorist organizations, attacks

1. Introduction

The Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) or Daesh (a term used by the USA, the United Kingdom, France and other Western European countries) is in fact nothing more than a Salafist terrorist organisation [1]. The establishment of ISIS was influenced by different circumstances and not a single decisive fact. Over the years, this organization had been gathering its forces, organizing itself into structures to show its presence at some point. The world has heard of the Islamic State, which is now on everyone's lips. Despite the fact that it is only a small and not recognised country in the Middle East, the fear it instils in the world, and especially in Europe, is great. The consequences of ISIS are enormous. Migration of people associated with this organisation has terrible consequences, as we have seen in France and as we witness it in other countries on a daily basis. Although members of the Islamic State are not typical Islamic terrorists, they profess radical Islam, which expansion into other territories may lead to clashes and tensions between the Middle East and Europe, as

well as cause some serious threats to the security of Europe and its inhabitants.

2. The origins and history of the Islamic State

This organization was established in 2003 as a branch of Al Qaeda in Iraq. It actively participated in a guerrilla war against American forces, and the attacks launched by the militants of this organisation initiated a spiral of a civil war in 2006–2007. In 2006 it announced the creation of the Islamic State of Iraq. During the following years, several more groups joined the Islamic State of Iraq and the Islamists expanded their influence in Iraq [2]. Soon afterwards it was broken up and its leader died in 2010.

The revival came with the beginning of the war in Syria. Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi took over the leadership of the organisation. Since 2011 the organization has been spreading rapidly in Syria and Iraq, killing the people who oppose its ideology on a massive scale. Soldiers from the government armed forces of Arab countries often desert to the ranks of the Islamic State. It is mainly the fear of the

cruelty of this organisation that makes them prefer to be in its ranks rather than to fight against it [3]. The awareness of ISIS members that the USA and the European countries are their real enemies, who want to physically liquidate the organization, has led to forming a new strategy of action.

It was by transferring members of this organisation to Europe in order to carry out terrorist attacks on civilians that they were supposed to discourage the allied countries from fighting against ISIS.

3. The activities of ISIS in Europe

There were also militants of the Islamic State on the boats filled with migrants arriving at the coasts of Europe. Identifying who is a terrorist and who is not, is not easy and sometimes even impossible. It turned out that the ISIS fighters coming to Europe had been living in European countries from where they went to the war in the Middle East and now they come back to strike against Europe.

The largest number of European terrorists fighting in the ranks of the Islamic State went to the Middle East from Belgium. Since 2012 as many as 400 people have travelled there with this purpose. This data was published on the basis of the analyses carried out by the Belgian security services. In the years 2011–2016, 42,000 volunteers from 120 countries joined the ranks of the Islamic State. More than 5,000 fighters came to Syria and Iraq from the Western European countries, of which Belgium was the richest source of the ISIS power. Large groups of ISIS supporters also reached the Middle East from France, Germany, England, Austria, Finland, the Netherlands, Denmark, Spain and Sweden.

The return of hundreds of Islamists from the Middle East to Europe is a challenge for the countries welcoming migrants who take advantage of the Western European citizenship and transfer the ideology and contacts from the ISIS structures. Another problem for the European countries is the

leakage of weapons and ammunition from the Old Continent to illegal organisations in Arab countries. The Azeri agency “Report.az” reported that on 14th November the European Parliament adopted a resolution in which it expressed its concern about the fact that large quantities of weapons were sold to ISIS in Syria and Iraq by EU member states. Bulgaria and Romania are among the countries blamed by the EP for facilitating the forwarding of the arms supplies to recipients in the Middle East [4].

