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INSIDE THIS ISSUE

**Counterterrorism News and
Information - 1**

**Kosovo: Five Suspects
Arrested for Preparing
Terrorist Acts - 2**

**Bosnia and Herzegovina:
Court of BiH Hands Down
Appeal Judgement in
Foreign Terrorist Fighter
Case - 2**

**EUROPOL: European
Union Terrorism Situation
and Trend Report 2021 - 3**

**Terrorism Investigation
Techniques: Undercover
Operations, Part I - 3**

CT News and Information Updating and Connecting Our Partners in the Region

*DOJ, Office of Overseas Prosecutorial Development, Assistance, and Training
(OPDAT) in partnership with the U.S. Department of State, Bureau of
Counterterrorism*

In this issue you will learn how Kosovo recently disrupted a suspected ISIS terrorist plot and seized a large number of weapons. You will also learn about a recent foreign terrorist fighter case appeals decision from the Court of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Further, we present a summary from the latest Europol report on terrorism, while at the end of this issue, we offer useful tips for undertaking successful undercover operations.

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Kosovo: Five Suspects Arrested for Preparing Terrorist Acts

Kosovo police and the Special Prosecution Office took down an alleged terrorist cell on October 10, 2021. Members of the cell are suspected of preparing to conduct terrorist acts. Law enforcement seized many weapons, including hand grenades, explosives, firearms, a drone and a rocket launcher. According to media sources, the investigation lasted for three months, was conducted in high secrecy, and involved the use of special measures of investigation and surveillance for monitoring and tracking the suspects' activities.



Weapons seized during the police action

Suspect Ardian Gjuraj is alleged to be the leader and the instructor of the group. The other alleged members of the group are Nuhredin Skenderi, Ergim Sylja, Mentor Bellaqa and Shkodran Krasniqi. According to the investigation order cited by Kosovo media, Gjuraj had risen to become a high-ranking official within the ISIS foreign relations office, and he had received instructions on how to build a terrorist network in the country. The media reports that the defendants attempted to purchase weapons from the Kosovo police during an undercover operation.

Ardian Gjuraj was previously convicted and sentenced to a year and five months in prison for terrorism in February 2018. He was released after five months by the Court of Appeals.

All the defendants have been ordered to remain in custody for 30 days by the Pristina Basic Court Special Department while the investigation continues.

Sources: <https://kallxo.com/lajm/detaje-grupi-radikal-islamik-planifikonte-sulme-terroriste-ne-kosove/>

<https://kallxo.com/lajm/dosja-e-prokurorise-sa-zgjati-hetimi-per-grupin-e-dyshuar-terrorist/>

<https://kallxo.com/lajm/detaje-se-si-ishin-ndare-rolet-e-grupit-te-dyshuar-terrorist-per-pergatitjen-e-sulmeve-ne-kosove/>

Bosnia and Herzegovina: Court of BiH Hands Down Appeal Judgement in Foreign Terrorist Fighter Case

In September 2021, the Court of BiH delivered its appeals judgement in the case of convicted foreign terrorist fighter Milarem Berbić, upholding the judgement of the trial court and affirming the defendant's 3-year prison sentence. Berbić was convicted on May 19, 2021, of the criminal offense of Unlawfully Establishing and Joining a Foreign Paramilitary or Parapublic Organization. The defendant left BiH in 2014 and traveled to Syria. During his stay in Syria, he assisted and fought on the side of ISIL as a member of the unit led by Goran Pavlović. On appeal, the defendant argued that the conviction should be overturned, while the prosecutor argued that the 3-year sentence was insufficient and should be increased. The appellate court, however, denied the arguments of both parties and confirmed the trial judgement.

Source: [Potvrđena prvostepena presuda Milaremu Berbiću za ratovanje u Siriji](#)

EUROPOL: European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2021

Released in June, Europol's European Union (EU) Terrorism Situation and Trend Report gives an overview of terrorist attacks and arrests in the EU, UK, and Switzerland in 2020.

According to the Report, there were 57 completed, failed, and foiled terrorist attacks in the EU in 2020, with 21 people killed and 54 injured. In addition, 62 terrorist incidents were reported by the UK in 2020. According to the report, more jihadist terrorist attacks were completed than thwarted in 2020. All 15 of the terrorist attacks – in the EU (10), Switzerland (2 probable terrorist attacks), and the UK (3) – were carried out by lone actors from diverse backgrounds, most of them using unsophisticated attack methods. A considerable number of these perpetrators were released convicts or prisoners, which reveals the effects of jihadist radicalization and recruitment in prison as well as the threat stemming from released prisoners. The return of foreign terrorist fighters to Europe in 2020 was affected by COVID-19 travel restrictions with hundreds of Europeans remaining in detention camps in Northeast Syria. Furthermore, the take-down of the messenger service Telegram in 2019 decreased considerably jihadist networking and operating online.

In 2020, 254 individuals were arrested on suspicion of committing jihadism-related offenses, which is a drop of more than 50%. The most frequent offense leading to arrest was membership in a terrorist group, followed by propaganda dissemination and planning/preparing terrorist acts, and facilitating and financing terrorism.

The majority of terrorist prosecutions completed in the EU Member States in 2020 (314 out of 422) were related to jihadist terrorism, specifically to offenses related to the conflict in Syria and to the activities of terrorist organizations that operated in that area, primarily ISIS.

The Report further notes that at least five jihadist attacks that took place in Europe in 2020 involved perpetrators who had previously spent time in prison, which indicates that Europe continued to suffer the effects of jihadist radicalization and recruitment in prisons and the threat from released prisoners.

