**Counter-terrorism Strategy of Latvia for 2021–2026**

**Table of Contents**

[Abbreviations 3](#_Toc156980529)

[I. Introduction 4](#_Toc156980530)

[1. International situation 4](#_Toc156980531)

[2. Situation in Europe 4](#_Toc156980532)

[3. The need for the Strategy, its objectives, and measures to be taken 4](#_Toc156980533)

[II. General Description of the Counter-terrorism System in Latvia 5](#_Toc156980534)

[III. General Description of Terrorism Threats 8](#_Toc156980535)

[1. International situation 8](#_Toc156980536)

[2. Situation in Europe 9](#_Toc156980537)

[3. Situation in Latvia 10](#_Toc156980538)

[IV. Priority Directions for Action of the Counter-terrorism Strategy 11](#_Toc156980539)

[1. International cooperation 11](#_Toc156980540)

[1.1. Counter-terrorism cooperation within the framework of the UN 12](#_Toc156980541)

[1.2. International coalition for fight against Daesh 12](#_Toc156980542)

[1.3. Participation in international missions and operations 13](#_Toc156980543)

[1.4. Information exchange in formats of cooperation within the EU 13](#_Toc156980544)

[1.5. Information exchange with foreign partner services 14](#_Toc156980545)

[1.6. Monitoring of terrorist content 14](#_Toc156980546)

[1.7. Protection of victims of terrorism 15](#_Toc156980547)

[2. Prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism 15](#_Toc156980548)

[2.1. Identification of persons and groups at risk 16](#_Toc156980549)

[2.2. Coordination of the measures to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism 16](#_Toc156980550)

[3. Restriction of the freedom of action of terrorists 16](#_Toc156980551)

[3.1. Restriction of the travel of terrorists 16](#_Toc156980552)

[3.2. Prevention of the terrorism financing 18](#_Toc156980553)

[3.3. Control of the Movement of Weapons and Ammunition 18](#_Toc156980554)

[3.4. Control of the movement of CBRN 19](#_Toc156980555)

[3.5. Restriction of the movement of explosives precursors 19](#_Toc156980556)

[4. Improvement of the protection of terrorism risk objects 20](#_Toc156980557)

[4.1. Security of critical infrastructure 20](#_Toc156980558)

[4.2. Security of crowded places 21](#_Toc156980559)

[4.3. Security of ionising radiation objects 21](#_Toc156980560)

[5. Improvement of laws and regulations and counter-terrorism plans 22](#_Toc156980561)

[5.1. The National Counter-terrorism Plan 22](#_Toc156980562)

[5.2. Response plans (“Object”, “Aircraft”, “Ship, “Crowd”) 23](#_Toc156980563)

[6. Improvement of the readiness of the authorities involved in implementation of counter-terrorism measures 23](#_Toc156980564)

[6.1. Counter-terrorism exercise 24](#_Toc156980565)

[6.2. Education of the authorities involved in counter-terrorism measures 24](#_Toc156980566)

[7. Public participation 24](#_Toc156980567)

# Abbreviations

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| UN | United Nations |
| USA | United States of America |
| AQ | Terrorist group Al-Qaeda |
| CBRN | Chemical, Biological, Radiological, and Nuclear materials |
| EU | European Union |
| EEA | European Economic Area |
| FIU | Financial Intelligence Unit of Latvia |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| LPMLTPF | Law on the Prevention of Money Laundering and Terrorism and Proliferation Financing |
| VDD | State Security Service [*Valsts drošības dienests*] |

# I. Introduction

## 1. International situation

Over the last few decades, terrorism threats have become an everyday reality in many countries around the world. Armed conflicts where terrorist organisations play a significant role are still ongoing in individual countries and regions around the world. They use the ideological and socio-economic differences existing among ethnic and religious communities of such countries and other factors dividing society in order to promote radicalisation and attract fighters. Taking into account that such situation in conflict regions will not be resolved in the near future, it can be concluded that conditions favourable for the activities of terrorist organisations will still remain in these regions. The relevance of terrorism threats will not decrease in the near future.

## 2. Situation in Europe

Trends of the last twenty years show that the development of terrorism threats in conflict regions also affects the security situation in Europe and thus also in Latvia. For the purpose of attracting new supporters in Europe, terrorist groups distribute messages dividing society in their propaganda materials. Moreover, to achieve their goals, terrorist organisations resort to violence and clearly justify its use against civilians as the only effective means in their ideology. Such activities of terrorist organisations aggravate the disagreements in society, hinder integration, and pose a threat to democracy, its values, and the lifestyle common in Europe.

## 3. The need for the Strategy, its objectives, and measures to be taken

The changing nature of terrorism imposes an obligation on the international community to regularly review the existing counter-terrorism measures and adapt them to the situation of terrorism threats. Within the framework of the UN, countries around the world have agreed on common strategic objectives to restrict the activities of terrorists and their groups. Legal acts regarding enhancement and alignment of counter-terrorism measures with the current situation of terrorism threats are also adopted and updated at the EU level on a regular basis. Taking into account that the Latvian competent authorities actively engage in various formats in the prevention of threats posed by the international terrorism, it is important to integrate these strategic priorities which have been identified internationally into the national counter-terrorism system. This Strategy takes into account the priority principles identified in the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy[[1]](#footnote-1), and the EU Security Union Strategy 2020–2025[[2]](#footnote-2).

The objective of this strategy is to identify national priority directions for action in the field of counter-terrorism for the next five years, taking into account the current terrorism threat. Identification of the priority directions for action will create a common understanding among competent authorities about the priorities for the next five years in the prevention of terrorism threats and the significance of the measures to be taken by such authorities within their framework. This in turn will ensure planned development of the Latvian counter-terrorism system and harmonised international cooperation. The Strategy will become a public document upon approval by the Cabinet.

A general description of both the counter-terrorism system and the threat is provided at the beginning of the strategy to describe the progress made so far and to emphasise the current threats and the challenges expected in the following years. The priority directions for action have been identified in the Strategy, taking into account the current situation of terrorism threats in Latvia and its international obligations.

Strategic-level priorities for preventing the threat posed by international terrorism have also been defined in the National Security Concept[[3]](#footnote-3) which was approved in 2019 on the basis of the priorities relevant at that time. The priority directions for action defined in the Counter-terrorism Strategy of Latvia complement the National Security Concept and set up priority areas of activities, describing them in a broader and more specific manner. Similarly, it should be mentioned that the measures to be taken by authorities, the areas of responsibility, and the performance deadlines for the implementation of the Strategy have also been included in the National Security Plan for 2021–2024[[4]](#footnote-4). In case of identifying any measures to be taken but not identified previously during implementation of the Strategy, they will be included in the next wording of the National Security Plan[[5]](#footnote-5). In contrast, when developing a new National Security Concept, it will be taken into account that a separate Counter-terrorism Strategy of Latvia with its defined priority directions for action has been developed, and a reference will be made to it.

# II. General Description of the Counter-terrorism System in Latvia

The origin of the Latvian counter-terrorism system is related to changes in the international security environment at the beginning of the 21st century which marked the terrorism threats as one of the most significant international security threats. After the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 in the USA and subsequent involvement of the National Armed Forces of Latvia in international peacekeeping operations in Iraq and Afghanistan which served as an aggravating factor for terrorism threats, a need arose also in Latvia to enhance the capacity of authorities to timely identify and respond to threats of a terrorist nature in a coordinated manner. The system at the time furthered neither development of a common counter-terrorism policy nor coordinated implementation of such policy.

