

Terrorists, saboteurs, spies in Polish prisons – the role of the Prison Service

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Introduction

Since 2021, we have been able to observe in Poland processes that are clearly connected to the international situation, in particular the war in Ukraine triggered by Russia and the migration crisis on the Polish – Belarusian border. We learn about the detention on Polish territory of spies, diversion agents, saboteurs carrying out various activities, including disinformation, with the aim of creating a sense of threat, fear and destabilising social mood in Poland. The fire at the shopping centre at Marywilaska Street in Warsaw or the activities of foreign intelligence services shown, among other things, in statements of the Internal Security Agency (ABW) or the National Prosecutor's Office are only a fragment of the processes described as hybrid events or even hybrid war.

This raises the question of whether the Prison Service, in carrying out its tasks, is prepared for the new challenges posed by hybrid warfare, which manifests itself in the presence of spies, saboteurs and diversionists

in prisons and remand centres. In order to answer this question, basic information will be presented on the Prison Service as well as prisons and remand centres, the functions performed by officers and employees, and statistical data on the presence of the indicated perpetrators in prisons and remand centres.

The legal framework for the functioning of the Prison Service and its tasks, and the organisation of prisons and remand centres – selected aspects

Operation of the prisons and remand centres as well as tasks of the Prison Service officers are described in many legal acts. The most important of these are the Penal Enforcement Code¹ and the *Act of 9 April 2010 on the Prison Service*².

The Prison Service, unlike the Police, the Border Guard or the State Fire Service but following the example of many countries, reports directly to the Minister of Justice. This model of service subordination has a tradition of over 100 years, except for the period between 1945 and 1956, when the formation was first subordinate to the Ministry of Public Security, and from 1954 to the Ministry of the Interior.

The Prison Service employs nearly 30 000 officers and employees, and is the third-largest uniformed formation in Poland in terms of personnel³. Rank insignia are an essential element of almost every uniform. In the Prison Service, they have retained military-style nomenclature in four corps: privates, non-commissioned officers, warrant officers and officers. The lowest rank, from which every officer begins their service, is private, while the highest is inspector general of the Prison Service.

The model of the Prison Service's functioning, taking into account its assigned tasks, principle of hierarchy, single-person management, uniform, service ranks and armament with firearms, positions the formation among other paramilitary-type operational groups performing an important role

¹ *Act of 6 June 1997 – the Penal Enforcement Code* (consolidated text, Journal of Laws of 2025, item 911, as amended).

² *Act of 9 April 2010 on the Prison Service* (consolidated text, Journal of Laws of 2024, item 1869, as amended).

³ Służba Więzienna – o nas (Eng. The Prison Service – about us), <https://sw.gov.pl/strona/rekrutacja-o-nas> [accessed: 4 VIII 2025].

in the internal security system⁴. This category includes, among others: the Police, the Border Guard, the State Fire Service, the State Protection Service, the Internal Security Agency, the Railway Security Guard. These are also the formations with which the Prison Service cooperates. The events that have been taking place on the Polish border since autumn 2021 have necessitated closer cooperation between the Prison Service and the Border Guard, as well as the Internal Security Agency. The Border Guard carries out part of its statutory tasks in direct cooperation with the Prison Service. This applies, among other things, to ongoing investigative and preparatory proceedings within the meaning of the Code of Criminal Procedure⁵, as well as to the exchange of information within a specific scope, e.g. related to the transport of remand prisoners of interest to the Border Guard. Cooperation between the two uniformed services serves to ensure both the security of penitentiary units and the safety of citizens.

The Prison Service's efforts to maintain order and security within prisons and remand centres as well as to protect the public from criminals are also supported on a cooperative basis by the Internal Security Agency. On 27 October 2021, both services concluded the *Agreement on scientific and educational cooperation in the field of countering radicalisation and terrorist threats*. This created new opportunities for cooperation, including the organisation of training courses, conferences and exchange of experiences. However, the strategic objective of the agreement was (...) *to counteract radicalisation leading to violent extremism and terrorism in the prison environment and to eliminate the risk of a return to radical activity after release from prison. For this reason, the cooperation will include, among other things, the analysis of cases of radicalisation in prisons in order to establish appropriate rehabilitation and deradicalisation programmes, which will also promote effective social reintegration in the post-penitentiary period*⁶. The organisational unit of the Internal Security Agency that played

⁴ J. Maciejewski, *Grupy dyspozycyjne. Analiza socjologiczna* (Eng. Dispositional groups. Sociological analysis), Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, Wrocław 2012, pp. 49–53.

⁵ *Act of 6 June 1997 – the Code of Criminal Procedure* (consolidated text, Journal of Laws of 2005, item 46, as amended).

⁶ *Współpraca ABW i SW w zakresie prewencji terrorystycznej* (Eng. Cooperation of the Internal Security Agency and the Prison Service in the field of counter-terrorism), Terrorism Prevention, <https://tpcoe.gov.pl/cpt/wydarzenia/1912,Wspolpraca-ABW-i-SW-w-zakresie-prewencji-terrorystycznej.html> [accessed: 5 VIII 2025].

a particularly important role in this area was the Terrorism Prevention Centre of Excellence, now the Terrorism Prevention Unit.

