



Euro 2016 – teaming up for security

by Pierre Minard

Friday 10 June saw the first match of UEFA's European Championship 2016 in France. As the French and Romanian teams entered the pitch of the *Stade de France*, it was difficult to forget that, only seven months earlier, three terrorists detonated themselves just outside the stadium during a friendly game between France and Germany, killing one bystander.

Fortunately, none of the suicide bombers managed to get inside the stadium (as was their likely intention), but the explosions marked the beginning of the Friday 13 November attacks which claimed over 130 lives. With ten stadiums and 'fan zones' hosting events, and around 2.5 million people from all over Europe and beyond cheering on the teams until 10 July, security is clearly the primary concern of French authorities overseeing the competition. This tournament raises the highly sensitive issue of the need for greater international and European cooperation when responding to security challenges. In this spirit, Europol, Interpol and participating countries have pledged their support to the French authorities throughout the competition.

Terrorist threats

It is a daunting task to ascertain the exact nature of the current terrorist threat. Besides commando-style attacks like in Paris in November last year, the menace of 'lone wolf' attacks resurfaced after the murder of a French police officer and his

partner near Paris earlier this month by a young man who had pledged allegiance to Daesh.

Prior to this, Mohamed Abrini, the prime suspect in both the recent Brussels and Paris attacks who was arrested in Belgium on 8 April, admitted to the authorities who questioned him that the original plan of his terrorist cell was to hit France again, this time during Euro 2016. It is only because of the pressure following the arrest of fellow Daesh supporter Salah Abdeslam and the prospects of the police closing in that the cell decided to change their plans and attack Brussels instead on 22 March.

Although Daesh continues to pose the most serious terrorist threat to Euro 2016, the group is increasingly struggling to hold on to its territory in Iraq and Syria. In the former, US-supported Iraqi troops, alongside Shia and Kurdish militias recently managed to drive Daesh out of Fallujah and are now setting their sights on Mosul in the north – the virtual capital of the Daesh in Iraq and by far the biggest city under its control.

In the meantime, in Syria, Daesh is increasingly being squeezed between an Arab-Kurdish coalition on one side and President Assad's forces on the other. This difficult strategic context for Daesh means that further retaliatory attacks on European soil, driven largely by desperation and the need to prove power projection, cannot be ruled out.



In addition to jihadist terrorism, the recent arrest of a French national with an arsenal of weapons at the Polish-Ukrainian border may also raise concerns over the possibility of far-right extremists. Moreover, counter-terrorism officials also have had to deal with hooliganism, the danger of which was demonstrated through the eruptions of violence in Marseille and Lille in early stages of the championship.

The means – old and new

To tackle the threats facing Euro 2016, French Interior Minister Bernard Cazeneuve announced the deployment of a heavy security presence: 45,000 police officers, 30,000 gendarmes, 5,000 personnel from civil protection services and 13,000 private security agents. Furthermore, part of the 10,000 French troops engaged in Operation Sentinelle are also guarding several venues and key transport hubs.

In order to avoid the spreading of disinformation on social media, a new smartphone app named SAIP was launched by the French authorities on 8 June. This ‘terror app’ is designed to issue alerts in the event of a terrorist attack in both English and French, and is programmed to tailor information based on the location of its user. It also lists sets of actions to be taken in the event of an attack.

Finally, the French have deployed means to enforce air security and surveillance, similar to those used during the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens and the 2006 FIFA World Cup in Germany, when NATO contributed to the security of the airspace by using its AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control System) planes. For Euro 2016, a variety of fighter jets, helicopters and other aircraft are on 24/7 standby to react to any airborne threat ranging from regular planes to drones. Besides the venues themselves, other potential targets of a terrorist attack, such as nuclear plants or official buildings are also covered by this aerial shield.

Sharing information

For all counter-terrorism efforts since 9/11, information-sharing has been a constant concern

– be it across national services or between countries. At the core of the system of cooperation for UEFA Euro 2016 lies the International Police Coordination Centre (IPCC). Inaugurated on 7 June, it hosts more than 200 police officers from all countries represented at Euro 2016, as well as staff from Europol and Interpol. The IPCC is an *ad hoc* structure which is used to centralise the gathering and sharing of information with the authorities of the host state. Small teams of police officers, both in the IPCC and on the ground, provide support to their French counterparts by quickly identifying any potential threat via the real-time exchange of information.

On top of this, Interpol, the international police organisation, has launched a Major Events Support Team (IMEST) which grants rapid access to a database of passport checks. This is a crucial tool, especially when it comes to identifying counterfeit passports that could be used by terrorists returning from Syria or Iraq – two of the three suicide bombers involved in the *Stade de France* bombings were, for example, in possession of fake Syrian passports.

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These cooperative efforts are unprecedented, if commensurate to the scale of the potential threat and the level of public exposure. They are also putting enormous strain on France’s security apparatus at a time when the country is also facing social unrest. These

gargantuan efforts may not end at the Euro 2016 final on 10 July, as the upcoming *Tour de France* – another global sporting event – is guaranteed to draw attention to France once again.

Yet these measures appear to be the price to pay to keep Europe’s societies open. They are also further evidence of the fact that cooperation works and teamwork pays off – both on and off the pitch.

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