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JIHADIST HOTBEDS AS POSSIBLE STARTING POINTS OF TERRORISM¹

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 presenting the relevant cases in some important countries. Reducing this topic only to some concrete countries is important because the causes of radicalism and jihadism are different and from time to time can change not only in a region, but in a single country as well. Radicalism and jihadism are in close connection with crisis areas. Besides the analysis of this topic, the study touches upon also the proposals to handle and solve this problem.

KEYWORDS: terrorism, jihadism, radicalism, foreign fighters, Middle East, Europe

INTRODUCTION

The terror-wave hitting the West in 2016 and 2017 had a significant impact on the elections and the policy of governments (e.g. The Netherlands, France and Germany). The causes that trigger the terrorist actions have not ceased to exist at all, and terrorists will certainly continue their activities in Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Yemen and Nigeria. This will entail further migration waves, and force many citizens to leave their home (IDPs – internally displaced persons). The terrorist organization – named as ISIS or DAESH – has proved its strong operative capability in Europe, and its members will remain active in Iraq, Syria, and in other countries as well for several years. This may modify the policy of governments in 2017 and ‘18 and not only in the countries where elections will be held.²

MIGRATION

The civil war will have been raging in Syria for eight years in March 2018. This devastating conflict has been reducing the country to ruins, deteriorating Syria’s relations with its neighbors, increasing the regional influence of Russia and Iran, and in addition, has severely tested the peacekeeping capability of the United Nations. As we could see in Afghanistan, if the combat activities come to an end, one combating side autonomously declares itself winner, nevertheless, the fighting or the revolt will continue. I am of the view that we have little chance to avoid such a scenario in Iraq and Syria.

¹ Revised English translation of Kis-Benedek, J. “Dzsihadista fészkek, mint a terrorizmus lehetséges kiindulópontjai”. *Hadtudomány* 27/1-2. 2017. 96–113.

² “TSG IntelBrief: North Africa’s Export-Import of Terror”. The Soufan Group. 23 February 2015. <http://www.soufangroup.com/tsg-intelbrief-north-africas-export-import-of-terror/>, Accessed on 2 January 2017.

Europe will have to cope with migration in 2018 too. 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 tackling of the migration crisis represents a political trump card in the hands of European politicians, they cannot afford to neglect it. Even the sporadic terrorist attacks can exercise a very negative effect on the political situation, let alone an eventual significant terrorist attempt.

After the appearance of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, many foreign fighters arrived from several countries. It is these fighters that constitute the core of the organization, in terms of combating personnel. They came mainly from Tunisia, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Belgium, France, Great Britannia and Russia (primarily from Chechnya and Dagestan). Researches pursued during the past 2-3 years proved that part of terrorist fighters left their homes and moved into another area only within their own country, and another part of them went to a foreign state.³ Thus, we can make a difference between local and regional terrorist hotbeds. These hotbeds often have different features, but they have also 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 was talking about Muslim ghettos that offer places for extremist hotbeds and bases, where unemployment is soaring, where policemen dare not enter, and radical orators and activists recruit future terrorists. This issue is studied primarily by the Soufani Group. It was Ali Soufani and Daniel Schoenfeld, who clearly proved that there are such hotbeds, nets inside the regions and settlements where ISIS can easily recruit fighters. However, the relevant studies also point out that – despite the intensive radicalization – the overwhelming part of Muslim citizens have not been radicalized yet and are not inclined to do so, even if they live 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, we could witness it to a smaller extent in the past as well. Between 1980 and 2011, we could hear that there were about 10,000-30,000 foreign fighters in the Muslim countries.⁴ According to US intelligence sources, in 2015 foreign fighters arrived in Syria and Iraq from more than 100 countries, mainly from Muslim states.⁵ They were immediately involved in combat activities. 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 – according to the Soufan Group – 27,000-31,000 terrorists had come from 84 states.⁶ These data are identical with those published by the Americans. However, the number of new fighters in Syria and Iraq drastically diminished, thanks – among others – to the relevant

³ Besenyó J. “The Islamic State and its human trafficking practice”. *Strategic Impact* 60/3. 2016. 15–21. http://cssas.unap.ro/en/pdf_periodicals/si60.swf, Accessed on 2 January 2017.

