CONNEKT
COUNTRY REPORTS
National Approaches to Extremism

Corinne Torrekens and Daphné de le Vingne (Eds.)

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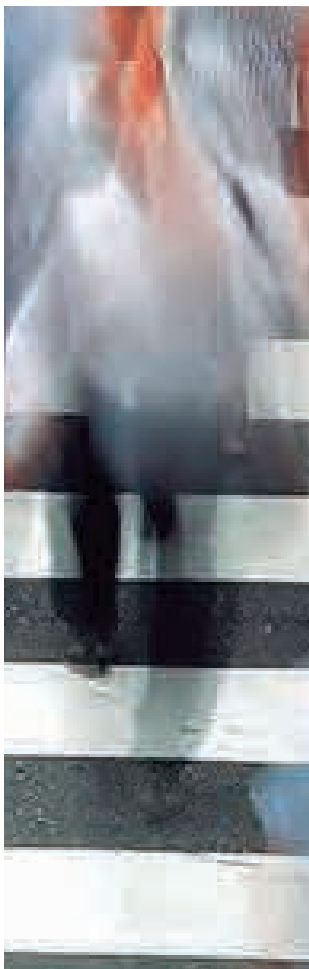

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COUNTRY REPORTS ON NATIONAL APPROACHES TO EXTREMISM
Framing Violent Extremism in the MENA region and the Balkans

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INTRODUCTION

Radicalisation is a controversial social issue that is polymorphic; it is expressed in several different ways and has multiple origins, which do not always align with the theories that have emerged so far. Researchers agree that radicalisation cannot be explained outside a given social context, as its transformation moves individuals to strengthen their ideological beliefs, to develop a polarised position towards those considered antagonistic, and to reinterpret the interactions that are mutually shared. Group dynamics favour this established antagonism but the shift from this position towards the defence of extremist views or violent action may depend on personal backgrounds and trajectories as well as on structural and contextual factors.

Understanding radicalisation as "the process of developing extremist ideologies and beliefs" and violent extremism as "ideologies that oppose a society's core values and principles" (Borum, 2012)*, the project CONNEKT (CONtexts of extremism iN mEna and balKans socieTies) frames these definitions within the context of social collective dynamics. In order to draw a comprehensive picture of radicalisation drivers in Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Bulgaria, the present document will focus first on national structural and contextual approaches and strategies towards radicalisation and violent extremism. This will allow the project to analyse and establish patterns of difference and commonalities between MENA and Balkan countries and also across regions. More prominently, it will shed some light on the impact of the international securitisation paradigm in the regions under study.

The present state of the art account will assess the weight of socio-political drivers in current approaches to radicalisation and violent extremism in the MENA region and the Balkans, particularly towards young people, and will also explore how a socially-rooted approach might fit into the current dominant paradigm of P/CVE in these regions.

The following country reports set out valuable data, figures and information regarding violent extremism in their specific contexts, and provide a brief overview of the main policies, strategies and initiatives regarding P/CVE in each country. Moreover, they also identify the most relevant stakeholders in the field, both as source and target of such past and current visions and actions.

This exercise will allow for the proper mapping of how target countries approach radicalisation and violent extremism and how it is framed in each one, so that the upcoming empirical research on the drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism from a macro, meso and micro level is accurately contextualised. Focusing on the perspective of the youth and on the role of community and civil society actors and particularly women prepares the ground for CONNEKT's upcoming research on community-driven prevention against radicalisation and violent extremism.

* Borum, R. (2012). Radicalisation into Violent Extremism. Journal of Strategic Security, 4(4)

EGYPT

Marco Pinfari, Associate Professor,
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Overview

COUNTRY PROFILE

Government system

Egypt is formally a republic that is self-identified as "Arab" – hence its official denomination as the "Arab Republic of Egypt" (ARE – *Jumhuryah Misr Al-Arabiyah*), which has been in use since 1971. The system of government is semi-presidential, with a directly-elected President serving – according to the latest constitutional amendments passed in 2019 – up to two six-year terms in office. The current President, Abd el-Fattah Al-Sisi, took de facto power after the 2013 coup d'état that deposed the previous President Mohammed Morsi, and was formally elected in 2014. Based on an *ad personam* norm included in the 2019 constitutional amendments, the duration of his current term in office has been extended to 2024, when he will be allowed to run for a third and final six-year term.

After the 2011 revolution, Egypt engaged in a short-lived democratic transition that culminated in several electoral rounds in 2011 and 2012. According to international observers, these elections showed "at least some core elements of electoral democracy" (Kirkpatrick, 2012). By contrast, since the 2013 coup d'état that led to the removal of Mohammed Morsi from power, Egypt has been ruled in an "increasingly authoritarian manner" (Freedom House, 2020). According to the 2020 Freedom in the World report by Freedom House, currently in Egypt:

> [m]eaningful political opposition is virtually non-existent, as expression of dissent can draw criminal prosecution and imprisonment. Civil liberties, including press freedom and freedom of assembly, are tightly restricted. Security forces engage in right abuses with impunity, and physical security is further undermined by terrorist violence centered in the Sinai Peninsula.

Moreover, an official state of emergency was declared in Egypt in April 2017 and has been renewed every three months since. Egypt's emergency law gives sweeping powers to Egyptian authorities to prosecute and detain individuals in breach of established legal procedures and, in several circumstances, to refer them to military rather than civilian courts.

Finally, while the country as a whole is run as a centralised state with no significant authority assigned to its 27 regions or "governorates" (*muhafazat*), the political and military grip of the Egyptian state is significantly stronger in the populated areas of the Nile Valley and of the Delta than in the peripheries. In particular, it is often argued that the Egyptian state has "lost control" over vast parts of the Sinai Peninsula (Horton, 2017: 23) in light of the recurrence of armed attacks and episodes of guerrilla warfare since the early 2000s.

Population

As of May 2020, Egypt's official population is 100.3 million (Central Agency For Public Mobilization and Statistics, 2020),[1] positioning it among the 15 most populated countries in the world. The highly-symbolic 100

[1] Egypt's national statistics authority, responsible for publishing official population count and other relevant demographic and statistical data, is the Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS). https://www.capmas.gov.eg/HomePage.aspx.

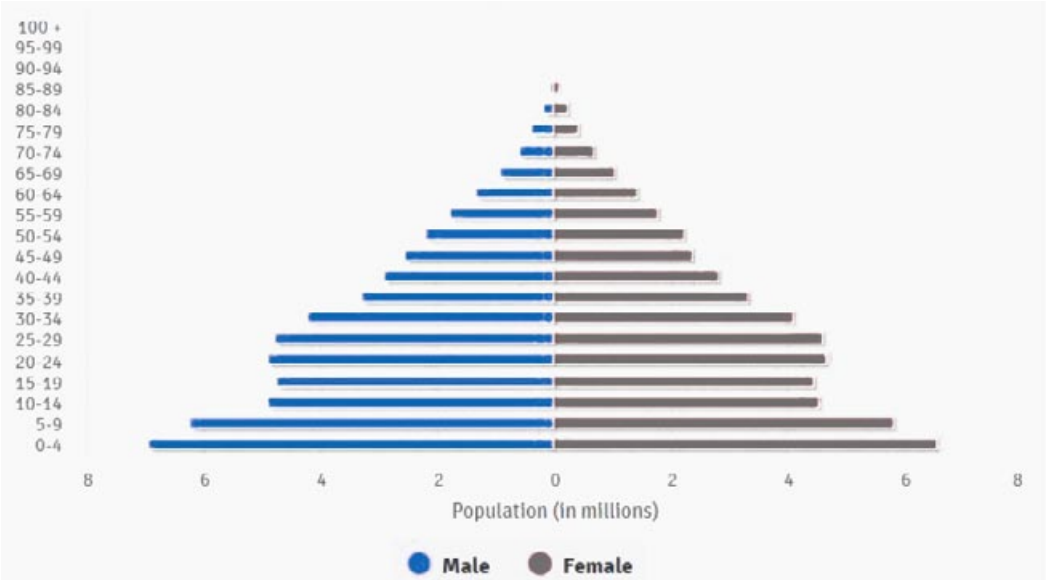
million mark was passed in February 2020, prompting comments from senior policy-makers that "population increase represents the biggest challenge before the [Egyptian] state," which should be approached as an "issue of national security" (Egypt Today, 2020). The estimated annual population growth rate for 2020 is 2.28% a rate that has remained mostly constant since the 1990s. The average fertility rate is 3.29 children born/woman.

Egypt's population pyramid (Figure 1) has a broad base. In 2020, almost exactly one in three Egyptians (33.62%) is younger than 15, and more than half (51.63%) are younger than 25 (CIA, 2020). The relative size of the 0-14 age group (see Figure 2) peaked in the early 1990s – when it amounted to almost 42% of the overall population – and it has marginally but steadily declined since (CIA, 2020: 36). As of 2020, the estimated median age in the country is 24.1 years. In 2014, the median age at first marriage was 20.8 years (BASEERA, 2016), and a mother's mean age at first birth was 22.7 years.

In July 2019, an official report of the Egyptian Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics (CAPMAS) claimed that in 2018 32.5% of Egyptians were living below the poverty line (defined as living with less than USD1.45/day), up from 27.8% in 2015 and 16.7% in 2000 (Associated Press, 2019). The same report also stated that 6.2% were living in extreme poverty (less than USD1/day). The wide-reaching economic reforms prompted by the USD12b IMF loan received by Egypt in 2016 are widely credited for this substantial and sudden increase in the poverty rate.

At the time of the 2013 coup, 55% of internet users were below the age of 24 and 71% of Facebook users were aged between 15 and 29 (Pinfari, 2016: 128). As of 2018, approximately 39 million Egyptians had access to Facebook, approximately 2/3 of whom were male (Figure 3) (Reda, 2018).

FIGURE 1. Egypt's population pyramid, 2020 (CIA, 2020)



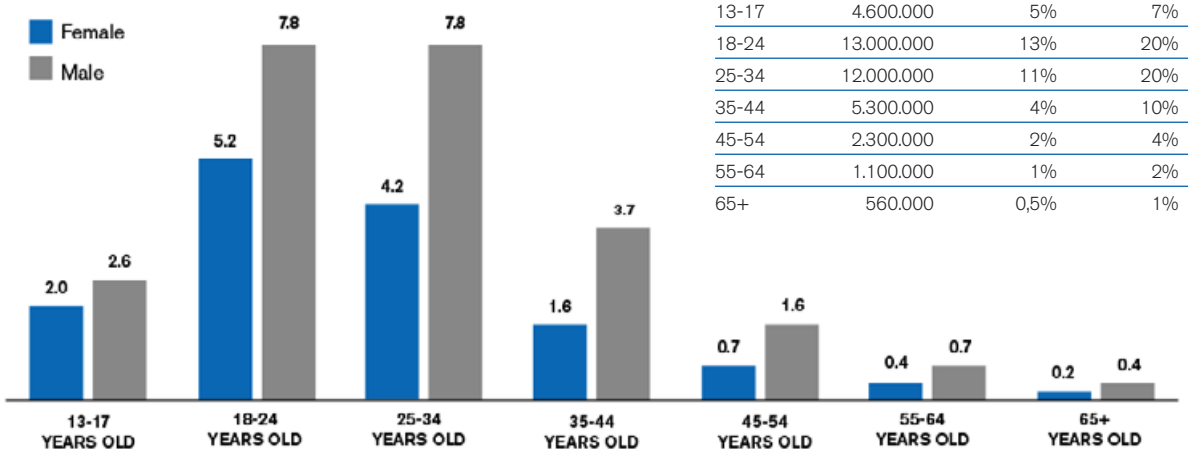
Own production. Source: CIA, 2020

FIGURE 2. Trends in population distribution by age in Egypt, 1988-2014

Age group	1988	1992	1995	2000	2005	2008	2014
Less than 15	41.2	41.7	40.0	37.3	34.2	34.0	35.3
15-64	55.0	54.6	56.3	59.1	61.7	61.9	60.4
65+	3.8	3.7	3.7	3.6	4.1	4.1	4.3
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Dependency Ratio	81.8	83.2	77.6	69.2	62.1	61.5	65.6

Own production. Source: BASEERA, 2016

FIGURE 3. Demographic information about Facebook users in Egypt, 2018



AGE	TOTAL	FAMALE	MALE
TOTAL	39.000.000	37%	63%
13-17	4.600.000	5%	7%
18-24	13.000.000	13%	20%
25-34	12.000.000	11%	20%
35-44	5.300.000	4%	10%
45-54	2.300.000	2%	4%
55-64	1.100.000	1%	2%
65+	560.000	0,5%	1%

Own production. Source: Reda, 2018.
Notes: The "Total" column of the inset table shows original values, while graph values have been divided by one million. Table percentages represent the respective gender and age groups share of total national Facebook users. Table values may not sum exactly due to rounding in the source data.

Main ethnic/religious groups

No ethnic groups are officially recognised by the Egyptian state, with essentially the entire population being labelled as "Egyptian" in official statistical reports. Three religious affiliations are recorded on official documents, including personal ID cards – (Sunni) Muslim, Christian and Jewish. However, no up-to-date information exists about the relative and absolute size of these groups – and of other groups that are informally present in the country (including Shi'a Muslims and Baha'i) – because since the 1980s questions related to personal religious affiliation are no longer included in the national census.

Based on informal estimates, Christians amount to anywhere between 5% and 10% of the Egyptian population, with peaks surpassing half of the local population in some areas along the Nile Valley, south of Cairo. Up to 95% of Egyptian Christians are members of the Coptic Orthodox Church, which is therefore by far the largest Christian denomination in the Middle East. The Egyptian Jewish community has been

substantially depleted by migration and demographic decline, and probably currently amounts to fewer than 100 individuals living in Cairo and Alexandria. Other ethnic groups include the Nubian people – traditionally settled in the Nile Valley south of Aswan but subject since the 1950s to several waves of internal displacement – and Bedouin tribes, settled primarily in the Eastern Desert and the Sinai Peninsula.

CONTEXTUALISATION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND RADICALISATION IN THE COUNTRY

The role of Egypt's cultural and religious milieu in the development of what is usually referred to as "radical Islamism" (Musallam, 2005) has been the object of substantial scholarly and political attention. In particular, events such as the foundation and development of the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1920s, the scholarship and activism of Sayyid Qutb, and the terrorist campaigns of the organisation known as *Al-Gamaa Al-Islamiyya* (GA) in the 1980s and 1990s have been extensively covered in the literature (Ashour, 2007; Aziz, 1995; Blaydes and Rubin, 2008; Wheatley and McCauley, 2008).

As the research framework of CONNEKT focuses predominantly on the current political and social environment of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and Balkan region, however, the scope of this analysis will concentrate predominantly on the period that followed the 2011 revolution to the present day (May 2020).

Overview of radicalisation and violent extremism

Especially in a country like Egypt that since 2013 has experienced a clear authoritarian regression, with the extensive use of emergency powers and the almost total erosion of freedom of press, the distinction (or lack thereof) between "radicalisation"/"violent extremism" (as ideological and social phenomena, including their potential but not exclusive relation with religion and political violence) and terrorism (as the actual, bifocal use of political violence at the service of a political agenda) should be analysed and problematised in its own right.

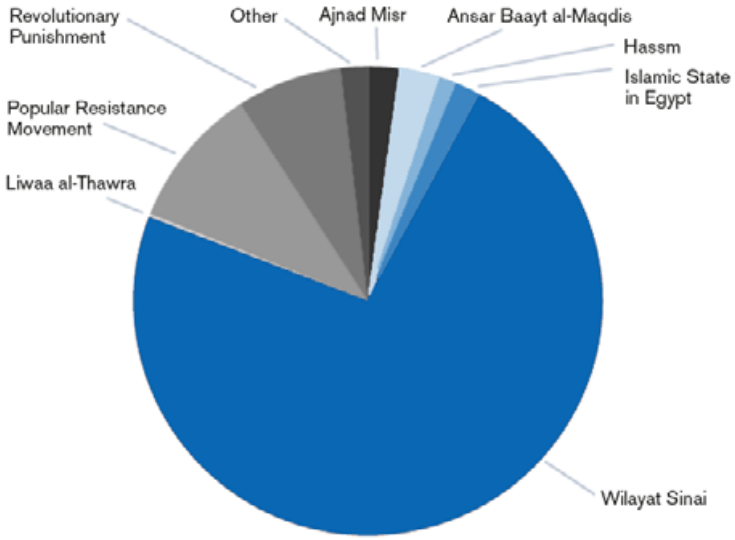
If we accept the official definitions adopted by Egyptian authorities and their equating of (Islamist) extremism with terrorism, (as discussed below), we can argue that since 2011 Egypt has undergone two parallel processes.

a. *The intensification* of processes of radicalisation. This signals a reversal of the processes that characterised the years preceding the 2011 revolution (approx. 1998-2011), during which Islamist groups like the Muslim Brotherhood and even groups that had previously engaged in terrorist activities, such as the GA, had instead increasingly become involved in mainstream politics. In the late 1990s, some of these groups – most notably the GA – had undergone formal processes of deradicalisation that were sanctioned and overseen by state authorities. In the aftermath of the 2011 revolution, some of these even formed political parties that acknowledged (at least formally) the rules of electoral democracy. After the 2013 coup, however, the exclusion of Islamist groups from government and their systematic and violent repression stopped and then quickly reversed this process, leading to the recrudescence of terrorist activities and campaigns across the country (Figure 4). This particularly affected the regions, like the Sinai Peninsula, in which state authorities were less able to assert their control.

b. *The diversification* of radical groups and militias involved in terrorist activities. In contrast to earlier wave of radicalisation and terrorism – during which it was possible to point at one group or alliance as the

single, key extremist/terrorist actor active in the country, whether the GA in the 1990s or the Bedouin-Islamist alliance in the early 2000s – the current scenario sees a wider variety of groups and actors active in Egypt, the breadth of which is summarised in the following paragraph. While some operational and ideological commonalities among these can clearly be identified, their international affiliations and – most importantly – their domestic agendas tend to differ; as a result, a broader variety of C/PVE initiatives should also be considered to engage with their ideological frameworks and potentially address their political grievances.

FIGURE 4. Monthly numbers of "terrorist" attacks in Egypt (January 2010-April 2018) (TIMEP, 2018)



Own production. Source: TIMEP, 2018

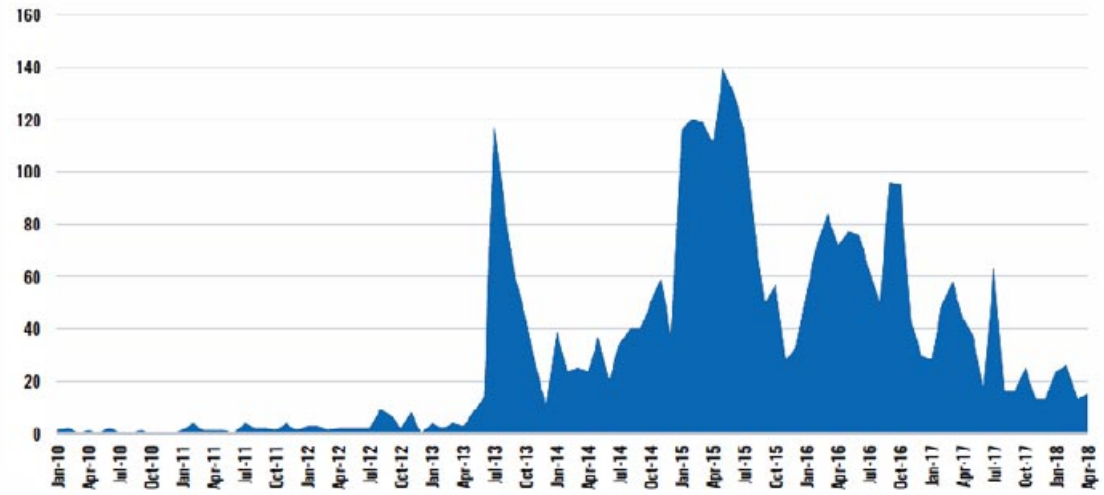
Presence of radical and violent groups in the country

Three main types of violent non-state groups have been operating in Egypt since at least 2013:

a. Groups (currently) *affiliated with the Islamic State (IS)/ISIS,* operating primarily from the Sinai Peninsula in conjunction with, and with the operative support of, members of local Bedouin communities. At the heart of the so-called "Sinai insurgency" is the group known between 2011 and 2013 as *Ansar Beit al-Maqdis,* which later swore allegiance to IS and became known as the "Sinai Province" (*Wilayat Sina*'). Since 2013, these groups have engaged in an intense quasi-conventional war in the Sinai Peninsula against the Egyptian security forces.

b. Groups *affiliated with Al-Qaeda,* operating primarily in the Western Desert and Cairo with several operational connections with groups previously or currently based in Libya. These include *Ansar al-Shari'a, al-Morabitoon* and *Ansar al-Islam* – the latter of which formally claimed one of the deadliest attacks against Egyptian security forces, the 2017 Bahariya attack which killed at least 16 policemen during a desert raid. However, little is known about their organisational structure, agenda and exact ideological framework.

FIGURE 5. Proportion of attacks claimed by different "terrorist" groups (January 2010-April 2018) (TIMEP, 2018: 6)



Own production. Source: TIMEP, 2018: 6

c. Groups *emanating from domestic opposition groups outlawed by the current regime,* primarily pursuing a domestic agenda and operating primarily in urban settings (Cairo, Giza and Alexandria). The official government-supported narrative implies that these groups are directly affiliated with the (now outlawed) Muslim Brotherhood and GA but, in most cases, little is publicly known about their organisational structure and membership. These include groups such as the *Helwan Brigades* and *Ajnad Misr.* The latter, in particular, was a splinter group of *Ansar Beit al-Maqdis* who explicitly sought revenge for the *Rabaa Al-Adawiyya* massacre – the killing of more than 800 Islamist militants in the immediate aftermath of the 2013 coup – by (exclusively) targeting security forces over at least two years (2014-15).

Citizens reported to have joined ISIS and other violent movements inside and outside the country

No independent source of information is available about the so-called "Sinai Insurgency" and "there is no official estimate of the number of Egyptians who joined ISIS" (Emam, 2019). At the peak of the insurgency in 2015-15, unofficial estimates of ISIS-affiliated operatives in Sinai were "between 1,000 and 1,500" active fighters (BBC, 2016), who probably relied on a larger network of local supporters and informants.

While Egyptian citizens are known to have joined ISIS-related groups abroad – most notably in Syria – no official estimate of their numbers exist, even though they are probably "in the low hundreds" (Emam, 2019). Other non-ISIS-affiliated groups in Egypt probably rely on loosely-connected networks of small cells, likely amounting to a few dozen active members overall.

Framing radicalisation and violent extremism

Scientific and academic state of the art

Key information and analysis on violent extremism and terrorism in Egypt is produced by three key sources.

a. Official government sources. Since 2016 journalists are not allowed to report from the Sinai Peninsula, and independent reporting on any terrorism-related events is heavily restricted. As a result, the only

official source of factual information about security-related events is the State Information System (SIS)[2] – a governmental agency that reports directly to the Egyptian Presidency.

b. Semi-official sources (government-organised non-governmental organizations – GONGOs – and government-supervised think tanks). The bulk of the research and analytical work conducted in Egypt on security-related issues is conducted by organisations that are directly related to governmental agencies and ministries, but maintain a degree of operational independence. The most prominent of these is the Ahram Center for Political Strategic Studies (ACPSS), which over the years has produced several high-profile reports and studies on Egyptian terrorist movements and radicalisation processes. Its latest three-year project in this area focuses on "using the concepts of human security to counter radicalisation and violent extremism in Egyptian society"; this project recommended that the use of "hard security" is limited to the fight to "territorial terrorism" in regions like the Sinai Peninsula, while a more comprehensive strategy based on a "diverse platform of actors from various sections of society and the state" is adopted to counter radicalisation (Akl, 2019). Among other relevant policy and research centres, the Cairo International Center for Conflict Resolution, Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding (CCCPA), directly affiliated with the Egyptian Foreign Ministry, is active both in producing collaborative research on terrorism and domestic/regional security, and in several C/PVE initiatives. However, the security-related activities of the CCCPA focus exclusively on radicalisation processes outside Egypt and have no direct impact on Egypt's own internal policies – since the domestic politics of Egypt are considered as the realm of activity of the Ministries of Defence and the Interior.

c. Independent think tanks and university projects. Independent projects and reporting on security issues are tightly scrutinised by state authorities, with public events on themes perceived to be politically sensitive regularly called off by the Egyptian state security. As a result, only a few institutions that are not affiliated with state authorities produce research and analysis on extremism and domestic terrorism. A partial exception is the Tahrir Institute for Middle East Policy (TIMEP) – which operates from Washington, DC – that curated several detailed reports on Egyptian extremist groups and their range of activities. Noticeably more critical of Egypt's regime than the ACPSS or CCCPA, TIMEP has provided a variety of policy recommendations to the Egyptian government especially for addressing the territorial insurgency in the Sinai Peninsula. TIMEP is particularly keen to dissuade Egyptian authorities from resorting to repressive strategies and "collective punishment" and has pointed at the need for encouraging "accountability in the security sector" to "ease restrictions on political discourse" and to "provide job training and employment opportunities" in the areas most directly affected, especially North Sinai (TIMEP, 2015).

Only a few studies on radicalisation and violent extremism in Egypt since 2011 have made extensive use of primary material and fieldwork; the lack of reliable, independent data and the difficulties in interviewing imprisoned operatives, politicians and activists are among the major obstacles to effective empirical research on these topics. A notable exception to this trend is the report by Human Rights First *Like a Fire in a Forest: ISIS Recruitment in Egypt's Prisons.* This report, published in 2019 and based on interviews with several

[2] Website: https://www.sis.gov.eg/section/7272/5021?lang=en-us

Egyptian detainees, concluded that "prison conditions in Egypt are fuelling recruitment to ISIS" and that radicalisation in Egyptian prisons is aided by the "rampant use of torture and other forms of mistreatment, abysmal prison conditions, and the frequent mixing of violent and non-violent offenders" (Human Rights First, 2019).

Defining violent extremism and radicalisation

As will be discussed in section *Official definitions of violent extremism and radicalisation* below, Egyptian authorities have not provided a definition of violent extremism and radicalisation. Still, a recent report by the ACPSS has attempted to promote a "differentiation between terrorism and radicalisation" (Akl, 2019). As part of this project, radicalisation was defined as:

> a multi-platform process in which different variables come together to create a tendency towards violence, both psychologically and operationally. The creation of this condition later on breeds terrorism, but the reasons and causes differ between the processes. Radicalisation is a process that works on changing a mentality towards more violent forms of action, but terrorism is a matter of logistical and organisational capacities. (Ibid).

Ethnic or religious communities considered by violent extremism and radicalisation approaches

Egyptian state authorities and their policies focus explicitly and exclusively on Islamic "extremism". However, Egypt experienced waves of "Christian extremism" in the early 2000s (Iskander, 2012: 114), even though the relevance of these groups and movements since 2013 has not been analysed thoroughly. More recently, in 2014 the constitutionally-protected claims of the Nubian people to return to their ancestral land south of Aswan (or receive proportionate compensation) have been "shot down […] on the basis of national security" by Egyptian state authorities (Mahmoud, 2018).

Strategies to counter/prevent Violent Extremism and Radicalisation (C/PVE)

C/PVE INITIATIVES

Mapping of C/PVE actors

While other countries covered by CONNEKT (such as Kosovo and Morocco) have complied with the recommendations of the UN Secretary General to prepare their own National Plans of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, Egypt has not yet produced one. This seems to reflect the lack of a comprehensive approach to C/PVE in the country, which has so far been characterised primarily by an over-reliance on repressive counter-terrorism measures carried out by army and police forces, by an increasingly obtrusive role played by Islamic religious authorities in controlling religious discourses in the country, and by the adoption of a "broad" but largely "inconsistent anti-terror legislation" that gives swiping powers to civilian and military authorities, with little oversight (TIMEP, 2018: 43).

Public policies and programmes

Egypt's official strategy to fight violent extremist groups has "primarily relied on a security crackdown – specifically on the Muslim Brotherhood – and large-scale military operations against IS in North Sinai" (Fanack, 2018).

This approach at least partially contrasts with the strategies pursued by Egyptian authorities in the late 1990s vis-à-vis the GA. At that stage – "after initial scepticism" – they decided to support and "actively foster" the process of "collective de-radicalisation" of imprisoned GA members that was initiated by members of their senior leadership in conjunction with Egyptian religious scholars (Brzuszkiewicz, 2017). This process began with the announcement of a ceasefire by senior members of the GA, which is typically described in the literature as "unexpected by security and other officials, commentators and even some of the [GA] membership itself" and was followed by a process of "ideological and organisational de-radicalisation" led by its own leadership (El-Said and Harrigan, 2018: 81). As part of such initiatives, state authorities "started to soften the measures targeting members already in prison, allowing visits and organising prison tours for the former leaders who wanted to spread their ideological revisions among the lower rank" (Brzuszkiewicz, 2017). Members of the ACPSS have called for extending this "very successful" experience to post-2013 Egypt (Akl, 2018); however, currently the overwhelming emphasis of Egyptian authorities on repressive measures made Egyptian prisons a hotspot for radicalisation and the spread of ISIS's ideology rather than as a place where the ideological reorientation of extremist groups can be achieved.

Official definitions of violent extremism and radicalisation

Egyptian leaders (including President Al-Sisi and the Egyptian parliament Speaker Ali Abd el-Al) (Asharq Al-Awsat, 2019) have not provided a definition of violent extremism and radicalisation. In official statements, "violent extremism" (as an ideological and social phenomenon) and "terrorism" (as the actual, bifocal use of political *violence* at the service of a political agenda) are typically mentioned together as part of the same

"threat" that Egypt faces, with no clear differentiation being drawn between the two concepts. The lack of a clear distinction between these concepts is compounded by the notoriously wide and inclusive definition of terrorism included in Article 2 of Egypt's "Anti-Terrorism Law" No. 94/2015[3], under which a remarkably broad variety of actors risks prosecution and detention in the pursuit of their constitutionally-protected rights – including "trade unions, […] journalists, human rights defenders, opposition parties and public-sector workers" (OHCHR, 2020).

Civil society

De-radicalisation and P/CVE strategies are treated in Egypt as matters of national security and, as a result, the involvement of civil society in these realms is extremely limited. For the purpose of this initial country report, no specific civil-society P/CVE initiative could be identified. A partial exception to this trend is the work of the CCCPE, a GONGO affiliated with the Egyptian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which pursues training and policy-oriented agendas in the fields of Preventing Radicalization and Extremism Leading to Terrorism (PRELT) and on Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR). However, its initiatives are directed exclusively to other African countries rather than Egypt itself – even if, especially on DDR, they can also have an indirect impact on Egypt's own militant groups.

Religious communities

Together with the repressive measures discussed above, Al-Sisi's repeated call for "renewing religious discourse" based on a "true understanding of Islam" (SIS, 2016) has been at the heart of Egypt's P/CVE strategies. Three key religious institutions are at the forefront of the development and implementation of this process – the Ministry of Religious Endowments/*Awqaf* (which primarily controls religious buildings like mosques and charitable institutes), Al-Azhar and the *Dar al-Ifta al-Misriyya.* The latter two institutions act as semi-governmental bodies (formally independent in the conduct of their tasks as supreme religious authorities, but institutionally and legally bound to Egyptian state authorities) and share the responsibility for overseeing religious education in the country and the issuance of key *fatwas.*

Since 2014 the role and competences of the Ministry of Religious Endowments have been expanded, making it the main governmental actor in this process. This involved three main sets of initiatives: (1) extending the control of the Ministry to all mosques and religious buildings, and their activities; (2) setting and disseminating a unified script for Friday sermons across all Egyptian mosques, to be followed diligently across the whole country; (3) positioning the Ministry as the only authority authorised to issue new preaching permits, with the further provision that even older preaching permits would also be vetted by the Ministry. Al-Azhar, whose graduates remain the only scholars allowed to apply for preaching permits, has also organised several public conferences and events to discuss the framework and content of such a "renewal" process.

[3] "A terrorist act shall refer to any use of force, violence, threat, or intimidation domestically or abroad for the purpose of disturbing public order, or endangering the safety, interests, or security of the community; harming individuals and terrorizing them; jeopardizing their lives, freedoms, public or private rights, or security, or other freedoms and rights guaranteed by the Constitution and the law; harms national unity, social peace, or national security or damages the environment, natural resources, antiquities, money, buildings, or public or private properties or occupies or seizes them; prevents or impedes public authorities, agencies or judicial bodies, government offices or local units, houses of worship, hospitals, institutions, institutes, diplomatic and consular missions, or regional and international organizations and bodies in Egypt from carrying out their work or exercising all or some of their activities, or resists them or disables the enforcement of any of the provisions of the Constitution, laws, or regulations. A terrorist act shall likewise refer to any conduct committed with the intent to achieve, prepare, or instigate one of the purposes set out in the first paragraph of this article, if it is as such to harm communications, information, financial or banking systems, national economy, energy reserves, security stock of goods, food and water, or their integrity, or medical services in disasters and crises."

Beyond these initiatives coordinated by the Ministry of Religious Endowments, which are by nature focused on the political and ideological control of religious discourse by state authorities much more than on its *renewal,* the details of the strategies pursued by Egyptian civil and religious authorities to address religious extremism are unclear – especially because, as convincingly argued by Ishak Ibrahim, "[n]either the presidency, Al-Azhar, nor the endowments ministry has determined a clear concept of what renewing religious discourse entails or how to begin undertaking it" (Ibrahim, 2019). This process has been further undermined, at the institutional level, by the substantial overlaps and conflicts of authority between these institutions, and at the ideological/religious level by the tendency of institutions like al-Azhar to exclude from such a "renewal" process religious norms and principles that impact on the broader socio-economic condition of Muslims in Egypt and other Sunni-dominated countries. This has led to what external observers rightly perceive as inconsistencies in the content of such a "renewal" agenda, whose focus on disavowing the use of violence in the public sphere has been compounded by the promotion of a "conservative personal status law that curtails the rights of women and that reinforces patriarchal norms" (Ibid).

Existence of critical evaluation systems

Impact of CVE-PVE on the threat of radicalisation

At least for the case of Egypt, this breakdown of specific methodological/implementation-related aspects appears as somewhat off-topic. These items assume that the C/PVE strategies implemented in the country are primarily, if not exclusively, programmes with a clear set of goals and targets – which may indeed be the case in other countries but arguably is not in Egypt at the moment.

P/CVE initiatives in Egypt, as discussed above, are to date primarily of a military nature – with a focus on tracking down and arresting members of groups perceived to be radicalised or involved in "violent extremism", or of a religious/ideological nature designed to "renew" the religious discourse among Egyptian Muslims. These initiatives are not meant to be specific outcome-driven projects and are pursued in a political and social environment in which state and religious authorities are not subject to direct accountability.

SPECIFIC INITIATIVES ADDRESSED TO WOMEN AND YOUTH

No specific initiative is directed to Egyptian women. While Al-Sisi often mentions youth as an age/social group that requires particular attention in combating "ideological extremism" (Ahram Online, 2019), no specific P/CVE initiative explicitly directed to young people could be identified.

Conclusion

Egypt is a key country in the MENA region, with a substantial youth bulge and with several violent militant groups active in its territory. However, the approach to de-radicalisation and P/CVE by state authorities has so far been driven predominantly by military/security considerations and by the assumption that a "renewal" of Islam's religious discourse imposed top-down by religious institutions can be sufficient to tackle any socio-economic or political grievance that motivates armed militant groups and leads individuals towards ideological or religious radicalisation. Especially in the absence of relevant initiatives coordinated by non-state, civil society organisations (CSOs), CONNEKT has the potential to shed light in particular on the socio-economic and political determinants and underpinnings of radicalisation and violent extremism in the country, blazing an alternative path towards addressing its underlying causes and motivations.

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JORDAN

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Overview

COUNTRY PROFILE

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan (HKJ) is situated in one of the most uniquely placed locations in the Middle East. It is in the heart of Levant, bordering Syria, Palestine, Iraq and Saudi Arabia, and is essential for what is considered the crossroad for Muslims, Christians and Jews as the Holy Land. The Kingdom was part of the Ottoman Empire for over 400 years (Fannack, n.d.) until 1918 when the empire ended, and in 1921 the British gained protectorate status over Transjordan, which covered the area of Jordan, including some parts of Iraq and Saudi Arabia. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan gained its independence in 1946 (Irvine and Abu Jaber, n.d.).

Jordan is well known for opening up its borders to its neighbouring countries' populations in need of refuge, from welcoming the Palestinians in 1948 and 1967 to the influx of Iraqi refugees after the 2003 US invasion of Iraq and to a greater arrival of Syrian refugees in 2012 that was so large it resulted in one of their settlements, a UNHCR-run camp, being considered the fourth largest city in the Kingdom (Hawkins, Assad and Sullivan, 2019). As of 2019, according to a UNHCR report, Jordan registered the number of persons of concern that stands at 744,795, with approximately 655,000 Syrians, 67,000 Iraqi, 15,000 Yemenis, 6,000 Sudanese, and 2,500 refugees from a total of 52 other nationalities.

Government system

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan is a constitutional monarchy that practices democracy and is governed by the rule of law. In the case of Jordan, the constitution grants substantial discretionary powers to the sovereign in the exercise of his authority: the King has the executive and legislative powers to, for example, ratify or veto laws and treaties, dissolve or suspend the parliament, appoint the government (for a four-year term) or dismiss it.

Jordan is a unitary state with the text of the constitution adopted for the first time in 1952, and amended and updated since. The constitution provides a framework under which the sovereign, government, legislature and judiciary are governed. The bicameral legislature is translated in the national assembly – parliament – with two houses: the Upper and the Lower House. The Upper House or Senate, also known as the House of Notables, is appointed by the King, who, in accordance with the constitution, usually nominates 65 members: former prime ministers, military commanders, former judges or diplomats (minimum age is 40) who had served either in the Lower House or in the government. The Senate is a respected and influential body that advises the Lower House on general policies. The Lower House members, 130 of them, are directly elected by the Jordanian citizens through universal adult suffrage (not guaranteed by the constitution), thus the House is known as the House of Representatives. The membership is elected for a four-year term through party-list proportional representation in a total of 23 constituencies. Due to the diverse population, the minimum quota system provides for a number of seats reserved for individual representatives: for instance, nine seats for Christians; nine seats for Bedouins; three seats for either Chechens or Circassians; and 15 seats for women (Inter-Parlamentary Union – Majalis Al-Nuwaab [House of Representatives], 2018). In addition, there are more

than 45 registered active political parties – 49 in 2019 – (Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy, n.d.) that play a part in parliamentary structure and functioning, with the list including the new Muslim Brotherhood Society, Islamic Centrist (Wasat) Party, Jordan National Alliance, etc. (Central Intelligence Agency, 2019). The multi-party system returned to Jordan in 1992 (having been abolished in 1957) with promulgation of the Political Parties Law, which was followed a year later by a single-member-district system being introduced, resulting in tribal and family ties being favoured over party/political and ideological affiliations. Several modifications of electoral laws, the latest being in 2016, ensued a system in which, in spite of a list-based electoral process intended to encourage voting on political affiliations, to date the majority of the Lower House representatives are not affiliated with any party. This in turn further contributes to tensions over the voting system, with the critics emphasising that, as it stands, the law favours less populated tribal constituencies (so-called "East Bankers")[1] over the almost over-crowded populated urban areas where mostly Jordanians of Palestinian descent (so-called "West Bankers") live, areas that are highly politicised and described as Islamic strongholds.

The government is appointed for a four-year term and can be dismissed by the sovereign or by a majority vote of no-confidence by the elected House of Representatives.

Finally, the constitution also provides for an independent judiciary, with civil, religious, and special courts. The constitution also provides for religious freedoms in spite of Islam being the state religion. Religious law extends to the matters of personal status, and is partially based on Islamic Sharia law.

Population

The population of Jordan is 10,209,819 as of 26 July 2020 (World Population Review, 2020). Some 98% of the population is Arab (Jordanians, Palestinians, Syrians, Iraqis, etc.), with non-Arabs accounting for 2% (Circassians, Chechens, Armenians, Kurds, Turkmens, etc.). Jordan granted citizenship to the Palestinians under the law of 1954 stipulating that "any person who, not being Jewish, possessed Palestinian nationality before 15 May 1948 and was a regular resident in [Jordan] between 20 December 1949 and 16 February 1954" (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near Est, n.d.) will have been considered a Jordanian citizen. As a result, a significant number of the Jordanian population are of Palestinian origin; there are also Palestinians who have been granted a passport but have no national ID number and therefore are not considered fully-fledged Jordanians. On the other hand, Iraqi refugees were never granted citizenship; instead Jordan considers Iraqi refugees as visitors but provides them with crucial services such as education and health. The influx of Syrians posed a question to Jordanian authorities on the threat of such a great number of refugees being present, whether it be the spill over of radicalisation or tension between governments or smuggling and trafficking on the border (Alshoubaki and Harris, 2018).

Main ethnic/religious groups

Sunni-Muslims are the dominant religious denomination, that make to up 92% of the population; the other 8% comprises minorities such as Christians, Shia Muslims, and Druze (Fanack, 2020). Christians altogether are

[1] Significant influxes of Palestinian refugees arrived in Jordan in both 1948 and 1967, concentrating primarily in urban areas. Most Palestinian refugees were given Jordanian citizenship. The presence of this large Palestinian Jordanian population contributed to a sense among "East Bankers" (primarily Jordanians descended from those resident in Jordan before 1948) that their national and cultural identity was being gradually eroded, particularly following a violent civil war in 1970 during which armed Palestinian groups were defeated by Jordanian government forces (International Crisis Group, 2012; El-Abed, 2004).

composed of different groups – Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Catholic and Protestants – and, in numbers, there are around 170,000-190,000 Christians and 15,000 Druze (Ibid.).

CONTEXTUALISATION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND RADICALISATION IN THE COUNTRY

Overview of radicalisation and violent extremism

Jordan has struggled with radicalisation for an extended period. It is no secret that radical ideologies are influenced by the political stability and events of the surrounding countries, and having had the approach of open borders for migrants and refugees from those neighbouring countries Jordan has found itself in a situation where the segments of that same population posed a threat to its security (Alshoubaki and Harris, 2018). In 2017, only 12% of the Jordanian population considered religious extremism to be a top priority concern (Counter Extremism Project, 2015).

A previous survey showed that 67% of the Jordanian adult population viewed Al-Qaeda as a legitimate resistance movement. However, after the 2005 attacks on Jordanian hotels, the percentage that still viewed them as a legitimate resistance organisation was a mere 6.2% (Speckbard, 2017; Braizat, 2006).[2]

Although Jordan does not disclose its official data, various local and foreign organisations have shown that Jordanians amount to being one of the highest contributors to foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) in the world, with 315 militants per million citizens on a per capita basis. Jordan also appears to be in the ranks of the top 10 countries that "provide" foreign fighters involved in the Syrian conflict (Speckbard, 2017).

Director of NAMA - Strategic Intelligence Solutions Fares Braizat said that "Jordanian fighters are principally males from impoverished backgrounds, who were previously underemployed or unemployed."[3] However, according to the WANA Institute (2018), factors like the "search for personal identity and purpose, the presence of corruption and cronyism, distrust in the government, weak youth engagement, economic pressures and unemployment, and strong opposition towards Israel, the West, and their perceived influence over the country" are equally important drivers pushing the young people to join violent extremist organisations. Furthermore, a drastic socio-economic situation, such as increased living costs, high unemployment rates and the economy which is at standstill, are all underlying push factors contributing to the increase of radicalisation.

The influx of refugees also makes the economic situation worse and makes unemployment rates higher. The security apparatus in particular has a concern about Syrian refugees being in fact disguised foreign fighters, particularly in the urban areas (Counter Extremism Project, 2015).

Citizens reported to have joined ISIS and other violent movements inside and outside the country

Data surrounding the involvement of citizens joining ISIS is contested as different sources provide different numbers, and there is a far too large gap for the data to be reliable. Speckhard (2017) suggests that there

[2] This survey, on file with Anne Speckhard, investigated Arab and Muslim support for terrorism. A three-level framework for analysis was applied: 1) examining respondent perceptions on killing civilians of an occupying state/country, 2) examining respondent perceptions towards groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah, Al-Qaeda (Bin Laden and al-Zarqawi), and 3) examining respondent perceptions towards government/state armed forces actions in terms of whether they could be viewed as terrorist or non-terrorist. The poll was conducted between 1-7 December 2005, sampling 1,417 respondents throughout the Kingdom, including 669 public opinion leaders (political leaders, business executives, and the media).

[3] Fares Braizat, director at NAMA – Strategic Intelligence Solutions, interview by Anne Speckhard, Amman (2 November 2016).

are around 3,000 to 3,950, whereas the Soufan Group (2015) claims that there are around 1,500 to 2,500 foreign fighters.

There is little to no data covering this aspect although there are studies previously highlighting the sympathy many citizens had for Al-Qaeda pre-2005 (Department of State, U.S. - Refworld, 2018). The November 2005 attacks were a series of near-synchronised bomb explosions at three hotels in the capital Amman. Around 60 people were pronounced dead and 115 were injured. All identified bombers were of Iraqi nationality and had apparent ties to Jordanian terrorist Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, who fled to Iraq to be part of Al-Qaeda in Mesopotamia (Fattah, 2005).

There is no exact number of how many Jordanians left to join a terrorist organisation or how many joined internally, but through these attacks it became apparent that there is/was involvement in terrorist organisations locally.

Presence of radical and violent groups in the country

The groups that have had traction within the country and have gained support internally as well as externally are mainly ISIS, Al-Qaeda and Al Nusra/Jabhat Al-Sham (Milton-Edwards, 2017). Many well-known figures in these terrorist groups are originally Jordanians; figures such as Abu Qatada, an Al-Qaeda preacher in Europe (Pantucci, 2008); Abu Muhammad Al Maqdisi, an influential radical cleric; and Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, an Al-Qaeda leader in Iraq, are all result of homegrown radicalisation — in some cases a prison-related radicalisation, as in the case of Al Maqdisi and Al Zarqawi (Gunaratna, 2004).

Framing radicalisation and violent extremism

Scientific and academic state of the art

For Jordan, which is hailed as an oasis of stability and order in an increasingly chaotic and volatile region, violent extremism has been a real concern. Notwithstanding the country's longer battle in the fight against terrorism and the close security surveillance over potential threats since the 2005 Amman bombings, which killed 60 people in a series of coordinated attacks on three famous hotels (NPR.org, 2005), preventing/countering violent extremism has become an increasingly more difficult task.

The state of the art points to three characteristics governing Jordan's fight against extremism. The following characteristics are inspired both by an analytical reading of the Jordanian battle against extremism and terrorism (Hazza, Majali and Rumman, 2016) as well as the synthesis of the literature by the Global Firearms Programme (GFP)'s team and their experience working on P/CVE issues in the country.

