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## Vienna attack. Bertolotti (REACT): "It signals the terrorists' intention to reorganize themselves throughout the territory."

The attack in Vienna, with four civilians dead and 17 wounded reported so far, 7 of them in serious condition, **"signals the terrorists' intention to reorganize themselves throughout the territory** and respond to the requests of the Islamic State, or what remains of it, and of Al Qaeda, which since last April exhorted their supporters to target Europe", **Claudio Bertolotti**, Executive Director of the Observatory on Radicalisation and Counter-Terrorism (REACT), author of the book "Immigrazione e terrorismo: I legami tra flussi migratori e terrorismo di matrice jihadista" (Start InSight ed.s), told SIR. **From the Bataclan to Vienna.** Commenting on last night's terror attack in the Austrian capital, the expert said: "unfortunately the attack was successful because it claimed victims. The attackers proved to be capable of engaging in urban guerrilla warfare, albeit not efficiently." The attack in Vienna, reminiscent of the terrorist attacks in Paris, at the Bataclan in 2015 and in Brussels in 2016, that left hundreds dead and wounded, Bertolotti explained, was marked by "minor strategic success. In fact, the attacks in France and Belgium ultimately led to a deadlock in European air traffic. There was only a citywide operational blockade in Vienna, hence more limited, although it involved the use of the Armed Forces and massive deployment of policemen." In addition, said the expert, who also chairs Start Insight, an organization dedicated to geopolitical issues, "in Paris and Brussels terrorists had carried out a veritable suicidal attack. This determination was lacking in the Vienna attack." Based on recent news, in addition to one terrorist killed, accomplices are reported to be on the run: "If the latter intended to sacrifice themselves - Bertolotti points out - they would have had themselves killed at gunpoint so as to die as martyrs and receive widespread recognition in the so-called radicalized community." Another aspect that differentiates the attacks in Paris and Brussels from those in Vienna is the "lack of explosives" as can be seen in the use of a fake explosive belt worn by the gunman killed in Vienna. "This is evidence of poorer technical skills of these terrorists compared to those who committed the attacks in Paris and Brussels." For Bertolotti the choice of the day, the eve of the lockdown, "may not be random. In fact, coronavirus containment measures in effect as of today would have left the streets and public places without potential targets. It was necessary to act quickly before the lockdown became effective." **The religious element.** The executive director of REACT highlighted a religious element that suggests a connection between the recent attack in the Notre-Dame Basilica in Nice (October 29) and the one in Vienna, committed near the Stadttempel Synagogue, located in the city center. *"In Paris and Brussels the terrorists conducted indiscriminate attacks, targeting our daily life as European citizens, our secularism. The underlying factor in Nice would appear to be the contrast between secularism and Islam and the question of the latter's non-interference in secular public life. The attack in Nice clearly targets Western symbols, in this case religious symbols. Striking against harmless and highly symbolic targets, such as churches and synagogues, serves the purpose of increasing visibility."* As regards the possibility that the Vienna attack could be replicated in Italy, for Bertolotti "it cannot be ruled out in theory. Access to weapons is not very difficult given the documented link between North African and Italian organized crime. Weapons are out there, and potentially so are the terrorists. Italy could be seen as a terrorist breeding ground, however - he notes - there are fewer potential recruits than in France, the United Kingdom and Germany. It's wrong to claim that immigrants represent a threat only because an attacker was immigrant." Instead, "due attention should be paid to increasing numbers of undocumented immigrants in the EU joining extremist Islamic groups. *The situation in Italy appears to be under control also because we have fewer second and third-generation immigrants who could become radicalized. We don't have a colonial past comparable to that of France and Britain and this is an advantage in terms of security.* Several contrast measures are in place in Italy, with a high number of foiled attacks. However - Bertolotti concludes - we must not lower our guard. The pandemic is exacerbating social and economic disparities across large segments of the population

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and could also encourage radicalist options by those who have become more vulnerable as a result of the crisis and Covid-19. It is no coincidence that many foreign fighters who fought in the Islamic State came, for example, from Tunisia, a country experiencing a major crisis.”

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