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Countering the phenomenon of radicalization and violent extremism: analysis based on the example of selected Western European countries

Introduction

Radicalization is the process of adopting an extremist system of views, and thus assimilating an extremist religious-political ideology that legitimizes terrorism as a means of social change. The increase in Islamic and right-wing terrorism in Western European countries is the result of extreme radicalization, primarily of young people who declare their loyalty and their services to organizations promoting the global fight against "infidels". An infamous example of the effects of growing radicalization in Western European countries was the high number of people who, "fascinated" by Islamist ideology, joined the so-called Islamic State in Syria and Iraq.[1] Radicalization most often begins with people who are frustrated with their lives or the policies of their governments, and often face social exclusion and xenophobia. These individuals seek out others with similar experiences and views, eventually forming a loose group. The process of radicalization often ends with a person's decision to commit a terrorist act. Identification of radical attitudes is difficult which results from the lack of clear

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[1]   A July 2018 study by the International Centre for the Study of Radicalization (ICSR) at King's College London based on official, academic and other data concluded that 5904 people from Western Europe joined the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, see *How many IS foreign fighters are left in Iraq and Syria?*, BBC, 20.02.2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-47286935 [accessed: 10.08.2022].

signs of this type of behavior in everyday life. The extreme degree of radicalization is revealed practically only when a person is involved in a terrorist activity.[2]

The dominant role in the radicalization of young people in Western Europe was played by mosques and Koranic schools run by radical imams who, without proper state control, preached their extremist views and ideologies. Research conducted over the last decade also indicates that some European prisons have become places of radicalization [so called "Universities of Jihadism"] and recruitment arenas for terrorist activities.[3]

It should also be noted that the Internet, including widely available socials such as Facebook, Twitter, WhatsApp, Messenger, as well as video platforms such as YouTube, have become useful tools for terrorist organizations to promote their ideologies.[4]

Only with a thorough understanding of the causes and process of radicalization can government and non-governmental agencies adequately address this threat by developing and implementing strategies and programs related to counter-radicalization, deradicalization and the fight against violent extremism. As defined by the UN Working Group on Radicalization and Extremism, counter-radicalization is "a package of social, political, legal, educational and economic programs specifically designed to stop dissatisfied and perhaps already radicalized individuals from crossing the border and becoming terrorists".[5] Deradicalization, on the other hand, is seen as "programs that are generally directed against individuals who have become radical in order to reintegrate them into society or at least deter them from committing violence".[6]

Thus, counter-radicalization focuses on prevention, while deradicalization aims to reverse the process, helping to subvert extremist ideologies and facilitating the departure of individuals from extremist groups. To this end, strategies and programs are being implemented to counter radicalization and prison recruitment, and to facilitate the rehabilitation of radical prisoners and their reintegration into society.[7]

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[2]   M.D. Silber, A. Bhatt, *Radicalization in the West: the homegrown threat*, New York City Police Department, New York 2007, p. 16.

[3]   R. Williams, A. Liebling, *Do prisons cause radicalization? Order, leadership, political charge and violence in two maximum security prisons*, "The British Journal of Criminology" 2023, vol. 63, issue 1, pp. 97–114.

[4]   O. Roy, *Jihadi radicalization: between the local and the global*, "NATO Defense College Policy Brief" 2021, no. 8, https://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=1555 [accessed: 24.10.2022].

[5]   *First Report of the Working Group on Radicalization and Extremism that Lead to Terrorism: Inventory of State Programs*, United Nations, 2008, https://data2.unhcr.org/en/documents/download/44297 [accessed: 24.10.2022].

[6]   *Ibidem*.

[7]   H. El-Said, *Deradicalization: Experiences in Europe and the Arab World*, IEMed, https://www.iemed.org/publication/deradicalization-experiences-in-europe-and-the-arab-world/?_x_tr_sl=en&_x_tr_tl=pl&_x_tr_hl=pl&_x_tr_pto=sc [accessed: 25.10.2022].