First, it has been largely led by the state's capable security apparatus, whether through laws and regulations, or the proactive engagement of security agencies through operations that aimed at careful monitoring of extremist groups and potential suspects. However, the increased complexities of the landscape created by the constant remodelling of the extremist groups' tactics and methods prompted a broader response beyond security and law enforcement agencies. More so, given the increased concern over the security loopholes in a number of recent operations: from the Irbid attack (March 2016) and the attack on the office of the General Intelligence Department (GID) in Ain Al Basha District (June 2016) to the car bomb targeting a military post near an earthen berm by the Rukban refugee camp (June 2016) (Hazza, Majali and Rumman, 2016).

This prompted the second characteristic: the relatively recent engagement of civil society and non-governmental actors. Albeit on the awareness and prevention level only, this engagement sought to expand the outreach of P/CVE efforts to address socio-economic and political drivers of radicalisation. International non-governmental actors and different United Nations (UN) agencies are an integral part of said efforts, providing significant funding for these and for research projects focusing on the topic.

Third, the creation of evidence-based knowledge around this topic in Jordan has been slow. For instance, there is no database, national or unofficial, to document interventions, track policies or measure the impact of P/CVE efforts. Likewise, the policy literature on the issue is still limited, with only a handful of national institutions and actors generating local knowledge on the issue. This stands as a real challenge given the fact that radicalisation in Jordan does not follow a linear trajectory; it is rather highly individualised, contextualised and influenced by shifts beyond the country's physical borders, namely developments in neighbouring Iraq and Syria. To elaborate, the book *The Salafis of Ma'an: A Sociological and Anthropological Study* sheds light on socio-economic structural factors that impacted the shape and rise of the Salafist movement in the southern city of Ma'an, which include the geographical location, the complex citizens-state relations there, as well as the socio-political discourse that the group built, which made their individual relations with the local community there a positive one (Centre for Strategic Studies, 2018).

Sociology of Extremism and Terrorism in Jordan: An Empirical and Analytical Study offers further insights into the state of the art in Jordan. For instance: the recruits and foreign fighters seem to go firstly to join ISIS (36.4%), second with the *Takfiri* movement (31%), third with the Al-Nusra Front (24.9%), Al-Qaeda fourth with a dismal 4.2%, and the remaining 3.6% join other extremists groups. Moreover, two thirds of them are married and the rest are single, with varying educational levels: 42.5% stopped at secondary school education, 31.1% did not finish secondary school, 21.6% have a bachelor's degree, 1.8% have a master's degree or higher, and around 3% hold a diploma, technical qualification or other type (Alghad Newspaper, 2018).

For instance, no evidence was found that fighters or their families are being compensated by armed groups in Syria (Proctor, 2015). Rather, the fiscal motivation driving recruitment, when spotted, appears to be on the part of the recruiters and not the recruits (Ibid.). Also, religion was not an obvious driver of the state of the art of radicalisation in Jordan, and social media plays a powerful recruitment role by glamourising the struggle and dramatising the plight of fellow Sunnis in Syria (Ibid.).

Prominent studies

In terms of studies, the aforementioned lack of data translates into a limited academic discourse and discussion around VE and radicalisation in Jordan. Security and law enforcement have been generally reluctant to disclose, for instance, official figures for Jordanian fighters and/or assessments of at-risk individuals within the country, and the number of studies published by security agencies on the topic ranges from few to zero. Arguably, more disclosure can be spotted recently with the State Security Court publishing terse details of certain cases they unfolded or some proceedings of court deliberations and sentences of accused individuals (Husseini, 2018).

Beyond official studies, non-governmental actors and think tanks have been contributing to the literature on VE and radicalisation in Jordan. Prominent studies include a series of books published by the Centre for Strategic Studies (University of Jordan), including: *The Salafis of Ma'an: A Sociological and Anthropological*

Study, which provides a deep analysis of the historical conditions and the specific geographic, political and cultural context in the southern governorate of Ma'an and tracks the development and emergence of the Salafist group and the transformations it went through, leading to the inception of the Salafist Jihadist movement (Center for Strategic Studies, 2013).

Another book, *Sociology of Extremism and Terrorism in Jordan: An Empirical and Analytical Study,* discusses in detail the results of an analytical field study that included nearly 760 jihadists, of which 190 were killed in Iraq and Syria, and offers 11 studies of in-depth cases tracking their journey into extremism (Alghad Newspaper, 2018). Moreover, the Centre for Strategic Studies (2013) produces a series of policy papers, including "'Salafist Transformations: Significance, Implications and Prospects", which was produced jointly with the German Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES) Office in Jordan.

Similarly, FES has actively contributed to the literature by sponsoring a number of publications. These include: *Post-Islamism: A New Phase or Ideological Delusion; From Caliphate to Civil State: The Young Face of Political Islam in Jordan after the Arab Spring; I Am a Salafi: A Study of the Actual and Imagined Identities of Salafis; Infatuated with Martyrdom: Female Jihadism from Al-Qaeda to the Islamic State, as well as Methods of Preventing and Combatting Terrorism in the MENA Region and in the West* (Friedrich-Ebert-Shiftung Jordan & Iraq, n.d.).

On the policy level, the West Asia-North Africa (WANA) Institute has produced a number of important studies. These include: *Trapped Between Destructive Choices: Radicalization Drivers Affecting Youth in Jordan; Examining Psychological Drivers of Radicalization in Jordan; Journey Mapping of Selected Jordanian Foreign Fighters; Charter on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism; Engendering Extremism: Gender Equality and Radicalization in the WANA Region; From Bladed to Brains: A New Battleground; Post-ISIS and Still Desperate: The Ongoing Drivers of Violent Extremism in Jordan, Tunisia and Lebanon, in addition to White Paper and a Theory of Change Towards More Effective Human Security Approaches in the Context of the Emerging Threat of Violent Radicalization in Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia* (WANA Institute, n.d.).

The studies of other actors covered additional aspects of violent extremism in Jordan, such as a policy brief produced by Mercy Corps, *From Jordan to Jihad: The Lure of Syria's Violent Extremist Groups* (Proctor, 2015), which highlighted the diverse socio-economic background of fighters, challenging the role of poverty as a key driver. Equally, the International Republican Institute (IRI)'s qualitative research on the local drivers of violent extremism in Mafraq and Zarqa, two municipalities which have been traditional hotbeds of radicalisation and host to large numbers of Syrian refugees, generated data that formed the basis of their report *Violent Extremism in Jordan: Local Governance, Tribal Dynamics and Forced Migration* (International Republican Institute, 2018). Additionally, a joint UN Women and Jordanian National Commission for Women (JNCW) study examined in a technical report the under-researched angle of *Women and Violent Radicalization in Jordan* (United Nations Entity for gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2016).

Main research and knowledge producers

Mostly non-governmental actors and think tanks have been contributing to the literature on VE and radicalization in Jordan.

Defining violent extremism and radicalisation

Establishing consensus on VE and radicalisation definitions is a difficult task. Yet, two key definitional elements can be highlighted.

First, whether radicalisation and VE are defined at the individual or radical group level. In Jordan, the existing literature largely views radicalisation and VE at the personal level, unpacking personal transformations that an individual goes through in response to different socio-economic and/or political contextual grievances (Bondokji, Aghabi and Wilkinson, 2016).

Second, the distinction between radicalisation and VE in terms of ideology and behaviour. In other words, the radical ideology that an individual could carry, which can be captured in elements of a dichotomous black-and-white thinking and constant "othering" of different groups, and the radical behaviour that entails exercising varying degrees of physical violence (Alrai Newspaper, 2018).

Definition targets

Three groups are typically covered by these definitions: explicit supporters/members of the Salafist Jihadist movement, which are dealt with through law enforcement and security agencies; potential recruits and at-risk youth, which are dealt with via a combination of law enforcement and security agencies as well as non-governmental and civil society actors (awareness and prevention); and the last group which concerns the Jordanian Foreign Fighters' returnees, whom the state is strictly in charge of handling, whether in terms of prosecution and sentences, or rehabilitation and reintegration into society. Geographically, several reports and experts — including an expert from the Ministry of the Interior in conversation with WANA's research team for a publication (WANA Institute, 2017) — refer to four cities as recruitment hotbeds in Jordan: Ma'an, Salt, Rusayfeh and Irbid.

Ethnics or religious communities considered by violent extremism and radicalisation approaches

No specific non-Muslim communities are considered and, importantly, no Muslim community is considered per se. This is an extremely important distinction to make —Jordan looks at the issue from an ideological / behavioural / political, and not religious, vantage. More often than not, the rhetoric on radicalisation and VE targets the narrative and act of radicalisation, which could be manifested along tribal, regional or gender lines, or sometimes over a soccer match between the two most-famed football teams in the country. Furthermore, Jordan's journey with P/CVE so far shows that radical groups and individuals engineer their attacks against hard rather than soft (civilian) spots, such as military and security targets, which drives home the point of VE in Jordan being a state versus non-state actors, above all else.

Methodologies employed to study violent extremism and radicalisation

A few empirical methods have been applied to understanding and analysising radicalisation and violent extremism in Jordan, the most prominent of which were abovementioned. Partially, this is attributed to the nature of violent extremism, which makes it difficult to access or trust primary resources such as fighters or recruiters. Additionally, there is the challenge of this issue being largely considered a security issue that is dealt with via law enforcement and security agencies. Lastly, there is little material investment in, and support for, empirical and policy research at the national level.

Strategies to counter/prevent Violent Extremism and Radicalisation (C/PVE)

C/PVE INITIATIVES

Mapping of C/PVE actors

In Jordan, the relevant C/PVE actors can be identified at three main levels: governmental, international non-governmental and national non-governmental (community-based organisations – CBOs).

At the governmental level, an official C/PVE Unit was first established in November 2015 (Assabeel Newspaper, 2015). The Unit was under the mandate of the Jordanian Ministry of the Interior and was led at the time by a retired General who served in Jordan's Public Security Directorate. In November 2016, the Unit was moved from the mandate of the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Culture (24.ae Newspaper, 2016). The Unit remained under the Ministry of Culture until February 2020, when it was yet again moved, this time to fall directly under the mandate of the Jordanian Prime Minister's Office (Alwakeelnews, 2020). Therefore, all said official entities are considered key governmental P/CVE actors, for they have worked on the issue at some time.

At the government's executive level, CVE more specifically is the clear mandate of the Ministry of the Interior. A role that is played by the different security and law enforcement agencies falling under the Ministry's mandate, from police and counter terrorism special unit, to the Directorate of Correctional and Rehabilitation Centres, which hold suspects/convicts of violent extremism. For instance, the Community Peace Centre of Jordan's Public Security Directorate (PSD) was established in 2015 as a project of the Directorate's strategic plan to combat violent extremism. It works on issues of awareness, prevention and treatment of the dangers of extremist thought (Public Security Directorate, 2015).

On the second level, a number of international non-governmental actors have been actively supporting Jordan's P/CVE efforts since the early years of the Arab uprisings, as the chaos that ensued afterward, particularly in neighbouring Syria and Iraq, facilitated the rise of numerous extremist groups. Key amongst such actors stands the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)'s Office in Jordan, which has worked closely with local authorities and stakeholders – municipalities, CBOs and academia – to produce Jordan's PVE strategy. A significant part of funding this effort came from the UNDP itself.

Additionally, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) launched a project entitled "Strengthening Criminal Investigation and International Cooperation for Organized Crime Cases in Jordan" (Abdelhamid, 2019). Funded by the government of Japan, the UNODC continued to extend its support to law enforcement institutions in prevention of violent extremism and the international cooperation in criminal matters through an integrated set of activities including capacity-building trainings, the development of training guidelines, and introducing international practices in PVE and international cooperation (Ammar, n.d.).

Likewise, the German Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Foundation contributed to the P/CVE literature in Jordan by designing surveys on the subject, doing so in collaboration with local entities such as NAMA Strategic

Intelligence Solutions. Equally outside the UN's umbrella, PeaceGeeks, a Canadian-Jordanian civil society organisation (CSO), has worked on a number of monitoring and evaluation concepts and assessments, while the International Alert engaged jointly with the UNDP on a project centred on improving the impact of PVE programming (United Nations Development Programme and International Alert, 2018). Recently, the Spanish International Institute for Nonviolent Action (NOVACT) has been initiating conversations about the P/CVE scene in Jordan, and contributing notably to the work of the Observatory to Prevent Violent Extremism (OPEV) by trying to establish a stronger Jordanian presence in it (Observatory to Prevent Extremist Violence, n.d.).

Finally, on the third level, a number of national non-governmental actors – and CBOs – have been having a prominent role in P/CVE in Jordan. An organisation such as the WANA Institute, a policy think tank, has been working on P/CVE issues from a human security and research perspective since 2015. Other active stakeholders include the IDare for Sustainable Development organisation that works on P/CVE from a youth and a programmatic perspective, and the Arab NGO Network for Development, as well as the Arab Renaissance for Democracy and Development (ARDD), both of which are OPEV members. Furthermore, national non-governmental actors such as the Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development (JOHUD) and the King Abdullah Fund for Development (KAFD) have integrated a PVE project within their strategic plans since 2017, targeting Jordanian youths across the Kingdom from the ages of 18 to 35 (King Abdullah II Fund for Development, 2018).

Public policies and programmes

At the public policies level, official P/CVE efforts in Jordan were launched back in 2014, at the time when the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) – or ISIS in the Arabic acronym – came to light. During this period, the Kingdom had established experience with counter terrorism (CT) efforts, however the P/CVE terminology was not very familiar. Nonetheless, P/CVE efforts were driven by a grave official concern regarding the increasing number of Jordanian fighters who became ISIS supporters and enlisted with the group.

In 2014, Jordan's National Policy Council along with a number of its specialised committees launched a nationwide campaign involving all relevant levels of government and security (the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Religious Endowments, the Ministry of Social Development, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the Ministry of Education, for instance), asking them to come up with a comprehensive strategy to combat violent extremism. A series of consultations, exchanges and discussions resulted in the National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism, the details of which were published in 2016 and took the official title of The National Plan to Counter Extremism (Alghad Newspaper, 2016).

According to the Plan, confronting extremism requires joint efforts that include all aspects related to this phenomenon: educationally, culturally, politically, socially, economically and religiously. The Plan emphasised the necessity of "enlightening with an open and tolerant religious culture that would allow pluralism and acceptance of the others to flourish, be it an opinion, an individual, a society, a religion or a culture." (Ibid.).

In its text, the Plan called for the promotion of the values of tolerance, pluralism and respect for human rights, as well as the acceptance of the "other". To do so, it tried to outline the general framework for how Jordanian institutions should move in and work towards achieving the goals the plan sets by developing detailed strategies and plans. Importantly, the Plan acknowledged the weak coordination that exists between various P/CVE stakeholders. (Ibid.).

In January 2019, the Jordanian Armed Forces (JAF) – Arab Army announced the development of their own specific strategy to counter violent extremism and terrorism, based on the directives of the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff at the time. The JAF's strategy was built on three pillars: military, security and technical. The aim of this strategy, from one side, is to protect and strengthen the capacity of the members of the Armed Forces in dealing with violent extremism and terrorism. From the other side, the same strategy enables JAF to take proactive measures that are aligned with what various state institutions and security agencies were already doing in this field, all while responding to the fast-changing strategic and geopolitical environment (Roya News TV, 2019). Specifically, the JAF's strategy seeks to:

- Introduce the members of the Armed Forces to the extremist organisations active in the regional arena and to the principles that underpin these organisations and their work;
- Educate the Armed Forces personnel about the methods used by the extremist organisations to attract their supporters;
- Ensure intellectual "immunisation" of the Jordanian Armed Forces personnel, and their protection against the methods used by extremist organisations to recruit members of the military into extremist thought;
- Cement the concepts of responsible citizenship, loyalty and affiliation among the Armed Forces members and promote a culture of tolerance, moderation and acceptance of others;
- Protect all enlisted officers and units of the Armed Forces from potential terrorist acts; and
- Establish a focal point to manage, unify and synergise the efforts of all those who are involved in implementing the strategy within the Armed Forces. (Ibid.)

On strategies, it is worth noting that, after the establishment of the government-level P/CVE Unit, a number of other P/CVE-related units that existed before were cancelled; the P/CVE Unit at the Ministry of Political and Parliamentary Affairs is one case in point (Alrai Newspaper, 2019). Such efforts are explained within the context of the Kingdom's attempt to have a single reference point regulating and coordinating P/CVE issues.

Official definitions of violent extremism and radicalisation

As it stands, there is no official definition of violent extremism and radicalisation that is endorsed by the Jordanian government. The aforementioned National Plan did, however, emphasise the need to use an "appropriate verbal terminology for the reference and meaning implied in the mind of society" when discussing violent extremism and radicalisation. Note, for instance, that the use of the term "Salafist Jihadists" when referring to the Takfiris in Jordan beautifies the image of Takfiri in the mind of the recipient, the same way referring to "terrorist organisations" as "fundamentalists" could mislead the recipient (Alghad Newspaper, 2016).

On a similar note, the country does have an official definition for terrorist acts. The latest amendments on the Countering Terrorism Law of 2014 identified the terrorist act as:

> "Any intentional act/threat thereof, or refraining from it, whatever its motives, purposes, or means, falls in implementation of a criminal or individual project that endangers the safety and security of society, if it would violate public order or cause terror among people or intimidate them, endangering their lives and putting it at risk, or harming the environment, public facilities, private property, international property, or diplomatic missions, or occupying any of them, or seizing them, or endangering national or economic resources, or forcing a legitimate authority, or an international or regional organisation, to take any

action or refrain from it [in this regard], or disrupt the application of the constitution, or laws or regulations." (Alkarama, 2014).

Further, the latest amendments, introduced and passed in April 2014, extended to include four articles of the original law, drafted and approved in 2006. The amendments broadened the abovementioned definition of terrorism to include acts such as "disturbing [Jordan's] relations with a foreign state" which, according to IFEX-The global network defining and promoting free expression (2014) – the formerly known International Freedom of Expression Exchange–, constitutes a threat to freedom of expression in the country. The amendment has further expanded the definition to include other acts such as "any information system or network that facilitates terrorist acts, supports or spreads ideas of a group that undertakes an act of terrorism, or subjects Jordanians or their property to danger of hostile acts or acts of revenge" as well as "forming a gang with the intent to commit thievery or infringe on people or money." (Alkarama, 2014).

Civil society

In spite of having a National Plan on P/CVE in Jordan, along with an official P/CVE Unit under the mandate of the Prime Minister's Office, it is fair to note that fragmentation is still a characteristic of the P/CVE scene in the country. A number of civil society actors work on P/CVE issues, yet their efforts are yielding a modest impact so far, mostly due to either the lack of a broader P/CVE umbrella/strategy or the duplication of efforts. Additionally, interventions seem to be designed for the short and medium term, as opposed to a long-term comprehensive paradigm.

As highlighted by the WANA Institute's White Paper, the limited coordination between different P/CVE actors in Jordan, including civil society actors and local CBOs, remains a significant impediment to having an effective P/CVE approach (Bondokji and Mhadeen, 2019). As a result, a clear silo-working phenomenon began to characterise the P/CVE landscape, impacting not only the short-term ineffective P/CVE interventions in the country, but more alarmingly limiting the positive P/CVE initiatives to a certain geographical bucket or a group of beneficiaries.

The challenge the civil society stakeholders is facing is two-fold. First, there is little to no credible P/CVE evidence and knowledge base, meaning that the interventions are typically designed based on either the donor's understanding of the P/CVE issues and its relevant priorities or those of the stakeholder. Either way, such interventions are not necessarily backed by an informed and objective understanding of the issue. In short, the interventions are largely context-insensitive. Second, the civil society actors share the general challenge of the narrowing civic space, particularly when it comes to the issues of security as they are viewed through a strong state-centric lens.

Religious communities

Mainly, there are two religious communities in Jordan: Muslims and Christians. A number of different organised and institutionalised bodies represent these religious communities, notably:

- For the Muslim community, there is the Ministry of Religious Endowments, the Supreme Judge Department, and the General Fatwa Department (which is a body independent from the Ministry of Religious Endowments);

- For the Christian community, there is the Ecclesiastical Court, and the Jordan Evangelical Council for the Jordanian Christians of the Evangelical Church. Notably, the members of the Christian community in Jordan belong to one of the four major denominational groups: Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant.

It is important to note that the religious pathway is key to Jordan's approach to the P/CVE issues. One case in point is the Amman Message, which started in 2004 as a simple but precise statement issued by HM King Abdullah II of Jordan and senior Islamic scholars. The Message sought to declare "what Islam is and what it is not, and what actions represent it and what actions do not." Its goal was to clarify "to the modern world the true nature of Islam and the nature of true Islam." (The Amman Message, 2020). Thus, the Message is considered an early attempt at combating the radical and extremist thought which uses the religion of Islam to justify its extremists' conduct. In its origin, it was HM King Abdullah II of Jordan who has sent the three key questions to 24 of the most senior religious scholars across the globe representing all branches and schools of Islam, as follows:

1 Who is a Muslim?
2 Is it permissible to declare someone an apostate (takfir)? and
3 Who has the right to undertake issuing fatwas (legal rulings)?

Based on the *fatwas* provided by the scholars, who, amongst others, included the Shaykh of Al-Azhar, Ayatollah Sistani and Sheikh Qaradawi, in July 2005 HM King Abdullah II convened an international Islamic conference of 200 of the world's leading Islamic scholars – *Ulama* – from 50 countries. In Amman, the scholars unanimously issued a ruling on three fundamental issues, which became known as the Three Points of the Amman Message, whereby:

1 "They specifically recognized the validity of all 8 *Mathhabs* (legal schools) of *Sunni, Shi'a* and *Ibadhi Islam*; of traditional Islamic Theology (*Ash'arism*); of Islamic Mysticism (Sufism), and of true *Salafi* thought, and came to a precise definition of who is a Muslim.
2 Based upon this definition they forbade *takfir* (declarations of apostasy) between Muslims.
3 Based upon the *Mathahib* they set forth the subjective and objective preconditions for the issuing of *fatwas*, thereby exposing ignorant and illegitimate edicts in the name of Islam." (The Amman Message, 2020).

As such, it is no wonder that Jordan's National Plan for CVE opens with a religious statement and a reference to Islam to denounce extremist thought, and consequently the acts of extremist organisations. In this regard, it is a common exercise for the Grand Mufti of the Kingdom to regularly showcase and present Jordan's experience with C/PVE at national and international events, citing the Department's efforts in confronting extremist and radical ideas. As is common, the Mufti refers to setting a special law regulating *fatwa* matters in Jordan within clear and specific controls and limitations as a success for the Kingdom in its P/CVE efforts (Roya News TV, 2017).

Similarly, one study notes that the Ministry of Religious Endowments and the General Fatwa Department topped the list of the most active participants contributing to the National Plan for CVE. The steering committee

which drafted the plan consisted of 14 different actors from different ministries and governmental bodies. From a total of 195 procedural proposals put forward as the Plan was being developed and consulted upon, a total of 59 proposals (30% of the total number) were submitted by the Ministry of Endowments and the General Fatwa Department; with 10 proposals out of 59 coming from the Fatwa Department (Al Sharafat and European Centre for Counter-Terrorism and Intelligence Studies Amman, 2019).

A closer look into the religious communities in the Kingdom reveals a variety of ideologies and backgrounds, standing sometimes at an opposing end of the religious spectrum. For instance, the country has different salafi movements, arguably growing in numbers and use of violence; Hamas supporters who adopt a peaceful model of movement; a wide base of Muslim Brotherhood supporters who engage in different socio-economic and political aspects of the country (they are also the largest/oldest political opposition group), as well as a concerning number of Jordanian fighters who were in the ranks of ISIS and *Jabhat Fatah al-Sham* (Al-Nusra Front) and are returning to the country (Counter Extremism Project, 2015).

Methodologies

Stakeholders involved

As noted earlier in the mapping section, a number of relevant actors are involved in the P/CVE field. Still, it is helpful to note that there are three "spaces" whereby the question of VE in Jordan is raised and tackled: the PVE space, the CVE space, and the space in between. Different actors and types of involvement are tied to each of these spaces.

Specifically, it is clear that more actors are within the PVE side of the equation as opposed to CVE, since the latter remains a strict security file that is not quite accessible to those outside security and law enforcement agencies.

The security and law enforcement agencies are the key actors involved within the CVE sphere from both an operational and a judicial point of view, relating to both the methods and modes of applying force, and to the laws and regulations governing the VE scene in the country (through, for instance, the Anti-Terrorism Law).

Interestingly, there are few to no actors in the space between PVE and CVE actors. This leaves an uncharted territory when it comes to the overlapping between these two approaches and their dynamics, meaning that the engagements on both sides of the aisle, P-and-CVE, lack the needed complementarity to address the issue comprehensively and effectively. Therefore, it is desirable for actors, old or new, to come in and bridge this space and break the state of parallelism that exists between the two as it stands.

With respect to the government's involvement, the P/CVE Unit at the Prime Minister's Office is the official government entity that is responsible for coordinating the different P/CVE initiatives and activities in Jordan. The Unit also directs international stakeholders as well as the donors towards the government's priorities as far as P/CVE is concerned to ensure relevance of P/CVE projects. To that end, an official ministerial committee was formed in 2018 to devise a "clear action plan" for the Unit, comprised of the Ministers of Higher Education, Religious Endowments, Education, Youth, and Culture (Jordan Times, 2018).

The role of the Unit, however, remains within the coordination and guidance framework, and it does not initiate or run P/CVE projects of its own. Different observers note that the Unit does not have the proper budgetary

means to play a more proactive role within the P/CVE field in the country, in addition to the constant shifts it witnessed between different ministries, as well as the frequent change of administrations and high turnover of its already small number of employees (Al Sharafat and European Centre for Counter-Terrorism and Intelligence Studies Amman, 2019). Combined, such factors hamper the Unit's full and active engagement with the P/CVE field, making the Unit closer to being one actor against many, as opposed to the regulatory and coordinating role it should have had in overseeing the full field and working towards its betterment. The Unit's involvement is mainly at the macro level.

In parallel, CSOs and semi-governmental bodies are also involved. This ranges from raising awareness and building capacity to contributing to the P/CVE literature and policy environment in the country (mainly in the case of think tanks and research centres). The focus of their involvement comes at the grassroots and micro levels.

Lastly, international non-governmental actors such as the different agencies of the European Union (EU) and UN contribute to national P/CVE efforts. Yet, it is worth noting that their contribution is not necessarily, or explicitly, always labelled as P/CVE. This is attributed to two reasons.

First, VE is part of the broader umbrella of structural issues being addressed, issues such as social cohesion, resilience building or even promotion of good governance. Therefore, the international non-governmental actors prefer an approach in which they are seen addressing these broader issues as opposed to the narrow-focused P/CVE per se. Second, it is widely understood – although there is no official position taken that can confirm this – that the country does not want to find itself associated with VE so starkly. The mushrooming of P/CVE programmes/projects since 2015 certainly fuelled this "quasi-official" disposition. This therefore means that the EU's or UN's contribution should not be seen as putting Jordan on an explicit "addressing VE" path.

Targeted populations

P/CVE initiatives in Jordan have targeted a long list of beneficiaries. From youth in general to vulnerable and at-risk youths, refugees, women, official state employees, military personnel, imams and female preachers, teachers, students at different Jordanian universities, tribal leaders, community leaders, media workers, journalists, and policy-makers, amongst others.

Yet, what is key to note about the target group involved in the P/CVE initiatives is that each stakeholder has worked within its own mandate, and seldom did such initiatives bring a variety of the aforementioned groups all together. To elaborate, the Ministry of Religious Endowments has worked mainly and closely with imams and female preachers, with a partial partnership with CSOs such as Al-Hayat Centre for Civil Society Development (RASED). The Ministry of the Interior has worked mainly and closely with its own staff, including police officers, with the help of the Communal Peace Centre and the Communal Police Division, both of which are divisions of Public Security Department (Ministry of the Interior).

Similarly, the Ministry of Education has worked closely on the aspect that relates to reforming the curriculum via its own body, the Supreme Council of the National Centre for Curriculum Development. Similarly, the Ministry of Local Administration (formerly the Ministry of Municipal Affairs) has worked with municipalities and communal leaders.

By the same token, CBOs and local actors have also targeted similar groups in their P/CVE initiatives, following an almost identical approach to the design and implementation of their programmes, whether through workshops, capacity-building programmes, or holding focus group discussions, resulting in an echo-chamber whereby CBOs were virtually conversing amongst themselves with minimal interaction with relevant policy-makers, or without having a conversation with security and law enforcement agencies controlling the P/CVE aspect of such efforts.

Enforcement mechanisms for the P/CVE initiatives

There are arguably three enforcement mechanisms for the P/CVE initiatives in Jordan.

First, a soft mechanism based on raising awareness and building the capacity of relevant stakeholders. Such a mechanism is delivered by both governmental and non-governmental actors who adopted the training, lecturing and workshop pathways to enforce their P/CVE initiatives. Furthermore, this mechanism relies heavily on civic outreach and communal awareness in the delivery of the programmes, and seeks to provide the beneficiaries with the skills and knowledge necessary to form a societal nucleus that should contribute to changing mindsets and creating a cultural and intellectual environment that enables [young] people to think maturely, distinguish between right and wrong, and adopt facts and documented information. Furthermore, it is dependent on the voluntary compliance of the targeted audience by building their capabilities to examine the information and materials provided to them and influence others, for instance.

Second, a hard mechanism based on the use and application of force, albeit clearly more so in the CVE than the PVE sphere. This mechanism is captured by the number of police raids and operational interventions that were applied to a number of incidents that Jordan has seen over the past few years, extensively since 2016. It is worth mentioning that this mechanism bears a hefty cost for security and law enforcement agencies as they have lost a number of their distinguished officers during such interventions and engagement with radical groups or individuals in the country.

The third mechanism combines hard and soft measures and is found in the legislative dimension of P/CVE efforts. Here, the reference is made towards the amendments of the key laws governing P/CVE matters, such as the Anti-Terrorism Law (latest amendment in 2014) and the Cyber-Security Law (the law was first introduced and passed in 2015). For this purpose, in 2015, the Public Security Directorate (PSD) established a specialised unit under the name of Cyber-Crime Unit (CCU), with a mandate to address all forms of cybercrimes. In 2018, the amendments to include harsher punishments for what the state deems a cybersecurity crime were introduced (Ammar, n.d.).

Available resources

Realistically, the majority of the funding available for P/CVE efforts is offered by the international donors, with a smaller contribution of the Government of Jordan through the existing budgets of the various relevant ministries and agencies. For instance, the official flagship of Jordan's P/CVE efforts, which is captured in the production of the National Action Plan, was funded by the Government of Japan with the support of the UNDP's office in Jordan.

Main objectives of the strategies or initiatives implemented

The ideal goal/objective is to both prevent – by detection and awareness raising – and deter – by the application of force. The debate on where the existing approach falls on the prevent-deter spectrum in Jordan

is not only ongoing but also indecisive (Hazza, Majali and Rumman, 2016). That is, evidence of both does exist but the indicators tilt towards one side over the other, depending on the circumstances. At points, the country was taking a clear prevention approach, whilst at others, especially during the peak of terrorist acts, the weight was much heavier on the deter and counter side. Examples on the former approach include moving the P/CVE Unit to the Ministry of Culture, launching the National Action Plan, and/or introducing a master's programme at the Royal Jordanian National Defence College, with the latter examples including the introduction of harsher sentences or broader and vague definitions of terrorism, as alluded to earlier.

Existence of critical evaluation systems

Impact of the C/PVE on the threat of radicalisation

In a regional research project, the WANA Institute sought to examine the balance between human security, which largely falls within the PVE sphere, and state-centric security policies (SSPs), which are essentially in the CVE sphere, in Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia (Bondokji and Mhadeen, 2019). The findings from Jordan established that:

- "Successful human security programming can prevent violent extremism and go beyond that to address drivers of broader instability in the region. This includes drivers of social conflict, economic strife, challenges hindering representative and inclusive governance, as well as questions related to the social contract in countries of the region.
- SSPs – procedural and legislative matters – can reinforce violent extremism. Excessive use of force, selective application of security measures, and constraints on freedoms of expression together reinforce the sense of marginalisation and alienation among citizens. In turn, this enhances the prospects of radicalisation.
- SSPs also hinder the implementation of human security programmes in various ways including procedural and administrative restrictions on civil society, as well as access to employment opportunities." (Ibid.).

In short, the findings came to emphasise that, if Jordan is to eliminate the prospect of radicalisation, a balanced P/CVE approach is needed—one that does not only tackle the issue from a pure security lens but extends to address the structural issues that are still present in Jordanian society. Without such a comprehensive approach, the existing efforts continue to pose a threat to countering radicalisation efforts as they do not seem to address the contextual grievances and drivers behind extremism. Such grievances include, but are not limited to, development voids that are seen between the centre, Amman, and the peripheries outside the capital. A macro-level analysis of the situation points to a continued sense of social injustice and animosity towards the state in certain areas, which constitutes fertile ground for radicalisation.

SPECIFIC INITIATIVES ADDRESSED TO WOMEN AND YOUTH

In principle, most P/CVE initiatives in Jordan attempt to address women and youths in particular. However, the topic of women and VE remains an under-researched subject in Jordan, while the youth initiatives lack the capacity to leave a significant impact and be sustainable beyond the funding of international donors. As such, donor-fatigue on P/CVE issues stands as a real, but understandable, concern.

Specific initiatives focused on women and youths include, but are not limited to, the following:

- King Abdullah II Fund for Development (KAFD)'s Counter-Extremism Thoughts Project: the project was launched in 2017, with the aim of building youth core teams equipped with essential skills and knowledge to undertake the task of contributing to changing the patterns of thinking, along with creating a cultural and intellectual environment that enables young Jordanians to think reasonably, distinguish between right and wrong, and adopt facts and verified information. The project aspires to build participants' capabilities in fact-checking and the ability to have an influence on others, and targets young Jordanians in all governorates within the age group of 18-35 (males and females). Participants go through four main stages; the first includes three training workshops, while the second stage focuses on broadening participants' intellectual boundaries through dialogue sessions discussing a number of subjects. In the last two stages, participants work to transform what they have learnt into practical projects by implementing voluntary youth initiatives to encounter extremist ideologies on social media.
- The Women, Peace and Security Framework of UN Security Council Resolution 1325: whilst this framework does not target women and radicalisation exclusively but the broader question of enabling women's participation in conflict prevention and peace-keeping, it is nonetheless a fitting framework for women and PVE in the country. To elaborate, the UN Women programme on implementing the Jordanian National Action Plan (JONAP) on UN Security Council resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) follows the Cabinet's approval of Jordan's first National Action Plan in December 2017 and its successful publication and launch in February 2018. As reported by UN Women, the 2018-2021 JONAP for advancing the implementation of UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, and its subsequent resolutions, was developed to respond to the country's latest security and military challenges.
- The Youth, Peace and Security Framework of UN Security Council Resolution 2250: similar to the 1325 framework, the 2250 framework does not seek to engage exclusively with youth (males and females) and VE per se, but it encourages youth's participation in peace-building efforts by ensuring their active prevention, participation, protection, partnership, and disengagement and reintegration (Youth4Peace, 2015). To this end, this framework could provide a great opportunity to specifically tackle the question of young returnees and their integration into society, which is a highly debated and timely topic in Jordan. Political will and support do exist to support the operationalisation and "Jordanisation" of the resolution, as manifested in the forming and launching of the National Coalition for Youth, Peace, Security 2250 in 2017, which consists of over 15 CSOs and official actors (such as the Ministry of Youth) and has been navigating its way into institutionalising this framework since. The current Secretariat of the National Coalition are Generations For Peace (GFP) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA).
- Other UN agencies, such as UN Women, which have supported local efforts to shed light on P/CVE from a gender perspective, and discussed "women and violent radicalisation in Jordan" with a number of local actors such as the Al-Hayat Centre for Civil Society Development – RASED and the Jordanian National Commission for Women (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2016). Similarly, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has engaged in prevention of violent extremism through a project focused on youth empowerment, which was part of a larger regional initiative UNESCO was spearheading in Jordan, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia.

- The Women and Prevention of Extremism in Jordan initiated in 2016: the project promotes leadership among women and youths in three countries in the Middle East and North Africa, and aims to enhance the capabilities of youths and women and their role in the social and economic field. The project was funded by the EU, and the exploratory and analytical survey was implemented jointly by the Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development (ACTED), the Arab Women Association, the Centre for Information and Research, and the Centre of Women Studies at the University of Jordan. The attempt was made to form a better understanding of the concepts and challenges facing women in local communities on the problems of extremism and gender-based violence with the aim of exchanging views, raising their voices and contributing to improving dialogue between civil society and the authorities by uniting ideas and procedures and proposing solutions and recommendations. The project's output explored the relationship between gender-based violence and extremism in Jordan (Information and Research Centre King Hussein Foundation, 2016).

Conclusion

As such, there are a number of issues regarding the state of the art and for the CONNEKT research project in Jordan to consider.

First, there are a number of gaps that the academic/policy literature is yet to cover. These include: the gender dimension of P/CVE in Jordan, the integration and rehabilitation of Jordanian Foreign Fighters and returnees, the resilience factors at the grassroots level, as well as the impact of state-centric security policies and whether they exacerbate or mitigate the risk of radicalisation. In this regard, it is key to note that the policy literature on the issue is still limited and needs to be enhanced, and more national institutions and actors generating local knowledge on the issue need to be supported.

Second, beyond the literature, it is clear from the review above that there are several P/CVE actors and stakeholders in Jordan, however, there is yet to be an officially announced national P/CVE strategy that would regulate the work of said actors and serve as an umbrella to ensure that no efforts are being duplicated.

Third, there is a need to create a national database to document interventions, track policies and measure the impact of the diverse P/CVE efforts.

Lastly, the pure focus on P/CVE efforts ought to be reconceptualised; that is, it needs to address the structural socio-economic drivers not only for the benefit of preventing/countering violent extremism but also to deal with the broader human insecurities impacting individuals. This is based on the realisation that VE is one conduit, amongst many, of channelling individual grievances.

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TUNISIA

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Overview[1]

COUNTRY PROFILE

Government system

During the period between Tunisia's independence in 1956 and the 2011 Revolution, the Tunisian political system was a republican presidential system based on a single ruling party (the Neo-Destour Party, during Bourguiba's period, and the Democratic and Constitutional Rally (RCD) party under Ben Ali's era). The 1959 Constitution granted the President extensive executive and legislative powers, while imposing restrictions on prerogatives of elected legislative and judicial bodies.

After the revolution of 17 December 2010-14 January 2011, the Constituent Assembly (Parliament) drafted a new Constitution that was ratified and formally adopted on 27 January 2014. After the ratification of the new Constitution, the political regime took a new shape. From an authoritarian presidential system to a republican representative democratic system with a strong focus on participatory democracy (Tunisian Constitution, 2014: Preamble). This new political system is a mixed system (semi-presidential/semi-parliamentary) or a "modified parliamentary system" that distributes the executive power between its two heads (the President of the Republic and the Head of the Government), a distribution that is designed to guarantee power sharing and checks and balances. Constitutional and legal experts have confirmed that the post-revolution political system has unique characteristics, which make its traditional classification as parliamentarian, presidential or dual difficult.

The President directly elected by the people (Tunisian Constitution, 2014: Chapter 75) represents the unity of the state and controls public policies in the areas of defence, foreign relations and national security. The President assumes the supreme command of the armed forces and the presidency of the National Security Council. He is responsible for military, diplomatic and national security officials' appointments. Moreover, the President of the Republic has the right to dissolve the Parliament in special cases stipulated by the Constitution (Tunisian Constitution, 2014: Chapter 77).

The Head of the Government is appointed by a parliamentary majority. He is responsible for forming the Government, which should be approved by the Parliament. If the proposed government fails to gain the Parliament's confidence, the Constitution stipulates that the President of the Republic shall entrust another figure to form a new government (Tunisian Constitution, 2014: Chapter 89). The principal responsibilities of the Head of the Government include setting general policies (Tunisian Constitution, 2014: Chapter 91),

[1] For the preparation of this paper, a desk research as well as six interviews and roundtable discussions were conducted during the initial phase. The interviewees were selected among actors from academia, politics and civil society spheres. The interviews were conducted with Mr. Sami Brahem (university professor who contributed to the National Strategy to Counter Terrorism), and Mr. Bouraoui Ouni (security expert), Mr. Hamza Meddeb (senior researcher with Carnegie Center and visiting professor at European and Arabic universities), Mr. Jihad al-Hajj Salim (researcher in Sociology, who wrote a number of research papers on the violent extremism topic), Mr. Abdul Latif Al Makki (member of the Tunisian Parliament and former President of the Parliamentary Commission for Defence and Security), and Mr. Aslam Soli (chairman of a Tunisian NGO called "Badeer, " which works on countering and preventing violent extremism among young people). Roundtable discussions were organised among members of the research team of the Jasmine Foundation for Research and Communication.

appointing ministers and relieving them of their duties, and appointing senior officials in the public administration (Tunisian Constitution, 2014: Chapter 92).

The Members of Parliament are elected by universal suffrage during regular legislative elections (Tunisian Constitution, 2014: Chapter 55). The Assembly of People's Representatives (ARP) represents the legislative authority in the country, including approving the government and adopting the country's budget and laws (Tunisian Constitution, 2014: Chapter 66). The ARP discusses and approves international conventions and treaties in trade, financial commitments and issues related to borders (Tunisian Constitution, 2014: Chapter 67). It also monitors the Covernment's work and questions its members. It can withdraw confidence from one of the members of the Government or the whole Government in accordance with the constitutional framework.

Population

According to the National Institute of Statistics (INS), the size of the Tunisian population at the beginning of July 2019 was 11,722,038 inhabitants. The number of births per a thousand inhabitants was 18.2, compared to six deaths per 1,000 inhabitants (the latest statistics in 2017). Unemployment reached 14.9% in the latest trimester of 2019, the lowest recorded rate since the second half of 2014. Since then, it has ranged between 15% and 15.6%.

Main ethnic/religious groups

According to the first article of the Tunisian Constitution, "Tunisia is a free, independent, sovereign country. Islam is its religion and Arabic is its language" (Tunisian Constitution, 2014: Chapter 1).

Historically, Tunisia has been known as a majority-Muslim society based on the Maliki school of Islamic jurisprudence and the Ash'arism school. However, the results of a study issued by the Believers Without Borders Foundation (Mabkhout, 2018) claims that this harmony conceals a diversity that presents complex problems. These problems are mainly due to the relationship between religious attitudes and societal transformation and the effects of globalisation.

There are various religious communities in Tunisian society, including small Jewish and Christian communities. In terms of Muslim groups, other than the majority Maliki school, the most prominent sub-groups are:

- The "preaching and advocacy group": a group limited in number and influence. It was one of the active religious groups during the authoritarian regime within the limits of the legal framework. It is characterised by a preaching discourse, not a juristic one.
- Salafism, both the so-called "scientific" ('ilmi) Salafism and Salafi Jihadist. These are linked to active Salafist groups abroad.
- Shiites: In Tunisia, they are mainly linked to the Iranian revolution and their intellectual and social support base is very limited.

CONTEXTUALISATION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND RADICALISATION IN THE COUNTRY

General overview of radicalisation and violent extremism

Citizens reported to have joined ISIS and other violent movements inside and outside the country

In August 2012, the Tunisian security authorities estimated that around 500 Tunisians had received military

training within Salafi Jihadist groups in Tunisia (CSIS, 2016). In recent years, no official information has been published on the number of those who were/are part of violent movements in Tunisia.

Ansar al-Sharia is one of the most prominent violent extremist groups active in recent years. Reports on membership of the organisation, classified as a terrorist group by the Tunisian authorities in 2013 (more details about this organisation are in the following section), show that this ranged between 10,000 and 20,000 Tunisians in 2012 (Íbid).

However, it should be noted that not all those members were involved in violent activities. A large support base, sympathetic to the organisation's cause, joined its social activities following several social, economic and psychological considerations. After its proscription, most Tunisians belonging to violent organisations went to fight outside the country by joining violent groups that were active regionally or internationally.

Some international organisations have reported that, since 2011, between 6,000 (The Soufan Group, 2020) and 7,000 (UNHR, 2015) Tunisian fighters went to Iraq, Syria and Libya to fight with Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) and Al-Qaeda. However, Tunisian authorities have stated that these figures are exaggerated and that the number of Tunisians who joined ISIS is between 2,800 and 3,000, while about 12,000 Tunisians were prevented from going to Syria and Turkey to join ISIS (Marsad Tunisie, 2015). However, the Washington Institute for Near East Policy estimates that 27,000 Tunisians were prevented from joining violent extremist groups in Libya and Syria and 1,000 to 1,500 Tunisians were believed to have joined jihadist organisations in Libya (Zelin, 2018).

Presence of radical and violent groups in the country

Although the Scientific Salafist Movement in Tunisia (Braham, 2014: 23-24) is often classified as an extremist group, it remains a doctrinal and devotional movement, while stating that political affairs should be left to the "ruler". The movement's ideology stipulates that, whatever the conditions, believers should never disobey the ruler. Therefore, the group did not enter into violent conflicts with the Tunisian state (during Ben Ali's era). Under Ben Ali, the regime did not see it as a threat but perhaps even as a useful mechanism since its activities were limited to religious worship and rituals, encouraging people to leave politics and public affairs to the ruler.

As for violent extremist groups in Tunisia, there is a kind of consensus that limits them exclusively to Salafi Jihadist groups. Only after 11 September 2001, and the war on Iraq, did extremist jihadist groups start to be more active. Significant numbers of Tunisian fighters went to join the jihadist movements in Iraq. Hundreds of alleged members of the jihadist movement in Tunisia were tried under the terrorism law under Ben Ali, but given the lack of judicial independence and conditions for a fair trial, it is impossible to state whether these can be taken to have been genuine members of these movements or politically-motivated trials.

After the revolution, the Jihadist Salafist movement emerged into the spotlight, especially after the amnesty issued in February 2011 by the interim government headed by the Ben Ali-era Prime Minister who had remained in place (General Amnesty, 2011). The amnesty included all those who had been tried for civil or military crimes if their cases were related to political and/or trade union activities. Among those included in the amnesty were the leaders of the Salafist movement, such as Abu Iyad al-Tunisi, later to become the founder

of Ansar al-Sharia. At first, he called for Tunisia to be a "land of preaching, not for Jihad" (Lakhal, 2012). However, the post-revolution transitional situation, which was characterised by a changing political and social context and reduced state and security capacity, represented a fertile environment for the growth of various organisations, including the Salafi Jihadist movement that expanded its popular support base.

