

# Countering Islamist Radicals In Eastern Europe

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## SECTION ONE: THE PROBLEM

### RADICALISM AND TERROR

Although Islamist radicalism differs considerably from terrorism, their pattern of *cause and effect* should be the guiding principle. Europe, including its Eastern portion, is becoming a breeding ground of a virulent strain of extremists and a frontline in countering them. It is often argued that these are not representative of Islam, the religion of peace, brotherhood, modesty, morality, self-discipline, which they hijacked, instrumentalized and reduced to a political agenda. These arguments are justified, particularly in a propaganda war aiming at hearts and minds, but the deep dogmatic roots of animosity, even holy violence, against infidels and the apocalyptic vision of the world should not be ignored. Islam's Sacred Scripts have not been relativized by an Enlightenment-type or any other reform. This inevitably provokes conflicts with the rest of the world as far as the status of women, homosexuals, other human and minority rights, the free choice of religion or agnosticism, the divine source of legislation are concerned. The Writings can be (mis)interpreted, but no practical effect should be expected from western or even Mideastern clerics challenging the *fatwas* and theological credentials of their radical colleagues. The latter shun the former as heretics and so do many million Muslims worldwide.

By *Islamism* I mean principled Muslim conceptualizations on the role of the individual and the religious community in public life, which cannot be criminalized of course. Despite the overlap *Islamist radicalism* is a different, mostly intolerant and aggressive phenomenon, which may unfortunately be justified from a theological viewpoint. Olivier Roy suggested that de-culturized Islamist terrorism is a postmodern phenomenon which disregards, in actual fact, theology and tradition.<sup>1</sup> This observation applies to a few, and most dangerous, extremists. Yet even they refer to the religious obligation of Jihad, martyrdom and the worldwide confrontation between good and evil.

Although religion is certainly not the single explanatory model of radical Islamist movements, it should not be downplayed. It is closely related to the psychological and sociological profiling proposed by Marc Sageman<sup>2</sup> and, more recently, Michael Taarnby:<sup>3</sup> friendship-, kinship- or discipleship-based groups of previously

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introverted, isolated, frustrated, alienated, "born-again" Muslims, who are spiritually comforted by socializing with each other. Emotionally conditioned and mentally manipulated by their ringleaders the recruits pledge alliance to them and to an imaginary world community (*Umma*), find their purpose in life, place in history and the vanguard of Jihad against their and God's common enemies. Martyrdom may be viewed as the ultimate reward, promised personal fulfilment and the restoration of dignity.

Similar brotherhood patterns have been common throughout the history of Islam, starting by the community of Prophet Muhammad and the Forebears (*Salaf*), whose example the fundamentalists envisage to restore in its full glory. Although most of those Forebears defended and spread Islam by the sword, the Prophet was primarily a spiritual leader, who should not be compared to today's radical recruiters. The Islamist know-how of mindset conditioning works on a worldwide scale, also for its authentic Muslim references and formidable resources. However, the dividing line is thin between hate propaganda, inflammatory mosque sermons, threats to Salafism's critics on the one hand, and on the other, logistical support to terrorist cells, recruiting, hiding, training and cash conduit. This study's geographical scope is limited to Europe's post-socialist portion excluding the Caucasus<sup>4</sup> and Russia<sup>5</sup> where the scale and, to some extent, the character of the problem are different.

#### "ETHNIC ISLAM" AND POST-SOCIALISM

For Eastern Europeans terror and radicalism are difficult to comprehend. For almost half a century, the only few terrorists temporarily residing in their region (Carlos, leftist or nationalist Arab warriors) were invited there by the ruling Communist leaderships. Moreover, the latter were the ones who terrorized their subjects and cynically labelled as terrorists those regimes' few armed opponents as Hungary's anti-Communist revolutionaries in 1956. In the socialist era terrorism was perceived as a feature of faraway lands, and so was political Islam. The region's ethnic minorities of Islamic tradition were forcibly and successfully de-islamized, even in Yugoslavia. Tito's Muslim nationality option at the 1971 census was practically unrelated to religion.<sup>6</sup> A 1990 sociological survey<sup>7</sup> showed that Bosnia-Herzegovina's so-called Muslims were even more secular than the Yugoslav average.