The purpose of this article is to identify and attempt to assess the effectiveness of the core strategies and programs implemented in selected Western European countries related to countering radicalization and fighting violent extremism. As the main research problem, this article poses the question: What is the effectiveness of the strategies and programs implemented in countering radicalization and violent extremism as exemplified in selected Western European countries? The problem of radicalization of people in Western European countries is extremely important, due to the fact that often extreme radicalization of individuals leads to terrorist acts. Therefore, effective counteraction to this phenomenon through the implementation of specific programs and strategies leads to a reduction in the risk of terrorist attacks. This analysis, due to the volume limitations of the article, covers only three countries – France, Great Britain and Germany. The main criterion for the selection of these countries was the significant number of people who joined the so-called Islamic State, as well as serious problems with the radicalization of Muslim minorities in these countries.

Strategies and programs to prevent radicalization and violent extremism

France

In France, in the years 2012–2021, almost 300 people died at the hands of terrorists (mostly "grown" in the country), and over 1,000 were injured. France was also the European country from which the largest number of citizens (about 2,000) joined the fighters in Iraq and Syria. Radicalization in French prisons, with an estimated 1,400 radicalized prisoners, is creating serious problems and challenges. The terrorist attacks carried out, as well as the high number of migrations of French nationals to Iraq and Syria, have highlighted the alarmingly high scale of radicalization in French society. This situation has led to much greater activity by France's anti-terrorist forces and services, which are now struggling to monitor around 15,000 suspected terrorists. As part of its efforts, the French government has established and repeatedly extended a state of emergency, strengthened its anti-terrorist legislation, intensified the monitoring of people suspected of having links with extremist groups, and started to set up deradicalization centers across the country.[8]

In April 2014, the first French counter-radicalization plan ("Plan de Lutte Anti-Terroriste", PLAT) was launched, which stipulated that a comprehensive approach to preventing and combating violent extremism (P/CVE) and countering terrorism (CT) should include factors believed to contribute to radicalization and violent extremism. It consisted of 24 different preventive measures aimed at preventing young

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[8]   *France: Extremism and Terrorism*, Counter Extremism Project, https://www.counterextremism.com/countries/france-extremism-and-terrorism [accessed: 25.10.2022].

French people from going to Iraq and Syria. A nationwide helpline was also launched for citizens with a toll-free number for reporting people suspected of radicalism and links with terrorist organizations. It should also be noted that in November 2014, the Anti-Terrorism Law was adopted, which prohibited suspected French nationals from leaving France and traveling abroad to participate in training or terrorist activities. The law also authorized the authorities to block websites glorifying terrorism and jihadist ideology. In addition, the enacted law provided for a new sanction – penalties for parents who incite their children to commit acts of terrorism or to go abroad for this purpose in the form of: 15 years imprisonment, a fine of EUR 225,000 and the possibility of losing parental rights, which is a European precedent.[9]

The objectives of the programs developed and implemented by the French authorities changed depending on the existing realities. By 2016, France had invested over EUR 90 million to support civil society's deradicalization efforts. The budget dedicated to the fight against radicalization was increased significantly after the wave of attacks in France in 2015 and reached EUR 123 million in 2017. This budget was administered by the Inter-Ministerial Fund for the Prevention of Crime and Radicalization. One of the flagship activities of this plan was the opening of the so-called deradicalization centers. The first, experimental camp for people in the process of radicalization – the Center for Prevention, Integration and Citizenship in Pontourny – was opened in September 2016. The Center employed 25 staff and was prepared to receive 30 patients. The project was to be the first of 12 centers of this type planned to deal with the danger posed by radicalized French youth. The program was to last ten months and involve young people aged 18–30 who, as part of their stay at the center, would meet with psychologists, psychiatrists, educators and imams who would help them improve their thinking and behavior. However, less than a year later, in July 2017, the Ministry of the Interior announced that the experiment with the open center turned out to be ineffective, and therefore the government decided to end this experiment. The government explained its decision by the lack of takers for this type of program (participation was voluntary). Many recognized experts in the study of terrorism and radicalization claim that from the very beginning the idea of functioning of these types of centers was doomed to failure. They argue that attempts to counter the radicalization of these people solely by confronting them with democratic values are ineffective, because if an individual rejects the world and the society they live in and adhere to a different ideology (in this case, radical Islam), it is difficult to suppose that young people will suddenly listen to people hired by the state.[10]

