

KRE Global Monitor

April - May 2015

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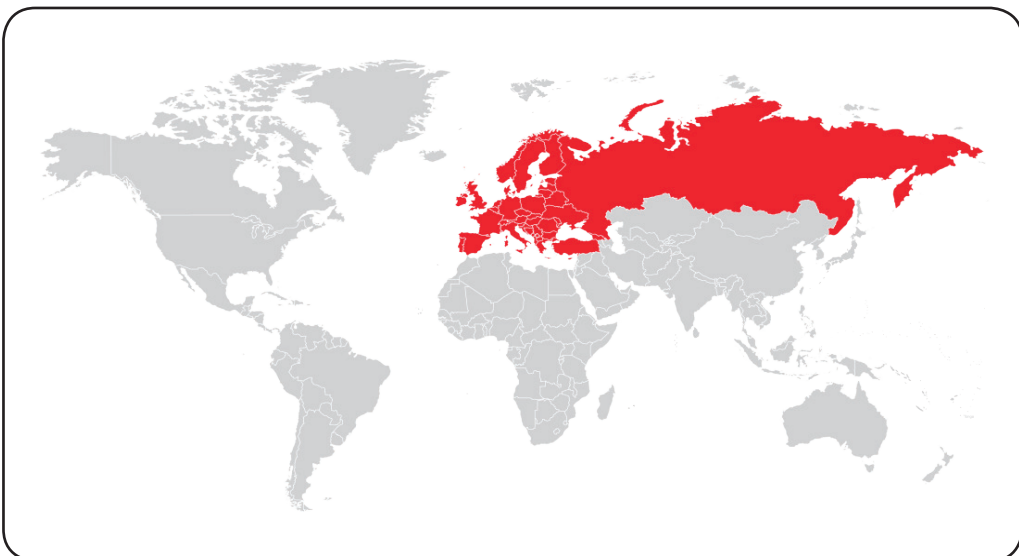
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Welcome to the April - May 2015 edition of the red24 Kidnap for Ransom and Extortion (KRE) Global Monitor. This bi-monthly publication, authored by the KRE experts at red24, provides Liberty International Underwriters' (LIU) clients with important information on recent incidents, as well as current and emerging KRE trends. In this edition, we focus on the threat of [Extortion in Europe](#). Our incidents snapshot section provides a short analysis of KRE incidents since April 2015, including details of incidents in [Burkina Faso](#), [Costa Rica](#), [Hong Kong](#), [Malaysia](#), [Nigeria](#), [Spain](#), [Trinidad and Tobago](#), and [Venezuela](#). You will also learn more about the team of KRE experts at red24, who provide crisis management services to clients. Together with LIU, red24 can help ensure that your clients are protected before, during and after a crisis. If you have any feedback on the red24 KRE Global Monitor, or if you would like to suggest a specific country, topic or theme for inclusion in a future issue, please do not hesitate to email kre@red24.com

Extortion in Europe

As with other key global security concerns, such as terrorism, crime and political instability, kidnapping poses a diverse and evolving threat to individuals and business operations in many areas of the world. However, the nature of the threat is fluid, with perpetrators, targets and modus operandi influenced by various regional and national political, security, economic and social circumstances, which are subject to change. While traditional kidnapping for ransom and extortion (KRE) continues to manifest in a major security threat in many high-risk regions, non-traditional forms of kidnapping, particularly extortion, are increasingly being recognised as key concerns in more stable, developed areas of the world. Traditionally synonymous with Latin America, where extortion has long been fuelled by the entrenched presence of criminal groups, high crime rates and poor law enforcement capabilities, the geographical footprint of this non-traditional form of kidnapping has expanded.

In an opinion shared by governments, regional bodies, security experts and analysts, extortion, in both its traditional and new technological forms, presents a credible and growing threat in many European countries, and should be viewed as a security concern for the region. Well-organised crime syndicates and racketeering groups, entrenched in many European countries, have a history of utilising extortion and racketeering as a means of income and extending operational capability. In the past, politically and ideologically motivated groups and individuals from all sides of the political spectrum have engaged in extortion to draw attention to their agendas. In addition, there are regular reports of cases where individuals, motivated by fast access to money and relatively low risks, or personal grievances, have engaged in extortion, often targeting high-profile individuals or businesses. Disgruntled current or former employees, business associates or suppliers are assessed to pose a potential threat to business operations.



The increase in extortion in Europe has also been fuelled by technological developments over the past decade. The growth in social media usage and the online presence of individuals/businesses, have allowed perpetrators the means to engage in online monitoring and pre-incident surveillance methods, often from outside of the geographical proximity required for traditional physical surveillance. Recent high-profile cyber attacks by unconfirmed state/non-state groups on various major European businesses and financial and political institutions demonstrate that digital and cyber extortionists are capable of infiltrating a range of prominent targets. A cyber attack targeting the German Bundestag (Parliament) in May 2015 may require the body to completely overhaul its IT system at the cost of several million euros. Additional recent cyber attacks include the online infiltration of French broadcaster, TV5Monde, in April, during which 11 of the station's channels were taken off air while material related to French military action against the Islamic State (IS) in Iraq was broadcast across the station's social media platforms.

What is extortion?