Taking into account trends of the international terrorism threats around the world, when Latvia joined the EU and NATO, a modern counter-terrorism system had to be established that would conform with the strategic priorities for preventing and combating terrorism and the fundamental principles of counter-terrorism activities of the EU and NATO member states.

Taking into account that at that time counter-terrorism functions in Latvia were divided among several State security institutions, the international cooperation was hindered and there was also a lack of integrated and coordinated counter-terrorism measures and of efficient use of the existing resources. The need for a specialised entity was identified to ensure information exchange and cooperation with the EU and NATO member states in the field of counter-terrorism, coordinate and supervise at national level the cooperation among the authorities involved in counter-terrorism measures, coordinate the protection of terrorism risk objects, and organise regular counter-terrorism exercise, ensuring readiness to prevent and overcome threats of a terrorist nature.

For the purpose of achieving these goals, in 2005, the Counter-terrorism Centre was established within the Security Police (now – the VDD) and entrusted with the following basic tasks:

* to develop the national policy for the fight against terrorism;
* to ensure constant readiness to effectively prevent and combat the terrorism threats;
* to implement uniform and coordinated implementation of counter-terrorism measures and ensure coordination among the authorities involved in counter-terrorism measures;
* to create and ensure coordinated and effective international cooperation in the field of combating terrorism.[[6]](#footnote-6)

One of the main functions of the established Counter-terrorism Centre, both at the beginning of its establishment and today, is to improve the counter-terrorism system by involving State and local government authorities and other legal persons, ensuring a common understanding of preventive and responsive counter-terrorism measures and coordinated actions during such measures.

When creating the counter-terrorism system, three priority directions for action have been defined: information analysis, prevention, and response.

**Information analysis** involves strategic, operational, and tactical assessment of all terrorism-related information, including data received from partner services, operationally acquired data, as well as information identified from open sources. Thus information exchange is developed both with foreign partner services and national-level State and local government authorities as well as representatives from the private sector regarding counter-terrorism issues. Data obtained within the framework of information analysis, international and inter-institutional cooperation are further used to prepare a potential threat analysis and inform the high public officials and authorities involved in counter-terrorism measures.

**Prevention** involves development of preventive counter-terrorism measures in order to timely identify and prevent potential terrorism threats and introduce an early warning system. In order to ensure a common approach to such a system in case of terrorist attacks, in 2007, a four-level terrorism threat system[[7]](#footnote-7) was developed on the basis of the principles of the NATO Crisis Response System.

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The terrorism threat level system[[8]](#footnote-8) ensures the following:

* timely informing of State, local governments, legal persons, and residents (early warning) of potential terrorism threats;
* common strategic guiding principles for planning and implementing counter-terrorism measures;
* a possibility to introduce security measures of equal intensity that correspond to the declared terrorism threat level and to strengthen them according to changes in the threat level.

Based on the introduced four-level terrorism threat system and in cooperation with the authorities involved in counter-terrorism measures, in 2008, the National Counter-terrorism Plan was developed determining the preventive measures to be taken by the authorities involved in counter-terrorism measures according to the four terrorism threat levels. Considering trends of terrorism threats in Europe and worldwide, the National Counter-terrorism Plan is updated every three years[[9]](#footnote-9).

An integral part of preventive counter-terrorism measures is to ensure operation of terrorism risk objects. Security of terrorism risk objects has been and remains one of the highest priorities in maintaining and improving the counter-terrorism system. Taking into account the relevance of critical infrastructure[[10]](#footnote-10) objects to ensuring important functions for the State and society, a systematic approach has been developed through which State security institutions coordinate implementation of different physical security measures, ensuring regular information exchange and other measures to reduce potential risks.[[11]](#footnote-11) When analysing attacks in the last years in Europe and worldwide, services are paying increased attention to objects and places where a large number of residents gather at the same time and where it is impossible to ensure increased security measures – these are the so-called crowded places. In cooperation with public authorities and representatives from the private sector, it is ensured that proactive information is obtained and security measures are evaluated in order to ensure protection of crowded places and public mass events from potential attacks.

**Response** includes development of counter-terrorism response plans and improvement of response capacities of the responsible authorities to successfully prevent and overcome a threat in case of a terrorist attack. In order for the authorities involved in counter-terrorism measures to respond to various threats related to terrorism, model counter-terrorism response plans, such as “Object”[[12]](#footnote-12), “Ship”[[13]](#footnote-13), and “Aircraft”[[14]](#footnote-14), have been developed determining actions in case of an attack involving hostage-taking or seizure of an object. Similarly, based on the current terrorism trends in Europe and worldwide, guidelines[[15]](#footnote-15) have been developed in cooperation with operational services to determine actions of the responsible authorities in case of an attack of a terrorist nature in a crowded place, involving combined attack methods or vehicle ramming into a crowd of people. In addition, a special, the so-called “RENEGADE” procedure has been developed, determining actions of authorities in case of an airspace threat and providing for forced landing of an aircraft or initiation of combat operations against it, where necessary.[[16]](#footnote-16)

For the purpose of testing the readiness of the authorities involved in counter-terrorism measures to prevent terrorism threats and to establish coordinated cooperation in measures involving elimination of consequences and recovery, the VDD has been organising national-level counter-terrorism exercise with full force deployment since 2006, simulating threats according to the terrorism trends in Europe and worldwide. The so-called “tabletop” or theoretical exercises are also organised on a regular basis in cooperation with State and local government institutions by playing out various terrorism-related scenarios.

Taking into account the amount of State and local government institutions involved in the established counter-terrorism system, the VDD regularly organises informative workshops and training sessions for cooperation partners on the Latvian counter-terrorism system, the security of terrorism risk objects, the trends of terrorism threats, the planning and implementation of security measures, and other issues. Training is also organised for educational institutions, representatives of commercial security companies, and other legal persons.

In order to promote cooperation among the Counter-terrorism Centre, State and local government institutions as well as legal persons governed by private law in the field of counter-terrorism and to ensure that the State is ready to effectively prevent terrorism threats and eliminate consequences caused by them, the Expert Advisory Council of the Counter-terrorism Centre was established in 2006 and it is composed of representatives from the public institutions involved in counter-terrorism measures[[17]](#footnote-17).

# III. General Description of Terrorism Threats

## 1. International situation

In certain countries around the world where stable power structures are absent or institutions lack the necessary resources to control security situation throughout their territories, or where active armed conflicts are taking place, a favourable situation arises for the existence and development of terrorist groups. These terrorist groups can have different objectives.

When evaluating the threats posed by terrorist groups, the scale of their activities is relevant both ideologically and practically. For the majority of the existing terrorist groups, the scale of their activities is related to change of government in one country or region, including one or more neighbouring countries (their territories). However, ideological objectives and the scale of activities of certain groups are international.

The current trends of terrorism threats show that the main threats are posed by Islamist terrorist[[18]](#footnote-18) groups that have expanded their activities in various regions around the world.

The most significant terrorism threats worldwide are posed by Daesh, the Islamist terrorist group based in Syria and Iraq, and also AQ which is based in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Moreover, terrorist groups based in several other countries (Yemen, Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia, Mozambique, the Philippines, and India) have taken a loyalty oath to one of these groups. Daesh and AQ support the so-called ideology of global jihad and can also carry out attacks outside their territory of operation, including Europe.

If a territory is under control of terrorist groups, it is used for training fighters and planning attacks. Groups also attract fighters from abroad to achieve their objectives. After arriving in the territories controlled by terrorist groups, foreign fighters undergo training in physical fitness, use of firearms and explosives, and also planning of attacks. Terrorist groups use these fighters to achieve their local objectives, they can, however, be also sent back to their home countries in order to carry out attacks.

