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# Becoming one: the great challenge for European security intelligence.

## How jihadist terrorism has strengthened the intelligence integration process.

By

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**A thesis submitted for the Joint Master degree in**

**Global Economic Governance & Public Affairs (GEGPA)**

**Academic year**

**2021 – 2022**

**June 2022**

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Professor Mathias Jopp for his valuable advice on the design and drafting of this thesis in his role as supervisor.

I would like to thank Professor Giulio Venneri for his important feedback in his role as reviewer.

A huge thank you goes to my dear friend and colleague Julius Wiebe.

Finally, I thank my family for their constant support.

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## Abstract

This dissertation analyses the structural changes in European intelligence caused by the presence of transnational terrorist and cyber activity, conducted by jihadist movements over the last twenty years. The aim of this thesis is to examine whether this threat has succeeded in provoking an internal EU reorganisation in security and intelligence and whether the presence of a common and unpredictable enemy has convinced EU member states to espouse a more cooperative approach in this regard. The study will also reflect on the real possibility of a full integration of intelligence branches, organised at supranational level and beyond national dependencies. Finally, the role of the Sahelian region as a crucial location for security and intelligence will be analysed. The choice of this geographical area depended on the fact that several phenomena, geopolitical, social and environmental, are inexorably linking the fate of this region to that of Europe.

# INTRODUCTION

This study stems from the idea that there can be no European Union without unity and that this unity cannot only refer to issues such as the market, the economy and the free movement of goods and people within a given territory. The paradigm of European integration, in fact, must stretch towards the idea of an union that is capable of moving towards a key issue involving the entire European bloc: improving security and intelligence policies. The European Council moved precisely in this direction when, on 26 February 2021, it reaffirmed its commitment to the 2019-2024 agenda by stating 'We remain committed to implementing the Strategic Agenda 2019-2024 by pursuing a more strategic course of action and increasing the EU's capacity to act autonomously. Specifically as regards security and defence, we want to promote the EU's interests and values as well as its resilience and preparedness to effectively tackle all security threats and challenges. We reaffirm that, in the face of increased global instability, the EU needs to take more responsibility for its security' (Council of the European Union, 2021). Thus, the EU's desire to continue the process of establishing an increasingly supranational European intelligence agency, which is able and willing to break free from the dependencies of national intelligence services and thus reverse the hierarchies within the institutional security landscape, clearly emerges. This need to unite the intelligence centres of the EU member states with a common direction reached a turning point in 2004, when Javier Solana, the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), prompted by the events of 11 September 2001 in New York, remarked on his desire to entrust the EU's Joint Situation Centre (SITCEN), later renamed EU INTCEN in 2012, with the task of conducting analyses that could support EU decision-making policies. According to the 2004 Justice and Home Affairs Council document, the EU's security policies, in Javier Solana's view, were ineffective because they lacked information about the organisation of terrorist groups, thus preventing the EU SITCEN from carrying out adequate analyses and activating EUROPOL's support. The latter, however, as pointed out in the document, would only have a supporting role, since operational leadership would, in any case, be held by the member states. Specifically,

Solana called for the heads of the 25 EU member states' security services to meet periodically in the Counter Terrorism Groug (CTG), improving operational cooperation through the use of the CTG and including EUROPOL in task forces, to improve joint operational performance. From 2010 to 2020, as confirmed by a EUROPOL report on terrorism in the EU, 8,571 people were arrested for terrorism in Europe and the UK, with a peak of 1219 arrests in 2017 alone, and 1799 attacks were carried out (EUROPOL, 2020). Although the data reported by the Institute for Economics & Peace (IEP) show that in 2021 compared to the 2017/2018 peak in the West there was a 68% decrease in attacks, it is by no means a foregone conclusion that this trend can be considered definitive. In fact, as Lorenzo Fruganti states in an article on the website of ISPI, one of Italy's most important research institutes: 'last 17 April, with a video message broadcast on a Telegram channel well known to Western intelligence services, the Islamic State (IS) made itself heard again at a time that was anything but random. It did so with the voice of Abu-Omar al Muhajir, the group's alleged new spokesman, in a blatant message steeped in the rhetoric of hatred, violence and revenge to which IS, as well as other jihadist groups, had accustomed us in the past. The call urges the militiamen of the organisation, today certainly far from the splendours of the 'Caliphate' in Syria and Iraq but still active and dangerous in various areas of the world, to ride the wave of the war in Ukraine to conduct attacks in Europe and avenge its long line of slain leaders' (Fruganti, 2022). In relation to Islamist terrorism, the IEP data are anything but encouraging. Indeed, they emphasise how, especially in the Sahelian region, there is a proliferation of Salafist movements that, together with the political instability that characterises the area, can represent a danger to European security. This issue is added to the management of migratory flows on African territory, which allows for the co-presence of terrorist and criminal interests. The plot thickens even more when the situation is analysed from a geopolitical perspective, which sees the aforementioned region at the centre of international disputes, in which various world powers are grappling to impose their leadership in terms of economic domination and military control. The European Union, in this context of hybridisation of risks, which is not only made up of human threats but also cyber threats, still presents itself in a condition of vast governmental fragmentation articulated on a national basis. European borders are increasingly extended to be defended, and the total opening of internal borders allows for the free movement of

people, of goods (including illicit ones) and thus also of risk itself. This dissertation aims to analyse the topic of security taking into consideration jihadist terrorist activity and intelligence activity in the European Union. The time span taken into consideration is related to the last twenty years, therefore, the investigation will regard attacks carried out on European soil, but also within the so-called externalised borders, specifically the Sahel.

# Methodology

This study stems from the will to analyse the level of integration and potential reached by European intelligence. It aims to analyse the reasons behind its development, its enhancement but also the potential that intelligence is currently unable to express due to the national fragmentation on which it depends. Islamist terrorism will be analysed in order to investigate the change that intelligence has undergone over the years. This choice depended on the analysis carried out on the data presented by EUROPOL in its latest reports, which have for years now presented a clear picture of what is the greatest threat to European security. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon, an analysis will be carried out concerning the type of attacks carried out, the observation of the biographical traits of the attackers and the way in which they acted. The role of propaganda will be analysed, and obviously also the use these movements have made of cyberspace. Since jihadist terrorism is a product of its time, it has been attentive to new technologies. This threat is now to all intents and purposes transnational, with operational capabilities almost everywhere in the globe, and can, by virtue of this, be taken into consideration, for the study to which we aspire here, more than other forms of hostility, such as political terrorism. Furthermore, the analysis of counter-terrorism policy and the security content of the Lisbon Treaty show that most of the changes in intelligence and counter-terrorism have occurred in response to attacks by Islamist terrorists. The study, therefore, questions whether such a destructive threat has played an absurdly positive role when analysed from the perspective of strengthening European integration. The analysis of this threat is aimed at stimulating reflection on a number of outstanding issues. Among these, that of whether or not there is a need to pursue a total integration of intelligence at a fully supranational level, whether or not the current fragmentation may still be able to deal with similar threats and assess whether or not intelligence activity is essential in externalised borders such as in the Sahel. To achieve these objectives, this dissertation will use quantitative data from official reports of intelligence departments, official documents published by agencies and statistical studies conducted by relevant international authors and think tanks. Not only that, in order to gain a better understanding

of the terrorist phenomenon, it will also use the analysis of interviews as well as documents collected thanks to the intensive in-depth lectures on the Sahel attended at the Institute for International Political Studies in Milan (ISPI). The material collected for ISPI will be necessary in order to develop the third chapter. The choice of Sahel is crucial in a study on European intelligence, as the sub-Saharan region is to all intents and purposes an externalised border of the EU, due to large-scale phenomena such as terrorism, illegal immigration, the presence of fragile states and intense cross-border criminal activity. In all likelihood, in some cases, the study will refer to official documents rather than essays or academic papers because of the subject matter, i.e. intelligence. The secrecy of intelligence work is also inexorably reflected in the amount of material available and sometimes does not allow for a wide choice of suitable documents. This difficulty will be especially obvious in the sections dedicated to INTCEN, the European Counter Terrorism Centre, SATCEN and their activities.

# Literature review

The key document from which this thesis originates is 'Governing the European Intelligence: Multilateral Intelligence Cooperation in the European Union' by Ahmet Ates Anıl and Çağlar Erkan. The importance of their work, published for the International Journal of Politics and Security, underlines two main issues on which this thesis is based. The first relates to the reference the authors make to Lefebvre's thinking, which attributes positive qualities to the diversity of intelligence expertise. Such diversity can also be found in the fragmented composition of intelligence that we find in Europe today, which is divided between EU agencies, working groups and national intelligence. According to Lefebre, 'the diversity of intelligence capabilities among different intelligence organisations paves the way for cooperation. It is also important to note that there should be a mutual threat or interest to incentivise the parties to collaborate. For instance, the United States has advanced technological intelligence gathering capabilities, whereas Turkey has advanced human intelligence capabilities relatively. Therefore, it would be wise for them to cooperate to further their mutual interests in the Middle East. Likewise, Ethiopian-US intelligence cooperation amplified after 9/11 at least for two reasons: mutual threat/interest and divergence on intelligence capabilities. On the one hand, Ethiopia's neighbour Somali had the potential to become a haven for Al-Qaeda to revitalise its organisational and tactical capacity after US intervention in Afghanistan. 6 Al-Qaeda's presence in Somalia posed a serious threat to both of the countries' (Anıl, Erkan, 2021). The second relates to the connection, which the authors have analysed and which this thesis wishes to explore: the issue of changing processes from a local to a global dimension; the operational paradigm shift of jihadist movements that are now widely active in the cyberspace and have therefore prompted the creation of open-source systems from which intelligence agencies draw; the mixing of these two phenomena. Understanding therefore whether this has prompted states to find a cooperative way in order to exert a more adequate counter-action. In addition, the above-mentioned document was also crucial in order to get a clearer picture of the current European intelligence structure. Some reports are of key importance to the drafting of the first chapter: EUROPOL's report 2021, which provides a clear picture of the main terrorist

threat; 'Spreading Propaganda in Cyberspace: Comparing CyberResource Usage of Al Qaeda and ISIS' by Choi Kyung-shick, Lee Claire Seungeun and Cadigan Robert, for information on the cyberspace activity of ISIS and Al Qaeda; Haroro J. Ingram, "Learning from ISIS's virtual propaganda war for Western Muslims: A comparison of Inspire and Dabiq" published in The International Centre for Counter-terrorism, for in-depth studies on the online propaganda of ISIS and Al Qaeda; and finally, the research by Lorenzo Vidino, Francesco Marone (ISPI) El Said and Barret (UNOCT) for the acquisition of information and data on foreign fighters. Concerning the second chapter, in addition to the official documents of EUROPOL, INTCEN, ENISA, SATCEN, the Council, the Commission and Parliament, other will also be referenced: Shashi Jayakumar on his study for the ICCT entitled "Cyber Attacks by Terrorists and other Malevolent Actors: Prevention and Preparedness" and Oliver Noyana for the European Army Interoperability Centre, both on cybersecurity. The third chapter, as anticipated in the methodology, is the result of the ISPI's intensive, in-depth, course. I found it necessary to expand my knowledge on the Sahelian issue because the study of the events and the reading of several academic articles revealed its crucial importance for European security and the role of intelligence.

# Chapter I

## Europe becomes a Union, borders are broken down and the threat becomes common. The identikit of a global threat.

In this section, the jihadist terrorist activity will be analysed, which, especially due to the advent of ISIS, has been threatening the internal security of the European Union for almost a decade. The aforementioned threat will be analysed, taking into consideration the innovation with which it achieves its goals, the use it makes of technology and the way it has been able to make inroads into the European social fabric, giving rise to the worrying phenomenon of foreign fighters. Through the analysis of the data provided by EUROPOL, a clearer picture of what the current situation is, in both qualitative and quantitative terms, of this threat will be painted. This analysis is intended firstly to give shape and dimension to the entity against which the intelligence agencies of the European states are facing, and secondly to open a reflection on the appropriate response to counter this threat. This chapter is aimed at understanding whether intelligence activity, practised at a supranational level, can be more effective than the hybrid and relatively fragmented activity that is currently implemented with regard to security.

