



Veiligheid van de staat  
sûreté de l'état

# INTELLIGENCE REPORT 2025

STATE SECURITY

.be





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sûreté de l'état

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# FOREWORD

I am proud to present our Intelligence Report once again this year. Preparing it is always a demanding task, yet at the same time a valuable opportunity for reflection. The report allows those who contribute to it — and, we hope, those who read it — to consider the threats we have faced over the past year, both as an organisation and as a society, and to look ahead to the challenges that lie before us in the months to come. For me, this Intelligence Report is therefore far more than a formal publication.



In my preface to the 2024 Intelligence Report, I observed that the international geopolitical context had a direct impact on our domestic security. This remains very much the case at the start of 2026. Russia's war in Ukraine continues to shape the security situation in Europe, and, by extension, in Belgium. While the conflict does not take the form of conventional military action on Belgian territory, it is reflected in a wide and evolving range of hybrid threats, including espionage, interference, cyber operations and disinformation. These activities are intended to test our resilience, sow doubt and undermine trust in our institutions.

China also continues to present a significant security challenge for Europe and for Belgium, particularly in areas where economic, technological and security interests intersect. Strategic investments, dependencies in key technologies, access to critical infrastructure, as well as cyber activities, espionage and interference, all require heightened vigilance to safeguard our national interests.

At the same time, the terrorist threat persists. Islamic State and al-Qaeda have not disappeared, as tragically illustrated by the attack at Bondi Beach in Australia on 14 December 2025. Ongoing conflicts in the Middle East continue to create conditions that enable radicalisation. In particular, the situation in Gaza acts as a catalyst for further violence, including beyond the region, and is actively exploited by terrorist organisations in their propaganda. Such rhetoric can incite individuals to turn to violent acts.

In addition to these threats, extremism in its various forms remains a cause for concern. The extremist threat posed by the Muslim Brotherhood is real and is reflected, among other things, in attempts to exert covert influence on government policy relating to Islam. In this respect, the movement also presents a risk of interference. More broadly, the current, increasingly polarised world provides fertile ground for the emergence and strengthening of extremist movements, both on the left and on the right. Extremist propaganda, intimidation of opponents and calls for violence are methods used on both sides of the extremist spectrum.

Alongside these challenges, organised crime continues to pose a growing threat to security. Criminal organisations are increasingly seeking to undermine the state, including through corruption, the intimidation of public officials and members of the judiciary, and the infiltration of legitimate structures.

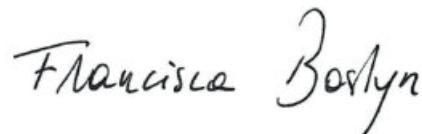
In this context, collaboration is not an abstract concept, but a daily reality. Indeed, it is essential today. The VSSE therefore remains firmly committed to national partnerships, in particular with the military intelligence service (GISS), but also with the other actors within the broader security chain. Only through close information sharing and joint analysis can threats be identified at an early stage and effectively countered.

International partnerships also remain essential for a service such as the VSSE. There is close daily cooperation with European partner services and with allies within NATO, reflecting the conviction that collective security strengthens us all. At the same time, the service remains attentive to the potential implications of new international developments, including changes in the foreign and security policies of key partners, such as the United States.

The multiplicity and complexity of these threats place considerable demands on both our service and on our staff. In recent years, we have implemented significant reforms; the focus now is on consolidation and continued professionalisation. With additional resources and an updated legal framework, we will be better equipped not only to analyse threats, but also to actively disrupt them, in line with developments in other European partner services.

In addition to its intelligence remit, the VSSE also fulfills an essential security role. The integration of the National Security Authority in 2024 brought with it an additional responsibility: overseeing the security of classified information. In today's geopolitical context, safeguarding such information has become a key pillar of both national and collective resilience within the European Union and NATO. Over the past period, the service has therefore made significant progress in developing this area.

Finally, I would like to close this foreword with a note of acknowledgement. The quality and credibility of the VSSE are, above all, owed to the dedication, integrity and professionalism of its staff. As Administrator-General, I am especially grateful for the remarkable sense of responsibility, expertise and resilience they demonstrate each and every day. I therefore consider this report to be a recognition of their work.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Francisca Bostyn". The signature is fluid and cursive, with "Francisca" on the left and "Bostyn" on the right, separated by a small gap.

# WORKING TOGETHER TO BUILD THE STATE SECURITY SERVICE OF THE FUTURE

Thanks to its comprehensive expertise and specialised knowledge, the State Security (VSSE) makes a tangible difference to our country's security every day. Both on the ground and behind the scenes, the service demonstrates its effectiveness in safeguarding our democracy and institutions.

In today's rapidly evolving geopolitical environment, Belgium must be able to rely on a forward-looking intelligence service. That is why we are investing in the VSSE, with the aim of developing it into the benchmark in the fight against extremism, terrorism, espionage and interference.

## Investing in security

Over the past legislature, the focus has been on recruiting additional staff for the VSSE. For the current legislature, we have committed to investing in technological resources, enabling the VSSE to adapt its operations to the ever-evolving threats, including hybrid threats.

To that end, we are further enhancing the VSSE's operational capabilities as well as its legal framework. In early December 2025, the Council of Ministers approved the procurement of a tool designed to intercept the communications of specific targets.

A revision of the Act on the Intelligence and Security Services will ensure that the VSSE is not only able to detect threats in a timely manner, but also to take effective action against them. Investing in the VSSE is therefore, unequivocally, an investment in our national security.

## Essential cooperation

Security and justice go hand in hand: robust and efficient security and intelligence services are a necessary foundation for a fair and effective justice system.

The justice system plays a crucial and connecting role within our security framework. We remain firmly committed to smooth cooperation with all



other actors. At the same time, we pursue an integrated security strategy, with the Federal Judicial Police, the Public Prosecutors' Offices, the National Drugs Commission, and the VSSE all being strengthened.

## Ensuring resilience

In a world where threats are increasingly diffuse and international, resilience is not optional, it is essential. The VSSE plays a vital role: discreet when necessary, resolute when required, and always guided by respect for the rule of law and our democratic values.

This Intelligence Report bears witness to that commitment and professionalism. At the same time, it highlights the importance of maintaining public trust in the VSSE, as well as the continued need to provide it with the resources required to safeguard our security and prosperity over the long term.

**ANNELIES VERLINDEN**  
MINISTER OF JUSTICE

# PART 1

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MULTIPLE,  
COMPLEX  
THREATS  
IN AN  
UNSTABLE  
WORLD

# RUSSIA INCREASES THE PRESSURE: A VAST AND DIVERSE ARSENAL OF HYBRID ACTIONS

Cyberattacks that take down government websites, disinformation campaigns, interference in (European) decision-making and espionage. Russia continues to draw on a vast and diverse arsenal of hybrid actions to exert pressure. Whether recent drone incidents also form part of this arsenal is still under investigation.

**The hybrid threat from Russia is not a new phenomenon, but the VSSE notes that it has continued to grow since 2022, including in Belgium. Although the ongoing war in Ukraine places significant demands on Russia in terms of resources, this has not prevented Moscow from maintaining or even increasing its hybrid activities in Europe for the time being.**

Russia derives several advantages from these actions. Hybrid actions can intimidate, sow confusion and therefore make the Russian threat appear greater than it actually is. In addition, such actions may be intended to cause economic damage, test government responses, gather intelligence, or divert the attention of intelligence and security services, in the hope that other clandestine actions remain under the radar.

**To achieve this, Russia obscures any direct link by working with intermediaries,**

using widely available resources, or ensuring that alternative explanations are possible. This plausible deniability allows the Kremlin to distance itself from these actions. Before attributing any operation to Russia, the VSSE conducts meticulous investigations in cooperation with national and international partners.

In the field of intelligence, there is close cooperation with the GISS and with various foreign intelligence services. The hybrid threat from Russia is not confined to Belgium; many European and non-European countries are also affected to varying degrees.

The VSSE also adopts a whole-of-society approach, engaging actors from across society to counter this threat. The service works closely with a wide range of security partners to enhance Belgium's resilience against the highly diverse spectrum of possible hybrid actions.





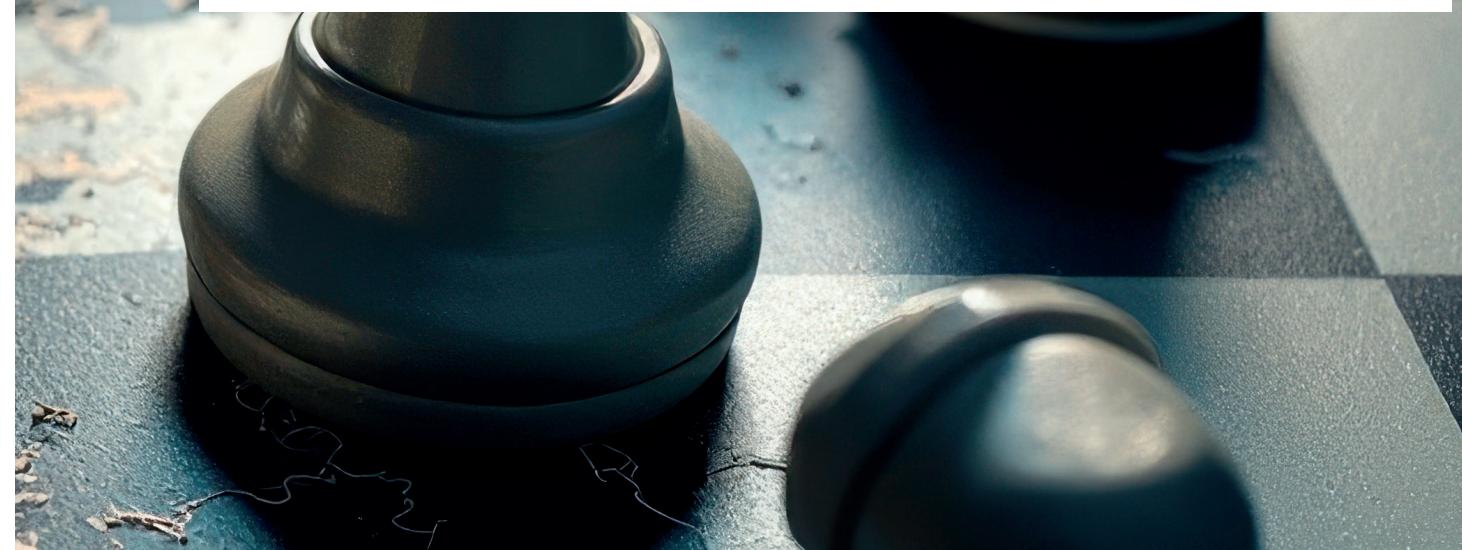
## ► DRONES FLYING OVER SENSITIVE INFRASTRUCTURE

Reports of drones over airports, military sites or sensitive infrastructure such as nuclear power plants peaked in the autumn of 2025. Many of these were 'false positives', where planes or stars were mistaken for drones. Other cases did involve actual drones. Whether these incidents were part of a Russian hybrid campaign remains under investigation.

What is certain, however, is that drones can be highly useful for individuals seeking to carry out hybrid actions. They can be deployed flexibly, are difficult to detect and have a significant potential impact (e.g. the suspension of air traffic above airports). Moreover, it is not only difficult to identify who is piloting the drones, but also who is coordinating the pilots. Plausible deniability in practice.

Nevertheless, caution is advised. It can be tempting to attribute every flying object to Russia, but this is precisely the effect they seek to achieve with their hybrid actions.