Extortion is the unlawful extraction of property, including goods, money and/or favours and privileges by way of duress. Extortion is classified as a crime; although 'the victim consents to the crime, the consent is obtained illegally.' Extortionists target individuals and/or their dependents, or business entities using intimidation and threats; methods may include the use of actual/threatened force, violence or fear, the pretence of official right or the threat of unfavourable government, police or legal action should the victim refuse to comply. Additional potential coercive methods may include explosive devices, arson, computer viruses or hacking, communication sabotage, kidnapping, malicious product contamination or industrial espionage.

Types of extortion

- **Blackmail:** Is a common form of extortion which involves the threat of releasing information or performing acts which would embarrass or cause damage to an individual or organisation. Blackmail involves the threat of revealing private information that is potentially damaging, rather than the threat of bodily harm. Such threats can be communicated in various ways and usually relate to sensitive personal or corporate information.
- **Sale and provision of protection:** This common form of extortion perpetrated by criminal groups involves coercing individuals or businesses to accept protection from a perceived security threat in return for financial payments or favours. Criminal gangs often manufacture the threat by actively creating an environment whereby security becomes necessary; this is achieved by participating in criminal activities to generate a perception of instability and insecurity. In many cases, the victim receives unsolicited protection and is required to pay for it whether or not it was asked for or required.
- **Digital extortion:** Is the illegal obtaining of digital information from a victim's computer or other device followed by the issuing of a demand which must be fulfilled in order to prevent the information/data from being shared. Undesirable/illegal information may also be transferred onto the victim's computer. The ransomed information may be of a personal nature, including personal details or potentially incriminating evidence (real or manufactured). In the case of corporate espionage, the perpetrators may seize client information and threaten to release it in the public sphere – which may result in significant damage to the company's reputation – unless the company acquiesces to their demands.
- **Cyber extortion:** is the threat or act of denying access to, or the stealing or destroying of, data held on an electronic device unless a ransom is paid.

While the well-publicised presence of the threat posed by extortion in Europe can no longer be denied, its extent remains difficult to quantify. Despite concerted efforts by European governments, the EU and regional policing bodies, accurate incident rates are largely unavailable; this is due to the nature of the threat. Extortion incidents are poorly reported as affected individuals and business entities may be fearful of repercussions, both from the perpetrators, and issues stemming from potential legal ramifications and reputational risk. The real or perceived possibility of law enforcement officials being in collusion with extortionists also contributes to an under-reporting of extortion incidents. Due to these constraints, the below risk assessment has been based on recent reports on extortion released by the European Commission and other regional bodies, red24's incident database and anecdotal evidence from specialised consultants and open sources.

Perpetrators: motives and modus operandi

In Europe, extortion is perpetrated by a number of groups and individuals for varying motives. The primary threat stems from organised crime groups (OCGs), unsophisticated criminal gangs and malicious individuals. There is a secondary threat from far-left and far-right politically motivated groups and extremist or radical groups. State-sponsored groups pose a known, yet unquantifiable threat.

Organised crime groups (OCGs)

Organised crime is a long-standing security concern in Europe, with national and transnational criminal syndicates involved in a wide array of criminal activities for financial gain in many countries across the continent. Illicit activities attributed to such groups include drug trafficking, human trafficking, prostitution, illegal trade in firearms and other products, fraud, counterfeiting, money laundering, extortion and racketeering. A well-known example of such organisations is the Italian mafia which has used extortion as a means of raising funds and maintaining territorial influence for decades. Such groups

can exert considerable pressure due to their reputations, making the need to satisfy demands even greater. Demands by OCGs may be in the form of a once-off payment, or in many cases, a regular financial or other concession.

According to a report released by the European Commission's Organised Crime Portfolio in 2015, conservative estimates of total criminal revenues from primary illegal activities in Europe amount to approximately 110 billion euros per annum; this figure excludes extortion and racketeering. It is difficult to ascertain the percentage that these crimes contribute to the overall revenue of OCGs. This is due to a number of factors, including but not limited to, the high under-reporting rate of this crime, lack of available extortion-specific data and the fact that payments are not necessarily financial; exchanges of goods, services, favours or influence are difficult to quantify in financial terms. Nonetheless, available research on this crime form in Europe specifically, suggests that it is a key source of income for many OCGs.

While domestic OCGs which are purely operational in one particular country are present in Europe, the majority of groups are transnational in nature, with operational bases and capabilities spread across several states. These groups are not homogenous, and frequently comprise numerous and varying nationalities. However, when examining the main OCGs operational in Europe, primary regional syndicates are driven by individuals originating from the following areas.

Motives for extortion

Financial gain: Financial gain is the most common motive for extortion in Europe, with a variety of actors, including individuals, organisations and criminal or terrorist groups using extortion as a means of raising money either for their personal use or to fund their organisations.

Political and ideological demands: Extortion for the purposes of political or ideological recognition is also recognised as an issue across Europe, with such measures being used by individuals and organisations to raise their issues and grievances. Extortion can also be used as a means of revenge or punishment against those who have attempted to counter such beliefs or work against them.

Power: Extortion can be used to control individuals, businesses or territory. This is usually a motive for organised criminal groups rather than individual perpetrators.

Primary OCGs which conduct extortion/racketeering in European Union member states

OCGs	Country
Albanian	Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Greece, Slovakia
Chinese	France, Italy, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, Netherlands, UK
Asian (other)	Czech Republic, Greece, Romania, Italy, Poland
Eastern European (other)	Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Latvia Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia
Western European (other)	Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Greece, Germany, Poland, Portugal, Sweden
Russian/Georgian	Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain
Turkish	Austria, Bulgaria, France, Germany, Romania, Netherlands, UK

In addition to OCGs, unsophisticated and opportunistic criminal gangs are also known to practise extortion. Such groups generally target low- to middle-class individuals, for reduced financial or other benefits, so as to avoid drawing attention to their activities from police.

