



## **Left wing terrorist groups in European countries: a threat still alive**

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Fighting global terrorism is considered to be on the highest place in the agenda of the EU security decision makers and authority officials. European countries, especially after the Madrid and London attacks are struggling to prevent and thwart operations of this huge terror magnitude, sponsored by Al-Qaeda and its affiliates. Yet, it is not true that the security problem for EU countries emerges only from 'outside inspiration' and only from the Jihadi menace. In fact domestic, 'traditional' left wing terrorist groups do continue to pose a security threat. A very good example of this situation is Italy, a country that is supposed to be on the first line of danger due to the threat caused by Islamist terrorism, and in the same time it continues to suffer from the activities of its very own radical leftist groups. In addition, Greece is experiencing a revival of radical left wing terrorism activity, creating not only internal problems, but also endangering- once more- the country's relationship to the US.

In the last 5 years just one of the left winged organizations active in Italy has perpetrated 4 attacks. The Revolutionary Front for Communism (Fronte Rivoluzionario del Comunismo -FRC)<sup>1</sup> has perpetrated its last attack on March 5 2007. A homemade explosive device, made of a pipe full of explosive powder and a fuse, was found in front of an unoccupied police station in Gelsomini Square, in Milan. The Revolutionary Front for Communism claimed responsibility for the attempted attack and wrote, "the attack unleashed is part of the more general revolutionary mobilization in retaliation against the recent arrests of comrades belonging to the proletarian vanguard movement."<sup>2</sup> The same organization on May 23 2003 claimed responsibility for sending a parcel bomb to the home of Carlo Borsani, the Lombardy Region Healthcare Councilor. The group stated that his healthcare work "has created a first class healthcare plan and a second class one and behind these dirty interests a lobby is operating in which all the government parties and some well-known associations participate. In the first place the function of the Compagnia delle Opere is to be recalled and it is certainly not by chance that the Lombardy Region's president is on of the most visible men of the political arm of Compagnia, Communion and Liberation."<sup>3</sup> One year before on July 29 2002 an explosive device placed by FRC was found placed near an office of the Labor Union CISL in Monza near Milan, related to another device found in Milan outside the headquarters of FIAT. The device contained a sealed envelope with electric wires sticking out and a screwdriver. The bomb was defused by the bomb squad. The group had sent a note priority mail, claiming responsibility for both bombs.

Activities are carried out by other (similar in the political rhetoric) groups too. For example, the New Red Brigades<sup>4</sup> continue to target high-ranking Italian businessmen

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<sup>1</sup>This group acknowledges the historical legacy of the communist Red Brigades of the 1970s and 1980s and it espouses many of the traditional slogans and propaganda of other Marxist-Leninists terrorists of Italy. Yet, it also spouts an anti-globalism rhetoric.

<sup>2</sup> Newspaper La Repubblica, 8/3/2007

<sup>3</sup> Newspaper Il Giornale, 25/5/2003.

<sup>4</sup> It is actually a splinter group of the Red Brigades, an Italian terrorist group active in the 1970's and early 1980's. When the Marxist-Leninist Red Brigades folded in 1984, two successor groups emerged, the

and politicians. These assassinations, coupled with other bombings and attacks, are ostensibly in pursuit of class struggle. The BR-PCC also justifies these continuing attacks as blows against imperialism, specifically as it is represented within Italian economic policy and the contribution to NATO strategy. In March 2002, the New Red Brigades assassinated Marco Biagi, an adviser to the Italian labor minister. Following the assassination, the group published a statement claiming responsibility for the killing. Notably, the statement commends the perpetrators of the September 11 attacks in the United States. In their own words, the New Red Brigades express the "need for the forging of alliances between anti-imperialistic forces and revolutionary forces in the regions of Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Middle East".<sup>5</sup>

The situation is similar in the neighbouring country Greece, re-enforcing the argument that apart from international Islamist terrorism, EU country law enforcement agencies have to be alert on the terrorist activities of their own, home-based, domestic groups. Greek authorities are trying to cope with the possibility of a new attack, as the group Revolutionary Struggle (Epanastatikos Agonas) has sent a public communiqué to a major newspaper threatening for a major attack. The organization has set as its targets a large number of the countries leading government figures, including the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Public Order.<sup>6</sup> It should be noted that the group has a large record of violent action, including the responsibility of the very recent April attack against a Police station in Athens and of course the attack against the American Embassy in Athens on January. The operational methodology and the tactics that the non-Islamist, non-jihadist groups follow until now, seem to be very different from what the Global Jihad network employs for its hits. There are no "martyrdom", suicide operations and in one aspect- until now- there is the assumption that the attacks of the domestic, secular and leftist organizations are not as violent and deadly; at least in the sense that the targets chosen are not the mass public, but certain authority figures<sup>7</sup>. Also there is such a big difference gap in ideological level that a cooperation between domestic Marxist- Leninist and Islamist groups appears to be highly improbable. Yet, all of the above cannot lead to the conclusion that the 'conventional' European terrorist groups are not dangerous for our security; on the contrary: First of all, their hits do upset the internal public order of the country and challenge the safety feeling of the citizens. Plus, in the past there is the precedence of both Red Brigades and 17 November<sup>8</sup> having training liaisons for their members in the Middle East. Thus, a collaboration can never be excluded- at least in the level of logistic support- between a domestic group and the Jihadi terrorism network for an attack in a European city. After all, experience has shown that terrorists have less ideological restraints and boundaries when it comes to achieving their goal than the ones we accredit to them.

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New Red Brigades/Communist Combatant Party (BR-PCC) and the New Red Brigades/Union of Combatant Communists (BR-UCC). The BR/PCC has chosen to follow the violent Communist path of the Red Brigades. Specifically, the BR-PCC is opposed to NATO and Italy's policies on labor and foreign relations.

<sup>5</sup> "Red Brigades admit killing," BBC News, Europe Section, 21 March, 2002.

<sup>6</sup> Newspaper Ethnos, 9/5/2007.

<sup>7</sup> Authority figures in the government, the judiciary, the business world, etc.

<sup>8</sup> The Greek leading Marxist- Leninist organization; its leaders were supposed to be apprehended and its structure dismantled before the Athens 2004 Olympic Games. A lot has been written though in the press regarding this assumption, doubting whether the true heads of the organizations were caught by the police and convicted by the Greek courts.