

## DŽIHADIZEM IN RADIKALIZACIJA V IZBRANIH REGIJAH EVROPE, BLIŽNJEGA VZHODA IN SEVERNE AFRIKE – ŠTUDIJA PRIMERA

### JIHADISM AND RADICALISATION IN SELECTED REGIONS OF EUROPE, THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA – A CASE STUDY

**Povzetek** Terorizem in z njim povezani pojavi, kot sta radikalizem in džihadizem, so eni največjih izzivov našega časa. S predstavitvijo primerov v nekaterih pomembnih državah avtor analizira vzroke in posledice terorizma. Pomembno je, da se pri tej tematiki osredotočimo le na nekaj držav, saj se vzroki za radikalizem in džihadizem razlikujejo in s časom spreminjajo ne le znotraj regije, temveč tudi znotraj posameznih držav. Radikalizem in džihadizem sta večinoma tesno povezana s kriznimi območji. Poleg analize tematike so v študijo vključeni tudi predlogi za obvladovanje in reševanje tega problema.

**Ključne besede** *Terorizem, džihadizem, radikalizem, tuji bojavniki, Bližnji vzhod, Evropa, Severna Afrika.*

**Abstract** One of the biggest challenges of our time is terrorism and its concomitant phenomena, such as radicalism and jihadism. The author analyses the causes and consequences of terrorism by describing relevant cases in certain significant countries. Reducing this topic to some concrete countries only is important, because the causes of radicalism and jihadism are different and can change over time not only across a region, but also within a single country. Radicalism and jihadism are mostly closely connected to crisis areas. Beyond the analysis of this topic, the study also touches upon proposals to handle and solve this problem.

**Key words** *Terrorism, jihadism, radicalism, foreign fighters, middle East, Europe, north Africa.*

## Introduction

The terror-wave hitting the West in 2016 and 2017 had a significant impact on political elections and the policy of governments (e.g. The Netherlands, France and Germany), while migration has an effect on the elections in Austria, Italy and Hungary. The causes that trigger terrorist actions have not abated at all, and terrorists will certainly continue their activities in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Nigeria. In spite of the defeat of the caliphate in Iraq and Syria, the conflict is not yet over. This will entail further migration waves and force many citizens to leave their homes. The terrorist organisation ISIS has proved its strong operative capability in Europe, and its members will remain active for several years in Iraq, Syria and other countries. This may modify the policy of governments in 2017 and 2018, and not only in those countries where elections will be held (TSG IntelBrief, 2015).

For the topic of this study it is important to define terrorism, jihadism and radicalism. Terrorism does not have a universal definition, but this is not a scientific problem, rather a political one. According to the AAP-06 NATO Glossary of terms and definitions, terrorism is "the unlawful use or threatened use of force or violence against individuals or property in an attempt to coerce or intimidate governments or societies to achieve political, religious or ideological objectives" (NATO AAP-06 2014).

Jihadism is more complicated to define because of the different interpretations of actions. The Arabic word means *effort* or *struggle*. In Islam it can be used to describe an individual's internal struggle against the baser instincts in the interests of building a good Muslim society. But jihadism or the jihadist movement means a struggle (even with arms) against infidels and apostates. The term jihadist has been used by Western academics to distinguish between violent and non-violent Islamists, and is not used by many Muslims. For Muslims "jihad" is very different from "fighting against non-Muslims". Based on this theory, many Muslim academics use "the so-called jihad" rather than "jihad" alone. In the Muslim world the "Islamist threat" is not accepted; they use "extremists claiming affiliation with Islam". "Islamist terrorism" does not exist; they use "insurgents". These examples clearly show how different the viewpoints are concerning this topic.

Radicalism and extremism have many meanings and could be the subject of many doctoral theses, especially if we consider the understanding of different countries and the fight against this phenomenon. As understood by this author, radicalism is a political orientation aiming for an essential change in society and government. Extremism talks about radical actions to gain more support for radical behaviours. We must not forget: not all radicals are terrorists, but all terrorists are radical.

## 1 FOREIGN FIGHTERS

2018 is the eighth year that civil war has been raging in Syria. This devastating conflict has reduced the country to ruins, deteriorated Syria's relations with its neighbours, increased the regional influence of Russia and Iran, and in addition, has severely tested the peacekeeping capability of the United Nations. As we have seen

in Afghanistan, even if combat activities come to an end, one side autonomously declares itself the winner, but the fight or revolt continues. The author has the view that we have little chance of avoiding this scenario in Iraq and Syria, but due to the very different interests of the regional powers, it will happen in a more complicated way.

