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The UK's Counterterrorism Policy in Its Relations with the EU

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The United Kingdom plays a special role in countering terrorism in the EU, as it is one of the most threatened Member States, and a territory that is often used by terrorist networks to recruit new members and prepare new attacks. Due to this, the "Brexit" scenario, improbable as it is for now, means that other Member States, with less developed counterterrorist policies, must strengthen their cooperation with their British partners, especially in the light of the rising terrorist threat emanating from foreign fighters returning from the Islamic State.

Recent terrorist attacks in France, including the shooting at "Charlie Hebdo" magazine, again catapulted the counterterrorism issue to the top of the EU and its Member States' agendas. The UK played one of the leading roles in the January meetings of the Council of the EU (in different configurations), which focused on ensuring better coordination and cooperation between Member States while countering terrorism. Due to the longevity of its experience with terrorism and combating it, the high domestic level of the threat, its strategic partnership with the U.S. and its traditionally ambitious foreign and security policy, London has the biggest influence on the EU's overall counterterrorism policy. Thus the potential "Brexit" scenario of 2017 threatens the EU with a major downgrade of its counterterrorism capabilities.

The Terrorist Threat to the UK and the EU. According to Europol data, the UK comes third in the EU as far as the terrorist threat is concerned. This is measured by terrorist attacks, plots and arrests of individuals for terrorism related offences. Theresa May, the UK's Home Secretary, recently stated that from May 2010 onwards the UK saw more than 750 terrorism related arrests, 200 individuals charged with terrorist offences, and 140 successful prosecutions related to terrorism. Between 2005 and 2014 the UK security services dismantled 40 terrorist plots. Almost 4,000 inhabitants of the UK, exposed through radicalisation to joining terrorist networks and organisations, were referred to the "Channel" programme, a multi-agency approach, which includes cooperation between local authorities, police, schools, health services and communities, to protect people at risk from radicalisation. The scale of the terrorist threat to the UK is also underlined by the number of the so-called foreign fighters who, while mostly affiliated with the Islamic State (IS), have fought or are still fighting in the civil wars in Syria and Iraq. Comprising approximately 600 Britons, around 300 of whom are already back in the UK, this is the third largest European contingent of volunteers in the Middle Eastern conflict, behind those from Turkey and France.

Western European Member States now regard the potential commencement of terrorist activities by the IS' foreign fighters after their returning to Europe as the biggest security threat. According to Andrew Parker, director general of the British Security Service MI5 terrorist organisations based in Syria have, since October 2013, been directly responsible for or inspired more than 20 successful and failed plots, including an attack on the Jewish Museum in Brussels, Belgium (May 2014), the alleged "lone wolf" attacks in Nantes, Dijon and Joué-lès-Tours, France (December 2014), terrorist attacks in Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu and Ottawa, Canada (October 2014) and the hostage crisis in Sydney, Australia (December 2014). While attempting to prevent further terrorist attacks, in which the returnee foreign fighters are often involved, the security services and police forces of Belgium, Germany, France and the UK are conducting investigations and making new arrests (the latest being on 27 January 2015 in France), which are aimed at

weakening the radical Islamist milieu whose members are involved in the preparation of terrorist acts in Europe, and also funnelling new recruits to frontlines in Syria and Iraq.

The British Response. Countering terrorism is an issue of utmost priority to the British Home Secretary, who regards the current terrorist threat to the UK as at the highest level in history. After the executions of two British hostages by the IS, the UK has decided to introduce the seventh (since 2000) counterterrorism legislation, which is to be voted through before the May 2015 elections. Currently at the report stage in the House of Lords, the Counterterrorism and Security Bill allows the police to temporarily confiscate the passports of anyone suspected of travelling abroad with an intent to join a terrorist organisation, creates so-called Temporary Exclusion Orders, which would allow the police and the security services to oversee the return of British terrorist suspects from abroad and enhances their power to relocate terrorist suspects to other parts of the country. The proposed bill also obliges schools and universities, among others, to have due regard for the need to prevent people from being drawn into terrorism, and puts the "Channel" project on a statutory basis.

The UK's Role in EU Counterterrorism. The UK plays a key role in formulating the EU's counterterrorism policy, and influences measures in this field adopted by the Member States. The *European Union Counter-Terrorism Strategy*, formulated in November 2005, while the UK held the rotating presidency of the Council of the EU, is based on the UK's 2003 CONTEST strategy, and enhances European counterterrorism measures through prevention, by aiming to counter terrorism at the stage of radicalisation of potential future terrorists. The UK is the leading member of the Council of the EU's working groups on terrorism. Its counterterrorism personnel are seconded to some of the new Member States to help them prepare the terrorism related agenda during "their" presidencies of the Council of the EU. The UK is also one of the founders of the EU9 group, which brings together interior ministers of countries most concerned about the issue of foreign fighters in the Middle East. The comprehensiveness and the scale of British counterterrorism, and the priority it enjoys in its internal security arrangements, is analysed by the other Member States, and the institutions and units forming the pillars of the British counterterrorism system are often visited, for comparative and training purposes, by delegations from other EU Member States.

At the same time, the UK is strengthening its counterterrorism cooperation with European partners bilaterally, and also with the EU institutions, while remaining staunchly opposed to further European integration tendencies in other fields. Not only is the Europeanisation of the British counterterrorism policy an opportunity to advertise domestically tested counterterrorist solutions to other EU Member States, but it is also a chance to add a security dimension to the EU's dialogue with, for example, Middle Eastern, African or Central Asian states. The UK's global foreign policy ambitions push the country towards utilising EU forums in the direction of its own security and economic interests, including combating non-European terrorist organisations that also threaten the territory of the EU.

Recommendations and Conclusions. Poland and the rest of the EU Member States, less threatened by international terrorism than the UK and other Western European countries, should prepare for the necessity of developing their own counterterrorism policy in the "Brexit" scenario. The UK's exit from the EU would mean the absence of British representatives from different EU Council configurations, and from the working groups devoted to countering terrorism, and would also lead to the UK quitting the EU9 and the Atlas network of Member States' counterterrorism police units. Moreover, apart from the structural, institutional consequences for both the direction and the quality of EU counterterrorism, "Brexit" equals a steady loss of earlier acquired individual and personal contacts between British and other Member States' security personnel.

In order to address this issue preventatively, Poland and other new Member States, less threatened by terrorism but also in the process of catching up with their Western European partners in respect to building their own counterterrorism systems, should aim to intensify such contacts between units and counterterrorism officials. Such actions should be one of Poland's priorities in its relations with the UK. Poland could also use elements of the British preventative approach to countering terrorism, aimed mostly at preventing Islamist radicalisation, by constructing its own measures, inspired by "Channel" and designed to combat radicalisation into left wing and right wing extremist networks and organisations.