Malicious individuals

Individuals either representing a cause or acting on their own behalf also engage in extortion in Europe, targeting organisations and often, wealthy individuals. Disgruntled current or former employees or individuals may also target businesses, including specific senior employees. Such individuals rely on threats to coerce a settlement; these are usually based on some prior knowledge of personal or potentially damaging information about the victim, which may or may not be real.

Politically motivated and/or extremist/radical groups

In the past, various politically or ideologically motivated groups in Europe have used extortion and racketeering as a method of raising funds to further their agendas. Such groups have fallen from far-left to far-right on the political spectrum, with varying separatist, nationalist and terrorist agendas. Prominent examples include the Northern Ireland's paramilitary groups, Basque separatist group, the Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) in Spain, Turkey's Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) and France's Corsican Separatist Movement. Some groups formed on the basis of a political agenda are believed to have branched into criminal activity, or at least have been tied to criminal and extortive activities. In one such example, reports released by local government officials in Belfast, Northern Ireland, in March 2015, suggested that numerous local business owners in the east of the city were relocating due to the extortion threat posed by loyalist paramilitary groups.

At present, there are growing concerns that Europe-based individuals or groups affiliated or aligned to regional or international Islamist extremist groups, such as al-Qaeda (AQ) or the Islamic State (IS) may engage in criminal activity in Europe to raise funds for future terrorist activity. Due to its relatively low-risk, and potentially anonymous nature, extortion, including digital extortion, may be increasingly utilised by such groups.

Geographical spread

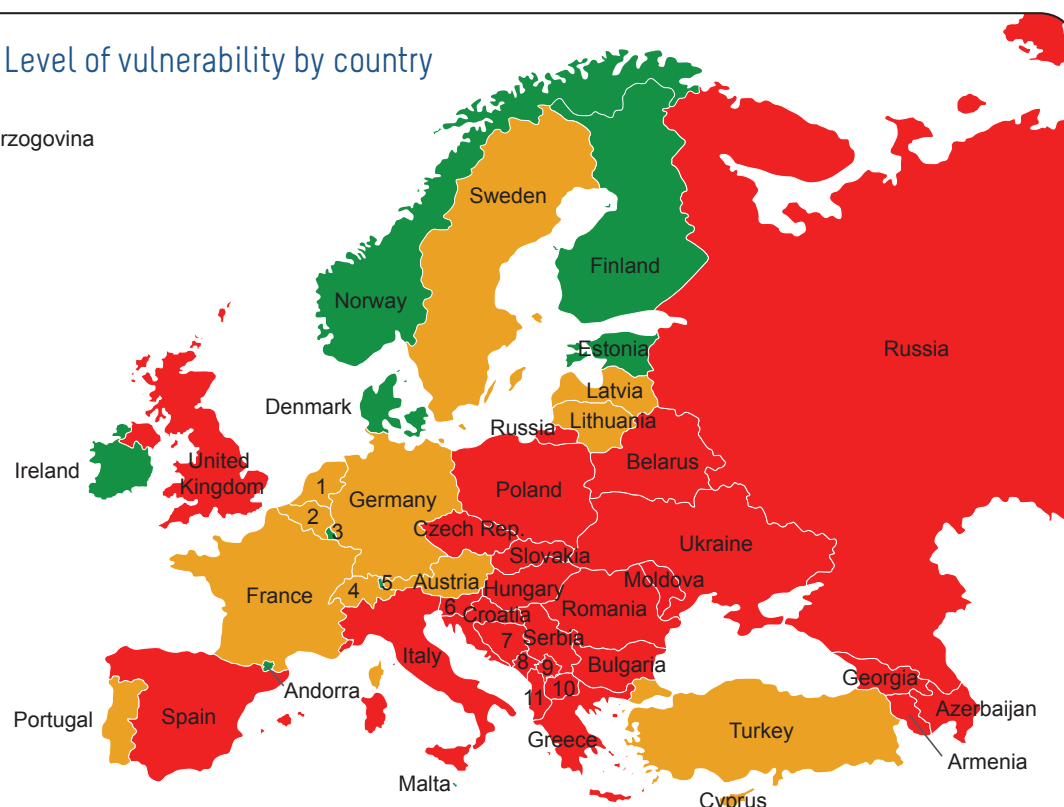
The risk posed by extortion in Europe in its various traditional and technologically-based forms differs from country to country, and even within areas of a specific country. For the purposes of this report, broad geographical trends have been identified and used to denote an overall extortion risk level per country; however, this is intended to provide an overall depiction of the risk environment in Europe and not an in-depth assessment of each country's specific extortion dynamics. In assessing the broad overall risk level per country (see below map) red24 has taken into account the following factors.

- Current threat environment with regards to extortion.
- National legislation regarding extortion.
- Perceived and actual ability of police, government and judiciary to address extortion, including cyber extortion.
- Improvements/deterioration in addressing internal factors which are conducive to an elevation in extortion risk, including corruption, high crime levels and poor legislative control.