The basic organisational units of the prison system are prisons and remand centres subordinated to the Minister of Justice⁷, who, by way of an order, establishes and abolishes prisons and transforms them into remand centres, taking into account existing needs. A prison or remand centre is managed by a director, while other officers and employees of the prison and other persons within the scope of their duties in relation to the organisation of work or various types of activities are the convict's superiors⁸.

A fundamental condition for the proper functioning of a penitentiary unit – understood as ensuring security and achieving the objectives of enforcing imprisonment and pre-trial detention, as well as protecting society from offenders – is the maintenance of order and discipline in the prison or remand centre⁹. This process should be carried out with the principles set out in Art. 4 § 1 of the Penal Enforcement Code and in other regulations concerning the treatment of inmates contained in the Act on the Prison Service. Article 2(2) of this Act lists the tasks of the formation, which include, among others:

- conducting penitentiary and rehabilitative interventions for persons sentenced to imprisonment,
- carrying out pre-trial detention in a manner that ensures the proper course of criminal or fiscal proceedings,
- ensuring that convicted and pre-trial detainees have their rights respected, particularly with respect to humane living conditions, respect for dignity, health and religious care,
- humane treatment of persons deprived of liberty,
- protecting society from offenders of crimes or fiscal offenses held in prisons and remand centres,
- maintaining order and security in prisons and remand centres,
- managing the Central Database of Persons Deprived of Liberty.

There are 171 penitentiary units operating in Poland, including: 64 prisons, 39 remand centres and 68 external branches of prisons or

⁷ Articles 68 and 208 of the Penal Enforcement Code.

⁸ Articles 72 § 1 and 2, 208 § 4 of the Penal Enforcement Code.

⁹ Article 73 § 1 of the Penal Enforcement Code.

remand centres, some of which have so-called detention wards¹⁰. The Penal Enforcement Code lists four types of prisons for convicts¹¹: for juveniles, first-time offenders, repeat offenders and those serving military detention. They may be organised as prisons: closed, semi-open and open¹². Various types of penitentiary facilities differ (...) *in particular in the degree of security, the level of inmate isolation, and the resulting obligations and entitlements regarding their movement within the facility and outside its premises*¹³.

The penitentiary map of Poland shows the locations of prisons, remand centres and external wards (Figure 1):

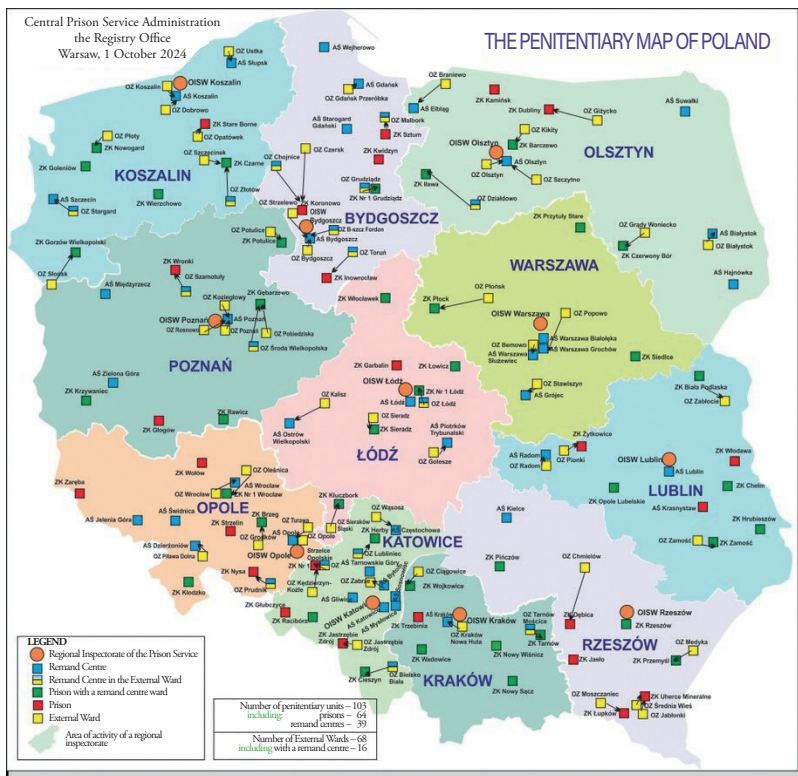


Figure 1. The locations of prisons, remand centres and external wards in Poland.

Source: data from the Registry Office of the Central Prison Service Administration.

¹⁰ Data from the Registry Office of the Central Prison Service Administration.

¹¹ Article 69 of the Penal Enforcement Code.

¹² Article 70 § 1 of the Penal Enforcement Code.

¹³ Article 70 § 2 of the Penal Enforcement Code.

As of 30 June 2025, there were 70 214 persons deprived of liberty in Polish prisons, including: 61 409 convicted persons, 7642 persons in pre-trial detention and 1163 persons serving sentences¹⁴. Population, i.e. the number of inmates in penitentiary facilities, at 70 000 persons, is approx. 84% of the system's capacity. In the prison population, i.e. those convicted, remanded in custody in Polish penitentiary units, male definitely dominate – 66 465, i.e. 94.6% of the total. Women constitute approx. 5.4% of this population (3749).