## 1.1 The Jihadist Terrorist Threat in Europe According to the 2021 Report of the Epistemic Communities in European Intelligence Bodies.

The report developed in 2021 by the epistemic group within EUROPOL outlines an overall scenario in terms of the security threat to the European Union. In relation to the subject of jihadist terrorism, the work is developed along a bipartition of information: firstly, there is a quantitative measurement of arrests and foiled and unsuccessful attacks, secondly a qualitative analysis referring to the characteristic traits of the attackers, active

cells, propaganda and consequent recruitment. Within the report, there is also a study section dedicated to terrorist activity outside European territory, in the Sahel region, which will however be used in the development of the last chapter. The data in the document, which is obviously the result of the intelligence activity and data collection of the individual national intelligence units, in coordination with the European institutional ones, underlines the downward trend already stated by the IEP. From this, it emerges that the jihadist terrorist phenomenon is the greatest concern for European security agencies to date, for multiple reasons: in 2018 and 2019, as reported by the security forces, two-thirds of attacks were foiled before they were carried out, while in 2020, the number of attacks carried out was more than double the number of attacks foiled (EUROPOL, 2021). The reasons include the strong tendency to personalise the terrorist attack, i.e. the tendency to act without the support of a cell and therefore in a spontaneous manner. This, as analyses of the attackers confirms, can result in a variety of backgrounds or places of origin that makes intelligence intervention even more complicated. In fact, taking into account the culprits of the 10 terrorist attacks carried out in 2020 on EU territory, we have a Sudanese refugee unknown to French intelligence who killed his victims with a knife bought shortly before his attack, an Iraqi asylum seeker not belonging to any organisation, a Pakistani who stabbed two people in front of the former Charlie Hebdo headquarters, not knowing that that was no longer the satirical newspaper's headquarters, a French convert to Islam with mental disorders, a German citizen with Kurdish parents who grew up in Bavaria and carried out attacks against Turkish activities, in response to the actions of the Erdogan-led government, a Syrian who acted in Dresden against a couple of 'homosexual sinners', a French loyalist who intentionally ran over two policemen, a Tunisian from an irregular immigration route, an Austrian citizen of Macedonian origin and finally an 18-year-old Chechen, son of parents granted political asylum, who beheaded a professor in France (EUROPOL, 2021). Alongside the phenomenon of lone wolves, there are two others of fundamental importance: the first is the one linked to radicalisation inside prisons, which relies on marginalisation and human suffering, and the second that is linked to what ISPI researcher Lorenzo Fruganti said and was already mentioned in the introduction, namely proselytising through Telegram. In fact, following the major operation to dismantle the jihadist cyber-network by the joint action of national intelligence agencies and EUROPOL, attempts to reconstitute the online propaganda and

recruitment network have been gaining momentum. This process, in this case, is taking the form of a more disorganised and decentralised action that could cause an increase in the level of difficulty in the monitoring activity. At the same time, probably this might be causing problems in the recruitment of would-be terrorists (Meili Criezis, 2020). Intelligence points out that terrorist activity is often linked to the religious current within Islam itself, the figure of the imam and the geographical area of origin of the latter. This obviously contributes to making it even more complicated for terrorists to create a single and homogeneous cell, and this even more so if one adds to the strong heterogeneity of the biographies and motivations of the various terrorists. In fact, despite the fact that Dutch intelligence identified more than 500 individuals involved in terrorist activities, there is no cohesive terrorist cell, as there is an ideological fragmentation caused by the imams and the Saudi ideologue Ahmad al-Hazimi. The greatest concern would seem to come particularly from the Salafist currents of the Madkhalist matrix from North Africa, the Western Balkans and Pakistan, which have a high level of proselytism and are currently present in Italy, France, the Netherlands and Belgium (EUROPOL, 2021). Particularly in Belgium, this current, declared as anti-democratic, racist and intolerant, is exponentially expanding its ranks of followers. From the information provided by intelligence, it appears that between 2019 and 2020 there was a considerable drop in arrests of terrorism-related offences in general, specifically with regard to jihadist offences from 436 in 2019 to 245 the following year. This trend may have multiple causes, but none of them can be confirmed with certainty. It cannot be ruled out that: the blockade of international mobility with the relative closure of the borders due to Covid-19 and the almost impossible movement of terrorists was the cause of the decrease in arrests; the counter-intelligence work of the intelligence community was effective in the previous years and had a deterrent effect; the leadership crisis that followed after the death of the historical leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi generated a strong sense of bewilderment within the followers of the Islamic State, in line with what Max Weber expressed in 'Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft', regarding charismatic power. These possibilities, therefore, leave room for two pessimistic scenarios: the first is that the reopening of borders may facilitate both the arrival of new terrorists and the return of foreign fighters; the second is that the arrest of the new head of IS, Abu al-Hasan al-Hashimi al Qurashi, in Turkey may give rise to a leadership capable of invigorating the movement; the third is that these two factors, linked

to the strong presence of Al Qaeda in the Sahel, may represent for Europe a return to the terror experienced between 2015 and 2018. Another source of concern is the presence of women within the jihadist formations, albeit identifiable in 13% of those arrested in 2020. In fact, as the study conducted by the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism attests, the female presence within jihadist formations is by no means to be underestimated. In 2015, 550 Western women were active as foreign fighters in the territories under the control of the Islamic State (Edwin Bakker, Seran de Leede, 2015), and, to date, many of those women have still not returned, while others are most likely to be among those stuck in prison camps in northern Syria.

## 1.2 Cyberspace. Is the ISIS 'revolution' too hybrid a threat for fragmented intelligence?

Unlike the other Jihadist acronyms that have struck Europe with their bloody attacks over the last decades, Isis has established itself as an innovative terrorist phenomenon, especially in the way it uses a new dimension in which to carry out its actions: cyberspace. Of course, ISIS's bloody attacks have been diverse, both in Europe and in Muslim countries, and have been aimed both at non-Muslims and at Muslims themselves who do not condone their own view of Islam. The most recent examples of the latter are those that have occurred in recent months on Afghan soil, where 50 people died in the April attack in Kabul and 30 in the October attack in Kandahar. What is to be emphasised here is that the innovation brought by ISIS to the terrorist phenomenon, especially to that of the Islamist matrix, is the use of cyber space as a platform through which to send messages into the heart of the West and, precisely, into Europe. This 'cyber-expansion' does not come about by chance, but is the result of a multi-front war strategy that ISIS has wanted to fight from the very start. As documented in the study on ISIS propaganda, "ISIS and Innovative Propaganda Confronting Extremism in the Digital Age" by Dylan Gerstel, this movement, compared to other terrorist formations, differs in terms of communication in terms of "sophistication, content and distribution mechanisms" (Gerster, 2015). The study emphasises how ISIS has dedicated two entire sections, within the movement, to the

construction of this atypical propaganda entity, with reference to the terrorist world. The first is the Al-Hayat Media, which targets potential future terrorists with the intention of conveying the image of an idyllic Islamist society in which to take part. The second, the Mu'assassat al-Furqan, deals with spreading fear and dismay, focuses on themes related to terrorist action. This aims to frighten both Western enemies and those within the Islamic world, namely the apostate Muslim brothers to whom ISIS has dedicated an entire issue in its English-language magazine, Dabiq. The International Centre for Counter-terrorism conducted an in-depth analysis in this magazine, the goal of which is to defy and humiliate the West by ridiculing its intelligence structures (Haroro J. Ingram, 2015). This will is not the result of a random and sporadic improvisation, but is the child of a pragmatic strategy in which ISIS wants to show itself capable of nullifying the gap between what it says it wants to do and what it actually does (Haroro J. Ingram, 2015). ISIS wants to show itself to be granitic and elusive to intelligence forces. Analysing the ICCT document again, we realise that with this attitude, in addition to ridiculing the West and provoking a sense of admiration in the eyes of its followers, it wants to send out a very subtle message that touches the individual from an existential and thus socio-psychological aspect. To do so, the message launched by ISIS aims to demonise contemporary society while at the same time branding the entire moderate Muslim community guilty of betrayal and complicity, which, as the study states, would have diluted the essence of Islam itself (Haroro J. Ingram, 2015). This attitude makes the battle of Islam both global and internal to the Islamic community, in that it involves both what is outside of it and what is within it. ISIS, by launching this message, does not only want to revolutionise the role of Islam in the world, but to represent an opportunity for not only religious but also personal revenge. It would therefore like to become the bearer of a new sense of community, of a new dimension that is able to take in Muslims who feel abandoned by 'diluted' Islam. As Olivier Roy points out on several occasions in 'Jihad and Death', the mission of ISIS in its propaganda campaign is to put forward an idea of the future that can represent, in the eyes of Muslims scattered around the world, an opportunity and a concrete project of revenge and revenge both of Islam and of themselves. The socio-psychological and existential dimension comes into play here. In fact, as Haroro Ingram's aforementioned study for ICCT points out, the attempt to express a strong sense of community, which protects the individual from the treacherous and

mystifying society, differs from that expressed by Al Qaeda in its magazine Ispire. While Al Qaeda refers to the community by pressing the choice of the community as the result of a process of identity and awareness, the messages launched by Dabiq appeal more to the rational choice, which would push the individual to immediate action (Haroro J. Ingram, 2015). In fact, the content of the crisis resolution messages put forward by ISIS in its magazine, consist in 54.55% of the cases of photo reports witnessing scenes of military action in the field. The mission is thus to exacerbate the crisis but to do so through messaging laden with practical and immediate meanings. ISIS's strategy is further confirmed by a study conducted by Choi Kyung-shick, Lee Claire Seungeun and Cadigan Robert in the International Journal of Cybersecurity Intelligence and Cybercrime (IJCIC) in which they show how ISIS, true to its strategy, prefers to use digital platforms that are as direct as possible. For instance, while it dedicates only 3.6 per cent to online forums and 10.7 per cent to websites (Al Qaeda 36.4 per cent), it uses Facebook posts in 16.1 per cent of cases (Al Qaeda 9.1 per cent), Twitter posts in 26.8 per cent (Al Qaeda 9.1) and YouTube posts in 42 per cent (Choi, Lee and Cadigan, 2018). This is because, the study further reveals, ISIS exploits more immediate platforms as it considers them more suitable for the messages it wants to launch: 23.2% of these contain beheadings, 16.1% from bombings while it reserves only 14.3% of content for threats (Al Qaeda 36.4%) (Choi, Lee and Cadigan, 2018). The relevance of this data from a European security perspective is linked to the fact that ISIS's action, through the methods explained above, has been able to go beyond the territorial limits of its geographical affiliation. In fact, the use of cyberspace, in a context of global connectivity and accessibility, has contributed, together with unpreparedness and flaws in intelligence activity, to the proliferation of terrorist messages even in the heart of EU countries. This has allowed the jihadist message to make its way indiscriminately onto the European and global stage. The concatenation of these events has generated two phenomena that are qualitatively and quantitatively unprecedented in the history of terrorism in Europe: that of foreign fighters and that of second generations, which will be discussed later. What is important to emphasise in this section is that the way ISIS has used the IT platform has demonstrated its ability to remove not only cultural but also religious barriers. The jihadist message, in fact, this time had its effects not only on Islamists in Muslim-majority Middle Eastern states, but also on the

grandchildren of Muslims who moved to Europe decades ago (the second generations) and even on young people of European descent.