Many European countries are threatened by another wave of ISIS attacks. The greatest threat is to be posed by the terrorists who will be released from prisons in the upcoming years. The extremists who will soon be released from prisons are called the “ISIS 2.0” — that is the second wave of terrorism that may sweep over Europe. The criminal law of many European Union countries allows to convict people who were members of terrorist organisations or who carried out attacks in other countries. This allows, for example, German courts to punish radical Islamists who, with the right of residence in Germany or a German citizenship, fought in the ranks of the Islamic State in Syria or Iraq. However, the difficulty in proving specific actions leads to low sentences for the jihadists returning from the Middle East: 2 to 6 years in prison. They are the ones who are supposed to pose the greatest threat. The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism in The Hague, in a report from 2016, estimated that about 30 percent of the fighters had returned to Europe [5].

These facts make the terrorist threat a part of the European “normality”.

After the fall of the caliphate in Syria, hundreds of extremists are planning to return to Europe and are organising attacks with the help of the supporters living in the Community. Worse still, thanks to the cooperation of the radical leaders with a broad group of supporters, the threat of the

Islamic terror has become a structural element of the European society.

It is considered that terrorist attacks may be carried out on the orders of Islamist commanders, organised by members of extremist groups or inspired by them. At present, the most dangerous is the last category of terrorism resembling the “cottage industry”.

It is estimated that in the Netherlands the Islamists can count on the support of more than 500 active members and several thousand supporters. They are all considered a potential threat.

It is also assessed that ISIS uses Turkey as a base allowing the extremists to reorganise and threaten Europe again.

It is stressed that 2019 will be a particularly dangerous year, as not only the terrorists regrouping in Turkey, but also numerous extremists released after serving sentences of several years will pose a threat. Those people behind bars have not changed their radical views [6].

In his recent speech, the leader of ISIS Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi signalled that he wants to return to the roots of the group, again trying to provoke a revolt in Iraq, destabilising the whole country and expelling American troops. But the self-proclaimed caliph also drew attention to the need for attacks in the Western Europe. In one of the excerpts, he encourages members of the group to carry out single-handed attacks using bombs, cars, rifles and knives. Baghdadi stated that one attack in the West is equal to a thousand attacks in the Middle East [7].

As it has been already mentioned, some extremists join migrants from Africa and try to enter Europe using falsified passports [8]. Relatively recently, the Belgian police detained the leader of the recruitment cell of the Islamic State, which operated in the European Union. The man comes from Morocco, but is a Spanish citizen. According to the investigators' findings, the detainee dealt not only with recruitment, but also with indoctrination of potential

jihadists.

The detainee probably belonged to the recruitment network of the Islamic State, which was broken up by the Belgian services some time ago. According to the investigators, the man apprehended in Zaventem, near the Brussels airport, was the leader of a cell which was also responsible for indoctrinating people who would be “embraced” by Islamic terrorist organisations. According to the Spanish Ministry of Internal Affairs, the man maintained constant contact with the leaders of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq.

It is worth noting that the Belgian services, which detained the man, acted in agreement with the Spanish police, which was also looking for the leader of the ISIS recruitment cell. A special statement emphasised that a network of Islamic State recruiters in Brussels had existed since 2014 and meetings with potential future ISIS soldiers were held in Brussels cafés, as well as in the apartment of the detained man.

He was detained on charges of recruitment to terrorist organisations, indoctrination and the dissemination of training and propaganda materials which encouraged terrorist attacks in the European Union [9].

4. ISIS terrorist attacks in Europe

The following is a list of the most serious terrorist attacks organised by ISIS members across Europe during the period 2011–2018:

- On 11th December 2018 in Strasbourg, France, during a Christmas market, 29-year-old Chérif Chekatt, a French citizen of Algerian origin, started shooting at people, shouting “Allah Akbar”. Five people were killed and 10 injured as a result of the attack;
- On 17th and 18th August 2017 in La Rambla Street in Barcelona and Cambrils 16 people died, including two children aged 3 and 7, and 5 attackers.