New types of threats to state security – hybrid activities

Since 2021, Poland has been particularly vulnerable to various types of activities that directly threaten the security of the state and its citizens, a significant part of them take the form of hybrid activities, as exemplified by the migration crisis. On 2 September 2021, at the request of the Council of Ministers, the President of the Republic of Poland introduced a 30-day state of emergency in parts of the Podlaskie and Lubelskie provinces¹⁵. The draft resolution of the Council of Ministers on submitting a request to the President of the Republic of Poland to introduce a state of emergency in these areas states, among other things, that: (...) *the unique nature and extraordinary scale of migratory pressure on the Polish-Belarusian border stem from deliberate and planned actions by the Belarusian authorities aimed at destabilising the situation on the border with Poland and other European Union Member States, i.e. Lithuania and Latvia. These actions take the form of a 'hybrid war' waged by the Belarusian regime*¹⁶.

¹⁴ CZSW BIS (Eng. The Information and Statistics Office of the Central Prison Service Administration) – monthly statistics – June 2025. Statistical data is available on the website: <https://www.sw.gov.pl/strona/statystyka>.

¹⁵ *Regulation of the President of the Republic of Poland of 2 September 2021 on the introduction of a state of emergency in parts of the Podlaskie and Lubelskie provinces* (Journal of Laws of 2021, item 1612).

¹⁶ *Draft resolution of the Council of Ministers to submit to the President of the Republic of Poland a request to declare a state of emergency in parts of the Podlaskie and Lubelskie provinces*, Serwis Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 31 VIII 2021, <https://www.gov.pl/web/premier/projekt-uchwaly-rady-ministrow-o-skierowaniu-do-prezydenta-rzeczypospolitej-polskiej-wniosku-o-wprowadzenie-stanu-wyjatkowego-na-obszarze-czesci-województwa-podlaskiego-oraz-czesci-województwa-lubelskiego> [accessed: 7 VIII 2025].

The Polish border security breaches were of a new nature and consisted not only of attempts by thousands of people of various nationalities to cross the border illegally, but also of the need to physically defend against groups of immigrants who destroyed security measures and attacked officers of the Border Guard, the Police, soldiers. The scale of these violations was unprecedented, as reflected in the Border Guard statistics. Suffice it to say that while in 2020 there were 129 illegal border crossings from Belarus, in 2021 there were already 39 697¹⁷.

The migration crisis has led to an increase in the number of crimes involving illegal border crossings into Poland (Art. 264 § 2 of the Criminal Code), assistance in organising such activities (Art. 264 § 3 of the Criminal Code) and deriving material benefits from them (Art. 264a § 1 of the Criminal Code). As a result of the actions of the services and the public prosecutor's office, some of the suspects were placed in pre-trial detention. The period from September to December 2021 was a time of increase in the number of foreigners in prisons and remand centres (Chart 1)¹⁸.

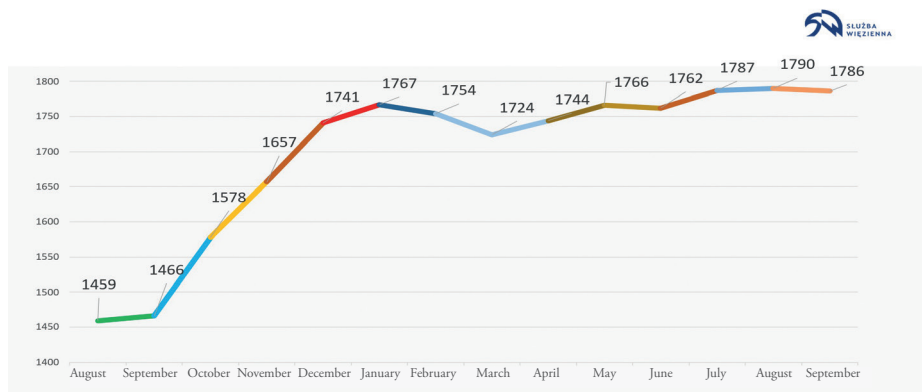


Chart 1. Foreign nationals in Polish prisons between August 2021 – September 2022.

Source: data from the Registry Office of the Central Prison Service Administration.

¹⁷ E. Szczepańska, *Nielegalne przekroczenia granicy z Białorusią w 2021 r.* (Eng. Illegal border crossings from Belarus in 2021), Straż Graniczna, 12 I 2022, <https://www.strazgraniczna.pl/pl/aktualnosci/9689,Nielegalne-przekroczenia-granicy-z-Bialorusia-w-2021-r.html> [accessed: 7 VIII 2025].

¹⁸ Służba Więzienna – statystyka (Eng. The Prison Service – statistics), <https://www.sw.gov.pl/strona/Statystyka> [accessed: 12 VIII 2025].

