BRIEFING **31/03/2016**

PRIOR SECURITY BREACHES AT BRUSSELS AIRPORT WERE NUMEROUS AND KNOWN

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It is not possible to assert that the attack on Brussels National Airport (also known as "Zaventem" after the municipality in which the airport is located) could have been avoided.

Nevertheless, there are **2 certainties:**

1) ***Islamic State,*** since 2014, has largely focused their attacks on "*soft targets*" in the West. In particular, they have chosen crowded areas with little protection: clear examples of this are the attacks in Paris on November 13 and the attack on Maelbeek subway station in Brussels on March 22. **An airport, however, is not, or at least should not be, a "*soft target*".**

2) Flaws in Brussels's airport security are not new and have been recorded many times.

We would particularly like to stress this latter point today.

- **<u>Infrastructure</u>**

➢ First, there is the **airport infrastructure,** which was built several decades ago. Although the buildings have undergone significant renovations in recent years, the fact remains that **the security of "restricted" areas (customs areas, basements, access to airplane runways, etc.) leaves much to be desired. Police unions, in an open letter addressed to the authorities, describe an "abominable" infrastructure, and access to "4 levels of the buildings" being available to everyone, including criminals.**

➢ We will mention only one example. In late October 2015, a group from ESISC was travelling from Zaventem Airport to Azerbaijan when **one of the members took "the wrong elevator" (unprotected and accessible to all) and ended up on a runway.** Granted, his presence was immediately

detected and security services intervened diligently. Regardless, this incident says a lot about infrastructure security.

- **<u>Airport staff members linked with criminal networks</u>**

  - **Several people with serious criminal records hired to carry out low-skill jobs** (baggage handling, cleaning) at the airport, granting some of them access to (allegedly) secured areas such as baggage sorting facilities and runways. This information was confirmed on March 31 by Vincent Gilles, president of the SLFP Police (liberal union of security services): **a "large number" of baggage sorting employees have "a criminal record for serious criminal acts."**

  - **6 high-profile robberies have occurred at the airport :**

    - On February 18, 2013, a team of 8 heavily armed men in 2 vehicles bypassed the "protection" fence around the aircraft landing and takeoff area and attacked a *Swissair* plane while it was being unloaded: 120 packages of diamonds worth 37.5 million EUR were stolen.

    - On April 2, 2001, a van driver escaped an attack thanks to his "sang froid."

    - On October 31, 2000, a *Brink's* van was robbed while transferring diamonds to a *Lufthansa* Airbus going to Frankfurt (value of the stolen diamonds: 6.5 million EUR).

    - On May 4, 1999, the robbers of a *Brink's Ziegler* van, which was transferring banknotes to a *Virgin* airplane, made away with 1.8 million EUR.

    - On February 17, 1999, 4 men dressed as *Sabena* employees stole the equivalent of 1.8 million EUR while it was being loaded onto a *Virgin* airplane.

    - On October 3, 1995 the robbery of a *Swissair* aircraft resulted in the loss of 1.125 million EUR, to the benefit of the attackers.

It is clear that in each of these 6 cases, **robbers worked with internal accomplices**: it is the only way they would have known details regarding transfer schedules, flights and vans involved, and, of course, which gates to target, considering that there dozens of gates at Zaventem Airport.

Accomplices have been identified in some, but not all, of these cases. However, it is well known that the Islamic State in Europe managed to create a kind of symbiosis between the "traditional" jihadist networks and those belonging to "Islamo-gangsterism." It is equally disturbing to note that **in each attack, the criminals were able to**

move about the take-off and landing areas undetected and uninterrupted, before leaving the scene in the same way.

- **<u>Radicalization of several airport low-skill staff members</u>**

➢ Several incidents that occurred in recent years highlight the religious radicalization of members of the low-skill staff.

  - On at least 2 occasions, passengers from Israel discovered anti-Semitic tags on their luggage. **Such incidents not only demonstrate the presence of radicalized people within the airport but also the fact that their behaviour is tolerated by their colleagues (no denunciation of these acts, which cannot be ignored by colleagues, was recorded).**

  - The perpetration of such acts can only be explained by the **lack of security controls in sensitive areas.**

  - Vincent Gilles, again, reported that "***among the porter staff, a lot of people celebrated the attacks in Paris***."

  - Other sources reported to ESISC that at least **15 porters joined (or tried to join) the ranks of Islamic State in Syria.**

  - According to Vincent Gilles, **the airport management board and shareholders are not addressing the issue**, likely for fear of triggering social conflicts.

  - According to Belgian media, **"at least 50 Islamic State supporters" currently work at the airport and have both security clearances and access passes** for all facilities, including runways, baggage holds and cockpits.

<u>In conclusion:</u>

It is clear that these factors have nothing to do with the attacks of March 22, which were carried out from the outside by terrorists disguised as travelers. It is equally clear that **the current situation, a "recipe for announced disaster," can no longer be tolerated.**

To restore public confidence, the management board of the airport of the capital of Europe must adopt a practice of "zero tolerance."

<u>In other words:</u>

➢ **Anyone with a criminal record (at least for acts of violence) should have their authorization and access passes to sensitive areas immediately revoked.**

➢ **Any kind of religious radicalism can no longer be tolerated.**

- **Airport staff should be checked regularly, as is the case in France where dozens of access passes have been revoked from radicalized individuals.**

As we are continuously told that in Europe, and in France and Belgium in particular, we are "at war," **it is high time for the managers of essential or sensitive infrastructures to adopt a culture of safety and to be proactive.**

END.