Extortion risks in Europe: Level of vulnerability by country

- | | |
|------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Netherlands | 7. Bosnia & Herzegovina |
| 2. Belgium | 8. Montenegro |
| 3. Luxembourg | 9. Kosovo |
| 4. Switzerland | 10. Macedonia |
| 5. Liechtenstein | 11. Albania |
| 6. Slovenia | |

- Low risk
- Medium risk
- High risk
- Extreme risk



The methodology employed incorporates the model used in the European Commission's 2010 report on Extortion and Racketeering in Europe as well as additional factors deemed to be relevant. Please note that these risk levels are specific to the European context, and should not be directly compared to risk levels outside of this region.

As depicted in the map, countries where the extortion threat is assessed to be elevated are not confined to a certain geographical region. High-risk countries are present across the continent. In Western Europe, the UK, including Northern Ireland, is assessed to face a high threat of extortion. Risk levels in Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg and the Netherlands range from low to medium. In these countries, the predominant threat stems more from sophisticated cyber criminals and disgruntled individuals than organised crime groups, although such groups do practise extortion in these areas.

Poor economic performance related to the global economic downturn has heavily impacted Europe's southern countries, and in places, led to an uptick in crime, including petty and sophisticated extortion. Loansharking and racketeering are commonplace in areas with strong criminal syndicate presences; hotels, restaurants and nightclubs are predominantly targeted. In southern Europe, extortion levels are elevated in parts of Italy, Spain, Greece and elsewhere due to high levels of corruption and the long-term presence of OCGs such as the Mafia in Italy. Spain is one of several countries in Europe where terrorist groups have used extortion as a means to fund their operations, with the ETA in particular previously demanding the forced payment by local businesses of what it termed 'revolutionary taxes.'

High extortion threat levels also permeate the former Soviet Union states of Eastern Europe as well as countries such as Ukraine, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Slovakia, Kosovo and Czech Republic, where corruption levels are assessed to be very high by European

standards, and extortion common. Extortion incidents remain fairly unsophisticated in these countries in comparison to recent cases in Western Europe and Russia; however, due to poor police response, authorities are largely unable to react to such incidents.

Due to high levels of corruption in the private and public sectors, extortion poses a significant security concern to both individuals and businesses operating in Russia. Low-level extortion and petty bribery, whereby illegal financial demands are made by government/police officials or criminal gangs, is fairly common. In addition, OCGs maintain an entrenched presence in many areas of this vast country; these organisations frequently demand protection money from businesses, taking the form of a specific amount each month or a percentage of the business' revenue. This money is paid to a 'Krysha' or 'roof' which will ensure that the business comes to no harm. Major OCGs have the operational capability and experience to carry out sophisticated extortion schemes against local and foreign businesspersons. Prominent and extremely wealthy Russian individuals and their families have been targeted in the past. A standard example of this is the case of businessman Suleiman Kerimov, a Russian billionaire who was targeted by a 17-year-old who threatened to kill Kerimov unless he was paid US\$10 million. Should clients require further information regarding extortion in specific countries in Europe, please do not hesitate to contact us via kre@red24.com.

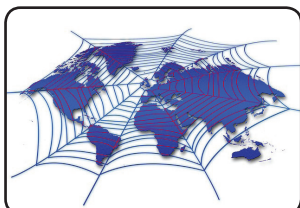
Victims

The choice of victim(s) in extortion incidents is highly dependent on the perpetrator, including their motive and operational capability. As mentioned above, individuals, organisations and businesses are vulnerable to being targeted by extortionists due to various motivations. Although specific high-value target groups are detailed below, with the rise of digital extortion and individuals/small businesses increasing exposure and vulnerability online, extortionists are becoming less discriminatory in selecting their targets. In broad terms, one or several of the following criteria is often present in extortion victims:

- Poor self-protection, including physical or online protection.
- Activities and earnings are vulnerable to being monitored.
- Inability to remove oneself/business from operational area of extortionist.

Although business operations in all sectors may be targeted by extortionists, in Europe, industries most affected tend to fall into the construction and entertainment sphere. Demands against such businesses may involve a financial settlement, the cessation of controversial practices or relationships, or the removal of an industrial practice such as redundancy notices.

As in elsewhere in the world, wealthy individuals, such as business owners, are considered high-value targets in Europe. Extortionist demands in these cases are almost exclusively financial, and frequently run into several million euros. Nonetheless, recent trends suggest that low- to middle-income individuals and small businesses are increasingly being targeted, for lower ransom demands.



Social media and extortion: Reduce your risk

As individuals and businesses become more interconnected via the internet and social media, extortionists (criminal, individual or ideologically motivated) are finding new ways to identify, observe and target potential victims. In an effort to market and manage products and brands online, often without adequate security knowledge, social media has become a major source of information for extortionists worldwide. Individuals and businesses are often unaware of the various ways in which information readily made available by themselves on social media can contribute to being identified as a target, as well as significantly hamper efforts to resolve an extortion attack. Social media may reveal details which can assist perpetrators in the following:

Identifying a target

- A victim's financial status and access to funds.
- A victim's business profile, clients, sponsors and suppliers.
- Political, environmental or ideological views which may increase their potential for being targeted.
- Current/future location. Physical security measures, at residence and place of business.