Other European countries also recorded unexplained drone flights last year. The VSSE is therefore in close contact with foreign partner services to exchange intelligence, research leads and findings. It goes without saying that the VSSE also works closely with other Belgian partners investigating drone reports, including Defence, the military intelligence service GISS, the Federal Police and the FPS Mobility.



## ► ESPIONAGE

The Russian espionage threat in Belgium has been significantly curtailed since 2022, when dozens of Russian intelligence officers under diplomatic cover were expelled. These large-scale expulsions delivered a serious blow to the Russian intelligence apparatus in the country.

In close consultation with the FPS Foreign Affairs, the VSSE rigorously screens the visa applications of Russian diplomatic personnel to distinguish genuine diplomats from intelligence officers posing as such. For the latter, the door remains

closed: it is not intended that the SVR and the GRU, Russia's civilian foreign intelligence service and military intelligence service respectively, return to work at a post on Belgian territory.

Throughout 2025, Belgium was compelled to deny more than half of Russian diplomatic visa applications in certain months, as the individuals concerned were in fact working for an intelligence service. Moscow is clearly not relenting, and continued vigilance is required.

## ► DISINFORMATION

Disinformation and influence campaigns are a long-standing component of Russian hybrid actions. In this context, a wide range of pro-Russian actors seek to sow division and undermine democratic institutions through anti-Western, anti-democratic and polarising messages. They often exploit existing rifts and current events opportunistically, sometimes also in Belgium.

Consider, for example, the pressure surrounding frozen Russian assets at the securities depository Euroclear in the autumn of 2025. In addition to 'normal diplomatic pressure', the SVR publicly adopted threatening language towards Belgium, in a clear attempt at intimidation.

Other Russian actors sought to stir resentment against the government and Belgian support for Ukraine last year, claiming, for instance, that the authorities were misleading the population about the 'high cost of support', or that most 'ordinary Belgians' were ashamed of the 'Russophobic and warmongering attitude' of the Belgian authorities.

These messages were subsequently picked up, repackaged, and further disseminated by other actors. Russian disinformation campaigns are not a strictly coordinated performance, but rather a loose association of individuals, channels, websites and blogs designed to create the appearance of widely held opinions or frustrations.

## ► SABOTAGE

**During 2025, the modus operandi of so-called disposable agents working for Russia, previously observed to cause concern in other European countries, also became apparent in Belgium. In our country, assignments for these 'freelancers' have, for the time being, been limited to low-impact acts, such as the distribution of flyers. Belgium has so far been spared from serious kinetic actions, commonly referred**

**to as sabotage. This is no longer the case elsewhere in the EU, as demonstrated by the damage caused to a railway line by explosives in Poland in November 2025. The VSSE is aware of the possibility that assignments for disposable agents go in an escalating line. Our service maintains close contact with national and international partners to draw lessons from their findings and enhance Belgium's resilience.**

## ► INTERFERENCE

Russian interference seeks to influence political decision-making by 'deceptive, unauthorised or clandestine means' for the benefit of Moscow. The European Parliament is a particularly prominent target, as demonstrated in the election year 2024, when the pro-Russian interference network behind Voice of Europe was exposed by several European intelligence services, including the VSSE.

The man pulling the strings of Voice of Europe from Moscow was a pro-Russian Ukrainian oligarch close to Vladimir Putin. He was placed under a first EU sanctions regime in May 2024, and then a second in May 2025. Key figures working for him on European soil were also blacklisted.

## ► CYBERATTACKS

Belgium also faced several forms of cyberattacks from (pro-)Russian sources in 2025. One of the most visible forms are Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks on websites of Belgian authorities, as well as public and private companies. These attacks overload websites with internet traffic, rendering them temporarily unavailable or difficult to access. Such attacks are usually more disruptive than destructive. However, if they escalate, it cannot be ruled out that temporary outages of key websites or IT systems could have a significant social impact.

In 2025, the VSSE observed that while these measures represented a setback for interference operations, they did not mark their end. Voice of Europe's network in the EU institutions was largely taken over by official Russian representatives. The activities were not always clandestine or subtle: individuals active in and around the European Parliament openly attended the so-called 'Europe-BRICS' symposium in Sochi in mid-November 2025. This event brought together European Russia sympathisers and representatives of the BRICS countries, in a clear example of diplomacy aimed at polishing Russia's image.

Within the intelligence community, the GISS' Cyber Command takes the lead on cyber investigations, with the VSSE playing a supporting role. Both services focus on complementarity and synergies in their joint approach to the cyber threat. The VSSE examines cyber incidents primarily from the perspective of the threat, for example espionage or interference, and – where possible – from the actor involved, rather than from a technical perspective.

## MONITORING COMPLIANCE WITH SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIAN INTERESTS

In recent years, the European Union has imposed several sanctions packages on Russia, not to target the population, but to send a political signal and disrupt the Russian war machine.

The VSSE contributes to monitoring compliance with these sanctions. This includes tracking companies that deliberately attempt to circumvent the measures. Cases are then referred to Customs or the Public Prosecutor's Office, which may initiate prosecution. In

addition, the VSSE raises awareness among Belgian companies to prevent situations in which they may, in good faith, do business with firms intending to ship goods or technologies to Russia in violation of the sanctions.

Obtaining an accurate picture of supply chains and structures in the context of sanctions requires extensive national and international cooperation. At the national level, the VSSE continued its close collaboration with the FPS Foreign Affairs in 2025.

# FROM BRUSSELS TO BEIJING: CHINESE ECONOMIC ESPIONAGE AND POLITICAL INTERFERENCE

The average consumer may associate Chinese economic policy primarily with Temu or Shein, but Beijing's ambitions extend far beyond attracting Western consumers. To achieve its goal of becoming a global leader in strategic technologies, China also copies from the West, including Belgium. 'Copy to China' companies, seconded researchers and straightforward economic espionage are among the potential techniques used by China.

Belgium, and by extension Western countries, maintain a complex relationship with the People's Republic of China. While economic cooperation with China is often necessary, it cannot be overlooked that the country is increasingly assertive in its drive to become a global political and economic power. It has become clear that economic cooperation with China carries certain risks to Belgian (economic) security.

China also has significant economic interests in Belgium and across Europe. For China's export-oriented economy, access to the large single European market – with more than 450 million potential consumers – is crucial. In Belgium, Chinese companies have long been

making considerable efforts to gain access to this European market. For instance, the Chinese technology company Huawei organised wide-ranging initiatives involving the European Union in Belgium. These activities operated in a grey area between lobbying, interference, and corruption with the aim of securing a role for Huawei devices in European 5G networks.

China pursues a highly structured and targeted policy to sustain its economic growth. In this context, the country has made clear its explicit ambition to become a global leader in strategic technologies including biotechnology, artificial intelligence and semiconductors.

## ► 'ASYMMETRICAL STEPS' TO CATCH UP

Nevertheless, China is aware that in certain, highly specific areas of technology, it still lags behind Europe and the United States. Closing that gap – and building a strategic advantage – is the Chinese regime's overriding priority. It is within this strategic context that Chinese activities are being conducted.

President Xi Jinping has referred to the 'asymmetric steps' that China must be prepared to take to catch up with the West in key

technological fields by 2050. This somewhat cryptic expression essentially reflects China's intention to intensify cooperation with Western companies and research centres, in order to gain access to crucial technologies in strategic and sensitive scientific and technological sectors.

In this context, China also targets Belgian companies, universities, research centres and spin-offs through investment and acquisitions, creating a risk of unauthorised technology



transfer. One example of an ‘asymmetric step’ is the use of ‘copy to China’ companies. To put it simply, Chinese firms invest in Belgian companies, research centres or spin-offs – preferably small entities developing promising technologies but facing funding challenges – to

gain access to specific technologies. They then establish a ‘copy to China’ company in China to produce the same technology on a larger scale. The original parent company is subsequently sold, ideally at a profit.

## ► DIRECT ESPIONAGE, ON AND OFFLINE

Although these hidden methods of acquiring Western know-how are significant, it should not be overlooked that China also pursues economic espionage through more direct means. This includes unauthorised access to sensitive data on IT systems of companies and research centres, as well as the recruitment of individuals holding key positions in economic, scientific or financial institutions.

In addition, Chinese companies collect data in Belgium on a massive scale, notably through popular apps such as TikTok, Temu, CapCut, etc. Under China’s national security law, this data may be required to be shared with Chinese intelligence services.

The information and technologies China acquires through these methods are not intended solely for civilian purposes. The potential military use of these technologies is an integral part of China’s strategic reflection and planning. The VSSE remains vigilant regarding this development, particularly as we assess that this trend will continue in the coming years.

As in previous years, the VSSE continues to detect risks, inform policymakers, and raise awareness among the various Belgian stakeholders of the risks to which they are exposed. The service aims to ensure that policymakers can balance Belgium’s economic interests with the mitigation of these security risks.

### Chinese intelligence operations in Brussels, an ecosystem with various players

Chinese intelligence and interference operations take many forms in Brussels, a cosmopolitan city due to the presence of numerous international organisations. While China’s civilian intelligence agency, the Ministry of State Security (MSS), is the most prominent actor, it is by no means the only one. For instance, the International Department of the Communist Party of China (IDCPC)—though not a formal intelligence agency—engages in intelligence-related activities and takes a particular interest in Belgian and European institutions. In addition, a wide range of agencies, institutions, think tanks, media outlets, and even companies operate to advance Beijing’s ambition to ‘Make China Great (Again)’.

Together, these various departments and institutions must, first and foremost, realise the ambitions of the Communist Party of China (CPC). These ambitions can be summarised as follows: absolute hegemony within China (including ideological, administrative and security control over the vast Chinese diaspora worldwide, also in Belgium) and the projection of power internationally, enabling China to assume a position on the world stage commensurate with its size, population, and economic and military capabilities.



## ► WHICH ARE THE FORMAL CHINESE INTELLIGENCE SERVICES?

Ministry of State Security (MSS)	Military Intelligence Directorate (MID)	Ministry of Public Security (MPS)
		

The MSS is the civilian intelligence service tasked with gathering intelligence on threats that could endanger the survival of the CPC. The MSS operates in China and abroad.

The MID is the military intelligence service which, besides military intelligence, also manages China's SIGINT<sup>1</sup> capability and conducts large-scale HUMINT<sup>2</sup> operations abroad, not limited to the military domain.

The MPS is the security service responsible for public security and control of the population and global diaspora. This police organisation also conducts clandestine intelligence operations abroad, primarily targeting the diaspora.

1 SIGINT STANDS FOR SIGNALS INTELLIGENCE AND REFERS TO THE INTERCEPTION AND POSSIBLE DECRYPTION OF COMMUNICATION SIGNALS.

2 HUMINT STANDS FOR HUMAN INTELLIGENCE AND REFERS TO THE USE OF HUMAN RESOURCES.

## ► HIGH-TECH AND OLD SCHOOL METHODS

To gather intelligence, China uses both high-tech and old school methods. Chinese intelligence services possess particularly extensive cyber capabilities, enabling them not only to conduct offensive cyber operations against individuals, companies and institutions beyond China's borders, but also to identify and remotely manage valuable contacts. In practice, Chinese intelligence services prefer to follow up the first, promising contacts online with an invitation to China, where there are more opportunities to further deepen the relationship, away from prying eyes.

This does not imply that Chinese intelligence services lack a physical presence in Belgium; on the contrary, they maintain an active presence. Identifying these officers is challenging, as they tend to be highly risk-averse and operate with great caution. In some cases, intelligence activities are outsourced to third parties to

reduce the exposure of officers to detection or legal accountability.

