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Annual Report 2024

CUTA

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PREFACE

Gert Vercauteren
Acting director

2024 was an interesting year for CUTA. During the first semester, we noticed a large number of threat reports, mainly resulting from the increased international tension, with the war in Gaza at the forefront. As of June the situation gradually improved. The number of threat reports decreased, as well as the number of threats against the Jewish and Israeli communities, which had increased significantly since October 2023. The international context, however, remained very volatile. Although in 2024 our country was spared from terrorist attacks, many attacks occurred in the West. Security services and the prosecutor's office dealt with many cases, which regularly led to arrests. In the Common Database T.E.R., we observed a global decrease in the number of persons, but this was in particular due to the removal of many FTFs, who likely died in Syria or Iraq.

The main threat continued to come from the Islamist sphere. IS and, in a lesser degree, AQ propaganda continues to resonate in certain circles and keeps attracting new generations. Often young people are involved, who were previously unknown to the security and intelligence services. 18% of the threat reports in 2024 involved minors. They often radicalise online and don't know each other offline anymore. This online dimension poses a major challenge.

For the rest, the threat image remains very diverse, including threats related to foreign countries. In the field of right-wing extremism, we observed a limited number of threat reports, but the prosecutor's office and the security and intelligence services dealt nonetheless with many cases. In the field of left-wing extremism, however, we observed a higher level of activity, in particular due to the war in Gaza, with small-scaled incidents, but without real acts of violence. Furthermore, CUTA closely monitored threats emanating from Russia's war against Ukraine. So far, its impact has been rather limited, with especially low-scaled cyberattacks, intimidations and disinformation campaigns.

In this context, CUTA pleads for a deepening of the implementation of the Strategy T.E.R. In 2024, we carried out two evaluations, one of the Strategy T.E.R. as a whole, and one of the Local Integral Security Cells. These assessments highlighted many positive things, but also the need to optimise the LISC-Rs. Those cells can, when they gather regularly with the competent services, keep the finger on the pulse and start a timely guidance of persons who are in a radicalisation process. An improved mental health support is also crucial in this context. After all, a lot of people in a radicalisation process, particularly vulnerable teenagers who are still forming their identity, suffer from psychological issues, for which appropriate guidance is rarely available. Therefore, CUTA and the services involved in the Strategy T.E.R., plead a better forensic training and support for these people.

In 2024, the new legal framework for the CDB was approved. CUTA contributed to it and began drafting a new circular for the practical implementation of this framework. Beside a large number of strategic and individual assessments, CUTA drew up about 1,500 punctual assessments. We organised two conferences in the context of the Belgian EU presidency and cooperated closely with the academic world. In short, there was a lot of work to be done, which we brought to a favourable conclusion thanks to a team of passionate, enthusiastic co-workers. I would like to warmly thank them as well as all of our partners at all policy levels, for their great commitment last year.

Gert Vercauteren ■

1. THREAT PICTURE IN BELGIUM

1.1 General threat in Belgium in 2024

Throughout the year 2024, the general threat level 3 (serious) was in effect in Belgium. Although in 2024, on the Belgian territory, no terrorist attack took place, the security and intelligence services processed multiple cases, which mentioned an intention to commit violence. Beside personal triggers, political and social developments played an important role as well. The major observations for 2024 were the strong online dimensions within radicalisation, the speed at which (especially) adolescents radicalise and the fragmented ideological playing field. In many cases, a classical ideological frame was partially or even completely lacking. In the course of 2024, CUTA received 287 threat reports. This is a decrease compared to 2023, when our service had 332 threat reports. After analysis it appeared that 213 of these 287 threat reports fell under CUTA's remit (radicalisation, extremism, terrorism). Jewish and the Israeli interests were the main target, followed by specific persons.

Threat level 3

Since the attack in Brussels of 16 October 2023 on Swedish football supporters, the **general threat level** was raised to **level 3 (serious)**. In 2024, the general threat level for Belgium remained unchanged.

As in the previous year, in 2024, the main threat emanated from the **jihadist ideology of the terrorist organisation Islamic State (IS) (including its Afghan-Pakistani branch ISKP) and Al Qaeda (AQ)**. The **number of threat reports**, the **seriousness** and **probability** of these threats, **national and international developments** all together determined this general threat level. The **attacks in Brussels and France** in the autumn of 2023, combined with the **escalated conflict** in the Middle East and the following **increased** polarisation resulted in a considerable increase in the number of threat reports in the autumn of 2023. From the **second half of 2024**, we noticed again a decrease **in threat reports**, but the Israeli-Palestinian conflict remained throughout the year a strong emotional trigger.

Currently:

» the threat is *serious*

1 2 **3** 4

Threat picture

In 2024, jihadist extremism remained the major threat. Special attention was given to ISKP, a regional branch of IS, which is active in the South of Central Asia, mainly in the region of Afghanistan and Pakistan. The increased (operational) capacity of ISKP, with a view to not merely inspire attacks, but possibly to facilitate them, is a factor to be taken into account.

Right-wing extremist ideologies were also a distinctive part of the threat picture, with different (attempts to commit) acts of violence in various Western countries. In **Belgium** specifically, the situation was somewhat **ambivalent**: the number of **right-wing extremist threat reports** was, certainly in the last months of 2024, very limited to **minimal**, but the prosecutor's office, the security services and the police carried out **investigations** regularly. Moreover, throughout 2024, right-wing extremist profiles were the **second largest group in the Common Database T.E.R. Anti-establishment feelings**, fed by disinformation continued to play a role. Although persons with anti-establishment sentiments were now and then very vocal in the course of the last year, the (violent) threat emanating from them remained relatively limited. **The left-wing extremist threat** was assessed as **low** in 2024, but showed a **higher level of activity** regarding the conflict in the Middle East.

The vast majority of the threat reports in 2024 (67%), concerned **lone actors**. Yet last year (as in the previous year) we also regularly noticed small **cells**, both in Belgium and outside Belgium. These were often loosely structured networks whose members had found each other through **private social media channels and chat groups**. Through these **social media, a lot of extremist or terrorist propaganda** was exchanged. In many cases **young people were involved, often mi-**nors, who seemed to radicalise **rapidly**.

The motivations and underlying causes of the threat reports were diverse. Not only **geopolitical and ideological motivations**, but also **religious motives** played an important role. **Conspiracism and personal grievances** were also possible catalysts. In the last year, potential perpetrators seemed, more than in the past, prone to the use of violence, due to an amalgam of **diffuse ideas, personal reasons and conspiracy theories**. The **ideological basis was often of minor importance**.

The **escalated Israeli-Palestinian conflict** with hard positions on both sides, paved the way for **polarisation**.

The **invasion of Ukraine by the Russian army** and the **sanctions against Russia** had a **limited security impact on Belgium**. Cyber threats and **attempts to influence and polarise** were the main concerns. **Abroad**, however, several **acts of sabotage**, possibly linked to Russia, took place. There were **no indications** suggesting that such sabotage acts also happened in Belgium. Nevertheless, the threat of sabotage and other intrusive actions remains present.

Profile: lone actors and small, unstructured cells

Even though the majority of the threat reports and the potential perpetrators still have a lone actor profile, in recent years, security services have also noticed a resurgence of **small cells and networks, mainly in the jihadist milieu**. These networks exist **mainly online** and are **not very structured**. They are made up of both **Belgians and foreigners**, generally **young people**, sometimes minors, with no prior extremist or terrorist background. **Jihadist propaganda circulates abundantly** within these networks. Often, a few individuals take the lead and announce their intention to carry out an attack in the long term. We see **similar small unstructured cells** in **right-wing extremist circles**, but in a lesser degree than in the jihadist sphere. Also in 2024, several of these smaller cells and networks were dismantled by the prosecutor's office and the security services. In most cases, the suspects had an Islamist-jihadist profile. Looking at the gender aspect, we note that the vast majority of the threats and plans to commit violence were carried out by men.

Fast radicalisation of minors

The **number of minors** involved in plans to commit extremist or terrorist violence in Belgium seems to have **increased** in the recent years. However, this phenomenon is not limited to Belgium. In 2024, the security services registered several attacks or attack plans involving teenagers, including in **France, Sweden and Germany**. Those cases illustrate the vulnerability of adolescents in the face of **online radicalisation** and the challenges for the authorities to prevent these adolescents from taking action.

In the past three years, **nearly a third** of the persons planning a violent action in Belgium were **younger than 18**. Looking at the identified perpetrators of threat reports, it turns out that the number of minors likewise show an upward trend in 2024. An increase in the number of minors in the CDB T.E.R.[1] was also observed in 2024, with around thirty minors under full status.

....
1 _Minors in the CDB T.E.R. are aged between 12 and 18._

Ideology

Jihadist-Islamist inspired extremism remained by far the **main motivation** in the threat reports (just above half). Threats linked to a **political context abroad** (mainly opposition) made up the second largest group, followed by the threat emanating from **anti-establishment** feelings and **right-wing extremist spheres**. The number of threats **from left-wing extremism** remained very **low** in 2024, as did the proportion of threats from the incel sphere and anti-establishment sentiments. The number of threats for which the underlying ideology or ideological frame was difficult to define, amounted to about 10%.

Threat analysis by ideology
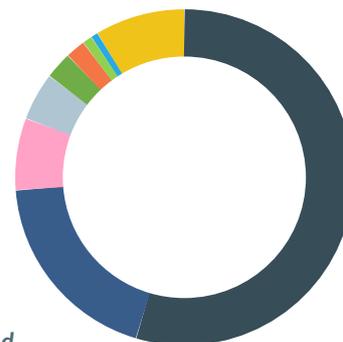
Legend

- ■ Islamist extremism
- ■ Context abroad
- ■ Anti-establishment
- ■ Right-wing extremism
- ■ Animals/Environment
- ■ Threats from state actors
- ■ Incel
- ■ Left-wing extremism
- ■ Unknown/to be determined

Targets

The targets of the threat reports depended largely on the **ideology** to which the (potential) perpetrator adhered. The **main targets** of threat reports in 2024 were, in order of magnitude: the **Jewish community** and **Israeli interests**, specific **persons**, the public in general, political authorities, police and army, public buildings, "infidels", specific communities, prison staff and critical infrastructure.