⁴ Hegghammer, T. “The Rise of Muslim Foreign Fighters. Islam and the Globalization of Jihad”. *International Security* 35/3. 2010. 53–94. http://www.mitpressjournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1162/ISEC_a_00023, Accessed on 2 January 2017.

⁵ “Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq”. The Soufan Group. December 2015. http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf, Accessed on 30 December 2016.

⁶ Barrett, R. “Foreign Fighters in Syria”. The Soufan Group. June 2, 2014. <http://soufangroup.com/foreign-fighters-in-syria/>, Accessed on 30 December 2016.

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 country for extremist fighters.⁷

As I mentioned above, most foreign fighters were from North Africa and the Middle East, but for us it is necessary to note that about 5,000 of them arrived from Europe. This number does not represent 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 is talking about 7,000 persons. From the Southeast Asian countries came 900, while from the Balkans 500 foreign fighters.

We would not be precise enough if we failed to clearly identify the following: inside a given country which are the towns, and inside the towns which are the districts or areas where jihadist hotbeds have emerged. In general, these hotbeds had come 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 had been jihadist nests for a long time, which provided fighters for conflicts among Muslim states.

Talking about the concrete countries, it is worth mentioning that out of the 5,000 European foreign fighters, 3,700 persons came from four countries only. It is Molenbeek District of Brussels, which “brought up” most terrorists and got into the focus of international attention, concerning the attacks committed in Paris and Brussels. If we analyze the recruitment places, we can notice that there are significant differences on the basis of social, ethnic, economic, and demographic circumstances of the given town or district. The motivations, grievances and several problems of a group or an individual can play a significant role in radicalization, and can induce persons to join a terrorist organization. Although ISIS and the Assad regime represent a strong attracting force, the recruits’ personal problems are more important motivations. We can notice a strengthening trend, according to which the presentation of personal examples and activities of charismatic leaders represents 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 relatively easy to recruit. It is necessary to mention that the closed Muslim communities are especially preferred hunting-fields for recruiters.

COUNTRIES MOST HIT BY RADICALISM

In this part, I try to analyse those countries and areas inside the countries that have a great impact on radicalization.

Tunisia

It was Tunisia that “sent” most fighters to Iraq and Syria, and later to Libya as well. The official data are about 6,000, while the non-official ones talk about 7,000 foreign fighters. If we consider that the country has 11 million inhabitants, it is rather surprising that out of every one thousand Tunisians, 55 persons are followers of extremist organizations.

⁷ Strobel, W. and Stewart, Ph. “U.S. military softens claims on drop in Islamic State’s foreign fighters”. Reuters. 28 Apr 2016. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mideast-crisis-recruiting-idUSKCN0XP33K>, Accessed on 30 December 2016.

Nearly 1,500 fighters went to the Libyan ISIS and the al-Qaeda in Islam Maghreb and other radical groups.⁸ According to some estimates, half of the foreign fighters are Tunisian citizens.

At some time, the majority of Arabs fighting in Afghanistan against the Soviets were Tunisians, thus 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 war in the Balkans, Tunisian jihadists fought also in Bosnia against the Serbs. Tunisian Ex-President Ben Ali took very serious measures against the radicals. However, this served only for strengthening radicalism. At the beginning of the Arab revolution, many extremists escaped from prisons, increasing the number of radicals. Among the reasons for radicalization, marginalization is worth mentioning, due partially to decentralization. After the revolution, an intensive political activity took place even outside the capital, which had not been the case before. Among the main reasons for radicalization were social exclusion and discrimination, rather than economic hardships. Compared to other fighters coming from different countries, a relatively large part of the Tunisian fighters were highly educated and graduated from high schools. This played a significant role in electing the ISIS leadership from among Tunisian extremists. In light of this, I think the view of the famous French professor Olivier Roy is quite understandable, 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 marginalization of the youth. 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 led them to take another course, different from traditional Islam.⁹ 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 is this that led to a schism.¹⁰ I can accept both views, because they do not exclude each other, and this can be proved in several fields. In this connection, we cannot ignore the fact that in Europe the period of radicalization has been ever shorter.

