



Protecting places of worship

The rise of religious hate

Andrew Staniforth and **David Fortune** introduce a new EU-funded project that promises to deliver the next generation of integrated measures to enhance the protection and preparedness of Europe's places of worship

It was the holiest day of the Jewish year when, on October 9, 2019, in the German town of Halle, a cantor at a synagogue leading worshippers in prayer glanced at a CCTV monitor and saw a gunman trying to shoot his way into the building. As officials ushered the congregation into an adjoining room, the gunman, later identified as 27-year-old Stefan Balliet, threw explosives into the complex and opened fire on the synagogue's front door. Recently reinforced, the main entrance to the place of worship held firm, saving the lives of those inside.

Apparently frustrated by his failure to breach the entrance, Balliet turned his gun on a 40-year-old woman who happened to be walking past. The shooting of the innocent pedestrian proved to be fatal and was followed by another unsuccessful attempt to gain entry into the synagogue. It is alleged that Balliet then drove off and stopped a few streets away, throwing a home-made explosive at a kebab shop, and shooting dead a 20-year-old man who was inside.

Prosecutors believe Balliet to be a loner, an outlier in his local community and motivated by antisemitism and xenophobia, who planned to massacre those inside the synagogue. Counterterror police investigators have tried to assemble the pieces of Balliet's life and explore his motivations, but it has proved challenging. Family members, including his mother Claudia, who taught ethics, German and general knowledge at a local primary school, refused to testify in court during his trial last year.

Balliet had no partner, no friends and was never a member of a political party. According to police investigators testifying at the trial, his life revolved around the anonymous forums and imageboards that have become an echo chamber for right-wing fanatics across the globe. Having self-radicalised on the Internet, Balliet is believed to be a true lone-wolf, acting alone without direction or operational support, using only online content as his inspiration. He learned how to handle weapons during his time in the German armed forces and completed his six-month military service in a Panzer grenadier battalion as an 18-year-old.

Balliet fulfils the stereotypical characteristics of an ex-armed forces white supremacist, even attempting to escape from prison by scaling a three-metre fence during a recreation period. He was recaptured moments later by prison authorities and transferred to a maximum security

prison to ensure his retention in custody until his trial.

Terrorist attacks and incidents of hate crime at places of worship now represent serious security concerns across the world, as extremists and terrorists promulgating hate and violent ideologies continue to commit crimes against places of worship with alarming regularity. Attacks on mosques and synagogues have been widely reported by European media, but a disturbing rise in the extent of attacks on Christian places of worship is only just emerging.

Shocking and depressing

Following an arson attack that caused a devastating fire to rip through the Gothic Cathedral of St Peter and St Paul in Nantes, France on July 18 last year, the secretary general of Justice and Peace Europe, Stefan Lunte, told Germany's Catholic Dom Radio that around 1,000 attacks occur annually on France's 42,000 churches and chapels, as well as on cemeteries and other Christian sites, with an average of three places of worship desecrated daily. Lunte commented: "This is happening in all European countries, but France is particularly affected. There are satanist cults here, as well as very extreme anarchist and libertarian groups, people often quite unstable psychologically. Individual cases cannot always be explained, but overall, it is shocking and depressing. Something is happening in French society that has long been neglected but is becoming evident with these fires. The country is becoming de-Christianised and there are people who wish, for whatever reason, to vandalise and destroy Christian symbols. The long-held strategy of keeping this under wraps simply does not work."

While the number of officially recorded anti-Christian incidents has remained steady over the past two years, according to figures collated by the Observatory on Intolerance and Discrimination Against Christians in Europe (OIDACE) in Vienna – which reveals 1,063 incidents in 2018 and 1,052 in 2019 – recorded incidents rose by 285 per cent between 2008 and 2019. Ellen Fantini, Director of the OIDACE has said that the trend of rising attacks was not confined to France, stating: "Most European countries do not provide statistics about anti-Christian incidents. Many don't even record them as such. Another problem is that many church officials don't even report incidents. Among countries that do report, those numbers are rising as well. For example, according



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individually or in a community, in public or private, through worship, observance, practice and teaching. To protect this human right, the EU adheres to the 2008 Declaration on Religions, Anti-Terrorism-Extremism Legislation. Moreover, attacks on places of worship are contrary to the founding human rights and the rule of law of the EU. Article 10 of the EU Fundamental Rights Charter is the baseline for human rights protection in the EU and offences against persons based on religion are punishable under criminal law where minimum rights, support and protection of victims of hate crime are established.

As across the European Union, freedom of worship remains a cornerstone of British life and the UK Government has stated its commitment to supporting faith communities so that they are able to worship free from fear or abuse. Over recent years, the UK Government has understood the need to adapt the way police and public authorities respond to religious hate crime, recognising that no two religions are the same and that historical, cultural and theological differences also shape attitudes and practices towards security.

Acknowledging the need to better protect places of worship, the National Centre for Social Research (NatCen), on behalf of the UK Home Office, last year launched a public consultation to address the concerns and vulnerabilities that worshippers feel when attending their place of worship. Responses are being collated, processed and analysed by NatCen, and a summary analysis will be published and shared with stakeholders in due course. While the results of the consultation are yet to be published, early analysis reveals the consistent and important message from religious leaders is striking the right balance between worshipping openly, without fear, and providing adequate security measures to protect worshippers.