Modus operandi

In 2024, the majority of threats were posted on **social media**, followed by threats made by phone, e-mail or anonymous letters. This can be explained by the **anonymity** and "**convenience**" of these platforms. Looking at the most mentioned **modus operandi** to commit violence, it appears that in nearly half of the threat reports the modus operandi is **not precisely defined**. **Explosives**, followed by firearms, physical violence and bladed weapons, come second. Vandalism, arson and others complete the list.
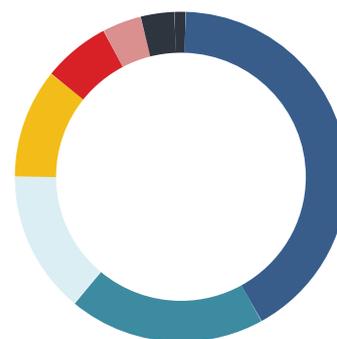
Legend

- ■ Unknown – To be determined
- ■ Explosives
- ■ Firearms
- ■ Physical violence
- ■ Bladed weapon
- ■ Other modus operandi
- ■ Arson

Threat level (seriousness and probability of the threat)

Slightly less than **2/3** of the threat reports were assessed as "**low**" (level 1), while about **1/3** of the threats were defined as "**medium**" (level 2). Slightly more than **10%** of the threats posed at a certain moment a **serious threat** (level 3). In 2024, no level 4 threats were reported (very serious or imminent).

Legend

- ■ level 1
- ■ level 2
- ■ level 3

This chapter involves the **threat reports** received by CUTA, which are the subject of an assessment with a threat level 1 to 4.

In the chapter about the Statistics and Publications (p. 22) a paragraph is dedicated to the punctual threat assessments, which in the end are likewise assessed as a threat level 1 to 4.

To be perfectly clear, this concerns two different types of assessments.

Religiously inspired terrorism: IS and AQ as a source of inspiration, ISKP came to the fore

The IS terrorist group's influence has remained perceptible in Europe in 2024, where **jihadist inspired attacks and incidents** often still bore the **mark of IS**, either because the perpetrator had **sworn allegiance** to the terrorist group, because IS **claimed responsibility** for the attack, or because the ***modus operandi*** or the choice of **target echoed IS** propaganda.

Although the direct operational threat from IS in terms of carrying out attacks in Europe diminished since the fall of the territorial caliphate, the group and its ideology **still provide an ideological anchor**. Both new and **recycled propaganda continue to be disseminated and consulted, including in Belgium**. Furthermore, **ISKP**, the Afghan-Pakistani branch of IS, came to the fore in recent years. The group poses a **threat** for both the **region itself as for the West**, not only through its **propaganda**, but also because of its **mobilising effect** to resort to violence.

The **power of attraction** emanating from the propaganda and the **nostalgia** for a caliphate should not be underestimated. The past year, this narrative still turned out to be attractive to **a young audience**, who often seems to radicalise rapidly. This **fast radicalisation**, certainly among adolescents, who often were still children themselves during the apex of IS, is **reinforced by disinformation** about the former caliphate and its decline.

Like IS, AQ remained **an active player in the global jihad**. Although AQ's direct influence in Europe is less than that of IS (both in terms of followers and propaganda), the texts and speeches of the former ideologists still speak to the imagination of supporters of jihadism.

Geopolitical tensions as a trigger

The mounting emotions as a result of the developments in the violent **conflict in the Middle East** could and can act as a **trigger** for **(jihadist inspired) terror**. Since the escalation of the conflict, both **AQ** and **IS** have regularly called **for violence against Israeli and Jewish targets, and against their alleged allies as well**. **The frustration** and the sense of **powerlessness** among (especially) adolescents of Islamic origin are factors which **could create a climate with an increased risk that certain individuals resort to violence, including in the West**.

Blasphemy

In 2024, supporters within jihadist networks paid a lot of **attention** to incidents that could be described as "blasphemous". Insults, **criticism and mockery** of the **Prophet**, the **Islam** or of **certain theological concepts** are then considered a **serious provocation** requiring a strong response. This response can range from **demonstrations** and calls for **boycotts** to **incitement to violence** in extreme cases. For both the **threat in Belgium** and the threat to **Belgian interests abroad** blasphemous triggers could play a **catalytic role** violent actions, as shown by attacks, such as the ones in the autumn of 2023 in France and Belgium.

Some local jihadist branches and militias remain active in different parts of the world

Branches of IS, also known as "**external provinces**" or **wilayat** were and are still active in different parts of the world. These pose a real threat to the stability of these regions. **AQ** also maintains branches and exerts influence across several continents. These have regularly had a negative impact on local security, particularly when the two terrorist groups have come into conflict.

In **Afghanistan** and the surrounding countries, we have seen **an increase in the activity of the terrorist group ISKP** since the Taliban took power in August 2021. The **propaganda machine of ISKP is running at full speed and also found an international echo**, not least through the publication of multilingual magazines, including the English-language outlet **"the Voice of Khurasan"**. The terrorist group regularly **urges to carry out attacks outside Afghanistan**, including against the West, **through both official and unofficial IS media channels,** with a particular focus on soft

targets. Attacks in Western Europe—carried out either by the group itself, by local cells, or by lone actors inspired by ISKP's propaganda and previous attacks—could therefore not be ruled out, as illustrated by the March 2024 attack on Crocus City Hall in Moscow, perpetrated by a Tajik cell. The group continued to carry out attacks in Afghanistan as well, although it regularly suffered losses in clashes with Afghan security forces.

On **the African continent**, and particularly in the Sahel and in Central Africa various groups are fighting **under the banner of IS and AQ**. The continent is considered to be an **operational centre** for both terrorist groups. Moreover, the **security situation** in several African regions has **deteriorated drastically**. The **coups d'état** by military rulers in a series of countries between Western and Eastern Africa are symptomatic of this deteriorated security situation. The chaos caused by these coups facilitated the actions of local terrorist groups. Also **disinformation** (including a strong hand of Russia through influencing operations) played a role in the deteriorated relations and the rising distrust against the West. Both AQ and IS have nevertheless continued to pursue an agenda that is primarily, if not exclusively, regional, and there appears to be no indication that this situation will change in the short term. However, this doesn't rule out the possibility that their propaganda may resonate with Western target audiences. Hence, they can reinforce their image as combative actors standing up against the Western "colonising" armies. Nevertheless, these various branches did not pose a direct threat to Belgian territory in 2024. CUTA noticed furthermore very few intentions of departures to IS or AQ branches in Africa.

HTS brought the Assad regime in Syria down

At the end of **November 2024, HTS** unexpectedly marched in a blitz offensive on the large cities in Syria. Mid-December they took Damascus and the Syrian president Bashar al-Assad fled to Russia. At the end of December, the leader of the movement, Ahmed al-Sharaa, stated that Syria would probably be able to organise elections in only four or five years time. In the meantime, a **new constitution** would have to be written and a **temporary caretaker government** would have to be formed.

Al-Sharaa **promises an inclusive government**, but many **minority groups** (including Christians and women) are very cautious. After all, HTS has its roots in the jihadist AQ. According to the most recent available figures, a few dozen of Belgian FTF are still active in the region where HTS now has control, including nearly **a dozen who are assumed** having **joined** HTS. At the end of 2024, the group focused exclusively on Syria and the organisation didn't have any intention to attract fighters from abroad nor to carry out terrorist attacks.

Right-wing extremism

In the past couple of years, **the right-wing extremist threat has gained a foothold in the extremist and terrorist threat landscape** in the West. It mainly involves a **virtual, internationally ramified phenomenon of (especially) young and very young people**. Specifically within Belgium, the threat from the right-wing extremist sphere was quite ambiguous in 2024. On the one hand the **number of right-wing extremist threat reports has been very limited in Belgium**. On the other hand the right-wing extremists represented the **second largest group in the Common Database T.E.R.** and in the course of the year, several **investigations** were carried out concerning right-wing extremists having an intention to use violence. Consequently, the right-wing extremist threat remained a priority for the security services.

Certain **trigger events**, such as **geopolitical developments in the Middle East and jihadist acts of violence**, can act as a **combustible**. This phenomenon is particularly visible on social media, although **no signs of violence** were recorded in 2024.

The perpetrators of right-wing extremist-inspired violent actions share some common characteristics: they usually act **alone**, are on the fringes of organisations and parties, usually radicalise **online** and **often** take action **without any imposed instruction from outside**. In many cases, additional factors such as personal grievances or psychological issues also play a significant role.

The **virtual world** is an important factor. Right-wing extremists from all over the world find each other on social networks. **Exacerbated racism** is associated with all kinds of **conspiracy theories around the Great Replacement or the coming race war** and is spread in ingenious ways (often through memes and dog whistles). Various attacks abroad by lone actors show the extent to which certain **vulnerable people** are **receptive** to this narrative. The major difference between the **right-wing extremist network** and jihadist terrorism and extremism is the **greater online visibility**, which makes it easier for young people to come into contact with right-wing extremist propaganda. Nevertheless, a **shift towards private online platforms** is also noticeable in these circles.

Left-wing extremism

The left-wing extremist movement in Belgium has been **fairly quiet over the last years**, leaving aside a minor resurgence during the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2024, the threat from the violent Belgian left-wing extremist sphere was **rather limited**.

However, the **conflict in the Middle East** led to a higher level of activity within left-wing extremist circles. The left-wing extremist and anarchist sphere attributes **responsibility** for the Hamas terrorist act on 7 October 2023 **almost exclusively to Israel**, which, through its policy of occupation and colonialism, would have left the Palestinians and Hamas no other choice but to undertake such violent actions. It cannot be excluded that **this degree of activity will increase further**. There have also been **infiltrations** of some **students protests** and **small-scaled incidents** (including graffiti and vandalism) against businesses and institutions with ties to Israel. Traditionally for the left-wing extremist sphere, anti-American feelings can also play a role, since the United States are considered Israel's main ally.

Influencing, disinformation and anti-establishment feelings

Since the COVID-19 pandemic, we notice a sharp increase in conspiracy narratives and disinformation, particularly on social media. During the pandemic, disseminators exploited existing frustrations and fears about the circulation of the virus and the responses of governments, thereby reinforcing polarisation.

But also after most of the commotion regarding the virus had died down, disinformation and a certain distrust of public authority persisted. **Anti-establishment** feelings continued to circulate on the Internet even in 2024 (and now still). **All kinds of crises were exploited**, by i.a. **extremist individuals and groups of all ideological sorts**, but also by **state actors, lobby groups and other organisations and people with a specific agenda**. Their aim is to undermine the trust and the cohesion in our society and to influence the pattern of certain events or the behaviour of certain groups. Very often a '**hybridisation**' of ideologies and ideas is noticed in this regard.

Many times, the **ideology cannot be clearly defined** and the disseminators pick elements from diverse ideologies to construct their own story and worldview. The **Internet and especially social media** play an important role in this process, because people easily end up in an 'ideological bubble'. In this way, they only receive and see the information or propaganda that supports their worldview. Such tunnel visions and echo chambers can bring about radicalisation, where individuals lose contact with the reality. In exceptional cases, this can lead to acts of violence.