Another, more conventional, method is the deployment of intelligence officers under diplomatic cover. Such intelligence officers are officially posted as diplomats (with the corresponding protected status) within China's diplomatic missions abroad. Diplomacy provides an ideal cover, as political espionage and interference can closely resemble regular diplomatic activities. If a 'diplomat' is identified or incriminated, the consequence is limited to being declared persona non grata, whereupon they must leave the country. With Belgium's new criminal law having updated and expanded provisions on espionage and interference, diplomatic cover may once again become a commonly used approach – not only by Chinese intelligence services.

## ► FROM BRUSSELS TO BEIJING: CHINESE INTERFERENCE IN POLITICAL DECISION-MAKING

Of course, not every Chinese diplomat is a spy. The sizeable Chinese diplomatic representation in our country (about 130 people in total) is understandable, given the scale and importance of China and Belgium's role as a host to numerous European institutions. Understanding the decision-making processes within a complex structure such as the EU is a legitimate and central task for Chinese diplomats, but also for other actors under the influence of the CPC, such as the IDCPC, which are also represented in Belgium.

Nevertheless, China does not limit itself to diplomacy, but also uses 'unauthorised, deceptive, or clandestine means' (the legal

definition of interference) to influence decision-making processes. A key challenge for the VSSE is determining where a particular act lies on the spectrum between diplomacy, lobbying, and interference. To this end, the VSSE cooperates closely with the FPS Justice, the Police, the FPS Foreign Affairs, and other national partners.

Members and staff of the European Parliament are the primary target of Chinese interference operations in Brussels. These actors target the European Parliament to disseminate Chinese narratives on issues such as Tibet and Taiwan, create a positive image of China, and influence the EU's geopolitical ambitions and economic and trade policies in ways favourable to Beijing.

Chinese intelligence services prefer to operate remotely. A widely used and well-established technique involves making contact through social media and professional networking platforms. Chinese intelligence officers pose as consultants or headhunters on these platforms in order to make contact with people in Belgium who have direct or indirect access to sensitive information. The covers used include both fake and real companies, universities or think tanks. The Chinese intelligence officer will then propose that the individual prepare a report on a geopolitical or economic topic in exchange for a financial incentive. Distinguishing between this type of approach and actual consultancy assignments is a real challenge.

Indicators that an approach may be linked to an intelligence service include:

- (1) after the initial contact, communication quickly switches to encrypted communication applications;
- (2) payments are typically made through intermediaries, online payment platforms or cryptocurrency;
- (3) there is an increasing pressure to obtain sensitive non-public information.



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500+ connections

Yvonne Wang  Active now 17 JAN 2026

Yvonne Wang  02:31

Hello, my client is interested in your government's assessment on trade restrictions against China targeting the microchips industry. Are you willing to draft a report of 2-3 pages? The budget is €1,000 or more depending on the quality and inside information.

# TRANSNATIONAL REPRESSION: FOCUS ON CRITICAL VOICES OF DIASPORA GROUPS

The VSSE most often observes that authoritarian regimes use subtle and discreet methods to silence dissidents living in Belgium, such as surveillance, as well as harassment, discrediting campaigns and pressure placed on friends and relatives back home.

In 2025, the VSSE recorded various attempts at transnational repression targeting people living in Belgium. Such repression is carried out by foreign governments seeking to exert strict control over members of their diaspora and to silence critical voices. These regimes aim to safeguard their internal stability without harming their international reputation. Transnational repression can take various forms, ranging from surveillance to intimidation, directly either at the individual residing in Belgium or at their relatives who remain in the country of origin. For example, it was previously established that a foreign government had pressured an exchange student to change the topic of his thesis because it touched on a sensitive issue in his home country.

Behind this transnational repression, the VSSE has observed the involvement of foreign intelligence services, whose agents frequently misuse their official cover to exert influence over their diaspora and to pressure dissidents. This includes highly visible practices, such as blatant

surveillance of demonstrations, which are filmed or photographed.

To achieve their objectives, foreign intelligence services also attempt to recruit members of diaspora communities in order to gather information on dissidents living in Belgium, many of whom are under refugee status.

Another common tactic used by authoritarian regimes is to falsely label political opponents based in Belgium as 'terrorists', enabling them to exploit legal proceedings to pursue extradition.

Cooperation and exchanges with its national and international partners are essential for the VSSE to more effectively identify the actors behind this repression, as well as the modus operandi of the intelligence actors of authoritarian regimes. In addition to intelligence work, raising awareness among other Belgian administrations is crucial for fully understanding the phenomenon and facilitating the exchange of relevant information.



Transnational repression is a form of foreign interference. It can be defined as political repression carried out by an authoritarian state beyond its borders, targeting any critical voice that could threaten the regime's stability or tarnish its image abroad. The primary important targets are generally political dissidents.

# GEOPOLITICS AND ECONOMY: THE HUNT FOR INNOVATION

In recent years, intelligence and economic security issues have become ever more critical, particularly in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This dynamic accelerated further in 2025, following a shift in the direction of US foreign policy.



In a world of ever less stable international relations, each country faces the challenge of achieving or strengthening its strategic autonomy. Meeting this challenge requires developing or acquiring sensitive technologies, specialised expertise, and scarce raw materials.

In Belgium, this international economic and scientific competition is generally conducted through perfectly legal channels. However, certain actors do not hesitate to exploit these mechanisms to carry out malicious or, in some cases, illegal actions, aiming to strengthen their positions of power, undermine competitors or acquire sensitive expertise or technologies.

As an open economy with world-renowned companies in high-tech sectors, cutting-edge

research centres, and as a strategic geographical location, Belgium is a prime target for such of illegal activities.

Whether in the form of economic or scientific espionage, the transfer of sensitive technologies to foreign countries, or hybrid actions targeting critical infrastructures, the VSSE is regularly confronted with the need to respond. The VSSE is responsible for collecting, analysing and processing intelligence relating to any activity that threatens, or could threaten, Belgium's scientific and economic potential. In particular, the VSSE focuses on issues in the fields of espionage, interference and the proliferation of dual-use goods - technologies or software which may have both civil and military applications.

## Cooperation as a key driver

In the current geopolitical context, identifying all threats to Belgium's scientific and economic potential is particularly complex. These threats are not only diverse but also rapidly evolving, affecting multiple sectors. To address this complexity, the VSSE cooperates with a wide range of public and private actors, reflecting the shared responsibility on which Belgium's economic security depends.

Our key partner remains the General Intelligence and Security Service (GISS), with whom we maintain close cooperation through permanent dialogue. Integrating their intelligence and expertise with that of the VSSE provides a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of threats to economic security. This integrated approach helps to avoid analysing threats in isolated silos and ensures they are considered in their broader context.

The VSSE also works closely with its partners on the Coordination Committee for Intelligence and Security (CCIV/CCRS) regarding the security opinions to be provided by this committee for foreign direct investments (FDI). Between January and December 2025, the VSSE coordinated

the drafting of over 130 opinions of the CCIV/CCRS on foreign direct investments. This is a rise of almost 30% compared to the number of opinions issued by the CCIV/CCRS<sup>1</sup> the previous year. The CCIV/CCRS requested the Interfederal Screening Committee to start screening procedures (second phase of the procedure) for four cases.

## Continuous awareness-raising

While an increasing number of companies and decision-makers are aware of the threats to which they are exposed and are taking appropriate measures to protect themselves, many businesses and research centres remain vulnerable to malicious actions. The VSSE continually raises awareness, particularly regarding threats that may arise during business trips or scientific missions abroad. The service takes a pragmatic approach, providing guidance on the precautions to be taken before, during and after such trips, to reduce the risk of falling victim to scientific and economic espionage. The VSSE assesses that the threat of espionage, interference or proliferation targeting Belgium's economic and scientific potential will remain at a high level in the short and medium term.

<sup>1</sup> CCIV/CCRS: COORDINATION COMMITTEE FOR INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY. WITHIN THE COORDINATION COMMITTEE FOR INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY (CCIV/CCRS), THE VSSE WORKS WITH THE GISS, CUTA, THE FEDERAL POLICE, THE NATIONAL CRISIS CENTRE AND THE FEDERAL PUBLIC SERVICE FOREIGN AFFAIRS TO DRAW UP PROPOSALS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE FDI-PROCEDURE TO BE SUBMITTED TO THE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL (NSC).



# THE TERROR THREAT CONTINUES: IS'S AND AL-QAEDA'S FIRE IS STILL SMOULDERING

Most plans for attacks in Belgium in 2025 were made by lone actors or very small cells inspired by the ideology of Islamic State (IS). The individuals involved were often minors and young adults. The trends in the jihadist threat identified by the VSSE and the GISS<sup>1</sup> in 2024 have largely remained unchanged. The online world and social media continue to play a crucial role, both in the radicalisation process and in the planning of attacks.

Ten years after the attacks in Paris, the jihadist-salafist-inspired terrorist threat in Belgium and across Europe has not disappeared. It remains the principal terrorism-related threat: 80% of the Joint Intelligence Centres<sup>2</sup> set up in 2025 were directly linked to this threat, which continues to originate primarily from IS and, to a lesser extent, from al-Qaeda.

However, this threat has evolved significantly since 2015. At that time, IS enjoyed sanctuary in Syria and Iraq and could rely on large numbers of foreign fighters, enabling it to coordinate attacks in Europe. The subsequent hollowing out of the caliphate and the loss of control over substantial areas of territory have since weakened its operational capabilities.

In rare cases, IS still encourages willing volunteers to carry out violent acts with the support of operational members abroad. Today, the organisation primarily relies on the vast amounts of propaganda it produces and disseminates through sympathisers worldwide. This highly decentralised strategy allows IS to continue inspiring and supporting terrorist attacks, although these are generally less complex and less successful than the attacks that struck Europe in 2015 and 2016. Nevertheless, these planned attacks, which are sometimes difficult to detect and therefore anticipate, contribute to a persistent sense of unease in society and reinforce fears of terrorism.

The individuals who came to the attention of the authorities in Belgium in 2025 for planning jihadist-salafist-inspired attacks had all consumed propaganda, primarily online, from terrorist organisations such as IS or al-Qaeda. They were often young, sometimes very young: the average age of individuals for whom a JIC was organised was 22, and the youngest were just 12 years

old. The trend of the increasing involvement of minors in the terrorist threat, first identified in 2024, continued in 2025. Around one third of cases involved minors in 2025. Moreover, in the vast majority of cases, these individuals' plans were either not yet at an advanced stage, poorly conceived, or difficult to execute.

This aligns with a broader trend: in 2025, jihadist-salafist-inspired terrorist attacks in Europe were committed by young individuals acting under the influence of, and sometimes in the name of, IS, but without any direct connection to its members. Their motivation was often linked to other grievances, whether personal or general: for example, the conflict in Gaza is frequently cited. The knife attack in Villach, Austria on 15 February 2025, in which one person was killed and five others injured, was an example of this type of inspired acts. This dynamic, combining ideological and personal motives, is ultimately not much different from the patterns observed in many cases of extremism or ideologically inspired terrorism.

Although the risk of coordinated attacks, like those in Brussels in 2016, is lower in the near term in Belgium, it cannot be entirely ruled out. The attack in Moscow in March 2024 showed that even when weakened, IS still has the capacity and determination to carry out acts of terrorism. Their propaganda also makes clear that IS and al-Qaeda still have ambitions to strike Europe. This was highlighted once again on 18 December 2025, when IS called for attacks against 'Jews and Christians' in Belgium in its weekly digital magazine. While such calls are not unusual, it is rare for attacks to follow. The fact that Belgium was singled out so specifically is nevertheless significant and underscores that our country remains a legitimate target in their eyes. The terrorist threat therefore remains serious.