Europe will also have to cope with migration in 2018. The countries of origin are not only the crisis areas of the Middle East, but also the African continent. The agreement concluded with Turkey in March 2016 has significantly reduced the number of illegal migrants arriving in Europe through the Balkan route. Since the handling of the migration crisis represents a political trump card in the hands of European politicians, they cannot afford to neglect it. Even sporadic terrorist attacks can exercise a very negative effect on the political situation, let alone a potentially significant terrorist attempt.

After the appearance of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, many foreign fighters arrived to join the organisation from several countries. It is these fighters that constitute the core staff of the organisation, in terms of combating personnel. They came mainly from Tunisia, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Belgium, France, Great Britain and Russia (primarily from Chechnya and Dagestan). Researches pursued during the last 2-3 years have shown that a number of the terrorist fighters left their homes and moved only into another area of their own country, while others went to a foreign state. We can therefore make a difference between local and regional terrorist hotbeds. These hotbeds often have different features, but also have a common denominator; their “personnel” are very radical extremists.

In this connection it is necessary to note that – after the Paris and Brussels attacks – the media have been talking about Muslim ghettos that offer places for extremist hotbeds and bases, where unemployment is soaring, where the police do not dare to enter, and where radical orators and activists recruit future terrorists. This issue has been studied primarily by the Soufan Group. It was Ali Soufan and Daniel Schoenfel who clearly showed that there are such hotbeds, network nets inside regions and settlements, where ISIS can easily recruit fighters. However, the relevant studies also point out that – despite intensive radicalisation efforts – the overwhelming majority of Muslim citizens have not been yet radicalised and are not inclined to be, even if they are living under difficult circumstances.

The security vacuum after the Iraqi war, as well as the Syrian civil war, attracted many foreign fighters to the combat areas. Although the intensive presence of foreign fighters is a new phenomenon, it has also been evident in the past, though to a smaller extent. Between 1980 and 2011, it is said that there were about 10,000-30,000 foreign fighters in Muslim countries (Hegghammer, 2010). According to US intelligence sources, foreign fighters arrived in Syria and Iraq from more than 100 countries in 2015, mainly from Muslim states (TSG, 2015). They were immediately involved in combat activities. However the number of

newly arrived foreign fighters cannot be determined, because their arrival is not continuous and their number always fluctuates. For example, in 2014, 12,000 fighters arrived from 81 countries, and by December 2015 – in the assessment by the Soufan Group – 27,000-31,000 terrorists had come from 84 states (Barrett, 2014). These data are identical to those published by the Americans. However, the number of new fighters in Syria and Iraq drastically diminished, thanks – among other things – to the relevant restrictive measures taken by western states, and due to the deteriorating situation in Iraq and Syria. At the same time, Libya became a new target for extremist fighters (Strobel and Stewart, 2016).

As I have mentioned above, most foreign fighters are from North Africa and the Middle East, but it is necessary for us to note that about 5,000 of them arrived from Europe. This number does not come as a surprise at all, because the most numerous Muslim communities – apart from the Arab world – live in Europe. The Soviet successor states “provided” 4,700 militants, although President Putin talked about 10,000 people (Flippov, 2017). From the south-east Asian countries 900 came, while 500 foreign fighters arrived from the Balkans.

We would not be precise enough if we were to fail in clearly determining the following: inside a given country, which are the towns, and inside the towns which are the districts or areas, where the jihadist hotbeds have emerged? In general, these hotbeds came into existence much earlier than ISIS appeared on the scene. Such towns as Derna in Libya, Ben Guerdene and Kasserine in Tunisia or the Pankisi Gorge in Georgia, for example, had been jihadist nests for a long time, providing fighters for the conflicts between Muslim states.

Talking about specific countries, it is worth mentioning that of the 5,000 European foreign fighters, 3,700 people came from only four countries. The Molenbeek district of Brussels “brought up” the most terrorists and became the focus of international attention with regard to the attempts committed in Paris and Brussels. If we analyse the recruitment areas, we can see that there are significant differences according to the social, ethnic, economic and demographic circumstances of the given town or district.

With regard to motivation, the grievances and problems of a group or an individual can play a significant role in radicalisation, and can induce people to join a terrorist organisation. Although ISIS and the Assad regime represent a strong attractive force, personal problems are more important motivators. We can see a strengthening trend by which the personal examples and activities of charismatic leaders represent a strong motivation in the hands of recruiters, especially in Europe. Another prevailing trend is that those young Muslims who have a criminal record or a very uncertain future can be recruited relatively easily. It is necessary to mention that closed Muslim communities are especially preferred hunting grounds for recruiters.

## 2 COUNTRIES MOST HIT BY RADICALISM

In this section, I will try to analyse those countries and areas inside countries that have a great impact on radicalisation.