Without Islam, Muslim identity is hard to keep for generations. Fewer Bosniaks (Bosnians of Muslim extraction) would have become interested in their roots if their families had not been massacred and raped *as Muslims*, while post-Christian Europe and the United Nations stood aside and watched idly. Some even encouraged the Serbs. If a Muslim woman enters into a sexual relationship with a non-Muslim man and her father or brother let her do so, that is probably the point where they cease to be Muslims. Such mixed marriages and cohabitations were rather common in the Balkans and the Soviet Union, where most alleged Muslims drank, ate pork, did not pray, fast and ignored Islamic law and tradition.

The post-socialist religious revival fell far behind expectations. One wonders to what extent such people can now be regarded as Muslims, particularly if they do not view themselves as such, despite being called Zaynab or Abdullah. Islam is, nevertheless, not considered worldwide as a club you can easily leave, not even if you supposedly joined it only by your birth. In this sense the majority of Europe's Muslims do live in its Eastern, formerly socialist, portion if Tatarstan,

Bashkortostan and Azerbaijan are also taken into account. All this must be kept in mind if one talks of Muslims in this part of the world, which I am also going to do for simplicity's sake.

The Communist police states had practically no experience of terrorism. The Islam they encountered was the opposite of radicalism or militancy: docile, subservient institutions, leaders and meek elderly faithful in the countryside. Harsh prison sentences were pronounced in Sarajevo when, exceptionally, a few Bosniaks had dared to raise pan-Islamic ideas with the leadership of Alija Izetbegovic. Later, as President, he and particularly his associates may not have always behaved as the champions of democracy. Some became dubious entrepreneurs, uninspiring Balkan nationalists, but hardly real radicals, despite the claims of Serbian propaganda.

Ethnic intolerance has been widespread in the whole region. Apparently only the Serbs of the 1990s had the weapons and the determination to *cleanse* those whom they identified as Muslims, regardless of the latter's limited Islamic awareness. This and the Bosniaks' betrayal by Europe made a part of them revisit, or reinvent, the historical religious dimensions of their identity as proposed by a few pan-Islamic ideologists like Izetbegovic himself. Bosnia-Herzegovina's precarious 1992-1995 predicament explained this almost artificial nation-(re?)building and the loud but not very effective "anti-crusade" protests throughout the Islamic world. No similar international Muslim solidarity was later offered to, let alone accepted by, the pro-western Kosovar and other Albanians who, unlike the Bosniak nationalists, did not need Islam to generate nationhood.

Both peoples, as well as other Eastern Europeans of Muslim tradition, have no other realistic choice than their region joining the realm of European democracy. Post-socialist authoritarianism, not Islam, was to be blamed for some of their leaders' arrogance and corruption even if in Sarajevo they used Islamic phraseology and symbols in the bloody early 1990s. These were exploited and grossly exaggerated by their adversaries. Most war-time pan-Islamic sympathies vanished gradually after the Dayton Agreements, and particularly following 9/11, although the Saudi-paid mosques proudly stand there and a lot of women wear headscarves. Radicals do operate in Bosnia, as elsewhere in Eastern Europe, but the Bosniak nationalists' responsibility for this should not be overstated.

What else could Izetbegovic have done in 1992-1995 than letting the Mudjahedin fighters in? Their war participation has become an important frontline experience not only for the world's Islamists, but also for its anti-terrorist police and intelligence community. A part of those bearded, mostly Arab, holy warriors may be preparing terrorist acts, but militant Islamism in Eastern Europe should not be restricted to the Mudjahedin at all. Most left at the end of the war. The influence of those who settled in Bosnia was limited to a number of local youngsters as the *Aktivna Islamska Omladina* (Active Islamic Youth - AIY) or the Furqan Association. Intelligence attention is justified as to the Middle Eastern backing these have enjoyed through transnational Islamist "humanitarian" organizations.