Several individuals find an impetus in the **war of the Russian regime against Ukraine** and adopt a pro-Russian stance, claiming that the population is being slavishly dragged along by the government's alleged anti-Russian propaganda. This stance is reflected in particular in an **aversion to international cooperation bodies**, such as NATO and the EU. The Russian regime subtly taps into these sentiments and seeks to exploit current

incidents or crises. This approach forms part of Russia's hybrid warfare strategy. Although the impact remained limited in 2024 and no elements indicate a threat of violence or sabotage in this context, it remains important to stay vigilant regarding this issue. **Influencing is a long term strategy**, where the trust of a population is manipulated and eroded. Potential effects can thus only gradually become more visible, engrafting themselves especially onto existing lines of fracture and crises.

Personal Motives: psychological issues & grievances

Several incidents the past couple of years, in Belgium as well as abroad, showed that acts of ideological or religious violence often stem from the perpetrator's personal situation. It is therefore inadvisable to confine our analysis too readily to traditional ideological frameworks (such as right-wing, left-wing, or Islamism). Radicalisation is always an individual – and complex – process. While traditional ideologies still provide fertile ground, there is a noticeable shift towards more diffuse patterns of thought and highly diverse triggering factors. Several incidents have also shown that psychological issues can sometimes strengthen the resolve of potential perpetrators to take action.

1.2 Russian invasion in Ukraine

Almost three years have passed since the beginning of the Russian invasion in Ukraine. When the war broke out, there were fears of repercussions for the security situation in the rest of Europe and in our country, particularly following the sanctions imposed by the West on Russia. Overall, this impact remained limited, although vigilance is still required with regard to possible attempts to exert influence, cyber threats and espionage.

Hybrid warfare

The **main geopolitical threat to the West** in 2024 still was '**hybrid warfare**'. Over the last few decades, Russian President Vladimir Putin has developed a doctrine that goes far beyond the purely military-technical aspect. In addition to the war in Ukraine, we also have to consider i.a. **cyberattacks, sabotage, propaganda and disinformation**.

Propaganda & disinformation

The aim of the **Russian state propaganda** is to completely imbue the Russian and the Russian speaking, both within the country and abroad, with the **Russian narrative**. The **West** (and thus not Ukraine) is seen as the **main responsible for the war** and as an **existential threat to Russia**. To this day Russia keeps propagating this narrative. **Information operations**, where the opponent is structurally put in a negative light with the aim of **bringing down the trust and the cohesion**, is a commonly used method. On social media, those narratives are largely spread towards the West, in the hope of increasing the polarisation and undermining the cohesion between the countries of the EU and NATO.

Cyberthreats and other forms of hybrid warfare

The West remains alert to **cyberthreats,** given Russia's capabilities in this domain and its **possible intention to use countermeasures following European sanctions**. However, **most of the cyberattacks, and the most significant, were directed against Ukraine**. Ukraine's neighbours, particularly Poland, were also targeted, albeit to a lesser extent, as were the Baltic states. In the conflict, **cyberattacks against Western Europe** still occur **less than first expected**. There is an **increased vigilance** everywhere, which undoubtedly makes it more difficult to carry out major cyberattacks successfully. That said, Belgium can, and has been, the target of cyberattacks by pro-Russian actors (for instance, the DDoS attack that lasted several days, before the local elections in October).

CCB and its **partners** find that **Western countries are specifically targeted** when they **undertake actions in support of Ukraine.** These are primarily DDoS attacks. Foreign **information operations** also feed off such cyberattacks: in the disinformation campaigns they are often cited as a proof **that the West is not resilient against these threats**.

Moreover, **since 2023** there has been an **increase** in **other hostile, hybrid activities by the Russian regime** on EU and NATO territory ("hostile reconnaissance", vandalism and sabotage).

War volunteers

In 2024, there were several incidents in Europe, **such as sabotage of (undersea data and internet) cables, incidents with "espionage ships" etc**. Security services of the targeted countries consistently pointed the finger at the Russian intelligence services, but official attribution is difficult. An additional difficulty is that Russia often hires "ad hoc agents" (ordinary citizens) to carry out such disruptive actions. Although the **direct damage** of such attacks **may seem limited** at first sight, they send an **important signal: critical and sensitive infrastructures are known and their vulnerabilities can be exploited**.

The **number of war volunteers who travelled to Ukraine has hardly increased for quite some time now**. By the end of 2024, only a handful were reportedly still active in the region. The profile of people who left for the conflict zone remained unchanged in 2024. Only a minority of those who actually took steps to leave may have had a potentially worrysome extremist profile.

1.3 The escalated Israeli-Palestinian conflict: impact on Belgium

On 7 October 2023, the Palestinian terrorist group Hamas launched a bloody, large-scale offensive against Israel from the Gaza Strip. In 2024, Israel carried on with its destructive operations in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Moreover, in the course of 2024, a larger, more regional dimension was added to the conflict as the tension with Lebanon and Iran mounted as well. The violent conflict had (and is still having) a global security impact. Tensions between and within communities have increased, and reports of anti-Semitism in particular have risen sharply in 2023. In the course of 2024, the number of threat reports linked to the escalated conflict in the Middle East decreased again. The situation remains a trigger for polarisation and possible expressions of (extremist) violence.

Polarisation

Since the escalation of the conflict, there has been an **increase in tension and polarisation in several communities**. A significant proportion of the population clearly feels concerned by the conflict. Indeed, the positions taken by the warring parties are **rigid and hard-hearted**, both parties accusing each other of war crimes and serious violations of humanitarian law. In this heated climate, the risk increases that individuals, whether impulsively or not, might start **acts of revenge**, primarily against Jewish or Israeli targets.

So the number of **threat reports against Israeli and Jewish interests** increased considerably in 2023, but it **decreased** again in the **second half of 2024**. As with any conflict, there is a danger that, in order to attract supporters, **extremist actors** will **instrumentalise** (and boost) the violence in Gaza and the West Bank, as well as the injustice against the Palestinians. Especially within the **left-wing extremist sphere**, the focus stays on the conflict. In Belgium (as in the rest of Western Europe), different triggers caused commotion online, and sometimes also offline.

Disinformation plays an important role as well, with the main objective of **polarising and** sowing **division**. Biased or even completely wrong coverage and information, divorced from its context, can lead to polarisation (and in extreme cases also to violence).

Belgian interests in the region

In 2024, no violent actions directly targeted Belgian (diplomatic) interests in the region. However, Belgian nationals in Israel, the Palestinian territories, or Lebanon could become collateral victims of violence. This risk of collateral damage also applied to Belgian diplomatic missions in Israel and Lebanon.

2. CUTA HIGHLIGHTS 2024

In this section, CUTA reviews the main evolutions and achievements within the service or with external partners, in which CUTA has been closely involved.

1 CDB Act and framework of the Strategy T.E.R. (the CDB T.E.R.)

In 2016, at the height of the Syrian crisis, the Common Database (**CDB**) was created, enabling the services involved in monitoring radicalisation, extremism and terrorism to **share unclassified information** with each other in **real** time. At that time, the CDB was mainly based on the regulatory framework of the Law on the Police Service.

The **Parliamentary Inquiry Committee** into the attacks on 22 March 2016, however, recommended that the CDB needed a **clearer autonomous legal framework**. The tragic death, following a knife attack, of the police officer Thomas Monjoie in 2022 has subsequently accelerated those efforts. A **working group**, **led by the Federal Public Service Justice**, was set up to take a closer look at the legal framework of the CDB. CUTA played an active role in this respect. Thanks to the **Act of 29 March 2024**, which came into force on 1 October 2024, the CDB received a **more robust and adequate legal framework** and was renamed **CDB T.E.R.** (terrorism, extremism, radicalisation). The new, autonomous act clarifies the roles and the responsibilities of the different partners in the CDB T.E.R., a neccesary evolution for an efficient monitoring of individuals in the context of extremism and terrorism, including the radicalisation process.

The **number of institutions** cooperating with the CDB T.E.R. has **increased** and now includes the French-speaking *Administration générale de l'aide à la jeunesse* and its German-speaking counterpart. The inclusion of these specific partners reflects the wish to improve the **follow-up** and the **protection of minors** aged 12 and older who are listed in the database.

In addition, the new act creates the **legal framework** for the operation of the **Local Task Forces** (LTFs), the platform for security monitoring within the Strategy T.E.R., and facilitates the **dissemination of information** to police officers **in the field** and care providers. These new aspects are carried out with special attention to the protection of the personal data of individuals who are listed in the CDB T.E.R.

2 Evaluation of the Strategy T.E.R.

Since **2021**, the **Strategy T.E.R.** has replaced the Plan R in Belgium's approach to violent extremism and terrorism. **A comprehensive and integrated cooperation** is the guarantee to the best possible **exchange of information** between all the partners involved. The **added value** of the Strategy T.E.R. compared to the Plan R is that **all the political levels** endorsed and validated the strategy, and that **all types of extremism** are addressed in a consistent manner. The Strategy T.E.R. also ensures the reconciliation of **repression and social prevention**. In the course of 2024, several actors and platforms involved in the Strategy T.E.R., were asked to **evaluate** it. The assessment revealed a number of findings (**best practices**):

— According to the different parties involved, the Strategy T.E.R. is an effective tool for the multidisciplinary approach of security issues. The Strategy T.E.R. structure (with its different consultation platforms, see also p. 40 and next) optimises the flow of information between the partners.

— The Strategy T.E.R. provides the needed **common framework** for the services.

— There is enough attention to the **necessary focus** on both **security monitoring and sociopreventive follow-up**. The Strategy also offers a clear overview of all the existing initiatives (federal, regional and local).

— The Strategy T.E.R. is the **appropriate platform** (with all the consultation platforms) to provide an **updated** view of the threats and phenomena, including an updated threat picture.

In addition, a number of **challenges** were identified, which the competent services will address in the coming years:

— The exchange of information is running well and smoothly, but requires further optimisation. This is especially the case for a more efficient information sharing between the **health care services and the security services**.

— The follow-up of radicalised individuals with one or more psychological problems requires further development and **greater coordination with the healthcare sector.**

— **Awareness raising at the local level**, as the primary actor in prevention, should be continued. The Local Integrated Security Cells (LISC-R) play a key role in identifying signs of radicalisation at an early stage. A **better feedback** to the **LTF** is needed, the participation of more sociopreventive actors should be encouraged.

— In October 2024, the **new CDB T.E.R. Act** came into effect. In 2025, it should be ensured that this new legal framework is **implemented** thoroughly.

— Sufficient attention should (continue to) be paid to (amongst others) **radicalisation in prisons** and the emergence of **new phenomena and trends** such as anti-establishment sentiments, hybrid threats and disinformation.

3 Belgian EU presidency: 2 conferences on security

In the first half of 2024, **Belgium** had the six-month rotating **EU presidency**. Security was a major focus of the Belgian presidency. In this context, **CUTA also organised two international conferences**.