Among the most important of these organisations is "Ansar al-Sharia", (Adel bin, 2014: 79) which was established in April 2011 by the Salafi Jihadist veteran combatant (in Afghanistan, Mali and Iraq) and former prisoner during the ousted Tunisian President Ben Ali's regime, Saif Allah bin Hussein, known as "Abu Iyad". The latter disagreed with the spiritual father of the Salafi Jihadist movement in Tunisia, Al-Khatib Al-Idrisi, in urging for pushing the jihadist project in Tunisia towards militarisation and declaring political allegiance and organisational loyalty to Al-Qaeda while Al-Idrisi called for a focus on preaching and the expansion of popular support for the movement. Ansar al-Sharia took a charitable and service-oriented approach based on a propagandist religious discourse in a Tunisian environment thirsty for freedom of speech and new ideas after a long period of authoritarian rule.

Ansar al-Sharia won popular sympathy at the beginning, especially amongst frustrated young people whose expectations of the revolution were shattered when they were faced with the complex realities inherited from dictatorship. While young people's aspirations were to eradicate corruption and enjoy social and economic opportunities, they saw little change after the revolution in a very complex and difficult political, social and economic climate. The Salafi Jihadist group utilised this and provided them with a puritanical discourse and lifestyle based on an idealised imagination of an Islamic caliphate in which they would enjoy justice, social solidarity and economic empowerment. This imagined alternative found interest among those who felt excluded and stigmatised by the state, and those who felt intense disappointment after the high expectations generated by the revolution.

The Tunisian Government classified Ansar al-Sharia as a terrorist organisation in 2013 following two political assassinations and other terrorist incidents, which it was shown to have a hand in. Subsequently, many of its leaders headed to fight outside the country, especially in Libya, Syria and Iraq. The Oqba Bin Nafi Brigade emerged as the main domestic terrorist organisation, with a discourse and activities focused on attacking Tunisian security and military personnel (Sü and Aakhunzzada, 2019). Between 2015 and 2016 Tunisia also witnessed a rise in the activities of local terrorist groups and members of the Islamic State (IS) in Jebel Chaambi on the Tunisian-Algerian border and on the Tunisian-Libyan border. The activities of these extremist groups have been shown to overlap with criminal and smuggling networks.

A distinction is made in some of the literature on the members of the terrorist groups mentioned above between two profiles (Ayari, 2017). The first group engages in acts of violence with a political dimension, while the second is involved in acts of banditry and smuggling that are perpetrated by desperate individuals who do not have an ideological dimension and cannot be described as activists but are rather individuals who live outside the law. It is this type of individual that is commonly mobilised in violent operations, known as "lone wolf" operations, acting as "mercenaries".

Ethnicity is not considered a significant factor for identifying violent groups in Tunisia. The main violent groups in Tunisia are not based on a specific ethnicity and most violent extremist groups claim belonging to a wider

and supranational community like ISIS and Al-Qaeda. Also, violent religious groups are essentially extremist Muslim groups (cited above).

Framing radicalisation and violent extremism

Scientific and academic state of the art

Under dictatorship, policy-making was done in a very closed circle within the regime, far from independent experts and the public. The presidential, one-party system involved extremely centralised decision-making processes. Therefore, the academic world and the production of knowledge in the field of humanities were completely disconnected from the sphere of political action, apart from where individual professors may be called on by the regime to help draft laws or advise. Knowledge production was subject to rigorous and strict control, and prevented from challenging the authoritarian regime. This estrangement between the world of politics and academia did not disappear after the revolution. Tunisian academia's participation in shaping public policies remains modest, despite the quality, experience and expertise of many Tunisian professors in Tunisian universities. This lack of policy-relevant studies also applies to the field of extremism and violent extremism,[2] despite the fact that it is widely recognised domestically as posing a real threat to Tunisian society, the economy and the political transition.

Violent extremism is not a topic of significant research activity even within state institutions. After the launch of an in-depth scientific research unit in 2014 in a state research institution, the Tunisian Institute for Strategic Studies (ITES, affiliated with the Presidency of the Republic), the unit's work was suspended in 2016 and its results neglected for various reasons.[3] The most important efforts of the unit have been its contributions to the national counter-terrorism strategy (discussed in detail in the second part of the report) and a study on Jihadist Salafism (discussed below).

A significant recent development is the partnership signed in July 2019 by the National Committee for Countering Terrorism, within the framework of its project "Interconnection" on "Preventing Violent Extremism in Tunisia"[4], with the Tunisian Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research, with the support of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP). The project launched a fund dedicated to supporting scientific research related to violent extremism in Tunisia (MHESR, 2019).

In this context, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research has opened a call for researchers and civil society organizations (CSOs) to apply for funding for "research projects aiming at analyzing the phenomenon of violent extremism and produce recommendations helping to develop strategies and programmes for prevention and comprehensive treatment" (Babnet Tunisie, 2019). The initial selection of researchers was announced in November 2019 but no research results have been shared to date.

[2] Interview, academic researcher Sami Braham.

[3] Tariq Al-Kahlawi, President of the Tunisian Institute for Strategic Studies (2012-2014), states that "many studies were ignored, among them a study on sustainable development in Tunisia and a study on decentralisation that was accomplished during his presidency of the institute and the study on Jihadi Salafism, which was disfigured." Mr. Sami Braham states that a strategy was prepared after extensive research but was left on the shelf due to the change in political leadership and the lack of continuity at the state level. He claims that the key study conducted by the unit, which was prepared by hundreds of Tunisian experts, was suspended and its results distorted.

[4] "Tarabott" project

There is a huge difference in investment in scientific research related to violent extremism between the Tunisian state, on the one hand, and international organisations and foreign think tanks, on the other, which are allocating abundant funds in this area. This is not due only to differences in terms of capabilities but also to the Tunisian state's long-standing lack of adequate investment in scientific research related to humanities and social sciences. As a result, research on violent extremism in Tunisia is mainly produced by international or foreign organisations.

Below, we set out the most important academic studies carried out on violent extremism in Tunisia. We discuss the most important results and methodologies, as well as presenting the definitions of extremism and violent extremism adopted when analysing the phenomenon.[5]

Defining violent extremism and radicalisation

- " Salafiya Jihadiya in Tunisia" (Hajj Salem, M. et al., 2014)

This book, published by the ITES, consists of seven main chapters. Each chapter is based on theoretical research or fieldwork carried out by young researchers and academics in the research unit established in 2012-2014 at the ITES, under the Presidency of the Republic. The Salafism Research Unit was supervised by Dr. Muhammad Al-Haj Salem. The aim of this work was to study the Salafist Jihadist phenomenon in Tunisia empirically, including its religious, cultural, social and political dimensions. This book provides an important and in-depth reading of the Salafist Jihadist movement's evolution in Tunisia, retracing its historical and intellectual developments. It deconstructs its relationship with the various components of society and state institutions, and its implications for Tunisian policy-makers, in terms of how to address the phenomenon through a combination of hard security and integration approaches.

Among the important results in this book is the study prepared by Dr. Muhammad Al-Hajj Salem, entitled "A Psychosocial Approach to the Salafist Phenomenon in Tunisia". It concludes that the Salafist Jihadist movement in Tunisia mainly attracts youth suffering from multidimensional poverty economic, educational and spiritual (religious). They are living marginalised lives mainly in marginalised urban spaces. They perceive the state and society purely through an exclusionary authoritarian image. This is confirmed by another study in the same book that traces the trajectories of youth who join jihadist groups. The study explores the impact of various factors that cause these individuals to be "vulnerable", with a focus on the sociological characteristics of jihadist youth in Douar Hicher (one of the poor suburbs of the capital). It also explores the causal relationship between vulnerability and the recruitment strategies of violent extremist groups based on converting marginalised spaces into protest spaces in which alternative or "self-excluding identities" are formed, including the identity advocated by the Salafist Jihadist movement. Another field study in the book concludes that "the affiliation of many Tunisians to the Salafist movement was not for intellectual and ideological reasons as much as it was for utilitarian and opportunistic reasons to improve their material and social conditions."

The chapters in this ITES publication attempt to present a holistic approach to studying the Salafist Jihadist phenomenon. After considering the phenomenon in its historical, social and political context, the research

[5] It should be noted that due to limitations and the structure of the report, we have chosen to focus on the most important studies. The remaining studies are included in the references section.

goes on to analyse individual Jihadist "profiles" by adopting approaches in various fields. Despite the focus on formulating specific policy recommendations for decision-makers, the study has been left on the shelf, similarly to other studies that combine theoretical and experimental approaches. Its recommendations appear not to have been adopted by state institutions due to complicated political and institutional considerations.
Throughout the book, no specific definition of extremism or violent extremism is provided. However, it is worth noting that in one of the studies (by the researcher Sami Brahem) we find a critical position regarding the use of the term "terrorism" by the international community to stigmatise a particular group or organisation. The term "terrorism" is criticised for being opaque, ambiguous and used to discredit or condemn political opposition. Sami Brahem describes violent extremism as "the use of physical armed violence under the name of Jihad, as a way to change the political and social reality in order to achieve what they believe is establishing the law of God in the state and society."

- "Terrorism in Tunisia: An Analysis of Judicial Cases" (TFESR, 2016)

A study issued by the Tunisian Center for Research and Studies on Terrorism of the Tunisian Forum for Economic and Social Rights (October 2016) is considered one of the most famous quantitative and experimental Tunisian studies on terrorism. The study is based on analysing the judicial cases of individuals who were tried for terrorist offences between 2013 and 2016. The study is based on a sample of 1,000 (965 male and 35 female) cases. The researchers focus on socio-demographic characteristics to study the terrorist "profile". For example, persons accused of terrorism are overrepresented in the governorate of Tunis and Sidi Bouzid, respectively 18.78% and 14.32%, out of a sample of 1,000. On the other hand, out of 400 persons brought before an examining magistrate between 2013 and 2016, 40% have a university degree ,36.33% have a level of secondary education, 13% have a vocational training diploma, and 4% have a baccalaureate.

It is worth noting that the study suffers from some methodological issues. It attempts to create a pattern for terrorist profiles in Tunisia but focuses on micro level individual characteristics without taking into account the individuals' social environment (parents' occupation and their geographical origin, for instance); nor does it draw on localised geographical data (the municipalities from which the extremists emerged). The study is thus very limited on the meso level (family and community structure) and on the macro level (cultural components, socio-economic factors and the relationship with the state).

The study does not adopt a reference definition of violent extremism and states that there is ambiguity in defining concepts. It argues that it is necessary to distinguish between two stages in the terrorist's trajectory: the first stage is an intellectual, psychological, theoretical and ideological stage specific to the individual, while the second stage is when those beliefs are transformed into material actions within the framework of a terrorist organisation.

- "Assessing the Threat Posed by Tunisian Foreign Fighters" (Ben Arab, 2018)

Another study issued by the ITES (2018), this one completed with the financial support of the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs. It was supervised by the principal researcher, professor of cultural studies, Amna bin Arab, with the contribution of Dr. Faisal Faisal, specialist in cognitive language, and Muhammad Iqbal Al-Loumi, a data analysis expert at the University of Quebec, in addition to three researchers. The study relies on individual interviews conducted by researchers with 83 Tunisian individuals (80 men and 3 women) convicted of terrorism-

related crimes. Some of them committed terrorist attacks between 2011 and 2016. Among them are 58 Tunisian fighters who have returned from conflict areas, or others who had sought to leave Tunisia with the intention of travelling to fight abroad. As part of this study, all of them were interviewed and participated in 18 focus groups where they were given the opportunity to interact with each other.

The research team built its questionnaire based on the ecological "Bronfenbrenner" model (Graph 1). It develops the hypothesis that the Tunisian fighter is at the centre of the model because of a set of factors (family and personal environment, ideology, societal environment, socio-economic and cultural factors and values). The aim was to outline a social and intellectual profile for the fighters. The study found some interesting data that would help with drawing terrorist profiles and analysing the phenomenon of extremism: around 55% of the fighters are young people (20-29 years) who are not married due to their young age, psychological instability and economic or professional status. It also shows that 40% of the fighters have limited formal education (with many not going beyond primary education), that they suffer from economic insecurity (7% are unemployed and the rest work in very insecure jobs) and 70% of the combatants interviewed said that they were drug or alcohol consumers. This high percentage may be linked to the findings in a previous study (Hajj Salem, 2014) that most of the young people involved in violent organisations have weak family and social ties and became involved in violent extremist groups when going through a difficult period characterised by failure and instability.

The study also posits, based on discussions with prisoners, that there is a relationship between the violence that the individuals in question experienced in their family or educational environment and the violence they adopted as part of a violent extremist group. The study shows that most of the offenders had experienced violence either within the family context, in their immediate social environment or in violent clashes with state security forces and had a criminal record before becoming involved in violent extremism.

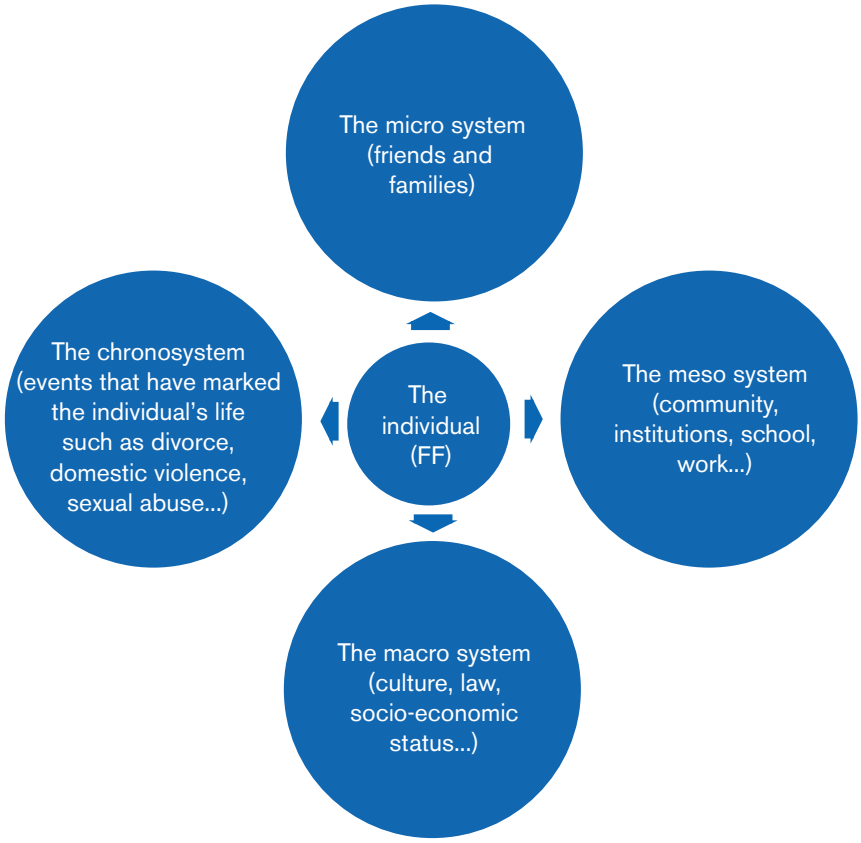
By using the area of residence of the combatant individuals as a variable, the study concludes that there is a direct relationship between deprivation (employment opportunities, infrastructure, leisure opportunities, etc.) and the number of foreign fighters in an area. But it highlights that some interior regions that have suffered from poor social and economic indicators for decades have not produced a large number of foreign fighters compared to other regions like Greater Tunis or Bizerte (on the coast). This confirms the dangers of drawing direct causal relationships between individual-level factors and social structures in understanding the phenomenon of violent extremism.

The study concludes that there is no specific pattern for a standard individual combatant because of their different life pathways. Moreover, there is no unique identifier that distinguishes foreign fighters from other individuals who choose to engage in terrorist activity inside Tunisia. However, there is a consensus that a set of factors was critical to pushing them towards extremism, the most important of which are an identity crisis in their relationship with their state and country, and deep disappointment in the revolution that failed to fulfil promises of employment, development and economic opportunities. The education system was also perceived as a failure and has affected the individuals' choices, as well as their tense relationship with state institutions, especially the security forces.

This study relies on unique access to the central actors in the phenomenon of violent extremism, through direct conversations with them and tracking their life pathways through questions that go beyond the micro level dimension of the phenomenon to the macro level and meso level, while seeking to avoid simplistic

explanations. However, legal conditions and procedures prevented the research team from accessing a bigger sample and increasing the number of meetings (58 individual conversations). The study has adopted a non-representative sample for interviewing the foreign fighters. Therefore, its results cannot be generalised but do provide an in-depth understanding of specific cases of violent extremism.

GRAPH 1. Ecological Model of Foreign Fighter. The FF Ecosystem



Source: Ben Arab et al., 2018.

- "Violent Extremism and its Motivating Factors in Tunisia in the 2010s" (Ayari, 2017)

This study was published by the UNDP in Tunis in 2017, written by researcher Michel Ayari, who is the senior analyst at the International Crisis Group (ICG) in Tunisia. The study represents an analytical literature review on violent extremism in Tunisia. It aims to identify and rank factors that might increase extremism and violent extremism. The study's goal is to produce recommendations to the United Nations (UN) agencies to better coordinate their efforts in responding to national prevention needs.

The study defines violent extremism as "the activity of individuals and groups who defend or justify violence for economic, social or political purposes and reject the universal values of democracy, the rule of law and human rights by spreading the message of religious, cultural and social intolerance." It provides an important theoretical contribution, as it presents two typical differentiated descriptions of violent extremist individuals (ideological combatant and "desperate outsiders"), depending on individual and social factors. The author

argues that most violent extremists in Tunisia are outsiders, living in situations of informality and showing a high level of readiness to engage in various forms of violence.

The author notes that most of the research carried out on violent extremism does not classify causal factors according to their nature (individual level and social), which leads to confusion in prevention strategies. A distinction between levels of analysis allows a distinction in levels of interventions to prevent violent extremism. The first level of intervention aims to increase the state and society's resilience in facing violent extremism. The second level aims to reduce the risks of extremism on the individual level.

The study identifies 33 factors for violent extremism. It describes them and assesses their impact on the social and individual levels for the two different profiles – "ideological combatants" and "desperate outsiders". The study distinguishes between seven categories for organising the factors of violent extremism: ideological factors, social and cultural factors, economic and social factors, individual perceptions, religious factors, institutional factors and situational factors. It produces a "qualitative risk analysis" matrix to show the causal weight of each factor and their categories in order to prioritise violent extremism prevention activities in Tunisia according to their potential impact on the social level (state and society) and individual level (the most vulnerable individuals).

- "Rethinking the Concept of Human Security and Its Approaches to Preventing and Combating Violent Extremism in Tunisia" (Zoghlami and Toumi, 2019)

This report was produced as part of a research project called "Towards a more effective approach to human security in the context of the emerging threat of violent extremism in Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia", implemented in Tunisia by the Jasmine Foundation for Research and Communication in partnership with the West Asia and North Africa Institute (WANA) and funded by the Dutch Research Council. It provides an analysis of human security approaches in preventing violent extremism, containing social tensions, and enhancing the resilience of local communities.

The study is based on in-depth fieldwork (desk research, focus groups, workshops and interviews) in six localities: Djerba and Ben Guerdane in the South, Carthage and Douar Hicher in the capital, and Menzel Bourguiba and Teborsoq in the North. Each region examined contained one "hotspot" where incidents of violent extremism had been common, and control areas where incidents of violent extremism did not occur. Dividing the chosen localities in this way enabled the development of hypotheses regarding locally-specific patterns of violent extremism, and the analysis of the relationship between local social structure and the phenomenon.

The study also presents policy recommendations for developing a new conception of security that integrates human security at the heart of all policy approaches, and moves away from purely hard security approaches. The research starts by defining extremism and violent extremism before moving on to analyse their motives and causes. We quote here definitions as they were cited in the report:

- Extremism: The belief in ideas that are very far from what most people consider to be true or reasonable and supporting these ideas. It involves positions and behaviours that go beyond what is ordinary and familiar among the members of a group. It can be considered as any adoption or development of beliefs

or ideologies that challenge the status quo and reject dialogue and mutual understanding and are usually followed by profound behavioural changes.

- Violent extremism: A concept that refers to the beliefs and actions of people who support and use violence to achieve ideological, religious or political aims. It is usually considered as the use of violence with ideological motives against the present situation and against the political and moral values of the group.

- "The Socio-economic Dimension of Islamist Radicalization in Egypt and Tunisia" (Süβ and Aakhunzzada, 2019)

This paper was produced by the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF) in 2019. It provides an analytical review of academic and non-academic studies that have worked on assessing extremism causes and dynamics in Tunisia and Egypt during the post-Arab Spring period. The paper also provides a developed theoretical model that identifies and reveals mechanisms linking economic and social factors to Islamic extremism. It identifies three general aspects about how social and economic factors affect extremism: (1) social and economic grievances; (2) social and economic opportunities, which are usually the absence of the state or its services; and (3) framing processes based on social and economic narratives.

Regarding the methodology, it combines qualitative analysis of the most important existing studies on the relationship between extremism and the socio-economic dimension with an experimental approach to analysing the jihadist scene in Tunisia and Egypt, and how Salafist groups – the most dominant – turned into violent groups.

It might concluded that academic and scientific research in the field of violent extremism in Tunisia after the revolution is active and dynamic. Its utility and policy relevance remain dependent on decision-makers' ability to translate its findings into policies, as well as their commitment to engage with research in a serious and objective way, away from political or narrow agendas. The fact that much of the above research cited was carried out by think tanks, CSOs and state institutions with bilateral or multilateral funding and foreign research centres makes the research outputs not entirely independent since they may be subject to the views of these agencies. The shortage of funding and its short-term nature means that in-depth research on violent extremism is still limited. Further research is required on different factors, levels of interaction and local contexts in order to help develop more contextualised and effective prevention methods.

It is also worth noting that for the majority of studies the terms of radicalisation and violent extremism are used as obvious terms for which no formal definitions were formulated.

Strategies to counter/prevent Violent Extremism and Radicalisation (C/PVE)

C/PVE INITIATIVES

Mapping of C/PVE actors

The state, activists in civil society and the religious sphere are the most prominent actors in combating extremism in Tunisia. Below we look at the role of each of them, with an analysis of the extent of their interaction and the degree to which their efforts are coordinated or complementary.

Public policies and programmes

Since the 2011 revolution, Tunisia has experienced difficult security conditions because of the increasing number of terrorist attacks. Tunisia has been through a difficult political transitional period, which has allowed a new open environment for freedom and individual liberties. The country has also witnessed turbulent periods characterised by deep social contestation. The political landscape suffered from instability and continuous changes of officials in important ministries and security institutions, and a questioned legitimacy of the state in an atmosphere full of criticism and public rejection. The state has lost some of its tools and capacity to impose order. However, after the deterioration of the security situation in Tunisia in 2013-2014 and the major terrorist attacks of 2015, the state managed to focus on dealing with the terrorism phenomenon, partly thanks to international support to strengthen the security sector capabilities in establishing a clear state approach to counter violent extremism.

The state national strategies in the fight against violent extremism

Work on a "National Strategy to Counter Terrorism" has been launched since President Moncef Marzouki's term by the Tunisian Institute for Strategic Studies, headed by Tarek Kahlaoui, an academic researcher. Hundreds of experts from academia and state authority officials prepared this strategy, which was due to be finalised in December 2014. The public version of the document contains more than 150 pages, detailing two main parts: diagnosis and "principles and lines of action" (Al-Kahlaoui, 2016). This document provides a comprehensive security approach in dealing with terrorism, as it stresses that countering terrorism is a responsibility that should not be placed on the security sector alone, but rather a responsibility shared by all state institutions and public agencies including ministries. The document views terrorism as a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. It also considers that the dangers challenging Tunisia go beyond local violent groups, which are driven by social, political, educational and cultural conditions, to a global strategy that seeks to involve Tunisia in the "awaited Caliphate", a more global project mobilising extremist groups from all over the world.

In the aftermath of the 2014 elections, the strategy did not gain the attention of the ruling party. It was not published and its programmes and recommendations were not translated into clear procedures and policies, which was confirmed by the researcher and academic Sami Brahem, a contributor to drafting the strategy. This is despite the fact that Prime Minister Mehdi Jomaa officially handed over the document to his successor Habib Essid before leaving his duties as Head of the Government during the succession ceremony. The strategy was

not concretised in a set of policies and programmes, as stated in an open letter from Tariq Kahlaoui addressed to the President of the Republic, Beji Caid Essebsi, which demanded: "Do not bury the counter terrorism strategy just because of political rivalry."

The National Security Council on 12 February 2015, under the guidance of the President of the Republic, decided to ignore the strategy and to prepare a new one from scratch (SNLCET, 2016: 2). To this end, a group of multidisciplinary experts and representatives of civil society were involved in drafting a new strategy based on the work of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Counter-Terrorism Committee. The team in charge prepared a draft of the National Strategy to Counter Extremism and Terrorism, which was reviewed and finalised by the National Committee for Countering Extremism and Terrorism (Leaders, 2016). The committee was created under the Organic Law on Countering Terrorism and Prevention of Money Laundering of 7 August 2015 (OLCTPML, 2015). The same law stipulated the creation of the Judicial Pole to Combat Terrorism as a pole specialised in terrorist cases to ensure better investigation and efficiency in dealing with terrorist cases. It is worth noting here that this organic law aims to confront terrorism and money laundering and to prevent them, in line with the international effort in this field and according to international standards and within the framework of international, regional and bilateral agreements ratified by the Tunisian Republic.

Various aspects of this law face criticism, as it was quickly rushed through Government and Parliament in a charged political atmosphere, following the Bardo and Sousse terrorist attacks. Criticism also focuses on the fact that it was not based on a strategic approach to preventing and countering terrorism. Furthermore, the law relies mainly on a hard security approach that might restrict individual liberties and exclude thinking about solutions for social and economic problems to address terrorism in depth and in the long run.

The National Strategy to Counter Extremism and Terrorism adopted in November 2016 built on four central pillars: prevention, protection, tracking and response (SNLCET, 2016). However, the strategy did not receive approval from experts and activists, especially at the methodological level, which showed confusion in concepts and objectives and was superficial in dealing with the phenomenon (Winter et al., 2017: 6). The academic and researcher Tariq Kahlaoui argues in an article (2016) that this new document neglected the diagnostic phase and went directly to recommendations that did not touch the core of the phenomenon but remained at the level of generalisation.

The National Strategy to Counter Extremism and Terrorism stipulates that various ministries, especially those directly concerned by the phenomenon, such as the Ministry of Women and the Family, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, and the Ministry of Culture, should be empowered by allocating a specific budget to counter extremism and terrorism. This decision has not been reflected in the ministries' programmes on the ground. Programmes conceived according to the strategy have not been implemented in those ministries.[6] The adopted strategy has also maintained the traditional role of the security forces and left it hostage to "conflicting ideology" (in the words of the security expert we interviewed) inherited from the authoritarian regime.[7]

Because of its lack of clarity, the official state strategy to counter extremism and terrorism did not succeed in effectively tackling the terrorist phenomenon, which led to an absence of in-depth discussions on the community

[6] Interview, researcher and academic Sami Braham.

[7] Interview, security expert on Bouaroui Al-Awni.

level (meso level). It did not provide a clear strategic plan or a common action for the various ministries concerned, which illustrates an absence of a clear vision and a comprehensive approach for the state in countering and preventing extremism and violent extremism.

A variety of national programmes to combat radicalisation and violent extremism

Although the state programmes are not well reported in the media, and more than one activist and expert we interviewed emphasised the poor communication and exchange between state institutions and CSOs, it is worth noting the increase in projects and programmes on combating violent extremism during 2015. The increase continued but at a lower rate until 2017, and to a lesser extent to the present. Below, we will present the most prominent programmes announced by the government in the area of countering/preventing violent extremism.

- As part of the state's policies in preventing violent extremism, the Ministry of Religious Affairs launched a campaign against violent narratives in 2015 entitled "We are Islam" targeting young people on social networks such as Facebook and Twitter. "We are the ones who represent Islam. They are not. We need to use technology in the same way, meaning the way violent extremist groups use it to attract and recruit," said Mrs. Najat Al-Hammami, who is the Head of the Ministry's Media and Communications Department (Petré, 2015).
- In 2016, the General Administration of Prisons and Rehabilitation worked with the US Department of State on establishing community reintegration centres of extremism and violent extremism prisoners who were released (Counter Extremism Project, 2020).
- Since 2016, the Government, under the supervision of the Ministry for Relations with Constitutional Commissions, Civil Society and Human Rights, launched the "Alternative Narratives" platform (Amouri, 2019). The platform aims to develop, produce and promote alternative narratives to combat extremism and terrorism in partnership with civil society and the private sector through technology and modern means of communication in order to consolidate a culture of dialogue, tolerance, diversity and acceptance. The platform was able to produce media content that mainly addresses Tunisian youth, such as short movies that were shown in the City of Culture and photo stories illustrating how discourses of violence and hatred spread within society and the methods of polarisation practised by extremist groups, published on official social media pages affiliated with the Tunisian Government.
- In mid-2017, the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research allocated 2.5 million Tunisian dinars over five years to support academic efforts to better understand the roots of extremism among young people and to develop plans and methods to face it. Four research projects were selected to be funded under this initiative one in the humanities and social sciences, and three in engineering and technology. This initiative is implemented in partnership between Tunisian research centres across the country, university professors and researchers from the Ministries of the Interior, Defence and Health. However, these projects will not be conducted before 2020 (Siliti, 2017).
- The National Counter-Terrorism Committee a national structure tasked with developing guidelines for state institutions in countering/preventing violent extremism and developing state policies and programmes also implemented a significant number of programmes within the framework of international cooperation. Among them are the Committee's programmes with the UN, such as the project "Preventing Violent Extremism in Tunisia through Human Rights-based Approaches for Development", launched in May 2018 and funded by the Swiss Government (US$3 million). It aims to support the National Counter-Terrorism Committee and to strengthen national capabilities in building resilience to violent extremism by engaging

various actors, especially the private sector and civil society (NCCT, 2020). The National Committee also represented Tunisia on the Board of Directors of the Global Fund for Community Participation and Resilience (GCERF) and presented a project to prevent violent extremism at the local level, with a value of USD5 million.

In a similar context, the project "Supporting the Network of Active Experts in Countering Violent Extremism" was launched under the guidance of the National Counter-Terrorism Committee and sponsored by the Ministry of Youth and Sports with the support of the Government of Canada. The aim of this project is to develop a set of initiatives and projects in the field of preventing violent extremism in order to the support decision-making process and communication between practitioners (NCCT, 2020).

The aforementioned programmes demonstrate that determined efforts are being made by various state institutions in countering/preventing violent extremism. They also show that Tunisia has several partners in its fight against violent extremism. However, these various programmes are limited by weak coordination among the various actors involved in and between the different programmes in order to support effective implementation. They are also challenged by changes in ministry officials or when passing from one government to another, due to the unstable political situation in a newborn democratic system.[8] Bureaucracy and red tape also disrupt the implementation of these programmes, especially since the Ministries of Defence and Interior do not provide adequate cooperation with programme participants even when it is the state institutions that launched them.

Another aspect of poor coordination in these programmes was mentioned by the president of a non-governmental organization (NGO) – in an interview with our research team – who has conducted major projects in the field of violent extremism (Dr. Aslam Souli), which is a clash between state institutions and conflicts between their policies. Tensions have been raised between the Ministry of Human Rights and the National Counter-Terrorism Committee when the first received a British grant for one of its projects (based on the human security approach), while the second received US funding for one of its projects (based on the hard security approach). This leads to a lack of strategic focus and coherence.

Focus on hard security policies

Experts and activists believe that the weakness of the state's policies is a systematic problem caused by the absence of participation mechanisms in setting and drafting policies. The committee that was formed to design the national strategy was not open to many stakeholders and actors in civil society, or to academia, which has many competent experts and provides a fertile environment for developing ideas. Moreover, hard security approaches are affected by a security sector that has not been subject to fundamental reforms since the end of dictatorship. It remains dependent on inherited experiences from the authoritarian system, and it remains unable to open up and engage and exchange with other actors. The security mentality is still rooted and affected by the authoritarian state climate, where the norm is to restrict information and consider everything related to security to be top secret and not open to discussion.[9]

[8] Interviews, President of Beder association Aslam Souli, and academic researcher Sami Braham.

[9] Interviews, academic Sami Braham and security expert on Bouaroui Awni.

The experts, parliamentarians and activists we interviewed unanimously agreed that the hard security solution is essential in confronting the terrorist phenomenon. However, they concurred that it is not a sufficient solution to the threat of extremism and violent extremism. The use of hard security approaches can often lead to a worsening of the situation unless accompanied by human security programmes to promote education, culture, development and tolerant religious values. There was a consensus that hard security and human security programmes are two mechanisms for different interventions in their respective fields. None of them can substitute the other and neither one of them works without having the other working.

While hard security approaches are still widespread, human security programmes are still deficient. For this reason, researchers and activists in local, national and international organisations continue to advocate for the need to develop systematic approaches that curb extremism and violent extremism by eradicating their preconditions. This can be achieved through programmes that work seriously to deal with socio-economic insecurity, address individual-level vulnerabilities and support local communities' resiliencies.

As for designing and implementing such programmes, interviewees emphasised that it is necessary to strengthen state institutions' capabilities and resources – such as the Parliament and the National Counter-Terrorism Committee – in order to design policies that take into consideration changing dynamics. Although state institutions have their methodologies and systems for assessing the impact of programmes on individuals and society, effective implementation requires opening up and building strong and sound relationships with CSOs of various specialisations (cultural, religious, educational, developmental, etc.) and think tanks and universities.

Official definitions of violent extremism and radicalisation

There is no clear and unique definition adopted by state institutions and by its officials in the National Strategy to Combat Extremism and Terrorism published by the Tunisian Government. The term "extremism" is mentioned 20 times without referring to a definition. Only at the beginning of the document do we find a reference to terrorism, which "represents a danger to all countries and peoples, and threatens the security of countries, the society's values, and citizens' rights and freedoms." One of the participants in preparing the first strategy to combat terrorism stated during an interview[10] that the Tunisian state does not adopt its own definition of violent extremism but rather adopts the UN definition like many other countries, knowing that the definitions of extremism, violent extremism, and terrorism are still controversial among member states.

Not having an agreed definition adopted by the state, civil society and other various components of the society is a systemic obstacle to designing clear policies that deal with core aspects of the phenomenon. The ambiguity in defining the concepts also contributes to the emergence of an area of interpretation based on personal views and interests in dealing with the phenomenon of extremism and violent extremism. It makes the state's policies confusing and driven purely by the views and interests of the political class that holds power during each mandate. Therefore, it is necessary for all national actors,

[10] Interview, academic Sami Brahem.

governmental and non-governmental, to work on the phenomenon definition that would be a clear starting point for moving towards clear goals.

Civil society

After the revolution, the Tunisian political scene witnessed the development of a climate of freedom for institutions, groups and individuals. Among them are CSOs and associations that have played a critical role in the democratic transition process and in resolving the difficulties and challenges that accompanied it. In the area of combating violent extremism, experts and activists we interviewed emphasised the important preventive role that civil society plays in direct and indirect ways. Many experts indicated that civil society interventions, with their different cultural, social, economic and developmental natures, and the different targeted groups of youth, family, women and children, have a very important impact in facing individual and societal fragility factors, and thus in limiting extremism through developing individuals' capabilities and society's resilience. Therefore, it is essential for associations and NGOs to continue to work in their respective fields and support various efforts in countering/preventing violent extremism.

The most important functions of civil society also include, as some experts pointed out, analysing violent extremism phenomena, which all researchers think is complex and overlapping.[11] Civil society can also help in providing legislative proposals and informing decision-makers. This task requires a certain level of efficiency and quality in the work of civil society, which is still developing its capacities.

Analysing the phenomenon and building a clear understanding that helps to formulate effective policies that are not limited to hard security policies but also include effective preventive policies were among the objectives of the Jasmine Foundation's project "Towards more effective human security approaches in the context of the emerging threat of violent extremism in Tunisia" (Jasmine Foundation, 2018). One of the most prominent findings of this project was the design of a model that illustrates the relationship between the material dimensions of human security (employment, economy, urban planning, etc.) and moral dimensions (culture, religion, identity, social ties, etc.). The research found that communities differ in their response to extremism and this response is not mechanical. It is subject to the degree of security that communities possess on several levels, whether material or moral. The results of the research emphasised that the approach to preventing violent extremism must be a localised one that takes into account the factors that characterise each community.

CSOs emphasised the importance of funding by international organisations to support the efforts of CSOs, as well as state institutions, in combating/preventing violent extremism. They noted that these challenges did not prevent civil society from playing an important role in training and developing youth and providing a positive atmosphere for encouraging active citizenship and participation, which helps them to channel and deal with frustration, anger and grievances, and thus contributes to reducing the potential attraction towards extremism and violence.

[11] Interview, security expert Bouaroui Awni, and Head of the Bader association Aslam Soleil.

Religious communities

For decades, the Tunisian regime imposed a unilateral understanding of religion and closely controlled and repressed religious institutions. The changes in 2011 have generated a broad public debate on the existence of a "religious vacuum" due to very weak official religious institutions, which contributes to "religious illiteracy" and the lack of effective mechanisms for providing sources of moderate religious thought. When the dictatorship ended, the opening up of political and public space exposed citizens, and especially young people, to new questions and debates as well as threats in an unstable and uncertain transitional domestic and regional climate. Among the most important threats that Tunisia experienced after the revolution was terrorism and violent extremism.

In order to prevent and limit these threats, a significant number of experts we interviewed pointed to a need to build a balanced religious discourse that promotes tolerance and dialogue. They argued that the immunity or resilience of youth and society against violent extremist narratives can be reinforced by reviving the values of the Reformist Tunisian Islamic School, which rejects *Takfir* and builds its vision on a *maqasid* approach that is flexible, moderate and urges coexistence.

Accordingly, experts and activists believe that strengthening the capabilities of religious actors including imams and officials of the Ministry of Religious Affairs is an urgent step to help them fulfil their social and institutional role in disseminating a moderate, persuasive and tolerant religious discourse that engages young people and different segments of society, and does not leave them with a lack of moderate sources, and spiritual, psychological and ideological confusion.

Some of those interviewed also argued that imams and preachers should develop their skills in using modern communication techniques as they are necessary for communicating with youth and for spreading positive messages on a large scale. Some also believe that religious actors should be trained in debating and public engagement, in order to conduct dialogue with young people and various social groups in a way that is persuasive.

Despite the role that religious institutions are expected to play in countering/preventing violent extremism, they remain largely absent from counter-terrorism strategies, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs is hugely under-resourced. It lacks the resources to train imams so that they can perform their important preventive role with young people in general and with young people whose vulnerability to extremism may be higher. One of those interviewed argued that Tunisia is the only Arab-Muslim country that does not have an official institute for training imams and that 65% of the imams in Tunisia did not even have a high school diploma.[12] This indicates that, to date, the state is not investing as it should in the role of the religious institutions in countering/preventing violent extremism policies.

[12] Interview, civil society activist, Research Archive of the Jasmine Foundation.

Methodologies

Stakeholders	Partners	Targeted populations	Implementation Mechanisms	Available Resources	Objectives (countering or prevention)
State institutions	- The Ministry of the Interior and Ministry of Defense - The National Counter - Terrorism Committee - Government - Parliament	- Those who have or are planning to carry out terrorist acts. - Youth (18-35 years old)	- The National Strategy to Counter Extremism and Terrorism - Conviction, deterrence and imprisonment (security and judicial mechanisms) - Training workshops in partnership with civil society	International funding. The most prominent: * The United Nations * European Union * Foreign Embassies: Swiss, Dutch, German, French, British, American	Countering is the first priority. Then prevention
Civil society	- International organisations (donors) - Tunisian CSOs - Tunisian research centres - Local associations	- Young people (18-35 years old) - Women	- Training workshops - Panel discussions and interviews with experts	International funds	Prevention
Activists in the religious field	- The Ministry of Religious Affairs -University Professors at Al Zaytounah University - Religious scholars and imams	-Young people	- Training workshops/training courses	Publicly funded	Prevention

Existence of critical evaluation systems

The experts and activists interviewed unanimously agreed that programmes to counter/prevent violent extremism lack evaluation by donors, as well as by national CSOs and state institutions. No papers or reports are available publicly or even to professionals explaining the impact achieved by countering/preventing violent extremism programmes at the individual and societal levels, and the challenges they faced.

The absence of evaluation of programmes related to violent extremism is an international problem and not specific to Tunisia. It has been stated in recent reports of international organisations such as the UN and the European Union (EU) that despite the dissemination of a set of guidelines for good practices in countering extremism/violent extremism prevention programmes in recent years, the methods and approaches for assessing the impact of these programmes remain without precise definition. This is due to a number of challenges:

- Theoretical challenge: The large number of variables, especially in complex and fragile environments, that can contribute to and influence the outcomes of countering/preventing violent extremism programmes. Hence, knowing and defining the relational links between various fields and involved stakeholders working on violent extremism needs a careful intervention design and the appropriate activities and efforts for each field or actor. The situation is further complicated by the local and contextual nature of the violent extremism drivers.

This analytical challenge requires a set of distinct, valid and accurate indicators to be designed or created for a specific local environment, which measures the impact of countering/preventing violent extremism programmes.

- The practical challenge: The sensitivity of the countering/preventing violent extremism programmes on the political level and regarding funding. Civil society actors often complained about the lack of time and funds given to completing the evaluation. On the political level, and for the sake of the security nature of these programmes, constraints on information and data are also reinforced by some international donors' short-term interventions. All of these factors disrupt the programmes and affect their results. Interviewees also pointed out the absence of a framework for those in charge of implementing programmes in order to be able to apply some precise and specialised evaluation methodologies. This demonstrates a gap between the traditional evaluation tools available and new tools being developed for evaluating the impact of programmes, and in particular countering/prevention of violent extremism programmes.

SPECIFIC INITIATIVES ADDRESSED TO WOMEN AND YOUTH

There are numerous countering/prevention violent extremism programmes especially targeting young people, given that they represent the most threatened category of being involved in extremism and most attractive to violent groups. Other programmes focused on women, considering their important role in countering and preventing violent extremism, but programmes and studies targeting women are still limited in Tunisia. Below, we set out examples of programmes designed for youth and women, which are the most cited in domestic media.

Active Citizens (2016-2017)

This was a social activism project carried out by the British Council in partnership with Tunisian CSOs, including the Jasmine Foundation. It was an eight-month programme targeting more than 300 young men and women from six Tunisian governorates. The beneficiaries are from popular neighbourhoods bordering the capital and deprived regions. The programme was based on social leadership training that encourages dialogue, non-formal education and individual and social leadership. Training focused on developing participants'

understanding of active citizenship and their individual roles as citizens, their abilities to design, plan and implement social action projects that address local challenges in their neighbourhoods, mobilise their communities and develop their sense of responsibility and local community so that they can achieve positive social change in their societies. After the training phase, participants were invited to develop and implement social action projects that meet the needs of their neighbourhoods. Therefore, the programme ranged between working on the individual cognitive level, practical skills, and social belonging.

According to the initial objectives, the Jasmine Foundation's evaluation of its own programme showed that it had succeeded in achieving the following goals:

- 300 young people were trained and educated in promoting a culture of peace, principles of citizenship, intercultural dialogue, leadership and social responsibility.
- 278 young people were trained in research methodology to diagnose challenges within their local communities using a participatory approach.
- 42 social action project proposals were submitted to a committee of experts. After their evaluation, 38 projects were approved.
- 35 social work projects were implemented.
- More than 100 partnerships have been signed with public authorities, with an average of three agreements per project.
- Nearly 70 local and national media outlets covered the young participants' social action projects, helping to promote the programme and developing the participants' self-confidence and status as local leaders.

Wise Women Voices against Violent Extremism in Tunisia (2018)
This was a project conducted by the Center of Arab Women for Training and Research (Cawtar), in partnership with the National Committee for Countering Terrorism and the US Embassy, with the participation of NGOs and experts. It was a research project aimed at a regional exchange of best practices and learning lessons on gender and combating violent extremism. It also aimed at building dialogue between the main actors and civil society, and launching preventive programmes to confront violent extremism.

The project was implemented through a number of workshops and meetings focused on the phenomenon of extremism, with the aim of identifying the underlying causes and their psychological and social effects, and to find possible solutions and mechanisms to mitigate them. Then, a set of recommendations were aimed at policy-makers on the importance of incorporating a gender perspective to address violent extremism. Among the most important project outcomes are the creation of "Together Against Violent Extremism in Tunisia", a network including CSOs and several government institutions, and the publication of an important review containing recommendations, conclusions and the most important national and regional experiences within the project meetings.

United Tunisians against Extremism and Corruption, A New Generation of Young People of Tunisia Tomorrow (2020)
It is a project launched by the Center for Islam and Democracy in Tunisia in partnership with the Organization for Human Security. The project targeted 400 young people in 10 governorates of Tunisia. The main objective of the project was to combat violent extremist discourse and to train local religious leaders, civil society activists

and young leaders on moderate, comprehensive and contemporary interpretations of Islam based on peace and against violence and extremism, as well as educating the local population, especially young people and families, on the values and benefits of peaceful dialogue and democratic discourse. Participants are receiving training in advocacy, conflict management and citizenship, which they will use to implement initiatives and awareness campaigns in their local communities targeting the general public, after which a competition ceremony will be held to award prizes to the most innovative and effective citizen campaigns.

Conclusion

Observations on the research situation in Tunisia in the subject of violent extremism

- The combination of levels of analysis: The reasons/motives for violent extremism can be defined as a combination of ideological, social and personal factors that appear differently from one context to another and from one individual to another. Most studies have dealt with the phenomenon of violent extremism by exploring two or three levels of social analysis (micro/macro/meso), which further complicates the analysis.

  We also note that most studies have rejected a direct, mechanical causal relationship between individual or social factors and violent extremism, such as the link between poverty or religion and violent extremism, which was rejected by the numerous studies. The same can be said for social conditions, which can be determinant in pushing some individuals to join extremist groups while not operating in the same way for other individuals.

  There is a need to reflect on how to build an ontological relationship between the individual psychological structure and the social structure. Looking at the way in which the individual builds and reviews his or her representations or social perceptions from a set of contradictions such as the social characteristics of the individual, his or her cultural and economic environment, previous experiences and the situations faced might lead to more realistic understandings.

- Methodological gaps: The few studies that have adopted a quantitative methodology have not worked on large samples sufficient to reach reliable results for designing public policies. It would be useful to broaden quantitative studies and complete them with other methodologies. It is also noted that experimental studies are rare, and the focus is on the analytical side without the epistemological distinction between levels of analysis.

- Failing to define the phenomenon: analysing and addressing the phenomenon of extremism and violent extremism requires a clear definition. This would provide greater clarity for policies and programmes.