Extorting a target

- Information regarding family and dependants which may make them vulnerable i.e. ages, schools, vacations, friends.
- Hamper negotiations should the victim be deemed to be giving information regarding their access to funds, which is in contrast to available online information.
- Hamper negotiations should present/past social media activity reveal that the victim is supportive of a cause or group which is distasteful to the perpetrator.
- Poorly secured social media accounts may be used by the perpetrator to gain further details regarding the target's means or to extort online connections of the initial victim.
- Potentially damaging information may be sourced from the victim (or dependents) social media accounts and used to coerce the victim into complying.
- Perpetrators may threaten to post illicit content onto the victim's social media profile in event of non-payment.

Outlook

In light of the political instability, economic uncertainty and entrenched criminal activity in many areas of Europe, extortion is expected to continue to present as a key regional security concern for the medium-term at least. The threat extortion poses to larger businesses, multi-national companies, media bodies and government interests in developed countries may increase further, particularly in areas which are already subject to elevated risk levels. In addition, the use of technology in the planning and orchestrating of extortion will grow, with risks associated with cyber extortion expected to proliferate. Business entities and individuals in Europe are advised to invest in risk mitigation planning in order to protect themselves and their employees from being affected by this form of criminal violation. A K&R insurance policy, which, in addition to coverage for traditional kidnapping, provides support and specialist assistance in resolving extortion incidents, can enable organisations to ensure that their duty of care obligations are fulfilled, while their potential exposure to operational and reputational risk is reduced. Extortion risk identification in the form of industry and country-specific threat assessments and organisational contingency planning can greatly reduce the risk of being targeted by extortionists.

red24 case study: Company extortion in the Netherlands

The CEO of a vitamin supplement company based in the Netherlands received an anonymous letter, claiming that the writer's mother had died of heart failure because she insisted on taking the vitamin supplements instead of her prescribed heart medicine. The writer demanded that the company issue a public apology and recall all of its products, and threatened to 'make the company suffer' should these instructions not be followed. Several days later, the CEO received an email referring to the anonymous letter; the writer wanted US\$1 million delivered to an overseas account in compensation for his/her loss. The email contained an attachment showing pictures of the CEO's residence as well as of the company's board of directors. The company was in possession of a KRE policy which the CEO activated under the extortion provision; the response consultancy, including IT forensic specialists, was called to manage and resolve the situation.

Global Incidents Snapshot

Americas

Colombia, May 2015: According to reports, the body of a Swedish national kidnapped in the north western department of Chocor was discovered in late May. Jan Philip Braunsch, a 27-year-old experienced traveller, went missing in the Riosucio area in mid-May 2013; he had been planning to hike from Colombia to Panama through the Darien Gap. Due to the presence of various non-state armed groups in the insecure Darien Gap region, including criminal gangs, drug traffickers and rebel groups such as The Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), Braunsch was assumed to have been kidnapped when police failed to locate him in extensive searches of the region.

Costa Rica, 11 April 2015: A Mexican national reportedly kidnapped in the Alajuela province on 11 April was released on 19 April. The kidnap victim was released during a security operation by Costa Rican law enforcement agents after a ransom had been demanded. Two members of the kidnapping ring were detained by security forces. No further details are available.

Mexico, 9 May 2015: An Argentine national reportedly kidnapped on 9 May in Orizaba, located in Veracruz state, was released in Ixtapaluca, located in Mexico state, on 24 May. The kidnap victim was freed during a security operation conducted by Mexican law enforcement agents who involved the missing persons unit. Authorities have identified and arrested four suspects in connection with the kidnapping incidents of the Argentine and a local resident also abducted on 9 May.

Trinidad and Tobago, 17 May 2015: The 22-year-old son and partner of a prominent local businessman was kidnapped near his residence in the city of Curepe, located in the East-West Corridor. Amit Singh's father, Nandlal Singh, was subsequently contacted by the perpetrators, who demanded a ransom payment of US\$1 million for his son. The victim was released 48 hours later on 19 May. According to police, no ransom was paid. This was the second kidnapping incident to affect the Singh family; in 2005, the father himself was kidnapped.

United States, 21 May 2015: A businessman from Oakland, California, was kidnapped by two armed assailants late on 21 May. The two perpetrators held him hostage at a San Leandro residence while they contacted his family and demanded a ransom payment of US\$150,000. Family members informed the police of the incident and the victim was freed during a police operation; the two perpetrators were arrested.

Venezuela, 22 May 2015: The US Embassy in Caracas issued a security message on 28 May indicating that there has been a spike in express kidnappings in and around the El Hatillo municipality, located in the south eastern region of Venezuela's capital, Caracas, since 22 May. At least seven incidents have been recorded by the embassy. The incidents have reportedly been perpetrated by a criminal group comprising six armed individuals who travel in sport utility vehicles (SUVs).

Asia

Afghanistan, 18 April 2015: A German national was kidnapped while travelling from the city of Kunduz, in Kunduz province, to Mazar-i-Sharif, in Balkh province. The victim was an employee of a German development-orientated company; subsequent to his abduction, the Taliban reportedly claimed to be holding him hostage. He was released unharmed on 29 May. The details regarding his release are unclear despite media reports offering multiple accounts of how he was freed.

China, 25 May 2015: Reports surfaced of the kidnapping of a three-year-old child in the city of Bozhou, in the north western Anhui province, in May. It has not been established when the incident took place. Kidnappers reportedly contacted the grandparents of the child by telephone and threatened to kill the toddler unless 600,000 yuan was paid. The family contacted the police, and the girl was released by the kidnappers on 25 May, allegedly due to their fear of being caught. It is believed that the perpetrators may have been well acquainted with the family.