It is important to note that the Tunisian foreign fighters do not originate from Tunisia as a whole, but from certain “contaminated” territories inside the country. Such a territory e.g. is the town of Ben Guardane, situated close to the Libyan border, which has been the center of smuggling networks and illegal arms dealers for years. At the same time, it seems to be the largest recruitment place for foreign fighters. All of the perpetrators of Tunisian terrorist attacks (Bardo Museum, Sousse Resort) lived in this town. If we examine the concrete causes, we can see that Ben Guardane can be found in the southern part of Tunisia, far from the northern touristic places; its development is extremely neglected by the government, it is characterized by poverty and unemployment; its citizens are practically isolated from Tunisian society.

⁸ Packer, G. “Exporting Jihad. The Arab Spring has given Tunisians the freedom to act on their unhappiness”. *The New Yorker*, 28 March 2016. <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/03/28/tunisia-and-the-fall-after-the-arab-spring>, Accessed on 2 January 2017.

⁹ Roy, O. “Le djihadisme est une révolte générationnelle et nihiliste”. *Le Monde*, 24 Nov 2015. http://www.lemonde.fr/idees/article/2015/11/24/le-djihadisme-une-revolte-generationnelle-et-nihiliste_4815992_3232.html, Accessed on 24 June 2016.

¹⁰ Dumas, C. “Gilles Kepel: <<Il faut écouter les prêches du vendredi>>”. *Libération*, 14 April 2016. http://www.liberation.fr/debats/2016/04/14/gilles-kepel-il-faut-ecouterles-preches-du-vendredi_1446225, Accessed on 8 May 2016.

Kasserine, situated alongside the Algerian border is another jihadist hotbed in Tunisia. The nearby border ensures for jihadists to maintain close contacts with their Algerian partners, and the mountainous Kabylia area offers excellent possibility for concealment. The Tunisian hotbed is not a new one, because the Tunisians actively participated in the Afghan war in the '80s. Today the main targets of recruitment are young men who are generally unemployed; in addition, recruiting activists have no difficulty in penetrating into the young Muslim communities.

The third known hotbed is Bizerte, located in the northern part of the country. Among the ISIS foreign fighters, about 11% is from Bizerte.¹¹ The inner core of radical groups consists primarily of those extremists who served their sentence in prisons before the 2011 revolution and later escaped to participate in the revolution.

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 have to take into consideration also the fact that Libya not only "sends", but also "receives" extremist fighters. ISIS' Libyan centre is established in the town of Sirte, which was the native town of Qaddafi and the seat of his tribe.¹² ISIS has integrated in its ranks many soldiers of Qaddafi, similarly to Iraq, which "enlisted" Baath Party members.

Libya's modern history is determined by tribal relations, nationalism, and the possession of oil. When there was some change in religious field, it always happened in secrecy. From religious standpoint, Libya has always been rather homogeneous, with a strong Sunni denomination. As tribal relations are regarded, today it is necessary for us to judge them critically because the Libyan tribal system is no longer an old, traditional social structure, but rather some unity of social organizations. Religious radicalism appeared after the removal of Qaddafi, because this type of radicalism had been persecuted by the dictator. This can explain the fact that radical religious groups had pursued their activity mainly outside Libya previously. The relations between local inhabitants and ISIS were very contradictory. Most of them did not support the ISIS fighters, because they regarded them as Qaddafi's returning soldiers.

In 2014 ISIS got a foothold first in Derna, from where the foreign fighters mainly came. The town's extremists had a certain role both in the Afghan and the Iraqi wars. When experts analyzed al-Qaeda's activity in Iraq, it turned out that most of the suicide bombers had come from Libya, more exactly from Derna. The radicalization of this town's extremists was due also to the fact that in the '80s and '90s Qaddafi rigorously prohibited the activity of Islam extremists.

Egypt

According to the Egyptian government, 600 citizens joined ISIS, but foreign sources are talking about 1,000 men. After the ousting of President Mubarak, Islamist groups continuously

¹¹ "TSG IntelBrief: North Africa's Export-Import of Terror".

¹² "TSG IntelBrief: The Islamic State's Expansion Strategy in Libya". The Soufan Group. 3 March 2016. <http://www.soufangroup.com/tsg-intelbrief-the-islamic-states-expansion-strategy-in-libya/>, Accessed on 2 January 2017.