- More than 140 people were injured, 16 of them critically;
- 22nd May 2017 - In Manchester, Salman Abedi, a British man of Lebanese origin, detonated a bomb after a concert of American singer Ariana Grande in the sports and entertainment hall. 22 people died, including two Poles, and more than 100 were injured. It was the most serious attack in the UK since the attacks on the public transport system in London in July 2005, where 56 people died;
 - 20th April 2017 - Three days before the first round of the French presidential election in the Champs Elysée in central Paris, an attacker shot a policeman and injured three people, including two officers and a German citizen, after which he was shot dead by the intervening police;
 - 7th April 2017 - Four people died and 15 were injured in Stockholm when a driver of an abducted lorry drove into the crowd and then hit a department store. The alleged perpetrator of the attack, 39-year-old Rachman Akilov from Uzbekistan, is in custody;
 - 22nd March 2017 - An attacker drove into a group of people on the Westminster Bridge in London, killing three people, and then attempted to enter the British Parliament, mortally injuring a police officer with a knife. The perpetrator was shot by the security services. The attack was carried out by Islamic extremist Khalid Masood, who was born and raised in the UK;
 - 19th December 2016 - Tunisian Amis Amri hijacked a lorry, and after shooting Polish driver Łukasz Urban in its cab, he drove it into a crowd at a Christmas market in the centre of Berlin. In the attack a total of 12 people were killed and more than were 50 injured. Four days later, near Milan, Italian police officers shot the terrorist who escaped from the crime scene;
 - 14th July 2016 - 84 people were killed in Nice in the south of France when, during the Bastille Day celebrations, a lorry drove into a crowd on a promenade. Mohamed Lahouaiej Bouhlel, a Tunisian attacker permanently living in France, was shot dead by the police;
 - 22nd March 2016 - In a series of three coordinated bombings in Brussels - two at the Zaventem airport and one at the Maelbeek metro station - 32 people and three suicide bombers were killed and approximately 340 injured. It was the bloodiest terrorist attack in Belgium's history;
 - 13th November 2015 - A series of coordinated vicious terrorist attacks took place in Paris, including an attack on the Bataclan concert hall, where terrorists held hostages. In the attacks 130 people were killed and more than 350 were injured. The Islamic State admitted to the attacks. It was the most tragic event that has affected France since World War II;
 - 14th February 2015 - In two shootings in Copenhagen - in front of a café and near a synagogue - two people were killed and five injured. The attacker was 22-year-old Omar el-Hussein, a Dane of a Palestinian origin, who pledged his allegiance to the Islamic State. The perpetrator was shot dead by the police one day later;
 - 7-9 January 2015 - In Paris, brothers Said and Cherif Kouachi shot 12 people in an assassination attempt at the editorial office of the satirical weekly "Charlie Hebdo". The following day, Amedy Coulibaly, who was associated with the attackers, killed a policewoman in Paris, and on the next day he took hostages in a kosher food shop, killing four people. The terrorists died during the operation of the French police special forces;
 - 24th May 2014 - Three people died and one was critically injured in a shooting

in the Jewish Museum in Brussels. The perpetrator who was shooting in the museum - Mehdi Nemmouche- was detained a few days later in Marseille;

- 22nd May 2013 - Two men brutally killed a British soldier Lee Rigby with a cleaver and a knife, who was walking along a street near the artillery barracks in East London. Michael Adebolajo - the soldier's killer - was sentenced to life imprisonment and his partner, Michael Adebowale, was sentenced to a minimum of 45 years of imprisonment;
- March 2012 - Radical Islamist Mohamed Merah shot three children and an adult, as well as severely injured one person in front of a Jewish school in Toulouse. Before that, he had murdered three soldiers in Toulouse and nearby Montauban. A few days after the attacks he was killed in a police raid.

On the other hand, the German intelligence services warn against planned attacks that use biological warfare agents. Islamic terrorist attacks with the use of toxic substances are possible at any time.

The services warn that it is time to say goodbye to the idea that terrorist attacks always follow the same pattern. The security services have been observing for a long time that attacks can be carried out in different ways. Terrorists are very creative in this respect and try to test all possible scenarios asymmetrically.

The Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) recently arrested in Koln a Tunisian - Sief Allah H. - suspected of producing highly toxic ricin for biological explosives. The Federal Public Prosecutor's Office also launched an investigation on the grounds of suspicion of preparation of an "act of violence against the security of the state." The new findings of the Prosecutor's Office indicate that the arrested person also had contact with the community of Islamic extremists.