<sup>1</sup> THE VSSE AND THE GISS HAVE JOINED FORCES TO COMBAT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM IN THE CECT PLATFORM FOR A NUMBER OF YEARS NOW.

<sup>2</sup> A JOINT INTELLIGENCE CENTRE IS A NATIONAL COORDINATION MECHANISM LAID DOWN IN THE STRAT T.E.R., IN WHICH THE INTELLIGENCE AND SECURITY SERVICES CAN

CONSULT EACH OTHER DIRECTLY IN THE EVENT OF A POSSIBLE TERRORIST THREAT ON BELGIAN TERRITORY. STRAT T.E.R. (STRATEGY ON EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM) IS THE BELGIAN NATIONAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH TO EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM, COORDINATED BY CUTA.

The VSSE assesses that a low-complexity terrorist attack, inspired by jihadist ideology and carried out by isolated perpetrators or small cells, is likely in the medium term.

To mitigate this threat, the VSSE and its partners work not only on intelligence aimed at identifying planned attacks, but also on other activities that support terrorism and are often less visible to the general public. This includes detecting the dissemination of terrorist propaganda and identifying the individuals involved in spreading it. The fight against these supporting

activities, whether logistical (supplying forged documents, weapons, etc.) or financial (fundraising for terrorist organisations abroad, for instance), also forms part of many intelligence investigations.

For several years, the VSSE has made the fight against terrorism a priority. The success of its work depends to a large extent on strengthening international cooperation, sometimes with new partners, which is an essential condition for detecting and preventing threats in a hyperconnected world.

## ► THE IS FRANCHISE

Since the fall of the physical caliphate of IS in Syria and Iraq in 2019, the organisation has undergone a transformation. IS has transformed itself into a decentralised organisation with powerful branches in different parts of the world. The central leadership of IS issues guidelines and instructions which are then implemented by the various local branches.

A number of prominent IS members were arrested in 2025, and several military operations were conducted against the various IS branches. As a result, there was a temporary loss of capacity, with IS focusing on their internal organisation. There was therefore less of a focus on spreading the threat outside the organisation's immediate sphere of influence. Nevertheless, history has shown that IS and its branches are highly resilient and can quickly adapt to changing circumstances. This loss of capacity is therefore likely a temporary phenomenon that may also rapidly change.

For example, the IS franchise in Khorasan Province (ISKP) saw some of its key figures arrested, as well as increasing pressure from the

Taliban authorities in Afghanistan and from Pakistan. This limited the capacity of ISKP, with tangible consequences for the franchise's planned attacks abroad as well as the frequency with which the group published its propaganda. For example, Voice of Khurasan, ISKP's English-language magazine, has only been published once since April 2025, whereas previously it was published almost every month. In contrast to 2024, the influence of ISKP on the terror threat was less prominent in 2025. Despite that, ISKP still has ambitions to organise large and complex terror attacks. It is highly likely that in 2026, ISKP will try to reorganise itself, to once again achieve its objectives.

Furthermore, the remnants of IS still present in Syria are an ongoing concern. Although there was a risk that IS might take advantage of the power vacuum created after the fall of the Assad regime in order to make a resurgence, this did not fully materialise in 2025. Nonetheless, IS is still active in Syria. In its propaganda, IS criticises the current trajectory of the new regime and still plans and carries out attacks in Syria.



BEEK  
BEEK

IS's centre of gravity is currently in Africa. IS branches in West Africa and the Sahel play an important role in this regard. For example, Islamic State in West Africa Province (ISWAP) controls a territory three times larger than Belgium. Islamic State - Sahel Province (ISSP) has also upped the pace of its activities, carrying out more frequent attacks in the region. However, these IS branches currently have a purely local agenda and there are no indications that they have the capacity to project the threat to Belgium.

IS Somalia also conducted an aggressive recruitment campaign

between 2023 and 2024. In the space of a year, IS Somalia had grown from a few hundred to possibly a thousand fighters by the end of 2024. This growth was temporarily curbed by a military offensive with international support that gained new momentum from January 2025. As a result, IS Somalia is unlikely to recruit any more Europeans or organise attacks in Europe in the short term. If pressure from counter-terrorist operations on the ground subsides, it is possible that IS Somalia could rebuild this capacity in the short to medium term.

## ► BELGIAN FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTERS ONE YEAR AFTER THE FALL OF ASSAD

On 8 December 2024, the Assad regime was unexpectedly and rapidly overthrown. A front of different groups installed a new regime in Syria in 2025, led by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS). A key challenge for this new regime is to bring together the various ethnic groups and armed groups active in the country. At the same time, the new regime continues to wage a military and judicial campaign against Islamic State, which is still a real danger to regional stability.

How successful the new regime is in this regard will have an impact on Belgium's security interests. In the first instance, the VSSE, in cooperation with the GISS, is still alert to the situation of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF) linked to

Belgium and based in Syria. No major changes were observed in the situation of these FTFs in 2025, who are in prisons and camps in northeastern Syria, or who have built their lives in the northwestern part of the country.

The recent regime change in Syria also means that there are now more possibilities to travel there, but since the local situation has not yet fully stabilised, it is not yet possible to draw any definitive conclusions as regards people travelling there. There are not currently any indications that a new wave of Belgian FTFs are heading to Syria, at least not in the near term. The VSSE and the GISS are closely monitoring this situation.

## ► HEZBOLLAH

Lebanon-based Hezbollah's political and military influence in the Middle East has been significantly diminished. The former key military player in the region is currently focused on its own survival, prioritising its internal reorganisation and rebuilding its capabilities. As a result, Hezbollah's activities remain concentrated in Lebanon and the Middle East.

The VSSE did not detect any specific threat from planned or implemented attacks by Hezbollah in or from Belgium in 2025. The VSSE believes it is unlikely that Hezbollah or individuals linked to the organisation will launch a terrorist attack

in the West in the near term. Nevertheless, Hezbollah still poses a long-term terrorist threat.

For example, Hezbollah propaganda was distributed in Belgium to a limited extent this year. Some mosques also organised memorial ceremonies for members of Hezbollah who died in the conflict between Israel and Lebanon at the end of 2024. Although limited in scope, funds are sometimes raised and collected on behalf of Hezbollah in Belgium. Some of these funds are believed to be destined for Hezbollah's military wing, but further investigation is needed to confirm this hypothesis.

## ► HAMAS

The conflict with Israel, which flared up following the terrorist attacks by Hamas on 7 October 2023, led to one of the deadliest conflicts ever for Hamas and the civilian population in Gaza. Hamas is therefore also primarily focused on its own survival and currently has no capacity to operate outside its immediate zone of influence.

The VSSE currently considers violent action organised and led by Hamas in Belgium to be unlikely, whereas this was 'highly unlikely' in 2024. This slight increase is in part due to the public call by a spokesman of the organisation in March 2025 to take up arms around the world. However, the VSSE has not identified any concrete preparations of violent acts by anyone linked to Hamas in Belgium. The main threat comes from radicalised lone actors who are influenced by issues such as the situation in Gaza.

There are individuals in Belgium, however, who can be linked to Hamas. The VSSE uses its investigative capabilities – including extra efforts for monitoring social media accounts – to identify them, determine their relationship with Hamas, as well as their activities for the organisation, in order to assess the threat they pose, and, if necessary, inform the political, administrative and judicial authorities. Nevertheless, it is not always easy to establish affiliation with Hamas. 8% of the terrorist cases discussed among the services in 2025 were related to Hamas.

Individuals linked to Hamas in Belgium are primarily active in raising funds, with some of these funds presumably also going to Hamas itself. These are activities without an immediate threat of violence, which are nevertheless problematic and in some cases punishable by law.



# THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD: BEHIND THE MASK OF MODERATION

The year 2025 has seen heightened public awareness of the activities of the Muslim Brotherhood, partly as a result of an official report by the French Ministry of the Interior on the Muslim Brotherhood as an expression of political Islam<sup>1</sup>. However, this is not a new phenomenon. The VSSE has been closely monitoring the Muslim Brotherhood and the threat it poses for more than 30 years. The VSSE works closely with the General Information and Security Service (GISS)<sup>2</sup> on this matter. The threat associated with the Muslim Brotherhood did not fundamentally change in 2025, compared to 2024 and previous years. The VSSE assesses that this threat will remain stable in Belgium in the years ahead. The threat emanating from the Muslim Brotherhood lies in the organisation's ideology, which may contribute to a climate of segregation and polarisation that, in turn, creates conditions conducive to (sometimes violent) radicalisation of certain individuals. It is very likely that the Muslim Brotherhood will continue to establish new organisations in an effort to expand its influence within the Muslim community in Belgium, promote its ideology and recruit new members. The VSSE therefore maintains close attention on this threat.

The Muslim Brotherhood is mainly characterised by its activities aimed at influencing public policy regarding Islam. As members of the Brotherhood often seek to conceal their affiliation and exert influence in a covert manner, such activities may be regarded as a form of interference. For this reason, the VSSE places particular emphasis

on raising awareness. Its objective is to ensure that Belgian and European authorities are able to identify organisations linked to the Muslim Brotherhood and, where appropriate, can decide to deny them a public platform or to exclude them from public funding, including subsidies.

1 « FRÈRES MUSULMANS ET ISLAMISME POLITIQUE EN FRANCE ».

2 THROUGH THE CECT PLATFORM, THE INTEGRATED CAPACITY OF THE GISS AND STATE SECURITY TO COMBAT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM.

## DEFINITION OF THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD

Since 2022, there has been a common definition of the Muslim Brotherhood that was jointly drafted by the Belgian security and intelligence partners.

*The Muslim Brotherhood is a socio-political Islamic movement whose ideology is primarily based on the thinking of Hassan Al Banna (1906-1949). The long-term objective of this movement is to establish a system in which religion governs all aspects of the life of the individual, society and the state. Founded in Egypt in 1928, the movement now has branches in various countries, including Europe and Belgium.*

*Regarding the means to achieve their objectives in Europe, the Muslim Brotherhood rejects the use of violence, including terrorism. On the one hand, they focus on preaching, education and socio-political activism to spread their ideology. On the other hand, they are involved in infiltration and lobbying to influence public policy on issues regarding Islam or the Muslim world. To this end, they profile themselves as the voice of the Muslim population and as credible representatives of the Muslim community at national and European institutions.*

*In this respect, they cultivate a public image of moderation and (relative) progressiveness. This approach sometimes contradicts their internal discourse, which includes rejecting secularism, regarding the religious norm as superior to national laws and portraying 'Western' societies and countries as inherently opposed to Muslims and Islam.*

*In terms of threat, certain positions of the Muslim Brotherhood may contribute to a climate of division and polarisation that, in turn, forms a breeding ground for the (sometimes violent) radicalisation of certain individuals. The threat posed by proponents of the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology in our country must therefore be considered on a case-by-case basis.*

The VSSE estimates that, in 2025, fewer than 10 organisations that could be regarded as structurally linked to the Muslim Brotherhood were present in Belgium. These organisations are assessed as being actively involved in the dissemination of the Muslim Brotherhood's ideology or engaging in interference activities, while also as maintaining structural ties with the movement at international, regional or local levels. In addition, the VSSE estimates that approximately 100 individuals in Belgium are actively involved in spreading the organisation's ideology.