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 the organization consists of Bedouin tribes, which have been involved in smuggling for years. Their leader, Abu Osama al Masri made an oath of loyalty to Abu Bakr al Bagdadi, the leader of ISIS. The motive of recruitment is the strong dissatisfaction with the government's policy in this case too. The inhabitants in the Sinai Peninsula have not received any governmental support for developing their economy and infrastructure. The Sinai organization of ISIS, Wilayat Sinai, carried out (in 2015, 2016 and 2017) many terrorist attacks against police stations and military checkpoints. The largest attacks took place in July 2015, when the terrorists killed altogether 70 Egyptian soldiers, policemen, and health servants arriving at the scene. The deadliest attack took place in November 2017, when more than 305 people were killed after militants detonated bombs and opened fire in a crowded mosque in the Sinai Peninsula.¹³ The Egyptian authorities are unlikely to be able to completely eliminate the terrorist organization, which seems to be strengthening also today.

The basis of radicalization is the hostile relationship between the Bedouins and the Egyptian government, which considers them as collaborators of Israel, qualifying them as "the fifth column". Many Bedouins have not got 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 black economy and market; including man- and drug-trafficking, and illegal arms trade. The Bedouin radicalization has been promoted by the recruitment activity of extremists who arrived from the Gaza Strip. First they recruited Bedouin fighters, and later on involved them in the leadership of some militant groups or inserted some of them into the Egyptian security organizations. Thus they were able to conduct 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, but a great number of fighters arrived also from Libya.

After the removal of President Morsi in 2013, a new "chapter" began in the life of radical organizations. They judged the ousting of Morsi completely illegal; thus they considered their activities as justified and legitimate. Although the two big terrorist organizations (Ansar Bayt al-Makdis and Wilayat Sinai), had some internal debates, they continued strengthening their ranks. Today we can confidently state that Wilayat Sinai constitutes a part of ISIS's global strategy and can even become its successor organization. It is true that Egypt and Israel make efforts to develop their anti-terrorist cooperation, which, however, cannot be considered to be really effective at all.

The Caucasus and the Former Soviet Republics

The North Caucasus has always been the citadel of Islam extremists and since the beginning of the Syrian civil war it has also been serving as a recruitment base. Political Islam and the nationalist feelings triggered two wars in Chechnya against Russia; therefore Chechnya represented a strong attractive force for foreign fighters. Local differences also gave an impulse to radicalization. In 2007, the jihadists established the Islamic Caucasus Emirate

¹³ Dahir, A. L. "State neglect and poverty in Egypt's Sinai Peninsula led to the nation's deadliest terror attack". Quartz. 25 November 2017. <https://qz.com/1138020/egypt-mosque-attack-isis-terrorists-suspected-in-sinai-peninsula-as-egypt-fails-to-curb-insurgency/>, Accessed on 7 January 2018.

with the aim to create an independent emirate against Russia and its supporters.¹⁴ It was this emirate that sent many fighters to Syria and Iraq or to Caucasus Wilayat. This region has been a militant territory for a long time. In North-Eastern Georgia, the Pankisi Gorge constitutes also a hotbed for radical Islam organizations. During the Chechen war, it served as a base for jihadists to support the war.

In the North Caucasus, it is Dagestan that is the most problematic country among the former Soviet republics. Dagestan has been “infected” by different clan systems, religious hostilities, crimes and Islam radicalism. In the beginning, it was Sufi Islam that prevailed, but in the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Salafists gained ground. In 1999 the Russian armed forces prevented the establishment of the Dagestan Islamic Republic, but the extremists have not given up setting up an emirate yet. We can confirm that the decisive actions of the Russian armed forces curbed the radical endeavors, which is demonstrated by killing of the two significant leaders of the emirates (Abu Mukhamad and Abu Usman). At the same time, we cannot 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 organizations is in close connection with ISIS’ activities in Iraq and Syria. The future of ISIS will have a significant impact on the activity of radical forces in the North Caucasus.