### 2.1 Tunisia

It was Tunisia that “sent” the most fighters to Iraq and Syria, and later also to Libya. The official figure is about 6,000, and non-official ones talk about 7,000 foreign fighters. If we consider that the country has 11 million inhabitants, it is rather surprising that from every thousand Tunisians, 55 people are followers of extremist organisations. Nearly 1,500 fighters went to the Libyan ISIS and al-Qaeda in Islam Maghreb and other radical groups (Packer, 2016). According to some estimates, half the foreign fighters are Tunisian citizens.

At this time, the majority of the Arabs fighting in Afghanistan against the Soviets were Tunisians, so this problem is not a new one. It is not surprising either that the “mother country” of the Tunisian Combat Group is Afghanistan. During the Balkan War, Tunisian jihadists also fought in Bosnia against the Serbs. The Tunisian ex-President Ben Ali took very serious measures against the radicals. However, this only served to strengthen radicalism. At the beginning of the Arab revolution, many extremists escaped from prisons, increasing the number of radicals. Among the reasons for radicalisation, it is worth mentioning marginalisation, partially due to decentralisation. After the revolution, intensive political activity took place even outside the capital, which had not been the case before. Among the main reasons for radicalisation were social exclusion and discrimination, rather than economic hardship. Compared to fighters deriving from other countries, a relatively large number of the Tunisian fighters were highly educated and graduated from higher schools. This played a significant role in choosing the ISIS leadership from among Tunisian extremists. In the light of this, this author thinks that the view of the famous French Professor Olivier Roy, who pointed out in several studies that European radicalism does not derive from Salafism or the Islamic Revolution, or from the anger of Muslims against imperialism, but from the generational, political and cultural marginalisation of youth, is quite understandable. These young men are fascinated by violence, and it is their disappointment about their future and the denial of the way of life represented by their parents that leads them to take another course, different from traditional Islam (Roy, 2015). By contrast, another famous French Islam researcher, Gilles Kepel, asserts that jihadism can be understood only if we start from Islam. Jihadist terrorism starts from the Salafist standpoint, whose roots can be found in the Middle East, and it was this that led to schism (Daumas, 2016). Both views can be accepted, because they are not mutually exclusive, and this can be demonstrated in several fields. In this connection, we cannot ignore the fact that in Europe the period of radicalisation has become ever shorter.

It is important to note that Tunisian foreign fighters originate not from Tunisia as a whole, but from certain “contaminated” territories within the country. Such a

territory is the town of Ben Guardane, for example, situated close to the Libyan border, which has for years been a centre for smuggling bands and illegal arms dealers. At the same time, it seems to be the largest recruitment place for foreign fighters. All of the perpetrators of Tunisian terrorist attempts (Bardo Museum, Sousse Resort) lived in this town. If we examine the concrete causes, we can see that Ben Guardane is found in the southern part of Tunisia, far from the northern tourist destinations; its development is extremely neglected by the government; it is characterised by poverty and unemployment; and its citizens are practically isolated from Tunisian society.

Another jihadist spot in Tunisia is Kasserine, situated alongside the Algerian border. The proximity of the border allows the jihadists to maintain close contact with their Algerian partners, and the Kabylia mountain area offers excellent possibility for concealment. The Tunisian hotbed is not a new one, because Tunisians actively participated in the Afghan War in the 1980s. Today the main targets for recruitment are young men, who are generally unemployed; in addition, the recruiting activists have no difficulty in penetrating into the young Muslim community.

The third known hotbed is Bizerte, which can be found in the northern part of the country. Of the ISIS foreign fighters, about 11% are from Bizerte (TSG IntelBrief, 2015). The inner core of radical groups consists primarily of those extremists who spent time in prison before the 2011 revolution and later escaped to participate in the revolution.

## 2.2 Libya

Due to the lack of an efficiently working government, it is very difficult to determine the number of fighters who travelled to Syria and Iraq. According to some estimates, this number is about 600, but we must take into consideration the fact that Libya not only “sends”, but also “receives” extremist fighters. The ISIS Libyan centre has been established in the town of Sirte, which was the mother town of Qaddafi and the seat of his tribe (TSG IntelBrief, 2016). ISIS has integrated into its ranks many soldiers of Qaddafi, similarly to Iraq, which “enlisted” Baath Party members.