- Limited policies and programmes: The predominance of hard security approaches in state policies is reflected in state budgets and political discourses on terrorist attacks. In addition, the various state programmes suffer from poor coordination between the key actors, and there is poor communication for these programmes. Furthermore, state policies and programmes are not subject to clear or transparent evaluation methods.

- Civil society is constrained by funding sources and the absence of national cooperation: CSOs working on countering or preventing violent extremism are dependent on international donor priorities. If the donor's priority changes, funding in a specific area will be reduced and funds will be allocated to new issues. These changes affect civil society activities and their sustainability in countering/preventing violent extremism, and their ability to build expertise and capacity in core themes. The state is also restricting civil society

activity in this area, as it is linked to sensitive security issues. Tunisian civil society has faced security restrictions when working on the issue of violent extremism due to the continuing closed culture among the security sector. Researchers working on terrorism or violent extremism find it very difficult to gain access to information on sensitive security issues. Furthermore, CSOs lack logistical and financial support from Tunisian state institutions. They have relied heavily on foreign funding when carrying out projects to research or address violent extremism. The Jasmine Foundation carried out extensive interviews with CSOs working on violent extremism in the framework of a previous project, which raised a number of structural challenges facing them in this field:

- Changing priorities of CSOs according to the funding offered by international donors.
- Adherence to the donor's agenda and amending approaches to understand and counter extremism to fit the donor's vision.
- The ambiguity of some donors in international/foreign organisations about the goals of their programmes.
- The ambiguous relationship between specific activities and countering/preventing violent extremism mechanisms.

- The need to strengthen the role of religious actors: Government policies in this area remain weak, and there is a significant need to increase training and support for imams to perform their role in communicating with young people and spreading a moderate religious discourse in Tunisian society.

What does the CONNEKT research project bring that is new compared to the research situation in Tunisia?

- Multidimensional methodology: CONNEKT's research differs from the research currently available in the Tunisian context in that it adopts a comprehensive multi-layered approach. The research is based on a quantitative-qualitative-experimental methodology that enables better interconnection between the research stages and aims to build a more complete picture of this complex phenomenon.

  The CONNEKT research methodology also relies on a research workflow system. Each work package focuses on a single methodological block (quantitative, qualitative or experimental). The research is conducted by a group representing the project partners. Hence, the research is based on specialisation and integration.

- Multiple variables, different and independent levels of analysis: CONNEKT's research is based on the largest possible number of variables (religiosity, economic conditions, political ideas and grievances, access to services and leisure opportunities, regional disparities, online consumption and behaviour, and international dynamics), which allows the design of a model of the different contexts of violent extremism. The research is also keen on studying these variables according to the three levels of micro, meso and macro analysis, in order to deconstruct the phenomenon by distinguishing between these different levels, and building a model that seeks to reflect the roles and interaction of these levels.

- Academic and field integration: The project seeks to use rigorous research methodologies to understand the drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism and transfer findings and recommendations to decision-makers on different levels (local, regional, national), and implement policy interventions involving local authorities and civil society. The CONNEKT project focuses not only on state strategies to prevent violent extremism but also on the community, social and local roles.

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MOROCCO

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Overview

Morocco is no stranger to violent extremism. This has become more apparent since the terrorist attack in Casablanca on 16 May 2003. This is not the first manifestation of violent extremism in its terrorist form in Morocco; there have been signs of urgency regarding suicide terrorism. Ever since, the threats of violent extremism have weighed heavily on the Kingdom's security policy. We will present this report in two parts. The first part will be an overview of the country and the context of violent extremism, as well as the literature on the subject in Morocco, which shows the difficulty of defining violent extremism. In the second part we will address all the points related to the state's strategy to combat violent extremism. This will enable us to see how Morocco has implemented *wasati* Islam ("centrist or mainstream Islam"). In Morocco, the politico-religious functioning is based on the figure of the King, Commander of the Faithful, who combines spiritual and temporal authority. The religious approach is based on a moderate Islam, commonly known as *wasati* ("Islam of the golden mean") to combat fundamentalism. *Wasati* Islam makes an interpretation of the *Sharia* that is adapted to the context as stated in the preamble to the 2011 Constitution. It is a question of reconciling the "pre-eminence granted to the Muslim religion" with "attachment to the values of openness, moderation, tolerance and dialogue." This *wasati* Islam is also reflected in practice with the reform of the Moudawana, the Moroccan Personal Status Code in the Family Law in 2003, a reform that aimed to give more rights to women based on the principle of a *wasati* Islam.

COUNTRY PROFILE

Government system

Morocco is a country in North Africa. It is located between the Atlantic coast and the Mediterranean Sea, and is characterised by its Berber, Arab and European influences. The Alaouite dynasty has ruled the country since the 17th century, and it is one of the oldest dynasties in the world. Its king is an omnipresent one, holding a central position in the political system despite the change of Constitution in 2011, following the events of the Arab Spring, and the rise of the Islamists to power in that same year. The uprising in the region, particularly in Tunisia, triggered a broad political protest led by the 20 February Movement, a movement formed by young people and linked by the extreme-left Nahj party and the Islamist Al-Adl wal Ihsane (Justice and Spirituality) movement (a group banned in Morocco). The main slogan of the movement was: "No to the combination of political and economic power" and was a message to the King. In order to confirm the exceptional status claimed by the monarchy, the King withdrew his investments in the food sector. Al Mada is a private Moroccan investment fund whose main shareholder is the royal family and that operates in several activities including distribution, banking, real estate, mining and construction, telecommunications, energy and insurance. It is present in 24 countries, particularly Africa, and is enhanced by a solid financial fund estimated at EUR 6 billion. The King very quickly proceeded to a political reform which resulted in a new Constitution in 2011 (Hibou, 2011). The PJD (Party of Justice and Development) was the big winner because it knew how to set up its political chessboard by claiming its support for the 20 February Movement, while serving the palace. It finally turned its back on the Movement just after winning the elections. The PJD is the only party that embodies social legitimacy and has an electorate that votes. The PJD has been an important element in stirring up anger on the streets.

Thus, since 2011, the constitutional regime of the Kingdom has been founded on the collaboration of the powers between the King and the Head of Government (Mouna, 2016). The King appoints the Head of Government from within the political party that wins the elections for the House of Representatives, and with a view to their results. The King can, on his initiative, and after consultation with the Head of Government, appoint the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Religious Affairs, and the Interior. These three ministers are called the ministers of sovereignty[1], because they embody the power of the state. The Islamists prefer to leave much of their constitutionally guaranteed power to the monarch whereas what matters to the ruling PJD is bringing it closer to the monarchy (Bendourou et al., 2014).

Population

Out of the thirty-six million people (Haut Commissariat au Plan Maroc, HCP) of the population in Morocco, Muslims represent 99.9%, and only 0.1% are Jewish (Pew Research Center, 2012). Morocco has undergone a rapid demographic transition by bringing in a relatively short period of time a large decline in fertility, which today stands at 2.38 children per woman. The Kingdom has been divided into 12 regions since the 2011 Constitution. These regions are supposed to be autonomous in their management but this autonomy does not exist in reality, and the central state continues to exercise full power over them. The population is dominated by young people, particularly in their 20s and 30s, which is not only the result of a population imbalance but also an imbalance in terms of population distribution by region. We can thus see that most of the population is concentrated on the Atlantic side or in centres of great economic activity, such as fishing and industry, as shown in this table.

TABLE 1.

1	Casablanca-Settat	6,861,739	19,448 km²
2	Rabat-Salé-Kenitra	4,580,866	18,194 km²
3	Marrakech-Safi	4,520,569	39,167 km²
4	Fez-Meknes	4,236,892	40,075 km²
5	Tanger-Tetouan-Al Hoceima	3,556,729	13,712 km²
6	Souss-Massa	2,676,847	53,789 km²
7	Béni Mellal-Khenifra	2,520,776	41,033 km²
8	Oriental	2,314,346	90,127 km²
9	Drâa-Tafilalet	1,635,008	132,167 km²
10	Guelmim-Oued Noun	433,757	46,108 km²
11	Laâyoune-Sakia El Hamra	367,758	140,018 km²
12	Dakhla-Oued Ed Dahab	142,955	130,898 km²

Own production. Source: Pew Research Center, 2012

This regional distribution of the population is followed by a great unevenness in terms of regional participation in the national GDP (Gross Domestic Product). It is especially noteworthy that the regions of Casablanca, Rabat-Salé-Kenitra and Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima contribute 58.2% of the national GDP. We also learn that four regions, Fez-Meknes with 9%, Marrakech-Safi with 8.8%, Souss-Massa with 6.7% and Beni Mellal-Khenifra with 5.6%, have generated 30.1% of GDP.

[1] Ministries of sovereignty are namely Ministries of the Interior, Religious Affairs and Foreign Affairs.

At the linguistic level, according to the 2014 General Census of Population and Housing (RGPH), Darija (Moroccan Arabic) remains the first language used in Morocco (91% of responses collected). The Amazigh languages, Tachelhit, Tamazight and Tarifit, occupy secondary positions behind Darija.

TABLE 2. Local languages used in Morocco (non-exclusive)

Indicator	Urban	Rural	RGPH 2014	Total RGPH 2004
Darija	96.3	82.7	90.9	89.8
Tachelhit	11.5	18.2	14.1	14.6
Tamazight	5.1	12.2	7.9	8.8
Tarifit	3.8	4.4	4.0	4.8
Hassania	1.2	0.3	0.8	0.7

Own Production. Source: RGPH 2004 and 2014

The interesting fact about the linguistic mapping of Morocco is that Tachelhit and Tamazight have clusters of speakers outside of their historical territories in many parts of the country due to spatial mobility. Data from the RGPH 2014 indicates that Rif Tarifit is far less widespread outside the Rif region.

Main ethnic/religious groups

Morocco is an Amazigh country with Arab, Andalusian and European cultural diversity. However, after independence in 1956, Arabic became the official language of the country. Amazighity was excluded or even fought against. It was not until 2001 that the Amazigh language was recognised through the creation of the IRCAM (Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture). It is only with the new Constitution that the country has introduced Amazigh as an official language. According to the 2014 census, the percentage of Moroccans who express themselves in Amazigh went from 28% in 2004 to 26.7% in 2014. This decrease has been contested by Ahmed Boukous, President of the IRCAM, and the Amazigh movement in Morocco (Benlarbi et al., 2018).

The Jewish community is estimated at 5000, most of them have left Morocco to live in Israel (Mdidech, 2007), this exodus followed the aspirations of Casablanca in 2002, which targeted the Synagogue (Bladi.net, 2016). Certain information sites speak of 800,000 Moroccan-origin Jews living in Israel, stating that "to better understand the figures, we must first mention the criteria taken into account. Thus, for the Ministry, a Moroccan Resident Abroad (MRE) is a person who has left the country since independence but maintains a close link with his or her country of origin. This may therefore be the first, second or even third generation."

CONTEXTUALISATION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND RADICALISATION IN THE COUNTRY

Overview of radicalisation and violent extremism

On 24 August 1994 Morocco experienced its first assault at the Atlas-Asni Hotel in Marrakech, a continuation of the fratricidal war in Algeria. It resulted in the closure of the borders between Morocco and Algeria. Judging that the young Frenchmen of Algerian origin who committed the attack were working with the Algerian regime, Morocco decided to close its borders. It was not until 2003 that Morocco was hit by a second more deadly attack, this time in Casablanca, which killed 33 civilians and 12 jihadists. On the night of 16 May 2003, 14 terrorists launched a series of suicide bombing attacks on various hotels, restaurants and community centres in Casablanca. These attacks targeted mainly the European community and the Moroccan Jewish community.

The suicide bombers are young members of Salafia from the poor neighbourhoods of Casablanca, particularly Sidi Moumen., a group that is reminiscent of Al-Qaeda. The bloodiest attack occurred in the Casa de España restaurant, where several customers were dining or playing bingo. Twenty people were killed. The May 2003 attacks are the most serious acts of terrorism in the history of Morocco. One week after the events, Parliament passed a law that expanded a person's legal detention time from eight to 12 weeks, without going before a court. Following these terrorist attacks, 200 arrests were made.

Although these were not the first manifestations of violent extremism in their terrorist form in Morocco (Dialmy, 2005; Alonso and García Rey, 2007), there were signs of suicide terrorism. Ever since, violent extremism threats have weighed heavily on the Kingdom's security policy. The currents that were present in Morocco, such as Sirat al-Mustaqim/"the True Path", and "Excommunication and Exile/*Al-Takfir wal Hijra*", as well as "Salafism of *Jihad/Salafiya Jihadiya*", were at the origin of the bombings that took place at five sites in Casablanca in May 2003. Since the war in Syria, Morocco has experienced a new wave of extremism, outwardly oriented towards a globalised radical Islam.

Citizens reported to have joined ISIS and other violent movements inside and outside the country

According to the Directorate General of Studies and Documentation (DGED) data, more than 1,500 Moroccan citizens left the country to join jihad in Iraq and Syria until mid-2017. This number is supplemented by between 1,000 and 2,000 nationals or bi-nationals residing abroad. The figure comes from the DGED's external information in 2014. According to the head of the DGED, at least 251 of them died (219 in Syria and 32 in Iraq). Some Moroccan jihadists hold positions of responsibility within the "Islamic state" (Justice, Finance, Interior), the most emblematic figure being the Amir who was in charge of the Torkman region (nicknamed Sham al-Islam/the arrow of Islam), as well as Ibrahim Benchekroun, alias Abu Ahmad al-Maghribi, who operated in the vicinity of Latakia. They were known to be tough in battle but had a very low level of education compared to the Iraqi and Saudi jihadists. But, why are the Moroccans radicalising? For Rida Benotmane, a former Islamist prisoner, now a blogger and an expert on the jihadi movement, we have to go back several years to better understand the attraction exerted by ISIS on a certain Moroccan youth. "The authorities have prepared the ground," he explains. For years, they allowed wahhabist thought to develop, which advocates a literalist Islam, especially in the North. In the name of a certain political equilibrium, this current was not only tolerated but also promoted, encouraging some Moroccans who find themselves more in a stricter and more combative Islam to take the plunge (Larbi, 2014). Morocco is leader in the fight against terrorism, with more than 200 jihadists returning to Morocco, detained and brought to justice by 2018.

Between 2002 and 2018, 183 terrorist cells were dismantled by elite Central Bureau of Judicial Investigation (BCIJ) units, preventing 361 planned attacks, said Abdelhak Khiame, Director of the BCIJ, and 62 of the 183 cells dismantled were directly linked to ISIS. These arrested felons have all pledged allegiance to ISIS. These are not local terrorist groups but rather individuals who organise themselves, appoint a leader and pledge allegiance to Islamic State. Most of these cells have ties with ISIS members back in Morocco.

Presence of radical and violent groups in the country

Violent radicalism is distributed as follows: Tangier 16%, Fez 15%, Casablanca 14%, Tetouan 13% and Salé 9%, of the radicals going to join war starting in 2011 (Masbah, 2019: 189). The cities of Tangier and Tetouan

alone account for 29%. Thus, Tangier provides 18.5 jihadists per 100,000 inhabitants, while Tetouan provides 28 per 100,000 inhabitants. This is explained by structural factors:

- the massive and uncontrolled urbanisation that characterise both cities;
- the predominance of illegal activities (drugs and smuggling);
- the high unemployment rate among youth;
- the rooting of wahhabism in these two cities since the 1980s;
- and, finally, the proximity of the enclave of Ceuta, which is a major hotbed of radicals who played an important role in the departure to Syria.

The term jihad is contextually twisted to the *Salafiya* movement wherever the behavioural factor is at stake. The economic, social, cultural, political and psychological dimensions are also important factors in understanding and explaining the phenomenon (although these factors are not made explicit and are taken for granted). All these dimensions are considered on the basis of the distinction between the theoretical-ideological, organisational/financial and executive levels. Such a position is justified as follows: "Moroccan terrorist Islamism must be considered as a total social fact. For it is not only an exchange of violence [...] but the dynamic form of a phenomenon that involves all the wheels of society" (Aboulouz, 2013: 3). Seen from a procedural perspective, the integration of a terrorist group is interpreted as the culmination of a process of de-conditioning and repackaging (Aboulouz, 2013: 10). The organisations studied in this framework are the following: Al-Takfir wal Hijra, Salifiya Jihadiya and Sirat al-Mustaqim.

Moroccan Islamism (Dialmy, 2000) is analysed from the same perspective. This time, Islamism is understood in relation to the rules of the game established by the political regime in the aftermath of independence. All forms of Islamism are understood as an Islamist movement (brotherhoods, associations, ulema, Sufism, etc.). Several works have attempted to look into the archaeology of radicalism in Morocco, returning to the radicalism of the 1970s (Zeghal, 2005). Thus, the assassination of one of the figures of the left on 18 December 1975, Omar Benjelloun, was the first manifestation of violent extremism motivated by religious ideology.[2] What is highlighted is the ideology, the evolution and the leaders of the three organisations of Islamism, which are Shabiba Islamiya (Islamic Youth), Al-Jamâ'a al islamiya / Harakat al-Islah wal Tajdid, and Al-Adl wal Ihsan (Fadil, 2018). The official support of wahhabism (Alonso and García Rey, 2007) since the 1960s would later produce a kind of boomerang effect. In other words, the wahhabist ideology supported by the political regime will constitute the main foundation for violent extremism.

It is said that violent extremism in Morocco is not a local phenomenon. It has transnational dimensions. Whether it concerns the procedures for carrying out terrorist attacks, such as those in Casablanca on the 16 May 2003, the funding resources or the emergence of Moroccan jihadists, violent extremism is a phenomenon that transcends national borders (Clément, 2006). Three factors are put forward to explain its emergence and evolution:

- the influence of international jihadism on potential Moroccan jihadists;
- the growing Islamisation of society;
- and the deterioration of the socio-economic conditions of the populations.

[2] The Islamist Youth, who was funded by Abdelkrim Motiî (1969), was the main culprit in this assassination.

In addition to these factors, there are other elements that promote jihadism, namely: media propaganda and distribution of CDs, cassettes and paperbacks funded by wahhabism. Regarding of Abdessamad Dialmy's studies, the authors do not hesitate to point to the political regime of King Hassan II. What was supported and encouraged to confront the leftist forces (the wahhabist ideology) will become a challenge and a threat to the political regime.

Framing radicalisation and violent extremism

Scientific and academic state of the art

As a culminating point, research into violent extremism has posed one question: what is radicalisation? What are the reasons for this radicalism? Among the comprehensive typologies of violent extremism, El Mostapha Rezrazi has established nine based on the development of extremism in prisons, the framework of which was responsive to the country's political situation. Before presenting it, it must be said that this typology seeks to trace the historical evolution of radical Islamism of Islamic youth in Morocco starting in the 1970s.

- The first type is between 1975 and 1988 (the period between the assassination of Omar Benjelloun and the fragmentation of Islamic youth).
- The second covers the period between 1988 and 1998 (emergence of small jihadist groups and attacks on the Atlas Asni hotel in Marrakech in 1994).
- The third covers the period between 1998 and 2001 (return of Moroccan fighters from Afghanistan).
- The fourth covers the period between 2001 and 2003 (massive return of Moroccan fighters fleeing the US War against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda and the rise of small groups coordinating campaigns to encourage virtue and prevent vice).
- The fifth covers the period between 2003 and 2005 (attacks of 16 May 2003 in Casablanca).
- The sixth covers the period between 2005 and 2007 (events taking place in the cities of Casablanca and Meknes).
- The seventh goes from 2011 to 2012 (attack on the Argana restaurant in the city of Marrakech).
- The eighth from 2013 to 2017 (which happens to coincide with the decadence of Al-Qaeda and the birth of ISIS).
- And, the ninth begins in 2017 and corresponds to the return of Moroccan fighters to Syria and Iraq (Ibid).

These typologies map the historical transition from the secret movement of the Muslim Brotherhood to the jihadist movements. In summary, there is a transition from Islamic violence targeting left-wing leaders (killed or assassinated by Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated groups, as in the case of Shabiba Islamiya in Morocco) to mainstream violence attacking society and its way of life.

However, the 2003 attack was notable, launching the first report on terrorism in Morocco. Without seeking to find a definition, this study attempts to clarify the socio-economic motives for terrorism, leaving it up to the state to include legal interpretations, which can be seen in the following pages (Dialmy, 2005). The latter is defined as "all the small groups which, in the name of Islam and through the use of physical violence, challenge the Islamity of the so-called Muslim societies and states, struggling for an international order defined as anti-Islamic" (Aboulouz, 2013). What is considered Moroccan Islamism is understood as a total social phenomenon. Otherwise, Islam alone must not be admitted as the sole cause of terrorism. A specific ideological linkage between "Salafism" and jihad ought to be mentioned at the outset. The movement starts and remains almost

centred around the spiritual and dogmatic willingness to limit both the Islamic creed and laws to the only authentic versions inherited from the past. The distance caused by the Western cultural impact and policy has contributed to the framing of a recursive historicity, which prunes the legacy to the detriment of the present age.

Prominent studies

Following studies conducted on Moroccan combatants abroad (in this case Syria and Libya), Mohamed Masbah (2015) uses the theory of "push and pull" factors to explain this phenomenon. Masbah distinguishes between political, logistical, sociological and ideological factors: a) Political factors: these refer to the attitude expressed by the Moroccan political regime with regard to the revolution in Syria. It supported the Syrian opposition by hosting the fourth meeting of the group of friends of the Syrian people (December 2018). This event was interpreted by the Moroccan jihadis as a sign favourable to their posture; b) Logistical factors: these are explained by a relatively easy trip to Syria and the expenses related to it (Mohammed V airport in Casablanca, Istanbul airport, Syria); c.) Sociological factors: these are explained by socio-economic conditions. With the statistics of an non-governmental organization (NGO) in Northern Morocco in support, the author explains that two thirds of the young people who joined jihad (foreign Moroccan fighters) are under 25. In addition, three-quarters of them come from the underprivileged social strata living in shantytowns in medium and large cities (Masbah, 2015: 3). The fact that the majority of Moroccan jihadis (foreign fighters) belong to the cities of the north is explained by their massive and uncontrolled urbanisation in recent decades, as well as youth unemployment; and d) Ideological factors: these are justified by the *fatwas* of the *Sheikh* that have incited jihad against the regime of Bashar Al-Assad, as well as the obligatory coming to the Sunni for help.

Jihadis establish religious and non-religious arguments to justify their recruitments. For religious arguments, they see Syria as the place of the last battle between believers and non-believers. And the non-religious arguments are rooted in frustrations related to corruption and the semi-authoritarian character of Morocco, which they blame for being too close to Western countries.

In the same context, the author provides another study to understand the motives and stages of recruitment of Moroccan combatants abroad (Masbah, 2019). In this regard, he shows that these motives are psychological, ideological and behavioural (Masbah, 2019: 187). Each of these motives is associated with a phase of recruitment: psychological motives are related to the phase of sympathy with extremist groups and it is considered a "rite of passage"; ideological motives are related to the phase of identification with the ideology of Jihadism and behavioural motives are related to the action that results in the journey to Syria for jihad (Mosbah, 2019: 188).

However, before presenting the results of these studies, it is important to point out the following concerning this work:

1. Despite the absence of a definition, these studies tend to show violent extremism as being of a foreign origin, especially in the Gulf countries. As a result, Moroccan Islam is represented as tolerant and non-violent/Islam *wasati* Islam. Thus, wahhabist extremism is perceived as threatening the cohesion of the Ummah/Moroccan community, where the notion of Ummah and the state merge into each other, especially during the attacks.
2. These works are either study reports or journalistic investigations, such as the analysis conducted in specialist reports (Houdaifa, 2017), or occasionally both.

3. Most of these studies tend to be assimilated into the state discourse, which has classified terrorism as any form of attack on the security of the state and of individuals.

We have seen that these works have essentially centred on a macro approach, with a neglect of the place of women in violent radicalism. The only work on women was carried out by Najat Bassou (2019) as her PhD thesis is centred on female radicalism. Bassou has tried to use individual trajectories to capture the attitudes and desires that help shape the radicals' choice of life. She distinguishes three projects that have led to the radicalisation of girls: the first refers to the search for a social position. These are girls who have gone through a situation of anomie, have a strong personality, and are looking for recognition. For these girls, radicalisation presents an escape route and a means of acquiring social status, and it is in this context that ISIS appears as a model of achievement. The second project concerns girls with attitudes of altruism. The images of children and civilians massacred are psychological reasons among others leading them to justify their jihadis engagement. Bassou shows that these girls have already experienced the trauma of death and long-lasting mourning. For her, this could explain their conversion. And the third project comes from a desire for marriage and the little love stories behind it. In the Moroccan context these girls are trying to escape social misery through marriage. Some girls are attracted by the idea of becoming wives of fighters, future martyrs.

This thesis manages to understand radicalism through individual processes and trajectories and concludes that the problem of radicalisation is rather political. Radicalisation can only be perceived through individual trajectories; these trajectories are marked by suffering and make it possible to see the social, familial, educational and also political disengagement that pushes to radicalisation.

Main research and knowledge producers

Indeed, the work highlighted is characterised by general analyses and conclusions, and many aspects of disarticulation are noticeable, namely between the advanced methodology and the analyses and conclusions developed (especially in the case of the work of Abdessamad Dialmy). The reader might have the impression that condemnation and value judgments, based on the existence of underlying ideological preferences, take precedence over the neutral and in-depth sociological analysis of the organisations studied. Thus, the process of radicalisation is sometimes understood in a mechanical and caricaturist way (compared to more detailed studies on the same phenomenon). A simplistic prototype of violent extremist can be identified: poor young individuals, with a low level of education, who have to some extent integrated violent extremism, sometimes unaware of their ideological situation. The researcher claims that people are sometimes subjected to a process of indoctrination in the houses of the Sheikh-Shuyukh by means of audio cassettes or in mosques, etc.. In addition, this work is broadly based on data relayed by newspapers or security services. This could even be the reason behind its weakness in terms of analyses and development. It has aimed to produce a stereotypical image of religious radicalism, a rather constructed cultural ideal type far away from real world dynamics.

In the Moroccan context "cognitive radicalisation" differs from "ideological radicalisation". In fact, those who engage in violent acts represent a very small percentage compared to those who sympathise, adopt or embrace radical ideologies. The first inclination could be heuristically described as "DIY" radicalisation and it is widespread in the Moroccan social context (Filali, 2019). One could term a "radicalisation of

consciousness" as one that faithfully reflects the case in Morocco; this radicalisation has been reinforced by the images of children killed in Syria. This takeover has long been connected to the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, especially in the books of the two Egyptian leaders Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb. Around the time, this movement was simply called the Sahwa Islamiya/Islamic Awakening. This ideological awakening has become a jihadist activity since the war in Afghanistan, which began in 1979. This portrayal of defeat in the face of the tragedy is accentuated by the two wars in Iraq and the Israeli violence in Gaza. The depictions revealed by the newspapers, however, fostered this Islamisation of consciousness, where the departure to Syria is viewed as a heroic act by the community.

Defining violent extremism and radicalisation

Violent extremism remains difficult for the perpetrators in Morocco; it is linked to a global context of globalisation. In the difficulty of finding a local definition, and probably even a lack of interest in the definition, the work on the subject has sought to explore the regional origins of this violent extremism (Masbah, 2015).

This literature seeks to provide models of extremism. It is tempting to provide many patterns to understand the motivations that drive individuals to join violent extremist groups. For instance, motivations can be traced back to the local characteristics of the regions to which the extremists belong (Pargeter, 2009). The next step is to understand why violent extremists often belong to particular regions; particularly the Tangier-Tetouan-Al-Hoceima region in the case of Morocco.[3].The objective is to see whether there is a relationship between localism and Islamist activism. Thus, the history of this region and the socio-economic characteristics of its populations are mobilised to provide some elements of a possible answer. Their Amazigh character, their complicated history with the central power and their marginalisation during a long period of time by the central power (Mouna, 2018) are all reasons behind their radicalism.

In a similar perspective, the integration of violent extremism (in its jihadist form) is explained by socio-economic, political and identity factors. In a first case, the focus is on youth unemployment, lack of opportunities and social injustice. In a second case, there is an emphasis on corruption. In a third case, the identity crisis among young people is considered (in this case young girls). This is due either to the feeling of being underestimated in one's family or in society in general (Ennaji, 2016).

Definition targets

The definition given to the extreme violence only refers to the Salafist movement, this denial does not include the violence of the extreme left in Morocco, especially in the academic world. This definition of violent extremism concerns only the actors of ***salafiya jihadiya***, it excludes all forms of violence that exist within the university, whether it is that of the extreme left or the Amazigh movement.

Methodologies employed to study violent extremism and radicalisation

The studies mentioned previously were essentially based on a diachronic reading of the evolution of the Salafist movement in Morocco. Most of them have been reports sponsored by institutional actors, including transcripts of interviews with former members of the Moroccan Salafist movement. However, violent extremism

[3] The cities of Casablanca, Fez and Salé are also known for the existence of violent extremism.

has not been the subject of research in Morocco in the sociological sense of the term, probably due to the difficulty of access to the field. The methodology remains dependent on a descriptive approach to the evolution of jihadist and wahhabist ideology in Morocco.

Strategies to counter/prevent Violent Extremism and Radicalisation (C/PVE)

C/PVE INITIATIVES

Mapping of C/PVE actors

Since the 2003 attacks, the state has attempted to counter radicalisation by returning to what is called the Moroccan Islam, an Islam that is tolerant and open to the world. This strategy has also been accompanied by a broad repression of the Salafism circuit in Morocco. Hundreds of Salafists were put in prison between 2003 and 2008 and this clean slate practised by the country triggered a broad protest against Law 03-03 on the Fight against Terrorism. With this law, Morocco announced the end of the policy of laxity (Bras, 2007; Tamburini, 2018). It describes terrorism as any act that has a deliberate association with "an individual or collective enterprise with the aim of seriously undermining public order by intimidation, terror or violence. Although violence and terror are materialised acts, the notion of intimidation remains ambiguous; it requires the judge to identify all acts that are not acts of aggression or terror as acts of terrorism. To reinforce its anti-terrorist legislation, on 14 January 2015 Morocco passed Law 86-14, which completes Law 03-03, which aimed to harden the pursuit against the acts of violent terrorism, and to punish the fact of joining or wanting to join a terrorist group, even if the terrorist acts do not aim to harm Morocco and its interests, in order to fight against the departure of jihadist to Iraq or Syria. The law also penalises any form of apology for terrorism.

Public policies and programmes

In order to control the influence of radicals, the Moroccan state has put in place several programmes and initiatives, summarised next:

1. The religious and institutional aspect: The religious factor refers to the nature of the political regime, of which the high religious authority is also the high political authority (the King is the Commander of Faithful/*Amir al Muminin*). Moreover, the reform of the religious domain plays a considerable role in the prevention of violent extremism. This level of reform is also called the institutional level. In a second phase, the state has carried out a reform of the religious fields, in particular by strengthening the role of religious authorities at the local level but also by institutionalising the role of the imams of the mosques. Thus, imams and Friday sermons are supervised by the Ministry of Habous/Religious Affairs, and no one has the right to speak in mosques without the permission of the authorities. The repositioning in the religious field has resulted in the creation of several institutions:
   - The Higher Council of Ulemas, created on 8 April 1981;
   - Rabita Mohammadia, created in 2006, an interest association that promotes an open and tolerant Islam;
   - the Moroccan Council of Ulemas for Europe, created by Dahir n°1.03.300 of 22 April 2004;
   - the restructuring of *Dar El-Hadith El-Hassania,* one of the most renowned religious teaching institutions in Morocco;
   - the Mohammed VI Foundation for the Promotion of the Social Works of Religious Officers, established on 23 February 2010;

- the Mohammed VI Institute for the Training of Imams, *Morshidin* (male religious counsellors) and *Morshidat* (female religious counsellors), created 20 May 2014;
- the Mohammed VI Foundation of African Ulemas, created on 13 July 2015;
- the School of Islamic Sciences under the Foundation of the Hassan II Mosque, reorganised by Dahir No. 1.16.159 of 14 September 2016;
- *Jamia Al Quaraouyine,* created 14 September 2016.

The objective of these institutions is to control the evolution of Islam not only in Morocco and Europe, but also in West Africa, where Morocco exerts an important religious influence. These institutions aim to control both the religious discourse and the religious learning. Actors trained within these institutions have become the spokespersons of Moroccan Islam in the media. Such a strategy is taken to underline the legitimacy of the state as a source of theological information and as a major actor in the religious field.

2. Educational aspect: The state has also proceeded to regulate the educational field by closing hundreds of Quranic schools and by implementing a reform in 2008 that recognises the *taelim attiq/*authentic teaching. Through this religious training the state has set up a religious training that ensures the seizure of power over the religious. At the level of so-called modern education, the state has reviewed all the literature on Islamic education, with the introduction of the values of the Moroccan Ummah, with an Islam: *Maliki Sunni, Jjunaydi* and *Ashari,* an Islam close to Sufi practice than to wahhabist orthodoxy.

3. The socio-economic level: the National Human Development Initiative was created in 2004. The aim of this initiative was to combat the socio-economic factors that accentuate radicalisation (CESE, 2018). Despite the mixed results of this initiative, it has succeeded in limiting the scope of violent extremism. This initiative was stopped in 2008, and the King set up a new commission to make a new proposal for a new socio-economic programme.

4. From a legal and security perspective: since the attacks of 2003, Morocco has passed Law 03-03 (on the Fight against Terrorism). But since 2015 Morocco has set up the Central Bureau of Judicial Investigation (*Bureau Central d'Investigation Judiciaire,* BCIJ), a high-level service that has since managed to unravel hundreds of dormant terrorist cells. In the same context, until 12 October 2018, approximately 183 cells have been dismantled. The total number of "devastating projects" envisaged was approximately 361. The number of extremists arrested was 3,129. On the basis of such a total, 292 persons had a criminal record. The number of arrests made in the context of operations ordered by the BCIJ was approximately 902. Among them were 14 women, 29 minors and 22 foreigners. On 27 October 2014, the Kingdom launched the Hadar ("Precaution") system, a surveillance system designed to secure the country's most sensitive points (airports, public squares, etc.) and protect citizens and foreign visitors through the deployment of joint units.

5. Revision programme *Musalaha/*Reconciliation: the interest is not only in the process of radicalisation but also oriented towards the process of de-radicalisation. The latter is divided into three stages: personal initiatives to revise extremist ideas (commonly known as *mouarajaat*); peer educator programmes initiated by the Rabita Mohammadia of the Ulemas; *Musalaha/*reconciliation. The official decreeing programme brought together former jihadi members tried in connection with the 2003

Casablanca attacks. These former extremists declared their submission to the king as the Commander of the Faithful. The aim of this policy was to recruit former jihadis into the state's ideology.

6. Media: in 2005, Morocco launched Assadissa, a television channel dedicated specifically to the religious sphere. The aim is to respond to the religious questions raised on the Middle Eastern channels that propagate the wahhabist discourse. In parallel to the television channel, a radio station is also being launched at the national level. Television also broadcasts courses and sermons from the mosques as part of a programme to combat illiteracy, presented by female guides/*Murshidat* mainly for women.

Official definitions of violent extremism and radicalisation

The Moroccan Government uses a broad definition of terrorism to convict hundreds of people suspected of belonging to terrorist cells. Many are held in secret for weeks and are subjected to torture. As a result, there is no definition of violent extremism, the state speaks only of terrorist acts, and extremism does not come under the jurisdiction of the courts.

Civil society

It is important to remember that this case involves several tensions between the state and certain civil society actors, in particular, the human rights associations (Mouna, 2020). The latter rejects the state's management of radicalism files, considering it as a means for it to settle these scores with its adversaries, given that the definition of violent extremism is absent. However, we observe several initiatives made by the European organisations in Morocco, especially German. The lack of a civil society recognised by international organisations has hindered the latter to set up awareness-raising initiatives for civil society participants, as well as research papers on the role of young people. Such papers give rise to meetings, most often held in Rabat. In our view, these programmes fail to represent a step forward in terms of knowledge on the subject, with almost no direct effects on young people. Elsewhere, the only association confronting the state is the Moroccan Human Rights Group, which is opposing Law 86-14, which it sees as a means to settle accounts for those who reject the political and economic decisions of government. Throughout that confrontation with the state, the government has banned the rental or leasing of premises to the Association Marocaine des Droits Humains (AMDH), which has found itself in its own premises to plan events (Mouna, 2018).

Religious communities

Morocco is a predominantly Muslim *Sunni* country, pluralism does not exist. Islam is the religion of the state, as shown by the 2011 Constitution and its predecessors. During the visit of Pope Francis to Morocco on 30-31 March 2019, King Mohamed VI of Morocco gave a speech on the religious openness of the Kingdom. He referred to the respect for religious practice of Moroccans, namely Islam and Judaism, and the respect for freedom of worship for foreign Christians living in Morocco. This discourse does not consider that Christian Moroccans exist as the King's subjects are either Muslims or Jew, and Christians appear to be only foreigners. It is interesting to note that some websites mention the number of 8,000 Christian Moroccans; and we even found their website. But, in general, the Christian Moroccan community is not very visible and this has put the Christian faith under the threat of Article 220 of the Moroccan Penal Code, which criminalises the undermining of the faith of a Muslim. It is thus important to point out that there is no work on religious pluralism in Morocco. This is a new area that does not appeal to the interests of researchers for the time being. On the other hand, the state's report is based on a security approach. What is said about Christians is also said about Shiites. The

adoption of Shiism began in the early 2000s with the success of Hezbollah in its war with Israel. Three months ago, Morocco allowed for the first time the Shiite community to celebrate, publicly, the Ashoura festival in Tangier. In 2015, they were allowed to open their first foundation in Tangier. However, although the authorities tolerate their beliefs, they demand that they are not expressed publicly. They are also banned from the mausoleum of Moulay Idriss Zerhoun, in the Meknes region, who they consider their "spiritual father". Finally, Shiites are notably absent on social media networks in Morocco, and communicate very little about their activities (Jaabouk, 2015).

Methodologies

In the 1980s, the state used religious groups to combat the Left's influence. This formula had been successful for 10 years, yet its social cost was immense, causing the state to rethink this strategy. The Government's reinforcement of Islamism has changed the social morphology, and the state has lately noticed the evolution of Islamic ideology within society through violent radicalism in its discourse on individual freedom, women, and so on. Thus, the state religion distanced itself from closed approaches, reviving the Sufi tradition of Islam advocated by Mohammed VI that is meant to be peaceful, social and open. And, indeed, in the Arab-Muslim region the nation is cited as an example in terms of spiritual governance and religious area management. Nowadays, the Tunisian, Libyan, French, Malian and Guinean imams are trained by and in the Kingdom.

This is the religious diplomacy of the Cherifian Kingdom. It is not the financial cost that counts, the state spreads out these qualitative victories. The objective of this policy is to control the processes of radicalisation within the country, but also to export the politico-religious model. The writings that criticise this approach put forward the use of religion in state affairs, which does not bother those in charge because Morocco is a country based above all on religious values. The King himself vehemently approves this policy, especially with the creation of the Institute for Training Imams in Rabat, Morocco, which is cited as an example of an effective tool for de-radicalisation in many countries. The practice of religion in this country is open and moderate, and the Institute, which has just expanded, intends to train imams who will apply this philosophy. Created in 2005, this institute now trains hundreds of imams and *murshidin* and *murshidat* (women) per year. However, initiatives to prevent radicalisation among the young are rare. Through this policy of de-radicalisation, Morocco seeks to impose an Islam of the *Wasatiyyah*/middle, an Islam that seeks to reduce the leverage of the countries that keep allowing entrances whether to Morocco or to the diaspora.

While these strategies have succeeded in reducing the ground for violent extremism, in 2018 the country faced a terrorist act in the small village of Imlil, in the Moroccan High Atlas 64 km from Marrakech in December 2018. This event claimed the lives of two young tourists aged 24 and 28 from Denmark and Norway. This incident touched the governmental security policy in Morocco. It caused the loss of 30 places in the ranking established by the International Terrorism Index. In 2018, the ranking reached 132 places out of all the countries concerned (138) with a score of 0,038/138 (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2018: 9). In 2019, out of the total number of countries covered by the ranking (138), 92 were had a score of 1,215/138 (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2019). On the other hand, in 2017, Morocco was ranked in 122nd place with a score of 0.077/138 (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2017). The country is among the top five countries of origin of recruits from ISIS in Iraq and the Levant (Banque Mondiale Région Moyen-Orient et Afrique du Nord, 2016) although it is less affected.

SPECIFIC INITIATIVES ADDRESSED TO WOMEN AND YOUTH

Since 2003, the Kingdom has put in place a double policy, regarding both security and religious affairs to deal with violent extremism. However, this policy does not target a specific social or age group. This is probably due to the absence of civil society, which has not sufficiently adhered to these initiatives, or to the fact that the state reserves this area for itself because it is so sensitive. Thus, apart from the fighting against illiteracy activities carried out in the mosques for women, which at the same time teach them some notions about Moroccan Islam, no initiative specifically targets women. In 2005, two years after the attacks in Casablanca, King Mohamed VI launched an initiative that was innovative and ambitious: the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH) . The King described this initiative as "part of the overall vision that constitutes the matrix of our societal project, a model built on the principles of political democracy, economic efficiency, social cohesion and work, but also on the opportunity given to everyone to flourish by fully deploying their potential and abilities" (Royal speech, 18 May 2015). Morocco believes that it is the socio-economic conditions that are at the origin of the extremism, so the project has tried to create a balance to cope with the causes of violent extremism in order to deal with the wahhabist propaganda.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this report intends to shed light on the question of radicalism in Morocco, looking into its local origins and subsequently into its link with the global context in order to delve deeper into the phenomenon of violent extremism in the Moroccan context.

If Morocco is perceived today as a model in terms of the fight against radicalism, with both an institutional and a political approach, one observes, however, the absence of an evaluation system involving CVE-PVE, the absence of a role for civil society, as well as the absence of specific initiatives addressing women. The data provided on violent extremism does not only come from government institutions, reflecting the extent to which survey-based data and fieldwork are needed to expand the scope of research as an independent source of academic research on the issue. Thus, linked by its multidimensional approach, both qualitative and quantitative, it will allow for a better understanding of the issue. In order to do this, in the context of Morocco, it is necessary to focus on the following points at a local and national level:

- Give priority to the local system, especially the religious councils of the provinces and regions.
- Pay heed to the country's religious policy training and research institutions: Rabita Mohammadia, the Jamia Al Quaraouiyine, the Mohammed VI Institute for Training Imams, etc.
- Speeches by civil society actors, in particular human rights associations.
- And work on the content of the media, in particular the Assadissa, promoted by the King.

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BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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Overview

COUNTRY PROFILE

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) is a multi-ethnic country with a population of 3.5 million split along religious lines. The main Abrahamic religions are present in BiH and are the foundation for ethnic divisions in the country: Bosniak Muslims, Catholic Croats, Orthodox Christian Serbs, and a minority presence of Jews. It became independent from Yugoslavia in March 1992 and went through a three-year war that left around 100,000 people dead (BBC News, 2017). The main parties to the war were the three major ethnic groups (Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs), in addition to military from Serbia and Croatia, as well as a variety of international forces (most notably United Nations [UN] peacekeepers and North Atlantic Treaty Organization [NATO]). The war ended in 1995 with the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement that also established the political system of BiH within its international borders. Post-war reconstruction was carried out with massive international assistance and several institutions and symbols of the country were adopted by international administrators, for example even the flag. Since 2000, and especially since 2006, the international presence has been greatly reduced. The country is largely autonomous in its decision-making, albeit with significant influence from its neighbours, Croatia and Serbia, as well as the European Union (EU). BiH submitted an application for EU membership in 2016 and started implementing the Membership Action Plan with NATO in 2018. It is a member and associate member of the UN, Council of Europe, Mediterranean Union, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and Central European Free Trade Agreement, and an observer at the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC), among others.

Government system

BiH has a very complex and devolved system of government established through the Dayton Peace Agreement. The country functions as a consociational democracy where power is shared between three major ethno-religious groups (Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs). The presence of group vetoes, territorial group autonomy and the requirement for multi-ethnic coalition governments creates additional layers of complexity and interdependence. Administratively BiH is divided into two regional entities, the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and the Republika Srpska (RS), and an independent unit, the District Brćko. FBiH is further divided into ten cantons, local self-governance units with a high level of independence, while RS has a centralised government. Although not a federation by name its functioning can most accurately be described as an asymmetric ethnic federation with weak central authority (Kapidžić, 2020). The Peace Agreement established the Office of the High Representative (OHR) as the leading organisation in civilian aspects of implementation of peace in BiH, which has the power to overrule any domestic decision and remove any local actor from office (Dizdarević et al., 2006). The OHR used these powers extensively between 1996 and 2006 but has since largely refrained from interfering in BiH's decision-making.

Government at the state level consists of a directly-elected, three-member collective Presidency (one from each major ethnic group) with very weak executive power, and a central government and Prime Minister approved by Parliament. The state government has limited power and is in charge of foreign policy, security

and defence, customs and immigration, foreign trade and communications, fiscal and monetary policy, human rights and refugees, and facilitating inter-entity coordination and regulation. Other competences are shared with subnational governments or exclusively in the hands of entities and cantons. At an entity level, both FBiH and RS have significant autonomy and are the main arenas of decision-making in BiH. Both have a weak President and strong Prime Minister with cabinet approved by their respective Parliaments. Entities have jurisdiction over policing, justice, finance, labour and welfare, healthcare, energy and industry, education, agriculture, veteran issues, and culture, among others. The Federation is furthermore divided into ten cantons, each with its own government and relative autonomy on local issues such as education and health care (Gavrić et al., 2009; Nešković, 2013). Checks and balances included in consociational power-sharing limit the power of any level of government and give an outsized role to (political party) leaders representing the ethnic groups. Elections are held every four years concurrently for all levels of government (except municipal elections). While they are considered to be mostly free and fair, the dominant role of ethnic parties skews electoral competition and limits country-wide and/or multi-ethnic politics and policies (Kapidžić, 2017).

Population

According to the latest census of 2013, BiH had a population of slightly over 3.5 million, and this number is declining. In 2020, the projected population will be around 3.25 million (Popis 2013 BiH, n.d.; The World Bank Data, n.d.). In 2013 FBiH had a population of 2,219,220, RS had a population of 1,228,423, and the autonomous district of Brćko had 83,516.

Main ethnic/religious groups

Bosniaks make up exactly half of the population with 50.1%, in addition to Serbs with 30.8%, and Croats with 15.4% (Table 1). About 2.7% of the population belongs to different groups and are categorised as "Others" (the official term for members of national minorities and people who do not identify with any of the three constituent nations). The census also confirmed that the two entities have a clear ethnic structure, with 92.1% of all Serbs living in RS, while 91.3% of Croats and 88.2% of Bosniaks live in FBiH (Black Insight, 2016).