## THE CHARITIES

From the early 1990s onwards many foreign Muslim, mostly Arab, charities and proselytizing agencies set up shop in the post-socialist world to spread Allah's word. Most of their representatives happened to be Saudi-paid Arabs. Both

Islamist and Diyanet (secular government) Turkish missionaries assisted their ethnic brothers in those lands in reconstructing their mosques and rediscovering their roots. The Iranian embassies also helped Eastern European Muslims, not only those of Azerbaijan and the few other Si'is. Most Middle Eastern proselytizers were out of touch with post-socialist reality. Their financial resources impressed the impoverished communities they targeted. They built and restored houses of worship and ritual slaughter-houses, provided for the Mecca pilgrimages of a few, distributed copies of the Koran and Islamist propaganda literature in local languages, often awarded small amounts of cash, organized summer camps and religious courses for youngsters, offered them scholarships in Muslim educational institutions in the Arab world and popularized anti-western ideas. With the relative exception of Bosnia this Salafi "re-Islamization" failed, in most cases, due to the secular and hostile environment, women's social responsibilities and freedom, western influence and the missionaries' incompetence. Young Arab immigrants have proved more responsive to their uncompromising anti-American and Judeophobic sermons. As in the West, well-off and determined militants took over many mosque pulpits.

In the early 1990s the ubiquitous Arab preachers may have looked fanatical but not dangerous. Their knowledge of, and commitment to, Islam appeared persuasive, and so did their criticism of Western Europe regarding the Bosnian tragedy. The latter justified both international Muslim humanitarian action and (illegal) weapon shipments to the beleaguered Sarajevo government. The breaking of the immoral UN arms embargo and the Eastern European re-Islamization project were inter-related for a while as the Austrian representative of the World Assembly of Muslim Youth [WAMY] happened to be Izetbegovic's old Sudanese friend: Elfatih Ali Hassanein. He also acted as Director of the controversial Third World Relief Agency purchasing arms and delivering them to Bosnia in 1992-1993. His personal role was probably exaggerated by *The Washington Post* article<sup>8</sup> on him that followed the police search of his Vienna office. Nonetheless, Riyadh-based WAMY operated an impressive network of Arab proselytizers virtually everywhere in Eastern Europe. Its Vienna logistical centre served as the main source of funds, inspiration and propaganda material in various local languages. Elfatih traveled widely in the region to encourage and pay his Arab associates and a number of deserving indigenous Muslim dignitaries. He did not hide his firm Islamist convictions which, in the early 1990s, did not sound as embarrassing as they would today. The same applies to the Arab immigrants who worked for him. Most still live in the region, more or less discreetly since 9/11. Their Judeophobia was repulsive even at that time.

In addition to WAMY, the Islamic International Relief Organization ("Igas") of Jeddah, the Al-Haramain Humanitarian Foundation (Riyadh), the Bin Mahfouz family's Al-Muwaffaq Foundation and the Saudi High Committee for Bosnia presided over by Prince Salman were the main Saudi-sponsored agencies that operated in Eastern Europe.<sup>9</sup> The Sudanese Da'wa Islamiya, the British Islamic Relief, Yusuf Islam's Muslim Aid, the American ICNA Relief and Mercy International, the German (Milli Görüs, immigrant Turkish Islamist) Internationale Humanitäre Hilfe, the Global Relief Foundation, the Benevolence International Foundation (BIF - Chicago) and the Taiba Foundation also provided considerable support to the region's Muslim institutions including local charities as Merhamet (Bosnia, Sandzak), El-Hilal (Macedonia, Kosovo), Irshad (Bulgaria) and immigrant Arab student organizations in almost every country. In Albania alone, more than twenty "international Islamic NGOs" have been active. For the last ten years the

impact of Turkish populist preacher Fethüllah Gülen (Zaman) has been noticeable in the whole region.

Particularly after 9/11, the Bosnian and the international press focused on the Arab charities' personnel. Many of these received Bosnian citizenship for fighting in the Bosnian army's "Mudzahed" Unit, marrying local women or otherwise. Certain former Mudjahedin terrorized the population, engaged in car bombing, hostage taking and armed robbery as did the Franco-Algerian Roubaix gang of Lionel Dumont and Mouloud Boughelane, Sudanese bomber Ahmed Zuhair Handala or Saudi kidnapper Abd al-Hadi Qahtani, the first Director of the Saudi High Committee for Bosnia, who is said to have been killed in Afghanistan in 2001. Saudi "humanitarians" Wael Julaidan, Yasin Kadi, the Tunisian Shafiq Ayadi (the latter two worked for Al-Muwaffaq), and BIF Director Enaam Arnaout were all involved with Bosnian business, banks and investment, besides their missionary work. Most of them personally benefited from the Saudi donations.