Libya’s modern history has been determined by tribal relations, nationalism and the possession of oil. If there was any change in the area of religion, it happened in secrecy. From a religious standpoint, Libya has always been rather homogeneous, with a strong Sunni denomination. With regard to tribal relations, today it is necessary for us to judge them critically, because the Libyan tribe is no longer an old, traditional social structure, but rather a unity of social organisations. Religious radicalism appeared after the removal of Qaddafi, because this kind of radicalism had been persecuted by the dictator. This can explain the fact that the radical religious groups had previously pursued their activity mainly outside Libya. The relationship between the local inhabitants and ISIS was very contradictory. Most of them did not support the ISIS fighters, because they see in them the return of Qaddafi’s soldiers.

ISIS obtained a foothold first in 2014 in Derna, from where the foreign fighters mainly came. The town's extremists had a certain role in the Afghan and the Iraqi wars as well. When experts analysed al-Qaida's Iraqi activity, it turned out that most of the suicide bombers came from Libya, specifically from Derna. The radicalisation of this town's extremists was also due to the fact that Qaddafi rigorously prohibited the activity of Islam extremists in the 1980s and 90s.

### 2.3 Egypt

According to the Egyptian government, 600 citizens joined ISIS, but foreign sources talk of 1,000 men. After the removal of President Mubarak, Islamist groups continuously posed a serious threat to the country's security. The best known Islamist group is Ansar Bajt al Makdis in the Sinai Peninsula. The core of this organisation consists of Bedouin tribes, which have been engaging in smuggling for years. Their leader, Abu Osama al Masri, took an oath of loyalty to Abu Bakr al Bagdadi, the leader of ISIS. The motive for recruitment is, in this case, strong dissatisfaction with the government's policy. The inhabitants of the Sinai Peninsula have not received any government support for developing their economy and infrastructure. The Sinai organisation of ISIS, the Wilayat Sinai, carried out many terrorist attacks against police stations and military checkpoints (between 2015 and 2018). The largest attacks against soldiers and policemen took place in July 2015, when the terrorists killed a total of 70 Egyptian soldiers, policemen and health workers arriving at the scene. The deadliest attack took place in November 2017, when more than 305 people were killed after the perpetrators detonated bombs and opened fire in a crowded mosque in the Sinai Peninsula (Dahir, 2017). The Egyptian authorities are unlikely to be capable of completely eliminating the terrorist organisation, which seems to be still strengthening today.

The basis of the radicalisation here is the hostile relationship between the Bedouins and the Egyptian government, which considers them collaborators with Israel, qualifying them as "the fifth column". Many Bedouins do not have citizenship and thus do not do military service. The fact that the government practically neglected them and did not give them economic or financial support has created and strengthened the black economy and market, including the human, drug and illegal arms trades. The Bedouin radicalisation has been promoted by the recruitment activity of extremists arriving from the Gaza Strip. First, they recruited Bedouin fighters, and later involved them in the leadership of some militant groups or inserted some of them into Egyptian security organisations. In this way they were able of conducting successful terrorist attacks. This success was also due to the fact that many members of the Sinai terrorist groups had gained experience in Afghanistan, Bosnia and Syria, although a great number of fighters also arrived from Libya.

After the removal of President Morsi in 2013, a new "chapter" began in the life of radical organisations. They judged the removal of Morsi completely illegal; thus they considered their activities to be justified and legitimate. Although the

two big terrorist organisations (Ansar Bayt al-Makdis and the Wilayat Sinai), had some internal conflicts, they continued to strengthen their ranks. Today we can confidently state that the Wilayat Sinai constitutes part of ISIS's global strategy and can even become its successor organisation. It is true that Egypt and Israel do make efforts to develop their anti-terrorist cooperation; however, this cannot be considered to be really effective at all.

## 2.4 The Caucasus and the former Soviet Republics

North Caucasus has always been a citadel of Islam extremists, and since the beginning of the Syrian civil war, it has been serving as a recruitment place. Political Islam and nationalist feelings triggered two wars in Chechnya against Russia, so Chechnya represented a strong attractive force for foreign fighters. Local differences also gave an impulse to radicalisation. In 2007, jihadists established the Islamic Caucasus Emirate with the aim of creating an independent emirate against Russia and its supporters (Stanford University, 2014). It was this emirate that sent many fighters to Syria and Iraq or to the Caucasus Wilayat. This region has been a militant territory for a long time. In North-Eastern Georgia, the Pankisi Gorge also constitutes a hotbed for radical Islamic organisations. During the Chechen War, it served as a base for jihadis to start from to support the war.