After the assassination of the Russian ambassador accredited to Ankara, the Russian authorities intensified 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 the Russian-Turkish relations to tangibly deteriorate. Like in the case of Europe, foreign fighters make efforts to return to Russia as well, but the Russian law enforcement agencies are making their best to prevent extremists from “infecting” the country again.

Belgium

All of the Belgian foreign fighters who joined ISIS are from Brussels.¹⁵ The majority of them was either born in Molenbeek District or spent a long time there. The district is characterized 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 Eastern countries.

If we talk about Brussels, we should not think of the capital in a narrow sense of the word. The city of Brussels consists of 19 districts; it is the most densely inhabited territory of Belgium, managed by 19 mayors and town councils. Brussels is practically a capital-region, which has two parts (as the whole country); Flanders – with its own language – and French Wallonia. Brussels’ region has its own administrative system with a chaotic network of several institutions, owing primarily to the different languages. If we want to draw a clear picture of Islam radicalization in the capital, we have to take into consideration this chaotic situation, which can be attributed – among others – also to the fact that the security services cannot smoothly cooperate with the local town councils, because they are subordinated also

¹⁴ “Mapping Militant Organizations: Caucasus Emirate”. Stanford University. 11 April 2014. <http://web.stanford.edu/group/mappingmilitants/cgi-bin/groups/view/255>, Accessed on 2 January 2017.

¹⁵ Higgins, A. and De Freytas-Tamura, K. “A Brussels Mentor Who Taught ‘Gangster Islam’ to the Young and Angry”. *The New York Times*, 11 April 2016. <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/04/12/world/europe/a-brussels-mentor-who-taught-gangster-islam-to-the-young-and-angry.html>, Accessed on 2 January 2017.

to local the authorities. In addition, the residences of future 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. The Muslims of Molenbeek practically have only very little chance to work their way to the top. Young Muslims very often cope with identity crisis. The above circumstances make the youth really attractive for charismatic recruiters. Among the Molenbeek recruiters, Khalid Zerkani (“Papa Noel”), who managed the largest recruitment network, was well-known throughout Europe. He is of Moroccan nationality, arrived in Brussels in 2002, and made intensive research work first of all among young Muslims with criminal records. He had an easy job as he looked for those young men who could not integrate into society, and he could convince them that what they had done or committed (even their criminal acts) were morally right and were in harmony with the Islam ideology, because they had done something against Belgian infidels. The money gained through minor crimes was used for buying air tickets. Out of the 300 recruited Belgian Muslims, at least 45 belonged to Zerkani’s recruiting network.¹⁶ However, the strength of his group was probably higher and considerably more dangerous than officially reported. It is enough to mention only one of its members, Abdelhamid Abaaoud, a co-organizer of the 2015 Paris and the 2016 Brussels attacks. Salah Abdeslam and Najim Laachraoui, who were supposed to have produced the bombs for the attack on the Brussels airport, also belonged to this group. Zerkani was finally arrested by the Belgian authorities for his recruiting and radical activities. During the investigations it turned out that from the suspected terrorists at least 14 persons were from the Molenbeek-cell, 11 of them were of Moroccan origin, and all of them had criminal records.

I find it important to note that terrorists are very often friends or personally know each other. It was also the Belgian cell which illustrated that terrorist groups employed familiar people rather than complete outsiders.

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

If we examine the Brussels-Antwerp axis, we cannot forget about the fact that it was this area where the neo-Salafist group of Belgium, the Shariah4Belgium was established. We have to take into consideration that this group was formed from the British al-Muhajiroun and the Islam4UK movements. The well-known missionaries Omar Bakri Muhammad and Anjem Choudary also participated in establishing these movements (see later in the next, British paragraph). These organizations were created to make the rights of Muslims acknowledged, and convert non-religious Muslims. They called on the Muslims to demonstrate a rebellious behavior against the ban on headscarf, by which the organizations obtained many Muslim sympathizers.

¹⁶ Ostaeyen, P. van. “A new statistical update on Belgian fighters in Syria and Iraq”. 2 February 2016. <https://pieter-ervanostaeyen.wordpress.com/2016/02/02/february-2016-a-new-statistical-update-on-belgian-fightersin-syria-and-iraq/>, Accessed on 2 January 2017.