Linking charity and proselytism with private finances started earlier, at the time of TWRA, with Elfatih Hassanein's Orient Bank. These radicals eventually returned home to Saudi Arabia, Sudan or disappeared as did the Mudzahed Unit's legendary Commander (*Emir*), the Algerian Abdelkader Mokhtarldji alias Abu Maali. He ran Al-Kifah, "Al-Qaeda's branch in the Balkans". Only Imad al-Misri, the popular financier of Bosnian re-Islamization is in prison in Egypt, where he was extradited in October 2001. The six Algerians deported from Sarajevo to Guantanamo in January 2002 were smaller fish. Nonetheless, Bosnian Salafis (the AIY, *Ensarije Seriata*) protested against their extradition.<sup>10</sup>

These revelations shocked Bosnians and raised questions as to the number of further, unidentified militant Islamists residing in the EU protectorate, their local sympathizers and the role of the Islamic Spiritual Community (ISC - *Islamska Vjerska Zajednica*), the extent of its cooperation with the Saudi High Committee and other charities which employed these ex-Mudjahedin as librarians, lecturers, organizers and missionaries. Most Bosniaks feel embarrassed now and would denounce Salafism if they were encouraged to do so.

Many wonder how Izetbegovic's nationalistic ruling SDA party (*Stranka Demokratske Akcije*) and intelligence service (Agency for Investigation and Documentation) protected Salafis in the 1990s. The trial of AID agent and BIF employee Munib Zahiragic, the interrogation of former interior minister Bakir Alispahic and other investigations shed light on Mafiocrazy, the involvement of several corrupt or ideologically committed Bosnian officials, bankers and police. False identities and passports were issued to those "humanitarian" Arabs. Their now well documented cases are symptomatic examples of a new type of unscrupulous militant Islamist, who is able and determined to adapt to, and recruit in, a European environment.

## BOSNIAK SALAFIS

The reportedly 2000-member-strong Zenica-headquartered AIY is a significant organization by Bosnian standards although this figure probably also includes sympathizers. Arab funding, the refugee problem, war reminiscences, high unemployment and the lack of prospects contribute to the AIY's popularity, particularly among students and in the country's central regions, but the organization managed to establish cells everywhere. The AIY's overtly pro-Salafi

stance contrasts sharply with the liberal Hanafi tradition of Islam in Bosnia. Even if the nationalistic SDA Party's elite used its concept of Islam as a mobilizing force and identity separator, Bosniaks remained western-oriented. With very few exceptions, they did not even consider a non-secular state or legislation in the bloody 1990s. Now they do so even less.

Headed by Chicago-educated Mustafa Cerić the religious leadership (ISC) was loyal to the SDA Party, its Nation-concept and pan-Islamism. The ISC is increasingly expected to find a *modus vivendi* with Bosnia's leftist and secular political forces, including women's rights advocates. Numerous European-minded enlightened scholars and dignitaries work in the ISC's ranks and various religious institutions: more than 1000 employees, over 1000 mosques, three academies of teacher training, six high schools, 1400 informal elementary schools and Europe's sole genuine Faculty of Islamic Theology. Several professors expressed concerns over the spread of Wahhabism which they should, with external help, be able to counter.

Sympathies for Salafism, the AIY and similar groups can, nevertheless, be detected within the ISC itself. Arab money is appreciated, also to run the war-torn country's many religious institutions and to build new ones. Moreover, Salafi ideology and anti-American worldview have influenced several hundred Bosniak graduates of foreign Islamic universities, particularly those of Saudi Arabia. Unlike many Muslims worldwide, those of Eastern Europe do not normally regard Islam as an all-pervasive system of norms that should transform and regulate society.