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9   A. Olech, *Unikalne rozwiązania Republiki Francuskiej w walce z terroryzmem i radykalizacją*, "Terroryzm. Studia, analizy, prewencja" 2022, no. 1, pp. 141–142, https://www.ejournals.eu/Terroryzm/2022/Issue_1(1)_2022/art/21240/ [accessed: 28.10.2022].

10   S. Fillion, *What we can learn from France's failed deradicalization center*, "La Stampa", 2.09.2017, https://www.lastampa.it/esteri/la-stampa-in-english/2017/09/02/news/what-we-can-learn-from-france-s-failed-deradicalization-center-1.34412986/ [accessed: 10.11.2022].

Summing up the Pontourny Center experiment, it can be argued that in the face of an extraordinary wave of terrorist attacks and the fear of being accused of inaction, the French government made decisions that were not well thought out and based on a faulty logic that assumed that one ideology could replace another.

In France, many other governmental and non-governmental measures have also been taken to prevent radicalization. The most important of them include:[11]

- Artemis Association: this government program seeks to protect individuals from the influence of radicalized family members by strengthening their ties with relatives who still feel loyal to French society.
- PHAROS Platform: this government platform is used to locate and neutralize illegal online content that glorifies violence and is used for hate speech. Citizens are asked to report their concerns about inappropriate online content to the authorities through PHAROS.
- Stop Djihadisme: this government campaign was launched after the attack on satirical magazine "Charlie Hebdo" in 2015. It provides both online (via Facebook and Twitter) and offline contacts and prepares counter-narrative programs for schools and prisons.

In addition, in 2016, the National Center for Assistance and Prevention of Radicalization was established (French: Center national d'assistance etde prévention de la radicalization, CNAPR) to coordinate counter-radicalization initiatives in France. Citizens can also report suspects to CNAPR, and the effect of this initiative was to collect the database listing about 20,000 people suspected of radicalisation. Prevention of radicalization in France in recent years has focused on building resilience towards Internet users and online content.[12]

Great Britain

The July 7, 2005 terrorist attacks on the London Underground and bus caused 52 deaths and over 700 injuries. These tragic terrorist attacks have also awakened government agencies responsible for counter-terrorism and anti-radicalization activity. In the course of intensive investigations, it turned out that the perpetrators of the attacks were British citizens, and the main place of radicalization of Muslim youth were mosques, where radicalized imams directly called for a fight against the West, conveying an extremist ideology. Between 2005 and 2008, 79 imams were accused of inciting hatred. Therefore, in June 2006, The Mosques and Imams National

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[11]   N. Käsehage, *Prevention of Radicalization in Western Muslim Diasporas*, [in:] *Handbook of Terrorism Prevention and Preparedness*, ed. A.P. Schmid, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, Zurich 2020, pp. 302–306.

[12]   *Signaler un contenu suspect ou illicite avec PHAROS* [Report suspicious or illegal content with PHAROS], 11.01.2016, https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/A-votre-service/Ma-securite/Conseils-pratiques/Sur-internet/Signaler-un-contenu-suspect-ou-illicite-avec-PHAROS [accessed: 10.11.2022].

Advisory Board (MINAB) was created to improve the management of mosques and the training of imams.