China, 27 April 2015: A prominent businessman was kidnapped in Zhanjian, Guangdong province. The victim's wife was then contacted with demands for a ransom payment of 18 million yuan. The victim was abducted after he was lured to the Zhanjian airport for a business meeting with the false promise of a lucrative jewellery deal.

Hong Kong, May 2015: A 16-year-old child fell victim to an extortion attempt after he was set up by an undisclosed person in an online chat. The teenager believed he was chatting to a woman. The perpetrator subsequently contacted him and demanded a payment of US\$3,000, in exchange for not making public the chat transcript.

Hong Kong, 25 April 2015: Hong Kong police launched a major security operation following the kidnapping of a 29-year-old female from her apartment in the Tseung Kwan O region. The victim, the granddaughter of the late Law Ting-pong, also known as the 'Knitwear King', who founded the Bossini clothing brand, also had HK\$2,000,000 stolen from her residence during the abduction. The original ransom demand was HK\$40,000,000; however, her family reportedly paid a HK\$28,000,000 (US\$3.6 million) ransom for her release on 28 April. A major police manhunt resulted in the capture of more than ten perpetrators in China's mainland Guangdong province as well as the recovery of some of the ransom.

Indonesia, 9 May 2015: Eleven employees of a construction company, PT Timur Laut Papua (TLP), were kidnapped while working on a road project in Bunom village, which is located in the Jayawijaya region of Papua province. Unverified reports indicate that a gang was responsible for the kidnapping. The hostages were released on 11 May following negotiations with the group; it is unknown whether a ransom payment was made.

Malaysia, 18 April 2015: A Bangladeshi university student and his Malaysian roommate were kidnapped in Petaling Jaya by a gang of eight Bangladeshi nationals. A ransom demand of Tk50 lakh was made. After the Bangladeshi father refused to pay the ransom, the perpetrators revealed personal, private information about the victim, fuelling suspicions that someone close to the family was responsible for the kidnapping. The hostage was subsequently murdered by the perpetrators.

Malaysia, 14 May 2014: The owner of the Ocean King Restaurant and his associate were kidnapped in the coastal town of Sandakan, in Sabah state, by suspected Abu Sayyaf militants from the Philippines. Unconfirmed reports indicate that a significant ransom demand was made by the kidnappers.

Pakistan, 6 May 2015: A kidnapped Iranian national was rescued from the outskirts of the town of Dalbandin, in the Balochistan province, following a security operation. Reports indicate that the victim, who is from the town of Isfahan in Iran, had been held hostage since being kidnapped three years ago; however, the exact circumstances surrounding his abduction remain unknown.

Pakistan, May 2015: A proof of life video purportedly showing a Chinese national kidnapped in Pakistan in 2014 was released online. The Chinese tourist, Hong Xudong, was reportedly abducted while travelling by bike in western Pakistan. At the time of the incident, Taliban splinter group commander, Shehryar Mehsud, claimed responsibility for the incident. The video is yet to be verified.

Philippines, 4 April 2015: According to reports, at least four businessmen were kidnapped in the southern Mindanao region. Local officials stated that the victims, who were working for a construction company in General Santos city, were abducted by unidentified gunmen while traveling on a national highway in Shariff Aguak town, located in the Maguindanao province, in late March. The nationalities of the victims have not been disclosed. In a separate incident, an Indian businessman was rescued in a failed ransom negotiation on 10 April. The victim had been kidnapped in Davao City on 7 April.

Europe and Russia

Turkey, 10 and 14 May 2015: At least four people were reportedly kidnapped by suspected Kurdish separatist militants in Turkey's south eastern regions in two separate incidents. The abductions have been blamed on the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and are believed to have occurred in Malazgirt, in Mus province, on 10 May, and in an unspecified locale in the Silvan district, in Diyarbakir province, on 14 May. Militants are said to have targeted civilians and construction workers in the aforementioned areas. Further details regarding the motivation for the abductions and the status of the victims are currently unavailable.

Spain, April 2015: A spate of virtual kidnappings continued in Spain during the month of April. This followed an upsurge in virtual kidnappings in a number of areas since January 2015. In May, Spanish police stated that over 700 incidents were recorded in March and April alone. Police stated that the victims had received phone calls from unidentified persons, who claimed to have kidnapped a dependent (usually a minor) and demanded a ransom payment for their return. In the recent cases, some victims appear to have been specifically targeted (perpetrators had some knowledge of the victim's circumstances); however, many of the calls appear to have been made at random. The average ransom demand was US\$10,000; however, the perpetrators frequently settled for significantly lower amounts.

Middle East and North Africa

Libya, May 2015: Numerous kidnappings involving foreign nationals took place across Libya during May. On 14 May, Egyptian media reports citing residents of Al-Sheikh Massoud village in Minya governorate indicated that 13 Egyptian nationals were being held in Libya for ransom. The families of the victims stated that the abductors had demanded US\$11,000, or 15,000 Libyan dinars, for each victim. In a separate incident, the UK's Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) issued a statement on 15 May saying that 'in May 2015, a British national was kidnapped by militia and subsequently released.' In another incident, unidentified assailants stopped a vehicle transporting a Turkish national in Sebha, located in southern Libya, on 17 May. The driver was shot and wounded, and the Turkish passenger was abducted. The incident occurred near the city's banking training centre. The victim was released on 18 May. A North Korean couple were reportedly kidnapped in a militant raid near Sirte in late May; the husband had been employed by the Jalu Hospital in Tripoli for several years. Finally, a manager of Mellitah Oil was kidnapped near Tripoli; he was later released under undisclosed circumstances.