The first conference took place in April 2024 for the partners of the international *Cooperation in Counter Terrorism Analysis Madrid Group*. The **CCTA Madrid Group** is a network of European fusion centres and partnerships between security and intelligence services (such as EUROPOL, EU INTCEN, and INTERPOL) aimed at sharing expertise and best practices.

The second conference was held in June 2024 for the members of the *European Expert Network on Terrorism Issues* (EENet), an **informal mixed network** composed of **academics and professionals from European intelligence and security services**. It also includes participants from multilateral organisations such as EUROPOL, EU INTCEN, and INTERPOL.

4 Threat assessment for the recognition of local religious communities

The **recognition of local religious communities** in Belgium falls within the **sphere of competence** of the **regions and the German-speaking community**. This official recognition entails both rights and duties for the administration of the recognised local religious community. When the administration complies with all the duties, it may receive financial benefits, such as a minister paid by the federal government. Based on the Royal Decree of 29 September 2024, a **new procedure** has been **introduced** to redact **threat assessments in the frame of the recognition of local religious communities**. Since half 2024, CUTA took over this matter from the State Security. The assessment is based on the information and intelligence, which CUTA receives from its support services and analyses the possible effects a recognition might have on **national security** and **public order**. Concretely, CUTA assesses whether there are any risks within the local religious communities in matters of **terrorism, extremism, harmful sectarian organisations, criminal organisations, interference or espionage**. CUTA provides the Service for Religious Denominations and Non-Confessional Life Stance Organisations with the result of the threat assessment, which forwards it to the Minister of Justice. The support services, the Financial Intelligence Processing Unit and the LTF concerned receive a copy.

5 Assessment of anti-establishment sentiments and the sovereign movement

In late 2023, CUTA conducted an **online survey** of 581 local authorities and 181 police zones asking them whether, and if so to which extend, they had already been confronted with the **sovereign movement**. 32% of the local authorities and 60% of the police zones in Belgium replied.

Based on the filled surveys and further investigation, CUTA drafted some analyses on the phenom-

enon. The most important findings were that groups and individuals expressing anti-establishment feelings are **visible** especially **online** through **social media** (including YouTube). But activities are also visible **offline**, amongst others in the form of lectures, workshops, etc. Based on social media activities, it can be estimated that **several thousands of individuals** in Belgium **show some level of interest in anti-establishment ideas**, but it is important to underline that all these people have a varying degree of involvement. The **vast majority of them does not display any behaviour that indicates a possible evolution towards hatred or violence**. **Fewer than 10 people** linked to this phenomenon are listed in the CDB T.E.R. These are individuals who clearly show intent to commit violence (the threshold for monitoring).

6 Communication

External communication - website

In 2024, CUTA published **8 news articles** on its website, which attracted in total **14,057 visitors**. This is a major decrease compared to the number of visitors in 2023 (22,087). This decrease can mainly be explained by the fact that **there haven't been serious terrorist or extremist incidents in Belgium**.

Terminology

In 2022, CUTA launched **an internal and interdepartmental project on terminology**. The aim is to develop a **coherent framework of concepts and definitions** with the **main services of the Strategy T.E.R.**, taking into account **the evolving threat landscape**. In 2024, these efforts continued.

Strategic Communication and disinformation

In 2024, CUTA also continued to participate actively in the interdisciplinary working group Strategic Communication and disinformation.

7 Outreach project

In 2023-2024, CUTA's Outreach project (see also p. 39) completed the **fifth round of its master's thesis competition**. The **University of Ghent** won the first prize again, this time for a high quality research on online toxic masculinity and polarisation. The winner presented his thesis at the annual colloquium, organised by CUTA for its partners and the academic world in June 2025.

In 2024, the editorial committee of the scientific journal Radices changed its **approach**. In order to respect the news value of the articles as much as possible, the **articles** are now put **online** on the Janeway platform of the UGhent from the moment they are **ready**. The winner of each CUTA's master's thesis competition is given the opportunity to write the first article of the journal. A complete edition was published in April 2025 and sent to all CUTA's partners. The articles and the complete edition can be consulted on CUTA's website.
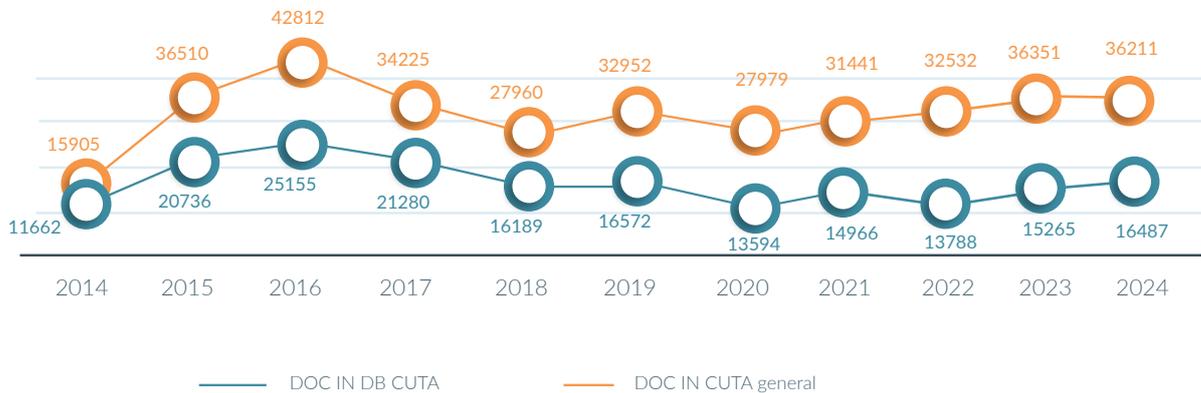
3. STATISTICS & PUBLICATIONS

3.1 Figures: handled documents

The figures in the following chapter provide a more concrete illustration of CUTA's work, and show the most significant trends, which appear (and are explained, as far as possible) in the graphs on the following pages.

Incoming docs versus docs in CUTA's database

The number of incoming documents (DOC IN CUTA general) was **stable** in 2024, compared to 2023 (36,211 DOC IN in 2024 compared to 36,351 in 2023). "DOC IN CUTA general" also include all the documents received through the secured networks.

However, **not** all incoming documents are **systematically** recorded **as a new document** in CUTA's internal database (IN DB CUTA). Some incoming documents remain available by other means or are added to existing files. 16,487 of the 36,211 incoming pieces in 2024 were registered as new documents in CUTA's internal database. This is about a thousand (1,222) more than in 2023, when we registered 15,265 new documents in CUTA's internal database.

Due to the national and international situation, the number of **outgoing documents increased** as well (**11,662** in 2024). The **difference** between the total number of messages (replies/reactions from CUTA) (11,662) and the number of documents, which are registered separately in the internal database (2,030) was significant in this regard as well.

Punctual threat assessments

CUTA carries out punctual threat assessments for **events, individuals[1], communities,** visits of **VIPs**, etc. both at the **request of other services** and on its **own initiative**.
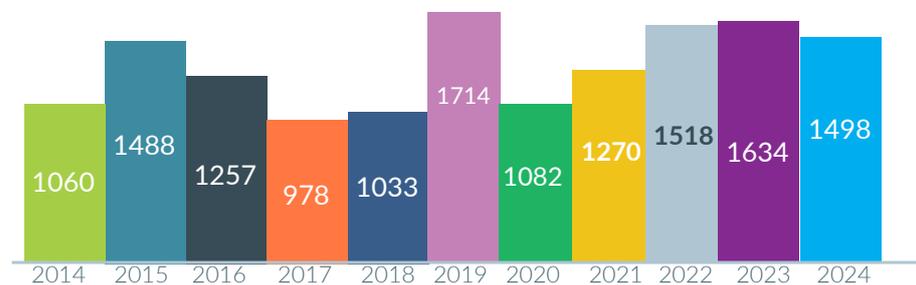
After its creation, CUTA invested heavily in **consultation** with all its partner services on (requests for) relevant information. The **terrorist crisis in Western Europe** had a major impact on CUTA's functioning: both the number of requests for assessments and the number of drawn up assessments rose sharply. In the wake of the crisis (**2017-2018**), the number of assessment requests and effective assessments **fell**. In **2019**, there was again a significant increase in the number of assessments. This trend can be explained by intensified **collaboration** with one of our main partners, the **NCCN**. The COVID-19 pandemic (2020-2021) also had a considerable impact. The number of assessment requests and drawn-up assessments **fell** sharply again, as public life was paralysed for long periods. The return to "normal life" then had an impact on the number of assessments. In **2023**, we saw the impact of **national and international crises** (the attack in Brussels, the escalated conflict in Gaza, etc.), leading to more requests for assessments and more punctual assessments. In **2024**, both the number of assessment requests[2] and the number of issued assessments were **stable** compared to 2023.

Assessment requests to CUTA (DEVAL)

2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
1067	1478	1862	1588	1231	1808	1556	1815	1821	1944	1808

Assessments drawn up by CUTA (EVAL)

2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
1060	1488	1257	978	1033	1714	1082	1270	1518	1634	1498

....

1   To be perfectly clear, this doesn't involve the individual threat assessments for persons in the CDB T.E.R. These will be discussed in the section about the CDB T.E.R. (see p. 25 and next).

2   The difference in the number of DEVALS and EVALS (the figures of the first ones are always significantly higher) can be explained by the fact that several services (NCCN, the Federal Police, the Local Police, etc.) often address a request for an assessment to CUTA separately, which are then answered by CUTA by one single assessment, intended for all the services.

Threat levels

If we look at the threat levels for the assessments, we see that just **under half** of the assessments resulted in a **threat level 1 (low)** and **half** in a **level 2 (average)**. **About one tenth** of the specific assessments were at **level 3 (serious)** and no punctual assessments resulted in a level 4 (very serious).

The **general threat level for Belgium** has remained at **level 3** (serious) since the attack in Brussels (see also p. 4-17). This does not mean, however, that this general threat level applies to all the punctual threat assessments. These always focus on a specific, situation to be assessed. It is on the basis of these punctual threat assessments that the **NCCN** develops **security measures**. The result may therefore differ from the general level (which has often been the case).

- level 1
- level 2
- level 3

3.2 Analyses & other publications

Strategic analyses

CUTA regularly draws up strategic notes to provide partner services with a global overview of certain trends, such as the international threat, right-wing extremism, left-wing extremism, the jihadist threat, the evolution of the threat reports and the CDB entities, etc.

Insight magazine

Several times a year, CUTA publishes its magazine **Insight**, each time dedicated to a **specific theme**. Insight is sent to all CUTA's support and partner services, including academic contacts.