The flag of the Muslim Brotherhood is visible in the background. It features a green field with a white crescent and a white star in the upper left corner. A red triangle is positioned in the upper left quadrant. The Arabic calligraphy 'الله اکبر' (Allah is the greatest) is written in white across the center. The flag is partially obscured by a dark overlay.

Based on the investigations conducted by the VSSE in 2025, there is no immediate threat of violent action from organisations or individuals structurally linked to the Muslim Brotherhood. The use of violence is explicitly rejected by the organisation in Europe. However, these organisations and individuals continue to pose a threat through the dissemination of extremist ideology and interference in public affairs.

# A CLOSER LOOK AT LEFT-WING EXTREMISM : LOUDER AND MORE VIOLENT

**Vandalism, resistance to authority, intimidation of political opponents, ... Left-wing extremist groups made themselves heard on several occasions this year. In 2025, the VSSE faced the challenge of identifying possible shifts among movements and individuals that could lead to acts of violence.**

Throughout 2025, left-wing extremist groups repeatedly drew public attention through violent actions. Riots during demonstrations, resistance to the police, and intimidation of political opponents — particularly during anti-fascist counter-demonstrations — were phenomena that occurred more frequently in 2025 compared to previous years. Taken together, these elements point to an increased potential for violence from left-wing extremist circles. Towards certain politicians, the police, and individuals and organisations they label as right-wing extremist, the rhetoric can sometimes be hostile, degrading, or even dehumanizing.

These violent actions, combined with the justification of violence as a means of action, remain a continuing concern. In practice, however, most left-wing extremists primarily focus on spreading their message non-violently. They

organise meetings, film screenings, lectures and group discussions. In addition, they organise or participate in demonstrations and protests. Left-wing extremist propaganda at such events is aimed at undermining the legitimacy of the democratic rule of law.

The VSSE closely monitors the threat to detect, as early as possible, any changes in modus operandi or warning signs. It also uses intelligence investigations to identify links between left-wing extremist groups and the acts of vandalism targeting buildings and institutions they see as symbols of capitalism. The goal is to provide accurate information to the authorities and support effective measures to reduce the threat. In the short term, the VSSE assesses that a terrorist attack from the left-wing extremist movement in Belgium is unlikely.



## ► BLACK BLOC DURING THE PROTEST ON 14 OCTOBER

A notable instance of left-wing extremist methods of action was the presence of a black bloc during the national demonstration held on 14 October 2025 in Brussels. Dressed in typical black clothing and unidentifiable due to face coverings, left-wing extremists from various groups coordinated acts of vandalism at multiple locations across the city.

Among other targets, the building of the Immigration Office suffered broken windows and graffiti on its façade. Several people were also injured as a result of the protesters' resistance during police intervention. Footage of these events was later used to criticise the authorities and to denounce alleged police violence.

## ► INFILTRATION OF CITIZEN MOVEMENTS

Certain left-wing extremist groups take advantage of the momentum of legitimate public involvement in the hope of attracting new followers to their ideology. Groups such as the revolutionary-communist *Secours Rouge de Belgique/Classe Contre Classe*, for example, focus on making contact with initiatives related to asylum and migration, the climate, (anti-)fascism, and minority issues.

They frame these topics within a worldview that questions the democratic rule of law and portrays the current social model as inherently exploitative and unjust. According to their ideology, societal problems can only be resolved through a violent overthrow of the existing system. They are firmly opposed to any type of social reform achieved through democratic or participatory processes.

To achieve this objective, some of these groups attempt to infiltrate broad civic movements such as Code Rouge and Stop Arming Israel. By aligning these movements with their own revolutionary goals and ideology, they exploit a shared sense of injustice, creating a risk of radicalising new sympathisers. Such a strategy, aimed at radicalising individuals within organisations, can polarise public debate on legitimate social issues, create divisions that hamper constructive discussion, and, in the most extreme cases, may even lead to physical confrontations or terrorist acts.

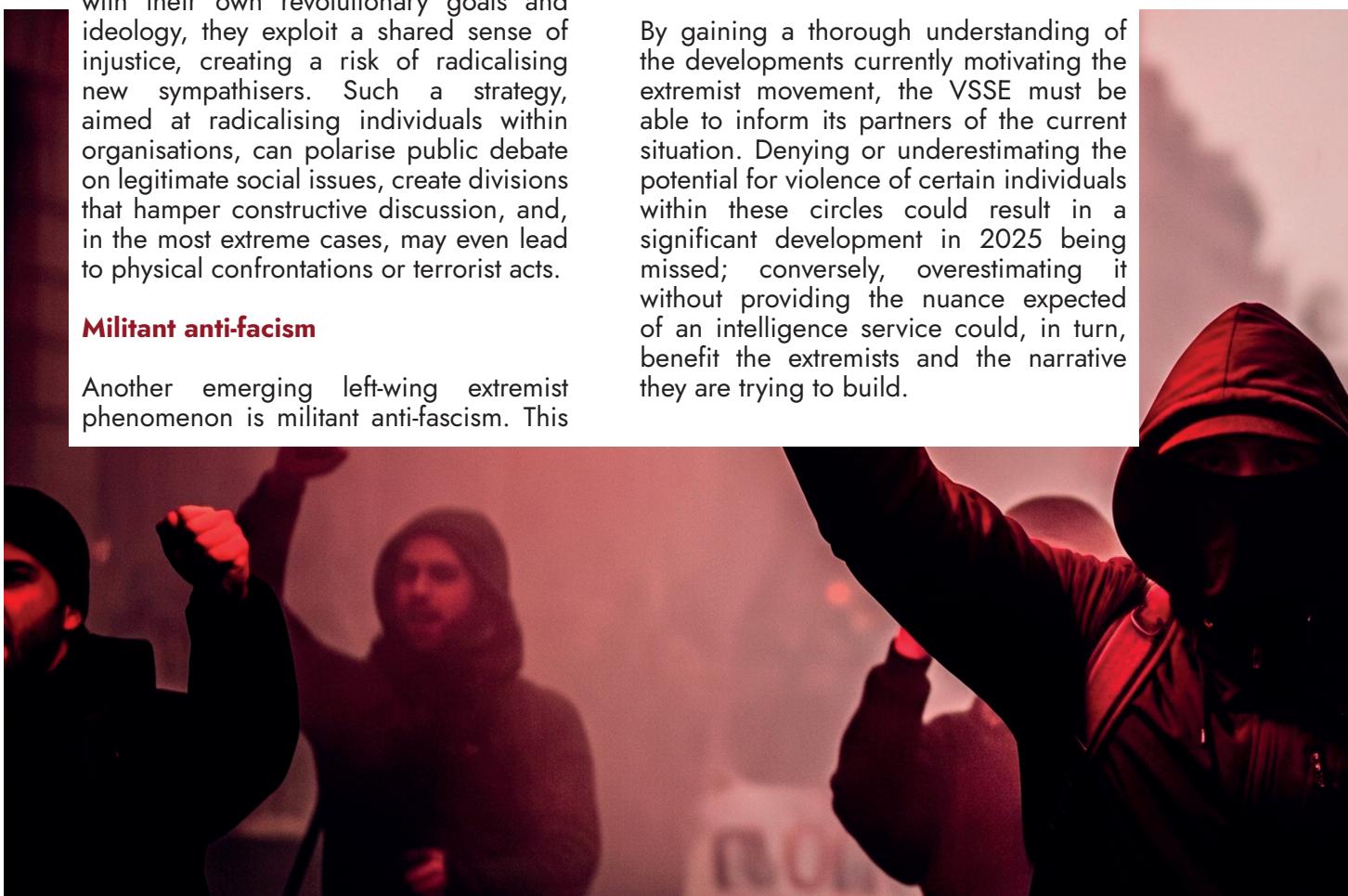
### **Militant anti-fascism**

Another emerging left-wing extremist phenomenon is militant anti-fascism. This

is a form of activism targeting individuals and groups considered to be right-wing extremist. Actions in this context are aimed at restricting the freedom of expression and association of perceived right-wing extremists. Militant anti-fascists are clearly distinguished from the broader, non-extremist anti-fascist movement, which focuses on debate and raising awareness to combat racism and anti-democratic ideas. The anti-fascist movement as a whole cannot be regarded as a structured entity.

Militant anti-fascists are not always affiliated with a single group or ideology. Nevertheless, many are inspired by a communist or anarchist worldview. They primarily act during lectures, meetings, and demonstrations organised by groups they consider to be right-wing extremist. While most of their actions are limited to counter-demonstrations, in some cases these can escalate into intimidation, riots, property damage, and aggressive disturbance directed against the police or political opponents.

By gaining a thorough understanding of the developments currently motivating the extremist movement, the VSSE must be able to inform its partners of the current situation. Denying or underestimating the potential for violence of certain individuals within these circles could result in a significant development in 2025 being missed; conversely, overestimating it without providing the nuance expected of an intelligence service could, in turn, benefit the extremists and the narrative they are trying to build.



## ► THE KURDISTAN WORKERS' PARTY

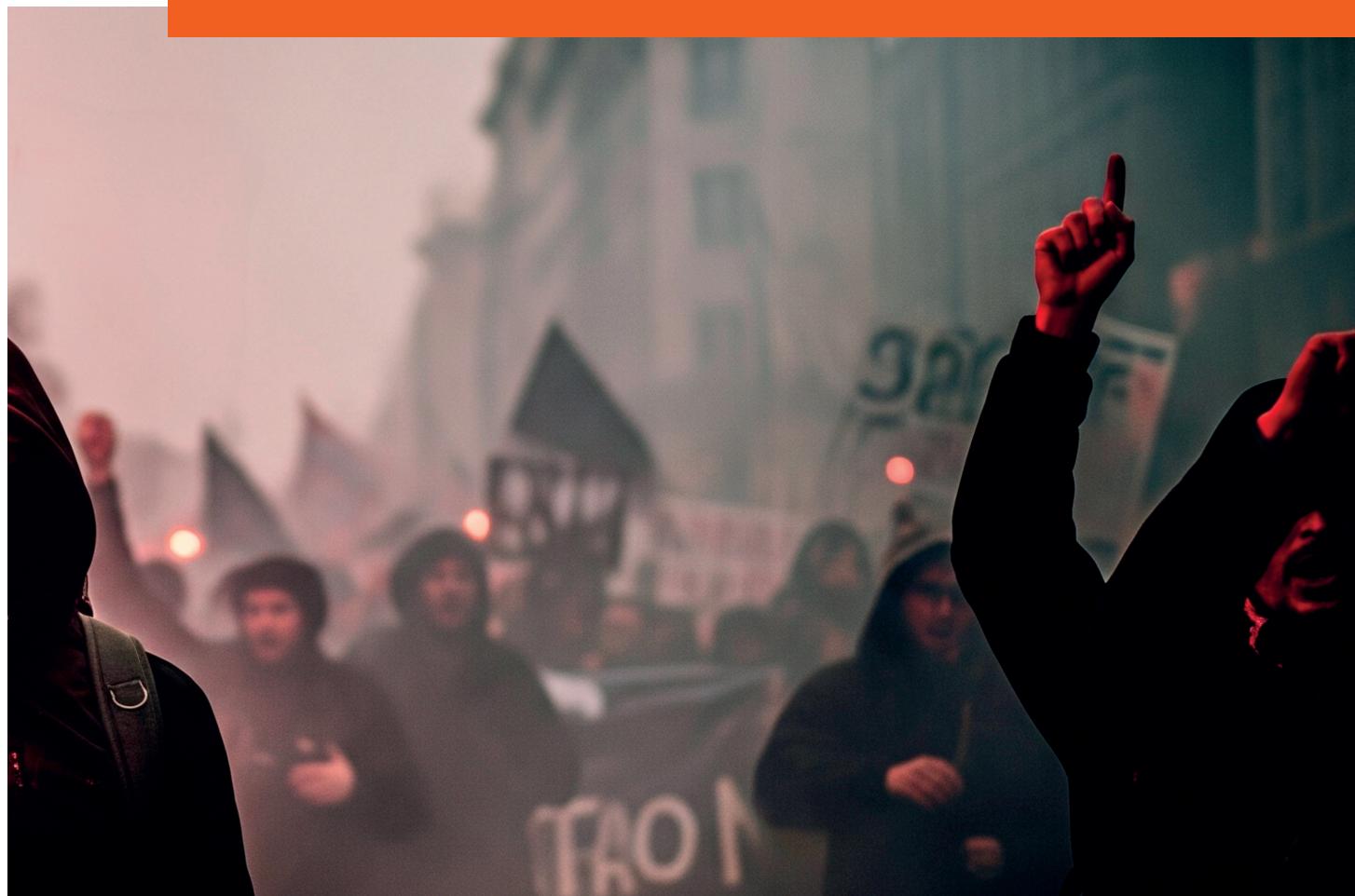
2025 marked a turning point for the left-wing extremist PKK, the Turkish *Partiya Karkeren Kurdistan*, or Kurdistan Workers' Party. Following a call from its leader, Abdullah Öcalan, who has been imprisoned since 1999, the organisation announced in May that it has disbanded and ended its armed struggle.