## 1.3 Communication echo and terrorism: synonyms for a latent common security policy?

ISIS' advance into cyberspace through videos of executions, 'mujatweets' and propaganda messages, precisely at a time of maximum expansion of social networks and the Internet, undoubtedly opens a chapter that concerns the very regulation of platforms. The messages launched by the jihadist movement have in fact helped the communication of national, private and public television networks within the European Union. Jihadist propaganda has created an echo that has unwittingly allowed ISIS documents to enter the homes of hundreds of millions of Europeans. So, while on the one hand we have to reduce gaps in digital regulation, on the other hand a journalistic issue emerges that in turn hides a much broader one, which is the need for a common effort, in terms of security policies, that can act as a shield from potentially destructive messages to the European population. In 2015 the director of the Italian public broadcaster RaiNews, Monica Maggioni, stated: 'You see, by now Isis has turned into a sort of Hollywood of terror. Their films are studied. Every communiqué is made with skilful direction. We do not want to become part of their propaganda. Not least because we wonder where they will go. Have you heard the news today of the hundred kidnapped in the Tikrit area, in which there are allegedly also children? So what do we have to wait for, to see the children in cages, to stop? We have decided to stop today. What you will see from now on on Rainews24 and on Rainews.it: a still-frame, a photo. And then we will continue to tell you, to explain what they are saying, what their messages are. But we will do it as journalists, putting ourselves between them, their propaganda, and you. We think that at the end of the day this is also the job of a journalist. For someone who does television, it is complicated to imagine saying this if you don't see it. The time has come to use the tools we have, our intelligence, democratic values, knowing how to live together, to understand what is the limit to which we also decide to adhere' (Maggioni, 2015). One might ask whether showing images

recorded with state-of-the-art cameras, showing 21 Coptic Christians dressed in orange, awaiting their own beheading and kneeling on the beaches of Cyrenaica, might be more useful to ISIS for proselytising or to the information needs of Europeans. To all intents and purposes, this is an issue that concerns security policies at a supranational level as it breaks down any geographical or anthropological boundaries. It is clear how, for the various European intelligence agencies, ISIS represented and still represents a lethal danger to the internal security of the European Union; therefore, the rules adopted by the European Council regarding online terrorist content, which will be discussed in the next section, converge in one direction.

## 1.4 European foreign fighters, second generations and lone wolves: complex phenomena challenging European intelligence.

In this section, the issue of European foreign fighters, second generations and the lone wolf way in which the latter have been attacking Europe, will be analysed.

### 1.4.1. Foreign Fighters.

The issue of foreign fighters is relevant to European internal security because it concerns individuals who have left Europe to go and swell the ranks of the jihadist struggle. This means that the radicalisation of these individuals is something that directly affects the countries of the European Union. The radicalisation scenario, which, as we shall see in this section, will prove difficult to understand in terms of categorising the subjects into a homogeneous and unifying identikit, touches on elements that we have analysed in previous sub-chapters, namely the use of cyberspace, the proliferation of propaganda messages via television, and the presence of Islamist imams in European cities. Likewise, this issue still involves the European Union due to the phenomenon of these fighters returning from the front. In relation to this, there are fears of the 'blowback' phenomenon, i.e. the danger that these terrorists, as it happened in the 2015 attacks in Paris and 2016 in

Brussels, received training abroad and then return to strike in Europe (Lorenzo Vidino, Francesco Marone, 2018). The quantitative data of the ISPI study, carried out by these two authors, attest to a total number of 60,000 foreign fighters. Of these, around 5,000/6,000 moved from EU countries. These include, above all, France with 1,900 individuals, followed by the United Kingdom (pre-Brexit statistics) and Germany with almost a thousand each, and Belgium with a number exceeding 500 (Marone, Vidino, 2018). When considering the ratio of foreign fighters per million inhabitants, it is Belgium with 46 per million inhabitants that even doubles the number of France (Marone, Vidino, 2018). Given the importance of these figures, the attempt to decode the complexity of the phenomenon of foreign fighters has prompted scholars of all sorts, including sociologists, psychologists, political scientists and statisticians, to search for a biographical truth to justify their existence. A recent study by the ICCT has attempted to investigate, based on the scarce data available, the profiles of individual foreign fighters who left Europe to embrace the armed struggle (Lorne L. Dawson, 2021). The study emphasises how the various attempts to attribute certain characteristics, as similar as possible to these terrorists, often do not reflect the data collected by intelligence centres and cannot therefore be considered clear-cut keys to understanding the phenomenon. The theory of psychiatric disorder is not be supported by sufficient data, substantial distinctions must be applied to the matter of religion, as several fighters converted shortly before departure, while others have been Muslims for generations. The same goes for the reliability of the theory that exaggerates the role of ideology. The analysis by El-Said and Barret for UN Counter-Terrorism (UNOCT) states that "almost 40 per cent of the sample stated that their motivations to go to Syria arose from an obligation to defend their fellow Sunnis," and this "confirms that many Muslim youth... perceive the conflict in Syria in community more than in religious terms". So, something that in a certain sense is connected to the communicative capacity of the Islamic State to cross visible and invisible borders, awakening in the souls of some the urge to feel part of something solid, something that unites and is not limited to simple prayer or reflection. A need to concretise an idea, reject its ambiguity and transform it into the pursuit of a structured and coherent action (Kruglanski, 1989; 2004). Foreign fighters often differ in terms of their personal profile, the time and place of their radicalisation, social condition, place of origin and marital status. Again, statistics would seem to confirm the concept of "the Islamisation of

radicalism" rather than "the radicalisation of Islam" but there is no data to confirm the fact that today's "terrorists are not the expression of a radicalisation of the Muslim population, but rather reflect a generational revolt that affects a very precise category of youth" (Roy, 2015). In fact, if it is true that neither foreign fighters nor second generations, as we shall see, tend to have a long history of fundamentalist religious faith. Therefore, intelligence activity is anything but easy to address and manage. The complexity of the phenomenon is articulated by substantial differences in the profiles of the terrorists, which do not seem to allow either a standardisation of the method of countering radicalisation and action, or shortcomings in communication between national intelligence services. This issue is amplified by the previous factor mentioned at the beginning of this sub-chapter, namely the 'blowback', better known as the 'return phenomenon'. Despite the fact that the EUROPOL report of 2021 indicates that currently the issue of blowback seems to be mild compared to the past, both due to law enforcement activities and due to the mobility freeze caused by Covid-19, it cannot be entirely considered as archived. In fact, the reopening of borders, parallel to the normalisation of the pandemic, could reopen routes that in some ways have never been completely closed. The terrorists who have left for the Middle East, which amount to around 5,000, often elude national intelligence, which is not always able to identify these individuals and their current movements. Belgium, for example, stated that in 2019, 288 Belgian foreign fighters were on the Syrian-Iraqi front, but of that number, around 134 are to date untraceable and potentially, as the EUROPOL report states, still alive and some of them active in the Hay'at Tahir alSham terrorist battalions in Idlib (EUROPOL, 2021). According to reports from various European national intelligence agencies, such as those of Spain and the Netherlands, the emerging trend is that foreign fighters returning from the front are trying to access their European home countries by exploiting the already active, and therefore easier to use, migration routes by blending in with migrants. Spanish intelligence specifically points to Libya as the terrorists' preferred point of departure, due to an already existing migratory channel of access to Europe and at the same time at the centre of a constant civil war that destabilises the area. This situation could also involve Algeria and Morocco, according to the report. Further confirmation of the use of migratory routes is also provided by the analysis of Dutch intelligence, which states that in addition to foreign fighters returning from Syria, there are others already arrested from

Yemen and Somalia (EUROPOL, 2021). Some of these would appear to have declared themselves refugees. Again, Dutch intelligence reports the presence of 100 Dutch terrorists still active on both the Syrian and Iraqi fronts who may return after the opening of the post-COVID-19 borders (EUROPOL, 2021). In this context, it is self-evident that the absence of internal borders within the European Union facilitates the passage from one country to another, which, by virtue of the existence of the Schengen area, must take place undisturbed in order to allow free internal movement between EU countries. The concern of returning foreign fighters obviously also involves non-EU European countries, such as the UK and Switzerland, which for obvious geographical reasons affect the security of the EU itself. While the UK states that of 675 fighters still alive who left its territory, slightly less than half have returned while others are presumed to still be in the Middle East, Switzerland, despite having recorded no departures and no returns since 2016, claims to have information regarding the risk of returning foreign fighters and the related strengthening of jihadist networks (EUROPOL, 2021). The concern about the 'blowback' phenomenon is closely linked to empirical data confirming the increased danger and precision of attacks carried out by terrorists who have returned to their homelands. A joint study by ISPI, ICCT and The George Washington University's Program on Extremism, states that an analysis of terrorist events that have taken place in Europe in recent years, underlines that those carried out with the help of foreign fighters who have returned to Europe, (Paris 2015, Brussels 2016), although fewer in number, turned out to be five times more lethal than those carried out without the 'returnees', and in general, the European countries with the highest number of fighters, namely France, Belgium and Germany are the ones where most terrorist attacks have occurred (Lorenzo Vidino, Francesco Marone, Eva Entenmann, 2017). A further concern that emerges in several studies and that seems to frighten intelligence units is the one concerning detention camps both on external territory, such as in Syria, and the prisons themselves on European territory, which could represent a point of radicalisation for new subjects and of strengthening the communication network of subjects already established in the terrorist sphere. The Belgian and Dutch intelligence agencies, again according to the epistemic community within EUROPOL, state that in the detention camps in north-east Syria, alHawl and Roj, individuals they have been investigating have found fertile ground

to consolidate relations with jihadist formations and do not rule out a return to armed struggle once they have served their sentences or through an escape (EUROPOL, 2021).

### 1.4.2. The second generation 'Lone Wolves': the example of the young British hacker Junaid Hussain.

By second generations we mean the grandchildren of Muslims who have emigrated to Western territories, in our case Europe, and who have chosen to radicalise themselves to Islamist terrorism with the aim of contributing to global jihad. This phenomenon, as shown in several studies including Olivier Roy's, is the result of a feeling of rejection, injustice and alienation that individuals feel towards the society in which they live. The action of ISIS, as widely discussed above, has succeeded, through its intense cyber-propaganda activity, in intercepting these feelings of malaise in many of these young people in Europe, providing them with a key to something concrete and inspiring to believe in. As Oliver Roy points out in "Generation Isis", radicalised young people harbour a twofold feeling of revenge: the first towards the West, both because it is accused of carrying out massacres in Islamic lands and of discriminating against Muslims, and the second towards their family, accused of being complicit in the decline of Islam's image in the world and of also being the bearers of a diluted Islam (Roy, 2017). Such sentiments are present in many radicalised individuals in countries, above all France, that propose an assimilationist culture, i.e. that tendency to create a monocultural society that would nationalise every cultural aspect and stifle anthropological differences. Many radicalised people, as Roy writes, feel deprived of their own culture and at the same time rejected by the 'host' culture because they are considered different (Roy, 2017). However, according to Roy's analysis, tracking down second-generation radicalised is far from simple, as they are not only present in France and their life path is anything but regular and not at all religious. In fact, contemporary second-generation terrorists are often defined as 'born again', that is, reborn in religious terms after having spent a decidedly profane life path among alchol, narcotics and drug use. Their path to radicalisation would take place in a short time, especially through an initial approach via the Internet, and a few months would

pass from their religious rebirth to the carrying out of the attack. Some of them become radicalised in prison after having ended up there for reasons related to petty crime. At the same time, it would not seem possible, according to Roy, to delineate a clear socio-economic profile of the radicalised (some have a degree and a fair level of integration) and often also a religious one, given that 25% of them are converts and many others, although already Muslim, had never assiduously attended mosques or places of worship. Contextualising Roy's book to this thesis, which specifically analyses the new form of jihadism and European intelligence, is this: "Radicalisation precedes recruitment; therefore, the destruction of external groups will not put an end to radicalisation. Organisations such as ISIS and Al Qaeda draw on an existing pool that they did not create' (Roy, 2017). The challenge facing intelligence is therefore highly hybrid and complex; it is not an exclusively military issue but one that primarily affects the new forms of communication used in society. The threat is not identifiable in territorially, socially and culturally established borders, it is strongly fragmented and the role played by cross-border cyberspace would once again seem to be the main battle-ground. Given the variety of different profiles of second-generation terrorists, in this study, we opted to use that of Junaid Hussain as an example, because his story fully reflects the characteristics and themes discussed so far. In order to tell Hussain's story, it is necessary to turn to the work carried out by Nafes Hamid for the Combating Terrorism Center in 2018 entitled 'The British Hacker Who Became the Islamic State's Chief Terror Cybercoach' and to extrapolate from his study at least two quotes from Hussain:

- "I am an extremist, I try extremely hard to hack websites to raise awareness of issues, I'm a terrorist, I terrorize websites & servers, But the EDL are extremists too, they try extremely hard to kick Muslims out of the UK, and they are terrorists, they terrorise local Muslim communities & businesses - Myself & the EDL are both extremists & terrorists, but why do they want to kick me out? Because I follow a certain religion? I was born in the UK, my skin colour may not be the same as yours but my passport colour is..." (Nafes Hamid, 2018).