TABLE 1. Population of BiH by ethnic/national affiliation

Area	Federation BiH	RS	Brčko	TOTAL BiH (numbers)	Total BiH (%)
Ethnicity					
Bosniak	1,562,372	171,839	17,411	1,769,592	50.11%
Croat	497,883	29,645	8,859	544,780	15.43%
Serb	56,550	1,001,299	14,023	1,086,733	30.78%
Other	79,838	15,324	695	96,539	2.73%
Not declared	18,344	8,189	213	27,055	0.77%
No answer	4,233	2,127	49	6,460	0.18%
TOTAL BiH				3,539,159	

Own production. Source: Census Results 2013

The majority of Orthodox Christians (92%) live in RS, while the majority of Muslims (88%) live in FBiH (Table 3). When we look at data combining religious affiliation and ethnicity, the overlap of ethno-religious identities becomes clear and delineates Muslim Bosniaks, Orthodox Serbs and Catholic Croats.

TABLE 2. Population of BiH by ethnic/national affiliation

Area	Federation BiH	RS	Brčko	TOTAL BiH (numbers)	Total BiH (%)
Religion					
Islamic	1,581,868	172,742	35,844	1,790,454	50.7%
Catholic	490,450	28,883	17,000	536,333	15.1%
Orthodox	57,120	999,802	28,838	1,085,760	30.75%
Agnostic	9,425	1,288	103	10,816	0.33%
Atheist	21,508	6,014	331	27,853	0.82%
Not declared	23,672	8,392	636	32,700	0.94%
Other	30,885	9,103	667	40,655	1.16%
No answer	4,292	2,199	97	6,588	0.20%
TOTAL BiH				3,531,159	

Own production. Source: Census Results 2013

CONTEXTUALISATION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND RADICALISATION IN THE COUNTRY

According to Azinović, radical ideology was quickly adopted in the BiH (Azinovic, 2017). As a state with a fragile institutional structure, a frozen conflict and unresolved issues of identity and governance BiH provided suitable ground for the development of this ideology. Bećirević (2016) writes in her book *Salafism Vs. Moderate Islam,* that in "a vulnerable Bosnian society with a recent history of genocide and mass violence, even nonviolent radical behaviour deepens the fear of 'others' and contributes to general social mistrust and insecurity" (Bećirević, 2016) Bećirević notes that since September 11th, and especially with the rise of Islamic States of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), this research field has become increasingly important and there was an urgent need to explain the concept and define key terms such as radicalisation, extremism, violent extremism, and terrorism. While academic definition and contextualisation of the terms follows Western literature, they are often used simultaneously and placed in the same context, especially by media. This sometimes creates confusion among government officials and decision-makers.

Academic literature provides an answer on how the process of radicalisation begins and how to end violent extremism. Azinović (2018) explains the concept of radicalisation and violent extremism through several phases. The process begins with an initiation, a "human touch", an interaction, followed by interaction with peers, people in the community, where the group dynamics are reinforced by a very specific worldview. In some cases, he also gives a significant role to social media and the internet. The most critical point of radicalisation, especially for young people, is the separation from their biological family, and inclusion in a new ideological family that provides them with protection and security. Vulnerable, traumatised individuals with unresolved mental health problems become the target of such narratives. When it comes to types of ideological narratives we can distinguish between political and religious radicalisation.

Overview of radicalisation and violent extremism

Citizens reported to have joined ISIS and other violent movements inside and outside the country

The departure of citizens from BiH to battlefields in Syria and Iraq was worrying. Azinović and Jusić considered BiH among the European countries most affected by this phenomenon (Azinović and Jusic, 2016). Determining the precise number of persons from BiH that joined ISIS in Syria and Iraq is difficult. Official government data puts the figure at 217 for the end of 2015, and the BiH Minister of Security stated that this number was around 230 in October 2017 (Azinović and Jusic, 2016). Unofficial estimates put the figure at around 330 citizens: for example, the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence suggests in its assessment that BiH provided between 300 and 340 foreign fighters (Hamidicevic and Plevljak, 2018). Among these 330 BiH nationals, there are some people who have dual citizenship or long-term residence in other countries where they were recruited and from where they travelled. The largest number of departures is between Syria and BiH (Ibid).

The identities have been established of 188 men, 61 women and 81 children who are believed to have travelled to Syria and Iraq from BiH and from the Bosnian diaspora between 2012 and 2015. The largest number of departures was registered during 2013 (Hamidicevic and Plevljak, 2016). Azinović (2017) gives a revised figure of 240 foreign fighters from 2012 to 2016 that joined ISIS. This is "the largest contingent of foreign fighters from the Western Balkans and the second-highest number of foreign fighters per capita out of any European country after Belgium" and Kosovo (Tzvetkova and Mancheva, 2019). While this estimated number puts BiH among the top European countries of origin for foreign fighters, if the ratio of foreign fighters to the total Muslim population is taken into account, the number for BiH is just below the average for the EU (Hamidicevic and Plevljak, 2018).

By the beginning of 2016, 47 men and 8 women came back, while 50 men and 1 woman were killed. This did not change much by the end of 2017 when a total of about 50 adult returnees came back to BiH from Syria/Iraq (Azinović, 2018). Since mid-2016 intensified efforts of BiH authorities contributed to a complete halt in both departures and returns. Death certificates for 76 fighters with BiH citizenship (including five women and four children) who were killed in Syria were made public in BiH media in April 2018 (Hamidicevic and Plevljak, 2018). As of December 2018, 98 adult Bosnian citizens (49 men and 49 women) remained in Syria/Iraq (Atlantic Initiative, 2018). According to Shtuni (2019), BiH nationals composed the largest group from the Western Balkans that remained in Iraq/Syria in 2019. While Kosovo accepting the repatriation of 110 foreign fighters in 2019, BiH repatriated only seven foreign fighters in 2019. Those who have returned in the early phase of the conflict may present a risk for further radicalisation, extremism and potential terrorist activities.

Currently, there are no violent movements within BiH. At the same time BiH citizens have joined violent movements and wars outside the country. In addition to Iraq and Syria, Ukraine is considered a destination where a small number of BiH nationals go to fight for foreign armed separatist groups. The number of BiH foreign fighters in Ukraine is estimated at seven, but the dark number is believed to be much higher. These fighters travel through Serbia, being assisted by the Movement of Serbian Chetniks Ravna Gora, in order to join pro-Russian paramilitary formations where they fought in the "Serbian Hussar Regiment" along with fighters from Serbia. In October 2017, according to BiH police agencies, there was only one BiH national on trial for fighting in Ukraine (Hamidicevic and Plevljak, 2018). An Atlantic Initiative Survey of 2,110 citizens and

12 focus groups in BiH found much higher support among Serbs for fighters going to Ukraine than from Bosniaks for fighters going to Iraq or Syria (Atlantic Initiative, 2018). They show that for Serbs, ethno-nationalist violent extremism was "associated with feelings of stability, agency, and safety" and this has not been condemned by political or religious leaders (Ibid).

Presence of radical and violent groups in the country

Most of the literature on extremism in BiH focuses on Islamic groups among Bosniaks. Azinović and Jusić (2016) write that since mid-2015, the Islamic Community in BiH has been working to gain insight into the actions of Muslim organisations, groups and individuals who carry out religious services and teaching outside its authorisation. Some of these groups have usurped the property of the Islamic Community, hindering its own work, and some operate from private houses and apartments. Among them are officially non-recognised Salafi and Shiite congregations, i.e. jamaats (Arabic for "assembly"). Any groups operating outside the purview and bureaucratic structures of the official and state-recognised Islamic Community in BiH are known colloquially as para-*jamaats*. There have been 38 identified para-*jamaats*,[1] out of which 14 have agreed to rejoin the Islamic Community.

Research conducted by the Atlantic Initiative indicates that the groups centred around these para-*jamaats* act as typical sects, i.e. religious congregations. Members blanket each other in "brotherly and sisterly love", "kindness and respect" and "good energy" and consider themselves morally superior to people in the community surrounding them, who they perceive as sinful and apostate. Indeed, members see themselves as part of a small, select group of true believers. These communities have been identified as fertile grounds for radicalisation and recruitment. Initially, Salafism in BiH was concentrated in smaller settlements in North BiH, Bihać, Maglaj, Ošve, and Gorna Maoća, but has since spread. The villages of Ošve and Gornja Maoća have especially high concentration of salafis. Gorna Maoća is very isolated and hostile to outsiders, following strict rules based on *Sharia* law and there are reports that Ošve used to house a training camp for jihadists (Tzvetkova and Mancheva, 2019).

There are reports of Serb and Croat groups being driven by ethnic nationalism and Orthodox and Catholic extremism, who often identify themselves as followers of the Serbian Chetniks and the Croatian Ustasha who were active during the Second World War. The Serb organisations and groups, working on an "extremist Orthodox agenda", are often supported by Russia, whilst the Croatian formations are often backed by the "radical elements of the Catholic Church and some political elites" (Becirević, 2018) It is not uncommon that these groups display neo-Nazi characteristics, engage in violent acts, and call for separation of territories inhabited by their respective ethno-religious groups from the state of BiH.

There is a least one secular organisation that can be classified as far-right. The Bosnian Movement of National Pride (BPNP) is a far-right Bosniak organisation based on ethnicity rather than religion. Formed in 2009, the BPNP calls for the creation of the socialist and national state of the Bosniak nation. The movement rejects the attachment of the Bosniak identity to a single religion and states that the Bosniak nation includes only those belonging to the European genetic and cultural heritage (BPNP, n.d.). It can be considered as nationalistic and

[1] 13 in Zenica,12 in Sarajevo, 17 in Tuzla, 3 in Bihać, 2 in Mostar, and 1 in Travnik.

unitarian, working against Serb and Croat efforts to increase autonomy, in addition to harbouring anti-Semitic and anti-communist views.

Framing radicalisation and violent extremism

Scientific and academic state of the art

In recent years violent extremism and radicalisation has been studied extensively in BiH. Many research projects were conducted by domestic and foreign researchers through non-governmental organisations. The issue of violent extremism and radicalisation has been treated as a security concern in BiH for almost a decade, especially following domestic terrorist attacks, and has been the focus of international and domestic policy-makers and security agencies. While empirical research from BiH is still scarce, especially within radicalised communities, descriptive and normative literature is available, including non-empirical policy papers, opinion pieces, news articles, and critical analyses – all of which are useful in identifying gaps in the research.

An outlier is the significant study on perceptions of Salafis by Puhalo (2016), which is based on surveys and a statistical analysis of perceptions and values among 130 salafis in BiH. This socio-psychological study is supplemented by perceptions of a sample of BiH citizens and analysis of news reports on salafis. Another is a study by Turćalo and Veljan (2018) that aimed to identify common and distinctive factors of vulnerability, as well as resistance to violence extremism in BiH communities with the highest number of foreign fighters, and the influence of key actors on these factors. Bećirović (2016) produced another qualitative study based on interviews and focus groups with 165 individuals (around half of whom were adherents of Salafism) examined the strategies used by Salafists to spread their ideology and explored why an increasing number of individuals are abandoning the centuries-long tradition of inclusive Islam in BiH for more radical interpretations (Ibid).

Prominent studies

Several studies that focus on BiH and the broader Western Balkans are prominent, but none stands out. Most are written by Vlado **Azinović,** Edina **Bećrovi** , Muhamed **Jusić** and Sead **Turćalo**, among others, and published by the Atlantic Initiative and other domestic and international think tanks and civil society organizations (CSOs). Some prominent examples are: Azinović, *Western Balkans Extremism research forum - Regional report understanding violent extremism in the Western Balkans*" (British Council, 2018); Turćalo and Veljan, *Community Perspectives on the Prevention of Violent Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina*" (Berghof Foundation, 2018); Azinović, *Between salvation and terror: Radicalization and the Foreign fighter phenomenon in the Western Balkans* (Atlantic Initiative, 2017); Bećirević, Halilović and Azinović, *Western Balkans extremism research forum - Literature review Radicalisation and violent extremism in the Western Balkans* (British Council, 2017); Azinović and Jusić, *The New Lure of the Syrian War: The Foreign Fighters' Bosnian Contingent* (Atlantic Initiative, 2016); Bećirević, *Salafism vs. Moderate Islam: A Rhetorical Fight for the Hearts and Minds of Bosnian Muslims* (Atlantic Initiative, 2016); Puhalo, *Selefije u Bosni i Hercegovini* (Salafis in Bosnia and Herzegovina) (Pro-Educa, 2016).

Main research and knowledge producers

The academic community has produced many scientific publications with conceptualisation and definition of key terms. The purpose of this work is to answer what radicalisation and violent extremism is based on, and to make recommendations for prevention. The BiH government and several CSOs, both domestic and foreign, are attempting to develop national and regional strategies and policies based on this literature and recommendations. In recent years, the media is particularly important in reporting on extremist groups and

radicalisation in BiH. Most objective reporting and investigative journalism has been done by the Balkan Investigative Reporting Network and Balkan Insight. At the same time there is a strong temptation for the media to focus on violence and sensationalism. Mainstream media in BiH (including some public broadcasters) predominantly follows ethnic lines and focuses on radicalisation of other ethnic communities. Reporting in a way that serves political elites and encourages ethnonational polarisation rather than informing the public. Hodzic and Sokol (2019) consider selective focus, one-sided and false reporting with unverifiable sources as common practice. This reporting overemphasises the danger of terrorism arising from other religious groups and portrays it in a negative light as a source of danger and instability (Raskrinkavanje.bo (n.d.).

Defining violent extremism and radicalisation

Definitions are mostly bundled with the terms "radicalism" and "violent extremism" often used interchangeably in research studies, government policies and literature. BiH adopted The Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Prevention and Combating Terrorism 2015-2020 in 2015. The Strategy does not explicitly define "terrorism" or "violent extremism", It refers in various ways to "terrorism and terrorism-related phenomena" or "violent extremism that can lead to terrorism" and cites "new terrorist challenges" that include foreign fighters but never defines any of these terms. However, efforts are being made in BiH to distinguish between radicalisation, extremism and violent extremism, with important contributions from the academic community. Academic experts identify the unclear terminology as a weakness and express concern because official definitions are an important aid in developing a common understanding of how to structure and implement P/CVE activities. For definitions they often rely on foreign authors. For example, Bećirević (2016) points to the difficulty in searching for the best way to conceptually distinguish between the terms "radicalisation" and "extremism" (often used interchangeably) and "violent extremism" and "terrorism" (also often used interchangeably). She also points out that the phrase "radicalisation into violent extremism" is used too frequently. This neologism clearly reflects the challenge researchers face in avoiding stigmatisation of individuals and groups who adhere to radical religious ideologies and hold radical religious or political beliefs within the legal boundaries of liberal democratic societies. However, Bećirević, Halilović and Jusić (2017) consider that authors and researchers have begun to employ these terms with more caution and with the acknowledgement that radicalisation does not necessarily lead to violence. They argue that it is necessary to distinguish between radicalisation linked to violent extremism and terrorism, and radicalisation aimed at initiating societal changes through non-violent means. Therefore, Bećirević (2018) writes that in the Bosnian context any analysis of "radicalisation into violent extremism" must acknowledge the process of reciprocal radicalisation, wherein mutual forms of extremism feed one another. Security experts have increasingly brought attention to reciprocal radicalisation over the last several years, warning that approaches to extremism that view the phenomenon exclusively through the lens of radical Salafism fail to account for the risk of reactive or co-evolutionary ideological movements. It is important to understand that competing extremist political narratives like those prevalent in BiH can contribute to violent extremism.

Definition targets

The Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Prevention and Combating Terrorism 2015-2020 does not include a clear definition of violent extremism or terrorism, so the scope of action and focus on target are equally vague. It states that its primary objective is the early detection of all terrorist activity, and rapid repression of individuals, groups and networks with terrorist intent. On the other hand, academic literature on violent extremism and radicalisation in BiH mostly mentions the Salafi movement and studies are exclusively

concerned with Islamic radicalisation, in line with donor-driven research priorities. However, it is important to note that extremism is present among all religious groups, which is often overlooked by donor-driven academic research concerned with Islamic radicalisation and foreign fighters.

Ethnic or religious communities considered by violent extremism and radicalisation approaches

Definitions do not specifically mention other extreme ethnic or religious groups. Yet, these are included in the broad (and vague) official government definition (Bosnia and Herzegovina Council of Ministers, 2015). Radical groups, such as those linked to the Chetnik and Ustasha movements (Serb Christian Orthodox and Croat Catholic, respectively) are often described as radical, or their followers as radicalised, in media and CSOs reports.

Methodologies employed to study violent extremism and radicalisation

There is a lack of empirical studies in radicalisation and violent extremism in BiH and most research uses secondary sources from security services and agencies or rely on a limited number of expert interviews.[2] In recent years, research on extremism in BiH has expanded but individual drivers linked to radicalisation have not yet been explored beyond the confines of Salafi-Jihadism. This represents a clear gap in the literature that needs to be filled. No research has looked at foreign fighters and radicalisation among the Serb and Croat communities. Also, research on community drivers of de-radicalisation is not well developed.

[2] Section “What is the scientific/academic state of the art in BiH?” elaborates on results of the most significant studies.

Strategies to counter/prevent Violent Extremism and Radicalisation (C/PVE)

C/PVE INITIATIVES

Mapping of C/PVE actors

The most relevant stakeholders working on P/CVE in BiH are:

- The Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina, n.d.) is the main government institution at the national level that is responsible for dealing with P/CVE. The ministry has a dedicated office that deals with C/PVE and closely cooperates with other stakeholders. At the same time it does not implement many programmes itself and has little funding available.
- The International Organization for Migration (IOM) (IOM, n.d.) works actively on PVE in close cooperation with governmental, intergovernmental and non-governmental partners in BiH. Since October 2015, the IOM has been active in increasing resilience of both communities and individuals in selected locations against radicalising influences but does not work on de-radicalisation. Through this work, the IOM has developed strong relationships with national and local stakeholders and carried out projects in more than 15 Bosnian communities that aimed to assess the drivers and prevalence of radicalisation. In October 2017, the IOM started a US government-funded project, Institutional Strengthening: Establishing a Formal Referral Mechanism for Preventing Violent Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina, following a pilot in six communities, with the aim to promote engagement and build resilience among youth. The project envisions work with families, media, employment centres, mayors, police, the Islamic Community and youth, in essence a local referral mechanism approach to identify at risk individuals and respond early and appropriately.
- The OSCE Mission (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (n.d.) in BiH works closely with the BiH government and other authorities in training and assisting them to improve relevant strategic documents on combating terrorism and C/PVE in a way that supports the rule of law and ensures respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Part of this work focuses on improving interagency, civilian-military and multisectoral cooperation, but also on spreading awareness among municipalities, CSOs, educational institutions, social care centres, mental health centres, police and religious communities at the local level on preventing and combating violent extremism. The Mission implemented a project, Support to Dialogue on Prevention of Violent Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Polis, 2016), from September 2015 to April 2016 with a focus on early warning and response.
- The United Nations Development Program (UNDP), acting as the main UN presence in BiH, works under the concept of prevention through promoting inclusive development, tolerance and respect for diversity. It has been active in coordinating a collective response by engaging local governments and international partners and facilitating the development of programme interventions and policy papers through its Human Security Programme, as well as addressing prevention of violent extremism in prisons.

- **Other stakeholders working on P/CVE efforts:** Regional Cooperation Council (RCC), Embassy of the United States, Embassy of Norway, Embassy of the United Kingdom, Embassy of Italy, International Republican Institute, Turkish International Cooperation and Development Agency.

Public policies and programmes

In the summer of 2015, BiH adopted the Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Prevention and Combating Terrorism for 2015-2020, followed by an Action Plan for implementation in October 2016 (Bosnia and Herzegovina Council of Ministers (2015). A significant portion of the Strategy consists of general measures directed at preventing individuals and groups from adopting violent extremist ideology. It also addresses the consequences of violent extremism, such as prosecutions and sanctions. This was reflected in changes made in 2014 to the BiH Criminal Code, which criminalised and stipulated sanctions for individuals who depart to fight in foreign wars. The focus on fighting in foreign wars is evident in the Strategy, perhaps to the detriment of broader prevention efforts. The activities laid out in the strategy fall into seven key areas: legislation, institutional capacity-building, education, prevention, protection, investigation, and responses to terrorism. The action plans derived from the Strategy have not been implemented yet, despite the fact that implementation was supposed to begin in 2016. However, the Strategy is considered by international experts as comprehensive and essentially aligned to relevant international standards and human rights.

Official definitions of violent extremism and radicalisation

The single relevant official document is the aforementioned Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Prevention and Combating Terrorism. It does not give a definition but builds on the definition by the OSCE: violent extremism and radicalisation that leads to terrorism.

Civil society

- One of the most important local think tanks active on the topic is the Atlantic Initiative (Atlantic Initiative, n.d.), which is also a local partner to all major international programmes. The think tank has been active in efforts to improve communication and coordination on C/PVE, in addition to mapping factors and actors of vulnerability and resilience to violent extremism in select communities (in Sarajevo, Zenica-Doboj, and Bosnian-Podrinje cantons). The Atlantic Initiative has prepared two reports on foreign fighters, looking at trends and patterns of radicalisation and recruitment in BiH, with data from document review, focus groups and interviews, as well as several other relevant research publications. The Atlantic Initiative also organises public academic events, such as presenting the Countering Violent Extremism Baseline Program Summary of Survey Findings – Bosnia and Herzegovina (Atlantic Initiative, 2018).
- Two international CSOs are active on C/PVE in BiH: the Berghof Foundation (Berghof Foundation, n.d.a) the European Youth Foundation. (Council of Europe, n.d.) Berghof cooperates with several local partners and is primarily concerned with better understanding of the drivers of violent extremism and supporting work that promotes tolerance and inclusivity. They are involved through the Opportunities for Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) in the Western Balkans (Berghof Foundation, n.d.). The European Youth Forum aims to build capacities of youth workers, activists, young teachers, volunteers and teachers on building peaceful societies by having an active role on preventing violent extremism. One of their more important projects is Violent Extremism vs Intercultural Dialogue and Peace aimed at young people.

- Other relevant CSOs are: the Democratization Policy Council, Global Analitika, Transkulturna psihosocijalna obrazovna fondacija, Hopes and Homes for Children, Humanity in Action, Centar Modernih Znanja CMZ, PRONI Youth Development Center in Brćko District, and GEA - Centar za istraživanja i studije.

Religious communities

The Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina is the organised and institutionalised presence of the religion in the country with the organisation's roots going back to 1882.

The Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina is an independent institution and activities organised by the Islamic Community are not managed by the government. The Islamic Community is a significant factor in prevention. In the *Strategy of Bosnia and Herzegovina for Prevention and Combating Terrorism* (Bosnia and Herzegovina Council of Ministers, 2015), religious communities are recognised as a protective factor in the active fight against all forms of violent extremism and terrorism. Therefore, through cooperation the Islamic Community actively participates in projects to combat violent extremism by developing a positive communication approach. It has been persistent in its attempts to take back control of all Islamic religious activity in BiH mosques, including radical interpretations, and to discontinue the activities of para-*jamaats*. In 2016, the Islamic Community called upon members of the para-*jamaats* to join the Community or face legal consequences. In what is heralded as a big success, approximately 90% of the known para-*jamaats* did so, thus giving the Islamic Community the authority to supervise their activities and appoint their imams (Perry, 2016). For the most part, imams of the Community are not accustomed or prepared to deal with radicalisation and violent extremism or its consequences – for instance, with the social re-integration of returnees. In 2017, the Ilmiyyah Association of the Islamic Community organised eight seminars for imams focusing on their duties, religious radicalisation and violent extremism (Ibid). The Islamic Community in cooperation with the OSCE has organised trainings for more 1,000 imams and developed an online module on violent extremism, hate crimes, and discrimination. With support from the EU Delegation to BiH, further training was provided for parents and adolescents. The Islamic Community also developed a strategic document regarding the integration of groups and individuals acting outside the purview of official Islamic Community structures, which included P/CVE measures focused on the education of imams and religious teachers. Additionally, the Islamic Community has established a youth network, with branches in communities across BiH, and has appointed coordinators for female activism.

As for Catholic and Christian Orthodox religious communities, they do not work to prevent violent extremism and view it as a problem related to Islam. Other radicalised groups, such as right-wing nationalists, neo-Chetnik Serbs, and neo-Ustasha-Croats are not directly affiliated with religious institutions.

Methodologies

Stakeholders involved

There is usually a well-defined dynamic of involvement in C/PVE. International donors, mostly governments acting through embassies or international organisations, set the agenda and give financial support for programmes, while local civil society, religious and even government institutions implement the programmes. This goes to the extent that a significant portion of government regulations is heavily influenced by expertise coming from abroad. International assistance is often bundled and channelled through multilateral organisations, such as the UN or

OSCE. Local implementation often relies on small, community-based CSOs or citizens' groups, such as the forumi za bezbjednost građana in RS, centres for social work, as well as the Islamic Community.

Targeted populations

In all domestic and foreign projects and programmes, youth were one of the most important target groups. Also, some programmes (such as those organised by the Islamic Community) targeted religious community leaders (imams). Many projects are organised in communities identified as particularly at risk. Recently, trainings have been organised for teachers and parents on how to present violent extremism in young people.

Enforcement mechanisms for the C/PVE initiatives

There are no specific enforcement mechanisms for C/PVE initiatives in BiH that would make any part of C/PVE obligatory for participants. Most initiatives rely on a combination of community pressure and personal contacts. A significant soft mechanism is the narrative put forward by the Islamic Community that excludes extremism as a religiously accepted option.

Available resources

The means in terms of budget are impossible to enumerate as almost all funding has been made available by foreign donors and has not been disclosed. For example, the IOM does not publish figures on its budget for C/PVE in BiH. Also, as several international organisations act simultaneously and cooperatively on C/PVE activities, acting through several local intermediaries, budgets for individual actions are often blurred. It is evident that donor funding for C/PVE has been increasing since 2012. At the same time, very few resources are made available through the budgets of BiH institutions.

Main objectives of the strategies or initiatives implemented

Initially, more focus was set on detection and countering but in recent years this has shifted more towards general prevention. The National Strategy includes both elements and gives them equal weight. Yet, BiH government institutions at all levels have limited capacities in operationalising and implementing the set goals. There is no systematic data collection, and existing official policy measures do not fully reflect issues identified by civic and international organisations. In particular, prevention is mostly left to the civil sector and religious leaders. Some of the goals in recent C/PVE programmes funded by donors are much broader and include enhancing community cohesiveness, strengthening civic components of interaction, community building and strengthening social capital.

Existence of critical evaluation systems

There is no critical evaluation system for C/PVE actions taken at any government level in BiH. Various donor organisations have their individual evaluations for each programme upon implementation, and conducted by in-house team-monitoring or by an outside agency. This evaluation is mostly conducted as an audit of the implementation mechanisms and not so much as a critical assessment of programme impact.

Impact of CVE-PVE on the threat of radicalisation

Such an assessment of C/PVE programmes has not been conducted. C/PVE programmes are generally considered to have some impact and continue to be supported by several international donors in BiH. Especially the mechanisms of C/PVE on reducing the threat of radicalisation are not studied in BiH.

SPECIFIC INITIATIVES ADDRESSED TO WOMEN AND YOUTH

Most C/PVE programmes in BiH specifically target youth and there are several examples below. On the other hand, no C/PVE initiatives could be identified that specifically address women.

- The IOM organised the project Institutional Strengthening: Establishing a Formal Referral Mechanism for Preventing Violent Extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina. They engaged with youth in vulnerable communities who enjoy local credibility in order to get suggestions of what young people and community leaders think is needed to strengthen that community. The general goal is to promote more youth engagement. A project Steering Board with donors, as well as other stakeholders, serves as a mechanism to monitor the project, as well as to share information on PVE/CVE more generally.
- The Youth Resource Centre (YRC) (Council of Europe, n.d.) has carried out several projects harnessing education and awareness raising to prevent violent extremism, including with the funding of foreign governments and international organisations (OSCE, IOM, USAID…). Examples of projects include the IOM-supported Catch Me If You Can campaign and Youth Against Violent Extremism project, which encourage greater involvement by youth in PVE, and the Young Activists in Combating Violent Extremism project, which aims to build capacity among young activists to detect and report radical behaviour among youth, both in person and online.
- Other projects include: Against Radicalisation and Violent Extremism in the BiH Public Space – strengthen the media and information literacy of young people (Nasa zajednica), Improving engagement of youth in vulnerable communities (CSO PUŽ Tuzla and VIZIONAR Bugojno), Misuse of the internet for extremist messaging (Islamic Community), Global ethics in schools (Transkulturna psihosocijalna obrazovna fondacija), Expressing stories of individual radicalisation into violent extremism through drama (OSCE Mission to BiH), Online communication campaign aimed at prevention and awareness-raising: United in CVE (OSCE), Insult Gallery - A wall of shame in public discourse (IOM, USAID and Boris Divković Foundation), the capacity-building project Violent Extremism vs. Intercultural dialogue and Peace (European Youth Foundation), No Extremism campaign with celebrities (Global Analytics).

Conclusion

- There are several points that arise out of the state of the art in BiH for the future CONNEKT research.
- Research on violent extremism and its prevention in BiH has been ongoing for almost a decade. There is much published material and even more experience noted in internal reports of international organisations that are not publicly available.
- Focus on youth and on the meso (community) level is prominent in most programmes aimed at C/PVE. Youth is viewed as the most vulnerable group but also as a key component of preventing peer-radicalisation.
- The analysis of different contexts and drivers of radicalisation is not fully developed and the interaction between levels of drivers is not explored in the BiH literature. This will be a novel contribution of CONNEKT.
- Many C/PVE programmes exist and have been run for several years. An analysis of their mechanisms, effects and impact would be beneficial as it would allow us to identify best practices and can be tested in other countries.

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KOSOVO

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Overview

COUNTRY PROFILE

Government system

On 17 February 2008, the Kosovo assembly adopted a declaration of independence which declared Kosovo to be a democratic, secular and multi-ethnic republic. The Constitution of the country established Kosovo as a democratic Republic based on the principle of separation of powers, and outlined the freedoms of its citizens. Article 4 specifies that the Assembly of the country exercises the legislative power, while the Government is responsible for implementation of laws and state policies and is subject to parliamentarian control. The President of Kosovo, on the other hand, represents the unity of the people and at the same time is the guarantor of the democratic functioning of the institutions of the Republic of Kosovo, as provided in the Constitution (Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, 2008).

Population

The last official census in Kosovo was held in 2011. According to this census, Kosovo had an overall population of 1,739,825 residents[1]. In recent years, Kosovo has witnessed an ongoing migration, especially of its young population. According to the Kosovo Agency of Statistics, during the last decade more than 220,000 citizens have emigrated from Kosovo. The largest number of citizens who emigrated from Kosovo during this period was recorded in 2015, when over 75,000 citizens left Kosovo. Then in 2016 and 2017, emigration decreased, while in 2018, there was again an increase in emigration, respectively over 28,000 people decided to leave the country. This official data refers to both legal and illegal emigration, and the vast majority of citizens who have emigrated belong to young age groups, mainly 25-44 years. In an absence of a more recent official census, the Kosovo Agency of Statistics has estimated Kosovo's overall population at 1,798,506 residents (Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2019).

Main ethnic/religious groups

According to the last official census of Kosovo held in 2011, in addition to the Albanian majority of 1,616,869 (92.9%), there were also seven recognised ethnic groups as official minorities: Serbs 25,532 (1.5%), 27,533 Bosniaks (1.6%), Turks 18,738 (1.1%), Ashkali 15,446 (0.9%), Egyptians 11,524 (0.7%), Gorani 10,265 (0.6%) and Roma 8,824 (0.5%). It should be mentioned though, that these results were often contested by certain Albanian and Serb circles in the country. In terms of religion, census results show that 1,663,412 (95.6%) of the population were Muslims, 38,438 (2.2%) declared as Catholic Christians and 25,837 (1.7%) as Orthodox Christians (Kosovo Agency of Statistics, 2013). It is worth noting that the 2011 Kosovo population census was largely boycotted by the Kosovo Serbs (especially in North Kosovo) who predominantly identify as Serbian Orthodox Christians, and therefore the Serb population was underrepresented (Collaku, 2011).(especially in North Kosovo) who predominantly identify as Serbian Orthodox Christians, and therefore the Serb population was underrepresented (Collaku, 2011).

[1] It should be mentioned that municipalities Leposaviq, Zubin Potok, Zveçan and Mitrovica North were excluded from the census; see Kosovo Agency of Statistics (2013).

CONTEXTUALIZATION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND RADICALIZATION IN THE COUNTRY

General overview of radicalisation and violent extremism

Similarly to other post-communist countries in Central and Eastern Europe, Kosovo also witnessed a resurgence of religiosity after the fall of communism. With the vast majority of Kosovo Albanians being Muslim, it is understandable that Islam was the most resurgent religion during this period. As a result of multiple internal interacting factors, the process of religious revival in Kosovo was tremendously accelerated after the war in 1999. The societal disorientation, high poverty, weak economy and political void made Kosovo fertile ground for the resurgence of religion (Demjaha and Peci, 2016: 80). Immediately after the war, the situation in Kosovo was chaotic, while public administration was virtually non-existent. The entire Kosovar society was rapidly exposed to a variety of competing ideas, both more liberal as well as more conservative ones. Kosovo war-ravaged population was exposed to different international faith-based organisations that have mushroomed throughout the country after the war. Under the guise of humanitarian aid, such organisations have ruthlessly exploited the poverty and fragmented social conditions of Kosovar Albanians, especially in rural areas, and seriously disrupted cultural hegemony of these communities (Blumi, 2005: 2).

In this context, it is important to assess the role of the Islamic Community of Kosovo (Bashkësia Islame e Kosovës, BIK), as the main institution representing the Muslim community in the country that has an uncontested power in organising the religious affairs of Muslim believers in Kosovo. As such, it is clear that BIK represents an actor that plays an important and multiple role in different aspects of radicalisation and violent extremism. Since it was considered as an institution that should defend traditional Islam, BIK has since the end of the war in 1999 been a target of foreign radical activists. Such attempts were initially curtailed by Mufti Rexhep Boja, who insisted on keeping the Gulf States faith-based organisations outside of the Islamic Community.[2] However, after his replacement in 2003, the control over BIK has been an on-going battle between moderate and radical Muslim imams. As a result, by 2008 BIK was undergoing a deep crisis of legitimacy due to the clash of two schools of thought: the Hanafi school, which had been practising its own theology (legacy of the Ottoman Empire) for the past five centuries, and a second school that believes that Kosovo's Islamic community should be part of the global Islamic community, unconstrained by the boundaries of nation-states and open to various external influences (Rudine and Kraja, 2018: 8). BIK senior officials blame the government for not acting on their warnings on the infiltration of various radical imams that challenged BIK's authority and brought about such a crisis of legitimacy within the ranks of Muslim followers. While BIK officials acknowledge that the government does not technically concern itself with the work of religious associations, they perceive this as a rule-of-law matter since such a challenge poses potential ideological danger to their authority (Ibid).

Recently, the Government has charged BIK with many important responsibilities related to prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo. As a result, BIK has been working with the government to gain oversight of all mosques in Kosovo with a goal to control narratives, thus blocking any radical messages from being spread in religious institutions. BIK itself has lately also started to be more proactive in condemning and warning about hate speech delivered in some mosques or by some high-profile imams. However, there are still internal clashes within BIK between so-called "moderate" imams mainly from the

[1] The head of the Islamic Community of Kosovo, Rexhep Boja, in 1999 angrily responded to the behaviour of the ultra-orthodox Saudi agencies by noting that "Albanians have been Muslims for more than 500 years and they do not need outsiders [Arabs] to tell them what the proper way to practice Islam is." See Deliso (2007: 55).

Hanafi School of Thought and so-called "conservative" imams. Interestingly, both sides criticise each other for spreading the ideas of radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo. These disagreements have fragmented practitioners, and are indirectly hampering the BIK's activities in tackling violent extremism and radicalisation in Kosovo (Qehaja et al., 2017: 11). While the role of BIK is essential in preventing extremism and radicalisation, BIK is often viewed not only as a solution to the problem but also as part of it. Therefore, for BIK to successfully fulfil its role in dealing with radicalisation and extremism, it is important to identify the main drivers within BIK that lead to radicalisation and violent extremism, and to tackle conditions influenced by BIK that are conducive to radicalisation and violent extremism.

First signs of radical and extremist views in Kosovo were identified shortly after the war in 1999. Security agencies that were monitoring such individuals saw their numbers rising in the following years. Through a slow and long-term process, inflammatory imams exploited the existing grievances of Kosovo citizens to proselytise Salafi/Wahhabi forms of radical Islam. Although the Ministry of Internal Affairs was aware of the potential threat, there was no serious and coordinated commitment to act until the media began publishing information about Kosovo's foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq (Perry, 2016: 34). When it was reported that Kosovo has the highest number of foreign fighters per capita in the world, until then dormant institutions of Kosovo were forced to act. Accordingly, in August 2014 police searched 60 locations throughout Kosovo and arrested 40 Kosovar citizens suspected to have participated in terrorism in Iraq and Syria. It was reported that the arrests were carried out in accordance with the Kosovo Penal Code to safeguard constitutional order and security in the country. Until January 2015 some 80 people were arrested under similar charges including a number of influential radical imams (Demjaha and Peci, 2016: 57).

At the same time, in March 2015, Kosovo's parliament adopted a Law on Prohibition of Joining Armed Conflicts outside State Territory that makes it a crime to "organise, recruit, lead or train persons or group of persons with the aim of joining or participating in a foreign army or police in any form of armed conflicts outside Kosovo." The law also stipulates that engagement in foreign conflicts can be punished with a prison sentence from 5 to 15 years (Assembly of the Republic of Kosovo, 2015). Later in September 2015, the Office of the Prime-Minister of Kosovo also prepared a Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020 as well as an Action Plan for the implementation of that strategy. The Strategy provided an overall analysis of the situation in 2015 by explaining the extent of the problem and potential threat within Kosovo, motives of extremism, push and pull factors as well as strategic objectives for early identification, prevention, intervention and de-radicalisation. The measures put forward by the strategy diverged from earlier repressive techniques of the counter-terrorist policy by including soft measures, investments in local communities as well as inclusion of non-governmental actors (Office of the Prime-Minister, 2015).

Citizens reported to have joined ISIS

Nevertheless, the radicalisation of Kosovo Albanian Muslims caught the attention of Kosovo institutions and the wider public only when the first death of an Albanian foreign fighter in Syria was reported in November 2012. When soon after it was reported that Kosovo has the highest number of foreign fighters per capita in the world, hitherto dormant institutions of Kosovo were forced to act (Kursani, 2015: 24). According to the latest data, since 2012 an estimated 403 individuals have travelled from Kosovo to join terrorist organisations in Syria and Iraq. Of those, 255 were foreign fighters, while the rest were women and children. Data provided

by authorities show that around 40 children were born in the war theatre to at least one parent of Kosovo origin. Meanwhile, some 135 individuals have returned to Kosovo and are being tried in local courts. An estimated 75 Kosovo foreign fighters are reported killed, while around 190 individuals are supposed to have still remained in conflict zones (Perteshi, 2015: 18).

It is worth mentioning that of those who remained in conflict zones there is an estimated number of only 66 men, who are considered potential combatants. This implies that the majority (around 70%) of those remaining in conflict zones are non-combatants (not directly engaged in fighting), estimated at 47 women and 92 children, or a total of 139 (Kursani, 2018: 18). Another interesting element is that a considerable number of the Kosovo's individuals who joined ISIS and other terrorist organisations in Syria and Iraq were from Kosovo diaspora abroad. Out of the 255 foreign fighters from Kosovo who have travelled to conflict zones, 48 of them or some 20% of Kosovo's total number of foreign fighters were young individuals who have no relation to Kosovo or were born in another country (Perteshi, 2018: 30).

Citizens joining other violent movements inside and outside the country

Despite the fact that since the beginning of 2016 there have been no recorded cases of foreign fighters originating from Kosovo, representatives of Kosovo's state institutions continued to view violent extremist threats mainly through the Islamist religious prism. However, in a study that assessed possible violent extremist threats in Kosovo, Kursani suggests that violent extremist threats in Kosovo were mainly politically motivated. He points out that around 80% of executed (actions taken) violent extremist threats were political in nature, while of the unexecuted (actions not taken) threats, close to 70% were religious in nature (Kursani, 2017). In terms of other violent movements, it is worth mentioning the foreign fighter phenomenon, which comes from the Serb population living in the north of Kosovo. Some media outlets have reported that around 300 Serbian foreign fighters funded by the Russian organisation the Kosovo Front have been fighting in the Ukrainian separatist territories (Stelmakh and Kholodov, 2017). While not all these fighters are from Kosovo, it is difficult to determine their exact numbers since usually all of them are referred to as Serb nationals (Velebit, 2017). It is worth noting that, despite being spotted from media reporting, the emergence of foreign fighters in Ukraine has not caught the attention of Kosovo's state institutions. Moreover, although countries in the Western Balkans consider foreign fighting as a criminal act regardless of the destination, returnees from the Middle East face a robust security-based response in their countries of origin, whereas those returning from Ukraine usually remain exempt from prosecution and severe sanctions (Beslin and Ignjatijevic, 2017).

Presence of radical and violent groups in the country

Following the wars after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, similarly to other countries of the Western Balkans Kosovo has witnessed the post-communist nationalism and revived religious passions. Prior to the proliferation of radical forms of Islam, the concepts of "radicalism" or "extremism" throughout the region were mainly linked to nationalism and sports hooliganism (Beslin et al., 2017: 15). Nevertheless, when it comes to radical and violent groups today, the main stakeholders in Kosovo are predominantly preoccupied with Salafism/Wahhabism and the phenomenon of foreign fighters. Moreover, as Perry points out, "other forms of extremism, such as domestic right-wing extremism, are noted as a secondary concern or even not acknowledged at all" (Perry, 2016: 4). As mentioned earlier, Salafi proselytisation in Kosovo started after the war in 1999 mainly through the influence of the humanitarian organisations from Saudi Arabia, other Gulf States, and Turkey. Since then, radical forms of Islam from outside countries have continued to spread among

Kosovo's Muslim population, since over the years these humanitarian organisations have managed to build a base of local representatives that allow them to continue to operate locally even without a physical presence (Center for Research, Documentation and Publication, 2015: 2). Key players of such networks are the local imams who have been educated in the countries of origin of these organisations. Upon return, they have managed to establish a movement of loyal followers as well as utilise certain mosques for their radical teachings (Demjaha and Peci, 2016: 53).

Obviously, it is very difficult to measure the exact extent of radicalisation and the direct level of threat from violent extremism in Kosovo. In terms of adherence to Salafism in the Western Balkans, Qehaja talks about heavily concentrated, moderately concentrated, and less concentrated locations. He claims that in Kosovo one finds less concentrated locations, i.e. municipalities where there are no organised Salafi groups, but there is a significant number of individuals following the Salafi interpretation of Islam (Qehaja et al., 2016: 76). Still, other authors warn about a "contingent of radicalised individuals that has often provided ideological, logistical, or financial support to foreign fighters and at times has been responsible for plotting terrorist attacks." (Shtuni, 2019: 21-22) While the number of foreign fighters represents a small minority of Kosovan society, it also comprises just a fraction of "an extensive network of like-minded militants, supporters, and enablers who not only openly share the same ideology but are also actively engaged in its dissemination and recruitment efforts through physical and virtual social networks" (Shtuni, 2016: 2).

It should be mentioned though that radicalisation does not necessarily lead to violence and therefore it is necessary to distinguish between radicalisation that directly links to violent extremism and terrorism and radicalisation that aims at initiating societal changes through non-violent means (Bećirević et al., 2017: 13). In line with this, Salafis are recognised as rather heterogeneous, and divided into the "mainstream" Salafis who hold conservative non- and often anti-violent views on religious practice and the "rejectionist" Salafis who propagate violence. According to Kursani, the "rejectionist" Salafis have been embraced only by a very small group of individuals in Kosovo compared to the embrace for the "mainstream" Salafis (Kursani, 2018: 301-17). On the other hand, Salafism is not the only outside influence being imposed on the traditions of Kosovo Muslims. Authors note that the Muslim Brotherhood and a small minority of active, violent Jihadists also seek to recruit adherents (Wither, 2016). In addition, Shia influences that mainly target intellectual elites exist as well, but they are less visible and have not managed to develop a more ambitious propaganda of Shiism. In recent years, the Islamist government in Turkey has also attempted to influence Muslims in Kosovo as part of its neo-Ottoman policies of the former Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu.[3]

Framing radicalisation and violent extremism

Scientific and academic state of the art

Recently, Kosovo has seen a significant number of research publications in the area of radicalisation and violent extremism produced by many local and international research institutes and organisations. The available literature on radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo has identified several explanatory factors for the phenomenon of radicalisation and foreign fighters in Kosovo. In doing so, authors employ different approaches and levels of analysis, ranging from "situational factors working at the macro level (i.e. country or community-wide), social/cultural at the meso level (i.e. affecting smaller communities or identity groups), and individual

[3] For a detailed explanation about the Turkish Islamic influence in Kosovo see Demjaha and Peci (2016).

factors at the micro level." Political factors at the macro level mainly refer to poor state presence and penetration in some areas as well as to the state fragility and instability. Different authors have indeed often mentioned dysfunction of the state apparatus accompanied with limited state penetration, poor governance practices and a lack of political accountability as well as high level of corruption together with low trust towards both local and central institutions as important factors driving radicalisation and violent extremism (Morina et al., 2019; Zaimi, 2017; Krasniqi, 2019; Hunsicker et al., 2015; Shtuni, 2016). At the meso level, economic factors include poor economic conditions, high levels of unemployment, inequality and poverty, while the social ones mainly relate to education and social exclusion. When it comes to the importance of the socio-economic conditions in driving radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo, opinions expressed by various authors differ greatly. Some research suggests that unemployment, poverty, a weak educational system and other socio-economic factors represent an important factor for radicalisation (Qirezi, 2017; Gjinovci, 2016). Selenica (2019) maintains that poorer socio-economic conditions represent an exacerbating factor rather than a driving one. Furthermore, she points out that unemployment and social (im)mobility represent an important driver of violent extremism since foreign fighters' unemployment rate is twice as high as the Kosovo average. On the other hand, other researchers dismiss altogether the importance of socio-economic factors as a driver towards radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo and point out other factors as relevant ones (Demjana, 2018; Demjaha and Peci, 2016; Shtuni, 2016).