In North Caucasus, it is Dagestan that is the most problematic of the former Soviet republics. Dagestan has been "inflicted" by different clan systems, religious hostilities, crimes and Islam radicalism. At the beginning it was Sufita Islam that prevailed, but in the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Salafists gained ground. In 1999, the Russian armed forces prevented the establishment of a Dagestan Islamic Republic, but the extremists have not yet given up on setting up an emirate. We can confirm that the decisive action of the Russian armed forces has curbed the radical endeavours, which was demonstrated by the killing of the two significant leaders of the emirates (Abu Mukhamad and Abu Usman). At the same time, we must not forget that the Caucasus Islamic State has made an oath of loyalty to ISIS.

In the Pankisi Gorge of Dagestan, the existence of Islam radical organisations is in close connection with ISIS's activities in Iraq and Syria. The future of ISIS will have a significant impact on the activity of radical forces in North Caucasus.

Since the assassination of the Russian Ambassador accredited to Ankara, the Russian authorities have been intensifying their control over the Caucasian and Central-Asian Islam communities, and their imams. Turkey plays a key role in transit traffic; therefore – among others – we cannot expect Russian-Turkish relations to tangibly deteriorate. As in the case of Europe, foreign fighters make efforts to return to Russia, but the Russian law enforcement forces are doing their best to prevent the extremists from "infecting" the country once again.

## 2.5 Belgium

All of the Belgian foreign fighters who joined ISIS were from Brussels (Higgings and De Freytas-Tamura, 2016). The majority of them were born in the Molenbeek district or spent a long time there. This district is characterised by poverty, migrants and unemployment, which is the highest in Belgium. The capital has many Muslim inhabitants, but their number is quite different in the various districts. The migrants arrived primarily from North African and Middle East countries.

When talking about Brussels, we must not think of the capital in a narrow sense. The city of Brussels consists of 19 districts; it is the most densely inhabited territory of Belgium, directed by 19 mayors and town councils. Brussels is practically a capital-region, which has two parts (as does the whole country): Flanders – with its own language – and French Wallonia. The Brussels region has its own administrative system, with a chaotic network of several institutions, primarily owing to the different languages. If we want to draw a clear picture of Islamic radicalisation in the capital, we must take into consideration this chaotic situation, which can be attributed – among other things – to the fact that the security services cannot cooperate smoothly with the local town councils, because they are also subordinated to the local authorities. In addition, the residences of potential foreign fighters are in different districts and inside different Muslim communities. Most of them live in the old, former industrial, impoverished, mainly Muslim-populated north-western areas.

As in France, the integration level of Muslims is very low. In effect, the Muslims from Molenbeek have only a very small chance of working their way out of their situation. Young Muslims are very often coping with an identity crisis. These circumstances make the youth really attractive to the charismatic recruiters. Among the Molenbeek recruiters, Khalid Zerkani (“Papa Noel”), who guided the largest recruitment network, was well-known throughout Europe. He is of Moroccan nationality; he arrived in Brussels in 2002 and first of all made an intensive research among the young Muslims with a criminal record. He had an easy job, as he looked for those young men who could not insert themselves into society, and he was able to convince them that what they did or committed (even their criminal acts) were morally right and in harmony with Islamic ideology, because they had done something against the infidel Belgians. The money gained from smaller crimes was used to buy air tickets. Of the 300 recruited Belgian Muslims, at least 45 belonged to Zerkani’s recruiting network (Van-Ostaeyen, 2016). However, the number of his group was probably higher and considerably more dangerous than officially reported. It is enough if I mention only one of its members, Abdelhamid Abaaoud, a co-organiser of the 2015 Parisian and the 2016 Brussels terrorist attacks. Salah Abdeslam and Najim Laachraoui, who are believed to have produced the bombs for the attack on Brussels airport, also belonged to this group. Zerkani was finally arrested by the Belgian authorities for his recruiting and radical activities. During the ensuing investigations it turned out that of the suspected terrorists, at least 14 people were from the Molenbeek-cell, 11 of them had Moroccan origin, and all had a criminal record.

It is important to note that the terrorists are very often friends or personally know each other. The make-up of the Belgian cell showed that terrorist groups employ people who know each other, rather than outsiders.

Belgian Muslim fighters arrived at the operational area from the whole country, but most of them came from the Islamic communities concentrated along the Brussels-Antwerp axis. Besides this concentrated area, there are also other “contaminated” territories; the largest is the region of Liège-Verviers. Liège is the fifth largest town in Belgium; if we consider the number of its Muslim inhabitants, it is among the 10 largest towns. From our topic’s standpoint, Charleroi, Genk, Namur and Ghent (and their surrounding areas) are also important places. This information indicates that it would be a mistake to concentrate our attention only on Brussels and its Molenbeek district.

