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Issue Brief

(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)

Spain to come up with the new "tourist model" and "tourist- phobia"

September 14, 2017

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While qualifying his views on the attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils that killed 15 people on August 17, 2017, Pere Mariné, executive member of Al Poble Nou Ens Plantem, one of the most active neighborhood associations against the tourism boom in the Catalan capital said,



“What has happened is dramatic, that is why I want to make clear that we are not against the tourist sector or the tourists, but against massified tourism.”¹ At least 130 people were injured when a driver deliberately slammed a van into crowds on Barcelona's most popular street in what police confirmed was a terror attack. Citizens of 24 countries were among those killed and injured in Barcelona.²

The attacks seem to have put on hold the intense debate over the country's tourism model. A truce was reached after months of protests experienced in the Catalan city of Spain to force greater regulation of the sector; to prevent the granting of new tourist apartments licenses and encourage a more controlled increase in the number of hotels.

Spain welcomed 75 million tourists in 2016, making it the third most-visited country worldwide. The tourism sector accounts for 11 per cent of its gross domestic product (GDP). Spain was close to becoming the most-visited country in 2017. It is neck-and-neck with the US, and not far away from number one, France.³

Spain is a country which has seen terrorism for decades. Aside from the terrorist attacks in Madrid in 2004, Spain has seen long years of conflict with Basque terrorist group Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) - an armed leftist nationalist and separatist organization in the Basque Country (in northern Spain and southwestern France) - and according to Thomas Baumert, professor of economics and statistics at

¹ “Barcelona terrorism attacks shake debate over tourism”, *Euronews*, August 29, 2017.

² Helena Horton, Barney Henderson and Robert Midgley, “Everything we know about the Barcelona terror attack”, *The Telegraph*, August 18, 2017.

³ Will the attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils harm Spain's tourism sector? *Euronews*, August 28, 2017.

Madrid's Cardenal Cisneros University, while the ETA has only recently handed over its arsenal to the authorities,⁴ its residuals cannot be ignored. The fight against the ETA has only partially hardened the security forces and advanced its anti-terrorism techniques. Similarly, one needs to keep in mind that there is a Catalan pro-independence youth movement - Arran - also going on in this region.

Undoubtedly, a continent which prides itself on tourism is badly affected by the terrorist attacks. The attacks in Brussels, Paris and Nice show there are consequences for the tourism sector. Tourists that have visited Brussels or Paris in recent years have had taken home a strange postcard of a high police and military presence in the streets. This also includes armoured vehicles. Almost all visitors who arrive in the city end up touring Las Ramblas which was the scene of the terrorist attack. According to a study by a local association, 213,000 people pass through this street every day. Of these, an estimated 80 per cent are tourists.⁵ The city council has defined tourism as the most serious problem facing Barcelona, but events of the July-August, 2017 have put a new perspective on the issue. The tourism sector shows a great resilience to terrorist attacks. The possibility of desensitization in public opinion to the news of terrorism is yet another yardstick. Arrivals in London recovered even quicker than Paris from its series of terrorist attacks. Nonetheless, numbers in mobility have decreased.

What are the interests of the terrorists in attacking the tourists? Does this mean a larger coverage of the international media by widening the impact or expanding the schisms between the civilizations? Thomas Baumert defines the attacks on the tourism industry as one of the objectives of "Jihadist terrorism".⁶ He however, ignores the spaces provided by the anomalies of the political, economic and strategic policies followed or even imposed by the western world while using religion to hide behind. For instance, disregarding the emerging trends of populist and nationalist movements which have already made their mark on the European political landscape in a series of closely-watched elections held across the continent during the years 2016-17 reinforce the widely misunderstood beliefs of the liberal Union. Similarly, the national governments' desire to protect themselves from the interference of the EU and its supranational oversight of values is yet another cause of brittle bonding.

Furthermore, despite the introduction of Common European Asylum System, the European countries are struggling with the mass movement of people and interpreting the accommodation of the refugees

⁴ Mark Bieter, "The Rise and Fall of ETA", *The Blue Review*, December 11, 2013.

⁵ Helena Horton, Barney Henderson and Robert Midgley, "Everything we know about the Barcelona terror attack", *The Telegraph*, August 18, 2017.

⁶ "Will the attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils harm Spain's tourism sector?", *euronews*, August 28, 2017.

and the migrants as threatening for their sovereigntist policies. They are experiencing one of the most significant influxes of migrants and refugees in their history. Pushed by civil war and terror and pulled by the promise of a better life, huge numbers of people have fled the Middle East, particularly Syria and Iraq, Afghanistan and Africa, risking their lives along the way. More than 80 per cent of the refugees are from these countries.⁷

On the other hand, lack of political consensus and will has hampered the Union's ability to effectively neutralize the challenge thus posed. For instance, Denmark has used the controversial law to seize migrant's assets. The L87 or 'jewelry bill' allowed authorities to seize cash from five migrants who tried to enter the country with fake travel documents.⁸ Similarly, Hungary and Slovakia have told the European Union's top court that sharing out asylum-seekers among member-states in a quota system is unlawful.⁹ The dispute is putting pressure on relations with other member states and threatens serious division within the bloc.

Tourism in the aftermath or during the wars is significantly a political endeavor, presenting both challenges and opportunities for the societies emerging from the effects of the violent conflict. No industry in these times of interdependence can be viewed in isolation. Today, unfortunately, the visceral, painful, and traumatic experience of violent conflict, especially in the Middle East and Afghanistan is being airbrushed into a dog-whistle politics of terrorism for geo-economic and geo-strategic interests by the entire western world and the major powers, while misrepresenting the actual lived experience of the migrants. It equally inflicts a vital component of soft power in public diplomacy in which tourism finds a vital role.

⁷ "Press Coverage of the Refugee and Migrant Crisis in the EU: A Content Analysis of Five European Countries", <http://www.unhcr.org>

⁸ Harriet Agerholm, "Denmark uses controversial 'jewellery law' to seize assets from refugees for first time", *Independent*, July 1, 2016.

⁹ Gabriela Baczynska, "Hungry-Slovakia challenge quotas on asylum seekers at top EU court", May 10, 2017, www.reuters.com