A further slight increase in the number of foreigners in Polish prisons occurred after Russia's full-scale attack on Ukraine in February 2022. It should be emphasised, that some of the individuals detained by the Polish authorities at that time had previously been wanted by Interpol on suspicion of belonging to terrorist organisations in their countries of origin and conducting such activities. Their presence requires the Prison Service officers to take constant preventive measures aimed at identifying any atmosphere or behaviour that could pose a threat to security in prison. This is particularly important in relation to remand prisoners who have organised terrorist attacks in their countries of origin or elsewhere, or who have belonged to Islamic State. Another important aspect is the need to counteract demoralisation and radicalisation in prison. It should also be remembered that prisoners or former prisoners remain of interest to Russian intelligence services as potential 'disposable agents' used to carry out hybrid attacks. The Report of the International Centre for Counter Terrorism (ICCT) and GLOBSEC points out that since 2022, there have been 110 hybrid attacks in Europe linked to Russia. The services identified 131 individuals residing in Europe and involved in such activities, at least 35 of whom had previous contact with crime. At the same time, the authors of the report emphasise that prisons both in Russia and abroad remain a place of recruitment for criminals, most often young men (around 30 years old) who are in a difficult financial situation, to carry out an act of sabotage¹⁹.

The situation on the Polish-Belarusian border is still very difficult, as evidenced by information presented by the Podlaski Border Guard Regional Unit²⁰. Only in the period from July to August 2025, numerous attempts to cross the border illegally occurred almost daily. For example: 1 July – there were 100 attempts; 4–6 July – 170; 10 July – 100; 16 July – 210; 18–20 July – 340; 25 July – 170; 6–7 August – 280; 12 August – 170; 13 August – 130. By 14 August 2025, the Podlaski Border Guard Regional Unit recorded 19 500 attempts to cross the Polish-Belarusian border illegally²¹.

¹⁹ *Russia's Crime-Terror Nexus. Criminality as a Tool of Hybrid Warfare in Europe*, https://www.globsec.org/sites/default/files/2025-10/Russia%20Crime%20Terror%20Nexus_Criminality%20as%20a%20Tool_0.pdf, pp. 24–31 [accessed: 10 X 2025].

²⁰ Straż Graniczna – aktualności (Eng. The Border Guard – News), <https://www.podlaski.strazgraniczna.pl/pod/aktualnosci/>.

²¹ M. Bura, *Na polsko-białoruskiej granicy* (Eng. On the Polish-Belarusian border), Podlaski Oddział Straży Granicznej, 14 VIII 2025, <https://www.podlaski.strazgraniczna.pl/pod/aktualnosci/67321,Na-polsko-bialoruskiej-granicy.html> [accessed: 18 VIII 2025].

A common feature of most of these events is their aggressive nature. Foreigners, attempting to enter Poland, very often destroy technical barriers using various tools, dig tunnels²², and throw stones, power insulators, tree branches, barbed wire spikes, glass bottles filled with sand and sticks tipped with sharp tools at those guarding the border. In this way, they damage border infrastructure, vehicles of the Border Guard, and, most importantly, create a real and direct threat to health and life of officers and soldiers. A tragic consequence of such actions was the incident on 28 May 2024, when Private Mateusz Sitek, while on duty, was stabbed by a foreigner attempting to breach the border security measures and, despite the efforts of doctors, died a few days later²³. Polish authorities were relatively quick to establish the perpetrator's appearance and origin. However, his capture was not possible, also because the Belarusian side, despite a formal note of protest, did not cooperate effectively.

Despite the efforts of the services, some foreigners manage to cross the border illegally and are detained once already on the territory of Poland. The Podlaski Border Guard Regional Unit reports the detention of citizens of, among others, Sudan, Yemen, Cameroon, Ethiopia, Afghanistan, India, Eritrea, Somalia, Bangladesh and Egypt. People who assist in illegal border crossings and organise them are also detained, including Ukrainians, Belarusians, Latvians and Poles. Only between 1 January and 7 July 2025 alone, officers of the Podlaski Border Guard Regional Unit detained 95 accomplices and organisers involved in illegal crossings of the Polish-Belarusian border²⁴, some of whom were probably charged with criminal offences resulting in pre-trial detention. It is worth mentioning the difficulties faced by the Prison Service officers in such situations, such as communication problems resulting from the arrested persons' lack of knowledge of English and their cultural and religious specificities.

²² M. Bura, *Podkopem (NIE) do Polski* (Eng. A tunnel (NOT) to Poland), Podlaski Oddział Straży Granicznej, 10 VII 2025, <https://www.podlaski.strazgraniczna.pl/pod/aktualnosci/66897,Podkopem-NIE-do-Polski.html> [accessed: 18 VIII 2025].

²³ *Ostatnie pożegnanie śp. szer. Mateusza Sitka* (Eng. The final farewell to the late Private Mateusz Sitek), 1. Warszawska Brygada Pancerna, <https://www.wojsko-polskie.pl/1bpanc/articles/aktualnosci-w/ostatnie-pozegnanie-sp-szer-mateusza-sitka> [accessed: 18 VIII 2025].

²⁴ K. Zdanowicz, *W bagażniku na zachód Europy* (Eng. In the boot to Western Europe), Podlaski Oddział Straży Granicznej, 8 VII 2025, <https://www.podlaski.strazgraniczna.pl/pod/aktualnosci/66859,W-bagazniku-na-zachod-Europy.html> [accessed: 18 VIII 2025].