This unexpected move revived the peace process between the Turkish state and the PKK. The organisation currently retains its armed capabilities, and several important steps will still need to be taken before the PKK fully relinquishes its weapons.

In Belgium, where the organisation has established several of its structures, the PKK continues its activities. These include public activities, such as demonstrations and support actions for the Kurdish population, as well as clandestine activities, such as providing logistical and financial support for the movement in Turkey, Syria, and Iraq. PKK activities in Belgium are important to the organisation due to the presence of numerous international institutions

in the country. The organisation seeks to expand its influence and gain political support for its cause. Some PKK sympathisers in Belgium also have connections with various left-wing extremist groups.

The VSSE considers it highly unlikely that the PKK will undertake terrorist actions in Belgium. The PKK threat to Belgium is primarily related to extremism. The PKK, a hierarchically organised and authoritarian organisation, exerts significant influence over the Kurdish diaspora. The organisation is able to mobilise sympathisers during public events, which can sometimes cause public order issues and tensions with the Turkish community. In some cases, this may even escalate into violent actions. The situation of the Kurds in countries such as Syria, as well as developments in the peace process, have a mobilising effect on these types of public events. The further progress of the peace process in 2026 will be decisive for the evolution of this phenomenon.



# RIGHT-WING EXTREMIST IDEAS : THE ATTRACTION OF A POLARISED WORLD VIEW

Up to 2025, the right-wing extremist landscape in Belgium was mainly composed of three structural ideological components: what is known as accelerationism or the 'siege culture', the identitarian movement, and neo-Nazism, alongside a wide range of sub-movements. With regard to the potential terrorist threat, accelerationism, i.e. provoking civil war to accelerate an inevitable collapse of society, represents the most significant danger in the near to medium-term.

In an increasingly polarised world, right-wing extremists find fertile ground to propagate and strengthen their ideology. This is driven not only by geopolitical developments, in which international law, the international order and the established balance of power are under growing pressure due to the 'right of the strongest', but also by a more heated public debate and the glorification by some of the all-knowing and all-powerful leader.



## ► GENERAL SITUATION OF RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM

While there is clearly a threat of violence from right-wing extremism, most activities within this milieu in Belgium revolve around spreading the ideology or participating in it as part of a group. Not all right-wing extremist narratives directly incite violence. Nevertheless, over the long term, they undermine trust in democratic institutions and processes and provide fertile ground for further radicalisation.

### **Terrorism with a right-wing extremist motivation within the operations of the Joint Intelligence Centres**

In 2025, 6% of the cases of the Joint Intelligence Centres had a right-wing extremist motivation. The median age of the individuals discussed at these JICs was 18 years of age. The trend of a growing number of minors and young adults involved in the terrorist threat continues.

## A difficult relationship

Right-wing extremism in Belgium encompasses a very broad spectrum of milieus, groups and activists, ranging from violently inspired online accelerationist subcultures, such as Terrorgram, to neo-Nazi groups and more ideologically activist organisations. Although the various right-wing extremist milieus have a complicated relationship and differ considerably in style and strategy, they share an essentialist view of humanity that regards cultural and 'racial' diversity as an existential threat. This view of humanity also encompasses the belief that certain democratic freedoms and rights, including equality and gender diversity, contribute to the perceived decline of society.

The resulting extremist narrative draws heavily on uncertainty regarding migration, feelings of insecurity and the perception of men's roles in society. While these issues are part of the broader public debate, discourse within right-wing extremist milieus is often hateful, racist, misogynistic and discriminatory. This can manifest in private conversations as well as in propaganda directed at potential sympathisers. In online transnational accelerationist and neo-Nazi milieus – including Belgian participants – this frequently involves fantasising about, inciting and glorifying violence against women, political opponents and minorities.

All segments of the right-wing extremist milieu extensively use the internet to disseminate their propaganda through group discussions, open and closed chat channels, video platforms and social media, often achieving international reach and significant engagement. The message is also propagated offline through sticker campaigns, meetings and lectures.

Right-wing extremist movements make full use of the social and technological context, which provides them with ever greater public space to exert influence and attract new supporters.

## The violent threat of accelerationism

The most significant violent threat posed by the right-wing extremist milieu comes from the online accelerationist subculture. This is an international phenomenon that also involves Belgians. This subculture consists of numerous chat groups where individuals promote the idea of accelerating the perceived collapse of society by inciting a racial civil war.

Accelerationists believe that this objective can be achieved by carrying out attacks against minorities. To this end, they distribute manuals, glorify right-wing extremist terrorists as models, and seek to incite others to commit acts of violence. Most individuals within these networks have neither the concrete intention nor the capacity to carry out attacks, and limit themselves to seeking connection through the expression of shared hatreds. Nevertheless, the VSSE has found that in a number of cases, both the intention and the capacity to conduct attacks were genuine, albeit limited. For this reason, the VSSE assesses that a terrorist attack inspired by accelerationism is possible in the near to medium term.

The VSSE maintains a specific focus on this milieu, and endeavours to inform its national and international security partners in a timely manner, so that potential terrorist intentions can be identified and neutralised. Nevertheless, distinguishing between genuine intent and mere boasting remains a challenge.

## ► NIHILISTIC EXTREMISM

Nihilistic extremism combines various phenomena including anti-Semitism and racism, accelerationism, misanthropy, Satanism and Eastern European skinhead culture. Although it draws on several sources of inspiration, there is a recognisable and relatively consistent frame of reference, underpinned by a clear ideology that is currently most closely aligned with right-wing extremism. Furthermore, groups within nihilistic extremism are inspired by cybercriminal networks and focus on disseminating images of child sexual abuse and engaging in extortion. The 764 network is one example of this phenomenon.

As nihilistic extremism is a transnational phenomenon, its exact scale is difficult to determine. A dozen perpetrators, each with multiple victims, have already been identified in Belgium. However, this is likely only the tip of the iceberg. Across Europe, there are hundreds of perpetrators and several thousand victims. It is clearly a widespread network that poses a serious threat.

Members of nihilistic groups meet in chat groups on various platforms, where they engage in activities such as extortion, doxing<sup>1</sup>, distributing images of child sexual abuse, incitement to self-harm and suicide, cruelty to animals and incitement to violence and terrorism. The objective is to gain access to the network's elitist, closed groups. Individuals may obtain access by sharing images intended to demonstrate their involvement in harmful activities. The more extreme and disturbing the material, the greater the prestige and the higher the likelihood of gaining entry to the network's inner circles.

The motives and ideas of the people within these groups vary widely, but their common denominator is the glorification of a world in which the strong dominate, without considering the needs of those considered 'weaker' people. Guided by their own interests and through the use of shocking acts, they seek to bring about the collapse of society in order to create what they describe as an 'elitist world'.

Members of this transnational movement primarily seek out vulnerable people such as children and people with mental vulnerabilities, on gaming platforms and online support communities. They seek to gain their trust before extorting and coercing them into self-harm, suicide, and sharing images of nudity. Some victims are subsequently forced to approach and extort new victims, who then become trapped within the network.

Although Belgium has so far not experienced nihilistic terrorist attacks, it is not possible to distinguish intentions among members of these networks on the basis of their location. Violent acts involving knives, vehicles, or poison are therefore also conceivable in Belgium, as is arson. There are indications that the network is increasingly shifting towards a modus operandi involving more specific physical acts of violence.

In cooperation with other security partners, the VSSE seeks to identify Belgian actors within these networks through intelligence investigations in order to develop an accurate assessment of the threat.

<sup>1</sup> COLLECTING OR SHARING PERSONAL INFORMATION, SUCH AS AN ADDRESS OR PHONE NUMBER, TO INTIMIDATE INDIVIDUALS.

In 2025, the VSSE observed for the first time that nihilistic extremism has a structural presence in Belgium. Despite drawing on multiple sources of inspiration, ideologically nihilistic extremism is clearly closer to right-wing extremism. This assessment does not exclude, however, that the phenomenon may continue to evolve and its ideological position could shift over time.

## 764

The 764 network is a transnational extremist community comprising hundreds of public and private chat groups on platforms such as Telegram and Discord. These groups are connected through shared membership, overlapping objectives and ongoing communication.

The 764 network was established in 2021 by Bradley Cadenhead, a 15-year-old US citizen, as a breakaway group from a criminal exploitation network following the arrest of several leaders for offences including grooming<sup>1</sup>, kidnapping, rape, child abuse and extortion. Through 764, Cadenhead combined misanthropy, Satanism and right-wing extremist accelerationism, drawing inspiration from the practices of exploitation networks. The group formalised its modus operandi and ideology by publishing official propaganda and distributing manuals. The group openly declared its alliance with various similar networks.

The 764 network occupies the extreme end of the spectrum of extremism. It justifies extreme violence as a psychological weapon aimed at the foundations of society. Acts of extreme violence, horror, and the dissemination of images of child sexual abuse are presented as ideals to be pursued, with such activities functioning as a form of currency to gain status and recognition within the community. Sadism is regarded as a distinguishing criterion between those considered 'worthy and unworthy'. The more sadistic, the more worthy they become.

Since the arrest of Cadenhead and several other individuals linked to 764, the network has fragmented into numerous offshoot groups that rapidly emerge and disappear, as members frequently seek to establish and lead their own groups.

<sup>1</sup> GROOMING IS THE PROCESS WHERE AN ADULT INTENTIONALLY APPROACHES AND MANIPULATES MINORS FOR A SEXUAL PURPOSE (SOURCE: CHILD FOCUS).



# ORGANISED CRIME: INCREASINGLY BRAZEN AND STRUCTURALLY UNDERMINING THE STATE

In 2025, the presence of organised crime, particularly in the drug trade, was further confirmed as a genuine subversive threat. Violence associated with these criminal networks was increasingly visible on the streets, and the intimidation of prison guards, police officers and even magistrates is no longer exceptional. In this context, the VSSE's specialised intelligence investigations complement the work of the Police and judicial authorities.

