



Weekly

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Europe Weekly Summary - August 11-17, 2021


Highlights of the Week

This report reviews notable events this week in Europe. This includes instances of vandalism targeting 22 health facilities in France; a cyber-attack targeting government networks in Lithuania; the passing of two controversial bills in Poland; Russia's decision to expel a British BBC correspondent; an incel-linked shooting attack in Plymouth, UK; and the death of the OPPZh-affiliated mayor of Kryvyi Rih in Ukraine.

EUROPE

August 11-17, 2021

- 22 health facilities were vandalized in **France** between July 12 and August 13.
- 1,677 million confidential documents were leaked in a cyberattack in **Lithuania**.
- The Sejm passed a bill restricting media and a bill restricting WWII restitution claims in **Poland**.
- **Russia** asked a BBC correspondent to leave the country by the end of August.
- An incel-linked attack killed six, including the perpetrator, in Plymouth, **UK**.
- The mayor of Kryvyi Rih, affiliated with the OPPZh party, was found dead at his home in **Ukraine**.



France

Notable Developments:

- Official reports claim that 22 health facilities, including 15 vaccination centers and five COVID-19 testing centers, have been vandalized nationwide between July 12 and August 13. The vaccination centers were set on fire or flooded while slogans and symbols of French Resistance and Nazism were spray-painted on the walls.

- The government has called for greater protection of health facilities across France since the incidents began. The introduction of the COVID-19 Health Pass has also sparked widespread protests nationwide, with tens of thousands protesting in cities nationwide on August 14 for the fifth weekend in a row. Some 1,600 police were deployed for three separate marches in Paris, a week after the health pass went into effect.

ANALYSIS: In light of the above, the threat of vandalism is likely to be elevated in the coming weeks, with vaccination centers likely to be targets of dissent due to the growing dissatisfaction around the COVID-19 health pass. This is supported by the threatening statements discovered at a vaccination center in Toulouse in the past week. Moreover, the protest movement against the pass is expected to intensify in the near term, further elevating the risk of violence, vandalism, and property damage near protest locations. In particular, widespread protests are likely ahead of the September 15 deadline mandating vaccinations for health workers. Given the above, police presence is expected to increase in the vicinity of all COVID-19 vaccine facilities. Additionally, far-right parties are expected to continue capitalizing on growing anti-government sentiment, evidenced by Florian Philippot, leader of Les Patriotes, attending protests in Paris in the past weeks.

Lithuania

Notable Developments:

- On August 12, the Foreign Ministry confirmed that an estimated 1,677 million confidential documents and correspondences were leaked on August 8, acquired through a cyberattack targeting the Ministry in November 2020. Additionally, an unsuccessful cyberattack attempt was also reported on August 11.
- The leaked data reportedly include Lithuania's policies towards Belarus, Georgia, and Russia; and information concerning the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline project. Although details regarding the attacker remain unconfirmed, Defense Minister Arvydas Anusauskas accused the Russian Federal Security Service (FSB) of carrying out the attack.

ANALYSIS: The leak highlights the increased security threat posed by cyberattacks targeting government networks. Although the FSB's involvement remains unconfirmed, the potential for the attack to have been a part of Russia's global espionage campaign cannot be ruled out, given that previous regional cyber-attacks have often been traced to Russia's Military Intelligence (GRU). The continuing diplomatic rows between the Baltic countries and Russia over espionage claims, as evidenced between Estonia-Russia on July 7, support this assessment. Regardless, based on precedent, Russia is liable to deny the allegations. With that, bilateral relations between the Baltics and Russia are expected to remain tense moving forward. In light of this, further attacks targeting government networks, as well as general infrastructure are likely in the near-to-medium-term.

Poland

Notable Developments:

- On August 11, the Sejm passed a controversial bill by 228 votes to 216 that could force a US media group to sell its controlling stake in Poland's main independent broadcaster. The bill was introduced by the ruling Prawo i Sprawiedliwość (PiS) party, and if approved by the Senate and President, would prevent companies outside the European Economic Area (EEA) from owning a majority in Polish media companies. Mass nationwide protests against the bill were recorded.
- On August 14, President Andrzej Duda signed the restitution bill that restricts former pre-World War II (WWII) Polish property owners to reclaim property seized by Nazis or nationalized by the Soviet-backed regime and establishes a 30-year limit on challenges to property confiscations. The Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid condemned the legislation and recalled an Israeli diplomat in Warsaw in response. US government officials also urged Duda to veto the law.

ANALYSIS: These developments reflect the PiS government's continuing shift to right-wing policies, which have raised tensions with the EU, as well as other allies, in this case, the USA. Following President Donald Trump's departure, Warsaw is likely to face significant condemnation from Washington for this trend. However, facing challenges from centrist and liberal opposition, the PiS are liable to consider securing its right-wing, nationalist base in rural areas. A lack of significant repercussions from the EU or USA will reinforce this trend going forward.

Russia & UK

Notable Developments:

- Russia has asked Sarah Rainsford, one of the UK-based BBC media outlet's two English-language correspondents in Moscow to leave by the end of August in response to London's alleged discrimination against Russian journalists working in the UK, per August 14 reports.
- According to the Russian state media, journalists from Moscow-backed organizations, such as RT and the online outlet Sputnik, had not been accredited by the UK government to cover international events. Russian foreign ministry spokeswoman, Maria Zakharova, announced that Moscow had warned London that it would respond to its "visa-related persecution of Russian journalists in the UK." The BBC has urged Moscow to reconsider its move.