Another example of events that are currently causing concern among many Polish citizens are fires. If it is caused by human activity, it is most likely a crime²⁵, which may be intentional, i.e. the perpetrator wants to and takes prohibited actions or anticipates the possibility of taking them and accepts it, or unintentional, when the perpetrator does not intend to commit a prohibited act but it occurs as a result of the perpetrator's carelessness²⁶.

Other circumstances arise when:

- a) participating in foreign intelligence activities or acting on its behalf, perpetrator or perpetrators commit acts of diversion, sabotage or terrorist offences,
- b) acting in an organised armed group, perpetrator or perpetrators commit terrorist offences²⁷.

One such planned action was the fire on 12 May 2024 at the shopping centre at Marywilska 44 Street in Warsaw. According to a statement issued by the National Prosecutor's Office on 12 May 2025, the arson attack was ordered by the Russian Federation's intelligence services. The investigation established that a Ukrainian citizen received instructions from another Ukrainian citizen residing in Russia to record the fire and the actions of the rescue services. The order specified the time at which the fire would break out²⁸.

Furthermore, the investigation established that two Ukrainian citizens involved in starting and documenting the fire at the Marywilska 44 shopping centre, together with two other individuals, planned and carried out, using incendiary devices, on the night of 8 to 9 May 2024, a fire at IKEA large-scale store in Vilnius.

As part of the same investigation, the circumstances of the fire at the building supply store in Warsaw on 12 April 2024 are being investigated. According to the findings of the prosecutor's office, the incident was the result of deliberate action, and the perpetrator was a Belarusian citizen. On 31 January 2024, the officers of the Internal Security Agency detained a citizen of Ukraine in Wrocław. He was acting in an organised criminal group and on behalf of Russian intelligence services, was preparing to carry

²⁵ Article 163 § 1 point 1 of the Criminal Code.

²⁶ Article 9 of the Criminal Code.

²⁷ Article 258 § 2 of the Criminal Code.

²⁸ *Zarzuty w związku z pożarem hali przy ul. Marywilskiej 44* (Eng. Allegations in connection with the fire at the market hall at Marywilska 44), Prokuratura Krajowa, 12 V 2025, <https://www.gov.pl/web/prokuratura-krajowa/zarzuty-m44> [accessed: 25 VIII 2025].

out acts of sabotage and diversion, consisting in particular of setting fire to buildings in Wrocław, located in close proximity to elements of strategic infrastructure²⁹. As the investigation revealed, a 51-year-old Ukrainian man (...) *was paid USD 4000 by Russian intelligence services to prepare to set fire to a paint centre on Kwidzyńska Street in Kowale, Wrocław. It operates at a paint factory owned by the US giant in this field, one of the 500 largest US companies in terms of revenue*³⁰. On 23 May 2024, the officers of the Internal Security Agency arrested a Polish man and two Belarusians suspected of setting fire to buildings in various parts of the country and acting on behalf of Russian secret service³¹.

The scale of the threat posed by hybrid activities is also evidenced by information about the detention in Poland of persons conducting espionage, sabotage, terrorist or other activities directly threatening the security of our country on behalf of foreign intelligence services. An analysis of information provided by the Internal Security Agency between 1 January 2024 and 30 June 2025 reveals a number of examples demonstrating the effectiveness of the Polish services in detecting such threats. Here are some of them³²:

- 9 September 2024 – arrest of a Belarusian woman on charges of spying for Belarusian secret service – the State Security Committee of the Republic of Belarus,
- 6 February 2024 – referral to court of an indictment against a Polish citizen suspected of spying for Russian secret service,
- 19 April 2024 – arrest of a Polish citizen suspected of reporting willingness to cooperate with Russian secret services,

²⁹ Funkcjonariusze Agencji Bezpieczeństwa Wewnętrznego zatrzymali mężczyznę działającego na zlecenie rosyjskich służb wywiadowczych (Eng. The officers of the Internal Security Agency arrested a man acting on behalf of the Russian intelligence services), Serwis Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej, 15 II 2024, <https://www.gov.pl/web/sluzby-specjalne/funkcjonariusze-agencji-bezpieczenstwa-wewnetrznego-zatrzymali-mezczyzynie-dzialajacego-na-zlecenie-rosyjskich-sluzb-wywiadowczych> [accessed: 25 VIII 2025].

³⁰ *Ukraińiec, który na zlecenie Rosji miał wywołać pożar we Wrocławiu idzie do więzienia. Sąd: „motał i kłamał”* (Eng. The Ukrainian man who was commissioned by Russia to start a fire in Wrocław is going to prison. Court: ‘He was confused and lied’), tuWrocław.com, 21 II 2025, <https://tuwroclaw.com/arttykul/ukrainiec-ktory-na-n1507326> [accessed: 25 VIII 2025].

³¹ *Statement*, ABW, 29 V 2024, <https://www.abw.gov.pl/pl/informacje/2501,Komunikat.html>. [accessed: 25 VIII 2025].