Since 2005, the UK government has embarked on more intense efforts to identify those at risk of radicalization, and has introduced programs to prevent violent extremism and deradicalization strategies primarily targeting those convicted of terrorism. However, in 2011, in the official government document, called "*Prevent* Strategy", it is stated that the current strategy of preventing radicalization and violent extremism functioning in Great Britain over the last few years has not been fully effective and needs to change. Since 2012, changes have been made to the *Prevent* strategy, which was a multi-agency program run by the police, in which representatives of various agencies, e.g. health, education and local authorities, also participated. *Prevent* is part of CONTEST (The Government's counter-terrorism strategy), which aims to stop people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. As previous anti-radicalization programs have been accused of spying on the community, the new *Prevent* strategy states that the program cannot be used as a means of covert spying. Since 2012, over 1,500 people have joined the *Prevent* program. The details of the program are still kept secret, but it is known that approximately 90% of reported cases of suspected radicalization turned out to be false. The Home Office calls the program "ideological mentoring", claiming that participation is "voluntary and confidential".[13]

Another doubt about the effectiveness of the adopted anti-radicalization programs rose after the statement of the head of the British intelligence MI5, who said that in the years 2011–2015 over 800 people left the UK to join the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria.[14] The study of this phenomenon has shown that most often the descendants of the second and third generations of Muslim immigrants have difficulties with integration into Western society due to cultural, religious and social differences. The growing feeling of marginalization and discrimination of migrants in Western civilization, leads to the process of radicalization and makes them vulnerable to the fundamentalist ideology of Islam.[15] In the UK, about 100,000 people convert to Islam every year, and according to experts London has become the largest center of Islamic thought in Europe.[16]

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[13] *Prevent* Strategy, presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for the Home Department by Command of Her Majesty, June 2011, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf [accessed: 14.11.2022].

[14] P.R. Neumann, *Radicalized. New jihadists and the threat to the West*, I.B. Tauris & Co. Ltd, Berlin 2016, pp. 87–88.

[15] *ISIS Foreign Fighters: Why do Foreigners Join the Caliphate?*, Vision of Humanity, https://www.visionofhumanity.org/can-economic-conditions-explain-flow-foreign-fighters-isis/ [accessed: 14.11.2022].

[16] T. Michalczak, *Europa w obliczu islamskiego terroryzmu*, Difin, Warszawa 2019, p. 159.

There are many government and non-governmental initiatives to prevent radicalization in the UK. The most important of them include:[17]

- The Active Change Foundation (ACF). The main objective of the program was to empower young Muslims and counteract their attraction to the ideas espoused by radical Islamists. Unfortunately, the ACF was accused by some members of the Muslim community of conducting surveillance for secret services, and for this reason many participants became distrustful and left the foundation.
- Generation Global project run by the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change. This project offers training for teachers to facilitate dialogue with students and help them to adopt a positive approach to solve problems that arise.
- Imams online – an initiative to prevent radicalization by imparting Islamic knowledge through recognized religious authorities.

However, the primary radicalization prevention program is "Channel", which was introduced in 2012. The program is voluntary and targets "vulnerable individuals" who, left unsupported, may lead to involvement in terrorist activities. Support may include education assistance, housing or employment assistance, health support, and ideological mentoring.[18]

Another major program, called Desistance and Disengagement (DDP), was introduced in 2016. DDP is a mandatory program that aims to reduce the risks posed by those involved in terrorism. The essence of DDP's operation is that it tries to dissuade individuals from participating in any terrorism-related activity in which they are involved and seeks to isolate them from any radical ideological beliefs they may have. To accomplish this task, DDP relies on a tripartite approach that includes psychological, theological and ideological mentoring. In addition to the above support, selected individuals also receive practical mentoring (job search, housing assistance, etc.) to support the individual's reintegration into society.[19]

The discussion about the effectiveness of deradicalization programs in the UK was rekindled by Usman Khan's attack near Westminster Bridge in London on November 29, 2019, which killed two people. Interestingly, Khan was a graduate of the "Learning Together" deradicalization program,[20] which he served in prison just before his parole a few months earlier. The discussion was fueled by another terrorist attack by Sudesh Amman in London on February 2, 2020, who stabbed two people

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[17] N. Käsehage, *op. cit.*, p. 313.