Sharia4Belgium – in addition to British sponsors – has built up close relations with the like-minded foreign organizations, e. g. with the Millatu Ibrahim in Germany, Forsane Alizza in France and Sharia4Holland. When these organizations established their international relations, the authorities evaluated them as some kind of rebels rather than security risk factors. However, later on, when these organizations took “too decisive” steps, the Belgian authorities arrested their leader Fouad Belkacem, which however, resulted in an irreversible radicalization of their followers. When the legal, open activity of the organizations was banned, the Syrian crisis offered them a new possibility for their activities; and many Islamists began travelling to Syria as foreign fighters. Sharia4Belgium alone sent 80 warriors to Syria. The decision of a court put the group on the list of terrorist organizations.¹⁷

Without getting into details, I would like to emphasize that – from the standpoint of the spread of Muslim extremism – the Belgian regions can be divided in sub-regions and towns. Alongside the already mentioned Brussels-Antwerp axis, inside Mechelen and Vilvoorde there are at least 13 active groups. It is a special feature of this territory that no foreign fighters went from here to Syria.¹⁸

We have to be very cautious while evaluating the opinion which decidedly asserts that the radical extremists come from among poor people. There are terrorists who do not conform to this assertion. For example, if we analyze the case of Abdelhamid Abaaoud, who participated in the Paris attack and 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 bequeath him the textile shop later.¹⁹ In pursuing the house search, the police realized that the terrorist lived under very good financial circumstances in his villa with a swimming pool. This also underpins my view that we cannot treat everything alike, and generalization is a big mistake.

The European data prove that 90% of foreign fighters come from major towns or their surrounding areas.²⁰ However, as far as Liège and its vicinity are regarded, the case is different. It is rather the “traditions” that have a dominant role there, given the fact that this area had the greatest lignite quarries, which in the ‘60s attracted many Moroccan and Turkish migrant workers accounting for the large Muslim community.

Great Britain

The European jihadist ideology “attacked” on the first occasion in Great Britain well before 9/11. Osama bin Laden and his lieutenants operated numerous organizations in Europe in order to recruit followers and raise funds for terrorist groups. The European migration laws, framed in the ‘90s, made it possible for the imams persecuted in their countries to come to

¹⁷ Torfs, M. “Former Sharia4Belgium leader Belkacem gets 12 years”. Flandersnews. 11 February 2015. <http://deredactie.be/cm/vrtnieuws.english/News/1.2236417>, Accessed on 8 May 2016.

¹⁸ Eriksson, A. “Mechelen: the Belgian city with no foreign fighters”. Euobserver. 26 April 2016. <https://euobserver.com/beyond-brussels/133185>, Accessed on 8 May 2016.

¹⁹ Vlierden, G. van “Profile: Paris Attack Ringleader Abdelhamid Abaaoud”. *CTC Sentinel* 8/11. 2015. 30–33. <https://www.ctc.usma.edu/posts/profile-paris-attack-ringleader-abdelhamid-abaaoud>, Accessed on 8 May 2016.

²⁰ Ginkel, B. van and Entenmann, E. (Eds.) “The Foreign Fighters Phenomenon in the European Union. Profiles, Threats & Policies”. The Hague: The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2016. <https://icct.nl/publication/report-the-foreign-fighters-phenomenon-in-the-eu-profiles-threats-policies/>, Accessed on 3 August 2016.

Europe.²¹ Great Britain was in the vanguard of this process. By this mistaken step, the British brought many radical imams in Europe, but later they tried to get rid of them by framing new laws and regulations, including immediate expulsions as well. Such a 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 the Finsbury Park. This mosque established relations between al-Qaeda and the persons recruited in London. Another charismatic leader was Omar Bakri Muhammad, who came from Syria in 1980 and immediately received asylum in England.²² 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 his country. Bakri had a “pupil”, Anjem Choudary, who had become the most influential ISIS recruiter by 2015, and had a significant role in sending 750 British fighters to Iraq and Syria.²³ He was a permanent “actor” in public media, thus he obtained 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 “The Satanic Verses”. The government of Margaret Thatcher – despite the request of moderate Muslims – did not ban the book, by reference to the freedom of speech. This encouraged the radicals, who began propagating that the British and the despotic Asian Muslims are enemies of Islam and concluded an alliance against Islam. During the Gulf War they harshly criticized the British government for its attitude and – during the Balkan war – for its failure to send troops to Bosnia in defense 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 approved numerous resolutions on the fight against terrorism. It extended the police’s sphere of action and made punishable even those who had documents that seemed to pose a threat to security. The Muslim community interpreted these anti-terrorist measures as steps intended to ostracize and marginalize Muslims, and violate their religious rights. Many Muslims in Britain are now susceptible to ISIS ideas, not only in London but also in Birmingham and Bradford. The British Muslims are from many countries, thus their organizations are very heterogeneous. Therefore, during its recruitment campaign, ISIS concentrates on “the common dominator”; on the dissatisfaction of Muslim youth.