When examining the Brussels-Antwerp axis, we must not ignore the fact that it was in this area that the neo-Salafist group of Belgium, Sharia4Belgium, was established. We must also take into consideration that this group was formed from the British al-Muhajiroun and Islam4UK movements; the well-known missionaries Omar Bakri Muhammad and Anjem Choudary participated in the setting up of these movements (see later in the British section). These organisations were created to make the rights of Muslims acknowledged, and to convert non-religious Muslims. They called on Muslims to demonstrate rebellious behaviour against the ban on headscarves, through which the organisations obtained many Muslim sympathisers.

Sharia4Belgium – in addition to its British sponsors – has built up close relations with like-minded foreign organisations, e.g. with Millatu Ibrahim in Germany, Forcane Alizza in France, and Sharia4Holland. When these organisations established their international relations, the authorities evaluated them as a kind of rebel group, rather than as a security risk. Later on, when these organisations took “too decisive” steps, the Belgian authorities arrested their leader, Fouad Belkacem, which, however, resulted in an irreversible radicalisation of their followers. When legal, open activity of the organisations was banned, the Syrian crisis offered them new opportunities for their activities, and many Islamists began travelling to Syria as foreign fighters. Sharia4Belgium sent 80 warriors to Syria. A court decision put the group on the list of terrorist organisations (Torfs, 2015).

Without going into detail, I would like to emphasise that – from the standpoint of the spread of Muslim extremism – the Belgian regions can be divided into sub-regions and towns. Alongside the already mentioned Brussels-Antwerp axis, within Mechelen and Vilvoord there are at least 13 active groups. However it is a special feature of this territory that no foreign fighters went from here to Syria (Eriksson, 2016).

We must be very cautious when evaluating the assumption which decidedly asserts that radical extremists come from among poor people. By contrast, there are terrorists who do not conform to this assertion. For example, if we analyse the case of Abdelhamid Abaaoud, who participated in the Paris attempt, and who was the grandson of a Moroccan migrant arriving in Belgium as a miner, we can see that his father established a successful, profitable textile business and sent his oldest son to an elite school to enable him to take over the direction of the textile shop later (Van Vlierden, 2015). In pursuing the house search, the police realised that this terrorist lived under very good financial circumstances in his villa, which even had a swimming pool. This also supports my view that we cannot treat everything alike, and that generalisation is a big mistake.

The European data show that 90% of foreign fighters come from larger towns and their surrounding areas (Van Ginkel and Entenmann, 2016). However, with regard to Liège and its vicinity, the case is different. It is rather the “traditions” that have a dominant role there, given the fact that this area had the biggest lignite quarry, which in the 1960s attracted many Moroccan and Turkish migrant workers; this accounts for the large Muslim community.

## 2.6 France

France has at least 100 neighbourhoods as bad as Belgium’s jihadi hotspot of Molenbeek (MailOnline 2016). The biggest hotspot for jihadis is the French Riviera, where some immigrants try to replace French law with their own Islamic rules. Dozens of people have left from Nice to join the Islamic State. The population of immigrants is growing; many of them are from the second or third generation from the Muslim countries of North Africa, and there is rising concern that they refuse to assimilate. Many people in France believe that the real reason Nice has become a jihadist hotspot is because it is a symbol of decadent and fun-loving western lifestyles.

During the investigations after the terror attacks in Belgium and in France, it came to light that networks uncovered in Belgium interacted and cooperated with their counterparts in other European countries such as France, the Netherlands and the UK, as well as with terrorist groups located in conflict zones such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Syria and Yemen (Nesser, 2015).

According to French intelligence services, 690 French nationals are currently (November 2017) fighting in Iraq and Syria. Of these, 295 are women. Around 28 French jihadist fighters are minors under the age of 15. An estimated 400 children have either been born into French jihadist families in Iraq and Syria, or have been brought to these countries by their parents. A total of 398 French nationals have so far returned from the jihadist hotspots, and all of them have been placed under formal investigation. Of these, 260 are currently in pre-trial detention, and 138 are under judicial supervision, meaning they must regularly report to the authorities (Molins, 2017).

## 2.7 Great Britain

European jihadist ideology first arrived in Great Britain even before 9/11. Osama bin Laden and his deputies operated numerous organisations in Europe in order to recruit followers and raise funds for terrorist groups. The European migration laws framed in the 1990s made it possible for imams persecuted in their own countries to come to Europe (Stewart, 2016). Great Britain was in the vanguard of this process. By this mistaken step, the British brought many radical imams to Europe, but later they tried to get rid of them by framing new laws and regulations, including immediate expulsions. One such prominent radical figure was (before 9/11) the Egyptian Abu Hamza al-Masri, who moved in London in 1979 as an Afghan jihadist leader. He came to London after his Afghan activity and became the imam of the largest mosque, which was situated in Finsbury Park. This mosque created a relationship between al-Qaida and the people recruited in London. Another charismatic leader was Omar Bakri Muhammad, who came from Syria in 1980 and immediately received asylum in England (Griffin, 2014). Today, such mistakes are hard to believe, but at that time the British authorities were naive enough to grant political asylum to nearly everybody who was supposed to be persecuted in their own country. Bakri had a “pupil”, Anjem Choudary, who by 2015 had become the most influential ISIS recruiter, and had a significant role in sending 750 British fighters to Iraq and Syria (Anthony, 2014). He was a permanent “actor” in the public media, thus obtaining great popularity among young Muslims.