The Home Office public consultation followed the Places of Worship Protective Security Funding scheme, which was a major government commitment in the 2016-2020 hate crime action plan. This scheme, which closed its final round of applications last year, provided £3.2 million funding for protective security measures at places of worship and associated faith community centres that were vulnerable to hate crime. Any crime motivated by hostility on the grounds of race, religion, sexual orientation, disability or transgender identity was classed as a hate crime but, for this particular scheme, the Home Office focused specifically on religion. To be considered for funding, the applicant needed to demonstrate that their place of worship or associated faith community centre was vulnerable to hate crimes that target people because of their religion. The scheme has provided 90 grants for protective security measures at places of worship across the country, funding innovative projects to tackle hate and providing protective security measures to a total value of £56,000 per application, which has included the installation of CCTV, automated vehicle gates, security doors and locks, intruder alarms, access control and video intercom systems.

The protective security scheme for places of worship has made improvements to the security of premises receiving the grants and should be considered for extension to allow more places of worship to benefit directly. But much more needs to be done to protect worshippers and their place of worship from violence,

abuse and intolerance. Greater efforts to establish and step up co-operation between public authorities and faith-based leaders and congregations – including the establishment of clear communication channels and providing information about, and a better understanding of, all manner of security threats, from hate crimes to terrorism – would be positive progress in strengthening the protection of places of worship that remain integral to the fabric of modern societies.

Last year, as part of a broad range of measures to tackle security concerns at places at worship, the European Commission, through the Internal Security Fund for Police (ISFP), launched a call for proposals encouraging law enforcement agencies, academia and the private sector to work together to enhance the protection of places of worship. More specifically, it has made funding available for partnerships to establish or strengthen co-operation between public authorities and faith-based leaders and congregations, alongside the sharing of knowledge, tools and good practices on protective measures across different EU member states.

Unique collaboration

One of the successful projects to receive funding from the ISFP call is PROTECTOR (PROTECTing places of wORship), which brings together a unique group of law enforcement agencies co-ordinated by Saher (Europe). Commencing in April, the two-year project includes police partners An Garda Síochána in Ireland, the Swedish Police Authority and the Municipality of Trento Local Police in Italy, joined by Antwerp Police in Belgium and the Policing Department of the University of Applied Sciences for Public Service in Bavaria, Germany. It presents a unique collaboration of police forces currently combatting threats to places of worship.

Working together, the PROTECTOR project consortium of police partners aims to deliver the next generation of integrated security measures, which aligns with the approach of tackling hate crimes and terrorism of the new EU Security Union Strategy launched last year. Margaritis Schinas, Vice-President for Promoting the European Way of Life, stated: “Security is a cross-cutting issue which goes into almost every sphere of life and affects a multitude of policy areas. With the new EU Security Union Strategy, we are connecting all the dots to build a real security ecosystem.”

Supported by the G20 Inter Faith Forum and the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI), the PROTECTOR project will design, develop and deliver the next generation of integrated measures to enhance the protection of all places of worship.

The PROTECTOR project consortium is complemented by the inclusion of Fondazione Bruno Kessler, the leading research institute in Italy, bringing exceptional technical expertise through the involvement of its Centre for Communication and Information Technology. The important role of Fondazione Bruno Kessler is amplified by the participation of its Centre for Religious Studies, which advances the critical understanding between religion and innovation in contemporary society.

To support policy and strategy development, the European Institute in Bulgaria adds great value to the PROTECTOR project consortium, bringing

extensive experience in policy development at national and EU level to ensure project outputs have maximum impact at the highest levels across the EU.

In building the PROTECTOR programme of work, consortium partners recognised that a multi-faith approach must be taken to create an ecosystem of protective security measures, including amplifying co-operation between public authorities, faith-based leaders and congregations through security awareness raising campaigns.

The PROTECTOR project partners also understand that places of worship *stricto sensu* and religious places – namely all places where people of religious organisations congregate, including religious schools – should be taken together. Combining this approach with the expertise of leading academic institutions, private sector organisations and police forces, the PROTECTOR project will significantly enhance the protection of places of worship through the assessment of hate crime and terrorism threats, examining protective security measures and law enforcement agency responses.

The project will implement a protective security strategy, specifically designed for places of worship of all faiths, which will be delivered with protective security plans for 25 places of worship located in five EU member states. To enhance the situational awareness and investigative capability of law enforcement agencies, new technology tools will be developed and tested at 15 places of worship in three EU member states. The project will also develop law enforcement agency, public authority and faith leadership protective security awareness expertise through the development and implementation of accessible training tools.

The project aims to establish and strengthen co-operation between public authorities and faith-based leaders and congregations through an engagement strategy, underpinned by the design and delivery of a security awareness raising campaign, encouraging the reporting of suspicious behaviour and the promotion of appropriate responses to threats.

The collective, sustainable impact of PROTECTOR outputs will significantly enhance the protection and preparedness of all places of worship across Europe, serving to increase the preventative and investigative capabilities of all EU law enforcement agencies in order to protect places of worship from all manner of hate crime, terrorism and emerging security threats. 

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the fabric of a local community, but also provide a symbolic target for a terrorist to raise attention to their cause, now calls for sustained action and support of the Council of Europe, which protects individuals' right to freedom of religion and belief under the provisions of Articles 9 and 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights. Among others, this fundamental human right comprises the freedom to manifest religion and belief,