- "I browsed the net, read books, watched documentaries, etc.. I was getting more and more into politics, I started researching deeper into stuff like the Free Masons, Illuminati, The Committee of 300, etc.. It made me angry, it changed the way I lived my life and the way I saw the world. I then started using hacking as my form of medium by defacing sites

to raise awareness of issues around the world and to 'bully' corrupt organisations and embarrass them via leaks etc., which is how I got into hacktivism' (Nafes Hamid, 2018).

From these two quotates, the lone action, cyberspace, sense of discrimination, feeling different, thirst for revenge, desire to ridicule intelligence structures, access to propaganda materials explicitely emerge. Hussain was a young man from 1994 who left Europe to actively participate in ISIS cross-border terrorism. A young man who, as stated by those who knew him in the interviews in Nafes Hamid's study, did not come from a socially marginalised background but had developed a second personality through the use of cyberspace (Nafes Hamid, 2018). Very outgoing and sociable in cyberspace, of few words and not very expansive in everyday life. A family friend interviewed stated that Hussain was not a religious man, in the sense that he was not the kind of believer who prayed five times a day and went to the mosque very few times in his life. His contribution to the cause carried out by the Islamic State was undoubtedly relevant as his activity was that of a hacker, but not just any hacker, the central hub of the cyber activity carried out by Isis, and head of the Islamic State Hacking Division (ISHD) (Nafes Hamid, 2018). His first computer hacking activities began well before his enrolment in ISIS. At the age of 15, he allegedly became a political activist by participating in protests against religious discrimination, at the age of 18 he managed to penetrate and ridicule British intelligence by hacking into Counter Terrorism Command (CTC) systems only to be discovered and prosecuted (Nafes Hamid, 2018). His decision to join ISIS is thought to have come about during the 50 days he had to serve in prison due to his hacking activities. In fact, Hussain stated that he met people in prison who would enlighten his life and that he felt like a 'cyber-terrorist' and an 'extremist' (Nafes Hamid, 2018). It is alleged that he left the UK to go to the front in Syria in 2013 and that it was here that he married Sally Jones, better known as 'White Widow', 25 years older than him, a British, Islamic convert and former punk rock singer. The latter, according to The Guardian and sources close to British intelligence, was until 12 October to 2017, the day of his alleged killing at the hands of an American drone, at the top of British intelligence's list of most wanted terrorists due to his importance in cyber activity and recruitment (Ewen MacAskill, 2017). As Mac Askill states in his article in The Guardian 'both Hussain and Jones were accused of trying to recruit extremists in the UK to carry out attacks. She was placed on a UN sanctions list that included a travel ban and freeze on assets, and a hit list for US bombings'. Hussain

in such a short time had managed to be third on the list of terrorists considered most dangerous by US intelligence, since the latter had also discovered the young hacker's involvement in the planning of several attacks in the US and the UK (Ewen MacAskill, 2017). Events that triggered a collaboration between security services that, for the first time in the history of intelligence activity, led to the killing of a hacker through the use of a drone (Aimee Rawlins, 2017). A final piece of information that underlines the importance of this young terrorist can be summarised in a quote from Nafes Hamid's work:" the value he (Hussain) brought to the Islamic State extended beyond his practical skill sets; his recruitment was a symbolic victory for the Islamic State as well. Hussain represented a diferent profile from the uneducated petty criminals looking for redemption from Europe's marginalised neighbourhoods'.

# Chapter II

## European intelligence: from fragmentation to the inevitable unification process? The milestones of the European intelligence integration process and the impact of the jihadist threat.

When one speaks of security, both internal and external, with reference to the European continent, one can already identify its origins in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War. In fact, it was precisely the Second World War that triggered the idea of building an entity that could be the guarantor of lasting peace on the European continent. The first steps towards a common destiny were taken in 1951 through the activation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and in 1957 with the Treaty of Rome, which, by establishing the European Economic Community (EEC), further tightened the bond between European countries. This paper will take the jihadist terrorist threat as a point of reference, as this has been the major source of security concerns for European citizens for the past twenty years. It will analyse the institutional set-up achieved by intelligence in Europe, which, rather than a pyramid structure, corresponds to a jigsaw made up of several agencies including official, informal and ad hoc created operational working groups. The aim is to better understand the work conducted at the European level, and the level of integration achieved in security matters. Therefore, the four official EU agencies, i.e. EUROPOL, INTCEN, SATCEN and ENISA, and the main regulatory milestones that have marked the European security agenda will be explored. This chapter seeks to examine whether the jihadist terrorist threat has had the effect of strengthening European legislation and national intelligence collaboration by virtue of increased effectiveness in law enforcement, and whether this threat might be a plausible reason for further cohesion in the future.

## 2.1 Between mistrust and the need for cooperation, the current EU intelligence architecture.

As is well known, the European Union is still subject to substantial levels of internal division; indeed, the integration process to which it aspires, often hampered by wavering national resistance, is not yet complete. Security, in this case intelligence, is one of those issues that makes Member States particularly mistrustful of the outside world. This mistrust is due to the fact that the topic in question revolves around secrecy. The latter is undoubtedly a key element needed to carry out intelligence work but, if jealously guarded by the respective national intelligence agencies, it can represent a source of danger to security itself. Indeed, the opening of the EU's internal borders and the globalisation of phenomena, including terrorism, make threats no longer local but supranational,, if not global. Islamist terrorism, through its hybrid and multidimensional, action has for several years been one of the clearest examples of this kind of threat. In the field of security, the last 20 years of European history can be represented by a long streak of bloodshed that starts with a symbolic event, namely the Islamist terrorist attack on the Madrid trains in 2004. In fact, this attack not only caused 193 deaths and over 2000 injuries, but also triggered a cascade of national anti-terrorist intelligence coordination in many European states (Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Ireland, Latvia, Spain and Poland) (Gijs de Vries, 2020). At the same time, the European Union has worked over the years to progressively integrate national intelligence apparatuses, with the aim of converging them towards an institution that would ensure their cooperation. As the essay by Mai'a. K. Davis Cross states, and as reported by Ahmet Ates and Anil Çaglar in the International Journal of Politics and Security (IJPS), the creation of intelligence cooperation, headed by a common governing institution, took the European Union twenty years of effort. Javier Solana, the then High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), prompted by both the attacks in New York and Madrid, pushed hard in 2004 to set up a European-level analysis centre to support EU government policies. A support that was not feasible at the time because SITCEN, forerunner of INTCEN, could not count on adequate open sources. Solana's efforts therefore undeniably and concretely set out the path that the EU is now taking in small steps. European intelligence is linked both to the

European External Action Service (EEAS), through the work of INTCEN, which answers to the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and to the Justice and Home Affairs Council (JHA), through the work carried out by EUROPOL. As things stand today,there are two types of governance: a vertical one, between national and European levels, and a horizontal one between the member states themselves (Cross, 2013). While the vertical level is composed of EU institutional bodies i.e. EUROPOL, INTCEN, the horizontal level is composed of the Club de Berne, the CTG i.e. the Counter Terrorism Group and finally the PWGT, the Police Working Group on Terrorism (Cross, 2013). The role of INTCEN and EUROPOL aims both to facilitate and improve the level of intelligence cooperation between member states and to produce information, often through report writing, about threats to European security. Increasing intelligence cooperation and the awareness of fighting a common risk has gradually led to the creation of increasingly large open-sources that have enabled the two EU intelligence agencies to provide an increasingly clear threat picture. The Member States, through the appointment of 70 members of INTCEN and 252 of EUROPOL, created the epistemic communities (Ates, Çaglar, 2021). According to Ates and Caglar and Stephen Lander, former chairman of the United Kingdom's Serious Organised Crime Agency and former Director General of the British Security Service, 'These three hundred and twenty-two intelligence personnel, from different backgrounds and nationalities, have expertise authority and cultivate personal relationships under the institutional arrangement, built an epistemic intelligence community, and amplified intelligence cooperation both conceptually and operationally' (Lander, 2004). Epistemic communities would thus be crucial due to their central role in both intelligence cooperation and data analysis. It is they who produce reports (such as the EUROPOL report used in this study in chapter one) on both religious, political and organised crime terrorism. The value of the reports is not only informative, in fact, the ability to provide a detailed report, the result of national intelligence data collection activities via open-source, allows these intelligence offices, and the EU itself, to be able to influence and decide on the security agenda. According to Ates and Caglar, the scope and effectiveness of the action of these epistemic communities has revolutionised the concept of trust between national intelligence agencies. Indeed, as written at the beginning of this section, mistrust among intelligence is a widespread factor, but the cooperative activity carried out by these communities would have collaborated in

overcoming mistrust in intelligence cooperation (Ates, Çaglar, 2021). With reference to INTCEN, researchers from the renowned think tank CEPS, disagree with what has just been stated. According to them, in fact, both INTCEN and EUMS.INT (military intelligence) fail to realise their full potential because of the lack of communication security, due, according to CEPS, to a dysfunctionality inherited from the Commission and the Council (CEPS, 2021). The researchers explain that interoperability of the encrypted systems of the two bodies just mentioned, and thus also of EEAS, on which INCEN and EUMS.INT depend, would be poor (CEPS, 2021). This inefficiency, as is often the case with European agencies, could be the cause of a low level of trust in the EU on the part of the Member States. In order to make up for these shortcomings, researchers believe that major investments and two-way exchanges involving both European and national intelligence experts are necessary (CEPS, 2021). As Fabio Vanorio, Ministerial Counselor at Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale (Italy), states in an article written in Start Magazine about European intelligence, the principles that are used in reference to INTCEN's activity are the need-to-know and the appropriate security clearance. The first of these principles, as stated by Matteo Pugliese, ISPI Associate Research Fellow at the "Centre on Radicalization and International Terrorism" and former OSCE Chairperson as a Special Representative on the Youth and Security agenda", in his article on ants.net, is a practice that emphasises the desire to curb the sharing of intelligence data as much as possible by reducing the exchange to what is strictly necessary and finally including the third-party rule "whereby information provided to a friendly Service cannot be disseminated to third parties without the consent of the source" (Matteo Pugliese, 2015). INTCEN's activity, therefore, relies on what states choose to make available, also because this intelligence agency cannot retrieve information in an alternative manner, as it is not authorised to employ field agents undercover and clandestine Human Intelligence (HUMINT) activities (Vanorio, 2018). Thus, what INTCEN can do is to gather as much information as possible from member states and make it available to other states. The uniqueness of the INTCEN would therefore lie in this special power that allows it to create a connection between national intelligence services that would otherwise not be possible. In fact, when analysing the composition scheme of the European intelligence architecture, the role played by the INCEN cannot be considered irrelevant. This agency enjoys a direct relationship with

another agency, SATCEN, i.e. the EU intelligence office in charge of supporting through the provision of satellite data the action of CFSP, CSDP, Member States, NATO, OSCE and above all EEAS, hence INTCEN (The Council of European Union, 2014). An example of a step forward in terms of increased interoperability in counter-terrorism actions, however, was in 2015 and concerned EUROPOL. On November 30th of that year, shortly after the wake of the attacks in the French capital, an agreement was made between the European Parliament and the European Council that placed EUROPOL in an crucial security position. The agreement provides for a fully-equipped EUROPOL for operations in cross-border territories and against terrorist threats including foreign fighters; the creation of specialised units within the European Police Office to ensure effectiveness and speed of response to serious threats; the creation of a direct relationship between EUROPOL and major private companies in the area of social media, which under the agreement made will have to take action at EUROPOL's request in order to remove content or web pages operated or linked to ISIS; that the Member States provide increasingly detailed intelligence data to EUROPOL; that EUROPOL then reports annually to the Parliament, the Council, the Commission and the parliaments of the Member States (European Parliament, 2015). In any case, according to Article 4(2) TEU, security in the European sphere is still conceived as 'national'; therefore, the responsibility belongs to the member states of the European Union, which, in line with Article 73 TFEU, are responsible for creating the conditions to ensure and improve cooperation between national intelligence (Voronova Sofja, Bakowski Piotr, European Parliamentary research service, 2022). Even the aforementioned EPRS think tank notes a lack of willingness of national intelligence to operate through the use of European agencies, in fact, what happens is that they often seek informal collaborations in preference to the Club de Berne (Voronova, Bakowski, EPRS, 2022). The Club de Berne, consists of a forum where the heads of intelligence of EU member states, with the addition of those of Switzerland, Norway and the UK, come together to cooperate in the field of security. The Club is an example of how its mission has specialised over the years precisely because of Islamist terrorism. After the events of 11 September 2001, it gave birth to the Counter Terrorism Group, which stands at the centre of relations between the 30 Schengen countries in the field of counter-terrorism. The institutional composition on terrorism, however, does not end there: as reported in the work of Ahmet Ates and Anil Çaglar on the IJPS, we find