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

²¹ Stewart, S. “Europe’s Chronic Jihadist Problem”. Stratfor. 5 April 2016. <https://www.stratfor.com/analysis/europes-chronic-jihadist-problem>, Accessed on 2 January 2017.

²² Griffin, A. “Omar Bakri Muhammad: Islamist leader seeks return to UK, after being banned in wake of 7/7 praise”. *Independent*, 29 June 2014. <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/omar-bakri-muhammad-islamist-leader-seeks-return-to-uk-after-being-banned-in-wake-of-7-7-praise-9570963.html>, Accessed on 2 January 2017.

²³ Anthony, A. “Anjem Choudary: the British extremist who backs the caliphate”. *The Guardian*, 7 September 2014. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/07/anjem-choudary-islamic-state-isis>, Accessed on 2 January 2017.

Western Balkans

The Western Balkans has been considered for a long time as home for Islam extremists, and it is no coincidence that 330 out of 850 persons who travelled to the operational areas from the region are Bosnians. Similarly to Chechnya, Bosnia also constituted a concentration area for foreign fighters.²⁴ As it happened in Chechnya, the foreign fighters arrived in Bosnia to participate in the war on the side of their Muslim brothers. It is but natural that the fighters brought the Salafist ideology with them as well. However, in 2010-11, the security forces began repelling the jihadist groups from the capital, which forced the extremists to withdraw to the small northern settlements where they enjoyed popular support. The withdrawn and a bit dispirited and dispersed Muslims were encouraged and driven together by imam Hussein "Bilal" Bosnic, who later even claimed for himself the role to supervise the practice of Muslim religious rights in Bosnia. With the emergence of ISIS, Bosnia became more and more a recruiting base. The principal motivations were; high unemployment level and the fact that young people had no promising perspective at all. In 2014 Bosnic was arrested, and in 2015 he was sentenced to seven years' imprisonment for having disseminated jihadist ideas. Nevertheless, the relations between the Bosnian jihadists and ISIS have remained active in practice, and the country continues to be a transit area for foreign fighters.

Some researchers do not agree with the opinion that there are jihadist hotbeds in the Western Balkans. According to Serbian researcher Florian Qehaja, today no jihadist hotbeds or conservative Islamic nets are in existence in the Western Balkans. Although there are some persons supporting Islamist ideology in the north-eastern part of BiH, in south-eastern Kosovo, north-western Macedonia, and south-western Serbia, there is no one place where Islamists are concentrated. The followers of conservative Islam are present in different numbers in the above places. Among those Muslims who practice their religion we can distinguish three groups: the first group is unprejudiced (liberal – most Muslims belong to this group), the second one is non-violent conservative, and the third group is violent conservative. The only difference between the last two groups is that one of them uses violence while the other does not do so. In BiH there are two conservative Islamist centers: Gornje Maoce and Osve. It is these two settlements that "sent" most foreign fighters to Iraq. Similar settlements are: 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 have previously determined. 146 persons went to Syria to fight there. It represented a difficulty for the authorities to make a distinction between the Macedonian and the Kosovo Muslims, owing to their family and friendly relations. In Kosovo, Macedonia, and Serbia, moderate and radical citizens are intensively blending. As regards radicals, I wish to mention only the following important settlements: Kacanik (Kosovo), Pogradec (Albania), Sijenica (Serbia). These are the places where most atrocities happened and from which most fighters went to Syria and Iraq.

