RETURNENES: WHO ARE THEY, WHY ARE THEY (NOT) COMING BACK AND HOW SHOULD WE DEAL WITH THEM? Assessing Policies on Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands. Egmont Paper 101, February 2018


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Abstract

Some 5000 men, women and children have travelled from Europe to Syria and Iraq since 2012. An estimated 1500 of these foreign terrorist fighters (FTF) have returned so far. Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands represent a third of European FTF and returnees. This report looks into the evolution of policies on returning foreign fighters in these three countries, comparing responses with regard to fighters that are still in the conflict zone, policies to deal with returnees in prison and attitudes towards the children of foreign fighters. It is the very first systematic and in-depth study into national approaches and policies vis-à-vis returnees. Its added value lies in the wealth of data, including data that has not been published before, and in the comparative angle.
Assessing policies on returning foreign terrorist fighters in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands, Egmont Institute, Brussels, February 2018, pp. 7-9, (hereafter, T. Renard and R. Coolsaet (eds), “Returnees: who are they, why are they (not) coming back and how should we deal with them?”, Egmont Institute). 15 See: “Greater Cooperation Needed to Tackle Danger Posed by Returning Foreign Fighters, Head of Counter‑Terrorism Office Tells Security Council”, United Nations, 29 November 2017. 11, Guidelines for Addressing the Threats and Challenges of Foreign Terrorist Fighters. A massive return of foreign fighters was feared at the time. Across Europe, the penal code was broadened to criminalize offenses related to traveling for terrorist purposes, in line with UNSC Resolution 2178 on Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs). Authorities embarked upon more comprehensive and even novel programs, ranging from prevention to repression, to deal with the threat. But the worst didn’t happen. The flow of traveling fighters waned significantly. From 2016 onwards, with ISIS’s state project collapsing, mostly women and families with small children returned from the Levant, not season… Assessing policies on returning foreign terrorist fighters in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands. Assessing Policies on Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters in Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands more. by Rik Coolsaet. Thomas Renard. This working paper explores how Belgium reacted to the growth of this new form of terrorism from its early signs in the 1980s until today. Next, it analyses the measures taken by the Belgian law enforcement apparatus since 9/11. Finally, it assesses Belgian specificities in combating jihadi terrorism. Introduction Belgium is not a significant safe haven for terrorist groups, according to the 2006 edition of the Country Reports on Terrorism, released by the U.S. State Department in April 2007. Belgium is only a piece in a global puzzle of terrorism, including its jihadi variant that gained wor