The VSSE focuses its efforts on organised crime when such activity clearly falls within its legal remit, for example in cases involving espionage, terrorism, extremism, proliferation or foreign interference. The service also intervenes when the activities of criminal organisations may have a destabilising impact on the country's political or socioeconomic fabric, in other words, when these activities undermine the authority of the state.



In Belgium, the drug trade in its broadest sense constitutes the main threat from organised crime. With the port of Antwerp, Belgium has one of the most important gateways into Europe, which has served as a magnet for the drug trade for many years. This international drug trade destabilises society in several ways, given the structural violence and corruption associated with it. When leaders of criminal organisations are imprisoned, the threat does not immediately disappear, on the contrary, it even places additional pressure on the Belgian prison system.

Over the past year, criminal organisations, particularly in the drug trade, have demonstrated their influence more strongly than ever before. Violence and intimidation, inherent features of this type of crime, have become increasingly visible and explicit. Shootings in public to settle internal scores and explosions at homes have contributed to a marked rise in insecurity in the public domain.

Violence, or at least the threat of violence, is increasingly being directed against governments and authorities. The threat towards prison guards, police officers and magistrates has substantially increased. Several Belgian magistrates have even had to receive police protection or temporarily relocate to safe houses - a situation that was unheard of just a few years ago.

The Police and the judicial authorities continue to take the lead in the fight against organised crime. Through its own intelligence investigations, the VSSE seeks to complement the work of its partners.

In practical terms, the VSSE investigates individuals and networks involved in subversive activities, including threats, acts of violence, or corruption directed against civil servants. Relevant information gathered during these investigations is shared with partner agencies to ensure a coordinated and effective response.

## PART 2

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THE VSSE  
IS BETTER  
EQUIPPED  
THAN EVER

# INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION : WORKING TOGETHER AGAINST BORDERLESS THREATS

International cooperation is crucial for the VSSE, both in the context of specific intelligence cases and for the strategic support of the Belgian security policy.

Over the years, the VSSE has built long-standing relationships of trust with many partners, while other partnerships were only established in 2025. More recent partners are primarily services from the African continent, the wider Caucasus and the Arab world. As a result, the VSSE's international network is now more global than ever. In 2025, the service organised nearly 400 bilateral consultative meetings. Additional international contacts occurred on an almost daily basis throughout the year, from management-level discussions to expert meetings, both bilateral and multilateral. This illustrates the intensity of the VSSE's international cooperation.

Liaison officers play an important role in the VSSE's foreign partner policy. These are formally declared VSSE members of staff who maintain a local presence in order to increase the responsiveness of the service. In this way, international liaison officers contribute directly to strengthening Belgium's security.

The VSSE also considers the national dimension of international cooperation and works closely with the GISS, as well as with the International Relations Service of the Belgian Federal Police. Regular consultations are also held with the FPS Foreign Affairs. Each cooperation has its own framework and dynamics, but mutual coordination ensures that Belgium presents a coherent and coordinated position internationally.

2025 was a year marked by significant geopolitical challenges for both the European Union and NATO. As host country, Belgium bears responsibility for providing security support to both institutions. The VSSE contributes substantially in this regard, including through the permanent exchange of data in specific intelligence cases. Monitoring EU developments that affect the functioning of intelligence services is also crucial. The appointment of a member of the VSSE to the Permanent Representation of Belgium in the European Union highlights the importance the VSSE places on this cooperation.



# TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES: HOW THE VSSE ADAPTS IN A RAPIDLY EVOLVING AGE

The VSSE finds itself in a rapidly changing environment. Technology is evolving at an unprecedented pace. New digital possibilities are creating opportunities for more efficient processes and smarter analysis, for example through the use of artificial intelligence, while at the same time presenting new challenges, such as increasingly sophisticated forms of encryption.

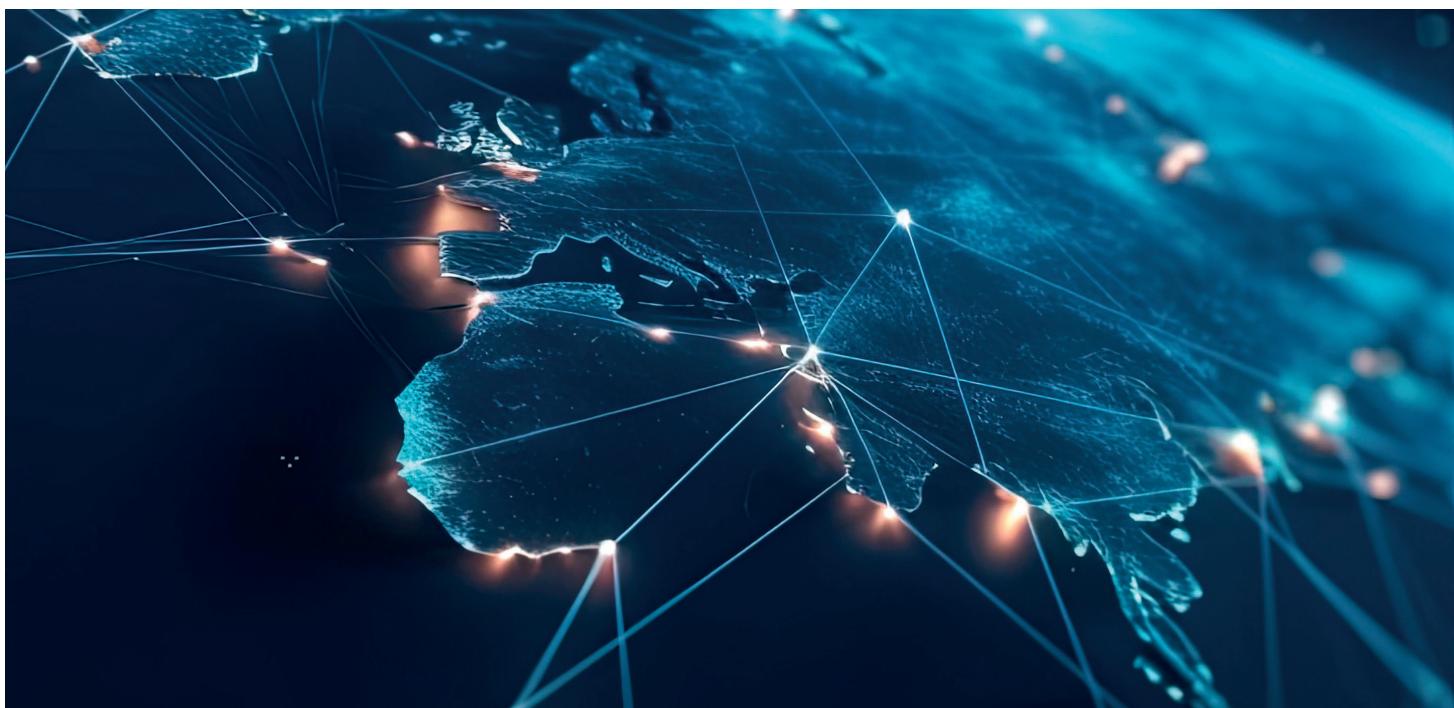
Technological advances are not a luxury for the VSSE, they are an absolute necessity. That is why the service is investing heavily in innovation. The government supports this vision and has significantly strengthened the VSSE's budget. Through interdepartmental provision appropriations<sup>1</sup>, the service had the financial resources in 2025 to expand its information collection capabilities and enhance its data-processing capacity. Over time, these investments will enable the VSSE to respond more quickly, intelligently and resiliently to the security challenges of tomorrow.

Against this backdrop, a Chief Technology Officer (CTO) has been appointed for the first time. This appointment reflects our ambition to embed technological advances in a structured and sustainable way. The CTO not only oversees

internal development and capacity, but also fosters strong partnerships: with national security actors, foreign partners, universities and research institutions, and the commercial sector. Cooperation is a crucial enabler in this context, allowing the service to stay at the forefront.

The VSSE continually assesses where further development is needed, which investments should take priority, and how to attract the right expertise. The answer lies in moving quickly, embracing innovation, forging strategic partnerships, and continuing to invest in talent. Innovation is not a project with a fixed end date, it is a continuous process. Strengthening technical capacity – both in terms of personnel and resources, and in close cooperation with national partners – will therefore remain an absolute priority in the coming years. The VSSE

<sup>1</sup> AN INTERDEPARTMENTAL PROVISION APPROPRIATION (IDP) REFERS TO A BUDGETARY MECHANISM USED TO FINANCE INITIATIVES AND EXPENDITURES RELATED TO A SPECIFIC SUBJECT MATTER.



has made a clear choice for progress: if we want to make the future secure, we must be ready today.

### **Leveraging technological innovation against threat actors**

The VSSE is not the only actor that uses technological innovations. Threat actors are evolving as well. The emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) has the potential to affect all the domains in which the VSSE operates, from espionage and interference, to extremism and terrorism, as well as counter-proliferation. While the impact varies across these areas, a clear common thread emerges: on the one hand, AI can detect patterns in large amounts of data and 'make the invisible visible'; on the other hand, it brings the power of automation, even in complex tasks.

A widely discussed example is information manipulation. Generative AI — which automatically creates text or audiovisual content — makes it easier than ever to create and disseminate disinformation, deepfakes and polarising content. Several hostile actors are already experimenting with these new possibilities, whether to sow division, undermine democratic institutions, or pursue financial gain. The VSSE conducts enhanced monitoring of information manipulation, and continues to prioritise synergies with the GISS and other Belgian partners. Countering disinformation requires a whole-of-society approach, in which resilience and digital literacy remain crucial - even in the age of AI.

However, AI can also amplify less visible threats.

Its ability to recognise patterns in the vast amounts of data available online makes it far easier to identify individuals of interest to foreign intelligence services—for use in espionage or interference, for example. Authoritarian regimes can use these technologies to monitor or intimidate dissidents in Belgium, thereby significantly extending their reach and impact.

In addition, AI enhances the capacity of extremist actors to produce propaganda and radicalising content. The risk of widespread individualisation and tailored radicalisation must not be underestimated in this regard. Furthermore, AI may lower the threshold for producing weapons and explosives, as built-in security mechanisms are not always foolproof, even in widely accessible models.

Although the most sophisticated AI applications are likely to remain limited to actors with substantial resources, expertise and training data, the broad availability of AI enhances the capabilities of all cyber actors. As a result, the rapid rise of AI is almost certainly a contributing factor to the sharp increase in both the volume and impact of cyberattacks.

The rapid evolution of AI also carries a risk of facilitating the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Artificial intelligence can reduce the need for specialised expertise and simplify or accelerate the development of nuclear, biological and chemical weapons. Specialised organisations such as the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) have already expressed their concerns in this regard.



# NEW RULES FOR THE VSSE: A FUTURE-PROOF LEGAL FRAMEWORK

**To enable the intelligence services to keep pace with the evolution of threats and technological developments, legislation must also adapt.**

The government agreement underlines this necessity, stating: '*We will ensure that the VSSE can play its role in the Belgian security architecture and in the international context, by giving it the operational resources and methods it needs to accomplish its remit. (...) For these reasons also, we are strengthening the operational tools and legal framework of the VSSE. By revising the Act Governing the Intelligence and Security Services, we are ensuring that the VSSE, through the oversight of the supervisory bodies, can effectively counter all threats (disruption).*'

Over the past few months, the VSSE, in close cooperation with the GISS, has been working on various amendments to the Governing Act, which applies to both Belgian intelligence services. The results of this work are now in the hands of the supervising ministers and are expected to be presented shortly to the Council of Ministers, before proceeding to Parliament.