³² ABW (the Internal Security Agency) – information, <https://www.abw.gov.pl/pl/informacje>.

- 16 May 2024 – sentencing by the District Court in Świdnica of a Polish citizen to 2 years imprisonment for participating in an organised criminal group of a terrorist nature and planning to carry out a terrorist attack using explosives – with the aim of seriously intimidating many people and causing an event threatening the life or health of many people or property of great value,
- 13 November 2024 – arrest of a Belarusian citizen acting on behalf of foreign secret services, suspected of attempting to set fire to a building located in Gdańsk,
- 1 April 2025 – arrest of a Ukrainian citizen acting on behalf of the Russian intelligence.

A partial summary of the Internal Security Agency activities related to detecting threats resulting from hybrid activities initiated and coordinated by Russian secret services and counteracting them, presentation of methods of operation and ways of recruiting for diversionary tasks can be found in the statement dated 25 October 2024³³. Interesting information about unconventional methods of recruiting people to carry out espionage and sabotage activities is also provided in the aforementioned report entitled *Rabota w Polsce*³⁴.

The described hybrid activities inspired by foreign intelligence services, most often Russian and Belarusian, serve to destabilise state authorities, creating a sense of threat among citizens and polarising society, fuelling ethnic conflicts, weakening the national community and questioning international alliances. Random individuals acting out of greed are often used to carry out attacks. The events presented are clearly criminal in nature, pose a direct threat to the life and health of citizens, undermine the security and interests of the Republic of Poland, and are punishable by severe penalties, most often for a period of not less than 5 years or life imprisonment.

³³ *The statement concerning diversionary activities of the RF*, ABW, 25 X 2024, <https://www.abw.gov.pl/pl/informacje/2569,Komunikat-dotyczacy-dzialalnosci-dywerysyjnej-FR.html> [accessed: 25 VIII 2025].

³⁴ *Jak działają rosyjscy szpiegowie w Polsce? "Rabota w Polsce" – reportaż Piotra Świerczka* (Eng. How do Russian spies operate in Poland? 'Rabota w Polsce' – a report by Piotr Świerczek), YouTube, 12 IX 2025, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=44O7Y_yMXGk [accessed: 12 IX 2025].

Spies, saboteurs and terrorists in Polish prisons – statistical data

In every case where the court applies the most severe preventive measure in the form of pre-trial detention, suspects of espionage, sabotage or terrorist activities are placed in remand centres or designated units, known as detention prisons. The legal classification most commonly applied to persons remanded in custody and subsequently convicted is suspicion of committing offences specified in Art. 130 § 19 of the Criminal Code (participation in activities for foreign intelligence service) and Art. 258 § 2 of the Criminal Code (participation in an organised armed group with the aim of committing a crime or a fiscal offence of a terrorist nature). Often, considering the nature of the acts, the legal classification includes the indicated articles as well as Art. 255a § 2 of the Criminal Code (participation in training that could enable the commission of a terrorist offence, or independently familiarising oneself with content that could enable the commission of such an offence).

According to statistic information provided by the Central Prison Service Administration, as of 30 June 2025, a total of 34 inmates were being held in Polish prisons and remand centres in connection with the offences specified in Art. 130 § 1–9 of the Criminal Code. Of the indicated group, 18 persons have been convicted and 16 are in pre-trial detention. Among those convicted, the largest group were citizens of Ukraine – 10, followed by Belarus – 4, Russia – 3, and Canada – 1. Among those in pre-trial detention, citizens of Ukraine also predominated – 4, followed by Poland – 4, Russia – 4 (including 1 woman), Belarus – 3, Lithuania – 1.

In the group under study, a total of 23 persons were charged with the crime of espionage specified in Art. 130 § 1 of the Criminal Code, of whom 18 were convicted and 5 were in pre-trial detention. Among those convicted, the majority were Ukrainians – 10, followed by Belarusians – 4, Russians – 3 and 1 citizen of Canada. Among those temporarily detained, charges were brought against 3 Ukrainians, 1 Pole and 1 Russian.

The charge of espionage under Art. 130 § 2 of the Criminal Code was brought against 6 persons, each of whom is currently in pre-trial detention, including 2 Poles, 2 persons from Russia (including a woman) as well as 1 person from Belarus and 1 from Lithuania. The charge of declaring readiness to act on behalf of foreign intelligence services against the Republic of Poland, as specified in Art. 130 § 3 of the Criminal Code, was heard by 2 persons in pre-trial detention. They are citizens of Poland and Belarus.

However, the charge of suspicion of committing the offence specified in Art. 130 § 7, consisting of participating in the activities of a foreign intelligence service or acting on its behalf, committing diversion, sabotage or committing a terrorist offence, was heard by 2 Belarusians, 1 Russian and 1 Ukrainian.

The information provided indicates that a Ukrainian citizen is being held in remand centre as a remand prisoner, charged under Art. 255a § 2 of the Criminal Code.