additional intelligence offices such as the Terrorism Working Group (TWG) and the Working Party on Terrorism (COTER), which, made up of representatives of the member states, carry out cooperation on counter-terrorism (Ates, Caglar 2021). The European Union, therefore, both for reasons related to the choices of national intelligence and those obliged by the treaties, cannot currently express a self-sufficient supranational intelligence. In fact, within the Single Intelligence Analysis Capacity (SIAC), i.e. the body that encompasses the three European intelligence units, SATCEN, INTCEN and EUMS INT, only the first of these is capable of producing intelligence data autonomously. In the aftermath of the Lisbon Treaty, the expectations of the then researcher of the Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation and current director of the International Centre for Counter Terrorism, Thomas Renard, regarding cooperative intelligence progress were already moderate. In fact, Renard stated that although the Lisbon Treaty was significantly positive in terms of internal and external EU reforms, it could not be described as a revolution. In fact, the EU, especially in the field of security, remains supportive and definitely not yet central, as both intelligence and military security is still entrusted to the member states (Thomas Renard, 2012). In 2012, ISIS had yet to appear in Europe and terrorism was less of a threat than in the early 2000s. However, ten years on, and with a long trail of attacks and serious intelligence failures such as those that occurred in Belgium during the Brussels attacks, the road to intelligence cooperation and unification still looks perilous.

### 2.1.1. Space and cyberspace.

In the highly technological counter-terror sphere, the EU relies on two key players: EU SATCEN, i.e. the European Union Satellite Centre based at the Torrejon air base in Spain, and ENISA, the European cybersecurity agency.

#### 2.1.1.1. Space Intelligence: SATCEN, Copernicus and Galileo.

The history of space intelligence in Europe, as Jean-Pierre Darnis, Xavier Pasco and Paul Wohrer state, emerged during the conflicts in the Balkan area in the 1990s. The realisation that space technology could be of fundamental importance for security activity arose from the strong demonstration given by the US military on the battlefield (Darnis, Pasco, Wohrer, 2020). At that point, as referenced by the study by the three researchers for the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Italy, France, Germany and Spain laid down a path aimed at developing space technology to support their own military actions, above all those of France in the Sahel (Serval, Epervier and Barkhane). SATCEN, as mentioned above, is of crucial importance to the European Union. This important role is due to two main reasons: the first is that this agency autonomously produces intelligence services and data (SIGINT), thus not limiting itself to the analysis of those coming from the member states' intelligence, and the second is that this autonomy is also reflected in the agency's operational activity. SATCEN's area of action is space, specifically Space Surveillance and Tracking (SST). Under the guidance of the High Representative and the supervision of the Member States, this agency, since 2002, the year of its foundation, has constantly pursued the improvement of its structure in order to maintain the autonomy that has always distinguished it within the European institutional landscape (Sorin Ducaru, 2021). SATCEN is a form of intelligence activity since, through the control of space and the satellite images it captures, it carries out operations in support of both EEAS and NATO. As stated in the SATCEN report of 2020 by the agency's number one, Sorin Ducaru, SATCEN's activity has proved indispensable for military actions, evacuation, and monitoring of weapons of mass destruction, but also for purposes related to environmental action and humanitarian aid (Ducaru, 2020). Not only that, in the field of security, SATCEN represents a multi-purpose and very useful element given the wide area of action now covered by threats, especially terrorism and organised crime. In fact, the provision of geospatial intelligence data enables SATCEN to assume a central and supportive role in EU decision-making. In this regard, it can provide images documenting the presence of terrorist cells, training camps and illicit activities (SATCEN, 2022). Since 6 October 2016, SATCEN has used the EU's earth observation programme, Copernicus, to carry out its activities. This programme is able to produce both satellite observation-based data, as mentioned above, and non-space data referred to as 'in situ' (Copernicus, 2022). The use of its intelligence products is useful for safeguarding both border areas,

by providing FRONTEX and other national authorities with 'Copernicus Border Surveillance Services', and the European economy. For instance, maritime piracy attempts are not uncommon, especially in the Horn of Africa or the Gulf of Guinea. In 2021, the IMB's Piracy Reporting Centre recorded more than 130 piracy incidents between successful attacks and hijacking attempts (Italy, International Chamber of Commerce, 2022). Specifically, the 'Copernicus Border Surveillance' acts for 'Coastal Monitoring; Pre-frontier Monitoring; Reference Mapping; Surveillance of maritime Area of Interest (AoI); Vessel Detection Service; Vessel Tracking and Reporting Service; Vessel Anomaly Detection Service; Environmental information; Multi-sensor monitoring; Large Area Pre-frontier Monitoring; Earth Observation (EO) Recon; Cross border crime surveillance' (European Commission, 2022). The 'in situ' data, mentioned above, is not the result of satellite images, but of signals from sensors positioned on strategic assets, such as administrative borders, diplomatic buildings, boats, refugee camps, aircraft and relevant terrestrial areas to report atmospheric parameters and geological anomalies (InSitu Copernicus, 2022). According to data collected by the IAI and Foundation pour la Recherche Strategique, the Copernicus action has enabled the European Union to secure benefits of around 13.5 billion euros in a period of less than ten years (Darnis, Pasco, Wohrer, 2020). The study by these three researchers, titled 'Space and the Future of Europe as a Global Actor: EO as a Key Security Aspect', focuses on the importance of EO, i.e. Earth Observatories, for the protection of the EU's strategic assets. However, the study further points out that, due to some shortcomings in data storage and analysis by European intelligence agencies, Copernicus is mostly used by non-European industries (Darnis, Pasco, Wohrer, 2020). Another EO programme used by the EU was also created within the EEAS in 2016. The programme in question is Galileo (GNSS - Global Navigation Satellite System), a protection system that uses satellite navigation technology for activities that allow intelligence to collect data on the positioning of items of interest ranging from mobile phones to military transport vehicles. Through the presence of 30 satellites in orbit, this protection system represents a security tool for Europe, both military and especially civil. Its importance is underlined in the study by the three IAI researchers as follows: 'To a certain extent, the Galileo case illustrates one of the strongest cases demonstrating a consolidated process for a genuine EU foreign policy action' (Darnis, Pasco, Wohrer, 2020). Indeed, the three researchers

explain how this programme was able to generate mistrust in the United States, once the undisputed leader in this technological field (Darnis, Pasco, Wohrer, 2020). In fact, the development of high satellite technology allows the European Union to act independently and autonomously in the field of geo-technology. To date, 7% of the economy requires technological support of this kind and the ability of the European Union to be able to equip itself with it, is a guarantee of sovereignty (European Commission, 2022) and thus an increase in internal cooperation of the member states. Furthermore, GNSS in the military field is also proving to be of crucial importance in armed conflicts. Indeed, its technology allows for an improvement in military strategies in terms of both the positioning of field forces and the use of high-precision munitions (Jérémie Ayadi, 2019). Daniel Fiott, Security and Defence Editor at the EU Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), in his paper for the Vrije Universiteit Brussels, entitled 'How can space support the EU's Strategic Compass?', states that through the Strategic Compass, the new EU Space Programme (EUSP) worth EUR 13.2 billion, will be activated (Daniel Fiott, 2021). This expenditure, through the development and improvement of new satellite technologies, linked to both Galileo and Copernicus, will guarantee a high level of defence and security of the EU and its related strategic assets (Daniel Fiott, 2021).

#### 2.1.1.2. Cyber attacks and law enforcement.

As emerged in chapter one, cyberspace has played a key role in the rise of ISIS and the proliferation of its messages. This kind of threat has made its way into the criminal landscape as technology has spread. Often, however, technological progress has not gone hand in hand with either regulatory policies or the creation of protective tools to combat it. This security gap has thus allowed a phenomenon that is apparently not harmful to human life to turn into a lethal weapon. Through effective propaganda, in fact, cyberspace, together with the role played by some imams in Europe, is to be considered among the major sources of radicalisation. The use of the cyber platform, however, has not only been limited to the proliferation of distorted religious messages, but also to demonstrate its extreme ferocity to the world. As reported by Shashi Jayakumar in his study for the ICCT entitled 'Cyber Attacks by Terrorists and other Malevolent Actors:

Prevention and Preparedness', before Isis, Al Qaeda had already set itself the goal of penetrating Western computer and digital infrastructures, websites, and airlines, because they were not yet effectively controlled. This evidence would be confirmed by Osama Bin Laden's interview with Ausaf in which the Pakistani leader stated "hundreds of Muslim scientists were with him and who would use their knowledge in chemistry, biology and (sic) ranging from computers to electronics against the infidels" (Shashi Jayakumar, 2020). The cyber-propaganda of Isis suffered a severe blow in both October 2018 and November 2019. As documented in the study titled "How telegram distruption impacts jihadist platform migration." on "Centre for research and evidence on security threats" the 2019 law enforcement action conducted by EUROPOL, managed to intercept 7.8 million posts scattered across 1911 channels, provoking a jihadist reaction that led to the creation of 105 additional channels, but which would be taken down within 14 days (Amarnath Amarasingam, Shiraz Maher, Charlie Winter, 2021). The same study later highlights how the 2019 action was carried out in collaboration, taking into account the norms of member state authority and thus emphasising how once again the threat in question represented a need for a collective law enforcement response. The 2015 agreement between the European Parliament and the European Council, providing EUROPOL with the authority to interact directly with private digital companies to have terrorist pages and content removed, is fully part of the EU's cybersecurity strategy. This agreement, As Annegret Bendiek and Eva Pander Maat point out in their article in "German Institute for International and Security Affairs" entitled "The EU's Regulatory Approach to Cybersecurity", was followed by another one in 2018 in which the Commission called for a proposal for an online regulation still regarding the dissemination of terrorist material. This "proposal would establish the responsibility of internet platforms to remove terrorist content within one hour and establish a positive obligation to detect the content and prevent its reappearance" (Annegret Bendiek, Eva Pander Maat, 2019). Regulation (EU) 2019/881 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 17 April 2019 is also relevant in this context. The relevance of this regulation, which is designed to create an area of cybersecurity and trust within the EU landscape, is represented by two main reasons: the first is the reference to the centrality of the European cybersecurity body, i.e. ENISA; the second is identified in the EU's desire to ensure security systems 'for ICT products, services and processes in the Union, as well as to

avoid fragmentation of the internal market with regard to cybersecurity certification systems in the Union' (European Parliament, Council of the European Union 2019). In Article 1 of the regulation, the role of ENISA emerges as a key reference point in the field and how its work aims to become a vehicle for cyber-cooperation, in expertise and legislation, between the member states in order to reduce national fragmentation in the EU. The need to strengthen the role of ENISA, an agency created in 2004, as it emerges from the regulation, is based on the presence of cross-border threats that indiscriminately attack European security using not only military but also, and increasingly, high-tech means (European Parliament, Council of the European Union 2019). In fact, the EU's desire to protect itself against a threat that indiscriminately affects European states is aimed at the centralisation of competences in full line with the European integration project. The objectives also include cyber resistance and resilience, law enforcement capabilities, cyber skills, transparency on procedures, cyber literacy and a common, certified idea of cybersecurity at European level (European Parliament, Council of the European Union 2019). In 2020, with the accelerated digitisation due to Covid-19, the European Union became even more aware of the increasing vulnerability to which it was exposing itself. With this in mind, it launched the New Cybersecurity Strategy (EUCSS) through a programme aimed at protecting this security sector. With good reason, Oliver Noyana reports in his article for the European Army Interoperability Centre on the statement made by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, in which she states 'cyber security and digitalisation are two sides of the same coin. This is why cyber security is a top priority' (European Commission, 2019). As the EUCSS shows, there are basically two fields of action. The first of these, with the aim of improving technological sovereignty, institutional leadership and cyber resilience, will be pursued through the use of two directives: NIS2 and the ERC. While NIS2 aims at reaffirming the need to protect strategic assets such as ministries, laboratories and hospitals, the CER (Critical Entities Resilience Directive) concerns precisely the resilience of these assets (European Commission, 2020). Still within this dimension, we also find the Commission's intention to establish the 'European Cyber Shield' with the aim of increasing cooperation between the parties in view of greater efficiency in combating the threat (European Commission, 2020). The second field of action instead introduces the Joint Cyber Unit (JCU), i.e. the new working group with operational capabilities in the field of cyber countermeasures.