In 2024, CUTA published two issues: one in June and the other in December.

3.3 Individuals in the CDB T.E.R.
evolution of the figures

The CDB T.E.R. is the **instrument** that gives concrete form to the **multidisciplinary approach** of the Strategy T.E.R. (see p. 40 and next). The CDB was **created in 2016**, after hundreds of Belgians left for Syria and Iraq to join terrorist groups (including IS). In the wake of the wave of attacks that hit Western Europe in 2015-2016, the **government** announced a series of **measures**, including the creation of the CDB, aimed at curbing terrorism and extremism in our society as much as possible.

The CDB T.E.R. is a **shared tool for information exchange in real time** between authorized services. Through the CDB, the services involved **constantly** exchange **unclassified information** on **entities that require priority monitoring**. At the end of 2024, the CDB T.E.R. Act was officially adopted. While formerly the CDB T.E.R. had been mainly based on Royal Decrees, this new act provides it now with a strong and independent legal framework.

There are **several types** of **access** to the CDB T.E.R., which have been established on the basis of **subsidiarity** and **proportionality** and above all a **need-to-know**. Information from the CDB T.E.R. is used, by **the LTF working** to discuss cases requiring security monitoring, and by all the other services which need to have access to certain information from the CDB T.E.R. in the framework of their competences.

For each individual in the CDB T.E.R., CUTA draws up an **individual threat assessment**. This threat assessment may be shared by the IO with the members of the LISC-R, if the individual in question is also discussed in the LISC-R. In this way, the CDB T.E.R. also provides indirect support for the preventive or the reintegration follow-up provided by the LISC-R.

The CDB T.E.R. comprises **five statuses**. The common denominator of all the statuses is **extremism** and (the intention to commit) **ideologically inspired violence** or incitement to ideologically inspired violence. All the people included in the CDB T.E.R. must have strong ties with Belgium (but do not necessarily have to be Belgian nationals). If a person no longer meets the criteria for inclusion under one of the five statuses, he or she will be **removed** from the CDB T.E.R. Individuals may be included in the CDB T.E.R. with **dual** or even **triple status** if they meet several criteria. The figures are therefore not always unmitigated; there may be overlaps. There were around fifty double statuses and one triple status in the CDB T.E.R. at the end of 2024.

Evolutions in 2024

As the operational manager of the CDB T.E.R., CUTA closely monitors the evolution of the entities in the database.

General findings

Over the course of 2024, the number of entities included in the CDB T.E.R. (with a full status) decreased from 652 at the beginning of the year to 574 by the end of the year (FTFs, HTFs, HPs, PVEs, PCTs). This decrease is largely due to the removal of several FTFs cat. 1 (present in the jihadist conflict zone in Syria/Iraq) who are presumed to be deceased with a high degree of certainty. Because of this removal, the number of FTFs cat. 1, who are believed to be deceased with a high degree of certainty, decreased from nearly 200 at the beginning of 2024 to about a hundred at the end of 2024.

During the year, CUTA drew up **305 new individual threat assessments** or updates for individuals in the CDB T.E.R.. These assessments are official documents, that can be provided by CUTA through a validation process. The requesting service can then use the documents in administrative procedures. These assessments are continuously updated.

Ideology

— 86% of the entities could be linked to an Islamist ideology. Despite the removal of many FTFs cat. 1 (see earlier), this group remains by far the largest one and remained more or less stable compared to 2023. Over the course of 2024, Islamist extremism continued to occupy a major place in the homegrown threat landscape;

— 8% of the entities could be linked to a **right-wing extremist** ideology, which brought the total to about 45 individuals at the end of 2024. This figure means a decrease compared to 2023 (a dozen of entities less in 2024 compared to 2023);

— 3% of the entities could be linked to a **left-wing extremist** ideology. This means a very small increase compared to the previous year. In 2024, the number of individuals included in the CDB T.E.R. because of their left-wing extremist ideology remained limited to fewer than 20;

— The remaining entities are monitored for various threats arising from a specific societal theme, such as anti-establishment feelings, state terrorism or a political context abroad.

New entities and removed entities

— Over the course of 2024, **a bit under 50 new entities** with a full status were **added** to the CDB T.E.R. in at least one of the categories;

— **About 150** entities were **removed** from the CDB T.E.R.;

— Over the course of 2024, a large part of the FTFs cat. 1, who were, based on very strong suspicions, assessed to be deceased, were removed from the CDB T.E.R. The other removals are the result of a structural positive evolution and / or because no new negative elements emerged. As a result, we notice a strong decrease of the total number of FTF cat. 1.

Gender

— **83%** of the CDB T.E.R. population are **men**;

— **17%** of the CDB T.E.R. population are **women**.

Detention

— At the end of 2024, **14,3%** of the entities in the CDB T.E.R were in custody in a **Belgian prison**;

— **94%** of them are **men** and **6%** are **women**;

— **85%** of the detained CDB T.E.R. entities serving a prison sentence adhere to an **Islamist ideology**;

— **7,3%** of the CDB T.E.R. entities serving a prison sentence adhere to a **right-wing extremist ideology**;

— The remaining group of the detained CDB T.E.R. population is labelled as belonging to the trends **'state terrorism' or 'anti-establishment'** or is connected to threats linked with a political context **abroad**;

— The largest group of CDB T.E.R. entities in detention are listed as PVEs, followed by the FTFs cat. 3 and the HTFs.

Photo by Ye Jinghan on Unsplash

Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs)[1]

Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF): persons who travelled to a jihadist conflict zone in order to join a **terrorist organisation** or who returned from a terrorist conflict zone, as well as individuals who were prevented from leaving or who intended to leave (included since the creation of the CDB in 2016). In 2024, the number of FTFs in the CDB T.E.R. **dropped** significantly. A large part of the FTFs were removed from the CDB T.E.R. because their death is considered confirmed, because they evolved in a positive way or because no new incriminating evidence was found within a specified period of time.

CAT 1: *in situ, in a jihadist conflict zone*

— CUTA has confirmed evidence that the individuals are **in the conflict zone** and joined a terrorist organisation there;

— According to the information available to CUTA at the end of 2024, the latest departure of a FTF cat. 1 from Belgium to the jihadist conflict zone in Syria dates back to 2018. The number of FTFs cat. 1 d**ecreased significantly** in 2024 primarily due to the **removal** of individuals whose deaths are considered confirmed.

CAT 2: *on the way to a jihadist conflict zone*

— CUTA has evidence that individuals left Belgium to travel to a jihadist conflict zone with the intent to join a terrorist organisation;

— In 2024, (as in the previous years) no individuals fell into this category.
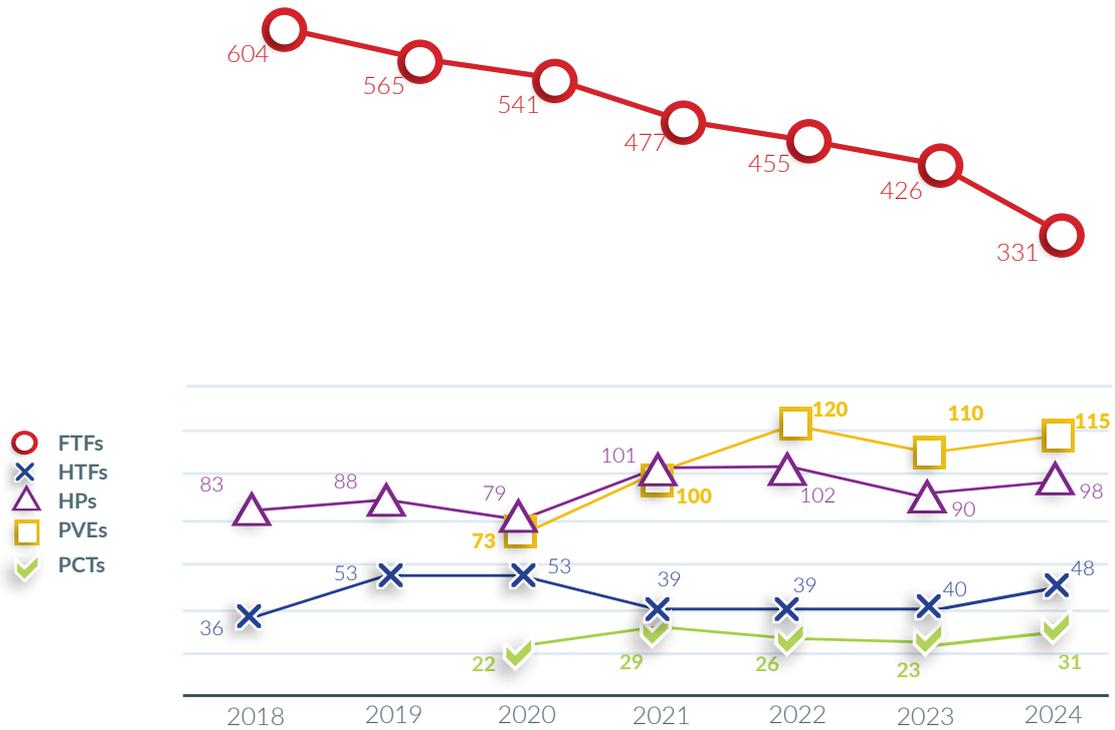
CAT 3: *returnees*

— From the moment FTFs cat. 1 are **no longer in the Syrian-Iraqi jihadist conflict zone**, they are considered FTFs cat. 3 and, therefore, are removed from cat. 1;

— When CUTA evaluates the threat of FTFs cat. 3 for two years as **level 1** extremism/level 1 terrorism and sufficient absolving information is available, the entity is **removed** from the CDB T.E.R.;

— This happens on the basis of a positive evolution, or because no new incriminating information was received on these individuals for an agreed period, or because the concerned individuals have no longer been resident in Belgium for a long enough period.

CAT 4 & 5 : *failed departures* and *potential departures*

— When CUTA evaluates the threat of FTFs cat. 4 for two years as **level 1** extremism/level 1 terrorism and sufficient absolving information is available, the entity is removed from the CDB T.E.R.;

— If for two years there is sufficiently solid information that the person in question **no longer intends** to travel to a jihadist conflict zone, the person is removed as FTF cat. 5 (potential departure);

— The number of individuals who remain in the CDB T.E.R. because of their (failed) attempt to leave remained **stable** in 2024. About thirty individuals remained. The same goes for individuals about whom information was received indicating a (vague) intention to (plan to) leave to a jihadist conflict zone. Also in 2024, this group remained smaller than 10 persons.