ISIS offers detailed instructions for the production of ricin and encourages the use

of this extremely hazardous substance in a special manual. Even its small doses can cause death [10].

Despite the official condemnation of Islamists who use terrorist acts in their actions all over the world, they end up on battlefields in Turkey and Ukraine. Some look for profit, but most of them treat the fighting as the achievement of their religious and political goals.

The participation of Islamic State fighters in the Donbass conflict was reported by British "The Times", referring to conversations with Islamists who are in a camp in Ukraine. Their place of residence is around Mariupol.

The Islamists fighting on the Ukrainian side come mainly from the Caucasus, in a large part from Chechnya, and they treat the fight against pro-Russian separatists and the Russian Federation soldiers as a fight against a common enemy.

The conflict in the latter country directly involves not only the ISIS people, but also other radical Islamist groups. Turkey, Russia, Western countries, Iran and the Kurds, who for years have been trying to establish their own country in areas belonging to Turkey, Syria and Iraq, are focusing on their own interests when it comes to the conflict in Syria. According to "Islam Today", Ankara engaged members of the Islamic State in Turkey's battles against the Kurds in northern Syria [11].

5. The activities of ISIS in Poland

Poland is neither an attractive destination for terrorists nor a place where they would look for shelter. However, it is located on an important route of people travelling from the Middle East to the West [12].

A suspect of belonging to the so-called Islamic State was detained in Poland. Alvi A. is of Chechen origin. He fought in the Middle East and returned to Europe. Poland is a part of the trail followed by terrorists going to the West.

Alvi A. was detained by the Internal Security Agency and the police. This is the result of a cooperation with the German services. He maintained contacts with Islamists' field commanders and that is probably why he got arrested.

It is too early to assess the exact scale of his activities, let alone to file specific charges. It is possible that he acted as a logistician, co-creating terrorist infrastructure in Western Europe.

Alvi A. was probably primarily active in Germany, but he decided to hide in Poland when the anti-terrorist services of our western neighbour started to approach him. Terrorists from ISIS, including many Chechens and people from the former Caucasian republics, are exploiting their connections with their countrymen in Poland, as well as with our criminal world.

In Katowice since April 2018 a trial against Mourad T. suspected of being a member of ISIS has been in progress. The man was to be a reconnaissance specialist who, among other things, checked the effectiveness of border authorities and the possibility of using smuggling routes leading from the Balkans to Germany across the southern border of Poland, especially through the Low Beskids. ISIS envoys repeatedly cross borders, investigate procedures, as well as search for and use weaknesses [13].

The reaction to the appearance of ISIS broadcast station with propaganda content in Poland was to block it [14].

Fascinated by Islam, an 18-year-old was sentenced to 10 years of imprisonment. Evidence found in his apartment shows that the teenager was in contact with ISIS. On his computer there were also a lot of propaganda materials produced by the Islamic State. He was fascinated by Islam and sent such materials to his friends.

The failed bomber was detained in June last year. The case was investigated by the Internal Security Agency, which says that if it had not been for the arrest, the attack could have happened in the upcoming weeks.

6. Conclusions

The Islamic radicals have realized that the services of individual European countries already have a good understanding of what is happening on their own territory and who could pose a threat here. However, the jihadists in Europe have also noticed that the services here do not exchange information on this subject quickly and effectively enough. If, for example, a potentially dangerous French citizen enters France, the local services will almost certainly "take care" of him immediately. However, if they are a citizen of another country, it may be easier for them to slip through the net meshes. We may be facing the threat of "itinerant terrorists" who may appear everywhere, but not in their country of residence [15].

The services of Western countries carried out a coordinated action against the propagandist arm of the Islamic State. Eight NATO countries carried out raids on ISIS servers and channels. The objectives of the two-day and organised investigation were the channels through which the criminal organisation sends its propaganda out into the world. This includes the Amaq agency, the jihadists' source, where information about the group attacks is always placed, as well as smaller portals and radio stations that publicise the jihadists' message.