Projections of terrorism threats indicate that terrorism threats around the world will not decrease over the next five years. This will be affected by both various international factors such as the global economic situation, climate change, migration and also future destabilisation of security situation in West Africa, Mozambique, Yemen, Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. The security situation in the respective countries will not significantly improve even after the end or cessation of conflicts in these regions. Moreover, the current ethnic, religious, ideological, and territorial tensions will also remain within societies of such countries, creating favourable conditions for activities of terrorist groups. Taking into account the respective circumstances and the role of Daesh and AQ in the global terrorism environment, it can be projected that the threats posed by these groups to global security will not diminish.

## 2. Situation in Europe

There are still elevated terrorism threats in several European countries. Currently, terrorist groups based in territories of armed conflicts, such as Daesh, lack sufficient combat capabilities to train fighters and send them to Europe to carry out large-scale attacks. Although Daesh has a limited capacity to organise complex attacks within the European territory, the group will remain the major source of terrorism threat. In the long term, the group will focus on spreading propaganda on online platforms trying to attract new supporters. Over the last few years, the majority of attacks in Europe has been carried out directly by homegrown terrorists (mainly second and third-generation immigrants from countries at risk of terrorism) who are inspired by ideologies of Daesh and AQ but plan and carry out the attacks themselves. Significant groups at risk will also include former prisoners and mentally unstable persons who are inspired by terrorist propaganda.

In addition to Islamist terrorists, over the last three years, right-wing extremists and their groups have also become active in Europe, carrying out premeditated terrorist attacks against ethnic minorities. During this period, activities of several right-wing extremist groups have been prohibited in the United Kingdom and Germany, and such groups have been included in the list of terrorist organisations. These decisions are related both to the ideology propagated by right-wing extremists which supports attacks against immigrants and to the arrests of members of such organisations for planning and carrying out attacks. The right-wing extremist groups will continue to make efforts to mobilise people by using criticism against the government (including EU policy) and conspiracy theories.

Left-wing extremists are also detained in some European countries for committing terrorist crimes, most of their illegal activities carried out are, however, related to hooliganism or acts of vandalism. Attacks carried out by left-wing extremists are mainly directed against property (for example, buildings and cars of State administration institutions and law enforcement institutions, newspaper publishers, bank branches, ATMs, deportation centres for asylum seekers, and critical infrastructure objects).

According to projections, the situation of terrorism threats in Europe will not change in the coming years and will remain at an elevated level. Terrorist organisations will continue to address new followers via propaganda, promoting radicalisation processes and involvement in terrorist activities. It can be projected that in addition to threats posed by Islamists, both right-wing and left-wing extremists will also continue to engage in terrorist activities. The power of the internet in promotion of radicalisation and dissemination of information useful for organising terrorist attacks will provide a possibility for residents of any European country, including Latvia, to become involved in terrorism. Terrorists will also continue using encrypted communication possibilities offered by the internet.

## 3. Situation in Latvia

The terrorism threat level in Latvia is low. The most significant risks are posed by radicalisation of some individuals, establishing of contacts with representatives of extremist and terrorist organisations abroad, and also those members of the Latvian Muslim community who travelled to Syria and Iraq before, joining the terrorist group Daesh.

Activities of the Muslim community living in Latvia have so far not contributed to an increase in radicalisation trends. Some individuals, however, come to the attention of the VDD on a regular basis due to their interest in terrorist organisations and radical interpretations of Islam. The interest shown by such persons is largely influenced by their contacts in the international environment.

One of the main groups at risk of radicalisation remains young Muslims or converts[[19]](#footnote-19). The interpretation of Islam preached in houses of prayer of the Latvian Muslim community does not promote radicalisation of converts. It is more affected by personal and external factors such as being influenced by ethnic Muslims who represent the radical interpretation of Islam and trusting their preaching. It should be noted at the same time that the potential involvement in violent activities in Latvia or abroad of the Muslims who have come to the attention of the VDD, including those who have adopted the radical interpretation of Islam, is currently considered to be low.

Terrorism threats posed by extremist-oriented organisations in Latvia are low. However, similarly to other European countries, signs of radicalisation have also been established in Latvia not only in the context of radical interpretations of Islam but also among supporters of other ideological directions. The VDD has learned of some mentally unstable individuals who, taking inspiration from terrorist propaganda materials available on the internet, have engaged in planning of terrorist attacks.

Overall, the extremist environment in Latvia is passive, and activities of activists are focused on mutual cooperation and active use of social networks. This environment is mostly represented by the so-called skinheads and neo-Nazis who share the common interest in extremist ideas and organisations. The activists often use social networks to disseminate critical information about Islamist radicals as well as immigrants, people of different skin colour, and sexual minorities. Representatives of the extremist environment often focus on various conspiracy theories and make an effort to convert other members of society to their ideas by hiding behind such theories. Spread of such ideas, including conspiracy theories, on social networks could contribute to the radicalisation of a specific part of society, in particular youth. This in turn could lead to an increase in the number of ideologically motivated crimes in Latvia.

There are also individual left-wing extremists operating in Latvia who associate themselves with, for example, ideas of the so-called National Bolsheviks and Antifa. The activists often disseminate information on social networks which corresponds to their messages with the aim of disturbing the democratic system in Latvia.

Projections indicate that no increase in terrorism threats is expected in Latvia over the next five years. Thus the most significant risk will continue to be the radicalisation of individual Latvian residents and their involvement in terrorist activities. It should also be noted that the experience acquired in recent years demonstrates that development of terrorism threats in Latvia is also affected by events in Europe and the rest of the world, as confirmed by the direct involvement of several Latvian residents in the armed conflict in Syria and Iraq. Opportunities provided by the internet and free travel will only exacerbate these risks in the future. In the context of overall terrorism trends in Europe, including Latvia, and the increasing spread of conspiracy theories and hate speech, specific right-wing and left-wing extremists will also retain a potential for radicalisation.

# IV. Priority Directions for Action of the Counter-terrorism Strategy

Based on the analysis of the situation of terrorism threats, seven strategic counter-terrorism directions for action have been identified to prevent and overcome the terrorism threats:

* international cooperation;
* preventing radicalisation and violent extremism;
* restricting the freedom of action of terrorists;
* improving of the protection of terrorism risk objects;
* improving laws and regulations and counter-terrorism plans;
* improving the readiness of the authorities involved in implementation of counter-terrorism measures;
* public participation.

The directions for action have been identified by taking into account the trends of terrorism threats in Europe and Latvia, the projections from partner services and the VDD regarding development of the situation of terrorism threats in Latvia and Europe. All the priority directions for action are equally important and complement different elements of the counter-terrorism system.

## 1. International cooperation

Today, terrorism is a cross-border crime, and persons who plan, prepare, and finally commit terrorist attacks can be not only in different countries but also on different continents. Moreover, modern technologies and social media allow terrorist propaganda materials to be rapidly disseminated around the world, ensuring an indirect link between terrorist organisations and their supporters. In such circumstances international cooperation among both responsible services and international organisations plays a significant role in preventing terrorism threats and planning response measures.

### 1.1. Counter-terrorism cooperation within the framework of the UN

In 2006, UN Member States, including Latvia, already agreed on implementation of the counter-terrorism policy, namely, the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and the action plan for its implementation that form an essential basis for a common strategic and operational framework in the fight against terrorism. Latvia contributes to the review of the Global Strategy by providing information about the progress made in strengthening the international counter-terrorism system, including in preventing money laundering, terrorism financing, and proliferation financing.