[18] *Case study. The Channel programme*, 9.11.2017, https://www.gov.uk/government/case-studies/the-channel-programme [accessed: 14.11.2022].

[19] D. Weeks, *Lessons Learned from U.K. Efforts to Deradicalize Terror Offenders*, "CTC Sentinel" 2021, vol. 14, issue 3, https://ctc.westpoint.edu/lessons-learned-from-u-k-efforts-to-deradicalize-terror-offenders [accessed: 14.11.2022].

[20] *Ibidem*, "Learning Together" is a prison education program developed by researchers at the University of Cambridge's Institute of Criminology.

before being killed by the police. Both perpetrators had previously been convicted of terrorism. In the aftermath of these attacks and under public pressure, the UK government passed an Emergency Act in early 2020 that prevents the early release of all prisoners convicted of terrorism before serving at least two-thirds of their prison sentence. Also in response to social criticism regarding the effectiveness of deradicalization programs, the UK government defended itself by referring to research by which in the years 2013–2019, only 3.06% (6 people) convicted of terrorism were again convicted of another terrorist offense after being released from prison. It was also noted that the recidivism rate for sex offenders is 13%, while for common offenders it is around 48%.[21]

Germany

In order to counteract radicalization of attitudes and fight against violent extremism, Germany has created a decidedly decentralized system, unlike France and Great Britain. It is characterized by great diversity and a significant share of non-governmental institutions (approx. 60%) in the implemented projects and programs. The last decade has seen a significant increase in government funding for antiradicalization, deradicalization and counter-violent extremism programs. Funds for counter-radicalization programs increased from EUR 42.8 million in 2015 to EUR 147.7 million in 2019. Financial outlays for deradicalization programs also increased significantly, from EUR 300,000 in 2015 to EUR 7.5 million in 2020[22]

Such a significant increase in funding for counter-radicalization programs was certainly influenced by the wave of terrorist attacks that swept across Europe in 2015–2017, which also affected Germany. Between 2011 and 2015, more than 900 German citizens left to join the so-called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria. The country is experiencing an exponential growth of supporters of Salafism and fundamentalism, which accounted for about 9% of the Muslim community in 2018.[23] In Germany, especially in the last decade, there has also been a significant increase in far-right extremism, which is gaining more and more supporters, taking advantage of the dissatisfaction of the local community towards migrants, which has led to many arson attacks on houses for migrants.[24] There was also a political scandal in 2019, when the Bundeswehr's Special Forces Command (Kommando Spezialkräfte,

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[21]   *Ibidem.*
[22]   D. Koehler, *Deradicalization in Germany: preventing and countering violent extremism*, CIDOB, 09.2021, https://www.cidob.org/en/articulos/revista_cidob_d_afers_internacionals/128/deradicalisation_in_germany_preventing_and_countering_violent_extremism [accessed: 20.11.2022].
[23]   *ISIS Foreign Fighters: Why do Foreigners..., op. cit.*
[24]   J. Glathe, M. Varga, *Trends of Radicalisation: Germany/3.2 Research Report*, Freie Universität Berlin, 2021, pp. 6–10, https://dradproject.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Germany-D3.2-country-report.pdf [accessed: 21.11.2022].

KSK) discovered that several soldiers of this elite unit were members of right-wing extremist groups such as "Hannibal". They stockpiled weapons and explosives and planned attacks, as the official communiqué put it, against the "German democratic system". As a result of this scandal, in June 2020, the German Ministry of Defense dissolved one of the KSK companies.[25]

In connection with the above, the activities of extremist groups have become the main focus of all prevention initiatives. It should also be emphasized that most of the programs also offer support for teachers, psychologists or municipal employees who encounter cases of radicalization in their daily activities. In 2016, the federal government issued the first national Strategy to Prevent Extremism and Promote Democracy (German: Strategie der Bundesregierung zur Extremismusprävention und Demokratieförderung). It includes the creation of advisory structures at the local level with the task of political and intercultural education and aim to focus on "vulnerable" people. A year later, a national program for the prevention of Islamic extremism was launched, focusing on prevention and deradicalization in prisons and maintaining a network of advice and information centers. Non-governmental organizations are also active. They offer training courses and workshops, disseminate literature and develop information programs (e.g. Inshallah Online – explaining how religious extremists use the Internet and what we can do about it). It should be emphasized that in Germany there are many governmental and non-governmental activities aimed at preventing radicalization. The standout programs include:[26]