This operational unit will have both the task of countering and preventing cyber-attacks on European facilities and to act as a central pivot for the cybersecurity units for the member states through the creation of protocols aiming at defensive collaboration (European Commission, 2020). Specifically, through the production of both NIS2-based reports and strategies to counter cyber attacks on European countries, as stated on cyberwatching.eu, the JCU will also act as a coordinator between: "ENISA, the Computer Emergency Response Team for the EU institutions, bodies and agencies (CERT-EU) Europol's European Cybercrime Centre (EC3) National Computer Security IncidentResponse Teams (CSIRTs) EU Cyber Crisis Liaison Organisation Network (CyCLONe) EEAS, EDA" (cyberwatching.eu, 2022). A final point worth mentioning here is the 'Cyber Diplomacy Toolbox'. As Oliver Noyana reports, this toolbox is the result of the need to develop a common, international diplomatic solution to malicious cyber activities in the European bloc (Ivan Paul, 2019). The EUISS, Noyana continues, states that this instrument is aimed at the creation of common cyber sanctions aimed precisely at those who attack internal cyber security, and in this sense the Commission would be willing to move towards sanction regimes applicable by qualified majority voting (European Commission 2020)

## 2.2 Policy Time Line. The threat is global and the EU agenda is a tightening funnel towards integration.

This section focuses on providing an overview of the main steps concerning EU security policies and institutions, and the analysis of the official documents of the Council of the European Union, European Commission and European Parliament.

### 2.2.1. 2005 - EU Counter Terrorism Strategy.

Created after the Islamist terrorist attacks in New York and Madrid, this is the first EU Counter Terrorism Policy document. From the analysis of its contents, it immediately

emerges that the EU is aware that terrorism is now a global threat and that this is growing in step with the level of internal openness and external interdependence of the European bloc. The process underway, as the document indicates, is amplified by the free movement not only of people and goods, but also of technologies, which, as the analysis in the first chapter of this work shows, have assumed a central role in propaganda, recruitment and action. The four pillars of the document are: the prevention of terrorism, the causes of radicalisation and recruitment; the protection of citizens, infrastructure and borders; pursuing terrorists within borders and beyond them to bring them to justice; and finally being ready to offer solidarity to victims of attacks. Through these objectives, the EU aspires to be at the forefront of the global fight against terrorism (The Council of European Union, 2005). The document emphasises the importance of external border protection through FRONTEX and, above all, of implementing the technological response to cyber-challenges that are putting internal security at great risk. It explores the of collecting biometric data, improving the collection and exchange of data between intelligence concerning travellers. The issue of securing both internal and external flows becomes a central pillar of counter-terrorism action. INTCEN is expected to increase its decision-making capacity in terms of the counter-terrorism agenda through improved data collection (The Council of European Union, 2005).

### 2.2.2. 2009 - Lisbon Treaty.

As showsn in the following section, the Lisbon Treaty still represents the most important step the European Union has taken in terms of security. The scope of this treaty is crucial, as it invests several branches of the security aspect without leaving aside the drive towards integration in institutional and regulatory matters. Thomas Renard said in his policy brief on the Center on Global Counterterrorism Cooperation "in the realm of counterterrorism, the Lisbon Treaty had a much bigger impact on the internal dimension compared to the external one" (Renard, 2012). In fact, the objective of the Treaty is precisely to give an improved boost to the realisation of a European security area through effective and multi-sectoral changes (Renard, 2012). There have been substantial changes to both the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the Common Security and Defence

Policy (CSDP). As Croatian Ambassador Josip Buljević states in his professional paper European Security Structures and Institutions after the Lisbon Treaty, “based on the results achieved so far, member states of the European Union have expressed their wish to take more responsibility in protecting the security of Europe and the whole world, through civilian, police-led or combined action” (Buljević, 2011). In fact, the treaty gave birth to real institutions that are now decisive for both the CFSP and CSDP, amongst them, the European External Action Service (EEAS), The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (HR/VP) and the President of the European Council. As stated in the document 'CFSP and CSDP after the Lisbon Treaty' drafted by the Italian Parliament, the EEAS, which according to Buljević has been placed at the centre of European intelligence activity, works in close cooperation with the member states' diplomacies. In fact, this body, which is largely composed of diplomats from the member states, is to be considered autonomous and distinct from the Commission. It relates directly and from a subordinate position with the HR/VP and contains within it, both the European Defence Agency (EDA) and INTCEN. The EDA has three main objectives: to facilitate and improve European defence through military cooperation between the member states; to give improved input to military research and technology; to represent the military institution for the policies pursued by the EU (EDA, 2017). The HR/VP, on the other hand, is basically comparable to a foreign minister with the authority to represent the EU. For the latter reason, he/she is in close contact with EEAS, INTCEN and EDA. As the document drafted by the Italian Parliament also states, his/her role also has a bridging function, in the sense that his/her activity is aimed at ensuring harmony in EU action. The Lisbon Treaty has also brought several innovations and proposals in the operational field. By paving the way for a common and unified defence, it has advanced the proposal, optional for member states wishing to join, to create a permanent defence structure; institutionalised a fund to finance EU military operations; enshrined the solidarity and aid clause in the event of terrorist attack and armed aggression. From the perspective of this study, the last two relevant points of the Lisbon Treaty concern the CSDP missions and the new voting mode introduced. Regarding the latter point, it is important to emphasise that the Treaty marked the transition from unanimity voting to the more 'communitarian' qualified majority voting (Thomas Renard, 2012). Concerning the Petersberg Missions, i.e. those aimed at humanitarian relief, peace-keeping, peace-

making and crisis management will now also be accompanied by counter-terrorism missions in third countries. This last point is very important since, the next chapter will be devoted to the Sahel from the perspective of branching out into the security aspect.

### 2.2.3. 2015 - European Agenda on Security, Prevention and Deradicalisation.

As can be seen from the date, this document came about due to the intensification of ISIS terrorist activity, which had never before struck so fiercely and indiscriminately in the Middle East, Europe and the Sahel. Awareness of the need to act cooperatively is reinforced and for the first time, the need of 'Combating cross-border crime and terrorism is a common European responsibility' (JeanClaude Juncker, 2015) and that 'member states have the front line responsibility for security, but can no longer succeed fully on their own' (European Commission, 2015). This agenda essentially continues what the previous one had set out to do, i.e. strive for ever more comprehensive integration and improved exchange of information on organised crime and terrorism. In this regard, it is indicated that The Schengen Information System (SIS), the most widely used tool for sharing information in missing persons and objects, has been improved since that year and can now be used 'to invalidate the travel documents of persons suspected of wanting to join terrorist groups outside the EU (European Commission, 2015). Particularly stressed here is the importance of the protection of fundamental rights, which should not be infringed upon but protected by intelligence and security policies. Emphasis is placed on the progress made in the democratisation of control over political and regulatory decisions introduced by the Lisbon Treaty, which will be discussed later. Member states are also urged to make greater use of the tools provided by the EU, most notably Prüm and the Secure Information Exchange Network Application (SIENA). While the former enables the assessment and comparison of sensible data such as DNA and fingerprints (and thus requires a regulatory adaptation of the Member States, already called for by the EU), the latter is a protocol of EUROPOL that therefore serves to make the exchange of data of the various national intelligence agencies within a common database fast and efficient

(European Commission, 2015). The document reports that it is the Commission's intention to progressively assume the power to dictate the agenda regarding risk assessment in order to make the management of terrorist phenomena unambiguous and not fragmented, to avoid an unnecessary and uncoordinated multiplication of efforts. Announcing an unprecedented amount of foreign fighters, and possible return of these to Europe after training, the commission in this paper also stresses the increasing role cyberspace is playing in the process of radicalisation and recruitment (European Commission, 2015). Therefore, both traditional terrorism and terrorism carried out via cyber platforms represent the main challenges for EU action from now on. In order to counter radicalisation at its roots, inclusion and education will be improved through the activation of ET 2020, while, in order to take a closer look at the origins and ways in which radicalisation manifests itself, Horizon 2020 will be activated by the Commission. Through the latter, EUROPRIS will take action in prisons to counter radicalisation and to improve deradicalisation with the support of the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), i.e. a working and research group consisting of several specialists in the field of prevention of radicalisation and deradicalisation. As stated on the European Commission's website, the group has 6000 participants, including police officers, teachers, youth workers, social workers and representatives of the Member States. The importance of the role played is underlined by the fact that the Commission from 2014 to 2020, through the Internal Security Fund - Police, a 4.2 billion fund also aimed at EUROPOL, fully funded the working group (European Commission, 2015). As proof also of the leading hypothesis of this thesis, i.e. that transnational threats drive towards, and necessitate, common and supranational law enforcement management, we can quote the Commission's message in reference to the RAN 'Preventing and countering violent extremism involves more than surveillance and security. The influencing efforts of terrorists and violent extremists do not stop at national borders; neither should our efforts to undermine the radicalisation and recruitment of future terrorists. The European Commission's Communication on Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism as well as the European Agenda on Security provide the policy framework for the EU's prevention policies' (European Commission, 2015).

### 2.2.4. 2015 - European Counter Terrorism Centre, an intelligence centre at the heart of EUROPOL.

Seven days after the Islamist attacks in the heart of Paris in November 2015, The Justice and Home Affairs Council (JHA) expressed a strong desire to establish the European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC) within EUROPOL. The power of the attacks carried out that day (six in just a few hours), stimulated the birth of this new working group, which aims to make the coordination and sharing of information regarding foreign terrorists, arms trafficking and terrorist financing even more effective (European Commission, The Justice and Home Affairs Council, 2015). As documented by CEPS researchers in the paper 'The EU and its Counter-Terrorism Policies after the Paris Attacks', The Justice and Home Affairs Council's plan envisages that the ECTC will be formed with the support of the member states, or rather with the secondment of counter-terrorism experts from the national intelligence apparatuses that can make operations aimed at identifying crucial data on terrorist attacks on European soil more efficient and faster. It is stated in the CEPS document, that in the conclusions of the JHA ruling, the Commission is invited 'to submit a new legislative proposal so that Europol can 'cross-check' Europol databases with SIS II' (Bigo, Carrera, Guild, Guittet, Jeandesboz, Mitsilegas, Ragazzi, Scherrer, 2015). The need for a European-level working group solely focused on terrorist activity is also underlined by the statements of an ECTC member appearing in the paper by Mihail Pâduraru, Claudia-Iohana Voicu, 'EUROPOL and INTCEN Security providers for the European Space' written for The 14th International Scientific Conference 'DEFENSE RESOURCES MANAGEMENT IN THE 21st CENTURY'. The official states that "We have to deal with a serious, well-funded, determined international terrorist organisation that is now active on the streets of Europe. It is reasonable to assume that there is a likelihood of new attacks. [...] We are dealing with a more significant and dangerous form of terrorism. I received a clear statement of intent from the Islamic State terrorist network, which wants to export brutal terrorism to Europe and on the international scene' (Pâduraru, Voicu, 2019). From the information that emerges on the official EUROPOL page, in order for the ECTC to develop the potential given to it by the European bodies, it needs four key elements: streamlined

information exchange and cooperation between member states; restrictive policies that do not allow terrorists to be able to make attempts to recruit or radicalise via social networks; and, finally, central strategic support capabilities (ECTC, EUROPOL, 2015). The same source also reveals the operational modalities in which the ECTC's activities are deployed, i.e. on-the-spot support of operational teams, intelligence activities to unearth funding for terrorist activity, provision of officers both in areas with high immigration risk for homeland security and CBRN-E expertise, and finally support activities to ENISA (ECTC, EUROPOL, 2015).