Similarly to other European states, Great Britain has been facing a serious security risk: the return of ISIS foreign fighters. At the beginning, despite the activity of radical imams, the ultraconservative radical school did not spread in England. That was the case until 1988, when Salmon Rushdie published his book “Diabolic Poems”. The government of Margaret Thatcher – despite the requests of moderate Muslims – did not ban the book, referring to freedom of speech. This encouraged the radicals, who began propagating the idea that the British and the despot Asian Muslims were enemies of Islam and had formed an alliance against Islam. They harshly criticised the British government for its attitude during the Gulf War and for its failure to send troops – during the Balkan war – to Bosnia in defence of Bosnian Muslims. They also condemned the British policy pursued in the wake of 9/11, especially the counter-terrorist cooperation of Great Britain with the USA.

Between 2000 and 2015, the British government adopted numerous resolutions on the fight against terrorism. It extended the police’s sphere of action and made it a punishable offence even to have documents that seemed to pose a threat to security in one’s possession. The Muslim community interpreted these anti-terrorist measures as intended to ostracise and marginalise Muslims, and violate their religious rights. Many Muslims in England are now susceptible to ISIS ideas, not only in London, but also, and especially, in Birmingham and Bradford. British Muslims are from many countries, so their organisations are very heterogeneous. For this reason ISIS concentrates on “the common denominator” – the dissatisfaction of Muslim youth – during its recruitment campaigns.

Radicalisation in Great Britain, based mainly on grievances, is the result of a long historic process and has today been influenced to a great extent by the activities of ISIS, the wars and conflicts in the Muslim world, and the foreign fighters who are returning to the country. We can certainly state that the British government programmes designed to tackle radicalisation and terrorism have not yet produced the expected results.

## 2.8 The Western Balkans

The Western Balkans has been considered the home of Islamic extremists for a long time, and it is not accidental that 330 of the 850 people who travelled to the operational areas from the region were Bosnians. Just as in Chechnya, Bosnia constituted a concentration area for foreign fighters, and they arrived in Bosnia, just like Chechnya, to participate in the war on the side of their Muslim brothers. It is only natural that the fighters brought along with them the Salafist ideology. However, in 2010-2011, security forces began expelling the jihadist groups from the capital, which caused the extremists to withdraw to the small northern settlements, where they enjoyed popular support. The withdrawn and somewhat dispirited and dispersed Muslims were encouraged and driven together by the imam Husein “Bilal” Bosnić, who later claimed for himself even the role of supervising the practice of Muslim religious rights in Bosnia. With the emergence of ISIS, Bosnia has increasingly become a recruiting base. The principal motivations were the high level of unemployment, and the fact that the young people had no promising perspective at all. Bosnić was arrested in 2014 and sentenced in 2015 to seven years’ imprisonment for having disseminated jihadist ideas. Nevertheless, the relationship between the Bosnian jihadists and ISIS has remained effectively active, and the country continues to be a transit place for foreign fighters.

Some researchers do not agree with the opinion that there are jihadist hotbeds in the Western Balkans. According to Florian Qehaja, (Director of the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies), no jihadist hotbeds or conservative Islam nets are in existence in the Western Balkans today. Although there are some people supporting Islamist ideology in the north-eastern part of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), south-eastern Kosovo, north-western Macedonia and south-western Serbia, there is no one place where the Islamists are concentrated. The followers of conservative Islam are present in different numbers in these places. Among those Muslims who practise their religion, three groups can be distinguished: the first group is unprejudiced (liberal – most Muslims belong to this group); the second is non-violent conservative, and the third is violent conservative. The difference between these last two groups is only that one of them uses violence, while the other does not. In BiH, there are two conservative Islamist centres: Gornje Maoce and Osve. It is these two settlements that “sent” the most foreign fighters to Iraq. Similar settlements include Zenica-Doboj, Tuzla, Sarajevo and Una-Sana. The recruitment of fighters is pursued mainly on the internet.