In summary, I can state that the followers of conservative and extremist Islam endanger the secular system by labeling normal, moderately religious people as apostates. Many radicals are organized in small groups, in a heterogeneous environment, under the subordination of a radical imam. The rate of recruitment inside the conservative Muslim population is

²⁴ Besenyó J. "Low-cost attacks, unnoticeable plots? Overview on the economical character of current terrorism". *Strategic Impact* 62/1. 2017. 83–100. <https://www.cceol.com/search/article-detail?id=531307>, Accessed on 2 January 2017.

10-30%, but it has not been proved yet that all of the recruited men did really leave for the area of operations.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The main catalysts of radicalism are: poverty, unemployment, lack of opportunities, uncertain prospective, juvenile delinquency, illegal drugs, political and economic marginalization, and last but not least, ideological impacts. All these factors can strengthen and overlap each other, can prevail differently in different environments, and can create fertile soil for radicalism. In order to efficiently face radicalism, it is necessary for us to identify and treat their roots, study its history, as well as its connections and internal elements, in concert with the given, concrete environments where radicalism has appeared. Its historical analyses can creatively contribute to the clarification of its causes, and in this way we can see also the difference between the radicalism witnessed in the '60s and that of today. According to the already mentioned Olivier Roy, we have to disassociate ourselves from the false or mistaken viewpoints. Such a false viewpoint is e.g. that young Muslims or Islam as a religion in itself cannot be integrated into Western society or even into the current, modern world order. It is a similarly mistaken standpoint inherited from the colonial era that we must exclude Muslims from Western societies, at the same time, however, we cannot say either that the intervention of the West e.g. in the Middle East is the direct cause of jihadism. In reality, these are not the real causes of the violent, militant behavior demonstrated by young Muslims in Europe.²⁵

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, practically 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 event took place in 2005, provoked by the call by Abu Musab al Sui for a global Muslim resistance; while the third one consisted of the communication and recruitment process on the Internet and YouTube.

The examples I described show that as regards the jihadist recruitment, there are differences among countries, regions, and even towns or districts. We have to get concrete information on all of them if we want to elaborate any counteractivity. We have to identify the specific grievances and complaints in each case and place. These concrete facts may be more important than the general causes (e.g. unemployment, poverty or incorrect governmental policy). I fully recognize and admit the significance of these general causes, but they in themselves do not necessary lead to radicalization. Therefore, it is instrumental for the relevant authorities to take into consideration the concrete factors, causes and grievances because this way they may be able of initiating an effective "counter-recruitment" program, making the work of Islamist recruiters much more difficult.

In implementing this program the authorities must contact and continuously maintain relations with those Muslim social strata that are against radicalism. They have to permanently counterbalance ISIS' strong media propaganda as well.

Through the examples mentioned in my study I proved that the Islamist recruiters (e.g. in Molenbeek and the remote villages of Bosnia or even in Great Britain) are very popular, and they had purposefully built a strong background for their work. They continuously rely

²⁵ Roy, O. "What is the driving force behind jihadist terrorism? – A scientific perspective on the causes/circumstances of joining the scene". Bundeskriminalamt. 18 November 2015. <https://www.bka.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/EN/Publications/AutumnConferences/2015/herbsttagung2015Roy.html>, Accessed on 23 May 2016.

on the already recruited Islamists. Naturally, it is very difficult for the authorities to penetrate into Islamic communities, generally divided into small, isolated groups, created on the basis of strong family ties and friendly relations. In summary, the authorities have to “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 have to avoid any political marginalization. The measures taken by counter-terrorist, security or military organizations cannot be carried out at the expense of the political dimension.²⁶ Exaggerated military actions can trigger further radicalization not only in the Middle East but in Europe as well. The jihadists, 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 a security solution, but for a political one as well.

I would like to emphasize also the role of prevention in a general sense. In some way we have to prevent the formation of such extremely closed communities, in which foreign radicals can also have a role.

Last, but not least, we would need a well-functioning, comprehensive, European counter-radicalization strategy which could include a de-radicalization program as well.

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²⁶ International Crisis Group. “Exploiting Disorder: al-Qaeda and the Islamic State”. Alnap. 14 March 2016. <http://www.alnap.org/resource/22222>, Accessed on 2 January 2017.

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