In relation to online jihadist propaganda, the Report observes that it has become more dispersed across a variety of platforms after the 2019 Telegram takedown and that ISIS supporters evidently continued to struggle to rebuild their networks and to ensure that ISIS messaging reaches target audiences. Even though the quantity and quality of propaganda produced by official ISIS media outlets decreased significantly in 2020, ISIS supporters continued to use multiple online platforms to propagate their ideology and to incite lone-actor attacks in Western countries. The Al-Qaeda network also continued to maintain a sustained propaganda presence online in 2020.

According to the Report, one completed right-wing terrorist attack was carried out by a lone actor in 2020, whereas three other attacks failed or were foiled. Thirty-four individuals were arrested on suspicion of involvement in right-wing terrorist activity. Suspects arrested for planning right-wing terrorist or extremist attacks have links to transnational violent online communities. The Report also notes that right-wing extremists use video games and gaming platforms to propagate their ideology. The number of convictions for right-wing terrorism increased in 2020 in comparison with 2019.

In relation to left-wing and anarchist terrorist attacks, the Report finds that the numbers for 2020 remained comparable to those from previous years, whereas arrests dropped by more than half. In 2020, prosecutions for left-wing and anarchist terrorism-related offenses were the second most common type of terrorism prosecution in the EU.

Source: [EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report 2021](#)

Practice Tip

Terrorism Investigation Techniques: Undercover Operations, Part I

The topic of this and the next issue's practice tip section will be undercover operations. In this issue we will briefly outline different types of undercover operations and important points that law enforcement agencies should consider before employing this investigation technique. In the next issue we will offer you some practice tips for conducting successful undercover projects.

An undercover operation is defined as an investigative technique in which law enforcement officers operate covertly for the purpose of developing evidence about illegal activities. In an undercover operation, one or more undercover officers is placed into position which enables him or her to provide direct information about criminal activity and to testify as a direct

witness against a subject or a criminal conspiracy. The scope of undercover operations can vary greatly, ranging from a simple covert contact in which some intelligence is gathered to highly elaborate projects involving several investigators.

Undercover operations have several advantages. First, they can produce spectacular results that may not be yielded through other investigation techniques. Second, unlike most approaches that are used to solve crimes that have already been committed, undercover operations enable law enforcement to proactively react and prevent a crime. Third, because of their official position and training, law enforcement officers are considered more desirable witnesses in court than informants or the average cooperative citizens.

However, undercover operations are at the same time extremely complex, time- and manpower consuming, resource-intensive, dangerous, and potentially psychologically harmful for the undercover officer and his personal life.

There are essentially three types of undercover operations: limited contact, semi-deep undercover, and deep cover operations.

In a **limited contact or “one shot” undercover operation**, an undercover officer makes “one or more brief contacts with a subject or other knowledgeable person for the purpose of developing intelligence or evidence” without revealing his identity as an officer. Such an operation could involve attending a meeting, engaging a person in a conversation, visiting a target location, etc. Although this type of undercover operation is usually short-term, it should nevertheless be well-planned and well-documented.

In a **semi-deep undercover operation**, an undercover officer “makes contacts in the target area with some degree of frequency, but he is not functioning on an around-the-clock basis.” In this type of project, an undercover officer should have quality props to support his fake identity, including false personal and vehicle documentation, and sometimes even a clandestine residence or employment that the subject can see if necessary.

Deep cover operation is the most complex level of undercover work. It is a full-time assignment in which an undercover officer joins the targeted subject or conspiracy on a full-time basis. This means that a deep cover officer should not perform other police work and that the law enforcement agency should refrain from using him to simultaneously perform undercover functions in different cases, unless they involve the same type of crime and can complement the targeted case.

As already emphasized, undercover operations are very complex and “involve a great deal more than an investigator telling people that he is someone and something other than what he really is.” For this reason, law enforcement agencies should thoroughly weigh all pros and cons before employing this investigation technique, taking into consideration especially the following points:

Have all other investigation techniques been exhausted? If less demanding techniques can accomplish the same objectives, undercover operations should not be used.

Is it an emergency situation? Situations where lives are at stake may require instituting an undercover operation. For example, if an extremist group is trying to obtain explosives to bomb a target, an undercover officer could assume the role of an explosives provider in order to preclude someone else from responding to the request.

Is there a suitable person available to function in the undercover role? Undercover work is unique and requires certain skills and talents that many people do not possess, and even investigators who possess such qualities may not be able or suitable to participate in undercover assignments for various other reasons (for example, the negative impact that such operations will have on their family life, they are well-known as law enforcement officers or have other specialized responsibilities within their law enforcement agency...). In any case, it is probably better to abandon the project than to use an inappropriate undercover operative.

Can the agency maintain complete security for the operation? The undercover operation should not be common knowledge in the department or the prosecutor’s office. The specifics of the undercover project should be kept on a need-to-know basis.

Is the agency able to protect the undercover officer? The law enforcement agency must do a proper assessment of what is required to fulfill this commitment because “the more dangerous the target, the more protection the undercover investigator may require.” Security for the undercover officer can require employing a variety of precautions such as surveillance, electronic coverage, even assigning additional officers to function in other undercover roles.

Is the agency able to deal with fallout? If it appears that an undercover agent and his family are in danger, or that the agent’s ability to continue functioning as law enforcement officer has been compromised, the law enforcement agency should be ready to transfer the undercover operative away from the area where undercover project was undertaken.

Source: William E. Dyson, *Terrorism: An Investigator’s Handbook*, Third Edition, Anderson Publishing (2008)