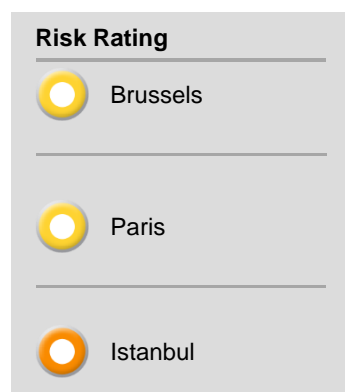


Terrorism in Europe



Prepared for

Press & Media



Country Risk Overview

Main Question to Be Answered

- What are the consequences of the most recent terrorist attacks in Istanbul and Brussels?

Major Risks

- High likelihood of further attempts of terrorist attacks in major cities
- Potential attack types range from minor individual activities to suicide bombings to thoroughly planned and coordinated attacks
- The number of terrorist attacks will rather increase than abate in the near future

Please note that this Special Bulletin was sent to EXOP clients earlier. If you would like to receive future Special Bulletins immediately, please contact your EXOP Consultant.

Recent Developments

The most recent terrorist attacks in Istanbul and Brussels were the last in a row of incidents that were indiscriminately aimed at soft targets such as travellers and passers-by. On Saturday, at least five people died and 36 were wounded when a suicide attacker detonated an explosive belt in a touristic shopping area in central Istanbul. On Tuesday morning, at least 31 people were killed and 270 injured in three bombings at the Brussels-Zaventem International Airport (BRU) and at the Maalbeek subway station in central Brussels.

Tuesday's Brussels attacks resulted in an immediate lockdown of the entire transport infrastructure, impacting plane connections just as much as trains and local transport. Communication networks for mobile phones temporarily broke down, businesses closed and European institutions suspended all activities. Security forces conducted anti-terror raids in Brussels, confiscating Islamist propaganda and bomb making materials. Most European nations and many other countries worldwide have established heightened security around critical infrastructure for the immediate future. The U.S. Department of State has issued a general travel warning for all of Europe with regard to possible "near-term attacks".

The latest incidents came only a few months after security measures were stepped up and terror threat levels were raised to the highest level in several Western European countries as a consequence of the November 2015 attacks that killed 130 people and wounded hundreds in the French capital Paris. In the meantime, the Islamic State (IS) and al-Qa'ida have claimed responsibility for a number of other attacks that mainly targeted Westerners, including a Russian aeroplane over the Sinai peninsula and hotels strongly frequented by internationals in Ouagadougou (Burkina Faso) and Bamako (Mali).

Impact

Beyond their most imminent repercussions, at least three mayor conclusions can be derived from the recent wave of terror attacks across Europe:

First of all, the attacks dramatically unveiled the persistent shortcomings of counterterrorist efforts in Europe and beyond, suggesting that further attacks on European soil can happen at any time and in any place. Both attacks took place under circumstances in which security forces were on high alert because of a number of related events in the recent past.

- Only two months earlier, a suicide bomber killed at least 10 foreign tourists and wounded 15 others on Sultanahmet Square in Istanbul. Moreover, a number of additional terrorist attacks have struck the Turkish capital Ankara and other targets in the country in recent months.
- While terrorists were not able to carry out major attacks in Western Europe between the events in Paris and Brussels, a couple of minor attacks, often committed by individuals without connections to international jihadist groups, and several allegedly foiled attacks maintained security awareness at a high level. Examples include a suspended football match in Hannover and the temporary closure of Munich's main railway station on New Year's Eve.
- The perceived threat was nowhere as present as in Belgium, where a terrorist raid carried out only four days before Tuesday's attacks finally resulted in the capture of one of the Paris attackers, who had apparently been hiding in Brussels's notorious Molenbeek district since November 2015.

Second, while the most recent attacks lay bare the vulnerability of both Western Europe's open societies and the increasingly authoritarian government in Turkey, they also allow drawing some conclusions on the potential range of further terrorist attacks.

- Individuals who are not connected to any established terror network or organisation and who are often radicalised via internet continue to pose a substantial threat to security. These "lone wolves" often go undetected by security institutions until they commit an attack. The IS, who claimed responsibility for the Belgian attacks, urged its supporters worldwide to focus on improvised and low-technology types of attacks using household items or private cars.
- Individual suicide bombers who detonate an explosive belt amidst a group of passers-by are a persistent security threat, as shown by the Istanbul attacks on Saturday and in January. The Turkish government blamed both attacks on the IS. While the group has not assumed responsibility for any of the Istanbul attacks, the use of explosive belts suggests an organisational background that exceeds the capabilities of a lone-wolf attacker by far.
- Most worrisome, however, is the fact that under the above-described circumstances of high terror awareness and ongoing anti-terror operations in Brussels, the attackers in Belgium were capable of carrying out highly sophisticated and coordinated attacks that in many ways resemble the modus operandi employed in Paris in November 2015. What is more, both the Paris and Brussels attacks could have resulted in even higher human losses if everything turned out as apparently planned by the attackers.