On the other hand, cultural factors in the case of Kosovo mainly refer to the issue of Islamophobia and the urge to aid Muslims across the world (Kursani, 2019: 17). Several authors believe that Islamophobia can play a significant role as a motivational factor of religious radicalisation in Kosovo due to the struggle between a Western identity, that is secular, and an Oriental one, that is Muslim, identity. Many Muslims feel that their Muslim identity is being deliberately diminished in order to prove statute of Kosovo in the West and its belonging to Europe. Moreover, according to some researchers Western characteristics of stereotyping Islam further fuel Islamophobia in the country, erasing Kosovar Muslim identity (Speckhard and Shajkovci, 2017; Ferizaj, 2019). Similarly, some researchers point out that the urge to aid Muslims across the world has motivated many foreign fighters from Kosovo to join the wars in Syria and Iraq. This is often linked with the legacy of the Kosovo war during which the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) intervened to save Kosovo Albanians from the Serb paramilitaries. In turn, many Kosovars felt a duty and strong responsibility to assist their Sunni Muslim "brothers and sisters" against Assad's atrocities in Syria (Goshi and van Leuven, 2017; Hunsicker, 2015; Shtuni, 2016; Speckhard and Shajkovci, 2017).

Another motivational factor that has dominated the literature about radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo is linked to the proselytisation activities of different international charities. Most of the authors see the role of Gulf-backed foundations and organisations, especially from Saudi Arabia and Turkey, as crucial in introducing the Salafi/Wahhabi form of Islam in Kosovo. Researchers also claim that these charities have been actively involved in promoting radicalisation and recruitment of young Kosovars through a combination of private mediators, extremist imams and donations (Demjaha and Peci 2016; Shtuni 2019; Krasniqi 2019; Goshi and Van Leuven 2017; Shtuni 2016; Gall 2016). In addition to researchers, such views are predominantly shared by the representatives of various state institutions in Kosovo. However, some authors claim that "there is little (if any) evidence that the often-mentioned cases of Middle East funded religious based non-governmental organisations (NGOs) directly recruited people into violent extremist ideological groups, or exacerbated the phenomenon" (Kursani 2018a: 4).

At the micro level, the available literature has addressed aspects such as individuals' identity issues and close family/relative ties as drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo. In an in-depth analysis employing both qualitative research and empirical data, the Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED) has explored the impact of religion on the ethnic identity of Kosovar Albanians during the state-building period. The analysis concludes that the ideological paradigm represents "the explanatory framework for significant social and identity shifts among Kosovo Albanians, namely from secular ethnic identity and religious cohabitation into a rapid ethnic religiosity and gradually increasing religious intolerance and extremism." (Demjaha and Peci, 2016: 82). Shtuni (2016:7), on the other hand, claims that various Islamic countries used religion as a foreign policy tool to aggressively promote religious identity and a conservative Islamic way of life in open tension with Kosovo's religious tradition and Western liberal democracy. Similarly, a study about security issues in the region claims that "individuals most vulnerable to violent extremism are those that are exposed or live in areas where identities are in flux, and where societal surroundings are more heterogeneous" (Stojanović-Gajić, 2018: 4). Likewise, some authors have warned about the importance of close family/relative ties as potential drivers towards radicalisation and violent extremism. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has been first to point out that close bonds may have played a role in, at least, increasing the numbers of those who have joined conflicts in Syria and Iraq (Xharra and Gojani, 2017). Other studies have also presented certain evidence that families and social connections might play a role as a driver towards radicalisation and violent extremism. This has been especially true for the recruitment into violent extremism, with more than 70% of those who have joined the conflict in Syria and Iraq being ones who have very close family/relative connections. Still, it should be acknowledged that there have no comprehensive studies related to the issue of family/relative connections as potential drivers to radicalisation and violent extremism and this requires further research (Jakupi et al., 2018: 11; Krasniqi, 2019: 78; Kursani, 2018a: 32).

Prominent studies

KIPRED has as early as 2005 published one of the most important work on the subject of Saudi influence, which warned about the first signs of radicalisation amongst Muslim Albanians in rural Kosovo. The paper offered a detailed analysis of the situation in Kosovo and pointed out that various international faith-based organisations operating throughout the country under the guise of humanitarian aid attempted to spread radical forms of Islam. KIPRED cautioned that activities of these organisations linked to political forces that are not bound to local interests might soon create a Kosovar identity which will be hardly controlled by political forces based in Prishtina or the region. Moreover, the study rightly predicted that an eventual war somewhere in the "Islamic world" in 10 years from now would seriously challenge the loyalties of Muslim Albanians in Kosovo (Blumi, 2005). Unfortunately, the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) and other international organisations on the ground ignored or failed to notice the activities of such faith-based humanitarian organisations. The newly created Kosovo institutions and its political elite manifested similar negligence towards Islamic radicalisation as their international counterparts at the time the paper was written. It was only in 2012, when the foreign fighters' phenomenon made headlines in local and international media, that local and international research institutes and organisations started conducting and publishing research related to radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo. The main points of these research publications will be summarised in the section below. Other prominent studies related to radicalisation and violent extremism worth noting are KIPRED's paper *What Happened to Kosovo Albanians: The Impact of Religion on the Ethnic Identity in the State-Building Period authored by Agon Demjaha and Lulzim Peci, and the Report inquiring into the causes and consequences of Koso¬vo's citizens' involvement as foreign fighters in Syria*

and Iraq of the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS) authored by Kursani, which have substantially contributed to identifying key issues and providing a better understanding of the problem related to radicalisation and violent extremism.

Main research and knowledge producers

As noted above, recently a significant number of research publications in the area of radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo has been produced by many local and international research institutes and organisations. Still, among them only few are academic publications, while most of the research is published in the form of non-empirical policy reports, research papers, opinion pieces, news articles and critical analyses. It should be mentioned that until 2016 first-hand research in Kosovo related to radicalisation and violent extremism was scarce, especially when it comes to studies within the radicalised communities. This was also true for research related to "how specific individual characteristics may play a role in the radicalisation process, what strategies are effective for radicalisation prevention efforts in the Western Balkans, and what roles different professionals can play in preventing radicalisation" (Bećirević et al., 2017: 26). Since 2016, progress has been made in addressing new topics related to radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo, though certain gaps remain, especially when it comes to literature that examines de-radicalisation efforts. This being said, it should be noted that the research conducted in Kosovo in this field after 2016 has occurred in completely different reality on the ground, since no foreign fighters from Kosovo have travelled to Syria and Iraq during this period. Consequently, the focus of the new literature has shifted mainly towards the issue of returnees and the associated threats, while continuing to be focused on the drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism.

The information provided in section 1.2.2.1 clearly shows that the number of academic studies related to the issue of radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo is rather limited. In addition to two journal papers (Kursani, 2018: 301-17; Shtuni, 2019), there are only two academic books (Elbasani and Olivie, 2015; Krasniqi, 2019), one paper in an edited publication (Selenica, 2019), and two Master thesis (Vlk, 2020; Kefalas, 2017) dealing with radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo. Most of the available studies related to radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo are produced by non-govermental organizations (NGOs), both local and international. These studies are mainly published in the form of policy papers, policy reports and research papers. Since main findings of academic studies and those produced by NGOs were presented in detail in section 1.2.2.1, the rest of this section will focus primarily on governmental studies.

As already mentioned, in September 2015, the Office of the Prime-Minister of Kosovo also prepared a Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020 as well as an Action Plan for the implementation of that Strategy. The Strategy was created to be a comprehensive response to radicalisation in Kosovo by addressing the many push and pull factors that influence people to turn towards Islamist ideologies. The measures proposed in the strategy are divided into four target areas: Early identification; Prevention; Intervention; and De-radicalisation and reintegration. In the early identification area, the primary initiatives focus on raising awareness, capacity for prevention, and identification of at-risk individuals (Office of the Prime Minister, 2015: 18). More concretely, measure one has the objective of organising training programmes for local officials, educational staff, and local police to initially identify at-risk youth and how to approach them. In addition, this measure also includes civil society and national institutions to provide the training, with support being provided by international organisations to create the guidelines of necessary action. Measure two, on the other hand, emphasises the need to createa national team to collect

data on the radicalisation trends in the country in order to identify radicalisation "hot spots". Measure three foresees dissemination of the information acquired during the research phase to schools and religious, public and educational institutions to implement the necessary mechanisms. Finally, measure four aims to take the identification process to a regional level through regional and international cooperation, by including schools, security institutions, social services, national intelligence, and governments (Office of the Prime Minister, 2015: 19).

The Strategy has given special attention to the prevention of violent extremism and radicalisation by assigning 10 specific measures to this objective. The first five measures within this objective are in fact counter-communication measures that aim to develop a thorough counter-narrative and effective information campaign. In line with this, measure one aims to create an overall plan on communication, while measure two focuses primarily on training journalists and scholars with an overall aim to create a counter-narrative on media and in educational institutions (Office of the Prime Minister, 2015: 21). Similarly, measure three promotes the creation of a public information campaign through the development of an information brochure to be handed out in lectures and training sessions. The primary aim of measures four and five is to promote tolerance and critical thinking of individuals. As such, measure four targets the religious communities with the creation of lectures and religious preaching that counter the arguments of radical ideologies and dissuade acts of violence and promote tolerance and coexistence. Finally, measure five aims to establish a commission to analyse any religious content online with the objective of translating moderate sermons and religious content into Albanian to promote tolerance (Ibid). On the other hand, the remaining five measures within the prevention goal are focused on supporting resilience-building in Kosovo. Consequently, measure six intends to provide grants for businesses, youth centres and NGOs that would create inclusion programmes for youth through sports, community service and traineeships. Measure seven foresees the establishment of safe environments in schools as direct support for frontline workers in educational institutions dealing with prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism. Measure nine is directly concerned with violent extremist offenders, and aims to prevent the recruitment of other individuals in prison by enhancing security and surveillance of extremist prisoners. Finally, measure ten initially proposes an overall assessment of the existing legislation with the aim of preventing radicalisation and violent extremism. Afterwards, the Office of the Prime, Minister in cooperation with the Ministry of Justice and experts from the field, are supposed to update or create new legislation to enable effective prevention initiatives (Office of the Prime Minister, 2015: 22).

In the objective of intervention for radicalised individuals, the Strategy proposes only three measures. First two measures foresee involvement and support to the radicalised individuals by family members and community networks. As such, measure one suggests the establishment of a rapid response team in local municipalities that would work directly with at-risk or radicalised individuals. To secure quick reaction to any signs of radicalisation, this measure insists on the inclusion of psychologists, religious leaders, police and social workers. On the other hand, measure two proposes the creation of a hotline through which family members, friends and peers could anonymously report suspected individuals or organisations that support or promote extremist ideologies (Office of the Prime Minister, 2015: 24). The final measure three suggests increased cooperation among youth organisations and educational institutions for the purpose of discussing the dangers of radicalisation and extremism. Such cooperation should be enhanced through the organisation of workshops, seminars, lectures, conferences and other activities that include at-risk youth (Ibid).

The section on de-radicalisation and reintegration of radicalised individuals covers only a small section of the National Strategy, and has only two proposed measures. Measure one aims at providing counselling for extremist prisoners, as well as providing any necessary social support for their families. Among others, such support includes the participation of psychological professionals and religious leadership who are specialised in offering support and counselling in cases of radicalisation and extremism. On the other hand, measure two of the de-radicalisation and reintegration strategy intends to create new reintegration programmes to help these individuals. Among others, the measure suggests creation of employment programmes in cooperation with local businesses in order to give a sense of meaning and responsibility to the rehabilitated individuals (Office of the Prime Minister, 2015: 25).

The Government of Kosovo has also drafted the National Action Plan, which provides a detailed description of the activities divided by each of the objectives of the Strategy, and also specifies the institutions in charge of implementing the activity. The Action Plan was supposed to help in defining countermeasures and preventive actions for relevant government ministries and agencies based on their capacities and expertise by providing clear indicators of success. The Kosovo Security Council (KSC) was responsible for monitoring the implementation of the government's National Strategy and the respective Action Plan. A larger government working group, which includes relevant ministries and representatives of NGOs, religious communities and others who lead the actions indicated in the Action Plan is also involved in the implementation process (Office of the Prime Minister, 2018). Although KSC should regularly report to the Government of Kosovo about the outcomes of the implementation and monitoring process, so far it has produced only an annual report for 2018 and a six-month report for 2019.

Defining violent extremism and radicalisation

It should be mentioned that until recently, authors in Kosovo gave little attention to the terminology and therefore terms such as "radicalism" and "violent extremism" were often used interchangeably. Later, efforts were made to distinguish between "radicalisation", "extremism" and "violent extremism", while at the same time employing definitions for these terms. Selenica (2019:4) claims that definitions about the concepts of radicalisation and violent extremism are unclear and that there is hardly a consensus in Kosovo over their meaning and use. According to her, a prominent local imam has defined radicalisation as "everything against religious norms that causes violence," while for a local researcher, radicalisation was "the process that leads to extremism but not necessarily to violence". The Berghof Foundation's report defines the concept of extremism as "any ideology that opposes a society's core values and principles." While acknowledging that extremists do not necessarily engage in violence, the report defines violent extremism as the one that occurs "when extremist worldviews are accompanied by the justification and use of extreme violence against those who do not share the same belief or ideology" (Morina et al., 2019: 4).

On the other hand, the UNDP study has utilised definitions of these terms given by the Oxford Dictionary. Accordingly, extremism is defined as "the holding of extreme political or religious views [or] fanaticism," while violent extremism is defined as direct usage of violence or as "encouraging, condoning, justifying or supporting the commission of violent acts to achieve political, ideological, religious, social, or economic goals" (Qirezi, 2017: 26). In his study, Krasniqi defines radicalisation and extremism exclusively through the prism of Islam. He defines "Islamic radicalism" as all forms of actions that are "manifested mainly through the discourse of the conservative doctrines of Islam's interpretation that exhibit a high degree of puritanism and religious

intolerance." Though it is not necessarily manifested through violence, Krasniqi claims that "Islamic radicalism is a dynamic process of embracing and manifesting extreme perceptions of a religious ideology, which may also affect the legitimacy of terrorist acts" (Krasniqi, 2019: 10). By the same token, Krasniqi defines the notion of "Islamic extremism" as "actions against constitutionalism characterised by the active opposition of any other religious doctrine or ideology" (Ibid).

Definition targets

As indicated by the section above, the definitions of radicalisation and violent extremism of most of the authors cover only Islamic religious communities. Few of them adopt more general definitions that, in addition to religious, also encompass political, ideological and social groups and individuals.

Ethnic or religious communities considered by violent extremism and radicalisation approaches

Almost all studies in Kosovo focus primarily on radicalisation and violent extremism stemming from the Salafism/Wahhabism, and thus primarily take into consideration Albanian Muslims. Other ethnic or religious groups linked with radicalisation and violent extremism are rarely considered. As already mentioned, other forms of extremism, such as domestic right-wing extremism, are seen as a secondary concern, not only by state institutions but by researchers as well. Moreover, although violent extremist threats in Kosovo are thought to be mainly politically motivated, there are no specific studies about such phenomenon. As a matter of fact, the Kosovo government has underlined the additional risk of violent extremism in North Kosovo among ethnic Serbian Kosovars. It has cautioned that these Serbian extremist groups might engage in "various acts of violence against [Kosovan citizens of Albanian ethnicity], institutions as well as local and international presence in [the north] of the country" (Goshi and Van Leuven, 2017: 22). Still, no concrete preventive actions have been taken by the government, nor have any specifically focused studies been conducted. The same is true about the emergence of foreign fighters in Ukraine, which despite being spotted from media reporting did not receive the attention of state institutions and researchers.

Methodologies employed to study violent extremism and radicalisation

As mentioned earlier, except for a few, most of the studies related to radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo are non-empirical ones. The majority of empirical studies are in fact mixed ones that combine desk research as well as quantitative and qualitative research methods to conduct research related to radicalisation and violent extremism (Kursani, 2015; Demjaha and Peci, 2016; Kelmendi, 2016; Goshi and van Leuden, 2017; Qirezi, 2017).

Strategies to Counter/Prevent Violent Extremism and Radicalization C/PVE

C/PVE INITIATIVES

Mapping of C/PVE actors

There is a number of relevant stakeholders working on countering and preventing violent extremism in Kosovo. The most important are public institutions such as state officials working in different ministries, departments, municipalities, education institutions, and justice-related institutions. More specifically, these include relevant institutions such as the Office of the Prime Minister, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Kosovo Intelligence Agency, Council of National Security, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, and Municipal Community Safety Councils. High-level officials and directors of education and social welfare in certain municipalities where the number of foreign fighters was much higher than in others are also considered as important stakeholders. In addition to state institutions, other relevant stakeholders include representatives of civil society and local experts in Kosovo as well international donor organisations that have actually funded the bulk of the research and projects related to this topic. Last but not least, the BIK plays an important multifaceted role in different aspects linked to violent extremism.

Public policies and programs

Almost all key Kosovo institutions are involved in prevention and countering of violent extremism and radicalisation.[4]

The Assembly of Kosovo (AoK) as a directly elected institution in Kosovo has a role to review and adopt draft legislation initiated by the government. In addition, the Assembly has an important responsibility for overseeing the implementation of legislation as well as for the strategic documents produced by the executive. The Assembly has to certain extent been proactive regarding countering violent extremism through the adoption of relevant laws, but it was rather passive with respect to overseeing the implementation of the Strategy. The Oversight Committee on Internal Affairs, Security and Supervision of the Kosovo Security Force and the Oversight Committee on the Supervision of the Kosovo Intelligence Agency have proved to be highly inactive when it comes to monitoring the activities of the Kosovo Government in the field.

The Kosovo Security Council (KSC) is a consultative body that brings together the main security-related representatives of Kosovo. It is responsible for the coordination of the implementation of the National Strategy on the prevention of violent extremism in Kosovo. The Secretariat of the KSC is in charge of harmonising all activities of state institutions regarding the prevention of violent extremism.

Having in mind the need for a holistic approach to CVE, there is a broader spectrum of involvement from different ministries and agencies of the Kosovo Government, including municipalities. Nevertheless, the Strategy clearly defines that not all ministries have an equal role in implementing the legislation and other strategic policies in this area.

[4] For a detailed information on mapping of different C/PVE actors in Kosovo see Qehaja et al. (2017).

The Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) has a primary role when it comes to implementation of all state policies in Kosovo, and thus represents the leading mechanism in the process of drafting a National Strategy. It is responsible for supervising the progress made, in close cooperation with KSC, while at the same time serving as a focal point in discussions with international actors.

The role of the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) is primarily viewed from the perspective of the role of the Kosovo Correctional Service (KCS), which falls under the responsibility of MoJ. Moreover, the justice system in Kosovo through the KCS aims to rehabilitate and reintegrate all individuals who commit crimes, including those related to violent extremism. In addition, the Ministry has primary responsibility for implementation of re-integration and de-radicalisation programmes, particularly within the KCS. KCS, on the other hand, represents the third most important link in the judicial system, which is to reintegrate individuals who committed crimes or have been sentenced following a ruling by the courts. Prisons may often serve as a place for the radicalisation of inmates. This set the need for significant investment in the KCS reintegration programmes that focus on vulnerable and radicalised individuals. The International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP) funded by the US State Department has been engaged with de-radicalisation programmes within the correctional system in Kosovo by doing risk assessment of prisoners that are subject to violent extremism.

Since unemployment and a lack of institutional care have very often been pointed out as factors bringing young Kosovans closer to violent extremism, it is clear that the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare (MLSW) plays a crucial role in the prevention of CVE. Similarly, because quality education is a key component in preventing violent extremism, the role of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) is very important. However, although MEST is responsible for the implementation of 40% of the activities of the Strategy, there is no budget line or financial means to ensure implementation of its activities. With an average of 75% of Kosovo's population being under 30, it is clear that the role of the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports (MCYS) is considered crucial in prevention efforts. Since youth is the group most at risk of violent extremism and radicalisation, its high level of unemployment and very limited cultural and sports facilities are considered to be very important for preventing youth from violent extremism and radicalisation.

The Kosovo Police (KP) is the only institution with the legal responsibility to provide safety and security for all citizens of Kosovo and to ensure the rule of law in the entire territory of Kosovo. As the only institution in Kosovo with solid capacity to deal with issues related to terrorism, KP is the most active and most successful institution in the field. It has been very active in investigating and arresting many citizens who have participated in foreign conflicts in Syria and Iraq as well as others who have recruited for, financed and supported the ideologies of the extremist organisations in Kosovo. The Kosovo Intelligence Agency (KIA), on the other hand, plays a crucial role in collecting and disseminating information to the Government of Kosovo and security institutions. Although the agency does not have any executive responsibility, the prioritisation of CVE has made KIA focus its capacities on collecting information that identifies any activity that might be detrimental to the national security of Kosovo.

The Municipalities of Kosovo should play an important role in preventing violent extremism according to the National Strategy on CVE, especially since out of 40 municipalities in the country some have been seriously affected by extremist ideology. Furthermore, all municipalities count on a Municipal Community Safety Council led by the respective mayors and where representatives of municipal assembly and government, security institutions, ethnic community, religious and civil society, media and business representatives participate

(Ministry of Local Government Administration, 2014). In this direction, municipalities should increase cooperation with BIK and the central government regarding CVE. They also play an important role in improving the education system at the local level, increasing social welfare for families affected by violent extremism and foreign fighters and increasing sports facilities for young citizens at the local level. While, in general, municipalities lack funds and human resources to address the challenges of CVE, it is encouraging that they have all expressed their willingness to cooperate with any NGO or organisation willing to contribute in the field of CVE.

Official definitions of violent extremism and radicalisation

The Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020 of the Kosovo Government defines "Violent Extremism" as "extremism which involves the use of violence; including but not limited to terrorism" and "Radicalisation" as the "process of approving extremist religious beliefs and in some cases converting into a violent extremist" (Office of the Prime Minister, 2015: 8).

Civil society

Civil society organizations (CSOs) in Kosovo undoubtedly represent one of the most important stakeholders in awareness-raising, de-radicalisation and prevention of violent extremism. Currently, there are only two organisations in Kosovo that are continuously involved in C/PVE projects: Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development (KIPRED) and Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS).

KIPRED was established in February 2002 as the first think tank in post-war Kosovo. Its work is based on principle values such as the rule of democratic principles; full impartiality; cooperation with public institutions and citizens' groups to promote democracy; and cooperation with institutions of a similar nature, whether local, regional and international. In the field of radicalisation and violent extremism, KIPRED combines the knowledge of the territory with a solid experience in the field of research with a particular approach to development and violent extremism. It has produced several policy reports related to the topic, including the first one ever in Kosovo *Political Islam among the Albanians: Are the Taliban coming to the Balkans* in 2005.

KCSS is an NGO and think tank in Kosovo that has contributed to awareness-raising and prevention of violent extremism. It has established a specific programme to conduct research, work on awareness-raising and advocate in the field. KCSS has been intensively engaged in organising various workshops, roundtables and discussions with the majority of local and central stakeholders in Kosovo.

In addition, there are some other NGOs with limited involvement in the field such as: Partners Kosova, ATRC, BIRN, Youth Council in Kosovo Municipalities and a few small NGOs from Gjakova, Center for Research of Security Policies, D+, Koha Vision, Foltash and Balkan Research Group.

Religious communities

The Islamic Community of Kosovo (BIK) is the main institution representing the Muslim community and the sole organisation responsible for the religious life of the Muslim population in Kosovo. Although BIK has over 600 mosques under its control and over 600 imams under its supervision across the entire territory of Kosovo, due to the lack of a Law on Religious Freedom BIK is registered only as an NGO and its mandate is not

regulated by Kosovan law. Without a regulated legal status and no bank account of its own, BIK's annual estimated budget of several million euros has gone through personal pockets or personal bank accounts of few individuals within the community, thus making both its budget as well as its activities vulnerable to manipulation and abuse. Such lack of financial transparency and accountability has resulted in some imams receiving uncontrolled funds from the Gulf States to build their own mosques (Kursani, 2015: 98). These practices have clearly enabled Wahhabi organisations to penetrate into BIK's ranks and radicalise it from inside. The fact that some of the more radical imams within BIK were arrested for inciting hatred and recruiting for terrorism indicates that at least some individuals in BIK have been engaged in spreading radical Islam in the country (Demjaha and Peci, 2016). All in all, BIK has at least initially not been optimally proactive in dealing with the issue of C/PVE. Recently, it has started to be more proactive in condemning and warning about hate speech delivered in some mosques or by some high-profile imams. The involvement of BIK in all activities aiming to prevent extremism and de-radicalise individuals is essential.

Methodologies

Stakeholders involved

The Kosovo Security Council (KSC) is the body responsible for monitoring implementation of the government's National Strategy and the respective Action Plan. The Council is comprised from a five-person working group (technical) and a larger government working group that is involved in the implementation process. The larger working group includes relevant institutions such as the Ministries of Internal Affairs, Labour and Social Welfare, Education and Science and Foreign Affairs, security and intelligence institutions, as well as representatives of NGOs, religious communities and others who lead the actions indicated in the Action Plan (Perry, 2016: 36). BIK was charged with many responsibilities to combat radicalisation that included giving lectures at mosques and community centres, as well as creating a counter-narrative for those who are at risk of becoming radicalised (Kefalas, 2017: 13-14).

KSC has organised meetings with local mayors to present the National Strategy and to inform them about the role of municipalities in implementing the strategy. It has produced a yearly report on the implementation of the state strategy on prevention of violent extremism and radicalisation in Kosovo. In November 2016, KSC organised a workshop in Peja by bringing together all relevant state and non-governmental stakeholders. The aim was to review the Action Plan of the Strategy and to discuss the next steps with respect to further coordination of the relevant stakeholders and implementation of the Strategy (Qehaja et al. 2017: 7).

Kosovo is an environment where a wide spectrum of institutions and organisations are involved in developing and acting on methodologies to combat radicalisation and violent extremism. Law enforcement institutions play key roles in combating radicalisation and the spawn of violent extremism. The Kosovo Intelligence Agency and the Kosovo Police play main roles in accessing critical information by identifying and evaluating potential individuals and groups seeking to either join or recruit others into their radical belief ecosystems. Government institutions covering social, economic and educational functions play important roles in employing strategies of prevention, intervention and reintegration. The "international community" consisting of international governmental and non-governmental organisations mainly provides capacity-building and assumes advisory roles although it is important to mention that they contribute the absolute majority of funding to local NGOs combating radicalisation and violent extremism. These governmental institutions have established working relationships with local NGOs of which for example, KIPRED, KCSS and the Advocacy Training and Resource

Center (ATRC) involving them in the working group of the Strategy and Action Plan on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation leading to Terrorism (2015-2020). Provided that local NGOs can add value and contribute knowledge and data to combating these phenomena, they are seen as important stakeholders. It is important to acknowledge that the involvement of BIK in all activities aiming to prevent extremism and de-radicalise individuals is essential. However, significantly only moderate imams are involved in such a process. KIPRED's study concluded that the main factor contributing to the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism in two municipalities under consideration was the rejection by local BIK officials and imams of organisations and individuals who have insisted on preaching radical forms of Islam. They collaborated early on with municipal authorities and also engaged actively on the ground in order to develop close ties with the population to understand their problems and needs. Moreover, despite objections and disapproval by the central BIK, and even serious tensions, local BIK officials have rejected the appointment of any imam for whom there was evidence that they were involved in preaching radical forms of Islam (Demjaha, 2018).

Targeted populations

Young people, particularly men aged 15-29, pose the highest risk for extremism and violence as they usually comprise individuals who seek other pathways in life due to structural failures in education and economic development in tandem with a lack of institutional capacities and integrity. Ideological motives tend to be the primary driver, while not excluding the socio-cultural environment, identity seeking, financial motive and/or the desire for adventurous endeavours. Online radicalism is considered a target environment that has played a crucial role in spreading radical religious views, mainly via Facebook, where tools of propaganda and recruitment are used to lure individuals in social networks with radical and extremist dispositions. The National Strategy fails to uncover the extent to which this tool is used to recruit but intelligence and law enforcement agencies in Kosovo have acknowledged that the cyber environment is fruitful for recruiters since they are usually being approached by individuals who follow their content instead of trying to actively recruit individuals. On the other hand, "radical leaders" are also a target group and are usually imams who through radical preaching play an encouraging role in planting religious extremist ideology in their follower base. Increasingly, these imams have been using social networking platforms to widen their follower base instead of being limited to a certain number of individuals who participate in their religious congregations.

Enforcement mechanisms for the C/PVE initiatives?

Enforcement mechanisms exist in the legal and policy framework of the Republic of Kosovo. Terrorism, radicalisation and violent extremism are covered in the Criminal Code of the Republic of Kosovo which addresses the aspects related to recruitment, financing, assisting and promotion. In 2015, the Republic of Kosovo adopted the Law on Prohibition of Joining Armed Conflicts outside State Territory, which serves as an annex to the Criminal Code and Criminal Procedural Code. The law covers in detail elements of organising, recruiting, leading and training of individuals or groups with the aim of joining or participating in a foreign army or police, paramilitary formations or sort of organised groups operating in armed conflicts outside the territory of Kosovo.

The Policy framework was initially governed by the Counter-Terrorism Strategy of Kosovo adopted in 2009; however, due to the necessity to address imminent threats the strategy was renewed for the period 2012-2017 without significant change. The need to adopt a broader strategy led to the drafting of the Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism (2015-2020) concluded in

September 2015. Additional frameworks that have aided the implementation of government actions in C/PVE initiatives include the National Strategy for Reintegration of Repatriated Persons in Kosovo 2014-2016, National Strategy and Action Plan for Community Safety 2011-2016, National Strategy of the Republic of Kosovo for the Prevention and Combating the Informal Economy, Money Laundering, Terrorist Financing and Financial Crimes 2014-2018, and the Action Plan. Public policies governing education, youth empowerment and diaspora have also been part of mechanisms that have steered preventive initiatives.

A junction of legal and policy frameworks enabled a bottom-up approach when the first P/CVE Referral Mechanism was established in the municipality of Gjilan in 2016. This mechanism was part of a municipally-led effort to prevent young people from travelling to conflict zones. Administered by the mayor's office, members included representatives of local institutions, including police, education, social work centres, hospitals and members of the religious community. By May 2018, it was reported that the Referral Mechanism had successfully dealt with seven cases, of which five individuals reported were identified and prevented to leave the country whereas two cases proved unsuccessful and they were referred to the prosecution. Due to the perceived success of the referral mechanism, many stakeholders have proposed or supported the idea of establishing the Referral Mechanism in each municipality, but no concrete steps have been undertaken by relevant government bodies.

Available resources

Action Plan for the Implementation of the National Strategy aims to cover four strategic objectives with EUR 2,801,600 for the 2017-2020 timeframe. The budget is designed to be allocated by relevant governmental institutions and in a few cases, by international donors, including international NGOs present in Kosovo (Office of the Prime Minister, 2018). Due to the individual budgeting policies of each institution involved in the Action Plan, there have been reported cases in 2019 that reported a lack of budget line allocated towards the implementing of the Strategy, although the institution has not been identified. In addition, there are various donors located in Kosovo or abroad who have supported Kosovo's civil society efforts in the area of C/PVE and de-radicalisation. The main donors include the US Embassy in Kosovo, the European Union (EU) Office in Kosovo, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) Mission in Kosovo, UNDP, the UK Embassy in Kosovo and the British Council, as well as many other donors with smaller contributions. The exact budgets of each of these donor organisations to support C/PVE and de-radicalisation activities are not known.

Main objectives of the strategies and initiatives implemented

The National Strategy objectives are designed to employ the entire spectrum of tools to combat the phenomenon of radicalisation and extremism, thus being a strategy geared towards detection, countering and prevention. The National Strategy has four strategic objectives that cover early identification activities, establishing prevention mechanisms, intervention and ultimately de-radicalisation and reintegration of radicalised individuals.

Early identification primarily focuses on individuals or groups deemed as potentially exploitable by other groups or individuals that have radical or extremist views.

Prevention mechanisms mainly feature capacity-building activities for stakeholders (government, educational sector, law enforcement, local businesses, civil society, and religious communities). According to the National

Strategy, to organize effective campaigns towards prevention it is crucial to have a productive cooperation with religious communities and to develop a strategic plan of communication for use in media, social media, public lectures and other public events. Provisions on trainings for journalists and scholars covering violent extremism are also an important activity of prevention.

Intervention is aimed to address greater cooperation among law enforcement, local communities and other institutions to properly establish a community-based response as a mechanism for intervention on individuals exposing signs of violent extremism. These measures include building trust among community members, social employees and law enforcement officials, consequently creating partnerships with local communities.

The fourth strategic objectives refers to *de-radicalisation and reintegration* of radicalised persons. Specific measures among others include provision of help for radicalised individuals, assessment of the risk posed from individuals who returned from foreign conflicts, and awareness-raising within the correctional system.

Existence of critical evaluation systems

Impact of CVE-PVE on the threat of radicalisation

The Kosovo Security Council does not employ an advanced critical evaluation system to measure the impact of the strategies employed and whether they have proved to weaken the threat of radicalisation. On a macro level, it is important to note that no individuals have joined foreign terrorist organisations in Syria or Iraq since 2016, although this may be a result of the engagements of the Global Coalition to Defeat the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) in MENA countries. The evaluation of the threat of radicalisation prior, during and after the implementation of the National Strategy or the supporting work by international governmental organisations or local non-governmental organisations is not part of any official evaluation system.

The Secretariat of the Kosovo Security Council produced an annual report for 2018 and a six-month report for 2019 on the monitoring of the implementation of the National Strategy. Referring to the Action Plan 2017-2020, these reports only identify challenges met during the implementation of activities and the rate to which planned activities have been completed or are ongoing. The *Annual Report 2018* shows the level of implementation of the planned activities for the four strategic objectives. Strategic objective 1 (Early Identification) has had a 91% implementation rate; Strategic objective 2 (Prevention) has had 70% implementation rate; Strategic objective 3 (Intervention) has had a 73% implementation rate and, lastly, Strategic objective 4 (De-radicalisation and reintegration of radicalised persons) has only had a rate of 36% implementation (Kosovo Security Council, 2018). The report covering January to June 2019 shows that 91% of the activities have been reported as in progress or completed whereas 9% have not begun implementation (Kosovo Security Council, 2019). The *Annual Report 2019* was due to be shared as a document with relevant stakeholders in early 2020 but changes in government leadership may have contributed to such reporting being delayed.

SPECIFIC INITIATIVES ADDRESSED TO WOMEN AND YOUTH

Although it was acknowledged that women in Kosovo were also being radicalised, their position and role has not been sufficiently addressed either by concrete projects or in the available literature. The few available studies try to explore how women participate in extremist movements or what motivates them. The report by Jakupi and Kelmendi has found very diverse pathways taken by extremist and potentially extremist Kosovo

women. Some were married women who have joined the conflict voluntarily, but there are also cases of women who were forced into joining the conflict in Syria and Iraq as a direct consequence of their dependency on their families and husbands (Jakupi and Kelmendi, 2017). Xharra, on the other hand, suggests that many women in Kosovo were radicalised prior to going to conflict zones, while some of them used to run women's camp for ISIS in Syria and were also engaged in online recruitment of ethnic Albanian females (Xharra (2016). The report by Speckhard and Shajkovci revealed "instances of women willing to defy cultural norms and embrace the adventurous path to extremism and violence, including spiritual and materialistic rewards promised in Syria and Iraq". Still, many questions about why women agree to travel to war zones with small children, and whether they are coerced into doing so are not yet fully answered. Also, the role of women as recruiters and perpetrators has also been almost entirely ignored or significantly downplayed (Bećirević, 2017: 28). In terms of concrete activities specifically addressing women in Kosovo, there is evidence only for certain activities related to rehabilitation and reintegration of women who have returned from conflict zones. The Government rehabilitation and reintegration programme for women and their children includes home visits, individual and family sessions, outdoor activities and a process of reintegration into society through school and training courses (Perteshi and Ilazi, 2020; Manisera, 2019).

There is an overall agreement that youth represents the main community at risk of radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo. On the one hand, most of the foreign fighters who had travelled to Syria and Iraq were 20-30 years old, while on the other, youth evidently is especially vulnerable to radicalisation, both online and through direct contacts.[5] This being said, it is clear that almost all C/PVE activities undertaken address youth as the main target group. The Action Plan for implementation of the National Strategy has foreseen a set of activities specifically for young people within prevention and intervention measures. To prevent radicalisation and violent extremism, training and information sessions for young people are planned in order to develop critical thinking among youth. Also, the Action Plan foresees capacity-building of youth centres and youth organisations for inclusion of young people with extremist learnings in civic education programmes and projects. As part of intervention measures for the purpose of preventing of risk from violent extremism, the Action Plan anticipates support for young people to design campaigns against violent extremism through educational programmes, debates and other activities. Unfortunately, there are no data whether any of these measures has been implemented.

[5] For instance, those who consume the most violent extremism online content are individuals between 18 and 34 years old. (Vlk, 2020: 109).

Conclusion

Initially, concerns on the risks posed by violent extremism and radicalism in Kosovo were raised almost 15 years ago by a local think tank. Nevertheless, these concerns were neglected during the tenure of UNMIK (1999-2008) and the Kosovo Government until 2014, when it became visible that the country has one of the highest numbers of foreign terrorist fighters per capita in Europe participating in the Middle East conflict zone.

Against this backdrop, since 2014 plenty of the policy-oriented literature has been produced mainly by local academics and professionals, and the state structures got mobilised to deal with the violent extremism and radicalisation. However, no research with a strict academic methodology that would explore micro, meso and macro factors of violent extremism and radicalism in depth has been conducted until now in Kosovo.

It must be noted that there are significant historical differences among Muslims living in various countries of the Western Balkans, especially in terms of numerous languages and ethnicities as well as levels of secularisation during communist times. Moreover, any serious analysis should take into consideration that Muslims in the Western Balkans are culturally and historically different from Muslims who have migrated to Western Europe from different countries around the world. Therefore, the planned comparative analyses of these factors with the countries of the region and the Near Middle East would provide a deeper understanding of these factors from a broader perspective. The inter-linkage of these two research components by the CONNEKT will provide original research outputs and much deeper understanding of violent extremism and radicalism in Kosovo.

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NORTH MACEDONIA

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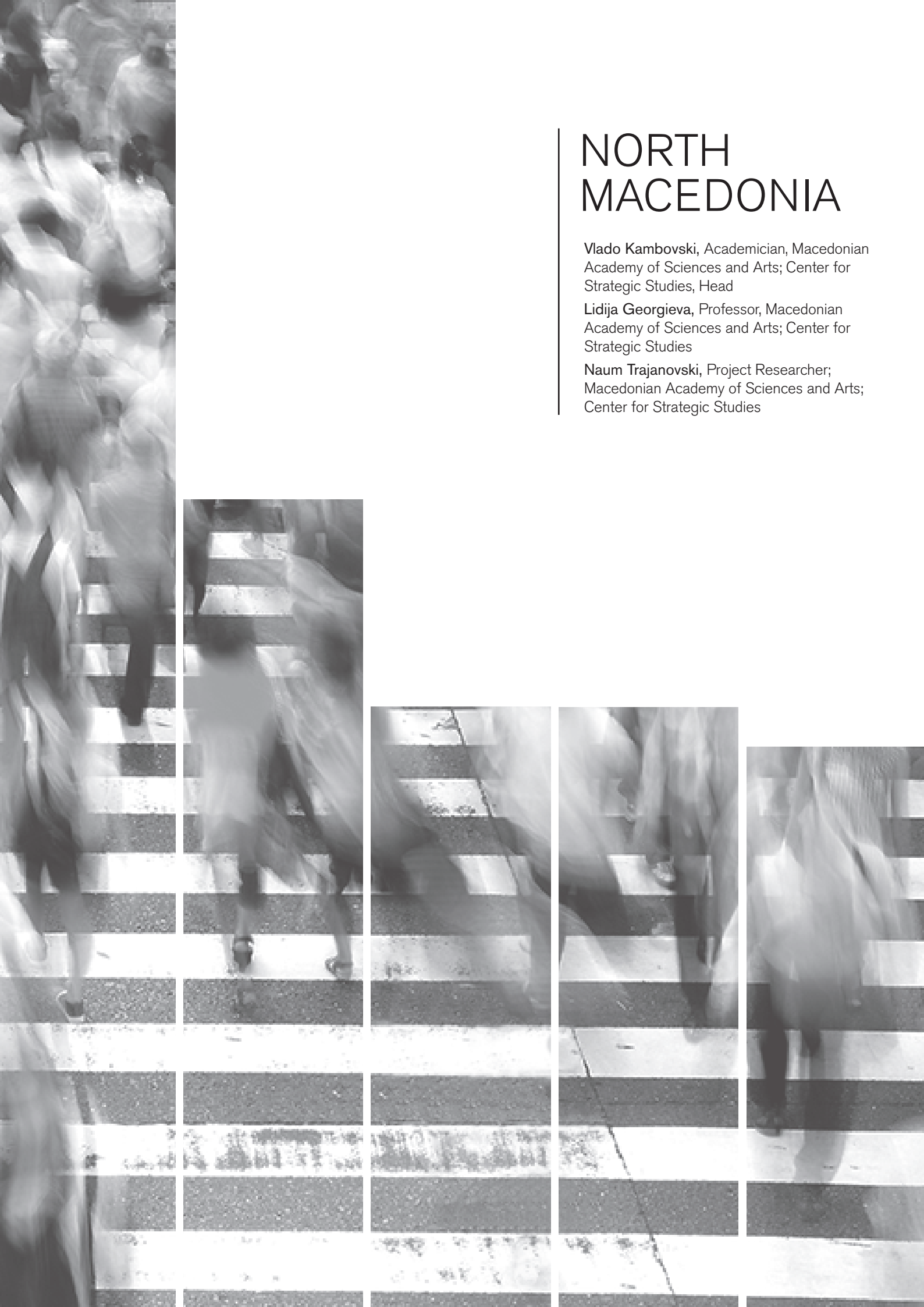

Overview

COUNTRY PROFILE

The Republic of North Macedonia has at least two characteristics that its citizens share: a complex ethnic structure and a strategically important geopolitical location in the Balkans. Most recently, as of 2017 and the formation of the new political government, the country reached two significant bilateral benchmarks: the Greco-Macedonian Prespa Agreement (17 June 2018) and the 2017 Treaty on Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation with Bulgaria.[1] This turn of events marks an important milestone in the Macedonian EU integration process.

Since the adoption of the Constitution of the Republic of Macedonia in 1991 until today, six changes have been made with 32 amendments. Constitutional changes reflect the dynamism of social change, which shapes the democratic pluralist, economic and legal system of the Macedonian state and its multicultural society.

The amendments to the Constitution that were made in 2018 for the purpose of applying the Prespa Agreement and the national legislation changes that followed are a necessary instrument of the Euro-Atlantic integration of the country.[2]

With the reforms and the conclusion of the Treaties of Friendship, Good Neighbourliness and Cooperation with the Republic of Bulgaria and Greece, the Republic of North Macedonia is approaching its goals: accession to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and European Union (EU) membership, following the opening of negotiations this year. The intensification of the process of Euro-Atlantic integration of Macedonian society presupposes the achievement of a general agreement that must take place as a continuous legal reform, which means harmonisation of the Macedonian legal system with EU law and NATO standards for development of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and freedoms and a consistent security system, as well as the creation of efficient, impartial and authoritative institutions that guarantee the rule of law.

By signing and then implementing these agreements, the Republic of North Macedonia sets an example for the reality and perspectives of the new model of regulating relations between the Balkan states, which only guarantees lasting peace and overcoming the deadly historical paradigms that still float over this area. The Republic of North Macedonia, with its geo-political position and natural multiculturalism developed over the centuries, is most called upon to move initiatives to conclude such agreements with its other neighbours (Albania, Kosovo and Serbia) as the first step towards concluding a pan-Balkan agreement on mutually permanent friendship, cooperation and good neighbourliness.

[1] On 1 August 2017, the two governments of the Republic of Bulgaria and the Republic of Macedonia signed the Treaty on Friendship, Good Neighborliness and Cooperation expressing common ground and determination to build a better future between the people and citizens of both countries. The Republic of Macedonia Assembly ratified the Treaty on 15 January 2018.

[2] On 27 March 2020, the Republic of North Macedonia became NATO's newest member, upon depositing its instrument of accession to the North Atlantic Treaty at the US State Department in Washington DC. NATO Allies signed North Macedonia's Accession Protocol in February 2019, after which all 29 national parliaments voted to ratify the country's membership. More in NATO (2020).

Our multicultural, multinational and multiconfessional society faces serious challenges and threats to human rights and freedoms, peace, tolerance, and other values. The creators of public policies face a historical responsibility for the consequences of their unreasonable actions – a responsibility before the generations that created the modern Macedonian society through mutual peace and tolerance and real multicultural life together. Hence, the authentic meaning of the idea of multiculturalism and tolerance, which is not derived from a theoretical book but emerges from our most distant history of the common life of citizens, cultures, religions, and languages in this area. That is the only answer to all the challenges, from terrorism to xenophobia and authoritarian political regimes (more in Taševa 1998; 2000; Atanasov 2003).

Government system

The Republic of North Macedonia is a sovereign, independent, democratic, and social state and its sovereignty is indivisible, inalienable, and non-transferable. The referendum on independence and autonomy was held on 8 September 1991 when the citizens freely manifested their will to separate from Federal Yugoslavia and afterward, on 17 November the Constitution was adopted. The rule of law, human rights, freedoms, ethnic parity as well as permanent co-existence and equality among all nationalities are the fundamentals of the government system of the Republic of North Macedonia. It was built as a unitary republic.

The political system as a parliamentary democracy is based on the principle of power divided into three branches: legislative, executive, and judicial with elected president who leads and represents the state at home and abroad. The Constitution and laws define the role of the President of the Republic of North Macedonia. The President is obliged to sign the decrees if, according to the Constitution, the laws are adopted by a two-thirds majority vote of the total number of MPs.

The Government is composed of a Prime Minister and Ministers who cannot be representatives in the Assembly. The Government exercises its rights and competence on the basis and within the framework of the Constitution and laws, but also proposes laws to the Assembly. It is the Government's responsibility to propose laws to the Parliament on prevention of radicalisation and countering terrorism and support its implementation.

The Assembly is in permanent session and works in meetings, which are coordinated and controlled by the President of the Assembly. It monitors the operation of the state administration bodies and the state administration. The Macedonian Assembly is unicameral with 120 MPs elected in direct parliamentary elections every four years. The Assembly elects its own president, who holds a second position in the political hierarchy of the state. The Parliament adopted the Laws on PVE/CT and through the work of the parliamentary commission should facilitate inter-ethnic issues.

Population

Since the independence of the country in 1991, demography and census have been critically important. Dissolution from former Yugoslavia has changed the ethnic composition and balance although, even as a constituent part, Macedonia is defined as multi-ethnic state of the Macedonian people. The contested nationalistic positions of Macedonians and Albanians erupted in violent conflict in 2001. After a six-month confrontation between government security forces and the National Liberation Army (NLA), the peace

agreement known as the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) was signed in August 2001.[3] Constitutional changes were made to improve the status and rights of the Albanians living in Macedonia (Popovska and Ristoska, 2015). Ethnic relations have improved since 2001 (Georgieva, Memeti and Musliu, 2017) but ethno-political mobilisation of two main ethnic groups and the influence of radical groups in the region creates fertile ground for radicalisation and for extremist groups to gain followers on both the ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian sides (Stojkovski and Kalajdziovski, 2018).