Libya, 7 and 27 April 2015: According to reports, two Bangladeshi nationals kidnapped by Islamic State (IS) militants in central Libya in early March were released on 7 April. The victims, four locals and an Egyptian national, were employees of an Austrian oilfield services firm. Subsequent to this, the bodies of five employees of Cyrenaica TV, who were abducted near Ajdabiya in August 2014, were discovered on 27 April. IS has claimed responsibility for the executions.

Yemen, May 2015: According to reports released on 29 May, at least four US nationals were unlawfully detained by the Houthis rebel group in Sanaa during the previous two-week period. While the identities of the detainees were not confirmed, it was reported that one victim has dual US-Yemini citizenship and that the remaining three held private sector jobs in the city. US journalist Casey Coombs and an unidentified Singaporean hostage were subsequently released under unconfirmed circumstances. Details regarding the remaining hostages are unavailable.

Yemen, May 2015: Further details have emerged pertaining to French national, Isabelle Prime, who was kidnapped together with her local translator in Sanaa on 24 February 2015. While past reports stated that both women were released on 19 March, in late May Prime's captors released a short online video depicting her calling on the Yemeni and French governments to secure her release. The French government has since confirmed the authenticity of the video, stating it was filmed in April. Although the identities of the perpetrators remain unconfirmed, it is possible that the pair were initially kidnapped by tribesmen who subsequently transferred Prime into the custody of an Islamist extremist group.

Sub-Saharan Africa

Burkina Faso, 4 April 2015: A Romanian national was kidnapped from the northern Sahel region. The incident occurred in the vicinity of Oudalan province's Tambao manganese mining site, located near Bukina Faso's border with Mali. According to reports, the victim was employed in a security-related role on the site. He was attacked by five gunmen while leading a security patrol. A Sahel-based Islamist extremist group has reportedly claimed responsibility for his abduction.

Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), 23 April 2015: Three employees of UN-MASS, a private demining company contracted to the UN in the DRC, were kidnapped on 23 April in the North Kivu province. The victims, comprising two Congolese and one Zimbabwean national, were abducted from their vehicle in Kibumba, which is located approximately 20km north of Goma. The trio were released under undisclosed circumstances on 28 April.

Mali, 5 April 2015: According to reports, a Dutch national kidnapped in Mali in November 2011 was released on 5 April. Sjaak Rijke was released during a security operation conducted by the French military in the Kidal region. The victim was kidnapped along with other foreign nationals while on holiday in the city of Timbuktu, located in the eponymous region, by Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) militants on 25 November 2011.

Mozambique, April and May 2015: According to reports, at least six kidnappings for ransom have taken place in the capital, Maputo, in 2015. In a recent incident on 9 May, a woman was abducted by unidentified gunmen after dropping her daughter at school in the Coop neighbourhood. Prior to this on 16 April, a Sierra Leonean national and long-term resident was kidnapped by a group of armed men in the Aeroporto area of the capital where the victim is believed to own a clothing warehouse. No further details are currently available, including information on the motivations for the kidnappings or if ransom payments have been demanded. In a separate kidnap incident in the city of Matola, Maputo province, an eight-year-old child was abducted near her school on 22 May. According to unverified reports, the victim's family received a ransom demand from the perpetrators shortly afterwards; the outcome of this kidnapping has not been disclosed.

Nigeria, May 2015: Numerous kidnappings of foreign nationals and high-profile locals were reported across Nigeria during the past month. On 18 May, a Sri Lankan employee of the Burni Coli Construction Company was kidnapped while travelling

between Okene, Kogi state, and the neighbouring state of Ondo. The victim's security escort was fatally wounded and the driver injured. On 28 May, the local authorities confirmed his release. In a separate development, authorities also confirmed the 20 May abduction of two foreign nationals, Syrian and Lebanese, in the Patani area of Delta State. The pair has been confirmed as employees of the Okmas Nigeria Limited construction company. Authorities also confirmed the 1 May kidnapping of a foreign expatriate in the southern Edo state. The victim, whose nationality is yet to be confirmed, was seized from a construction site in the town of Auch, located in Etsako West local government area. A security operation to secure the victim's release is reportedly ongoing. In addition, according to media reports, an Irish national, who was kidnapped in the Wasagu/Danko local government area in the north western Kebbi state, was released on 15 May. The victim, a Catholic priest, was kidnapped by unidentified gunmen on 12 May. The exact circumstances surrounding his release remain unclear at this stage; however, unconfirmed reports indicate that a ransom was demanded and allegedly paid.

South Africa, 5 April 2015: An employee at a prominent game reserve resort was arrested for orchestrating a tiger kidnapping. The employee reportedly kidnapped a fellow staff member and then forced the victim to reveal the resort's banking details and private passwords. The perpetrator stole US\$17,000 from the premises and electronically transferred US\$420,000 into several personal accounts.

Piracy

South East Asia, April 2015: Reports released by the International Maritime Bureau (IMB) indicate that a small coastal oil tanker is hijacked every two weeks on average in South East Asian waters, making the region the pre-eminent piracy hotspot. According to the IMB, 55 percent of piracy and armed robbery at sea incidents to date in 2015 have occurred in South East Asian waters.