- The Datteltäter – established in 2015 as a civil society initiative. The founders of this program were a group of young Germans who themselves also have ties to Islam or share a migrant background. The program seeks to counter Islamic fundamentalism with satire and focuses on prejudice against Muslims and Islam.
- The German Institute for Radicalization and Deradicalization Studies (GIRDS) offers various training courses on deradicalization and cooperates with other organizations in developing counter-radicalization initiatives and advises these institutions in this area by offering evaluation of the ongoing projects by high-level experts.
- The Nexus program is part of the "Prevention and Deradicalization in Prisons and Probation Services" project which offers psychological support to prisoners and their families.

Other counter-radicalization initiatives include the nationwide advice hotline for relatives of Islamic extremists, launched in January 2012 as part of a public-private partnership. Initial assessments suggest that this type of contact between a radical person's family member and a government employee is highly desirable. In the

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[25] N. Käsehage, *op. cit.*, pp. 307–308.
[26] *Ibidem*, p. 309.

period from January 2012 to September 2020, the hotline received over 4.5 thousand phone calls asking for advice or a call for action.[27]

Another important initiative of the German government, taken in November 2020 in response to a series of racist and right-wing terrorist attacks, is the adoption of the Catalog of actions to combat right-wing extremism and racism. The plan provides, among others, establishing an independent institute for evaluating programs to counter radical extremism and creating a legal basis for financing such projects. The adopted plan provides for the financing of various initiatives in the years 2021–2024 in the amount of EUR 1 billion.[28]

Despite some successes of German programs (neo-Nazi deradicalization helped about 2,000 people leave far-right groups between 2001 and 2016), one of the most pressing shortcomings of German P/CVE programs is the lack of evidence-based and systematic monitoring and evaluation of these programs.[29]

Although each country is developing its own strategies and programs to counter radicalization and combat violent extremism, it is worth mentioning an interesting program launched in 2011 by the European Union (EU) called the "Radicalization Awareness Network" (RAN). Within RAN, practitioners from different European countries can meet with other specialists in their field to exchange ideas, knowledge and experiences in countering radicalization and violent extremism. Currently, the RAN network brings together more than 6,000 practitioners from all EU countries.[30]

Conclusions

The analysis shows that it is very difficult to give an unambiguous answer to the main research problem presented in this article, concerning the assessment of the effectiveness of the implemented strategies and programs in the field of countering radicalization and violent extremism as exemplified in selected Western European countries. This is mainly due to the fact that practically in all countries there is a problem of real evaluation of the effectiveness of the implemented programs by all leading institutions and external experts. Some countries, such as France, admit to the failure of deradicalization programs, pointing to the need for a more

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[27]   D. Koehler, *op. cit*.
[28]   *Maßnahmenkatalog des Kabinettausschusses zur Bekämpfung von Rechtsextremismus und Rassismus*, Presse- und Informationsamt der Bundesregierung, Berlin, 25.11.2020, https://www.bundesregierung.de/resource/blob/974430/1819984/4f1f9683cf3faddf90e27f09c692abed/2020-11-25-massnahmen-rechtsextremi-data.pdf?download=1 [accessed: 25.11.2022].
[29]   D. Koehler, *op. cit*.
[30]   *Radicalization Awareness Network*, EU Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/radicalisation-awareness-network-ran/about-ran_en [accessed: 08.12.2022].