Those in pre-trial detention and those who have been convicted are held in remand centres and closed prisons³⁵, i.e. penitentiary facilities with a high level of technical and security measures. The aforementioned group of 35 persons convicted and remanded in custody in connection with the acts referred to in Art. 130 § 1–9 and Art. 255a § 2 of the Criminal Code requires increased supervision by the Prison Service officers and particularly careful planning of penitentiary measures and security measures, taking into account the requirements of order and discipline that are the basis for the security of a prison or remand centre. This is supported by the nature of the crimes, the circumstances and motivations for committing them, the threat of severe punishment, the personality traits of inmates diagnosed by prison staff already in the initial period of isolation, and, at least in some cases, skills that may pose a threat to the security of the penitentiary unit.

It should be emphasised that 13 people from this group, i.e. 37%, were classified as persons posing a serious threat to society or a serious threat to the security of the facility. Therefore, they are directed to special units for so-called dangerous prisoners, where increased protection of the public and security of the prison are ensured. This means that the prison administration has deemed these individuals to pose a serious threat to society or to the security of the facility within the meaning of the provisions of Art. 88a § 1 of the Penal Enforcement Code. Qualification for this category entails a number of restrictions and the highest level of the prison regime, understood as the scope of rights granted and, above all, the obligations imposed by Polish law³⁶. At the same time, a total of 141 convicted prisoners and detainees were held in all units

³⁵ Article 88 § 3 of the Penal Enforcement Code.

³⁶ Articles 88b and 88c of the Penal Enforcement Code.

for inmates posing a serious social threat or a serious threat to the security of the facility.

As of 31 July 2025, a total of 239 persons were detained in all penitentiary facilities for committing an offence specified in Art. 258 § 2, excluding acts specified in Art. 130 of the Criminal Code. This group include 185 convicted prisoners, including 4 women and 54 remand prisoners, including 3 women. The vast majority are held in closed prisons – 216. Seven of them have been classified as dangerous prisoners.

Poles definitely dominate the group of convicts – 181, including 3 women. Among them are citizens of Latvia – 2, Ukraine – 1, Armenia – 1 (woman). The majority of those temporarily detained are also Poles – 42, including 3 women. Followed by citizens of Ukraine – 7, Lithuania – 2, the Czech Republic – 1, Armenia – 1, Tajikistan – 1. The analysed group is dominated by Poles – 223 persons. Followed by Ukrainians – 8 and citizens of Lithuania – 2, Latvia – 2, Armenia – 2, the Czech Republic – 1, Tajikistan – 1.

Since the offence referred to in Art. 258 § 2 of the Criminal Code may be both criminal and terrorist in nature, it is difficult to determine unequivocally on the basis of statistical data how many convicted and remand prisoners in penitentiary facilities have committed acts of a terrorist nature. Separating this category requires additional analysis.

It can already be predicted that the group of spies, diversionists and saboteurs of various legal statuses, numbering 35 people, will grow, because many investigations, as prosecutors say, are ongoing, and the activity of foreign intelligence services remains high, despite the successes of the Polish services in detecting such threats. An example of this is the information posted on 1 August 2025 on the X platform by the Minister Coordinator of Special Services about the arrest by the Internal Security Agency of a citizen of one of the Asian countries who, as a staff officer of the military intelligence service (...) *was conducting intelligence activities detrimental to the security of the Republic of Poland and allied military structures. The National Prosecutor's Office presented him with charges, and on 1 August 2025, the suspect was remanded in custody for 3 months by court order*³⁷.

This is also confirmed by another announcement of the Internal Security Agency from 14 August 2025 regarding the arrest of a 17-year-old

³⁷ Tomasz Siemoniak, post on the X portal, 1 VIII 2025, https://x.com/TomaszSiemoniak/status/1951279798526890013?ref_src=twsrc%5Etfw%7Ctwcamp%5Etweetembed%7Ctwterm%5E195 [accessed: 25 VIII 2025].

Ukrainian citizen who has been charged by the prosecutor's office with multiple offences, including those specified in Art. 130 § 7 of the Criminal Code (sabotage activities on behalf of a foreign secret service), and who has been remanded in custody for 3 months by the court³⁸.

Particularly important from the perspective of the Prison Service officers is to have as much information as possible about the person brought into custody, including their actual identity and motivation for committing the offences specified in Art. 130 § 1–9 or Art. 255a § 2 of the Criminal Code. The criminal activity may have various origins, i.e. it may be a direct consequence of the profession of a spy, agent or e.g. economic, resulting from blackmail, national or religious. Knowledge in this area is one of the prerequisites for officers when planning penitentiary and security measures related to, for example, decisions on placement in a specific penitentiary unit, ward, single or shared cell, selection of fellow inmates or monitoring³⁹. Equally important, especially from the perspective of prison or remand centre security, is information about training courses completed or skills acquired that could facilitate espionage or sabotage activities. Such skills could be used during periods of isolation, e.g. to attempt an escape or cause danger. Information about persons with whom a convicted or remand prisoner intends to maintain or maintains contact by telephone, correspondence, visits to the prison or material support is of similar importance. Reliable information is obtained in accordance with all security procedures through cooperation between the Prison Service and other authorities, in particular the public prosecutor's office, the relevant uniformed services and the courts.