Latvia closely cooperates with the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism as well as the Executive Directorate of the Counter-Terrorism Committee which conducted its first assessment visit in Latvia in 2021. Latvia also participates in events of the UN Counter-Terrorism Week which are organised by the UN Office of Counter-Terrorism at the end of June or at the beginning of July each year, and also becomes involved in various informative events in the field of counter-terrorism organised by UN Member States. In addition to that, Latvia actively becomes engaged in the development of the UN General Assembly resolutions that also cover the use of media and information literacy in the fight against disinformation and misinformation, including hate speech, which can be applied to tackle disinformation created not only by countries but also terrorists.

The UN Security Council has adopted a series of internationally binding resolutions that foresee addressing violent extremism, radicalisation, spread of terrorism, financing of terrorism, terrorist organisations, and individuals, and also foreign terrorist fighters in a targeted manner for the purpose of strengthening international peace and security. All sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council are assumed by the European Union, issuing legal acts which are directly and legally binding on all of its Member States. Latvia fulfils its obligations contained in the UN Security Council resolutions, implements them in practice, and also has actively supported adoption of several resolutions on the topic of counter-terrorism, for example, resolution 2462/2019 on countering the financing of terrorism, resolution 2396/2017 on foreign terrorist fighters, resolution 2341/2017 on protecting critical infrastructure from terrorist attacks, and also resolution 2322/2016 on international judicial cooperation in countering terrorism.

### 1.2. International coalition for fight against Daesh

The Global Coalition against Daesh was formed in September 2014, bringing together 83 countries around the world. The goal of the Global Coalition is to reduce combat capabilities of Daesh and to defeat it completely. Member states of the Coalition are committed to countering Daesh and organisations supporting it. In addition to the military operation Inherent Resolve in Iraq and Syria, involving also representatives of the National Armed Forces of Latvia, the Coalition has committed to the following:

* fighting against the financing of Daesh;
* preventing the travel of foreign terrorist fighters;
* supporting the restoration of the territory liberated from Daesh;
* restricting the dissemination of the group’s propaganda.

Participation in the Global Coalition provides a possibility for Latvia to directly contribute to the defeat of Daesh which is currently one of the main sources of terrorism threats around the world.

### 1.3. Participation in international missions and operations

One of the most significant counter-terrorism measures is participation in international peacekeeping missions and operations in cooperation with other EU and NATO member states. Their goal is to promote counter-terrorism in regions where international terrorist organisations operate. In these regions the terrorist organisations:

* plan attacks on EU and NATO member states, their objects of interest;
* train fighters;
* carry out activities supporting terrorism: create propaganda materials, recruit and radicalise fighters, and also provide logistics services;
* hide group leaders.

It is important to highlight the longstanding involvement of the National Armed Forces of Latvia in the missions lead by the NATO and the Coalition in Afghanistan[[20]](#footnote-20) and Iraq[[21]](#footnote-21). In participating in these missions, Latvia contributes to strengthening capacities of the local security forces so that they could counter the terrorism threats independently. In the alternative, Latvia’s contribution to EU training missions in Mali and the UN stabilisation mission in Mali (MINUSMA) should also be noted. Mali faces continuous attacks carried out by terrorist groups, and an increasing number of ISIS-affiliated terrorist groups have been able to establish themselves in the territory of Mali. Latvia’s contribution to both missions by training the local security forces and providing expertise in intelligence analysis is a vital contribution to the common efforts to stabilise the situation in Mali and counter the terrorism threats.

Latvia should, in cooperation with other EU and NATO member states, provide support to the countries located in regions at risk of terrorism so that they could control the security situation within their territories. This is a possibility for Latvia to make a direct contribution to mitigation of the threat posed by international terrorist organisations.

### 1.4. Information exchange in formats of cooperation within the EU

Representatives of Latvia will continue to work in various formats of cooperation within the EU (working groups, workshops, meetings) to adopt best practices and coordinate implementation of individual preventive measures at the international level.

The EU Council’s Working Party on Terrorism (TWP) leads and supervises the EU Council’s general agenda on counter-terrorism. It is mainly responsible for the following:

* exchange of information on the situation of terrorism threats in the Member States;
* coordination of measures to prevent radicalisation and recruitment;
* adoption of best practices of the Member States in preventing and combating terrorism;
* provision of recommendations to political decision-makers.

The Working Party cooperates closely with the EU counter-terrorism coordinator and Europol, the EU’s law enforcement agency. It also works together in several policy areas with the Working Party on Terrorism (International Aspects) (COTER).

The Working Party on Terrorism (International Aspects) coordinates positions of the Member States on international counter-terrorism aspects. It mainly carries out threat analysis regarding countries other than EU Member States in order to enhance EU cooperation with these countries. Within the framework of the Working Party, specific topics and issues of counter-terrorism cooperation are discussed with the relevant countries, as included in the current agenda by the rotating EU Council presidency. Closer cooperation is also coordinated with countries of the regions that are associated with risks of terrorism threats in the EU: the Western Balkans, the Middle East and North Africa, the Sahel region, and the Horn of Africa. Similarly, the Working Party also follows the latest developments in counter-terrorism issues in countries that are strategically relevant to the EU security: Central Asia, South Asia, and South East Asia regions. Cooperation in international formats such as the UN, NATO, and the Global Coalition against Daesh is promoted within the framework of effective counter-terrorism policy.

Additionally, representation of Latvia is ensured in the Standing Committee on Precursors established by the European Commission. Active participation is also maintained in the European Commission’s working parties on protection of critical infrastructure, unmanned aircraft, and protection of public places.

### 1.5. Information exchange with foreign partner services

Possibilities for free movement of persons within the Schengen area allow terrorism risk subjects to travel from one EU Member State to another. Terrorists have historically used such possibility to disguise their movement with the aim of reaching armed conflict zones in third world countries. In such circumstances, timely information exchange about terrorism risk subjects plays a crucial role to prevent them from reaching the armed conflict zones where they can acquire the knowledge and skills necessary for carrying out attacks.

Similarly, also contacts of terrorism risk subjects living in Latvia with extremists in other European countries have promoted their radicalisation in individual cases. Timely identification and evaluation of such contacts play a significant role in preventing terrorism threats.

State security institutions daily exchange information at the international level with both foreign partner services and international organisations (EU, NATO) and their units about persons who have come to the attention of the Service in the field of counter-terrorism. The data obtained as a result of such information exchange are used for monitoring terrorism threats and planning preventive measures in order to reduce further radicalisation of risk subjects and their involvement in terrorist activities.

### 1.6. Monitoring of terrorist content

It is important for the prevention of terrorism to restrict dissemination of terrorist propaganda materials available on the internet. Today, the internet has become the main channel for the distribution of terrorist propaganda. Although currently Daesh, AQ, and other terrorist organisations lack sufficient combat capabilities to carry out attacks in Europe, the propaganda materials of these groups continue to inspire their supporters living in Europe to commit terrorist attacks. Terrorists also continue to use the internet in order to spread their propaganda, intimidate societies, radicalise and recruit fighters, and also to incite them to perform terrorist attacks.

The European Parliament and the Council have adopted the Regulation[[22]](#footnote-22) on addressing the dissemination of terrorist content online. After adoption of the Regulation, the need for the VDD to conduct internet monitoring in order to discover, process, and analyse the terrorist content will grow rapidly. The VDD will serve as the national contact point for removing terrorist content from the internet. Establishment of this contact point and commencement of its operation will constitute one of the priority measures in the field of internet monitoring in order to contribute to restricting the dissemination of terrorist content.

Taking into account that part of this content will be posted on internet resources located abroad by terrorism risk subjects living in Latvia, cooperation with the Internet Referral Unit of the EU’s law enforcement agency (Europol) which has been established in cooperation with the major internet social network sites will be relevant to the removal of this content.