The number of mosques in Skopje (Macedonia) is higher than experts had previously determined. From here, 146 people went to Syria to fight. It was difficult for the authorities to make a distinction between the Macedonian and the Kosovo Muslims, owing to their family and friendly relationships. In Kosovo, Macedonia and Serbia, moderate and radical citizens blend together intensively. With regard to the radicals, I just wish to mention the following important settlements: Kacanik (Kosovo), Pogradec (Albania), and Sijenica (Serbia). These are the places where the most atrocities happened, and from where the most fighters went to Syria and Iraq.

To sum up, we can state that the followers of conservative and extremist Islam endanger the secular system by labelling normal, moderate religious people as apostates. Many radical people are organised in small groups, in a heterogeneous environment, under the subordination of a radical imam. The rate of recruitment inside the conservative Muslim population is 10-30%, but it has not been shown yet that all of the recruited men really left for the operational area.

### **Conclusion and recom- mendations**

The main catalysts of radicalism are: poverty, unemployment, lack of opportunity, uncertain prospective, juvenile delinquency, drugs, political and economic marginalisation, and last but not least, the ideological impacts. All these can strengthen and overlap each other, can prevail differently in various environments, and can create fertile soil for radicalism. In order to efficiently face radicalism, it is necessary for us to identify and treat its roots and study its history, as well as its connections and internal elements, in accordance with the given, concrete environments where radicalism has appeared. Historical analyses can creatively contribute to clarifying its causes, and in this way, we can also see the differences between the radicalism witnessed in the 1960s and today. According to Olivier Roy, already mentioned above, we must disassociate ourselves from false or mistaken viewpoints. Such a false viewpoint is, for example, that young Muslims or the religion of Islam itself cannot be integrated into western society or even into the current, modern world system. It is a similarly mistaken standpoint inherited from the colonial era that we must exclude Muslims from western societies, but – at the same time – we cannot say either that the intervention of the West, for example in the Middle East, is the direct cause of jihadism. In reality, these are not the real causes of the violent, militant behaviour demonstrated by young Muslims in Europe (Roy, 2015).

Today's jihadism is the third wave of jihadism, pursued by the second and third generations of western Muslim youth. It is about three closely linked events – effectively about a continuous stream. The first was the 2004 revolt in France, which resulted in a conflict between third generation Muslims and the French government. The second took place in 2005, provoked by the call of Abu Musab al Sui for a global Muslim resistance; while the third consisted of the communication and recruitment process on the internet and YouTube.

The examples I have described show that, with regard to jihadist recruitment, there are differences between countries, regions and even towns or districts. We must collect concrete information on all of these if we want to elaborate counter-activity. We must identify, in each case and place, the specific grievances and complaints. These concrete facts may be more important than the general causes (e.g. unemployment, poverty or wrong governmental policy). I fully recognise and admit the significance of these general causes, but these in themselves do not necessarily lead to radicalisation. It is instrumental for the competent authorities to take into consideration the concrete factors, causes and grievances, because in this way they can become capable of initiating an effective “counter-recruitment” programme, making the work of Islamist recruiters much more difficult.

There are now (in 2018) at least 5,600 citizens or residents from 33 countries who have returned home. Added to the unknown numbers from other countries and to the so-called “home grown” terrorists, this represents a huge challenge for security and law enforcement entities (Barrett, R., 2017). In implementing this programme, the authorities must contact and continuously maintain relations with the Muslim social strata that are against radicalism. They must also permanently counterbalance the strong media propaganda pursued by ISIS.

Through the examples I have mentioned in this study, I have shown that the Islamist recruiters (e.g. in Molenbeek and the remote villages of Bosnia or even in Great Britain) are very popular, and they have purposefully built up a strong background network for their activities. They continuously rely on the already recruited Islamists. It is naturally very difficult for the authorities to penetrate the Islamic communities, generally divided into small closed groups, created on the basis of strong family and friend relationships. In sum, they must “attack” and deny exactly those arguments that are used by the recruiters.

It may be an important recommendation that in the fight against radicalism we must avoid any political marginalisation. The measures taken by the counter-terrorist, security or military organisations cannot be carried out at the expense of the political dimension (International Crisis Group 2016). Exaggerated military actions can trigger further radicalisation not only in the Middle East, but in Europe as well. The jihadist, radical hotbeds in the Middle East are the symptoms of current instability rather than its causes. The appearance of jihadist groups raises the need not only for security, but for a political solution as well.

I would also like to emphasise the importance of prevention in a general sense. We must prevent in some way the formation of such close communities in which foreign radicals can have a role.

Last but not least, we would need a well-functioning, comprehensive European counter-radicalisation strategy, which could also include a de-radicalisation programme.

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