Malaysia, 2 and 15 May 2015: According to recently released reports, a Singapore-registered oil tanker was temporarily seized by pirates in Straits of Malacca, off Malaysia's west coast, on 2 May. The incident occurred off Port Dickson, located in Negeri Sembilan. It was reported that eight pirates armed with machetes boarded and seized Ocean Energy before siphoning oil from the ship to another vessel. The pirates then robbed the crew and damaged the vessel's communication equipment before escaping; no injuries were incurred during the raid. Subsequent to this on 15 May, armed suspects hijacked a Malaysian ship, the Oriental Glory, near East Malaysia's Brunei Island on 15 May. According to the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP), the ship was travelling from Labuan to Tanjung Manis when it was surrounded by six fishing vessels, boarded and rerouted to a location approximately 188 nautical miles (348km) north west of Brunei Island in order for its fuel to be siphoned.

Nigeria, 8 and 12 April 2015: French oil services company, Bourbon Offshore, announced the release of three kidnapped local crewmembers on an undisclosed date. The three victims were seized when a group of pirates boarded Surfer 1440, a light speedboat used to transport employees to and from offshore sites, off Nigeria's coast on 8 April. In a separate incident on 12 April, the Nigerian navy successfully thwarted a hijacking by a group of ten pirates. The group approached an oil tanker, the MT IMAS, in two speed boats; an exchange of gunfire with maritime forces as they attempted to board left several pirates dead.

Somalia, 13 May 2015: At least 13 Iranian fishermen were reportedly kidnapped by suspected Islamist militants after their vessel washed ashore Somalia's eastern coastline. The Iranian fishing vessel reportedly suffered a technical fault and begun listing in waters off Somalia's Galgaduud administrative region before washing ashore in the coastal el-Dher district. Although unconfirmed, it is believed that the fishermen were subsequently seized by militants from the al-Shabaab Islamist extremist group.

Yemen, April and May 2015: There are growing concerns that the current conflict and insecurity in Yemen may manifest in an increase in maritime crime in surrounding waters, in particular, the Bab-el-Mandeb strait. Offering the fastest route for vessels travelling to the Suez Canal, the strait is a busy shipping thoroughfare. Approximately 16,000 vessels pass through Bab-el-Mandeb per year, and it is a conduit for around 30 percent of the world's crude oil. There is some apprehension that pirates may take advantage of the poor security environment to set up bases in Yemen's coastal provinces from which to conduct attacks in the region. Although unverified and not included in official figures, there have been reports of attempted piracy incidents in recent months. Iranian authorities recently stated that they have thwarted at least four attacks since November 2014, including in the Bab-el-Mandeb strait. The latest reported attempted attack targeted a Kuwait-flagged oil tanker and took place in April 2015; the vessel's on-board security forces were successful in preventing the attack. While further incidents of this nature cannot be discounted, key security measures by international bodies remain in place in Bab-el-Mandeb to protect its position as a primary regional shipping lane.

Meet the specialist: Europe consultant exposure

red24's Special Risks Team has an extensive physical and operational presence across Europe, with approximately 15 retained consultants based in Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, the UK and elsewhere. On average, each consultant has 15 years' experience within specialised units of the respective national police or military forces; areas of expertise include maritime crime and piracy, kidnapping and hostage negotiation, malicious product tampering and extortion and counterterrorism. Fluent in German, Dutch, French, Swedish, Danish, Spanish and various other languages, red24's Europe consultants have in-depth understanding of ransom and extortion negotiation tactics, extensive experience in the resolution of kidnapping and extortion incidents both within Europe and elsewhere, as well as crisis management and response experience. red24 consultants have successfully resolved cases in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Nigeria, Guatemala, Mexico, Yemen, Turkey, Syria and Venezuela. Through our specialist consultants red24 is able to offer pre-incident training, including crisis simulations, hazardous environment courses, security briefings and contingency planning to individuals and companies across the continent and abroad.

About us

red24's Special Risks advice, assistance and response services are retained by a number of insurance companies in the UK and USA. In the event of a kidnap, hijack, extortion or wrongful detention incident covered by one of our partners, Insureds will receive expert practical advice and assistance from red24, who are always on call to provide whatever help the Insured requires. red24 not only help Insureds achieve the possible release of the insured person, we also provide risk management and pre- and post-loss consultancy. As a policyholder, Insureds will have access to red24 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and will be issued with a number to call in the event of an emergency.

red24

red24 is a leading crisis management specialist. Founded in 2000, red24 provides security information, advice, consultancy and assistance services to corporate entities, private clients and insurance providers across the world. Our team has an unparalleled reputation for providing a comprehensive range of risk management solutions, both to individuals wishing to protect themselves and their families and to companies wanting to minimise the risks to their personnel, operations, reputation and profitability. Our experienced, multi-disciplinary team of experts is ready to help you, your company and your employees 24 hours a day, seven days a week. red24 has operating experience in over 120 countries worldwide and the capability to physically support any organisation across the globe within 24 hours.

Our Special Risks team is led by Jack Cloonan, formerly of Clayton Consultants, and comprises a high-quality team of highly-skilled professionals. Selected for their experience in crisis management, KRE response and negotiation, security management and implementation of risk mitigation strategies, team members have been drawn from various fields, including the military, law enforcement and the intelligence services, and each team member has approximately 15 years of experience in crisis handling.

The red24 Special Risks team is supported by red24's 24/7 Crisis Response Management (CRM) Centre and its multilingual team of analysts and security experts.

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