### 2.2.5. 2017 - Directive on Combating Terrorism.

On 15 March 2017, Directive 2017/541 is issued by the European Parliament and the European Council, replacing the previous Directive 671/JHA of 2005. The comprehensive directive reiterates that the cross-border nature of terrorism, the danger posed by foreign fighters, financing attempts and propaganda via cyber platforms, have caused a sharp increase in the level of both operational and regulatory cooperation between member states. By virtue of this, it also reports that the United Nations Security Council, precisely because of the magnitude of this threat, has asked member states that the crime of terrorism should no longer be judged according to national regulations but to international ones (United Nations Security Council - UNSC). In fact, in the same year as the directive, the European Council endeavoured to implement the Additional Protocol to the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism. This centralisation of law enforcement manoeuvres obviously led to the sharing of the definition of what should or should not be considered a terrorist act. The Directive, in this regard, given the activity carried out especially by ISIS on cyberspace, calls for computer activity that reflects a willingness to participate in terrorism to be included, by virtue of this, in the offences ascribable to that of terrorism (The Council of European Union, 2015). This requires strong cross-border cooperation involving not only the official bodies of the Union but also EUROPOL and Eurojust (Eurojust, 2015). In fact, the latter, through its access to information on terrorism prosecutions at European level, can act as a facilitator

and central actor for the improvement of regulatory cooperation and in addition has the capacity to develop strategies concerning returning foreign fighters (Eurojust, 2020). This happens through the direct relationship it enjoys with the Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) network, through which it is able to collect data, carry out analysis and provide input to the various European agencies active in the field of terrorism. In essence, its activity has a cohesive effect that greatly reduces the unevenness of prosecution (Eurojust, 2020). The Directive goes hand in hand with the normative need to create a clear and shared normativity that can serve as a concrete response to terrorist activity by outlining the essential traits that must be included in this category. The idea behind the directive is to conceive the sharing of definitions of terrorist offences as 'reference points for cooperation and exchange of information between national authorities' (European Parliament, The Council of European Union, 2017).

### 2.2.6. 2020 - EU Security Union Strategy.

"Europeans today face a security landscape in flux, impacted by evolving threats as well as other factors including climate change, demographic trends and political instability beyond our borders. Globalisation, free movement and the digital transformation continue to bring prosperity, make our lives easier, and spur innovation and growth. But alongside these benefits come inherent risks and costs. They can be manipulated by terrorism, organised crime, the drugs trade and human trafficking, all direct threats to citizens and our European way of life. Cyber-attacks and cybercrime continue to rise. Security threats are also becoming more complex: they feed on the ability to work cross-border and on inter-connectivity; they exploit the blurring of the boundaries between the physical and digital world; they exploit vulnerable groups, social and economic divergences" (European Commission, 2020). The European Commission that kicks off the new EU Security Union Strategy 2020-2025 reveals the complexity reached by the terrorist phenomenon, which is increasingly rooted in the technological, social and global processes of our time. Terrorism appears chameleon-like and a child of its time. Climate change, migratory flows, free movement and social unrest are elements that can and in

fact are exploited by terrorism to strengthen its presence on both a local and cross-border basis. Of course, the document emphasises the evidence that has emerged from Covid-19, which has put the interconnectedness that characterises our age under the magnifying glass. Insecurity and risk are multifaceted, affecting strategic assets, people and individual locations, but have a reflection on the entire system around them. Therefore, the EU's goal is to protect the security and rights of EU citizens everywhere in the EU but also acting outside the EU borders. In this regard, it is also important to consider the regulatory aspect that guarantees this protection. Particularly in the last two decades, the EU has been working on legal mechanisms to protect against terrorism, since, according to Title V of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), this is considered a serious crime. These legal instruments include: Directive 2017/541, which outlines the concept of terrorism and the offences to which it corresponds; Regulation 2019/1148, which lays down rules that aspire to prevent the misuse of chemicals, which could be used for the construction of bombs (European Parliament, The Council of European Union, 2019); The Directive of the European Parliament and the Council amending the previous Directive 19/477/EC concerning the acquisition and possession of weapons; The 6th Directive on AML/CFT (AMLD 6) of the Parliament and the Council against money laundering and terrorist financing in the EU, which serves as a liaison point for financial intelligence units; the functions performed by Eurojust, such as the Counter-Terrorism Register (CTR), which aims to analyse established links against terrorism suspects, in order to have greater coordination in the field of identifications (Eurojust, 2019; European Commission, 2021). To strengthen the security strategy and given the complex nature of terrorism, but also crime in general, the EU, through the 2016 Common Framework and the 2018 Joint Communication, defines the basis and countering for hybrid threats. The EU, as stated in the document, will implement the strategy, providing tools and countermeasures through the creation of a platform at the disposal of the member states, which will however be directly responsible for counteraction at the operational level (European Commission, 2020). In spite of the will and trajectory of European integration, there are still structural features that prevent the EU from being able to act directly and for which it must necessarily entrust action to the nation states. The still incomplete integration inevitably leaves room for substantial national differences, often also in matters of strategic assets, so that the direct protection of these cannot yet be transferred

to a supranational level. The paper anticipates the amendment to the 2016 EU Playbook 79, i.e. the Protocol, on countering hybrid threats, which the EU would like to strengthen (European Commission, 2020).

# Chapter III

## Externalisation of borders and the jihadist threat. Does the future of European intelligence and security pass through the Sahel? Why is joint action in Sub-Saharan Africa important?

This chapter will analyse the link between European security and the crisis in the Sahel, i.e. the large slice of sub-Saharan African territory that begins on the shores of the Atlantic Ocean and ends in the Horn of Africa. Globalisation, as we know, amplifies the scope of phenomena on a global scale, transcending national and continental borders. The crisis in the Sahel can be presented in its own right as one of those phenomena that are far from being considered local. The destiny of the Sahel and Europe are linked insofar as at stake are both geopolitical interests, especially after Russia's recent 'entry' into Mali, and large-scale social phenomena such as terrorism, climate crises, the drying-up of Lake Chad, human trafficking and a strong migratory flow. The complexity of the challenge, once again, calls for a cooperative security effort as the Sahelian crisis represents a far from negligible threat to the fate of European security.

## 4.1. A look at the Sahel crisis.

The crisis in the Sahel has not stopped deteriorating since 2012, marking an overall worsening in terms of both terrorist and political violence. This crisis originated in northern Mali and from a local phenomenon has spread like wildfire to Burkina Faso, Niger, Nigeria and Chad. One of the main sources of insecurity stems from Salafist militant groups that in many cases replace states in the administration of territories by

offering basic goods and services. Jihadist groups rely solely on internal conflict dynamics within the economy on which these regions are based: tribes (particularly the Peul), pastoralism and ethnicity. Thus, this is a crisis that sinks into dysfunctional governance dynamics on which other factors intervene that have worsened the dynamics, such as the crisis in Libya. The fall of Gheddafi deprived the region of an element of geopolitical stabilisation through investment policies towards the area (ISPI, 2022). In fact, after the fall of Gheddafi, the return of some Tuareg groups to the Malian territories, which in their attempt to create an independent state, Azawad, triggered the crisis. Not only the Tuareg, but also several Salafi jihadist groups claim the will to create an Islamic state in the heart of Islam, above all Boko Haram, which translated means 'Western education is forbidden'. This terrorist group, among the most ruthless on the planet, as stated by Mukhtar Bello in his work entitled 'The Terror Campaign of Boko Haram: Its Transformation and Challenges to Nigeria's Security', has claimed more than 30,000 lives and displaced 3 million people from north-east Nigeria who now live in refugee camps (Mukhtar Bello, 2021). In fact, Boko Haram has managed to create in the Borno region, i.e. the slice of land in the north-east of Nigeria that borders the shores of Lake Chad, an unrecognised proto-state by the name of ISWAP. Chad, on the one hand, experiences even more directly the tragedy of the drying up of its reservoir, on the other hand, according to statistics of The Global Economy (TGE), it suffers from one of the highest average threat rates in the world, i.e. 9.35 out of 10,00 and over 478,000 refugees (The Global Economy, 2021). Still according to TGE estimates, the eleven Sahelian states (Somalia, Sudan, Guinea, Chad, Nigeria Mali Niger Burkina Faso Cameroon Eritrea Mauritania) have an average Fragile state index from 2007 to 2021 that places them among the top thirty in the world, automatically making the entire region among the most unstable in the world (The Global Economy, 2021). In fact, regime upheavals are by no means uncommon here. A series of coups d'état in the region has fostered destabilisation: in Mali in 2021, in Burkina Faso in 2022, in Chad in 2016, in Guinea in 2021, in Sudan in 2021. To date, one of the most important factors in the regional crisis is undoubtedly the crisis of the Malian government, with the related coup d'état, where in a historic turnaround the local government has freed itself from the support of the French government to enter into agreements with Russian military apparatuses for the security of the area. Wagner's presence is now confirmed and it is thought that there was genuine

Moscow involvement behind the manoeuvres that led to the Malian regime change (ISPI, 2022). Discontent with France had already been in the air for several years, in fact there were now active in the area groups such as the 'Group de Patriot' that were pushing for Russian support at the expense of French support (ISPI, 2022). Moreover, between 2017 and 2018, Mali and Burkina Faso had concluded the purchase of Russian military armaments that in fact concealed a Russian political-economic-military interest in the area. Which concerned with the conclusion of energy agreements related to the exploitation of mining potential (ISPI, 2022). Still in Mali, and in general in the Sahel, an event has been taking place for two years now that partly mirrors what is happening in Afghanistan today: namely the end of peaceful coexistence between the jihadist cells of ISIS and Al Qaeda (such as Al Shabaab, Boko Haram, AQIM, Ansar al-Din, Katibat Macina and al-Murabitun). This multiplies the risk factors in the area followed by a relative push of the population to abandon those lands. The EUROPOL report of 2021 also states that the ISIS spokesperson has strongly urged Muslims in Burkina Faso, Chad, Congo, Kenya, Mali and Nigeria to join ISIS (EUROPOL 2021). As Marc Helbling and Daniel Meierrieks state in the British Journal of Political Science of Cambridge University Press, although there is no direct relationship between terrorism and migration, the latter is to be considered, on a large scale, a 'Trojan horse of terrorism' (Helbling, Meierrieks, 2020). In addition, it is again stated in the paper, but also demonstrated by the biographical analysis carried out in this paper, that certain socio-economic conditions, and certain cultural policies, can lead to the radicalisation of migrants, especially second-generation migrants, into the ranks of terrorist movements. The exploitation of migration as a Trojan horse to reach Europe or as a financing possibility for terrorist movements is of paramount importance for European security. Regarding the Sahel, the country of greatest concern in terms of migration flows is Niger. The state of Niger is in fact a landing area in the middle between Sahelian countries, those of the Gulf of Guinea and Libya. It is no coincidence that, since 2018, there has been a rise in the level of concern in Europe related to the increased perception of insecurity linked to the migration crisis. First of all, people started talking about the 'perfect storm', i.e. the conjunction of migration and terrorism, and it is precisely this factor that has attracted interest in European countries intervening with cooperation and development aid. As Julien Brachet states in his article for ISPI entitled 'The Sahel, Europe's "Frontier Zone" for African

Migrants', precisely because of its geographical location, Niger has been supported to become an active partner for the external border protection project (Brachet, 2021). Brachet further states that migration was not considered a problem in Niger at all until the European Union decided to "put pressure on Niger's government" to "break the business model of (people) smugglers", especially in the northern part of the country, where the town of Agadez is considered by European experts to be a continental hub for irregular migrants on their way to Libya and then Europe via the central Mediterranean route" (Brachet, 2021). Precisely because of the need to fight, the EU has activated two protocols for the collaboration and support of local authorities to improve migration policies in order to protect legal migration and at the same time counter the presence of criminal activities in this area, these programmes are the EUCAP Sahel Niger and the New Migration Partnership Framework (Brachet, 2021).