ANALYSIS: The expulsion, the first of a British journalist from Russia in a decade, is illustrative of the deteriorating Russia-UK relations. The incident also reflects the targeting of individual foreign citizens and organizations by the Russian government as a diplomatic tool. That the development comes in the run-up to the September State Duma elections in Russia, indicates that the expulsion is likely part of the Kremlin's ongoing crackdown on both domestic and foreign media on the pretext of curtailing any "foreign interference," with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) not sending observers due to "limitations" imposed by local authorities. Given the cultural

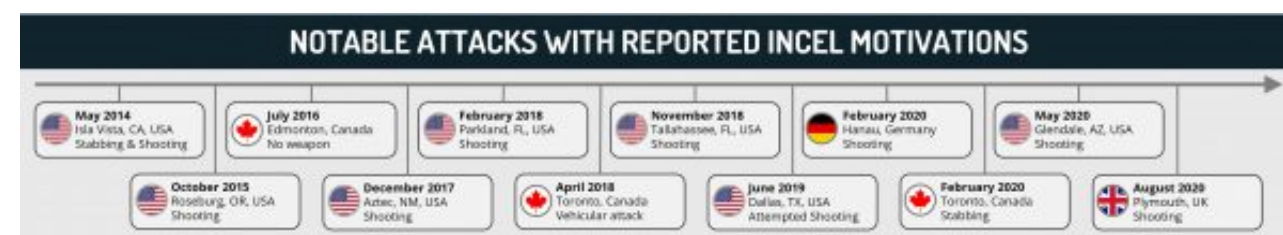
importance of the BBC within the UK, bilateral tensions between London and Moscow are likely to increase, with further tit-for-tat measures likely in the coming months.

UK

Notable Developments:

- Reports indicate that Jake Davison, the individual who perpetrated a shooting attack in Plymouth on August 12, was an adherent of the “incel” ideology. Davison killed five people, including his mother within their home, before going into the local area where he killed a child and her father, a woman, and injured two more.
- Police investigators have found that Davison made numerous comments on social media forums disparaging women in the preceding months and that he was radicalized through online forums espousing the ideology.
- The attack is the first major “incel”-inspired attack in the UK, although in March 2020, Anwar Driouich, who was reportedly inspired by the “incel” ideology, was jailed due to possession of an explosive device.

ANALYSIS: Given that Davison appears to have been an adherent to the “involuntary celibate-incel” ideology and was radicalized online, the Plymouth shooting highlights the threat of violent attacks in the UK initiated by online radicalization, which has been exacerbated by the proliferation of extremist content on social media platforms and forums during the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the wider threat of violence from “incel” adherents in the UK remains in question, the attack is likely to increase political debate on the matter, while also attracting potential adherents. With that, pressure to preemptively police and block extremist content percolating on social media platforms and online forums are liable to grow in the near term. Given the difficulty in obtaining firearms in the UK, incel-inspired attacks will likely primarily use sharp weapons, although attackers may attempt to obtain firearms or explosives.



Ukraine

Notable Developments:

- On August 15, Kryvyi Rih Mayor Konstantin Pavlov, affiliated with the pro-Moscow Opposition

Platform – For Life party (OPZZh), was found dead with a gunshot wound in his house.

- It remains unclear whether the death was a murder, suicide, or caused due to the mishandling of the weapon.
- Authorities have opened a criminal case and are currently investigating the incident. Pavlov had defeated President Volodymyr Zelensky's Servant of the People party candidate to become the mayor in December 2020.

ANALYSIS: Despite the absence of details, the OPZZh is likely to accuse the Zelensky government of politically orchestrating the mayor's killing, as evidenced by the party's statement alleging that state investigators are attempting to falsely label it as a suicide. As such, the incident is likely to exacerbate the prevailing tensions between the pro-Moscow party and the government in the backdrop of several sanctions imposed on opposition lawmakers and business entities that have close ties to Russia. Additionally, the incident is also likely to attract criticism from Moscow, which has accused Zelensky of suppressing the pro-Russian opposition forces. With that, anti-government protests organized by the OPZZh are likely to intensify in the coming weeks. Future protests are likely to be held in urban areas, including Kyiv, and carry with them a heightened potential for unrest in the form of clashes with police and Zelensky supporters.

Other Developments:

- On August 11, the **Belarusian** Foreign Ministry ordered the **USA** to reduce its staff at the US Embassy in Minsk by September 1, following sanctions imposed on Belarus by Canada, the UK, and USA on August 9.
- In **France**, the Constitutional Council, France's highest constitutional authority, ruled that the recently passed anti-separatism law was constitutional with minor changes on August 13, meaning the bill can now officially become law.
- In **Germany**, a **UK** national working at the British Embassy in Berlin was arrested in Potsdam on August 11 for allegedly carrying out espionage activities for **Russia**.
- **Germany** tightened travel restrictions for numerous countries on August 13, including the **USA**. Travelers from high risk countries will need to be fully vaccinated or demonstrate an essential reason for entering. Additionally, unvaccinated travelers from high risk countries will be subject to a ten-day quarantine upon arrival.
- In the **UK**, the Department of Health announced that all individuals aged 16 and 17 in **England** will be offered their first dose of the COVID-19 vaccine, starting August 23.

The Week Ahead

- August 19: XR to stage multiple protests in Berlin, **Germany**
- August 21: Protest in Munich, **Germany**
- August 23: Independence Day in **Ukraine**
- August 24: Tube Strike in London, **UK**