According to the last formal census conducted[4] from 1 to 15 November 2002, the population in the Republic of North Macedonia was 2,022,547.

Main ethnic/religious groups

According to official data from the last census conducted in 2002, of the total population of 2,022,547, according to the citizens' declaration of nationality:

1,297,981 (64.18%) are Macedonians;
509,083 (25.17%) are Albanians;
77,959 (3.85%) are Turks;
53,879 (2.66%) are Roma;
35,939 (1.78%) are Serbs;
17,018 (0.84%) are Bosniaks;
9,659 (0.48%) are Vlachs;
20,993 (1.04%) other groups.

Overall, 33.3% of the population is Muslim. Religious beliefs are predominantly divided along ethnic lines, with most ethnic Macedonians practising Eastern Orthodoxy and ethnic Albanians practising Islam (Stojkovski and Kalajdziovski, 2018).

CONTEXTUALISATION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND RADICALISATION IN THE COUNTRY

Overview of radicalisation and violent extremism

According to North Macedonia's Ministry of Justice's Directorate for Execution of Sanctions (DES), by 9 April 2020 14 people were found guilty of joining a "foreign army, police, paramilitary or parapolice formation," 36 were found guilty of terrorism and joining a terrorist organisation, 15 of threatening the constitutional order and security and four persons were held in custody (Ministerstvo za pravda, 2020). The DES is the most relevant national institution for gathering and compiling the data on the people found guilty of issues related to terrorism or terrorist grouping. Therefore, a multidimensional approach that focuses on preventing violent extremism and radicalisation (PVE) leading to terrorism is inevitable. As a small country, it cannot influence

[3] Since the signing of the OFA, the country has had occasional ethnic clashes in the 2010s – such as beatings, attacks on police officers, ethnically-motivated killings, and violent protests – usually in a pre-election period, as some political parties have exploited nationalist sentiment as a rallying cry in support of their political agendas. More in Stojkovski and Kalajdziovski (2018: 4-5).

[4] The data included in the report is the last official data from the latest legal census in the country, which was held in 2002. Since then, due to constant migration from the country, the size and ratio between ethnic communities have been changed and there was no political will for a new census. The State Statistical Office is compiling some predictive data, but this is not official. The current population of the Republic of North Macedonia is 2,083,374 as of Wednesday 1 July 2020, based on Worldometer preparation of the latest United Nations data. Source: https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/macedonia-population/ (accessed on 1 July 2020)

geopolitical trends but as a matter of interest to geopolitical actors, it has to build a policy and support actions that will strengthen its geostrategic position and increase stability in response to violent extremism, radicalisation and terrorism, as an evident growing international threat (Kambovski 2018b).

Citizens reported to have joined ISIS and other violent movements inside and outside the country

In 2017, a report by the Soufan Center (2017) counted 135 Macedonian foreign fighters in Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIS) between 2011 and 2016. As a break-down, the study counted 80 returnees out of these 135 foreign fighters, 27 killed and 35 still in the conflict zone. By comparison, the number of Macedonian foreign fighters is close to the number of Albanian foreign fighters (136), lower than the number of foreign fighters from Bosnia and Herzegovina (260) and Kosovo (316), and higher than the number of foreign fighters from Serbia (42) and Montenegro (up to 30).

The erstwhile President of North Macedonia, Gjorgje Ivanov, announced on 22 June 2016 a number of "110 Macedonian foreign fighters, and additionally to that 25 had been killed in Syria, and 86 fighters had already returned to Macedonia" (Ivanov 2016). There were three women among these 110 Macedonian foreign fighters, according to high-ranking personnel from the Macedonian State Security Agency, information presented by Selimi and Stojkovski (2016) in their report on the Macedonian civil society efforts in countering violent extremism. In addition, several other studies produced figures on the Macedonian foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq. Vasko Šutarov (2018), quoting "various security sources" in his publication from 2017, counted "around 135 citizens" who departed to Syria and Iraq, "some 27 died, and around 80" who returned.

In 2018, as part of the Extremism Research Forum regional report on the Western Balkans, Vlado Azinović (2018) published data "reported to researchers in early 2018 by intelligence and police officers in the region," which was picked up by the majority of researchers in the following period. According to Azinović, the number of Macedonian foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq was 140 men and 14 women, amounting to 154 foreign fighters in toto in the period from 2012 to 2017. There is no exact data provided for children foreign fighters in the study. By comparison, these figures are higher than the number of Albanian (109), Serbian (49) and Montenegrin (23) foreign fighters, while lower than the numbers of Kosovar (303) and foreign fighters from Bosnia & Herzegovina (BiH) (240). Contextualised per million citizens, the figure of Macedonian foreign fighters is 77 per million Macedonian citizens. On the other hand, the study finds that the number of 22 Macedonian foreign fighters per Macedonian Muslims, 1 in 4,545, is one of the highest in the region, alongside Serbia. Finally, according to Azinović's study (2018), there are 80 returnees out of the total number of 154 Macedonian foreign fighters, which again is fewer than Kosovo (130) but ahead of BiH (50) and Albania (40).

The latest research, conducted in the wake of the disintegration of the ISIS-controlled territory in Syria and Iraq, shows a clear decline in the number of Macedonian foreign fighters from 2017 onwards.[5] However, the end of ISIS as the world has known it, according to Azinović, "does not mean an end of the radicalisation and recruitment into extremism and violence in the region," in general, and in North Macedonia, in particular

[5] These departures "effectively stopped" in 2018, according to the findings presented by Filip Stojkovski and Natasia Kalajdžioska (2018). The reasons for these developments, besides the demise of the ISIS controlled territory, are reported to be the new legislative on terrorism in North Macedonia, as well as the novel and practical obstacles for reaching the war zones in Syria and Iraq. See also the National Counterterrorism Strategy of the Republic of Macedonia (2018-2022) by the Macedonian Government and the National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism published in February (2018).

(Azinović 2018). Moreover, in 2018, seven Macedonian citizens were arrested for having participated in the war in Syria and Iraq (Perry, 2020).

Moreover, Savevski and Sadiku (2012) stress that in North Macedonia there is a radical wave of Islam, which on certain occasions can mobilise many citizens, but that there are few, if any, organised groups. In the aftermath of the waves of protest in May 2012, there was an attempt to politicise such a presence in the media and fuel speculations about the emergence of an Islamist party that would represent the interests of such groups, but this has so far come to nothing. It is thus impossible to speak of any serious tendency towards voicing radical Islamic views in a political framework, such views being largely confined to the private sphere and individual religious practice. The only exception is moderate religious messages conveyed to the public by some public figures and media. Therefore, we can say that no real religious rhetoric has been established in public discourse, although this discourse does have greater religious content than before.

On the other hand, as Houry (2019: 59-81) argues, in the absence of a collective agreement for transferring detainees to their home countries, the United States began transferring some of the detained men to their country of origin through bilateral arrangements. The American officials did not provide specifics about the countries involved in this operation, but the media reported that Macedonia had taken back some of their nationals. Additionally, as of 2019, 11 Macedonian citizens were charged for their foreign fighting activities in Syria and Iraq with 33 years of imprisonment in total. The average number of years of imprisonment per individual foreign fighter is the second lowest in the region, after Montenegro (Azinović, 2018).

During the so-called refugee crisis in 2015, the media frequently raised the question of the number of ISIS fighters among the people crossing North Macedonia, one of the states on the so-called Balkan refugee route. Deliso (in Trajanovski, 2017) summarises this argument in a rather clear manner, stressing that "with the incessant wave of illegal migrants coming across the Turkish and thereafter Greek border into Macedonia, it is impossible to tell how many more ISIS fighters have entered the Balkans since". An unpublished study from 2016 shows that the public broadcaster was one of the major proponents of this discursive stance, while a critical focus was in general deficient (Trajanovski, 2017).

Presence of radical and violent groups in the country

The most recent radical groups in North Macedonia are pinned down, by various researchers, to the names of two "influential imams in Macedonia": Rexhep Memishi and Shukri Aliu. According to Qehaja and Perteshi (2018), the two imams have both "embraced a violent form of fundamentalist Islamic ideology and spearheaded the creation of youth groups, bringing in jamaats or para-jamaats. Many of the men active in those networks ended up in Syria and Iraq," while "the rest continue to spread the fundamentalist ideology through online content." The authors also marked the existence of several social media platforms, mostly on Facebook, Telegram, Twitter, and YouTube, as the major contemporary challenge of the Macedonian state. Herein, the case of Abdullahu, who included the ISIS narrative on social media and religious events in order to mobilise Macedonian foreign fighters centred around the imam's self-sacrifice for the *ummah* and the Muslim Brotherhood, is one of the most pertinent cases in these regards. In general, the violent content posted on social media includes "calls to Jihad" and attacking the "crusader" Jews and Shiites, supports terrorist attacks in the West and supports the arrested imams, in combination with reports from the ISIS battlefields.

Politically, North Macedonia, as a new democratic state, did not, heretofore, ban any party, even though the state has developed a legal mechanism invoking justifications for banning political parties. In the state, those rationales stress an eventual anti-democratic ideology and violence (Bourne and Casal Bértoa, 2017). There are, however, several fringe organisations, which oftentimes evoke certain violent symbols and use militant discourse and hate speech. The March 2019 case of the arrest of the leader of the Macedonian Christian Brotherhood, a far-right formation, after his public threats to the erstwhile Macedonian Prime Minister is one of the most prominent examples (Mkd.mk, 2019).

Framing radicalisation and violent extremism

Scientific and academic state of the art

It is extremely difficult, perhaps impossible, to stress how utterly important the fight against violent extremism, radicalisation and terrorism is in the Republic of North Macedonia.[6] Although these phenomena raise concerns in all countries and regions, the Macedonian policy-makers and executive authorities have an even more difficult task – that is not just to prevent violent extremism radicalisation and terrorism within the state's borders but to also prevent individuals from joining foreign terrorist (i.e. paramilitary) organisations.

As Kurseni (2019) notes, up until 2016 the "research on violent extremism in the Western Balkans was not thoroughly grounded in evidence-based research". Azinović (2018) aims to create an informed and nuanced picture of the violent extremism activity within the country, with a final goal of informing policy development. With the regional scope as a background, Azinović claims that the CVE phenomenon should be treated in a locally specific manner, avoiding one-size-fits-all approaches.

In the words of Stojkovski and Kalajdžioska (2018), CVE is a result of a set of factors, and thus a "soft approach" – as opposed to the exclusive, top-down approach – is necessary in order to understand the phenomena of radicalisation. As a result, the authors state that this approach reveals the need to engage as many local actors as possible to broaden the research perspective on ethno-nationalist and rightist discourses and, finally, to further research the relationship between ethnicity, the perception of power and its social distribution. The final approach can be found in the study conducted by Qehaja and Petreshi (2018). Namely, this research approach is focused on one targeted group and aims to understand a certain aspect of its development. In the case study, the authors look at the relation between radicalisation, violent extremism and the practice of Islam. The three study groups use multi-methodological perspectives combining quantitative and qualitative research methods, as well as various data collection techniques.

One can clearly state that there is a wide range of institutions with a direct or indirect agenda related to the issues of radicalisation and violent extremism in present-day North Macedonia – from state-sponsored institutions on a central level and research institutes to local municipalities and NGOs. Yet, several studies indicate the gap and the lack of a more structured form of cooperation between all stakeholders in the national setting.

Prominent studies

Besides these academic and research institutions, a set of various international institutions and agencies, as well as domestic actors and stakeholders, are actively contributing to the scholarly discourse on violence,

[6] The name Republic of Macedonia is used when referred to the period before Amendment XXXIII of the Constitution came into force.

peace studies and national security in the North Macedonian context. The Intelligence Agency of the Republic of North Macedonia and the Military Service for Security and Intelligence within the Ministry of Defence can be mentioned in these regards as official institutions that frequently publish data that is picked up by various researchers. Most recently, several regional and country reports were published by the Western Balkans Extremism Research Forum, funded by the British Government; the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Federal Ministry of Europe, Integration and Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Austria published a guide for civil society and their role in CVE and radicalisation in 2018; the Democracy Lab and the Berghof Foundation published a country case study in 2018; while the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies, supported by the German Marshall Fund Balkan Trust for Democracy programme, the Slovakian Stratpol, as well as the US Embassy in North Macedonia, have also published separate country reports on terrorism over the course of the last few years. The US Embassy also funded several organisations researching the various means of countering violent extremism in the country.

The concluding remarks in regards to the Macedonian case study can be roughly divided into two categories, the first one opting for a better understanding of the Macedonian multicultural and multiconfessional context (OSCE publications, Democracy Lab publication and the KCSS publication) and the second one calling for a better understanding of the gradual shift of the radicalisation processes and the dissemination of extremist narratives into the less visible online spaces (WB Extremism Research Forum publications).

Defining violent extremism and radicalisation

The definitions on violent extremism and radicalisation have thus differed in the recent literature dedicated to the study of these social phenomena in the national, Macedonian context.

A 2018 study published by the OSCE (2018) in Macedonian language provided a compound definition of "radicalisation towards terrorism" as a "dynamic process in which a person accepts the terrorist violence as a possible, even legitimate action". This approach towards radicalisation was recreated in the governmental and ongoing National Counterterrorism Strategy of the Republic of Macedonia (2018-2022) (National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism (2018: 11).

On the other hand, several Macedonian researchers depart from Mohammed Hafez and Creighton Mullins's (20158: 260) definition radicalisation as a process which "involves adopting an extremist worldview, one that is rejected by mainstream society and one that deems legitimate the use of violence as a method to effect societal or political change". For the studies by the Macedonian researchers using this definition, see Stojkovski and Kalajdžioski, "Perspektivi na Zaednicata", Selimi and Stojkovski, "Assessment of Macedonian efforts" and Stojkovski and Kalajdžiovski, "Report on Macedonia".

Analytic, a local think thank conducted the first policy study in 2016 and brought attention to the issues in the country that correlates with foreign fighters from North Macedonia, i.e. current trends, institutional and legal responses and the impact of constitutional amendments, relevant stakeholders, de-radicalisation and resocialisation. The policy paper issued specific recommendations for the Government and stakeholders based on findings and good practices in the region.

As for the other constructs, a 2018 study on the foreign fighters' issue in the Western Balkans provides a literature review and a concept operationalisation on the subject matter (Wagner, 2018).

Definition targets

There is a clear lack in the data on the Macedonian youth joining the FF in the war zones in Syria and Iraq. This aspect was pointed out by most of the latest research on the subject matter.

In addition, several studies concluded that in the Balkan states with relative Muslim minorities, such as Serbia and North Macedonia, the mobilisation of prospective FF appears to be more successful. This point further leads to various interpretations. Several studies thus juxtapose the radicalisation process with the Christian Macedonian ethno-nationalism in the state. On a different note, Azimovi collocates the developments within the Muslim minority groups in the Balkans and the diaspora groups as social groups "often most susceptible to radicalisation into violent extremism." Both the aspects were highlighted as research gaps and thus require further investigation.

Finally, the bulk of the literature points out the capital city of Skopje and its surrounding municipalities as the centre of the mobilising and recruiting activities. A 2017 research study by the Atlantic Initiative provides a particular break-down of the Macedonian FF within ISIS, highlighting not only Skopje (air, Gazi Baba, Saraj and Ara inovo) but also the cities of Kumanovo and Gostivar as regional centres of these activities. In these regards, a more nuanced perspective on the developments beyond the city of Skopje and the regional centres is certainly lacking in the scholarly discourse.

Ethnic or religious communities considered by violent extremism and radicalisation approaches

To grasp these developments, one should take into consideration the socio-political constellation in post-OFA North Macedonia. Namely, with the intra-ethnic demands institutionalised in 2001, violent extremism within the country was significantly settled – with only a few cases in the time period of two decades. On 12 April 2012, five Macedonian civilians were killed near the lake of Smilkovci, in the vicinity of Skopje – an attack which the Macedonian Ministry of Internal Affairs defined as a "deliberate terrorist act aimed at destabilising the country." In early May 2015, a shootout between the Macedonian forces and a self-identified ethno-Albanian National Liberation Army erupted in the Macedonian town of Kumanovo, taking the lives of eight policemen and 10 militants and leaving 37 officers hospitalised. As outcome result, 28 men were arrested and charged with "terrorism-related charges" by the Macedonian authorities. The two events were often put in the context of transnational, Kosovar-Macedonian cross-boundary network of radicals (Shtuni, 2016).

Another regional network was publicised in 2017, after a failed terrorist plot in Albania that was targeting the national football team of Israel and involved accomplices in Kosovo and Macedonia (Azinović, 2018).

The aforementioned "refugee crisis" from 2015 was also used regarding the ongoing war in Syria and Iraq. According to the state statistical data presented by North Macedonia's Media Information Agency (MIA) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), approximately 27,000 people entered the Macedonian territory in the first half of August 2015 alone, while approximately 41,000 people from the start of July 2015. These numbers will provoke heated reaction within some rightist outlets, who will start highlighting the number of terrorists crossing Macedonian territory. It was the erstwhile President Ivanov who also picked up this discourse in

February 2016 by stating that a significant number of people who crossed North Macedonia's state borders are "terrorists and foreign fighters" (Krstevski, 2016). This statement should be put in the immediate social and political context. Amid the contested Greco-Macedonian relations in the mid-2010s, Ivanov criticised the Greek side for its failure to enclose the logistical information on the people crossing Greco-Macedonian state borders, which in turn can result in a poorly monitored day-to-day development by the North Macedonian authorities. The statement was, however, further amplified by the rightist media and the anti-migration voices.

Finally, even though the Republic of North Macedonia officially refused to apply sanctions and restrictive measures on Russia for annexing Crimea in 2014 "for different reasons unrelated to the problem of foreign fighters," according to Beslin and Ignjatijevic, there was no Macedonian foreign fighters reported to be in the war zone in Ukraine. It should be clearly stated that North Macedonia, alongside the other Balkan states, declaratively supported the Ukrainian sovereignty over Crimea (Beslin and Ignatijevic 2017).

Methodologies employed to study violent extremism and radicalisation

As for the methodological approaches, it can be noted that the authors of the recent set of studies employed various tools for grasping the socio-political phenomenon. The first group of studies aims to widen the scope of the research, putting the national case studies into the regional context. This approach is close to the "methodological nationalism" research approach. One of the most paradigmatic cases, here, is Azinović (2018) take on the regional CVE developments. A similar, holistic approach was employed in a second group of studies, whose authors also recognise the complexity of the issue and opt for a more comprehensive understanding.

Most studies employ qualitative research methodologies, predominantly expert interviews, focus groups and secondary literature analysis.

What is missing is a multidisciplinary approach to the phenomena of violent extremism and a focus not only on particular case studies but also a comparative one, as well as research on the full scale of the process from risk assessment of violent extremism, prevention, suppression and reintegration.

Strategies to Counter/Prevent Violent Extremism and Radicalisation (C/PVE)

C/PVE INITIATIVES

The National Strategy of the Republic of Macedonia for Countering Violent Extremism 2018-2022 (NS/CVE) and National Strategy for Countering Terrorism 2018-2022 were adopted by North Macedonia's Parliament in March 2018. In order to implement the National Strategies, the Government declared its commitment to develop appropriate procedures and regulations. However, the implementation and the impact of the NS/CVE on the process of radicalisation are mostly analysed by various civil society organizations (CSOs) supported by international donors rather than policy analysis and research supported by government institutions.

Following the recommendations issued by national and regional actors, the government created and appointed a 44-member National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) and Counterterrorism (CT). The government tasked the Committee and Coordinators to revise the 2017-2020 National CT Strategy and to draft a new National CVE Strategy as well as CT and CVE National Action Plans. The National CT/CVE Committee and Coordinator met for the first time in November 2017 to map out a plan to draft the National CVE Strategy and Action Plan, but the government failed to provide funding to implement this plan.

The National Committee for the Prevention of Violent Extremism and the Fight against Terrorism (NCSNEBPT) leads the initiatives to implement the Action Plans (with input from relevant institutions and ministries of the Government: the Ministry of Education and Science, Ministry of Local Self-Government, ZELS (Local Self Government Units Community), Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Agency for Youth and Sports, Committee on Relations between Religious Communities and Religious Groups, as well as other institutions, are involved in the work of the National Committee. The representatives of 22 institutions serve as members/deputy members of the wider National Committee. These members act as inter-ministerial liaisons, managing the implementation of activities outlined in the National Strategy and Action Plans. Civil society, led by NGOs, religious leaders, local communities, youth, women, the media, and others, according to the Strategy has an additional role to play and is responsible for coordinating and communicating the efforts of different actors. In 2019 the National SNBPT Coordinator and two Deputy National SNBP Coordinators were appointed. The NCSNEBPT coordinates (non) state (institutional) capacities in efforts to prevent violent extremism and the fight against terrorism. The NCTSNBT promotes inter-institutional co-operation to counter and prevent violent extremism in line with the recommendations of the EU, the US and the UN Secretary-General's Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Extremism.

Public policies and programmes

The recent analyses on public policies and programmes concluded that when it comes to combating violent extremism, the first association for many is law enforcement and the criminal justice system. A key aspect of the fight against violent extremism is the revamping of existing laws to better address the problem of foreign fighters and violent extremism, which in turn leads to terrorism. The criminal justice system must be able to respond to terrorism-related activities through fair and effective investigation, prosecution and punishment for acts of terrorism. It is also necessary to have an approach that includes preventive measures, such as

prosecution of individuals for terrorist attempts, complicity, funding, recruitment and training. While law enforcement is always important, preventive measures are equally as, if not more, important. The Western Balkan Extremism Research Forum in 2019 published a report and identified several important aspects of public policies. First, it points to the gaps in analysing P/CVE; second, it analyses driving factors and returnees; third, it emphasises the remaining gaps.

The important conclusion is that the lack of primary research has prevented policy-makers and other stakeholders from knowledge about drivers of violent extremism; the narrow focus on individual cases prevented a more complex regional policy towards P/CVE; the focus is on FF and not on all driving factors of violent extremism; on Islamic radicalisation but not on other forms of violent extremism. The multidisciplinary and multilevel character of violent extremism needs the same complexity of policy answers.

The National Strategy for PVE is based on the latest grassroots research on community dynamics regarding extremism, conducted by CSOs in North Macedonia. The general mission of the Strategy for PVE and FAT is to develop effective, accountable and comprehensive government and social capacities and activities for the prevention, protection, prosecution and response (PPPR) of radicalisation and violent extremism that can lead to terrorism, in line with the values of the state, in order to enable/promote a safe and prosperous State.

The specific mission for the prevention of violent extremism is to ensure and promote a safe, secure and prosperous state through coordinated activities that prevent, protect, execute and respond to the early identification and detection of factors contributing to radicalism, extremism and violent acts in the form of terrorism and/or terrorist activities.

The Strategy is mainly focused on the executive and the judiciary, with little attention to communities or wider social actors. This is a challenge, as it does not sufficiently involve preventing radicalisation, but rather dealing with its consequences. Community involvement is needed to find the roots of the problem, gain insight into why people are embarking on violent extremist pathways, and the opportunity to work to prevent radicalisation.

Official definitions of violent extremism and radicalisation

The legal framework contained provisions to combat terrorism but there were no specific provisions criminalising the participation and recruitment of foreign troops. The legislation covering the field of terrorism comes from Articles 394-a, 394-b and 394-c of the Criminal Code and the Law on Prevention of Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism.

According to the amendments adopted on 3 September 2014, Article 322-a of the Criminal Code now reads:

> One who creates, organises, recruits, transports, organises transportation, equips, trains or otherwise prepares a person or group to participate in foreign military, police or paramilitary formations, in organised groups or individually outside the territory of the Republic of Macedonia shall be punished with imprisonment of at least five years.

The law does not apply retroactively.

These statutory provisions do not apply to persons holding the nationality of the countries in which their military or police formations participate, or to Macedonian nationals participating in military formation under the control of an internationally-recognised government or international organisation.

According to the National Strategy for PVE, violent extremism:

> …refers to the beliefs and actions of people who support or use ideologically motivated violence to pursue radical ideological, religious, or political views.

Civil society

CSOs in North Macedonia were not immediately engaged and recognised by state institutions as relevant actors in PVE or Fight against terrorism. Due to this, there was almost no involvement of civil society in this process up to the adoption of the National Strategy in 2018. Even after the National Strategy identified civil society and other NGOs as important, the number of CSOs working on this issue is still extremely limited. Thus, there is a lack of knowledge on this issue within the CSOs themselves. It seems that Analytica think tank is the only organisation in the country that provides insight and research on the issue related to civil society in Macedonia (Stojkovski and Kalajdziovski, 2018; see, as well, Stojkovski 2019).

The NEXUS Civil Concept is implementing a research project called *Enhancing the Understanding of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF) Phenomenon: Challenges of rehabilitation, resocialisation and effective reintegration of FTF Returnees in the Republic of North Macedonia.* Having this category of sanctioned individuals in the penitentiaries, the project needs to anticipate the country's ability to undertake and administer adequate activities for rehabilitation, resocialisation and reintegration (RRR) of convicts from this category with the optimistic goal of eventually de-radicalising and disillusionment (Nexus, 2019).

The first training Module 1 for Leaders against Intolerance and Violent Extremism (LIVE) is intended to benefit people with leadership potential who are well-connected in their communities, actively contributing to a positive change, and motivated to make an impact against violent extremism. It is designed for persons whose potential can be leveraged, rather than for persons who are already experts in preventing violent extremism. The LIVE training is intended to strengthen their skills and knowledge, so they can further contribute to building resilience of local communities to violent extremism (Nexus International Broadcasters Association, 2020).

The Association of Journalists of Macedonia (AJM) in cooperation with the Initiative for European Perspective (IEP) and the "Institute for peace, security and policy research Konica", is implementing the project *Building resilience against violent terrorism and extremism through reinforced journalists, media and government officials* in the period from December 2019 to December 2020. The main objective of this project is to strengthen the capacity of the media and state authorities to communicate violent extremism and terrorism in a way that reduces the threat. The AJM budget for the implementation of this project is 34,098 € (Association of Journalist of Macedonia, 2020).

Religious communities

There are two major religious communities in contemporary North Macedonia, Orthodox Christian and Muslim, led by the Macedonian Orthodox Church and the Islamic Religious Community (IRC); and several smaller

ones: the Roman Catholic Church, as well as the Jewish community and the Evangelical Methodist Church.[7] According to the Macedonian legal system, the religious communities are separated from the state and equal before the law.[8]

The Macedonian Orthodox Church, its claim to autocephaly and the Serbian Orthodox Church's denial of that claim represent what is probably the single most important challenge to the Macedonian Orthodox Church. In 1967 an assembly of the Church proclaimed autocephaly. Although there are statements this issue is exclusively between two churches, it becomes politicized regularly and touches nationalistic feelings on both sides. Thus interethnic relations are closely related to interreligious relations and rise of nationalism.

In North Macedonia, 83.5% of Macedonians consider themselves members of a Church; of these 81.9% believe in God and 45.8% are "strongly attached" to their religious community and only 12.6% "faintly attached" (Bezomrazno, 2014).

Muslims account for 33% of the population. North Macedonia has the 5th highest proportion of Muslims in Europe. Most of the Muslims in the country are Turks, Roma or Albanians, although there is a small number of Macedonian Muslims. Thirty-three different religious teachings have been registered in North Macedonia. Five churches and religious communities are listed in the Constitution as religions that have a great traditional and historical connection with North Macedonia (Relijiga, 2020).

The Islamic Community of Macedonia (ICM) is the official Islamic religious community in North Macedonia. They are against the use of violence in the name of any religion. The IRC is active in countering violent groups and has developed a draft project to prevent radicalisation and terrorism in collaboration with the Hilal charity. The project's strategy is to strengthen moderate attitudes by raising public awareness and reaching out to the Muslim community in Macedonia, and at the same time working on the resocialisation of former foreign fighters. The project aims to counter the "twisted version of Islam" narrative preached by radicals. The IRC believes that strengthening the religious voice that transmits what it believes is the true message of Islam to Muslims in Macedonia should be the first and most urgent intervention in Muslim communities. The proposal also includes elements of support for families that have members affiliated with foreign armies. These families face a great deal of psychological burden and social exclusion from the community. The last pillar of the project is to facilitate the reintegration of foreign fighters back into Macedonia. This project, however, never received any funding and is currently on hold. ICM representatives have expressed concern that state authorities are not cooperating with them on the Strategy on Violent Extremism (SVE) and that they have been invited to only one meeting (with the former President Ivanov). According to them, the high unemployment rate, and the overall bad economic situation of young people in Macedonia is one of the

[7] The remaining 28 religious teachings, recorded in the register, are mostly Christian-Protestant churches. There are also those that are traditional religions from the East. For five years now, the Mormons, the fastest growing religion in the world, have been operating in North Macedonia as registered. They call themselves the "Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints". There are 1,952 churches and 580 mosques in present day in North Macedonia, and at least 50 churches and 10 mosques are either under construction or renovation. This means one church or mosque per 831 residents, unlike the European average, where there is one religious object for every 10,000 to 12,000 members of the population. However, the Islamic Community is adamant that the 580 mosques in Macedonia do not match the current needs of its flock. "Muslim believers of different ethnic backgrounds make up to 40% of the country's population," Afrim Tahiri, General Secretary of the IRC, maintained.

[8] The Law on the legal obligation of the church, religious community and religious groups regulates the establishment and legal status of the church, the religious community and religious group, arrangement of worship, prayer and religious rite, religious instruction and educational activities, income of the church, religious community and religious group, as well as other issues.

reasons when it comes to radicalisation. In a situation where young people see no hope for a better tomorrow, they become an easier target for manipulation. ICM said that it incorporated counter-narratives into Friday sermons with Muslim worshippers. ICM also conducted one Countering violent extremism training session for approximately 12 imams. Local think tanks continued to research the drivers of terrorism. The Macedonian municipalities of Aracinovo, Cair (Skopje), Gostivar, Kicevo, Kumanovo, Ohrid, Struga and Tetovo are members of the Strong Cities Network.

On a different note, the local religious communities depicted preciously, which were vocal in the initial processes of radicalisation in North Macedonia, were reported to be organised by two "illegal" imams who, after their stays in the Middle East, started mobilising religious groups, *jamaats* and para-*jamaats* in North Macedonia (Qehaja and Perteshi 2018). Finally, the aforementioned Macedonian Christian Brotherhood, even though not registered as a religious community, employs religious and far-right narratives for mobilising potential affiliates.

Methodologies

Stakeholders involved

The general approach of implementation of the National Strategy on P/CVE is that the National Committee is the main national actor that coordinates activities of other governmental and civil society actors in the implementation of the Action Plan on local, national and regional level. According to some recent analysis, the main improvement in public policy on P/CVE is that the National Strategy complemented the preventive approach to security that was dominant before 2018/19. Still, we can suggest that prevention of violent extremism deserves a complex and integrated approach of all actors.

The reference to the methodology also means changes in the current approach that is reduced to the definition of the main actors and activities, outputs and time-frame of the Action Plan on implementation. The methodology should be improved and translated into a process of risk assessment from violent extremism and identification of key risk factors, development of monitoring capacities and exchange of information, financing of the Action Plan activities, evaluation of success, good practices, sharing, and so on.

The focus is on various issues at the local government level, pointing to several areas where state and local authorities and institutions need to work together to prevent the emergence of violent extremism and terrorism. These include improving trust and cooperation between government security services and religious leaders; clarifying comprehensive training and support for religious communities to oppose online radicalisation; improving training in communities, families, prison staff and religious leaders in order to identify the early signs of violent radicalisation; developing means and measures to counter the volume of misinformation highlighted by polarising narratives in vulnerable categories of citizens; and creating processes and procedures to encourage programmes in communities to support social cohesion, which prevents violent extremism and terrorism.

Three municipalities in Macedonia – Cair, Gostivar and Kichevo – will establish community action teams. These teams will be responsible for developing local plans, including activities to build partnerships and links between communities and central government. The programme is piloted in these municipalities as outlined in the recently adopted National Strategy and Action Plan for Preventing Violent Extremism in Macedonia. The programme is implemented by the Search for Common Ground from October 2018 until October 2020. It is co-funded by the United Kingdom and the Netherlands more in Ministerstvo za vnatrešni raboti (2017).

On the regional level, North Macedonia and countries in the region are part of the EU Initiative for the Western Balkans in the Fight against Terrorism: An Integrative Action Plan initiated by the Council of the European Union. The initiative aims to "eliminate further duplication and overlap in the fight against terrorism and activities of violent extremism in the Western Balkans." The initiative assumes that the fight against violent extremism in the Balkans requires a coordinated approach by all stakeholders active in the region.

North Macedonia is a member of the Council of Europe's Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering Measures and the Financing of Terrorism, a Financial Action Task Force (FATF)-style regional body. North Macedonia's Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU), the Money Laundering Prevention Directorate (MLPD), is a member of the Egmont Group of Financial Intelligence Units.

Enforcement mechanisms for the C/PVE initiatives

As discussed above, 86 fighters have returned to the country, 11 have been sentenced to prison terms, and four are facing trial. But some of them did not even get home. Mohamed Zekiri, from Ohrid, was arrested by Turkish police (2015) after returning from a training camp in Syria with three other jihadists. Two police officers were killed in the shootout, after which he was sentenced to life in prison. Another Macedonian citizen has been arrested for recruiting soldiers in Italy. To prevent violent extremism, the study recommends an effective re-socialisation programme implemented by prison penologists.

The long prison sentences received by returnees from the battlefields of the Middle East have reduced the number of like-minded people leaving the country to fight in Iraq and Syria, according to a survey by the NGO Analytica. However, the problem has not been eradicated, as more than 100 people still stand by ISIS with a handgun (2016).[9]

The results of the research (Analytica) showed that after the police actions "Cells 1 and 2", in which 15 people accused of participating in foreign army, police, paramilitary or parapolice formations were arrested, the number of young people from Macedonia who go to the battlefields in the Middle East has decreased.

Available resources and main objectives of the strategies or initiaives implemented

The National Strategy is not supported with a budget in addition to regular one from the main actors i.e. government institutions and ministries and local institutions.

The National Committee activities in implementation of National Strategy 2018-2022 are supported by donor projects including one described above.

[9] A five-year prison sentence for four defendants, a five-and-a-half-year prison sentence and a seven-year prison sentence were assigned to the six suspects in the "Cell" case, who pleaded guilty at the first public hearing to the indictment and reached a plea agreement with the Prosecutor's Office. The highest prison sentence was imposed on the first suspect, Rev. Medzepi Memishi, who is suspected of participating in foreign military, police, paramilitary or parapolice formations, according to Article 322-a, paragraph 1. Ahmet Darlishta, who is charged with the same crime, but after three articles of Article 322-a, was sentenced to five and a half years in prison. The suspects, Fazli Sulja, Sejfula Edemovski, Shehu Muhamed and Resulj Saiti, who are suspected of two counts under Article 322 for participating in a foreign army, police, paramilitary or parapolice formations, were sentenced to five years in prison.

The NSPVE stress that "A preventive approach to radicalisation and violent extremism is the most economical way to deal with this problem, which must not be treated insufficiently or in general ignored, given that the use of force is always the last, not the first and unique answer option" (Government of the Republic of Macedonia 2018).

The specific mission of the National Strategy is to ensure and promote a secure and prosperous state through coordinated activities that prevent, protect, execute and respond to injury identification and detection of factors contributing to radicalism, extremism and violent acts in the form of terrorism and/or terrorist activities.

In the case of North Macedonia, the priority actions include strengthening North Macedonia's counter-terrorism structures and strategies, including with an improved threat assessment; stepping up efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism, including with a multi-agency approach at the local level, as well as addressing the challenges posed by returning FTF and their families; and establishing a national threat assessment of money laundering risks and improving the link between financial intelligence and prosecution

Existence of critical evaluation systems

Impact of CVE-PVE on the threat of radicalisation

According to the National Strategy, there are limited capacities for P/CVE at the state level. The marginalisation of communities, intolerance about differences in culture, religion and languages and unfair or unjust practices of law enforcement agencies are the main risks for successful action. It is expected that institutional efforts to create comprehensive training and support in creating platforms and databases for sharing agency information, data and intelligence and increased trust and cooperation between government security services and leader communities will ensure consistency of efforts.

The National Strategy focuses on various issues at the local government level, pointing out several areas where state and local authorities and institutions need to work together to prevent the emergence of violent extremism and terrorism. These include improving trust and cooperation between government security services and religious leaders; clarifying comprehensive training and support for religious communities to oppose online radicalisation; improving training in communities, families, prison staff and religious leaders in order to identify the early signs of violence radicalisation; developing means and measures to counter the volume of misinformation they provide, point out the polarising narratives in the vulnerable categories of citizens; and creating processes and procedures to encourage programmes in support of communities of social cohesion, which prevents violent extremism and terrorism.

Unemployment and inappropriate responses from police authorities compound the frustration of communities that believe their needs are not taken seriously. Failure, or latent response to community calls for help by state institutions in the protection of citizens, strengthens the emergence of violent and radical activities. In North Macedonia, the tendency to encourage citizens to maintain ethnically and professionally closed societies, rather than efforts to encourage inclusive, inter- and intra-cultural integration and religious tolerance, are largely important reasons for NEMIRI. Furthermore, these differences in society contribute to the individual or collective will to accept extremism. Ultimately, division and exclusion will significantly contribute to the transnational overflow effects, which intensify the consequences at the local, state and regional level (Government of the Republic of Macedonia, 2018).

SPECIFIC INITIATIVES ADDRESSED TO WOMEN AND YOUTH

Women, Peace and Security and UN SC Res 1325 is the only framework that addressed the relation between women and security. It contains three strategic goals including strengthening the gender perspective in the formulation and implementation of the peace, security and defence policy. The Ministry of Defence took the leading role from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) but, so far, the new National Action Plan that will eventually touch upon the issue of women and P/CVE is not visible.

The MotherSchools Model Initiative is creating opportunities to boost trust among community members, which is a fundamental concept for overcoming the stigma and taboos associated with violent extremism and terrorism. In the beginning, many mothers were reluctant to join the project, initially due to the controversy over the content of the topic and the implications that may arise in the environment in which they live. Those who completed the programme gained a sense of pride in their achievement and built a strong sense of camaraderie, self-confidence, and openness to each other's communication. The MotherSchools is a "Women without Borders" programme, designed for mothers with the goal to provide mothers with the competence and confidence to guide their children through the challenges of adolescence, negative influences and growing global uncertainties. The MotherSchools initiative creates a safe space to learn, build trust and find support from others experiencing the same issues, without judgment or fear. Last year the programme was implemented in Saraj and Chair and this year MotherSchools programme was expanded in three new municipalities: Tetovo, Gostivar and Studenichani. The MotherSchools programme in these municipalities started in October 2019.

The EU supported Youth Work in Prevention of Violent Extremism. Through this project, SEGA[10] promoted this method to the wide stakeholders and prepared the ground for further developments related to structured dialogue. The project aimed for young people and decision-makers to become aware of processes and risks leading to extremism and radicalisation and be empowered to engage in anti-extremism efforts both individually and collectively at national level and within their local communities. The importance of the project is that it touches the most vulnerable group on radicalisation, the youth, as most of the reports confirm that, besides ethnic or religious differences, high unemployment and social exclusion affect the youth and facilitate the paths of radicalisation. In a way this fills the gap identified in policy dialogue between youth and policy makers in many areas including P/CVE.

[10] SEGA is a national platform of youth organisation dedicated to lobbying for needed legislative changes as well as committed to supporting youth activism, access to information and participation of young people in activities for solution of their problems (SEGA, 2020).

Conclusion

Given the cross-institutional data and multidisciplinary sources, we would like to point out two particular aspects as concluding remarks on the state of the art in the present day Republic of North Macedonia.

On the one hand, we would like to emphasise the historical particularity of North Macedonia and draw attention to its multi-confessional legacy. In other words, from a diachronic perspective, Macedonian society has a long tradition of multi-ethnic and multiconfessional tolerance which can be traced back to the Byzantine and Ottoman Empires. From a contemporary perspective, these legacies translated into a set of constitutional, legal and socio-political instruments which institutionalise the multicultural reality in a way that is without a regional precedence. The various (i) localised and (ii) primarily individualised cases of radicalisation in North Macedonia, as presented in the report, best illustrate this point. Therefore, we suggest:

- Considering the long history of multiconfessional and multiethnic cooperation and everyday life in the Macedonian context,
- Considering the societal particularities in the Macedonian context,
- Considering the geopolitical position of the Republic of North Macedonia, its bilateral and regional relations, as well as its position within the wider arena of international political relations.

On the other hand, we would also like to point out several aspects that appear to be under-researched in the literature and not given the proper attention by the official state institutions and civil sector. Some of the remarks are restated as points in other research papers and policy analyses on North Macedonia. Herein, present day Macedonian society can benefit from a compound research on:

- The relation between the new media and social media and the processes of radicalisation. This aspect was hinted at in several studies on the violent extremism and radicalisation in North Macedonia but has not yet been analysed in a structured and systematic manner. A critical discourse analysis on the social media content and an analytical operation of gathering first-hand experiences with the social media editors can be a way to grasp these developments in Macedonian society.
- The process of media frames and influence on public opinion. One can clearly state, based on various research on other topics, that the media is setting the agenda on certain public discussions. In these regards, one can ask a mixed-method research question on the way the media influences public opinion on violent extremism and radicalisation in North Macedonia.
- Hate speech and the process of radicalisation. The public sowing, without a sense of responsibility for the spoken word, appears as the main generator of the social climate of intolerance and prejudice on national, ethnic and other grounds which appears as a general psychological framework for the expansion of all forms of acts of hatred from acts of physical violence to acts of verbal and psychological abuse. In the Macedonian practice of the authorities responsible for combating and preventing hate speech there is an evident reserved attitude towards the application of legal

prohibitions. Hence, the low number of registered cases of criminal prosecution or taking other legal measures.

- Even though various state institutions in North Macedonia came up with several national strategies on countering violent extremism and radicalisation, one can point out that knowledge of the implementation of these strategies is lacking. Herein, a functional analysis on a particular institution can serve as a tool for grasping the institutional memory, institutional efforts and accomplishments of certain institutional strategies on the topics of violent extremism and radicalisation.
- The relation between the state institutions and civil society, and the role of the latter in the process of raising awareness and researching the phenomena of violent extremism and radicalisation in the North Macedonian setting. In these regards, we would also like to point out the numerous studies conducted by the civil sector as a certain accomplishment. Yet, a structured, meta-level analysis of the relation between the official institutions and the civil sector partners, not only the NGOs, is a point to be developed in the future.
- The NATO accession and the latest benchmark in North Macedonia's EU integration is certainly a point that should be examined in the future regarding the state's issues with violent extremism and radicalisation.
- The most recent pandemics and the state measures employed for battling the crisis have already provoked some issues between North Macedonia's government and certain religious institutions. The impact on the radicalisation and violent extremism in the state is yet to be explored.

Finally, we would like to highlight that an interdisciplinary approach and mixed-methods study is the best way to grasp these socio-political phenomena in the national context. In addition, a cross-national and transnational analysis, as projected within the CONNEKT research objectives, will certainly contribute to a better understanding of the aforementioned gaps in the literature and the most recent developments that are not part of the scholarly discourse.

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BULGARIA

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Overview

COUNTRY PROFILE

Government system

Under the terms of the 1991 Constitution, Bulgaria is a parliamentary representative democratic republic and has a multi-party system. It is a unitary state with local self-government. The constitution guarantees human rights, rule of law, separation of powers, and freedom of speech, press, conscience and religion. Executive power is exercised by the government. The prime minister is head of the Council of Ministers, which is the primary component of the executive branch. Legislative power is vested in both the government and the National Assembly. The unicameral National Assembly, or Narodno Subranie, consists of 240 deputies who are elected for 4-year terms through a mixed electoral system. The judiciary is independent of the executive and the legislature. The President of Bulgaria is directly elected for a 5-year term with the right to one re-election. The president serves as the head of state and commander-in-chief of the armed forces.

Population

Latest official data indicates that at the end of 2018 the population of Bulgaria was 7,000,039 (National Statistical Institute). The country's population has been on the decrease in recent decades. Compared to 2010, the decline is over half a million people (6.7%). The ethnic and religious composition of Bulgaria's population is diverse and dynamic. According to the latest census data (2011) (National Statistical Institute, 2011), the majority of the population are ethnic Bulgarians (84.8%), with Turks being the largest ethnic minority (8.8%), followed by Roma (4.9%). The Turkish and the Roma communities are historical minorities formed during the Ottoman domination between 16th and 19th centuries. Smaller ethnic minorities such as Russians, Armenians, Jews and Vlachs account for less than 1% of the population.

Main ethnic/religious groups

In the 2011 census, 21.8% of the population did not answer the question about their religious affiliation. Of those who answered, 76% identified themselves as Orthodox Christians. The largest religious minority was that of Muslims (10%). Bulgaria is the EU member state with the largest autochthonous Muslim community that has been formed over the centuries following the Ottoman conquest at the end of the 14th century. Muslim communities have been part of the modern national Bulgarian state since its foundation in 1878, hence Bulgarian society is the successor of centuries-long experience of interaction between Christian and Muslim populations. The overwhelming majority of Muslims (95%) self-identified as Sunni, and the rest as Shiite or simply as Muslims. Both the Sunni and the minority of Shi'a profess traditional Islam, which has been developed under the influence of the Ottoman Empire. This Islamic tradition is different from interpretations and practices of Islam in the Arab world and was termed "Balkan Islam" (Popovic, 1986). A number of other religious denominations have very small communities: Protestants 1.1%, Catholics (including Uniates) 0.8%, Armenian-Gregorians 0.03% and Jews 0.01% (Table 1).

TABLE 1. Religious groups in Bulgaria (2011 census)

Religious Denomination	Number	%
Total population	7,364,570	
People who responded to religious affiliation question	5,758,301	100%
Eastern Orthodox	4,374,135	76%
Muslim	577,139	10%
Catholic	48,954	0.9%
Protestant	64,476	1.1%
Jewish	706	0.0%
Armenian – Gregorian	1,715	0.0%
No affiliation	682,162	11.8%

Own production. Source: National Statistical Institute, 2011 census

While Orthodox Christianity is professed almost exclusively by ethnic Bulgarians, Islam is the religion of three historical minorities: Turks, Roma and Bulgarian-speaking Muslims.[1] The latter group is a community formed during the Ottoman domination when under various circumstances Bulgarians converted from Christianity to Islam. Members of this community today self-identify in three different ways: as Bulgarians, Turks or Pomaks. For all of them Bulgarian is the mother tongue. Members of the Roma community share different religious affiliations, including Orthodox Christianity, Evangelism and Islam. Notably, religious conversions among the Roma community are a common practice (Беновска-Събкова and Алтънов, 2010).