Summary

The outbreak of war in Ukraine at the beginning of 2022 and the accompanying huge wave of migration provided an opportunity to reflect on the state of the country's preparedness to function in extreme conditions. The Prison Service also conducted such an analysis, reviewing

³⁸ *Komunikat ABW ws. zatrzymania obywatela Ukrainy* (Eng. Statement of the ABW on the detention of a Ukrainian citizen), ABW, 14 VIII 2025, <https://www.abw.gov.pl/pl/informacje/2668,Komunikat-ABW-ws-zatrzymania-obywatela-Ukrainy.html> [accessed: 25 VIII 2025].

³⁹ Article 73a of the Penal Enforcement Code.

the tasks and defence regulations in force in this area, assessing their adequacy, determining the infrastructure resources available and the state of preparedness of the formation. Based on the audit results, a number of important decisions were made, including those related to the supply of fuel, communications equipment, ammunition, food and planning preparations to increase defence capabilities. Already in March 2022, a cooperation was established with Territorial Defence Forces, thanks to which in 2022 and 2023 the training process for the Prison Service officers was expanded to include typically military issues. The trainings were also carried out in facilities subordinate to the Ministry of Defence. The formal basis of this activities is the *Cooperation agreement between the command of the Territorial Defence Forces and the Central Prison Service Administration* concluded on 21 December 2022.

The issue of defence tasks and, more broadly, the role of the Prison Service in wartime remains not only an interesting but, above all, a very practical area of scientific research. At the same time, in the author's opinion, taking into account the ongoing war in Ukraine, Russia's imperial policy, hybrid warfare activities already underway on our territory, and the opinions of national and international security experts, it is extremely important for the management of the Prison Service to continue its planning, organisational, logistical and training efforts to prepare the formation as well as possible for a crisis. The experiences of the Ukrainian Prison Service (Ukrainian: Державна кримінально-виконавча служба України) operating in wartime conditions and carrying out activities characteristic of prison formation, which undertake a number of additional tasks, including supporting local communities and defence forces, securing the stay of prisoners of war and carrying out their exchange, organising a system of recruitment for military service among selected groups of convicts, and removing the effects of missile and drone attacks on penitentiary facilities.

The cooperation between the Prison Service and other uniformed services is particularly important for ensuring order and security in prisons and remand centres and for protecting the public from offenders who are deprived of their liberty. Due to the risks associated with activities of hybrid nature, cooperation with the Police, the Internal Security Agency, the Border Guard and the State Fire Service takes a new significance. The following measures should be considered essential: initiating, continuing and intensifying the following projects:

- 1) systematic conduct of exercises to improve cooperation between officers, based on scenarios that take into account real threats, including hybrid threats, in the areas of crisis command, information transfer, communication system compatibility and organising evacuation,
- 2) taking into account the importance of the medical component, i.e. first aid with elements of battlefield medicine, in the exercises carried out,
- 3) systematically organise, including remotely, training courses and workshops with experts to discuss the specific nature of certain threats and the possibility of applying preventive procedures, e.g. terrorism prevention, radicalisation, hybrid threats, cultural differences,
- 4) creating channels for the rapid transmission of information about threats and crisis situations, including appointing officers for cooperation, determining means of communication, including alternative ones, and the scope of information that can be transmitted, taking into account the applicable regulations in this area. If a need to change legal regulations is identified, initiating this process,
- 5) conducting periodic evaluations of cooperation and implementing conclusions directly into practice,
- 6) if necessary, updating or concluding new bilateral cooperation agreements that take into account the current situation and identified needs and specify, among other things, their scope, form and responsible persons,
- 7) undertaking joint scientific research and other projects, also financed from external sources, increasing the formation's ability to operate in conditions of threat, including hybrid threats.

In the context of ensuring order and security in prisons and remand centres as well as protecting society from offenders imprisoned in penitentiary facilities, it also seems important to develop formal procedures for prisoners who have committed offences specified in Art. 130 § 1–9, Art. 258 § 2 and Art. 255a § 2 of the Criminal Code. These may include, among other things:

- methods of monitoring formal, legal and personal situation,
- carrying out preventive measures, penitentiary measures, including the prevention of radicalisation,

- system of obtaining and transmitting information about individuals and cooperation in this area with other formations and institutions, including the appointment of officers responsible for implementing this process within the Prison Service structure.

One of the arguments in favour of taking such measures is the possible increase in the number of hybrid incidents predicted by experts, mainly generated by the activities of the Russian and Belarusian intelligence services. Furthermore, the serious threat for society and the security of prisons and remand centres resulting from the presence of perpetrators of such crimes in these places should be taken into account. Arguments are also provided by the aforementioned Report of the International Centre for Counter Terrorism (ICCT) and GLOBSEC, which identifies prisons as potential places for recruiting criminals to carry out hybrid attacks. It is also reasonable to continue planning, organisational and training work, as well as to develop algorithms for action that take into account the scale and nature of threats. The obligations arising from the provisions of the *Ordinance of the Minister of Justice of 5 March 2024 on the organisation of tasks within the framework of defence obligations* are also important in order to strengthen the defence capabilities of the formations. This requires close cooperation between the management of the Prison Service with the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of National Defence.

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