### 1.7. Protection of victims of terrorism

In 2018, Member States were called on in Council conclusions[[23]](#footnote-23) to nominate single contact points responsible for the exchange of information about the assistance, support, protection, and compensation systems available for victims of terrorism. In addition to that, the Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on combating terrorism[[24]](#footnote-24) imposes an obligation on Member States to provide the necessary support and protection to victims of terrorism and their family members. The single contact points of European countries will have to ensure fast information exchange and provision of assistance to the victims in case of a terrorist attack. The VDD has been designated as a single contact point in Latvia for victims of terrorism, and it will ensure operational exchange of data of victims with contact points in other EU Member States and provision of information to the victims of terrorism about the support available to them. Establishment of this contact point and commencement of its operation will be one of the priority measures to mitigate the consequences caused by terrorism.

## 2. Prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism

Radicalisation is a multi-stage process in which a person adopts an ideology, its interpretation, or any other model of mindset which allows him or her to use violence as a means of achieving the set objectives. This process is an integral part of terrorism and occurs with every person who becomes involved in terrorist activities. At the same time, it should be pointed out that not all persons who have become radical inevitably engage in terrorist activities, however, those who become engaged have all gone through the process of radicalisation.

For this reason, the prevention of radicalisation has significant importance in common counter-terrorism measures because they allow to stop the potential or already planned involvement of a person in terrorist activities without resorting to repressive methods and before committing a criminal offence.

### 2.1. Identification of persons and groups at risk

In order for the prevention of radicalisation to be targeted and effective, it is necessary to identify those groups in society that are potentially most vulnerable to radicalisation. Identification of persons and groups at risk should be continuous and ongoing, since experience shows that both the process of radicalisation and the groups in society vulnerable to it can change over time.

Additionally, the identification of persons and groups at risk should be comprehensive, involving every available authority, private sector entity, and resource which can bring added value to this process. Taking into account that significant spread of radicalisation has not been observed in Latvia so far, it is important to identify and also take into consideration the current trends prevailing in other European countries, the results of analysis of the identified cases of radicalisation, and the examples of good practice, since the previous experience demonstrates that the trends established in Europe also become relevant in Latvia over time.

### 2.2. Coordination of the measures to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism

Taking into account that a number of public authorities and other partners are involved in the prevention of radicalisation at national level for the purpose of ensuring targeting of the measures to prevent radicalisation, it is necessary to coordinate activities of the involved parties. This task is carried out by PREVENT[[25]](#footnote-25), the Inter-institutional Working Group for the Prevention of Radiation led by the VDD. When taking coordination measures, a flexible and development-oriented approach should be adopted within the framework of this Working Group, allowing to respond to new trends of radicalisation and terrorism development in both Latvia and Europe as effectively as possible. Where necessary, and in particular where it contributes to the identification of persons and groups at risk and/or the identification of radicalised persons, the Working Group should attract new participants upon agreement.

## 3. Restriction of the freedom of action of terrorists

Modern technological progress provides a wide range of opportunities to move people, money, objects, and information to the necessary destination within a short time. Terrorists use these technologies to ensure activities of their organisations and also to plan and prepare attacks (when raising financing, moving fighters and materials necessary for attacks). Thus restricting the freedom of action of terrorists can reduce the overall terrorism threat level.

### 3.1. Restriction of the travel of terrorists

*3.1.1. Visa control*

In today’s world, free movement is one of the biggest advantages. Terrorists also try to use this opportunity. One of the significant mechanisms for restricting movement of terrorists is the control of visa issuance.

Taking into account that Latvia is a member state of the Schengen area, local laws and regulations have been developed in accordance with the common visa policy of the Schengen area, thus Latvia has a possibility to restrict unjustified movement of persons. Work in various counter-terrorism formats also makes it possible to prevent unlawful cross-border movement of persons.

Laws and regulations define the range of persons subject to increased attention in the process of visa issuance and also lay down procedures applied by the services which are involved in the control of migration process in order to agree on visa issuance with State security institutions.

It should, however, be noted that over the recent years the visa policy of the Schengen area has been inclined towards introducing different facilitation measures for individual categories of persons. This factor significantly complicates the control of visa issuance and creates situations that can be used by terrorists. On the positive side, different information systems continue to evolve providing for a possibility to exchange information in a timely manner about potentially dangerous travellers.

It is essential to follow and participate in the development of the common visa policy of the Schengen area over the next few years in order to prevent excessive liberalisation of the visa policy. Similarly, it is necessary to regularly review local laws and regulations so that the institutions involved in the control of migration process, including State security institutions, would have sufficient tools to prevent unjustified movement of persons.

*3.1.2. Traveller risk analysis*

The Aircraft Passenger Data Register, a State information system managed by the VDD, and the Passenger Information Unit provide essential support to the VDD and other competent institutions in conducting an examination of persons related to terrorism risks and discovering potential routes of movement of these persons. In using the information obtained during the course of the examination of passenger data, the authorities involved in the field of counter-terrorism can identify the involvement of previously unknown persons in terrorism-related activities.

Continuous development of functions of the Aircraft Passenger Data Register information system ensures its compliance with the requirements of the authorities involved in the field of counter-terrorism and provides a possibility for the VDD Passenger Information Unit to exchange passenger data and results of their analysis in an operational manner both at national and international levels.

International and inter-institutional cooperation is relevant to strengthening the capacity of passenger data processing, enabling the VDD Passenger Information Unit to respond to the latest trends of terrorism threats in a timely manner and conduct an appropriate examination of such trends. Effective communication with all air carriers engaged in international carriage of passengers from or to Latvian airports is equally important.

In addition to processing aircraft passenger data, it should be ensured that the authorities involved in the field of counter-terrorism are actively engaged in the work with new EU security and entry control information systems (ETIAS[[26]](#footnote-26), EES[[27]](#footnote-27), ECRIS-TCN[[28]](#footnote-28), etc.) which provide additional opportunities to control entry and movement of persons associated with terrorist activities at the EU external borders.

### 3.2. Prevention of the terrorism financing

The supervisory authorities designated by the LPMLTPF should continue the ongoing work in preventing the terrorism financing in accordance with the Strategy for the Prevention of Terrorism Financing for 2019–2021 and its subsequent updated versions, including to ensure that the LPMLTPF subjects report immediately to the FIU on each suspicious transaction, including a transaction or activity which raises suspicions that the involved funds are directly or indirectly related to the terrorism financing or attempt to carry out such activities. If the information at the disposal of the FIU rises reasonable suspicions that a person has engaged in terrorism financing or its attempt, the FIU provides this information to the VDD in compliance with the requirements of the LPMLTPF.

The FIU draws up the National LPMLTPF risk assessment report every three years. The last report for 2017–2019 was published in 2021.[[29]](#footnote-29) The relevant report concludes that terrorism financing threats, vulnerability, and, in the alternative, also risks are low in Latvia. Latvia has a developed financial sector providing services which could potentially be used for terrorism financing. It has, however, been concluded that during the reporting period the understanding of terrorism financing and circumvention of sanctions among the LPMLTPF subjects has significantly improved, just as their ability to identify suspicions of terrorism financing and circumvention of sanctions (also circumvention of sanctions not related to terrorism) and to report suspicions to the FIU in accordance with the LPMLTPF and the Law on International Sanctions and National Sanctions of the Republic of Latvia. There has been an increase in the capacity and understanding of public authorities of terrorism financing and circumvention and breach of sanctions.