CONTEXTUALISATION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND RADICALISATION IN THE COUNTRY

Overview of radicalisation and violent extremism

The types of radicalisation discussed in this report are Islamist and far-right. They vary significantly in terms of spread, manifestations, organisation and number of individuals involved, as well as the popular attention. While some Roma (Salafi) communities are considered at risk of Islamist radicalisation, Roma in general experience a high level of stigmatisation and marginalisation and are also targeted by far-right groups. While the factors driving the adoption of Salafism among some Roma communities, and the support for Islamist organisations and ideas emerging among a small group of Salafi Roma, are various, marginalisation and widespread discrimination towards the Roma community as a whole is certainly one of them. Other important contextual factors are hostility towards Islam, which has been a key part of the Bulgarian national discourse developed historically in opposition to the (Islamic) Ottoman Empire, as well as insufficient understanding and research on Islam as a religion and social practice and its history, theological doctrine and practice (Mancheva, 2019).

Bulgaria has been only marginally affected by violent manifestations of Islamist radicalisation and extremism. In 2012, Bulgaria was targeted for the first time by a terrorist attack, which was plotted externally and

[1] Respect to the differentiating ways in which members of this community self-identify, the term chosen to denote them in this report is Bulgarian-speaking Muslims. For a detailed account of the representation of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims in the demographic statistics, see Иванов, М. (2012) Помаците в българската етнодемографска статистика. сп. Население 1-2.

committed against Israeli citizens visiting the country for holidays. In the attack, five Israelis and one Bulgarian were killed together with the perpetrator himself and another 35 persons were injured. On 5 February 2013, the Bulgarian government officially named Hezbollah as the perpetrator of the terrorist act (Лалов, 2013) and as a consequence the military wing of the organisation was included in the EU list of terrorist organisations (Янков, 2013). Since the onset of the ISIS-related conflict in Syria and Iraq, the country has become a transit route for transnational fighters from Europe on their way to combat zones and back. Arrests and prosecutions for terrorist-related offences have also increased since the onset of the ISIS-related conflict and following tightened legislation and new terrorism-related criminal provisions after 2015, but are mainly related to foreign nationals transiting through the country (FTFs) (Dzhekova and Stoynova, 2018/2019).

Risks of domestic Islamist radicalisation are most often associated with the entry of Salafi interpretations of Islam in Bulgaria and their adoption by some Muslim communities in the country (Todorov and Shentov, 2016). Salafism is not typical for Bulgaria and is often considered as being at odds with the traditional Hanafi Sunni Islam professed by the majority of Muslim communities in the country. Even though the Salafi interpretations of Islam have been rejected by the majority of Bulgarian Muslims, Salafism has managed to reach Muslims in Bulgaria through four main channels: 1) foreign missionaries; 2) foreign charities from Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia or Kuwait; 3) young Muslims from Bulgaria who receive education at prestigious religious universities in Egypt, Jordan and Saudi Arabia; and 4) migration to Western European countries and encounters with local (immigrant) Muslim communities (Todorov and Shentov, 2016). In Bulgaria the spread of Salafism is limited to a small number of Bulgarian-speaking Muslim villages and Roma settlements. While Salafi interpretations of Islam should not be equated with radicalisation, in some isolated instances, the adoption of Salafism has been manifested through endorsement of radical Islamist organisations and their ideas by some Roma. The first such act was reported as early as 2003 when a flag with the sign "The state is a Halifat" was displayed above two houses in the Roma Quarter of Iztok in the town of Pazardjik, where followers of the banned Islamist organisation Halifat were gathering together (Николов, 2004). About 10 years later in cities like Pazardjik, Plovdiv and Asenovgrad some acts demonstrating sympathy with organisations such as Al-Qaeda in Iraq, and later ISIS were observed (Mancheva and Dzhekova, 2017). In 2015 a criminal trial was launched against the chief Islamic preacher in the Pazardjik Roma quarter Ahmed Musa (previously convicted in 2004 and 2012 on similar charges) and 13 of his followers from the local Salafi Roma community on charges of anti-democratic propaganda, religious hatred and inciting war (Mancheva and Dzhekova, 2017). The defendants were reportedly involved in disseminating ISIS-inspired propaganda and calls for jihad, while also allegedly providing logistical support to transiting foreign fighters going to Syria (Ibid).

Far-right radicalisation and extremism, despite being more prevalent and resulting in more violence in comparison to the highly publicised instances of so-called Islamist radicalisation, has not received as much public attention and has not been subject to any sustained efforts at assessment or counteraction. In Bulgaria, far-right and ultra-nationalist groups have been associated with numerous completed violent acts, including by political party members), (Nova, 2016) as opposed to violent manifestations of Islamist radicalisation. Far-right extremism operates in and is enabled by an environment of widespread prejudice towards minorities like the Roma (Галъп Интернешънъл, 2015) and worsening attitudes towards other minorities like homosexuals (Дневник, 2019). On the other hand, recent surveys show that Muslims in Bulgaria, while experiencing religious resurgence since the fall of the socialist regime, do not support more fundamental aspects of religion such as the wearing of ***niqab*** and the use of ***Sharia*** law to decide on community matters (Иванова, 2017).

Non-violent activities of the far-right groups include demonstrations and protests, commemorations of controversial historical figures, sports events and even charitable activities. However, numerous acts of hate speech, hate crime and vigilante incidents against ethnic, religious and sexual minorities have been associated with different far-right organisations. During the peak of the refugee crisis in Europe, there have been spontaneous and organised vigilante activities against migrants at the Bulgarian border, including violent apprehensions (Stoynova and Dzhekova, 2019: 164-182).

Citizens reported to have joined ISIS and other violent movements inside and outside the country

Only one Bulgarian citizen of Syrian descent is alleged to have joined ISIS (ICCT, 2016).[2] He was allegedly involved in fighting for the terrorist organisation from 2013 to 2016 (Дневник, 2017) before returning to Bulgaria in 2017. Generally, however, the country acts primarily as a transit zone for foreign fighters as reported by the Ministry of the Interior and the State Agency for National Security (SANS) (Друмева, 2019).

Since the mid-1990s state authorities imposed a more restrictive regime to the operations of externally funded Muslim organisations and foundations in Bulgaria, including rejection of the renewal of registrations or subjecting them to investigations (Троева, 2012),[3] while there have been several deportation and arrests of foreigners for their radical religious proselytising. Cases of suspected Islamist extremism or international terrorism in Bulgaria have been relatively few in recent years, as described above. As per the latest reports by the Bulgarian State Agency for National Security and by Europol, 14 arrests related to terrorism were made in 2018, and 15 Compulsory Administrative Measures (CAM)[4] were implemented in Bulgaria (ържавна агенция „Национална сигурност, 2019; Europol, 2019). According to the State Agency for National Security, around 332 FTFs passed through Bulgaria between 2013 and 2015 en route to Syria and Iraq (Stollova, 2016). Since 2016 there have been at least four criminal trials against several (mostly foreign) defendants on terrorism-related charges.[5] It is not possible to provide the exact number of Bulgarian nationals who have joined violent movements abroad, as such information is gathered by security authorities and is subject to classification.[6]

ISIS has managed to directly and indirectly inspire radicalisation in Bulgaria in some isolated cases, as well as among Bulgarian citizens residing abroad. In 2018, a Bulgarian citizen and an Austrian citizen with Bulgarian-Turkish ethnicity were sentenced in Austria for preparing a terrorist attack and for recruiting others to travel to Syria and join ISIS (bTV Новините, 2018). In 2019, a teenager who fell under the influence of ISIS was arrested in Plovdiv for planning a suicide bomb attack (Бързакова, 2019). The state prosecution has so far opened three court trials against Bulgarian citizens (mostly Roma, but also some imams from Bulgarian-speaking Muslim communities), who, based on adopted Salafi interpretations of Islam, are charged with propagating anti-democratic ideas, participation in a banned Islamic organisation, propagating hatred on religious grounds and incitement of

[2] While foreign sources have claimed that up to 10 Bulgarian citizens may have joined Daesh at some point, these suggestions have not been confirmed.

3 A total of 30 such organizations operated in Bulgaria until 1994. Since then most of them are banned with only 5 remaining by 2004 (Николов, Й. (2004)

[4] The CAMs applied to foreigners include three types of measures: expulsion, revocation of the right to reside and prohibition to enter the territory of the country.

[5] Among them three Syrian nationals with refugee status residing in Germany, one Bulgarian national of Syrian origin, one Swiss national and one dual Bulgarian-Australian citizen.

[6] It is worth mentioning that, according to the Mirotvorets Center established by the pro-Western Ukrainian government, five Bulgarian citizens have either fought in Donbas or aided pro-Russian separatists in Ukraine. (Club Z., 2016).

war (a trial against Ahmed Musa[7] from 2004; a trial against 12 acting imams and Ahmed Musa from 2012 to 2015; a trial against 14 Muslim Roma, including Ahmed Musa, from July 2015).

Incidents related to far-right extremism, especially hate crime, which are much more numerous, get much less attention both by law enforcement and the media. As per official police statistics, the number of recorded crimes against religious denominations, as well as incitement of discrimination, violence or hate-based on ethnic or racial bias (Art. 162-166 CC) were as follows: 21 (2017), 29 (2016), 10 (2015), 17 (2014), 21 (2013), and 18 (2012).

Estimating the spread of far-right extremism offences is particularly challenging, mainly due to problems in recording and investigating hate crimes. As per data reported by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), a record high number of hate crime-related sentences have been passed in 2018 (most for crimes committed in previous years), while only six such crimes have been prosecuted in 2018 and nine in 2017.

TABLE 2. Hate Crime in Bulgaria, 2014-2018*

Year	Hate crimes recorded by police	Prosecuted	Sentenced
2018	46	6	158
2017	22	9	9
2016	28	299	71
2015	704	752	135
2014	617	750	117

*The data includes offences with a hooligan motivation
Own production. Source: OSCE/ODIHR (n.d.)

It should be noted that estimating the actual extent of hate crime is difficult and there are reasons to believe that hate crime is severely underrepresented. Latency is an important problem. Another significant issue is that certain hate crimes remain hidden within more general criminal classifications.[8] A review of judicial cases reveals that despite evidence of a discriminatory motive in some cases, the crime was still prosecuted as hooliganism. Therefore, a proportion of hate crimes remain unrecognised as such.

Presence of radical and violent groups in the country

There are no publicly known domestic violent Islamist (or other religious) groups or organisations active in the

[7] The activities of Ahmed Musa, the chief Islamic preacher in the Roma quarter of Pazardjik and the informal leader of the group around him, have been monitored by law enforcement since the early 2000s. He has been the subject of a series of arrests and three court trials. His first trial took place in 2004 and ended with a three-year suspended sentence for participation in banned Islamic foundation, rejection of the secular state and preaching in favour of a Halifat (Telekabeltv, 2015).

[8] A number of Criminal Code articles explicitly deal with specific extremist offences or hate crimes (Art. 162-166 CC) – see numbers above. However, with regard to murder and bodily injury, the Criminal Code does not allow for the separation of xenophobic and racist motives from hooligan motives as aggravating circumstances. Homophobic motivation is not included as an aggravating circumstance for any crime. As per police statistics, hundreds of bodily injury offences are recorded annually, but it is not possible to assess what share are bias crimes. Exact numbers are as follows: 609 in 2015, 780 in 2016, and 887 in 2017. Complete data for 2018 is not available; in the first half of 2018, 414 incidents were recorded by police. Source: Ministry of the Interior, Police Statistics.

country and there is increased scrutiny and control exerted by security agencies in the context of global Islamist terrorist threats. The perpetrators of the only terrorist attack in recent Bulgarian history were foreign nationals (Николова, 2013) and some experts connected it to Hezbollah (Dariknews, 2019). Since the mid-1990s, state security authorities have increasingly restricted the operations of foreign-funded (e.g. Saudi Arabia) Islamic charitable organisations proselytising Salafism through prosecutions or refusing renewals of registration.

As elaborated above, it is difficult to estimate the support base of far-right groups as data about their acts is incomplete both in terms of official statistics and as a subject of research. The far-right scene in Bulgaria includes a spectrum of actors roughly falling in the following three categories: political parties, non-parliamentary ultra-right organisations and informal groupings (incl. skinhead or neo-Nazi gangs) (Todorov, Shentov, ed. 2016). The most prominent political actors include ATAKA, the first far-right party to be represented in parliament, following elections in 2005, and the Patriotic Front, a three-party coalition (including ATAKA), which is the first far-right political entity to become a decisive factor in government as a partner of GERB in the current cabinet (since 2017). There are several non-parliamentary ultra-right organisations and movements active in the country, some of which have political ambitions. The most notable and longest-running is the *Bulgarian National Union* (BNU), founded in 2001, which in the past was refused registration as political party. Other informal organisations such as *Blood & Honour*[9] and *National Resistance*[10] are dominated by skinhead youths and football hooligans, who share racist views against Roma, migrants and refugees. Informal groups represent gatherings mostly involved in hooligan acts and hate crimes without a particular ideological base, such as skinhead and neo-Nazi gangs. Their members are usually young males, sharing a common subculture based on football team support, a certain style of music or extremist symbols such as swastikas, "SS", the Celtic cross, or White Pride. For a brief period during the 2015 migration crisis, there was activation of vigilante groups aimed at preventing irregular migration and carrying out illicit "arrests" of migrants close to the Bulgarian border with Turkey, but they quickly diminished in visibility after the dissipation of the migrant crisis (Ibid).

Framing radicalisation and violent extremism

Scientific and academic state of the art

In Bulgaria, radicalisation and violent extremism as potential threats to society entered the political agenda relatively late, around the mid-2010s, and mainly explore the domestic implications of global and EU-wide responses to so-called home-grown Islamist radicalisation, the activities of terrorist organisations such as ISIS and Al-Qaeda, and the issue of foreign fighters transiting through Bulgaria to and from the conflict zones in the Middle East. Factors of vulnerability among the local Muslim population discussed in the literature include external influences such as the penetration of interpretations of Islam that are uncommon to the Hannafi Sunni tradition in Bulgaria, the influence of high religious educational institutions abroad over Bulgarian citizens who graduate from them, the transit of FTFs through the country and the global reach of ISIS and similar violent extremism groups (Todorov and Shentov, 2016; Проданов и Тодорова, 2005;

[9] 'Кръв и чест' in Bulgarian. This website provides information about the organisation's activities but it is not clear whether it is the official Blood & Honour Bulgarian site: https://28bulgaria.blogspot.com/

[10] 'Национална съпротива' in Bulgarian. The organisation does not seem to have currently any online presence. Its Facebook page has been closed down several times, following complaints about its xenophobic, anti-Semitic and anti-Roma content.

Министерски съвет, 2015a). The internal security risks identified by experts are associated with the social deprivation and exclusion of some communities that make them vulnerable to radical (religious) ideologies; the accessibility through the internet of radical propaganda; and the potential of provocation and spread of Islamophobic and xenophobic attitudes (Todorov and Shentov, 2016; Проданов и Тодорова, 2005; Министерски съвет, 2015a).

The public (and academic) debate on the threat of home-grown Islamist radicalisation in Bulgaria revolves around two main questions that are often mixed together (Mancheva, 2016: 27-53). The first is how and why an orthodox-based religious resurgence took root in some Muslim communities in the country. The second is whether and to what extent these processes may be considered a sign of Islamist radicalisation. There is a vast body of literature focusing on various aspects of the history and the present situation of historical Muslim communities in Bulgaria[11], exploring, among other aspects, to what extent the processes of religious resurgence among some segments of the Muslim communities influence individual and collective expressions of religious profession along the axis moderate – radical Islam (Evstatiev, 2016; Ghodsee, 2010; Троева, 2012; Иванова, 2014). Experts on Islam and religious and ethnic minorities strongly caution against a simplistic equation of religious resurgence based on orthodox interpretations of Islam with radicalisation.[12] Scholars conducting research among communities considered "vulnerable" stress that "while the strong religiosity does not favour (up to now) extreme behaviour," there is "direct dependence between the religious zeal and increase in its external attributes on one side and the degree of pressure which is systematically implemented by the state and society" on these Muslim communities (Иванова, 2019).

The factors that contributed to the adoption of orthodox interpretations of Islam by some Muslim communities (Roma and Bulgarian-speaking Muslims) discussed include the unstable religious identity among Roma and Bulgarian-speaking Muslims, dire socio-economic situation and marginalisation, deficiencies of the Islamic training of imams in Bulgaria, the weakness of the Muslim leadership after 1989, and the political instrumentalisation of religion, leading to the neglect of the religious needs of certain segments of the Muslim community and perpetuating a "theological vacuum" (Evstatiev, 2016).[13] The formation of a Salafi community among the Roma is attributed to social segregation, discrimination, stigmatisation, seeking new meaning and social identification, strong group solidarity and support, integration within the community through participating in informal economic activities, shared identity and religious practices, cosmopolitanisation through increased travel to Western Europe, and exposure to new religious practices and ideas abroad (Mancheva and Dzhekova, 2017).

The factors leading to members of some Roma communities expressing support for violent extremism causes or organisations such as ISIS, on the other hand, have not been explored in depth. A study on the root causes and the social meaning of certain manifestations of sympathy with radical Islamist ideas and organisations among Roma from the Iztok neighbourhood in the city of Pazardzhik found that, while the adoption of Salafism

[11] It deals with a range of topics such as the history of relations between the state and minorities, the post-1989 social and economic development of Muslim communities, their migratory practices, identity dynamics, and mutual attitudes with the majority Christian population. Some representative studies include: Eminov, A. (1997) Turkish and other Muslim Minorities of Bulgaria (New York: Routledge).; Желязкова, А. (1997) Мюсюлманските общности на Балканите и в България. София: ИМИР.; Градева, Р. (2001) История на мюсюлманската култура по българските земи София: ИМИР.; Карамихова, М. (2003) ред., Да живееш там, да се сънуваш тук. Емиграционни процеси в началото на XXI век София: ИМИР.

[12] Experts such as A. Zhelyazkova, S. Evstatiev or V. Chukov draw a line between adoption of Salafi interpretations of Islam and Islamist radicalisation.

[13] See also: Ghodsee (2010).; Троева, Е. (2014) Традиционен" и „нов" ислям в България. Български Фолклор 3, 4.; Zhelyazkova (2014; 565-616).

among this community did play a role in this process, additional factors need to be considered, such as ISIS online propaganda as an external pull factor, the rise of a charismatic spiritual leader and an informal local mosque, contacts with Islamist circles abroad, as well as group capsulation as the result of increased negative public and media attention following a much publicised trial on "radical Islam" (Mancheva and Dzhekova, 2017). Deficiencies in the government and institutional approach towards the Muslim denomination as a whole, and responses to the perceived threat of home-grown radicalisation in particular, are emphasised by a number of authors (*Иванова*, 2019; Dzhekova, 2016). Field research on attitudes among Muslim communities has found that capsulation is strongly associated with such responses and the rise of Islamophobia and nationalism, rather than with increased religiosity (*Иванова,* 2017).

On the other hand, factors fuelling the rise of the populist radical right in post-socialist period discussed in the literature include: rising populist counter-narratives to democratic liberalism in the post-socialist period, capitalising on social and economic discontent (especially after the economic crisis), systemic institutional distrust, political alienation, rising welfare chauvinism, and the fear of the rise of "radical Islam" (Avramov, 2015; Krasteva, 2016; Genov, 2010). At the same time the issue of reciprocal radicalisation (far-right and Islamist) remains highly under-researched.

Prominent studies

One of the earlier academic publications discussing comprehensively the threats of Islamist radicalisation in Bulgaria in the context of external developments and internal risks was published in 2005 (Проданов and Иванова, 2005). However, while it drew a general frame of discussion, no in-depth exploration of any of the outlined risks has been undertaken.

Therefore, research from the field of anthropology and Islamic studies, as well as sociological studies exploring state-minority and majority-minority relationships discussed above is central to an in-depth understanding of the complexity of contextual factors related to risk factors of Islamist radicalisation in Bulgaria.

One of the most comprehensive recent reviews of trends in radicalisation and violent extremism is the 2016 study *Radicalisation in Bulgaria: Threats and Trends* by the Center for the Study of Democracy (Todorov and Shentov, 2016), exploring how and to what extent internationally observed radicalisation processes are manifested in Bulgaria, taking into account a number of contextual specifics. It takes stock of existing research but also draws extensively on statistical data and interviews with experts and stakeholders. It provides systematic overview of main actors, ideas, manifestations and risk factors associated with radicalisation (including Islamist, right-wing and left-wing, and football hooliganism), while critically examining institutional responses and offering policy recommendations. The Centre for the Study of Democracy (CSD) has published a comprehensive review of academic concepts of radicalisation, as well as topical studies on different aspects of the phenomenon, which serve as a foundation for further research and are often used as a reference guide by other scholars and public institutions. CSD has also produced practical tools and guides to improve understanding and knowledge of the phenomenon among practitioners and policy-makers (Dzhekova et al, 2017a; Dzhekova et al, 2017b).

Since 2015, a number of studies have examined radicalisation and violent extremism from a security perspective (e.g. in the light of the recent migration wave, the rise of ISIS and FTF movements; review of national and EU-level legislation and policy responses, among others) (Солаков and Христов, 2019; Krastev,

2016; Dimov, 2015; Антонов, 2019; Димитров, 2017; Хаджийска, 2019). However, most of these rely on secondary sources and analysis of court trials.

Studies of far-right radicalisation are mostly focused on far-right political parties and the fluctuations in their popular appeal (Avramov, 2015; Krasteva, 2016; Genov, 2010). These are produced mainly by NGOs and academic scholars. A number of studies examine the genesis and rise of political far-right and national populism movements as typical for Bulgaria's post-socialist period and democratic consolidation, highlighting their cyclic and paradoxical nature, the diversification of actors and the eclectic ideological positions occupied by its most prominent actors, including hard and soft versions of populism and nationalism (Avramov, 2015; Krasteva, 2016; Genov, 2010). The research on other (informal) far-right movements is limited (Ivanov and Ilieva, 2005; Stoynova and Dzhekova, 2019).

Nevertheless, hate crime against minorities as an important manifestation of radicalisation is examined by scholars (Спасова, 2018) and addressed by reports of human rights and advocacy organisations (Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, 1992; Богданов, 2019; Amnesty International, 2015). Some of these studies view hate crime as a form of radicalisation "in the everyday life" that is often overlooked (Спасова, 2018). There are several studies on topics related to radicalisation, such as prejudice (Накова, 2001), stereotyping (Пампоров, 2008) and hate speech (Фондация Фридрих Еберт, 2017; Иванова, 2016; Иванова, 2018), which find that in the past decades there has been a more frequent and overt use of hate speech on the part of the media or even political actors for the spread of negative stereotypes in relation to different ethnic, religious and sexual minorities (Pamporov, 2013). Research on social distances and on majority-minority attitudes is also prominent, drawing on representative surveys (Пампоров, 2020; Иванова, 2017).

Main research and knowledge producers

Despite increased governmental attention, state-sponsored research is very limited in the area of radicalisation and violent extremism,[14] despite the adoption in 2015 of the National Strategy for Countering Radicalisation and Terrorism (Министерски Съвет, 2015). Instead, the most comprehensive academic research on the issue is published in a number of studies by the CSD,[15] as well as by university scholars and academic research centres with a long-standing track record in studying minority issues, religion and security aspects, as well as the political far-right, followed by human rights and advocacy organisations.

Defining violent extremism and radicalisation

Official definitions of radicalisation and violent extremism are provided in the National Strategy for Countering Radicalisation and Terrorism (2015-2020):

[14] Тренд ООД, Ранно разпознаване на признаци на радикализация с оглед успешно прилагане на ранна превенция (forthcoming).

[15] The following studies of radicalisation by CSD have been published since 2015: Rositsa Dzhekova et al. (2020 – forthcoming) Far-right Narratives and Youth Vulnerabilities in Bulgaria. Sofia: CSD.; Dzhekova, R., Moravec, L., Bláhová, P., Ludvik, J., Stejskal, L., Anagnostou, D., Skleparis , D. and Stoynova, N. (2017) Situational Assessment of Extremist Trends. Sofia: Center for the Study of Democracy.; Dzhekova, R., Mancheva, M., Stoynova, N. and Anagnostou, D. (2017a) Monitoring Radicalisation. A Framework for Risk Indicators. Sofia: Center for the Study of Democracy.; Mancheva, M. and Dzhekova, R. (2017) Risks of Islamist Radicalisation in Bulgaria: A Case Study in the Iztok Neighbourhood of the City of Pazardzhik. Sofia: CSD.; Todorov, B. and Shentov, O, eds. (2016) Radicalisation in Bulgaria: Threats and Trends. Sofia: CSD.; Dzhekova, R. and Stoynova, N. (2018/2019) From Criminals to Terrorists and Back? Quarterly Report Vol 1 and 2. Bratislava: GLOBSEC.

Radicalisation is a process of adopting extreme opinions, views, beliefs and ideologies, to the extent of fierce rejection of all alternatives. It is characterised by a decisive readiness for imposing one's views and principles over the rest of society, through rejecting the constitutional foundations of democracy and non-respect for fundamental human rights. In some cases it can lead to adopting the ideology of violence.

Radicalisation which leads to violence is a phenomenon where individuals or groups of people adopt opinions, views and ideas, which might lead to acts of terrorism.

Violent extremism is a phenomenon where individuals or groups of people support or carry out ideologically motivated violence to achieve their ideological goals.

Source: Council of Ministers of the Republic of Bulgaria. Strategy for Countering Radicalisation and Terrorism (2015 – 2020), 2015.

Numerous studies published by the CSD since 2016 also adopt these definitions, but also provide a review of the state of the art in academic discourses on definitional issues (Dzhekova et al. 2015), which is used as a reference point for other authors. CSD often points to the difference between violent and non-violent radicalisation in its work. CSD also uses definitions by EU and United Nations (UN) institutions such as EC's definition of radicalisation as "a process of socialisation leading to the use of violence" (European Commission's Experts Group on Violent Radicalisation, 2008: 5)., as well as the Council of Europe definition of violent extremism: "promoting, supporting or committing acts which may lead to terrorism and which are aimed at defending an ideology advocating racial, national, ethnic or religious supremacy and opposing core democratic principles and values" (Council of Europe, 2015). Other authors either adopt the official state definitions, refer to foreign academic works, or do not provide a definition at all. An academic discussion on concepts and definitions of radicalisation is lacking.

Definition targets

The definitions are broad enough to cover all types of violent extremism. However, in reality Islamist radicalisation has been the main focus of law enforcement and intelligence efforts, while far-right radicalisation and acts of violence have remained under-reported, under-researched and often under-prosecuted.

Ethnic or religious communities considered by violent extremism and radicalisation approaches

Roma communities are often considered as being at risk of Islamist radicalisation, due to some isolated cases of Salafism being proselytised among some of these, and to a lesser extent Bulgarian-speaking Muslims (Pomaks) and recent Arab migrant communities. In terms of non-Muslim communities, members of far-right groups and movements are mainly ethnic Bulgarians.

Methodologies employed to study violent extremism and radicalisation

Studies employ mostly qualitative methodology, drawing mainly on interviews and focus groups with stakeholders. There are a number of anthropological studies on Muslim communities' social life and culture although few of those focus on the issue of radicalisation per se. Some of the main shortcomings of studies on Islamist radicalisation are that they do not rely on primary data. The few that do draw mainly on interviews

and/or focus groups with experts and stakeholders (police, social workers, teachers, policy-makers) rather than with representatives of "at risk" communities such as Roma or youth (Иванова, 2019).

Quantitative methods such as structured interviews and representative survey research are used in studies of discrimination and intolerance, social distances and minority issues, some of which also include questions probing radical views (Спасова, 2018). Prominent among these are a study on attitudes of Bulgarian Muslims conducted in 2011 and 2016 (Иванова, 2017), as well as a 2019 study on majority-minority attitudes (Иванова, 2020). The latter uses a mixed-method research design (representative survey with standardised interview questionnaire and in-depth interviews among minority groups) to show that 24% of respondents believe that there is religious extremism in the country. Members of the Muslim minority groups are seen as primary proliferators, and most people believe the phenomenon is foreign to Bulgaria (i.e. it comes from networks outside the country) rather than an internal process.

Strategies to Counter/Prevent Violent Extremism and Radicalisation C/PVE

C/PVE INITIATIVES

Mapping of C/PVE actors

The main actors active in the field of P/CVE so far have been mainly from the public security sector, while prevention of radicalisation is not sufficiently recognised as part of the mandate of frontline practitioners (such as education and social services) and is not integrated in their work, while non-state actors are insufficiently involved in prevention (Dzhekova, 2016). There is no specialised stand-alone coordination body in charge for P/CVE development of specific programs and overseeing their implementation. The Security Council at the Council of Ministers is responsible for strategic decision-making related to P/CVE and provides overall assessment of security threats, proposes measures and coordinates and guides the work of security agencies. The coordination of the strategy and action plan implementation monitoring is designated within the Ministry of the Interior. In the *2018 Report on the implementation of the Annual Plan for 2018,* the bulk of the activities were carried out by the Ministry of the Interior as a leading institution, followed by the State Agency for National Security (SANS).

SANS monitors radicalisation and violent extremism using overt and covert means (use of agents and informants, surveillance, etc.) and on the basis of information received from foreign intelligence services. SANS also monitors the activities of high-risk extremist groups and organisations operating in the country, although there is no publicly available information on which groups are considered high-risk. Various law enforcement bodies such as the Border Police and the Directorate General for Combating Organised Crime are responsible for monitoring and countering different risks related to violent extremism and terrorism.

Public policies and programmes

The Strategy for Countering Radicalisation and Terrorism (2015-2020) was adopted by the Council of Ministers in December 2015, along with a Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy (Министерски Съвет, 2015b). In the following years, annual plans were adopted for 2016, 2018 and 2019. Implementation reports were published for 2017, 2018 and 2019. The objective of the Strategy is to establish a comprehensive multi-agency approach towards preventing and tackling radicalisation. Next to more traditional law-enforcement methods for prevention of terrorism, this goal is to be achieved through the establishment of cooperation and information exchange mechanisms between different stakeholders, the establishment of mechanisms for early detection of vulnerable individuals and those on the path to radicalisation as well as de-radicalisation programmes for those already radicalised. However, as per annual activity reports (Министерски Съвет, 2017; Министерски Съвет, 2018a) a significant amount of the concrete actions are experiencing delays. In addition, some planned activities are under consideration for suspension.

It should be noted there have been several attempts in recent years to govern religion (and restrict religious freedoms), mostly initiated by far-right political parties in government and prompted by increase threat

perceptions related to the rise of "radical Islam".[16] For example, the heightened public attention to the ongoing court trial against Ahmed Musa and his followers from 2015 contributed to a series of resolutions enacted at local level by the municipal councils in a number of Bulgarian cities to prohibit the full face veiling of women. (Mancheva, 2019) The process culminated in the adoption of the Act to Limit the Wearing of Clothing Partially or Completely Covering the Face.[17] Such resolutions were passed by the municipal council of the city of Pazardzhik, Stara Zagora and Burgas. Furthermore, on 4 May 2018 a Project Law for Revision of the Denominations Act in Bulgaria was submitted to the National Assembly. The proposed revisions were justified with the need to impose stricter state control (by the Directorate of Denominations at the Council of Ministers) over the financial and denominational activities of Bulgaria's denominations as a means to prevent and fight religious radicalisation (Манчева, 2019). The overarching objective of the proposed amendments was to tackle "radical Islam" by way of imposing strict control over the activities of the Muslim denomination in the country. The proposal faced the concerted opposition of all religious denominations (Mancheva, 2019). Although it was not adopted, it demonstrates that religion is prone to instrumentalisation on the part of political actors with populist agendas.

Official definitions of violent extremism and radicalisation

As quoted before official definitions are provided in the National Strategy for Countering Radicalisation and Terrorism (2015-2020). An attempt to introduce the vague term "religious radicalism" in the Denominations Act in 2018 has failed following fierce opposition by all religious denominations to this and other amendments proposed, as discussed above (Mancheva, 2019).

Civil society

The role of civil society in P/CVE initiatives is spelled out in the National Strategy for Countering Radicalisation and Terrorism (2015-2020). Representatives of NGOs were included in the drafting of the Strategy as well. In pursuit of the development of a multi-agency approach to tackling radicalisation, NGOs and CSOs are to take part and contribute towards:

- The development of indicators for early identification, monitoring and risk assessment and early warning system by first line practitioners as well as citizens.
- The development of prevention programmes.
- The development of sustainable channels of cooperation, information exchange and coordination of activities at both national and local level, through a consultation mechanism bringing together first line practitioners, state institutions, and local government and non-governmental organizations in order to implement early prevention initiatives in cases of radicalisation.
- The development and implementation of de-radicalisation/disengagement programmes.

However, despite the active role afforded to NGOS and civil society in the Strategy, its implementation has experienced significant lag. The few measures implemented in which NGOs/CSOs were involved were actually related to EU-funded research, seminars or training projects (Министерски Съвет, 2017). Their envisioned engagement in key actions such as the development of prevention programmes and multiagency cooperation

[16] For a detailed analysis see: Иванова, Е. (2019) Законотворчеството като експеримент. Балканистичен Форум 2: 277-294.

[17] Passed by the National Assembly on 30 September, 2016 and promulgated in issue 80 of the State Gazette (SG) of 2016,

mechanisms at local level has not taken place. Outside the strategy and action plans' scope, NGOs independently implement a number of EU-funded actions (not reported in the government's implementation reports) focused on research, community engagement and capacity-building in the field of prevention of radicalisation as part of broader European partnerships across different member states.

Religious communities

Similar to civil society, religious and ethnic communities are afforded a role in the multi-institutional approach towards preventing and tackling radicalisation envisioned by the Strategy. Religious communities are to participate and contribute towards:

- The development of prevention programmes.
- The development of mechanisms and indicators for early identification, surveillance and threat assessment and the development of a system for early notification by first line practitioners as well as citizen reports.
- The development of sustainable channels of cooperation, information exchange and coordination of activities at both national and local level.
- The development and implementation of de-radicalisation/disengagement programmes.

However, according to the implementation plans and reports, engagement of religious communities is envisioned in only one specific activity, which has not been implemented namely the development of a cooperation mechanism between central and local authorities and religious and ethnic communities in order to prevent terrorist recruitment in the territory of Bulgaria (Министерски Съвет, 2017). It is important to note that in the post-communist period the Muslim religious leadership appeared deeply divided by struggles for control over the Chief Muftiate (Mancheva, 2019). These were manipulated by political parties, among which the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF)[18] played an active role. The control over the Chief Muftiate and the resources which the institution was managing translated into a political capital and provided opportunities for consolidation of the Muslim/Turkish vote. As a result, since the early 1990s two High Muslim Councils have existed, each backed by a different political party and electing two different Chief Muftis. The conflicts between the two factions of the Muslim denomination remained up until 2011 and served to weaken the authority of the institution as spiritual leader of Muslims in Bulgaria (Chodsee, 2010).

Methodologies

Stakeholders involved

The Strategy envisions a broad involvement in prevention and counteraction initiatives, including the involvement of diverse sets of first line practitioners (police, teachers, social and health workers) and wide involvement in programme development and implementation including state institutions, local government NGOs and civil society, as well as religious and ethnic communities and media. However, this ambitious vision has not been implemented as evidenced by the significant lag in realisation of the concrete actions planned. The Ministry of the Interior, the State Agency for National Security and the Prosecution Office have so far been the leading, if not the only, institutions enforcing measures in this regard. Respectively, government measures implemented

[18] The Movement for Rights and Freedoms was established in 1990 as the political party of the Turkish and Muslim population in Bulgaria

so far have been rather-security oriented with no systematic effort being laid in the field of prevention and addressing root causes and drivers, or building resilience. Moreover, some security measures have been enacted as prevention measures.

Targeted populations

The targets of the government response towards radicalisation and terrorism are those vulnerable to radicalisation, those who have already radicalised and those who are on the path towards radicalisation. The Strategy aims to address both Islamist and far-right radicalisation and extremism, and adopts a broad definition which in principle encompasses all types of radicalisation. However, the risks of Islamist radicalisation are examined in more detail suggesting that there is a bias with regard to religious radicalism. Law enforcement response has also been largely targeted at potential Islamist extremists (Todorov and Shentov, 2016). In addition, since most prevention initiatives have experienced delays, persons vulnerable to radicalisation or those on the path towards radicalisation have likely not been targeted successfully and systematically through comprehensive measures. Radicalisation risks among inmates or probationers has not been addressed so far in the Strategy.

Enforcement mechanisms for the C/PVE initiatives

An inter-institutional working group, summoned by the Ministry of the Interior is in charge of developing the strategy and action plans and drafting implementation reports. These are approved by the Council of Ministers. Many of the planned measures under the National Strategy and action plan are pending implementation. There are no established multi-agency cooperation platforms or referral mechanisms at local level to monitor and prevent radicalisation and support at-risk persons, although such mechanisms are envisioned in strategic documents.

Available resources

No specific budget has been dedicated to the implementation of the Strategy, Implementation Plans or Implementation Reports, nor is there a dedicated coordination body overseeing strategy development and implementation with its own budget. Instead, measures are spread among a wide array of institutions that have not been awarded additional funds specifically for the implementation of radicalisation-related measures. Several project-based actions addressing different aspects preventing and countering radicalisation have been initiated under European Council (EC) funding programmes managed by the Ministry of the Interior (Internal Security Fund Police, among others).

Main objectives of the strategies or initiatives implemented

The approach as elaborated in the Strategy clearly encompasses objectives of detection and countering, as well as prevention and reversing radicalisation. In reality, however, the emphasis so far has been placed on detection and countering through the security sector (law enforcement and intelligence), while efforts to apply a multi-agency, holistic approach to prevention are at a very early stage.

Existence of critical evaluation systems

Impact of CVE-PVE on the threat of radicalisation

No officially mandated independent evaluations of the C/PVE performance of law enforcement and intelligence institutions have been undertaken. Reports of the Ministry of the Interior and of the State Agency for National Security (mainly annual reports of activities) provide minimal data about radicalisation and violent extremism and no analysis of the effectiveness and impact of existing counter and prevention efforts. The

Annual Implementation Reports on the Strategy only track the progress of specific activities. Instead, non-governmental and human rights organisations have mainly acted as a corrective to partial government response. Reports by such organisations have consistently identified shortcomings in the approach and legislative framework which hinder radicalisation threat assessment and prevention (Amnesty International, 2015; Todorov and Shentov, 2016; Amnesty International, 2012) and have attempted to make up for blind spots in hate crime analysis by gathering victimisation data (Богданов et al, 2019). Evaluating the spread of hate crime, NGOs have pointed out various gaps in registration, investigation and prosecution.

Another issue raised by CSOs is the insufficient capacity and experience of frontline practitioners for prevention of radicalisation, and the predominantly security-oriented approach to a complex phenomenon requiring multi-agency cooperation and a culture of trust between various stakeholders, such as local police, local communities and civil society (Todorov and Shentov, 2016).

SPECIFIC INITIATIVES ADDRESSED TO WOMEN AND YOUTH

An example of a specific initiative targeting Bulgarian youth is the EU-funded campaign Find Another Way under the project Resilient Youth against Far-Right Extremist Messaging Online (YouthRightOn), led by CSD. It tackles the problem of far-right influence over youth (14-19 year olds) in Bulgaria by providing alternative narratives to confront extremist messages and ideas propagated online, as well as offline guides for teachers aimed at building resilience and core skills such as critical thinking, tolerance and conflict resolution. No initiatives targeting women have specifically been identified.

Conclusion

Bulgaria has been only marginally affected by violent manifestations of Islamist radicalisation and extremism, be it domestic or foreign. Since the onset of the ISIS-related conflict in Syria and Iraq, the country has become a transit route for transnational fighters from Europe on their way to combat zones and back, which resulted in an increase in arrests and prosecutions for terrorist-related offences. At the same time, orthodox-based religious resurgence among some segments of the domestic Muslim communities have often been linked in public debates and institutional responses with Islamist radicalisation. Even though the Salafi interpretations of Islam have been rejected by the majority of Bulgarian Muslims, Salafism has managed to reach some segments of the community through various external channels. In some isolated instances, the adoption of Salafism was manifested through endorsement of radical Islamist organisations such as ISIS and their ideas by some Roma. There is an urgent need to better understand the underlying drivers of the two processes and take these into account when designing policy responses. Such factors include the weak religious leadership within the Muslim denomination, dire socio-economic situation and severe social exclusion and stigmatisation of communities concerned, deficiencies in the Islamic training of imams and state funding, and social identity dynamics. Government and institutional responses to the perceived threat of home-grown radicalisation, coupled with rising far-right sentiments, minority prejudice, and hate speech remain areas of concern. At the same time, violent manifestations of far-right extremism such as bias crimes are under-reported and under-investigated.

Bulgaria has undertaken important steps in establishing its approach towards preventing and tackling radicalisation and terrorism through adopting a comprehensive strategic and legislative framework. However, key challenges in implementation remain. The focus is primarily on Islamist radicalisation, despite the fact that far-right extremism and associated phenomena such as hate crime and hate speech, as well as rising xenophobic attitudes are significant challenges. The Bulgarian government and public institutions are yet to develop a more comprehensive understanding and evidence-based knowledge of radicalisation that might lead to violence, the risks it poses to society, and how to prevent and counter it. The policy response so far has been focused on fending off and preparing to respond to potential terrorist activity, while approaches to addressing conductive factors and drivers are yet to be developed. The engagement of key non-state actors such as civil society and religious communities in such initiatives is limited.

Academic research has been advancing, as scholars have analysed radicalisation and different aspects thereof. However, with some notable exceptions, there is still a lack of in-depth analyses based on primary data to significantly enhance understanding of the issue of radicalisation and violent extremism in Bulgaria.

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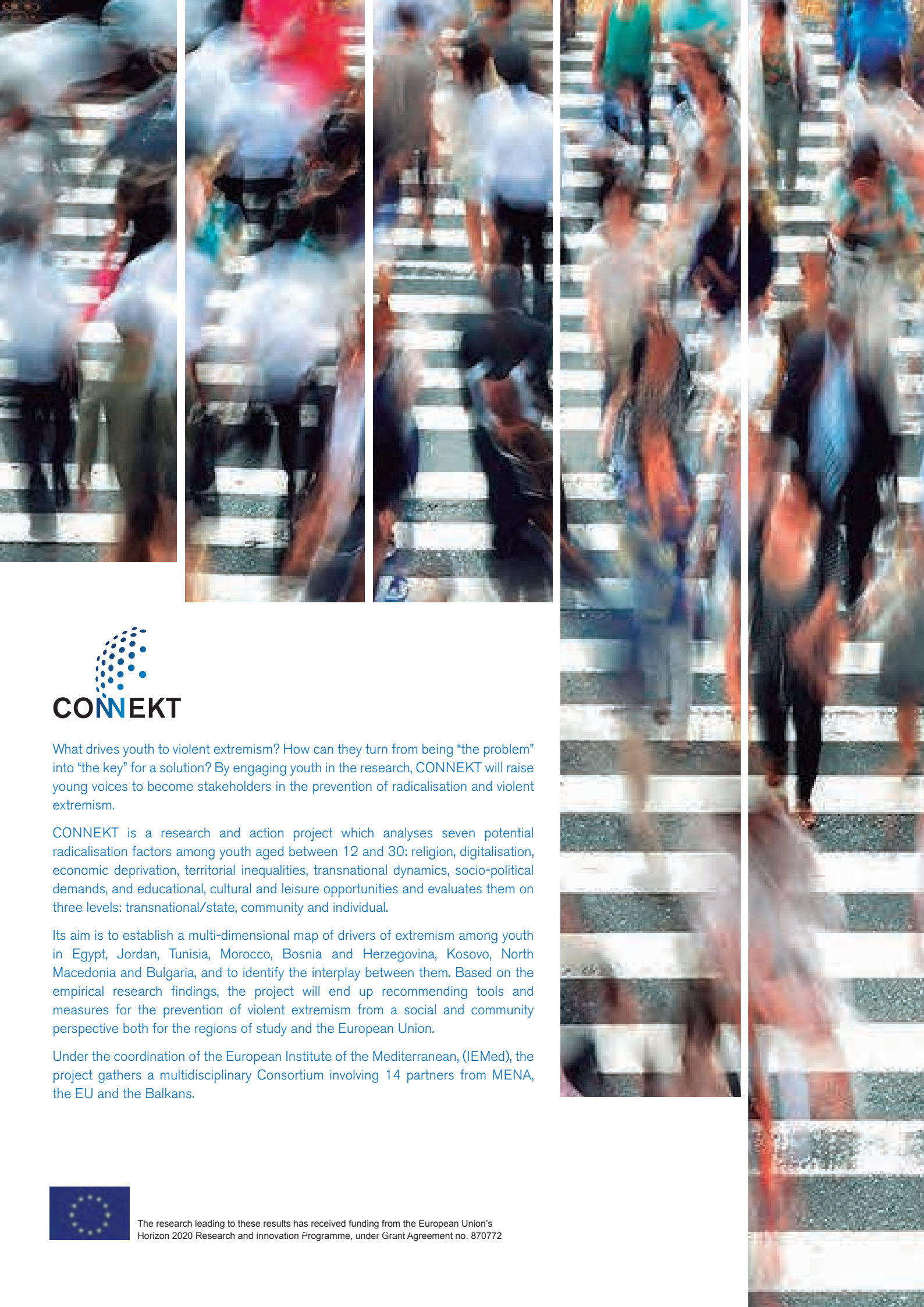

CONNEKT

What drives youth to violent extremism? How can they turn from being “the problem” into “the key” for a solution? By engaging youth in the research, CONNEKT will raise young voices to become stakeholders in the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism.

CONNEKT is a research and action project which analyses seven potential radicalisation factors among youth aged between 12 and 30: religion, digitalisation, economic deprivation, territorial inequalities, transnational dynamics, socio-political demands, and educational, cultural and leisure opportunities and evaluates them on three levels: transnational/state, community and individual.

Its aim is to establish a multi-dimensional map of drivers of extremism among youth in Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Bulgaria, and to identify the interplay between them. Based on the empirical research findings, the project will end up recommending tools and measures for the prevention of violent extremism from a social and community perspective both for the regions of study and the European Union.

Under the coordination of the European Institute of the Mediterranean, (IEMed), the project gathers a multidisciplinary Consortium involving 14 partners from MENA, the EU and the Balkans.

The research leading to these results has received funding from the European Union’s Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme, under Grant Agreement no. 870772