A number of young Bosniaks venerate the Arab Mujahedin for their war services to the country at a time when few Europeans sided with it. The AIY also refers to Islamist puritanism's role in strengthening the youth's sense of social responsibility, family values, combating delinquency, criminality, drug and alcohol abuse as well as extra-marital sexuality, women's vestimentary and other "indecencies", which are always a major Salafi preoccupation. Ideological guidance is provided by the AIY's periodical (*Saff*) and preachers. These are not unambiguously rejected by the ISC.

The ISC's own "Youth Circle" (*Omladinski Krug*) is less influential than "Young Muslims" (*Mladi Muslimani*), the SDA Party's political juniors, are. Muslim student association *Sahwa*, female organizations *Horizont* and *Nahla* are much less political although they also promote what they regard as Islamic traditions, values and principles, which imply clear preferences in public life. Besides the AIY, *Nedwa* and *Selam* are youth organizations that also receive Arab funding. *Nedwa* is, in actual fact, WAMY's Bosnian branch. (*Nadwa* means "assembly" in Arabic.) It builds mosques, holds seminars on Islam, publishes religious books, Islamist reviews and videotapes, encourages learning the Koran by heart, sponsors deserving Bosniak students and sends a number of them to two-week training seminars in Saudi Arabia.

Wahhabi hate speech in Bosnia can be delegitimized only by the Bosniaks themselves, preferably by theologians and the leading personalities of public life, who should be incited to do that. Only Bosniak intellectuals can effectively discredit the homegrown Salafis whose motivations reflect, partly, the crisis of Bosnian society. Young Bosniaks should not be exposed to anti-western, misogynous, intolerant instigation.

Foreign militant Islamist penetration, as the 2002 registration of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's offshoot in Sarajevo as a charity, should be publicly denounced. Arab and Bosnian radical networks may represent a potential for terror by providing human capital, financial and institutional background, logistical support, and free passage opportunities in a country with notoriously poor immigration control.

Even if the AIY has not physically harmed anyone, more should be known about its activities and Middle Eastern contacts. Radical recruiting should be uncovered, preferably with the cooperation of the ISC but even without it. In this respect the contribution of secular Bosniaks should also be expected. For the security threat's decisive religious connotations however, the radicals' anachronistic (markedly Arab) message must be well understood. It is, in actual fact, incompatible with Bosniak nationalism. Terrorism investigations that disregard the religious dimension can only result in press-based listings and superficial descriptions of Islamist groups, at best.<sup>11</sup>

## BY COUNTRIES

The dichotomy and the interaction of Islam-based Bosniak nationalism and imported anti-western Muslim radicalism are not restricted to Bosnia itself as the overwhelming majority of Croatia's, Slovenia's and the Serbian Sandzak's (the Raska Oblast's) ethnic Muslims also identify themselves as Bosniaks. (Those of the Montenegro Sandzak do not.) In Croatia and Slovenia Muslim religious institutions are probably not strong enough to effectively cover up for immigrant Salafi activities although Imam Sevko Omerbasic's Zagreb mosque was a well known center of Arab humanitarian and ideological aid during and after the war.<sup>12</sup>

The majority of the Sandzak's population are ethnic Muslim. Their religiosity has traditionally been more pronounced than Bosnia's. Radical Sarajevo Imams Sulejman Bugari's and Nezim Halilovic Muderis' sermons are popular in Novipazar, where local leaders (Mufti Muamer Zukorlic, his cousin Federal Minority Minister Rasim Ljajic and even their Bosniak party-leader opponent Sulejman Ugljanin) often refer to Muslim-National identity. Funding and instructors from Gulf countries are obviously welcome at Novipazar, its impressive private Islamic University and the Muslim countryside. Hundreds of bearded local youth listen to the Wahhabi message. Biased Serbian reports often describe the Sandzak as the "missing link" in the Islamist Green Transversal stretching from Kabul to Velika Kladusha. Similarly to Bosnia, the Sandzak's religious and political leaders are certainly not Salafis. The attraction of pelf is, nevertheless, rather strong in the poor mafia province. Smuggling, corruption and the lack of genuine police control facilitate the Islamist radicals' task. The Police Chief is the third cousin.<sup>13</sup>