### 3.3. Control of the Movement of Weapons and Ammunition

Taking into account the requirements of the European Parliament and the Council regarding control of the movement of weapons in EU Member States, the new Law on the Handling of Weapons was adopted in 2019. The new wording of the Law ensures harmonisation of the Latvian conditions for the movement of weapons with those of other EU Member States and EEA countries in the regulation concerning the movement of firearms, salute weapons (acoustic weapons), gas, signal weapons, and deactivated firearms. The Law lays down stricter requirements for the classification and deactivation of weapons and prevents possibilities for persons to acquire, without an authorisation, Flobert and gas weapons which can be converted for shooting with munitions of war.

It is expected that the Register of Weapons will enter into full operation by 2023, and thus the entire process related to the issue of authorisations will become digital. After issue of an authorisation (making of the entry in the Register), officials of the competent authority will take control measures (for example, inspect conditions for the possession of a weapon) in accordance with the regular procedures – on site at the address indicated by a natural or legal person. The Register will also improve traceability of weapons and ammunition for the purpose of carrying out inspections with natural or legal persons.

### 3.4. Control of the movement of CBRN

A possibility that radicalised persons could use chemical, biological, radiological, or nuclear materials in Latvia for terrorist purposes remains low. However, taking into account the potential scale of social and financial consequences of such attacks, the responsible services should be prepared to respond to them effectively. Therefore cooperation among the authorities involved in the counter-terrorism system should be encouraged in order to prevent possibilities that CBRN materials are used for terrorist purposes.

In order to ensure such measures, international and inter-institutional coordination mechanisms have been established on the basis of which national-level response algorithms[[30]](#footnote-30) have already been developed in cooperation with the State Police, the State Fire and Rescue Service, and authorities responsible for radiation control and nuclear safety to take coordinated and effective actions upon receipt of information about potential CBRN threats. Although the likelihood of the threat is relatively low, it is necessary to pay special attention to the readiness of the authorities to respond to CBRN attacks and their ability to take measures to eliminate consequences in a coordinated manner by minimising the impact on the environment and society as much as possible.

### 3.5. Restriction of the movement of explosives precursors

Analysis of the trends of terrorism threats demonstrates that one of the most common methods for organising terrorist attacks is use of improvised explosive devices in order to achieve a maximum number of victims and also social and financial consequences for society. Manufacturing of improvised explosive devices involves use of explosives precursors which are chemical substances or mixtures containing them that are explosive in a specific combination or concentration. Taking into account that explosives precursors are available commercially in any EEA country, a centralised mechanism has been developed to control the movement of explosives precursors, as stipulated by Regulation (EU) 2019/1148 on the marketing and use of explosives precursors, in order to prevent their use for illegal purposes. Referring to the Regulation and for the purpose of ensuring control of movement, the VDD has established a national contact point for reporting suspicious transactions involving explosives precursors as well as cases of their loss or thefts.

In cooperation with State and local government institutions and merchants, the VDD ensures exchange of information about suspicious transactions, thefts, or cases of loss involving explosives precursors and coordinates cooperation among the authorities involved and private merchants. The up-to-date information about the movement of explosives precursors within the country allows the VDD to prevent such explosive materials from falling into the hands of persons tended to carry out terrorist activities.

In order for the system to function effectively, it is necessary to update information about the current market situation at appropriate regular intervals, identifying new merchants that perform activities involving precursors. These merchants should be educated about the existing risks and the necessary actions in case of discovering suspicious incidents. Understanding of officials of the law enforcement authorities involved should also be enhanced regarding the responsibility of merchants according to the approved regulatory framework and the application of administrative liability by organising different training sessions and involving these officials in the inspections of merchants.

## 4. Improvement of the protection of terrorism risk objects

Protection of terrorism risk objects from potential attacks makes it possible to meet primary and daily functioning needs of society. Improvement of the security of such infrastructure by strengthening technological and physical capabilities, and also staff’s knowledge of the potential threats and actions when facing them, along with preventive and response measures, contribute to the improvement of the overall security environment. A terrorism threat level in the country remains low due to timely identification and response to suspicious activities and inter-institutional cooperation.

Development of the established system continuously requires educational and individual work with officials responsible for security in objects as well as security staff in objects by organising regular training sessions and informative workshops. The readiness of objects to respond to suspicious activities or terrorist attacks should be improved by organising various progress exercise sessions on both theoretical and practical levels.

### 4.1. Security of critical infrastructure

Critical infrastructure is a significant component of the national security system, and its concept has been explained in the National Security Law. The VDD is one of the three State security institutions which work in the field of security of critical infrastructure objects on a daily basis. Control of the physical security regime of such objects falls within the competence of the VDD. Taking into account the impact of objects, systems, or their parts on maintenance of vital societal functions and ensuring of fields such as security, economy, etc., the work involving critical infrastructure objects constitutes an integral part of a successful counter-terrorism system.

The work involving critical infrastructure objects is organised in a planned manner[[31]](#footnote-31), as the VDD coordinates implementation and improvement of various physical security measures. These measures provide for protection of the external perimeter, pass control, effective security work, the development, implementation of security plans and instructions, and also security systems and evaluation of effectiveness in an object. The VDD also ensures systematic information exchange with these objects regarding suspicious activities or incidents occurred, and also carries out regular inspection of the objects in order to ascertain the effectiveness of physical security measures and provide recommendations for improving the security regime accordingly. Every year, a list of critical infrastructure objects is updated and approved by the Cabinet. It is important in the future to pay attention to the ability of different critical infrastructure and services to respond to various threats and ensure continuity of their operation in crisis by laying this down in internal procedures. It is also necessary to provide for introduction of specific additional measures in the work involving critical infrastructure objects which will result from a new European Commission directive on the resilience of critical units.

### 4.2. Security of crowded places

Taking into account the methods of operation employed in the terrorist attacks which have occurred over the recent years in Europe, it can be concluded that they are often aimed at achieving a maximum number of victims, thus causing an increased psychological impact of the terrorist attack, therefore the VDD also focuses on ensuring security of crowded places and public mass events.

In cooperation with State and local government institutions and security merchants, the VDD has identified mass gathering objects where a large number of visitors are present or where attacks of a terrorist nature could be potentially carried out involving a high number of victims. The VDD updates the list of such objects annually. As in the work involving critical infrastructure objects, the VDD ensures systematic exchange of information about suspicious activities in objects, carries out regular inspection of the objects, organises training sessions, and provides recommendations for improving the security regime, where necessary. In addition to this, informative workshops are organised for persons responsible for security in the objects and for representatives of commercial security companies. The trends of terrorism threats in Europe demonstrate that the security of crowded places will remain a relevant and essential element of the counter-terrorism system. Taking into account this fact, despite the low terrorism threat level in Latvia, it is necessary for the persons maintaining and managing crowded places to regularly enhance their understanding of the overall threat to such objects, their actions in case of the threat, and the significance of ensuring daily security that can be accomplished by organising training sessions and exercises.

As regards the public mass events, the VDD is involved in the planning of security measures for the largest national and international events and, in cooperation with State and local government institutions and commercial security companies, also in the ensuring of security during such events. In taking the introduced security measures during public events and evaluating their effectiveness, the VDD provides recommendations for enhancing security requirements to event organisers and persons responsible for security, including commercial security companies. Involvement in the planning of different public events should be continued, ensuring a comprehensive approach to the implementation of security measures. It should be encouraged to make changes in regulatory framework requiring organisers of public events to develop security plans for an event depending on the scale of the event, the number of participants, and other parameters, and then to agree on them with the responsible services.