comprehensive approach to this problem.[31] In this particular case, it seems that, on the one hand, the uncompromising approach of the French authorities to the fight against terrorism confirmed the principle that "violence breeds violence", and on the other hand, a very liberal approach to counteracting radicalization ended in failure of this project. In turn, the United Kingdom defends the effectiveness of its anti-radicalization and deradicalization programs, citing a relatively low rate (approx. 3%) of recidivism of convicted terrorists. However, from many expert opinions, the thesis that comes to the fore says that "[…] terrorists involved in deadly attacks should not be a priority for deradicalization, they should simply never be allowed to go free and have a chance to harm anyone else"[32]. In this context, it seems that German programs achieve the best results, mainly due to extensive and close cooperation between governmental and non-governmental entities.

Despite the limited possibilities of research and analysis of the implemented P/CVE programs, it is possible to formulate a few conclusions. Although P/CVE has become one of the essential pillars of the fight against terrorism, this field is still at the stage of searching for the best solutions and experiments. It also seems that the well-prepared groups of experts available on the European market are too small in relation to the number of P/CVE strategies and programs launched. Countries lack credible and competent staff who have sufficient knowledge of the radicalization process and are able to detect the real signs of this process. Therefore, today the field is mostly dominated by practitioners with relevant experience (sometimes converted former extremists) but they are usually left without extensive comprehensive training in the complexities of P/CVE work.

It should be emphasized that in Western European countries there is no one-size-fits-all approach to countering radicalization. Individuals who are radicalized or in the process of radicalization accept or reject interventions basing on their own experiences. The basis for the effectiveness of P/CVE programs and strategies is their holistic approach and focus on the person and their environment. Success also requires a proper understanding of the motivations of radicalized individuals and groups in any society. The basis for achieving progress in counteracting radicalization is also the need for a much better assimilation of the Muslim minority with the local community and broad cultural and religious education aimed at promoting the so-called peaceful Islam.

Deradicalization is an individualized and long-term process in which not only the individual plays a large role, but also the mentor who must personally engage in activities targeted at the person. An essential factor in this case is the credibility and

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[31]   S. Kern, *France: Deradicalization of Jihadists a "Total Fiasco"*, Gatestone Institute, 26.02.2017, https://www.gatestoneinstitute.org/9982/france-deradicalization [accessed: 10.12.2022].

[32]   L. Duffy, *How much do we really have to learn from Europe about counter-terrorism?*, CapX, 7.02.2020, https://capx.co/how-much-do-we-really-have-to-learn-from-europe-about-counter-terrorism/ [accessed: 10.12.2022].

legitimacy of the mentor. Credibility refers to genuine commitment and legitimacy refers to the appropriate knowledge and experience in the area of Islamic culture and religion that mentors should have. The lack of adequate credibility and legitimacy of mentors, as shown by the experience of many European countries, automatically causes a lack of trust in such people, which in turn gives little chance of success of the programs implemented.

It also seems that an important factor and added value of national programs to counter radicalization and violent extremism should be the experience developed in the area of international cooperation on the basis of such programs as the Radicalization Awareness Network.

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How many IS foreign fighters are left in Iraq and Syria?, BBC, 20.02.2019, https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-47286935 [accessed: 10.08.2022].

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Countering the phenomenon of radicalization and violent extremism: analysis based on the example of selected Western European countries
Abstract

Over the past decade, Western European countries have experienced a surge in Islamist and right-wing terrorism. The terrorist attacks have made the European community aware of the scale of the terrorist threat. The increase in the number of terrorist attacks is due, among other things, to the increasing radicalization, which in effect, in many cases, leads to terrorist activity. Confirmation of the negative effects of increasing radicalization in Western European countries, was a surprisingly large number of young people (men and women) who joined the so-called Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. Therefore, individual countries are implementing their strategies to combat radicalism and extremism, and taking measures aimed at deradicalization of already radicalized people. The main purpose of the article is to analyze the measures taken to counter radicalization and an attempt to assess their effectiveness, based on the example of selected Western European countries.

Keywords: radicalization, counteracting radicalization, deradicalization, violent extremism, terrorism