It was the third such attack on the terrorist media base. According to Europol, the ISIS propaganda has so far been available in nine languages through a range of media, from e-mail newsletters to smartphone apps. Similar actions against supporters of the Islamic State were taken by social networks. Not always with satisfactory results, because the deleted accounts and networks are often replaced by new ones [16].

The threat posed by the establishment and the functioning of the Islamic State is very serious today. That is why all European countries, whether they are members of the European Union or not, should consolidate their efforts to combat this threat effectively.

Only mutual cooperation, also with the USA and other countries, can lead to achievement of the goal of liquidation of the Islamic State, end of the war in Syria and stabilization in Iraq and other Middle

Eastern countries. However, this will require a great deal of effort and commitment, which may take even the next few years.

References

- [1] www.encyklopedia.pwn.pl/haslo/Panstwo-Islamskie. Accessed 08 January 2018.
- [2] A. Myszyn, ИсламскогогосударствоТерриториявойны, (in) <http://www.liga.net/projects/igil/>. Accessed 08 January 2019.
- [3] M. Siekański, *Historia państwaislamskiego w pigulce [The History of the Islamic State in a Nutshell]*, (in) <http://pl.blastingnews.com/swiat/2015/06/historia-panstwa-islamskiego-w-pigulce-00457639.html> . Accessed 10.02.2019.
- [4] <https://www.pch24.pl/tam-i-z-powrotem--z-zachodniej-europy-do-panstwa-islamskiego,64566,i.html>. Accessed 6 February 2019
- [5] <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/szef-interpolu-alarmuje-nadchodzi-isis-20-6329669078812289a>. Accessed 6 February 2019.
- [6] <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/wywiad-holandii-islamisci-nie-zostali-pokonani-rosnie-zagrozenie-terrorystyczne-6314007431469185a>. Accessed 11 February 2019.
- [7] <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/panstwo-islamskie-szykuje-sie-do-powrotu-planuje-skupic-sie-na-europie-6288911317800577a>. Accessed 11 February 2019.
- [8] <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/mezczyzna-z-europy-rekrutowal-terrorystow-w-maroku-był-zamieszany-w-zabojstwo-turystek-6333078416767105a>. Accessed 11 February 2019.
- [9] <https://www.pch24.pl/lider-siatki-rekrutacyjnej-panstwa-islamskiego-zatrzymany-przez-belgijska-policje,54926,i.html>. Accessed 12 February 2019.
- [10] <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/niemieckie-sluzby-bezpieczenstwa-ostrzegaja-terrorysci-testuja-rozne-scenariusze-6265179069433473a>. Accessed 14 February 2019.
- [11] <https://www.pch24.pl/terror-im-nie-przeszkadza--bojownicy-panstwa-islamskiego-walcza-dla-turcji-i-na-ukrainie,65270,i.html>. Accessed 16 February 2019.
- [12] <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/ruszył-pierwszy-w-polsce-proces-terrorysty-z-isis-takich-ludzi-prawdopodobnie-jest-u-nas-wiecej-6237175283873409a>. Accessed 16 February 2019.
- [13] <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/abw-zatrzymala-czlonka-isis-ukryl-sie-w-polsce-przed-poscigiem-w-niemczech-6327101884528769a>. Accessed 20 February 2019.
- [14] <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/abw-zablokowalo-radio-isis-na-polskiej-domenie-nalezy-spodziewac-sie-odnowienia-dzialalnosci-6220601080800897a>. Accessed 20 February 2019.
- [15] <http://wyborcza.pl/1,75477,19123651,dzihad-wedrownny-zagraza-europie.html#ixzz40AAAtTSFp>. Accessed 26 February 2016.
- [16] <https://wiadomosci.wp.pl/miedzynarodowa-akcja-przeciwko-isis-cios-w-propagande-dzihadu-6246099226638465a>. Accessed 26 February 2019.