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1   *Art. 2, 7° of the Act of 29 March 2024 regarding the creation of the common database "Terrorism, Extremism, Radicalisation process" ("T.E.R.")*

Evolution of CDB T.E.R. figures throughout the years

Legend:
- ○ FTFs
- ✕ HTFs
- △ HPs
- ☐ PVEs
- ✓ PCTs

FTFs: 604 (2018), 565 (2019), 541 (2020), 477 (2021), 455 (2022), 426 (2023), 331 (2024)

HPs: 83, 88, 79, 101, 102, 90, 98
PVEs: — , — , 73, 100, 120, 110, 115
HTFs: 36, 53, 53, 39, 39, 40, 48
PCTs: — , — , 22, 29, 26, 23, 31

Hate Propagandists (HPs)[2]

Hate propagandists or HPs: persons who seek to justify the **use of violence** for **ideological purposes**. Through their influence, they aim to **radicalise their environment** and undermine the rule of law (added on the basis of the Royal Decree of 23 April 2018). They were added to the CDB T.E.R. in 2018 in order to meet the evolving threat landscape. HPs can adhere to **all sorts of ideologies**. Over the course of 2024, the total number of HPs fluctuated between 90 and just over 100. The number of individuals monitored for left-wing extremism, has remained quasi-stable in recent years and fluctuated around ten. In the right-wing extremist spectrum about 30-35 persons were monitored. The number of HPs who were followed up because of Islamist ties has slightly increased in 2024, from nearly 50 persons to around 60.

....
2   Art. 2, 11° of the Act of 29 March 2024 regarding the creation of the common database "Terrorism, Extremism, Radicalisation process" ("T.E.R.")

Homegrown Terrorist Fighters (HTFs)[3]

Homegrown Terrorist Fighters (HTFs): persons who do **not intend** to travel to a **terrorist organisation abroad**, but who choose to commit or support **terrorist acts** in Belgium (added on the basis of the Royal Decree of 23 April 2018). Homegrown Terrorist Fighters or HTFs were added to the CDB T.E.R. in 2018 to meet the **evolving trend in the threat picture** of individuals no longer travelling abroad or returning from a jihadist conflict zone to commit a terrorist act. On the one hand, it became more difficult for individuals to leave; on the other hand, from 2017-2018 on, terrorist groups urged them not to move to the caliphate, but to carry out violent actions in their own country[4]. The **decline of the terrorist organisation IS**, with its concomitant diminishing appeal and waning propaganda, has undoubtedly contributed to this. In 2024, the number of individuals labelled as HTF increased from 40 to 50. Due to a refinement of the applied methodology in the CDB T.E.R., several perpetrators of the 2016 attacks in Zaventem and Brussels got, were assigned the HTF status, in addition to their FTF cat. 3 status. Important to know: **all ideologies** can be attributed a HTF status in the CDB.

Potentially Violent Extremists (PVEs)[5]

Potentially Violent Extremists (PVEs): persons with extremist sympathies **who intend to convert these into actions through violence**, but who have **not** yet taken **concrete steps** to do so (added on the basis of the Royal Decree of 20 December 2019). They have been included in the CDB T.E.R. since early 2020. Thanks to the addition of the PVEs, the phenomena of **right-wing and left-wing extremism** can be better monitored. In 2024, the number of PVEs monitored for left-wing extremist ideologies remained low, involving fewer than 10 individuals at the end of 2024. The number of right-wing extremist PVEs in the CDB T.E.R. has reached a ceiling since mid-2022, and also stagnated in 2024 between 20 and 30 individuals. The number of jihadist oriented PVEs remained stable in 2024, like the year before, at around 70-75 entities.

Persons convicted of terrorism (PCTs)[6]

Persons Convicted of Terrorism or PCTs: persons who are **convicted** of terrorism, **interned** or placed under specific **protective measures** for terrorism in Belgium or abroad (added on the basis of the Royal Decree of 20 December 2019). They have been added to the CDB T.E.R. since early 2020 based on the Royal Decree of 20 December 2019. Double statuses are not possible for PCTs. By the end of 2024 there were a total of around thirty PCTs.

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3   *Art. 2, 8° of the Act of 29 March 2024 regarding the creation of the common database "Terrorism, Extremism, Radicalisation process" ("T.E.R.")*

4   *This doesn't mean that there haven't been any calls at all for departure to join terrorist organisations in a jihadist conflict zone, such as for instance in 2024 by Al-Adnani, IS spokesperson. Both options to commit violence are welcomed by the organisation.*

5   *Art. 2, 9° of the Act of 29 March 2024 regarding the creation of the common database "Terrorism, Extremism, Radicalisation process" ("T.E.R.")*

6   *Art. 2, 10° of the Act of 29 March 2024 regarding the creation of the common database "Terrorism, Extremism, Radicalisation process" ("T.E.R.")*

3.4 Individual administrative measures

CUTA formulates substantiated recommendations to the National Security Council, the Minister of the Interior and the Minister of Foreign Affairs when taking individual administrative measures (**ID-Ban, Pass-Ban and Freezing of assets**). These are **preventive measures** to prevent individuals from committing terrorist acts.

CUTA's recommendation is based on consultation and close cooperation with several of our support services and partner services, in particular the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office. All individual administrative measures are registered in the CDB T.E.R..

ID-ban

When the ID-ban measure is applied, a person's **identity card is revoked or cancelled**, or the distribution of the identity card is refused. The execution of the measure is the responsibility of the **Minister of the Interior**. The application of the ID-ban measure automatically involves a Pass-ban measure, for the same duration as the ID-ban. The aim is to avoid the individual leaving Belgium to go to a jihadist conflict zone. An ID-ban is **limited** in time. The validity of the measure is three months and the procedure can be extended once if substantial elements are provided that justify the extension.

Over the course of 2024, CUTA did not initiate the ID Ban measure at any point.

Passban

When the Passban measure is applied, a person's passport is **withdrawn, invalidated or not renewed**.

Several services (such as the Federal Public Prosecutor's Office, the Local Public Prosecutor's Offices, the FPS Foreign Affairs and CUTA) can submit a proposal to have a person placed on the Passban list. Its execution is the responsibility of the **Minister of Foreign Affairs**.

On **31 December 2024**, the Passban measure on the initiative of CUTA applied to **27** individuals. The validity of the Passban measure is not restricted in time and can only be lifted upon substantiated request by one of the competent authorities.

Freezing of financial assets

The "Freezing of financial resources and assets" measure involves **freezing** a person's **accounts**. The individuals subjected to this measure appear on the *National List* and the measure is published enacted via the Treasury in the Official Gazette.

Over the course of 2024, **3** administrative measures of "Freezing of assets" were applied. CUTA reassesses these measures on a regular basis (at least every six months). Based on these reassessments, in 2024, **2** individuals were removed from the National List and therefore it was decided to end the freezing of their assets.

By the end of 2024, **265** administrative measures of 'Freezing of assets' were active, mainly against FTFs cat. 1 (travelled to the conflict zone in Syria-Iraq).

4. ABOUT CUTA

4.1 Who are we?

CUTA, the Coordination Unit for Threat Analysis, is the **federal centre of knowledge and expertise** in charge of **assessing** the **terrorist and extremist threat** in Belgium and against Belgian interests abroad. Furthermore, CUTA is charged with the **coordination** of this approach. Our **threat assessments** enable authorities such as the National Crisis Centre (**NCCN**) and the **Integrated Police** services to take appropriate **measures** in order to ensure security in Belgium as much as possible. To carry out our tasks, we rely on the **intelligence and information provided by our support services and partner services**[1]. CUTA works in full independence and is under the aegis of the Minister of Interior and the Minister of Justice.

The C of Coordination

The 'C' of Coordination is the core of our name. We believe in a **multidisciplinary approach** and in the necessity of **building bridges**, in coordination and in collaboration with our support services and partner services. Relevant information from the different partners should be shared with all the services concerned, in order to determine which service is the most suitable to take appropriate action.

Support services

Integrated Police services (FedPol & LocPol)

State Security (VSSE)

Military General Service for Intelligence and Security (SGRS/ADIV)

FPS Mobility & Transport (Mob)

FPS Interior (IBZ)
>   *Immigration Office (OE/DVZ)*
>   *National Crisis Centre ((NCCN)*

FPS Foreign Affairs (AE/BuZa)

FPS Finance (Fin)
>   *Customs & Excise*
>   *Treasury*

FPS Justice (Jus)
>   *Department of Religions and Humanism*
>   *Directorate General for Prison Facilities (DG EPI)*

Other partners

Financial Intelligence Processing Unit (CTIF/CFI)

Public Prosecution Office (MP/OM)

Centre for Cyber security Belgium (CCB)

Communities & Regions

Local Partners
- *Municipalities*
- *Prevention and deradicalisation officers*
- *Information Officers (IO)*

....
1   *The support services are the services as prescribed in the CUTA Act of 10 July 2006 art. 2, °2, adapted by the Act of 31 May 2022.*

4.2 Mission, vision and values

Mission

CUTA's mission is defined by law: to **guarantee as much as possible** the **security** of Belgian citizens and interests as well in Belgium as abroad, while respecting the principles and values of the democratic rule of law.

Vision

The events in the last 10 years have prompted security services **to review** and better align their **approach to terrorism and extremism**. A good security policy requires in-depth **cooperation** and mutual **trust**. Sharing intelligence and data is a sine qua non. That is why the 'C' of 'coordination' in our acronym is so important.

The challenge is now to continue on this path. As coordination unit, we are committed to fostering **effective information flow between all partners** working on the issues pertaining to terrorism and extremism, including the radicalisation process. Within the framework of the national Strategy against Terrorism and Extremism, including the Radicalisation process (**Strategy T.E.R.**), we want to contribute to facilitating the information flow between the various levels of government. As expertise centre, we aim to support civil society and politics in the further development of an **integrated** and **joint** approach to prevent extremism.

Values

CUTA operates **independently** within the Belgium's national security framework. We therefore attach great importance to **objectivity, transparency and credibility**. To carry out our statutory missions, we need to be able to take a step back from the hot topics and to take a critical and impartial look at the information we have. In this context, diversity - also within our organisation - is an added value.