Third, there are various reasons to assume that the number of terrorist attack attempts is rather bound to increase than to abate in the near future, with a distinct possibility of further strikes being of a similar size as the Paris and Brussels attacks.

- The increasing military retreat of the Islamic State in its strongholds in Syria and Iraq could prompt the group to divert from military failures by seeking worldwide attention through further terrorist attacks.
- Turkey is not only under threat from members of the Islamic State, but also from militants of Kurdish and ultraleftist groups.
- Terrorist cells appear to be largely intact in Western European countries, as evidenced by the fact that one of the Paris attackers could go into hiding for four months before being detected by security forces; open borders between European states make it easy for these groups to move from one country to the next.
- The high number of returning fighters from Syria and Iraq poses a continuous security threat; at the same time, heightened controls at European airports to intercept and prevent jihadist movement may lead militants to plan domestic attacks instead of travelling to the Middle East.
- IS still has at least one skilled bomb maker in Europe who is capable of producing sophisticated explosive belts.
- It is virtually impossible to protect all potential soft targets, and terrorists have shown a high readiness to change targets. While they mainly targeted leisure venues in Paris, the Belgian attackers concentrated on traffic infrastructure. Within the Brussels airport, they detonated their suitcase bombs at the check-in counter, i.e. before security screenings take place.

Outlook

A series of successful terrorist attacks in major European cities could result in lasting repercussions on public life from London to Istanbul in the medium to long term. Further attacks of a similar scope as those seen in Paris and Brussels could bring about fundamental changes, some of which would have a substantial impact on business activities and travellers.

- Terrorist attacks on major transport hubs such as the international airports of London, Paris, Frankfurt, Amsterdam and Istanbul could severely affect business activities, as these airports handle hundreds of thousands of passengers a day and connect different international destinations with each other.
- Travellers may need to adapt to increasing travelling and commuting times as governments decide to enact hard measures, such as physical barriers, security gates, checkpoints, restrictions on movement and traveller screenings. As a consequence of the November 2015 terror attacks, for instance, France has already introduced security gates at platforms in railway stations of the high-speed Thalys train.
- In addition, the likeliness of delays and cancellations because of unidentified luggage found or bomb threats received is bound to increase with the number of actual terrorist attacks because of attention-seekers and a surge in awareness among airport and station officials as well as fellow travellers.
- Freedom of movement for travellers could become limited. Potential travel restrictions may not be confined to nationality but may include a person's individual travel history. Travellers belonging to certain ethnic or religious groups could increasingly become subject to specific security screenings.
- Venues for business events and locations for offices or subsidiaries could increasingly be chosen in the light of security developments. Obtaining regional and even district-based security intelligence, which is already common practice in many other world regions, could become increasingly important for European cities as well.
- Lone-wolf attackers could become a growing concern to business activities, as radicalised employees may be willing to prepare attacks or sabotage operations over months using specific skills, such as expertise in hacking, chemistry or engineering.
- The economic costs of security could rise substantially. Governments could see themselves forced to permanently deploy security personnel to public places and mass gatherings. Target hardening by making infrastructure more resilient to terrorist attacks through backup infrastructure or redesigning railway stations and airports would prove even more time and cost-intensive.
- Providing security for mass events such as the upcoming UEFA European Championship in France or the Tour de France could divert so much human resources and become so expensive that events of this kind will increasingly be questioned.
- Further terrorist attacks could also influence consumer behaviour in the affected countries, particularly in such sectors as accommodation, tourism and transport.

Recommendations

In EXOP's Global Risk Database, you can find up-to-date and comprehensive recommendations of our risk analysts on how to adequately respond to the situation described above.

If you do not have access to EXOP's Global Risk Database, we will gladly send you our recommendations. Please feel free to contact us.



EXOP Headquarters, Konstanz, Germany

About Us

EXOP supports corporations, medium-sized companies, development organisations and authorities with risk management solutions for business activities abroad. The assessment and avoidance of security-relevant and medical risks enable successful business activities in markets with elevated risk potential. Preventive trainings for travellers, country information systems, risk assessments of sites and projects abroad, worldwide situation reporting, 24/7 assistance services, traveller tracking and professional crisis management belong to our core competences.

Tel: +49 (0)7531 942 16 0

Email: info@exop-group.com