### 4.3. Security of ionising radiation objects

The relevance of controlling sources of ionising radiation is characterised by the potential consequences that can result from exploitation of sources of ionising radiation for abusive purposes. Close collaboration has been established in cooperation with EU Member States to ensure safe transportation of the sources of ionising radiation for export, import, and transit through the territory of Latvia. In accordance with international agreements, State authorities and private merchants systematically replace the most dangerous sources of ionising radiation with alternatives ensuring the relevant functions.

As with the detection of CBRN risks, materials and technical facilities of State institutions are adequate to ensure detection of radiation risks (materials). The detection of ionising radiation has been integrated into standard security checks at border control points in order to timely identify persons or cargoes with an increased level of ionising radiation. Taking into account the trends of different technological developments, authorities should continue to ensure that the material and technical resources at their disposal are appropriate and effective.

The VDD organises, at least once a year, physical security inspections of the specific objects where sources of ionising radiation are stored, located, or processed in order to identify potential vulnerability of the object and provide recommendations for their mitigation.

## 5. Improvement of laws and regulations and counter-terrorism plans

In order to ensure that the Latvian counter-terrorism system conforms to the international and EU regulatory requirements and best practices in the field of counter-terrorism, it is necessary to ensure appropriate regulatory framework by taking into account the existing or potential future threats. The most essential element in overcoming the threat of a terrorist nature is a common understanding among the authorities involved in counter-terrorism measures in respect of the tasks to be carried out, mutually coordinated actions, and regularly reviewed and updated procedures and plans.

Taking into account this fact, it is necessary to review laws and regulations and counter-terrorism plans on a regular basis in line with changes in international legal norms. In order for the authorities involved in counter-terrorism measures to obtain information about the existing or planned changes in international legal acts and also information about the best practice of other countries in the field of counter-terrorism, these authorities should participate, within their competence, in formats of cooperation at the international level and within the EU.

### 5.1. The National Counter-terrorism Plan

In 2008, the National Counter-terrorism Plan was developed – a national-level inter-institutional document which, according to each terrorism threat level, determines the preventive counter-terrorism measures to be taken by all involved authorities in various fields for the prevention of the threat.

The measures identified in the National Counter-terrorism Plan correspond to the current trends of terrorism threats in Europe and Latvia, and they are based on conclusions drawn from multiple exercise sessions. The so-called “tabletop” or theoretical exercises are organised once a year where the authorities involved in counter-terrorism measures simulate different theoretical scenarios and test the readiness to introduce preventive counter-terrorism measures as the terrorism threat level increases. Similarly, the testing of the measures specified in the National Counter-terrorism Plan is one of the key elements in the exercise with full force deployment. In order to implement the measures specified in the National Counter-terrorism Plan and the preventive counter-terrorism measures in a coordinated manner, the authorities have support plans in place which have been agreed on with the VDD. In improving procedures and organising tabletop exercises, the understanding of authorities should be especially developed regarding the significance of their obligations and their mutual ability to jointly coordinate, attract, and reallocate the necessary resources by implementing preventive measures, particularly in cases where an increased threat is identified over a wide territory of Latvia or where the identified measures are of extensive scope.

In order to ensure improvement of the National Counter-terrorism Plan, it is updated and approved by the Cabinet at least once every three years.

### 5.2. Response plans (“Object”, “Aircraft”, “Ship, “Crowd”)

Timely, coordinated, and pre-tested response by the operational services and authorities involved in counter-terrorism measures during an attack of a terrorist nature plays a crucial role to mitigate the consequences caused by the attack, including to reduce the number of victims and fatalities, neutralise threats posed by attackers, and stabilise situation in society.

In Latvia, responding to an attack of a terrorist nature that has already taken place and involves hostage-taking or seizure of an object, actions of the authorities are determined by standard counter-terrorism response plans titled “Object”, “Aircraft”, and “Ship” which have been especially developed and tested in regular exercise. According to their names, they provide for the actions to be taken by the involved authorities, the mutual coordination of services, and overcoming of the threat in land objects, aviation objects or on ships, ports and port facilities. These situations envisage a special approach to operational planning and decision-making by taking into account that crises of such character can extend for several hours and, in individual cases, even days. The developed plans should be improved according to the up-to-date changes in other laws and regulations and the reallocation of functions of authorities, and also the determined mechanisms for mutual cooperation among those involved in response measures should be improved.

Based on the current terrorism trends in Europe and worldwide, guidelines have been developed in cooperation with the operational services that foresee actions of the involved services when responding to an immediate terrorist attack in any public place or during a public mass event where the attacker uses weapons, explosives, vehicle ramming into a crowd, or combined attack methods. Such incidents require effective immediate response and elimination of consequences. Although the elimination of consequences may take time, overcoming of the threat itself and neutralisation of the attacker is usually a short-term process coordinated by the operational services in cooperation with the VDD. Based on the information specified in the guidelines, the counter-terrorism response plan “Crowd”[[32]](#footnote-32) has been developed determining the actions of the authorities involved in counter-terrorism measures in case of an attack of a terrorist nature without hostage-taking or seizure of an object. Taking into account that it is precisely these types of attacks which have been experienced by the European infrastructure and society over the recent years, it is necessary to strengthen the response capacities of the involved operational services for an immediate and unavoidable attack, ensuring effective coordination of resources on the scene and elimination of the threat.

Development and improvement of the plans are based on the current trends of terrorist activities in Europe and worldwide and on the experience and conclusions drawn from the response of operational services in the countries that have experienced a number of terrorist attacks. It is necessary to regularly test the counter-terrorism plans and laws and regulations in inter-institutional exercise sessions at different levels. Conclusions reached during these exercise sessions in respect of the effectiveness of procedures and mutual cooperation should be integrated into plans, thus adjusting them to the actual situation.

## 6. Improvement of the readiness of the authorities involved in implementation of counter-terrorism measures

Successful implementation of preventive and response counter-terrorism measures is not possible without coordinated cooperation of the authorities involved in counter-terrorism measures which is ensured by regularly updated procedures and their sequential testing in counter-terrorism exercise, and also not without modern materials and technical facilities. The readiness for coordinated response to potential attacks is ensured by organising training for authorities and then supplementing procedures based on their conclusions.

### 6.1. Counter-terrorism exercise

Counter-terrorism exercise is the cornerstone of the functioning counter-terrorism system which ensures that interoperability, effectiveness, and compatibility of different laws, regulations, and procedures are tested in practice. Theoretical or the so-called “tabletop” exercises are organised once a year, and practical field exercises with full force deployment are also organised at least once every two years, testing the readiness and procedural awareness of the authorities involved in counter-terrorism measures, responding to attacks of a terrorist nature. The fundamental response principles such as notification, arrival on the scene, deployment of resources, primary activities on the scene, mutual cooperation of authorities, deployment of coordination elements, investigative activities, and other relevant elements of counter-terrorism response are tested in the exercises with full force deployment. Special attention should be paid to organising counter-terrorism exercise by enhancing understanding of the defined response algorithms among the involved services. In testing the actual application of procedures, officials will be prepared and able to respond effectively in the case of crisis as the threat level increases.

### 6.2. Education of the authorities involved in counter-terrorism measures

For the purpose of ensuring a common understanding among the involved authorities of various counter-terrorism measures, developed procedures, their significance, trends of terrorism threats, and also relevance of the implemented measures, the VDD regularly organises informative workshops on different terrorism-related topics in the field of preventive and response measures for the involved authorities, critical infrastructure objects, mass gathering objects, and merchants engaged in ensuring physical security or movement of explosives precursors. Organisation of such informative workshops will remain as an element of the routine counter-terrorism system by ensuring continuous information exchange with partners regarding developments in the field of counter-terrorism.