What will change as a result of these amendments? Without prejudging the decisions of the Government or Parliament, the project comprises two main elements:

- Adapting current legislation on intelligence collection methods. Several proposals have been put forward to accommodate new technologies and to improve various aspects of the legislation.
- Introducing a specific task for the intelligence

services: the possibility of disrupting a threat.

The latter represents a minor revolution for the VSSE, whose role has hitherto been limited to 'collecting, analysing and processing' intelligence. When a threat is detected, the VSSE has traditionally had to rely on other competent channels, such as the Judiciary, to address it. However, this approach offers no solution for certain threats, for example, when no criminal offence has been committed.

The introduction of this new capability will not replace existing instruments but will serve to complement them. Moreover, it will always be used in consultation with other partners who are competent in the matters concerned.

Among its missions, the VSSE is charged with protecting the democratic and constitutional order. It follows, therefore, that both when amending the legislation on special intelligence methods and when granting the power to disrupt, particular attention must be paid to monitoring their use. The aim is not to provide carte blanche to the intelligence services. At the same time, it is essential that these methods remain administratively practical, ensuring a rapid and targeted response to threats that may be imminent.

It should always be remembered that the ultimate objective is, and remains, to make Belgium safer.

# DIRECTORATE OF SECURITY: A FULLY FLEDGED STRUCTURE FOR ENHANCED PROTECTION

The VSSE has recently decided to elevate the security department to a fully-fledged directorate. This decision is not merely symbolic; it reflects a clear determination to place greater emphasis on security matters and strengthen the service's resilience in light of a changing geopolitical environment.



## For the benefit of the organisation

The Directorate of Security is responsible for deploying resources where they are most critical to the organisation, with the aim of ensuring the security of personnel, information, systems and facilities. In doing so, the VSSE adopts a transversal approach to identifying and managing the risks faced by the organisation.

A service in evolution implies a number of challenges, and security processes are constantly being reviewed to ensure that activities are carried out in accordance with security policy. Although awareness remains an important part of the work, the management of internal risks also requires the necessary priority.

## And for the benefit of its partners

It is therefore logical that the National Security Authority (NSA), which is responsible for the protection of classified information and has been incorporated into the VSSE since January 2024, falls under the VSSE's Security

Directorate. Through the NSA, the VSSE plays a central role in implementing policy on the protection of classified information, in particular by processing requests for security clearances. The procedures for handling these requests will be further optimised in 2026.

As security issues concern all public authorities, the VSSE attaches great importance to sharing its experience with partners and readily provides advice to other public services whenever possible. In 2025, nearly 20 'sweeping' missions (the detection of concealed listening devices) were carried out on behalf of national partners, either as part of a homologation process for an installation or in response to a serious suspicion of a security incident. At the same time, the service also benefits from the expertise of its partners. In 2025, for the first time, the VSSE made use of a dog trained by the Federal Police to detect electronic devices, in a successful operation that illustrates the added value of such partnerships.

# BUILDING TRUST: THE ROLE OF THE NATIONAL SECURITY AUTHORITY

In early 2024, the National Security Authority (NSA) was transferred from the FPS Foreign Affairs to the VSSE. At the time, a two-year transition period was planned, during which the NSA was to review its internal operations and implement any necessary adjustments. This transition period is now drawing to a close. It is therefore an appropriate moment both to reflect on the progress made and to look ahead to the year to come.

The NSA has a clearly defined role within Belgium's security architecture: to ensure that classified information is handled correctly. Its objective is to establish a relationship of mutual trust. All stakeholders, at both national and international level, must be confident that their classified information is managed appropriately. This long-term trust is essential to maintaining the secure flow of information, a fundamental element of the security landscape. Clear rules, together with oversight to ensure they are applied, are necessary to build and maintain this trust—this is precisely the role of the NSA.

In 2025, the NSA took an important step in facilitating the exchange of classified information by issuing guidelines on the new classification level, *restricted*, added to the existing levels of *confidential*, *secret* and *top secret*<sup>1</sup>. In addition, guidelines on the physical storage of classified information have been finalised and will be disseminated in early 2026. In the first half of 2026, guidance will also be published explaining how classified information may be processed and communicated electronically. This represents just the beginning of the NSA's

efforts to strengthen the secure handling of classified information.

To establish a clear framework for handling classified information, Belgium and the NSA still have work to do. Several projects are planned for 2026, including procedures for transporting classified information, managing security incidents and guidelines that the NSA can issue to security officers to better support them in their duties.

Ensuring the correct handling of classified information is, of course, essential. Equally important for the NSA is that this information can be used as smoothly as possible, even though this is not always straightforward. Effective communication with all stakeholders is therefore vital to build understanding and support. In 2025, the NSA took important steps in this regard, for example by involving security partners in the drafting of its guidelines.

At the end of 2025, the NSA once again hosted the 'Security Days', during which over 1,000 security officers and company directors were

<sup>1</sup> THIS WAS DONE TO BRING THE BELGIAN CLASSIFICATION LEVELS IN LINE WITH THOSE OF NATO AND THE EU.





briefed on developments in the management of classified information. Strengthening relationships with partners and enhancing the accessibility of the service are key priorities for 2026.

In 2024 and 2025, the NSA was also entrusted with a number of new responsibilities, including regulating the use of cryptography for encrypting classified information and overseeing the secure use of the Galileo global navigation satellite system. To implement these new responsibilities effectively, the service will need to recruit and integrate additional staff.

In addition to the ongoing challenge of clarifying the framework for classified information, the NSA must continue to ensure the smooth running of its daily operations. Figures for the number of security clearances issued are provided below. This is taking place at a time when the geopolitical situation remains highly tense, making classified information increasingly important and its rigorous handling all the more essential.

In this context, the NSA's work is not only demanding but also highly engaging. By establishing a regulatory framework, the NSA contributes directly to strengthening Belgium's security culture, in close cooperation with other public authorities and the private sector.

Looking ahead, the NSA's priorities for the coming year include developing a robust policy that balances security with trust, while ensuring the seamless use of classified information through direct engagement with its clients.

### The NSA in figures

In 2025, the NSA issued 11,953 individual security clearances (versus 11,840 in 2024) and 539 clearances for companies (versus 485 the previous year). This represents a modest increase in both categories. Before a security clearance can be granted, it is verified whether the individual demonstrates the required loyalty, discretion, and integrity to handle classified information. These investigations are not conducted by the NSA itself, but by the VSSE and the GISS. An increase in the number of security clearances consequently requires these services to carry out a greater number of investigations.

# ACADEMIC OUTREACH: THE VSSE JOINS FORCES WITH ACADEMIA

**Knowledge is crucial to the intelligence community, and the VSSE therefore places great importance on maintaining high-quality cooperation with academia. Today, this collaboration is more structured than in the past, with the VSSE striving for a mutually beneficial arrangement that adds value for all partners.**

For an intelligence and security service, knowledge is essential in the broadest possible sense. The VSSE seeks to understand the world and the threats facing Belgium, with the aim of identifying hostile actors, their motivations and their actions - if possible, even before they manifest in the field. As a learning organisation, the service also seeks to enhance its own expertise, striving to carry out its tasks efficiently and professionally. To this end, the VSSE continuously optimises its technical tools, operational framework, and internal processes.

Driven by this pursuit of knowledge and improvement, the VSSE focuses on external contacts, cooperation and partnerships. The academic community is a key player in this regard, providing extensive expertise in various fields and areas of interest to our service. Given the multiplicity of threats and the rapid pace of technological developments, engagement with academia is not merely desirable but essential.

The service maintained contacts with Belgian universities and scientific institutions in the past. Over the last two years, however, the VSSE, has structurally prioritised cooperation and exchanges with the Belgian scientific community as part of its 'Academic Outreach' initiative. The service proactively approaches the academic

world regarding issues and projects linked to its priorities, whether directly connected to intelligence missions or more broadly related to its day-to-day work. At the same time, spontaneous inquiries from the scientific community now receive greater attention than before. The VSSE aims to foster beneficial interactions with individual students, researchers, and academic institutions. Cooperation and exchange can only succeed if they provide added value for both the service and its academic partners — a goal the VSSE consistently strives to achieve. In 2025, this positive message was actively promoted across Belgian universities.

Looking ahead, the VSSE will host a 'Students' Day' in 2026, during which students will have the opportunity to exchange views with experts on topics relevant to their master's theses.

The service will provide one-on-one contact with master's and PhD students and will invite renowned academic speakers to debate with VSSE staff as part of the 'Academic Outreach Invites' programme.

More information on public activities related to Academic Outreach can be found at: [vsse.be/academic-outreach](http://vsse.be/academic-outreach).

# THE VSSE'S FIGURES FOR 2025

## ► INCOMING MESSAGES

**39,750**

This figure includes all incoming intelligence-related messages received by the VSSE from both national partners and foreign intelligence services. In 2025, a slight decrease in the number of messages was observed compared to 2024.

NA's are intelligence-related messages sent to national partners. In 2025, an increase was recorded compared to 2024.

**2,066**



**3,939**

NE's are intelligence-related messages sent to foreign intelligence partners. This number has remained stable compared to 2024.

**REPLIES TO PARLIAMENTARY QUESTIONS**



## ► USE OF SPECIAL INTELLIGENCE COLLECTION METHODS

**1,988**

The VSSE has a legal framework to apply special intelligence collection methods (SIMs). These intelligence collection methods interfere with the private lives of fellow citizens (such as intercepting telephone conversations). These methods may only be used under the supervision of three independent magistrates.

## ► SECURITY CHECKS

In 2025, the number of security checks conducted by the VSSE increased by 5.14 percent compared to 2024. This upward trend in verifications has been ongoing for several years. Given the current geopolitical context and heightened security awareness, the VSSE expects this number to continue rising in the coming years.

# 335,503

ARCHIVAL COLLECTION	NUMBER OF LINEAR METRES
Inciviques	10
Sûreté Ruanda-Urundi	16
Occupation Résistance	14
Occupation Allemande	1,5
Occupation Collaboration	2,5

## TRANSFER OF HISTORICAL ARCHIVES

Since October 2022, the VSSE has embarked on a major project to declassify its historical archives and subsequently transfer them to the State Archives. In 2025, a total of five record series were declassified and transferred, amounting to 440 standard archival boxes. The table on the left provides an overview of the collections transferred over the past year:

## MANAGING THE PAST FOR THE FUTURE

The VSSE is gradually declassifying its archives in preparation for their transfer to the State Archives. The table above provides an overview of this process. Access to these archives, via the State Archives and the Centre for Historical Research and Documentation on War and Contemporary Society (CEGESOMA), is becoming increasingly straightforward, enabling the public to explore our shared history. The VSSE is firmly committed to continuing these efforts in the future.

A significant proportion of contemporary intelligence activity no longer takes place on paper. The intelligence community, too, is undergoing digital transformation. The management of digital archives therefore

represents a major challenge. For this reason, the VSSE has taken the initiative, in cooperation with its partners (the GISS, the Federal Police, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, OCAD and the NCCN) and the State Archives, to establish a working group tasked with addressing the complexity of digital archiving and access to digital records.

The scale of this challenge is illustrated by the 9 mm films held by the VSSE. These films are currently being declassified and, where they continue to hold historical value, will be digitised and transferred to the State Archives. To this end, the VSSE has engaged CINEMATEK, the Royal Belgian Film Archive.