## 4.2. Drugs and gold. Financing of terrorist activity and criminal organisations.

The Sahel region is characterised not so much by being an area of large-scale production and trafficking of cocaine. Drug flows have been active for decades through direct links with criminal organisations active in Bolivia, Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Brazil. Guinea-Bissau, for example, was called Africa's first narco-state ten years ago. This name derives not only from the quantity of drugs imported from Latin American countries, but above all from the government protection of illicit activities related to this traffic. In this regard, it is important to recall the DEA's arrest of former navy chief José Américo Bubo Na Tchuto. As Lorraine Mallinder states in Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime “for Latin American drug lords seeking alternative routes to the heavily policed waters around Spain and Morocco, lawless Guinea-Bissau had it all: porous borders, chronically unstable politics, weak institutions and easily bribable officials, like Na Tchuto - and many other public servants” (Mallinder, 2018). The United States has supported the fight against drugs in the western Sahel with political, intelligence and military support. Not only that, the DEA as mentioned above has

operated on the ground through arrests, interceptions and confiscations. The peak of this fight took place between 2006 and 2008, only to be revived in 2018, the year in which the fight against drug trafficking with significant investments by Western countries was back on the agenda. However, to date, interceptions in the Sahel remain severely low for cocaine, while those for smuggling ashish and Tramadol, a drug with psychoactive effects that has made a strong foothold in local consumption and sales, due to its very low prices and the strong addictive effect it creates, are growing (ISPI, 2022). Just in Chad, as The Guardian states "Chadian army officers and intelligence officials were sentenced on Friday to up to 10 years in prison for drug trafficking, the state prosecutor and their lawyer told AFP. In January, a vehicle carrying 246 cartons of the opiate painkiller Tramadol, with an estimated value of 12.3 billion CFA francs (18.8 million euros, $21 million), was seized on its way to neighbouring Libya, a judicial source said. An army general, two colonels and a head of the National Security Agency were among 10 people sentenced in the capital N'Djamena... Chad's 1,000-kilometre (620-mile) border with Libya is a lawless zone where criminal gangs, illegal gold miners and rebels operate, much of it beyond the control of the security forces" (The Guardian, 2020). We are therefore talking about a market that transversally involves organised crime, state intelligence and military apparatuses. Regarding the issue of gold, in the Sahel we find two types of extraction: that relating to concessions to private companies, aimed at a small to medium-scale industry where Canadian and Russian companies are particularly active, and that relating to artisanal enterprises that escape state control. Mali, with 63 tonnes per year (2021) and Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali with 150 tonnes per year (2021) are among the largest producers in Africa (ISPI, 2022). The issue of gold is important for security purposes because this, processed and traded in such quantities, can be used both for financing terrorism and for that of political or paramilitary movements aspiring to carry out a coup d'état. Not only that, this resource feeds corrupt phenomena especially in Niger where, for example, some Tuareg entrepreneurs with far from clear relations with organised crime, supported Niger's ruling party in the last elections and managed to obtain a stash for the gold market operated by their activities.

## 4.3 European presence in the Sahel. Is division synonymous with weakness and ineffectiveness?

The European presence in the Sahel can be summed up essentially in the role played by France. Unlike Great Britain, in the post-colonial era, France, albeit with ups and downs, has never severed its relations with its former colonies. In fact, France's foreign policy approach towards those lands is aimed at securing control and maintaining political-economic relations (ISPI, 2022). When it became clear towards the end of the 1950s that the countries were about to ask for independence, the French authorities, aware of the process underway, tried to adapt to this in the least traumatic way possible by aiming to recognise African demands, but keeping a certain level of control over them. The aim was to create privileged access routes to resources, which France had secured and could no longer give up. In order to do this, France decided to guide the stages of independence through a process that was tightly woven into the framework law 'Loi Defferre 1956'. It is here that the paradigm of Françafrique (Félix Houphouët-Boigny, 1955) opens up, i.e. a process of quasi-independence based on patrimonial logic and corruption to secure economic interests for France and by extension for the African states themselves. France decided to embark on this path because sub-Saharan Africa was necessary to guarantee both the continuity of a resource supply system according to a monopolistic model but also because of the need for outlet markets, given the strong demographic rise of these lands (ISPI, 2022). By virtue of this, France immediately secured defence agreements that gave it the right to maintain military bases on African soil. Also during this period, the doctrine of 'Foccartism' emerged, i.e. a system of relations between the Elysée Palace and the leaders of sub-Saharan Africa, devised by the French diplomat and businessman Jacques Foccart, which was based on a combination of public and private relations, affairs of state and family relations. A system that was carried on by death and that united several legislatures over the decades. The first signs of a break in these Franco-African relations occurred during the first half of the 1990s, with the death of Houmphouet Boigny, one of the pillars of that system of political-economic and securitarian subordination of African states to France. A serious step backwards occurred in Rwanda during the period of the genocide, when France was accused of supporting the Huti regime through military

supplies and training programmes for army units. A further step backwards, first introduced by Mitterrand with the 'La Baule' speech, and then continued by the European Union, is the presence of conditions related to aid and the maintenance of relations and political support (ISPI, 2022). These conditions, if on the one hand they press for the advancement of a democratisation project, on the other hand, clash with the presence of other international actors that on their side do not seem particularly interested: above all China, Turkey and Russia. The latter, through the action of the Wagner Group, is now fully present in the race to stabilise Mali. The crisis in Mali began in 2012 and is plagued with extreme instability due to the coexistence in the territory of rebel military formations, Tuareg groups claiming the independence of Azawad, and jihadist groups from Al Qaeda and Isis calling for the formation of an Islamic state. The first French operation in Mali was Serval, with the objective of countering the advance of jihadist groups towards the centre of Mali, reconquering the northern territories and eradicating the presence of terrorists in Azawad. The latter objective, ISPI confirms, is still unfulfilled today as many guerrillas are still at the front while others have camouflaged themselves in the population and operate suicide attacks. Since 2014, Operation Barkhane has been launched, a regional operation this time and not just limited to Mali. France deployed 3500 soldiers to limit the supply flows of jihadist groups and their trafficking and to effectively control the borders. The result was a shift of these jihadist groups from northern Mali to the central territories of the Sahel, land areas that were in fact already facing huge crises, from humanitarian to climate to the presence of several terrorist groups linked to IS and Al Qaeda. The latest military operation in the Sahel follows a multipolar approach. In fact, this time it is not only France that acts in sub-Saharan territory but also other EU states (ISPI, 2022). Tabuka introduces several European task forces: Germany has committed itself with political and governance support while Sweden, the Czech Republic and Italy have also contributed by sending troops to the front. In fact, as ISPI sources confirm, France has been able to engage European allies thanks to the EU's contribution and this is essentially for the following reasons: security, development and political stability. Since 2018, there has been an increase in concern related to terrorism and strong waves of migration. The militarisation of this area of Africa, however, first by French troops and then by other European states, has caused a revitalisation of instability in the area due to the response action of rebel, paramilitary and jihadist groups. As Silvia

D'Amato states in her study entitled 'Patchwork of Counterterrorism: Analysing European Types of Cooperation in the Sahel', published by Oxford University Press on behalf of the International Studies Association, France's position as the 'natural mediator of cooperation' with the Sahel is still confirmed in 2021 (D'Amato, 2021). Thus, despite repeated unsuccessful attempts by France and the arrival of third powers such as Russia and Turkey in the Sahel, the European Union still seems unable to change course on operational intervention. The steps forward in 2018 with the support to Niger had given hope for a different future regarding the type of European intervention. As Katherine Pye states in her policy brief for the Centre for European Reform, entitled "The Sahel: Europe's forever war?" "Opération Barkhane will cost an estimated €695 million in 2019 and as much as €911 million in 2020. Meanwhile EUTM Mali's combined budget for 2020-24 has increased to €133.7 million. EUCAP Sahel Mali's budget for the period 2021-23 increased to €89 million and EUCAP Sahel Niger had a budget of €63.4 million for the years 2018-20. MINUSMA has the highest annual budget of any UN mission in the world, at $1.18 billion in 2020-21, with substantial contributions from EU member-states such as Germany. Yet despite Europe's huge investments, the security situation in the Sahel has deteriorated drastically" (Pye, 2021). The historical predominance of France's African presence in the Sahel, compared to the other EU powers, seems to be unwilling to give way to the need to act unitedly in an attempt to achieve more efficient results. European interventions, as witnessed by the Pye study, have and are still proving to be in vain and in line with a fragmented intelligence, political and military logic. The substantial improvement of the intelligence architecture at a European level and the regulatory reforms introduced over the years suggest a capacity for intervention that is certainly greater than that which can be implemented by a single state, albeit a powerful one, such as France. The area of interest is vast and the EU, as we have seen, is equipped with instruments of analysis and data production that are potentially important for intervention in support of political forces and therefore of the peoples who are trying to resist the political, security and environmental drama that the Sahel is facing. The fate of the Sahelian countries and the European Union are today, and most likely in the future, intertwined. The Sahelian case is a perfect example of the externalisation of borders. Oriol Puig, a researcher at the Barcelona Centre of International Affairs (CIBOD), not without reason calls the Sahel 'Europe's other border'. From the drying up of Lake Chad to

migration, from the coexistence of criminal actors to the very strong presence of jihadist cells rooted in the territory and linked to those in the Middle East, make the Sahel a challenge in the future of the European Union. It is especially in the Sahel that Europe today can prove itself united, putting into practice the enormous potential it has developed with the Lisbon Treaty and the various intelligence policies discussed in chapter two. In this sense, Europe can try to overcome new and old obstacles for a real and effective intelligence and security integration for internal and external borders.

## Conclusion

The universality that characterises the phenomena of our time exposes the European bloc to danger on a large scale and on several fronts. This is amplified by the fragmentation of borders and the uneven approaches taken by national security forces, which in this sense contribute to the multiplication of the risk for our region. From this perspective, unity can be synonymous with knowledge, communication, information and thus security. Many European states have personally experienced various types of threats to their security. For example, Italy, for many years, had to deal with domestic political terrorism, Spain with independence terrorism, France, Germany and Belgium with Islamist terrorism, the Balkan countries with ethnic terrorism, and, again, Germany lived for nearly half a century in an unprecedented climate of tension. These events can undoubtedly be useful for the creation of an intelligence structure that aspires to be granitic, precisely because of the various positive and negative experiences gained in the field over the past decades. Unifying these competences under a single directorate, independent and superordinate to the security structures of individual states, would be revolutionary both externally, from a geopolitical perspective, and internally, as it would inevitably include structural issues involving various institutions, both 'union' and national, and their respective roles. Indeed, the transition from a fragmented to a unitary reality would require the systemic redesigning of the structures operating in this field. The European integration project thus turns out to be the key in the development of the functioning of this supranational institution, which cannot yet assert itself as a geopolitical power also because of these structural fragilities that characterise it. With reference to Islamist terrorism, we can state that this has represented and still represents a strong push towards reforms and radical changes for the EU legislation and its counter-terrorism policies. The study has shown that cross-border jihadist terrorism is a phenomenon that, due to its complexity, has provoked a structural and regulatory reorganisation of the EU. In fact, the EU, over the last twenty years, has been able to equip itself with intelligence apparatuses of excellence that, if used with methods far removed from the logic of national and particular interests, would allow it to put in place security policies and geopolitical scopes far greater than the

ones at present. This thesis also confirmed the idea that a supranational intelligence is not possible without a shift in sovereignty established by EU regulations and treaties. In fact, without a revision of the Lisbon Treaty, European security seems destined to have a subordinate role to that of its member states. A European supranational intelligence, despite the numerous initiatives of European bodies and the enormous pressure experienced during the season of Islamist attacks, is an objective that still seems far from being realised for both structural and, above all, regulatory reasons. While the attempts of the European Union and some European politicians push for total security integration, also reinforced by the Ukraine War, the member states and their intelligence services still seem to be focused on local law enforcement, when the threat acts across the board and across borders. If the EU's efforts are not accompanied by a paradigmatic revolution accepted by the member states, the risk is to keep adding more cooperation agencies into an institutional galaxy that is already full of them. What clearly emerges at the end of this paper brings us back to the Hegelian concept of the 'travail of the negative', i.e. the assertion that behind a negative moment there is a positive one, since the negative is necessary for change to occur, in order to bring about growth and synthesis.

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