4.3 What are we doing?

Since our creation in 2006, our competences and missions have considerably expanded. The missions of CUTA:

- Drawing up the **general threat assessment for Belgium** (barometer for all the threat elements);

- Drawing up **punctual as well as strategic threat assessments** pertaining to Belgian citizens or interests, i**n Belgium as abroad**;

- Drawing up **individual threat assessments** for the entities listed in the Common Database T.E.R. (CDB T.E.R.);

- Drawing up **threat assessments** for the recognition of **local religious communities**;

- Ensuring the **operational management** of the Common Database T.E.R. (CDB T.E.R.);

- Drawing up strategic threat assessments pertaining to critical infrastructure;

- **Coordinating** the **Strategy T.E.R. and facilitating the information flow** between the Belgian services involved, including through the National Task Force (NTF), the Local Task Forces (LTF), the national Working groups (WG/GT) and the Local Integral Security Cells concerning radicalism (LISCs-R);

- Providing **reasoned opinions** within the framework of individual administrative measures **(freezing of assets, ID-ban, Pass-ban)**;

- In collaboration with other services, providing **recommendations** in the framework of the procedures **Foreign Direct Investment**;

- Maintaining **contacts** and relations with **counterpart services abroad** by exchanging information and providing relevant information to the Belgian services concerned. CUTA is an advocate of more European and international collaboration between foreign partner services (fusion centres);

- **Providing authorities and services with expertise and knowledge** in the fight against terrorism and extremism.
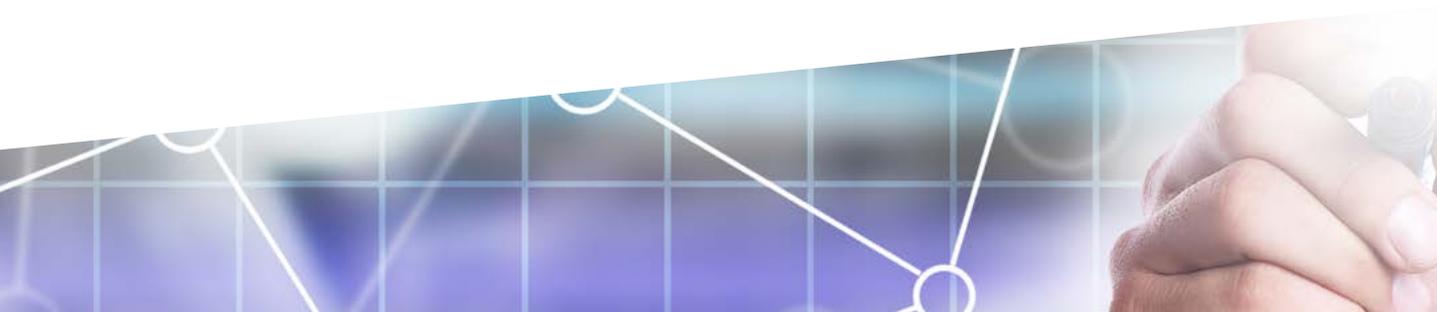
4.4 Staff

In 2024, the number of CUTA's staff employed has **slightly risen**. From 84 staff members in 2023, the staff employed extended to 87 in 2024. This figure exclude staff members seconded to national or international authorities for specific missions during the year.

The conditions for the recruitment of a director and a deputy director of CUTA were modified in 2022. Those positions remained officially vacant in 2024. That is the reason why Gert Vercauteren stayed on as acting director.

The Royal Decree on the staff of CUTA allows a **maximum of 108 staff members.** Given the evolution of the missions of the service and the ensuing increasing workload, there is still a need for extra staff, especially in the supporting positions, which have been understaffed in recent years.
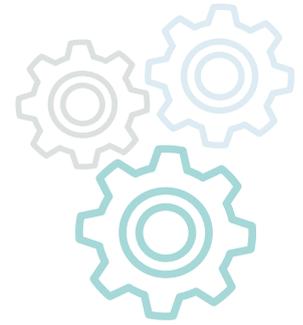
The departments

CUTA's activity rests on four operational departments of which the competences are complementary in order to address the statutory missions of the unit. The direction is supported by a Strategic and Coordination Unit. CUTA also has a department for administrative and logistical support (Strategic Support department) and a department for IT support. CUTA attaches great value to a transversal functioning, in which the various departments work together from their own expertise on certain issues, thus complementing each other.

CUTA's **organisation chart**:
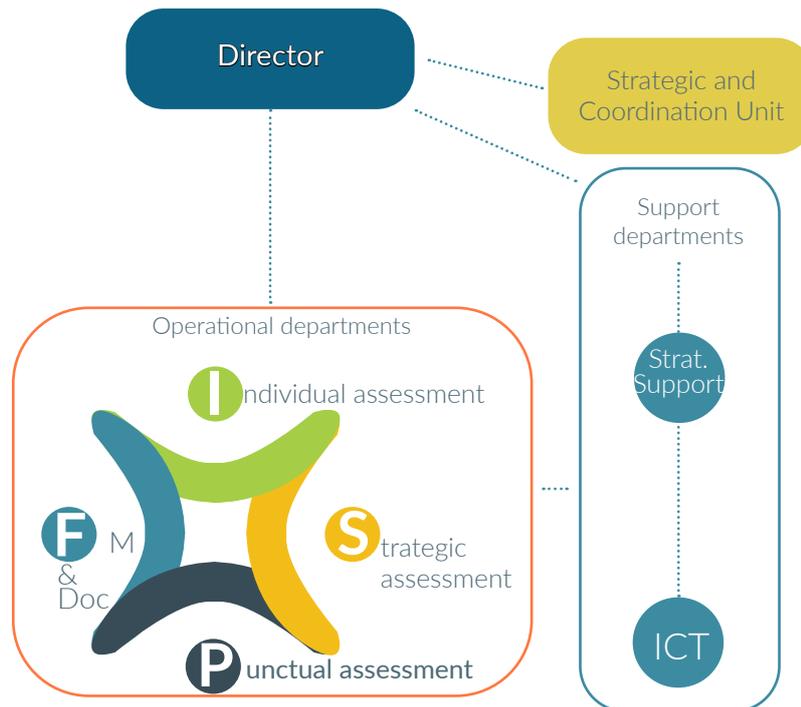
Strategic and Coordination Unit (StratBelCo)

The Strategic and Coordination Unit **supports the management** in overseeing and monitoring CUTA's strategic, legal and cross-functional files. The StratBelCo Unit helps to define the service's strategic objectives and ensures interdepartmental coordination. This leads to a clearer division of the roles and greater consistency within the service.

Strategic support

The Strategic support department provides **functional and administrative support** to the management and to the four operational departments of CUTA. It comprises a General and Executive Secretariat, a Budget, Accounting and Purchasing unit, a Logistics unit, a Communications unit, a Translation unit, a Legal unit and a Human Resources unit.

ICT

The ICT department is responsible for the **technical operation and the development of CUTA's internal and external databases**. It also makes sure that CUTA's IT infrastructure operates within the framework of the legal requirements and security standards set by our supervisory authorities and partners.

Punctual assessment

The Punctual assessment department is made up of staff members who are **seconded from** CUTA's **support services**. They act as liaison officers between CUTA and their service of origin. Drawing up **punctual threats assessments** is their main task. These are assessments of **the extremist or terrorist threat** against events, persons or buildings in Belgium or against Belgian interests abroad. A second type of assessments analyses the threat **arising from certain** individuals or groups. The third category of punctual threat assessments is the 'general threat assessment for Belgium', which is drafted every month at CUTA's initiative for the National Security Council (CNS - NVR).

As part of their duties, these staff members attend the coordination meetings of the NCCN, which determines the security measures based on those assessments. To do so, the NCCN relies, amongst others, on the threat level determined by CUTA. The Punctual assessment department also answers the questions posed by the various support and partner services (requests for information or RFIs). Most of the RFIs come from the Immigration Office and from the CTIF/CFI. Finally, this department ensures weekend and night shifts to ensure the continuity of CUTA's service and its contact with support and partner services.

Strategic assessment

The Strategic assessment department assesses the **main trends** of threats against Belgium and Belgian interests abroad through analytical papers. Those papers deal with **cross-cutting topics** as well as with **specific groups or trends** (such as left- and right-wing extremism, Islamist/jihadist extremism and terrorism, etc.). Those analyses are performed on own initiative or at the request of authorities. The department also drafts strategic assessments of critical infrastructure. In the framework of the Act on critical infrastructure, CUTA draws up an assessment for each national or European critical infrastructure within nine months of its designation as such by the NCCN. Those assessments pertain not only to the terrorist and extremist threat, but also to all phenomena coming under the competence of CUTA's partners. Close cooperation with CUTA's various partner and support services is necessary in order to achieve an integrated assessment.

Individual assessment

The mission of the Individual Assessment department is to ensure the **comprehensive monitoring** of individuals requiring **priority monitoring** in our country as part of the Strategy T.E.R. (see below, p. 40 and next) and who are included in the CDB T.E.R. (see also below, p. 41 and above, p. 25 and next).

This 'comprehensive monitoring' includes the assessment of the threat emanating from these individuals and the participation in the case discussions. The department is also responsible for raising awareness about the importance of the LISC-R as part of socio-preventive monitoring and reintegration. This comprehensive approach is in line with the risk management philosophy, in which the continuous exchange of information, the threat assessment and the implementation of measures tailored to each individual alternate and complement each other.

File Management & Documentation

The File Management & Documentation department (Dos&Doc) is responsible for **managing CUTA's internal database**. This department is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the database, which receives all information and documents from the various partners. The department handles the input of all incoming documents and the dispatch of all operational documents to CUTA's partners. The department Dos&Doc optimises the flow of information to CUTA's other departments and is also responsible for processing all this information, depending on its relevance and taking into account the internal processing guidelines, in close collaboration with the other departments. Finally, the department manages the **monthly statistics** relating to all these operational data and the number of entities included in the CDB T.E.R.

4.6 Transversal functioning

CUTA's "connecting-the-dots" slogan reflects its commitment to transversal and multidisciplinary cooperation both internally and externally.

Within CUTA, functioning of the operational teams

In these teams, members of different departments and units work together across disciplines on a particular **issue, region or trend**. Based on the way they work, team members complement each other's knowledge, expertise and insights and interact effectively. They decide who will be responsible for which issues (organising and coordinating meetings and briefings, drafting notes and reports, searching in the various systems, etc.). This way of working allows a **quick response to evolving developments**. Depending on current events, new members can easily be added to a team or teams can be quickly reduced.

Focus: Outreach to the academic world

The Outreach Project is about structuring and optimising ties with the academic world. To efficiently tackle security problems within our society, we need more insights and interdisciplinary cooperation. The academic world is an essential partner in this.

To strengthen those ties, several projects are ongoing within Outreach:

— **Students@cuta:** Students can submit questions to CUTA in the context of their master's thesis at specific, set times. There was again an on-site edition at CUTA in March 2024. About thirty students were present.

— A **thesis competition:** In cooperation with the Belgian universities, CUTA organises a thesis competition every year. The first prize is a speakers' chair at the colloquium gathering the security services and the academic world. The UGent won the first prize again.

— An **annual colloquium**: In 2024, CUTA did not organise a colloquium as part of the Outreach Project. The Outreach colloquium (Fusion Conference) was postponed to 2025. Anti-establishment sentiments were the central theme.