## 7. Public participation

The VDD will continue to inform the public about the relevance of terrorism threats and prevention of radicalisation. Public awareness of the risks of radicalisation plays a significant role in the prevention of terrorism. People who are informed of the signs of radicalisation are able to recognise them better and timely inform authorities of potential risks. One of the principal means of informing society at large will still remain creation and distribution of booklets related to terrorism threats.

One of the tasks of the VDD is to have regard for the public safety and prevent the turning of persons with radical tendencies against vulnerable groups in society. The VDD emphasises that the public participation is important in preventing fellow citizens from turning to radical and extremist ideas which can lead to violence against others.

Public participation and civic responsibility when recognising potential radicalisation of a fellow citizen or other terrorism-related risks play an essential role in mitigating terrorism risks. In such situations, information provided by citizens can help the VDD to identify and prevent terrorism threats in a timely manner. In ensuring public safety, the VDD examines every report made by residents on observed suspicious actions or changes in personality that could indicate radicalisation or an intention to commit a terrorist attack.

It is essential that residents understand the seriousness of the threats posed by radicalisation, are informed about its signs, and do not overlook such signs when observing them in the personality of a fellow citizen. In order to promote public awareness and thus also participation in reducing terrorism risks, the VDD takes measures aimed at both the general public and specific groups in society which face radicalisation more often.

For the purpose of increasing the overall involvement of society in mitigating terrorism risks, the VDD mainly develops and disseminates informative materials. The VDD has issued several informative booklets such as “Radicalisation”, “Actions in the Case of a Terrorist Attack”, and “Explosives Precursors. Reporting Suspicious Transactions, Cases of Loss, or Thefts” containing information that is periodically updated in line with the trends of terrorism threats in Europe. Every year, the VDD also publishes a public report on activities of the Service which includes a section on latest developments in the field of counter-terrorism. The respective informative materials in digital format are accessible to everyone on the VDD website. The VDD will continue to develop and disseminate different informative materials on the topic of terrorism threats.

One of the prospective directions for the work of the VDD to enhance public participation is development of social network accounts and their involvement in public information about the topic of terrorism threats. Taking into account that a significant part of the Latvian population actively uses social networks on a daily basis, in 2019, the VDD created an official Twitter account for communication with the public. The Twitter account of the VDD continues to grow its number of followers and will be developed into an effective tool of public communication through which it is intended to further inform the public about radicalisation and other terrorism-related risks. The official Twitter account of the VDD also provides residents with a possibility to quickly and conveniently communicate with the Service and submit information at their disposal, including sending direct messages only to the VDD rather than sharing them publicly.

In order for the VDD to be able to identify and prevent cases of radicalisation within these groups as soon as possible, it is crucially important to inform and involve professionals who work closely with the groups at risk of radicalisation in their daily work and are able to notice the first signs of radicalisation. It is at the initial stages when it is more likely to interrupt radicalisation of a person. In connection with this, the VDD regularly organises informative workshops devoted to radicalisation and intended for officials and employees of State and local government institutions whose work is related to representatives of the groups at risk of radicalisation.

1. Including A Counter-Terrorism Agenda for the EU:Anticipate, Prevent, Protect, Respond approved on 9 December 2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Approved on 24 July 2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Approved by the notice of the *Saeima* of 26 September 2019, On Approval of the National Security Concept [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Approved by the Cabinet on 15 September 2020 (Cabinet minutes No. 54, Par. 49 TA-1658) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. for 2025–2029 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Cabinet Order No. 927 of 26 November 2004, Concept “Establishment of the Counter-terrorism Centre” (Informative Part) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Stipulated by Section 22.1 of the National Security Law [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Declaration of terrorism threat levels is stipulated by Cabinet Regulation No. 485 of 10 July 2007, Procedures According to which Terrorism Threat Levels Are Declared [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. At the moment of development of the Strategy, the existing National Counter-terrorism Plan was approved by the Cabinet Order No. 631-S of 11 December 2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Stipulated by Section 22.2 of the National Security Law [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Stipulated by Cabinet Regulation No. 496 of 1 June 2010, Procedures for the Identification of Critical Infrastructure, Including European Critical Infrastructure and Planning and Implementation of Security Measures [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Cabinet Order No. 754 of 13 December 2017, at the moment of development of the Strategy, the updated version of the plan is in the process of inter-institutional coordination [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Cabinet Order No. 756 of 13 December 2017, at the moment of development of the Strategy, the updated version of the plan is in the process of inter-institutional coordination [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Cabinet Order No. 755 of 13 December 2017, at the moment of development of the Strategy, the updated version of the plan is in the process of inter-institutional coordination [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Guidelines for the Actions of Responsible Services in Case of a Terrorist Attack approved by the head of the State Security Service (agreed upon by the State Emergency Medical Service, the State Police, the State Fire and Rescue Service) on 17 August 2020 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Cabinet Regulation No. 290 of 18 April 2006, Procedures for Requesting Forced Landing of an Aircraft in the Interests of Public Order and Security and for Taking Decision To Perform Combat Operations Against an Aircraft in the Territory of the Republic of Latvia [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Cabinet Regulation No. 880 of 22 November 2005, By-laws of the Expert Advisory Council of the Counter-terrorism Centre. Available: www.likumi.lv/ta/id/122154-pretterorisma-centra-ekspertu-konsultativas-padomes-nolikums [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Persons who carry out or support violent activities under the influence of radical interpretation of Islam.

    [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Persons who turn to a specific religious direction by converting to it from another belief system or non-belief during their lifetime. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. During the period up to 2001–2014, Afghanistan saw the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission, followed by the Resolute Support training and advisory mission in 2015 which, according to NATO decisions taken in April 2021, will be concluded by 11 September 2021. Despite the conclusion of the mission, NATO will continue to support the Afghan Government in its fight against terrorism without the military presence in Afghanistan. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Since 2016, Latvia has been participating in the operation Inherent Resolve led by the Global Coalition against Daesh, and Latvia has also been involved in the NATO mission in Iraq since 2021.

    [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Regulation (EU) 2021/784 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 April 2021 on addressing the dissemination of terrorist content online [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Council conclusions on Victims of Terrorism adopted by the Council Justice and Home Affairs held on 4 June 2018, 9118/18 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Directive (EU) 2017/541 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2017 on combating terrorism and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/475/JHA and amending Council Decision 2005/671/JHA [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. The Working Group was established in January 2018, and it is operating as a sub-group of the Expert Advisory Council of the Counter-terrorism Centre. Its goal is to identify radicalisation risk environments/groups in society, involve social/professional groups related to them in the operation of PREVENT, conduct targeted training, identify radicalisation processes, etc. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. European Travel Information and Authorisation System [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Entry / Exit System [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. European Criminal Records Information System – Third Country Nationals [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. https://www.fid.gov.lv/uploads/files/Dokumenti/Riska%20zi%C5%86ojumi/Nacion%C4%81l%C4%81%20NILLTPF%20risku%20nov%C4%93rt%C4%93juma%20zi%C5%86ojuma%20kopsavilkums.pdf [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Cabinet Instruction No. 12 of 5 August 2008, Instruction Regarding Actions of Responsible Institutions in the Event of Finding a Substance or Object of Unknown Origin if It is Suspected that It Contains Explosive, Radioactive, Dangerous Chemical or Biological Substances, as well as if Indications of Terrorist Attack are Detected. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Stipulated by Cabinet Regulation No. 496 of 1 June 2010, Procedures for the Identification of Critical Infrastructure, Including European Critical Infrastructure, and Planning and Implementation of Security Measures [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. At the moment of development of the Strategy, the draft counter-terrorism response plan “Crowd” is in the inter-institutional coordination process before being submitted to the Cabinet for approval [↑](#footnote-ref-32)