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Europol says terror attacks rising, warns on Mali and Syria



The number of terror attacks in Europe rose significantly last year, the continent's policing agency said Thursday, warning that conflicts in Syria and Mali provided potential breeding grounds for future militants.

In its latest "EU Terrorism and Trend Report," Europol said there had been 219 terror-related attacks in the 27-nation bloc last year in which 17 people died as a result.

"This and other findings in the report describe a threat from terrorism that remains strong and varied in Europe," said The Hague-based agency.

"The volatile situation in Mali also requires significant attention, as it offers a new theatre that may appear an attractive destination for those seeking to engage in armed conflict in support of religiously inspired insurgents," Europol said.

"These individuals may pose a threat on their return to the EU."

The same went for Syria, which saw a distinct rise in the number of EU citizens travelling to the country as jihadists to "fight alongside groups associated with religiously inspired terrorism."

"The full implications of increased participation of EU citizens are currently unclear but may have an impact on the future security situation in the EU," Europol said. The EU's anti-terror chief Gilles de Kerckhove said in Brussels on Thursday that young Europeans were heading "in the hundreds" to Syria to fight, posing "a serious threat" to Europe's security.

The deadliest attacks in 2012 happened in France when Islamist gunman Mohammed Merah killed seven people in Toulouse and nearby Montauban in March.

In July, five Israeli tourists and a Bulgarian were killed in a bombing at the Black Sea Burgas airport which Sofia later pinned on Lebanese Shiite group Hezbollah.

The EU defines terrorism as “acts which aim to intimidate populations, compel states to comply with the perpetrator’s demands and destabilize the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or international organization.”