— The **scientific journal** Radices: Since 2021, Outreach publishes each year an online publication in collaboration with the academic world. The journal brings together promising and out-of-the-box research. Winners of the thesis competition get the opportunity to write a contribution. In the course of 2024, it was decided to revise the publication: As to respect more profoundly the topical value of the contributions, the decision has been taken to publish each article from the moment it is ready. The collected articles (published on the platform Janeway, but also available on the website of CUTA) is published before the annual colloquium.

— **Lectures** at universities: Also in 2024, CUTA visited several universities to speak about its functioning and its multidisciplinary approach to extremism and terrorism.

— **Thematic meetings** with the academic world: Regularly, CUTA invites academics to come and present their research (linked with CUTA's competences). The discussions that follow these presentations are enriching both for the researchers, who can test their work against the field, and for CUTA, that has to keep being critical and that gains new insights. In 2024, there was 1 lecture in this context at CUTA.

For the Strategy T.E.R. to succeed, cooperation and trust between all services involved are crucial

With external parties in the context of the Strategy T.E.R.

The objective of the Strategy T.E.R. is to curtail all forms of extremism (including the radicalisation process) in our society as much as possible.

Important in this regard is that **all forms of extremism** are addressed **in a consistent manner.** The Strategy T.E.R. incorporates various consultation platforms and structures (the **NTF**, the **LTFs**, the **National Working Groups** (WG) and the **LISC Rs**), where all competent services and actors working on the phenomena of terrorism and extremism are gathered around the table and share information. This may involve information sharing at the strategic level (NTF, most of the Working Groups) or information sharing and discussions at the individual level (LTF and/or LISC-R). CUTA plays a **coordinating role within the Strategy T.E.R.** All operational departments of the service are closely involved in its operation through participation in various platforms.

NTF · The National Task Force

The National Task Force, or NTF, is the **strategic consultation platform** that steers the Strategy T.E.R. It is chaired by CUTA. Because of the Belgian political constellation, the NTF is the strategic consultation platform par excellence where **all different levels of government in our country sit down together** to tackle radicalisation, extremism and terrorism. The NTF is responsible for **the general management** and continuous monitoring of the implementation of the Strategy T.E.R. In addition, the NTF can provide feedback at political level if necessary.

LTF · The Local Task Forces

CUTA is represented in the **18 Local Task Forces (LTFs),** which serve as **the central hub** of the Strategy T.E.R. In terms of **enforcement and security**. The LTFs form a network where security services exchange information and discuss **concrete cases**. In mutual agreement, the partners decide whether and how entities are followed up by taking security measures (LTFs) or socio-preventive measures (referral to the LISC-Rs). The input of the LTFs is important in order to feed the CDB T.E.R.

WG · National Working Groups

When the Strategy T.E.R. was introduced, it was agreed that the WG would initially adopt a more **strategic approach**, in support of the case-by-case operational monitoring that takes place at LTF level. The multidisciplinary experts in the working groups provide **concerted expertise, opinions and analyses** of phenomena, trends or groups in support of the LTF.

TM · Traineeship for magistrates

Since 2018, CUTA has organised **observational internships** in the form of in-depth **briefings** for trainee magistrates on the **functioning of CUTA** and the security landscape. Due to a reorganisation of the training programme at the Institute for Judicial Training (IGO/IFJ), in 2024, exceptionally, there were no briefings. **The next edition will take place in the course of September 2025**.
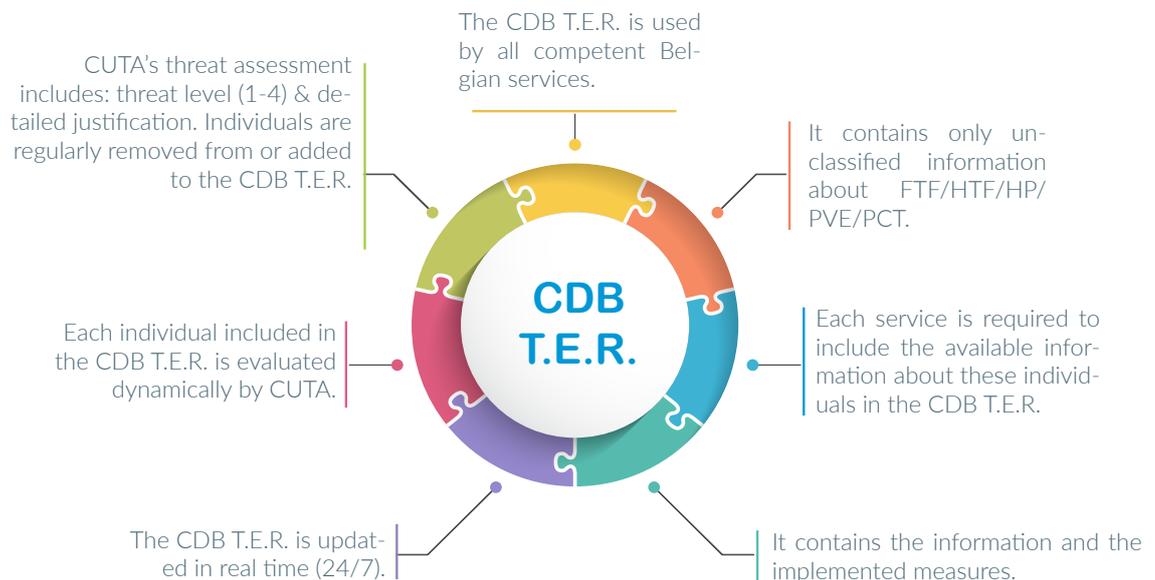
CDB The Common Database T.E.R.

The Common Database T.E.R. is the **transversal tool** and the backbone of **information sharing** within the **Strategy T.E.R.** In the CDB T.E.R., all competent services share **unclassified information**, in close consultation and according to strict, legally regulated criteria, on Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs), Homegrown Terrorist Fighters (HTFs), Hate Propagandists (HPs), Potentially Violent Extremists (PVEs) and Persons Convicted of Terrorism (PCTs) that are monitored with priority (see also p. 25 and next). **Access** to the CDB T.E.R. is **multi-stage**. Each of the services can only see and do what they need to do to fulfil their missions. Services granted writing access are legally required to feed the CDB T.E.R. with relevant information.

CUTA is the **operational manager** of the CDB T.E.R. As a consequence, CUTA is responsible for the quality check, the **validation** of the entities in the CDB T.E.R., for the **registration** of new entities, and for the **removal** of entities who do not belong in the CDB T.E.R. anymore. Rigorous efforts are made to ensure that individuals in the CDB T.E.R. still meet all criteria for inclusion. CUTA drafts an individual threat assessment for each individual in the CDB T.E.R. It includes a threat level between 1 and 4 and a detailed motivation identifying the threat across five risk domains.

Over the course of 2024, the CDB T.E.R. underwent again some technical improvements. Through the addition of several tailor-made filters for the participating services in the interface of the database, they can, for instance, filter information according to their own specific needs and perform more goal-oriented requests.

CUTA's threat assessment includes: threat level (1-4) & detailed justification. Individuals are regularly removed from or added to the CDB T.E.R.

The CDB T.E.R. is used by all competent Belgian services.

It contains only unclassified information about FTF/HTF/HP/PVE/PCT.

Each individual included in the CDB T.E.R. is evaluated dynamically by CUTA.

CDB T.E.R.

Each service is required to include the available information about these individuals in the CDB T.E.R.

The CDB T.E.R. is updated in real time (24/7).

It contains the information and the implemented measures.

4.7 Legal framework

CUTA's organic framework

— Act of 10 July 2006 on the threat analysis;

— Royal Decree of 28 November 2006 implementing the Act of 10 July 2006 on the threat analysis;

— Royal Decree of 23 January 2007 on the staff of the Coordination Unit for Threat Analysis;

— Royal Decree of 24 August 2007 holding the award of a function allowance for certain staff members of the Coordination Unit for Threat Analysis;

— Act of 30 July 2018 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data;

— Royal Decree of 29 September 2024 regarding the extension of the threats assessed by the Coordination Unit for Threat Analysis in the framework of the application for recognition of local communities of the recognised worships, in execution of Article 3, second paragraph, of the Act of 10 July 2006 on the threat analysis.

Common Database

— Act of 29 March 2024 regarding the creation of the common database "T.E.R.";

— Royal Decree of 14 July 2024 on the common database "T.E.R.".

Preventive individual administrative measures
(frozen assets, Passban, ID-ban)

— Consular code of 21 December 2013 (articles 39/1 to 39/4 and 62 to 65/2);

— Act of 19 July 1991 on the population registers, identity cards, foreigner identity cards and residence permits (article 6, § 10);

— Royal Decree of 28 December 2006 with regard to specific restrictive measures against certain individuals and entities in the fight against the financing of terrorism.

Varia

— Act of 1 July 2011 on the protection of critical infrastructure;

— Royal Decree of 22 December 2020 on the setting up of the National Security Council, the Strategic Intelligence and Security Committee and the Intelligence and Security Coordination Committee;

— Act of 3 May 2024 on the compensation of victims of an act of terrorism and concerning the insurance against damage caused by terrorism.

Strategy T.E.R. & LISC-R

— Strategy T.E.R. adopted by the Consultation Committee on 8 September 2021;

— Act of 30 July 2018 regarding the creation of Local Integral Security Cells concerning radicalism, extremism and terrorism.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AQ — Al Qaeda

CCB — Centre for Cyber Security Belgium

CCIV — Coordination Committee for Intelligence and Security

CCTA — Madrid Group

CDB T.E.R. — Common Database T.E.R.

CTIF/CFI — Belgian Financial Intelligence Processing Unit

COC — Supervisory Body for Police Information

DDOS — Distributed denial of service

DG EPI — Directorate General of the Prison Administration

EENET — European Expert Network on Terrorism Issues

FM&Doc — File Management and Documentation

FPS FA — Federal Public Foreign Affairs

FPS IA — Federal Public Service Interior Affairs

FPS MOB — Federal Public Service Mobility

FTF — Foreign Terrorist Fighter

HP — Hate Propagandist

HTF — Homegrown Terrorist Fighter

ID-ban — Withdrawal of identity card (preventive administrative measure)

IO — Information Officer

IS — Islamic State

ISKP — Islamic State Khorasan Province

LISC-R — Local Integral Security Cell concerning Radicalism

LTF — Local Task Force

NCCN — National Crisis Centre

NSC — National Security Council

NTF — National Task Force

Passban — Withdrawal of passport (preventive administrative measure)

Plan R — Action Plan against Radicalism

PCT — Person Convicted of Terrorism

PI — Preliminary investigation

PVE — Potentially Violent Extremist

RFI — Request for information (information request by a partner or support service)

SGRS/ADIV — Military General Service for Intelligence and Security

Strategy T.E.R. — Strategy against Terrorism and Extremism, including the Radicalisation process

VSSE — State Security

WG — Working Group