

Europol: Arab spring poses terrorist threat to EU

2011-04-20 14:17:14 by webmaster

20 APR 2011

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EUOBSERVER / BRUSSELS - Arab revolutions and the economic crisis could increase the risk of terrorist attacks in the EU by Islamist, far-left and far-right groups, according to a report by the union's joint police body, Europol.

The annual survey, the EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report, out on Tuesday (19 April) covering events in 2010, noted that the vast majority of terrorist incidents in the EU last year came from separatist groups such as Eta in Spain or the Turkish group, the PKK/Kongra-Gel.

Foiled or successful separatist attacks accounted for 160 out of the total 249 cases in 2010, compared to 45 far-left incidents and just three Islamist cases.

The highest number of arrests on terrorism charges came in France (219), followed by Spain (118), Ireland (62), the UK (45) and the Netherlands (39). Germany, the largest EU country, recorded just 25 and Italy 29. Small countries Belgium (20) and Greece (18) saw high levels of arrests. Romania (16) was the only post-Communist EU member with a notable figure.

In terms of overall trends, numbers went down year-on-year in France, Italy, Spain and the UK. But they went up in Germany, Ireland and the Netherlands.

The biggest change comes in the nature of the groups involved, however.

EU countries saw a 50 percent jump in the number of arrests linked to Islamist terrorism and a 12 percent jump in cases linked to far-left and anarchist groups. In Greece, the far-left figure jumped 30 percent.

Remarking on the ideology of Islamist groups such as Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) and Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP), Europol said incitements to violence concentrated on: the Mohammed cartoons in Denmark; banning the veil in France; the Swiss anti-minaret vote; the war in Afghanistan; and Spain's 'occupation' of Ceuta and Melilla in Morocco.

On the Arab spring, it noted that AQIM and AQAP "have been reduced to observers, incapable of influencing events" and suffered "a notable setback" in terms of support and recruitment "because peaceful protests have proved more effective in deposing dictators than years of terrorist attacks.

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