In the Albanian lands pro-American sentiment is palpable among both population and politicians. Kosovo Sunni Muslim Religious Leader Rexhep Boja, similarly to his Montenegro counterpart Rifat Fejzic, strongly condemned Wahhabi indoctrination. Ironically, Wahhabi charities have been encouraged to operate in Kosovo by the unpopular United Nations Interim Administration (UNMIK) to satisfy what it believed to be the traditionally Muslim Kosovars' spiritual needs. Besides undeniable humanitarian relief and mosque constructions, the Saudi Joint Committee for Kosovo and similar Arab organizations have striven to uproot Hanafi and Sufi customs and brainwash young Kosovars, more in the countryside than in the secular cities.<sup>14</sup>

Salafi Jihad should not be confounded with Albanian distrust toward Kosovo Serbs and Slav Macedonians. The Albanian dignitaries' cooperation in reliably identifying radicalism in their midst will be much more difficult to obtain if western terrorism analysts ostensibly label them, for instance Skopje Mufti Zenun Berisha, as Al-Qaeda allies.<sup>15</sup> The misinterpretation of the real threat obstructs its detection and comprehension. Salafis do pay Eastern European youth to attend their courses and to distribute promotional literature and videotapes. This happens everywhere, not only in the Skopje neighborhood of Kondovo and Gazi Baba or Kosovo's Prizren and Djakovica, where Serbian sources indignantly reported such practices from. Local community leaders are needed to isolate and discredit these and other troublesome activities. (Crvena Ruza, Teratikt).<sup>16</sup>

The situation is more alarming in impoverished Albania. After 1997 Salafis could expect no sympathy from the pro-US leftist authorities, which extradited several Arab militants. Wahhabi presence is, nevertheless, still represented by the numerous Arab charities and certain newly built mosques. Tensions divide the country's Sunni spiritual leadership, the Islamic Community (IC) headed by Selim Muca. The events following the unsolved 2003 murder of markedly pro-western IC Secretary-General Sali Tivari reflect the Mideastern-trained young Albanian clerics' vehement criticism of their western-minded colleagues. The latter appear to be on the defensive, while the Arab charities back the former. This does not affect Albanian society at large, which is mostly secular and not "70 per cent Muslim" as it is usually portrayed. The threatening potential of even small radical groups does justify attention to the ways Salafis operate in the country. Islam's oft-discussed instrumentalization in Albania's public life (Organization of Islamic Conference membership, Bashkim Gazidede's role in the early 1990s), Albanian national mind's alleged un-religiosity, Bektashi spirituality, Gheg-Tosk division are less relevant in this respect.<sup>17</sup>

In Bulgaria too, the more than one million ethnic Muslims, mostly Turks, pose little threat. Grand Mufti Selim Mehmed often declares that "We do not want Islam to have an alien shape" although Mideastern funding contributes to his institutions' budget. However, the estimated 20,000 Arabs living in the country, their proselytizing charities which target particularly Slav (Pomak) and Roma Muslims, but also Turks, are food for concern. In autumn 2003 the police dismantled Islamist centres in the south, around Velingrad and Pazardzhik. From time to time, former Grand Mufti Nedeem Gendzhev sounds the alarm bells over the danger of fundamentalism, recruitment and the return of hundreds of Bulgarian students from Arab universities.<sup>18</sup>

Bulgaria's geo-strategic situation and the prospects of US military bases there call for vigilance. For sending troops to Iraq the country was threatened several times by Al-Qaeda, the Tawhid group. Reports on the Netherlands-based Al-Waqf al-Islami's involvement in Bulgaria provoked nervousness despite the official denial of any danger.<sup>19</sup> Saudi-funded and US-terror-listed Al-Waqf built mosques and encouraged missionary work (*da'wa*) in other Balkan countries too, particularly in Albania. Only superficial information has been available on these pan-European Salafi networks.

The number of Arabs residing, legally or illegally, in Romania is much higher. They run Islamic centres mostly in university cities such as Constanta, Iasi, Bucharest and Cluj. As in Bulgaria, it is often unclear what the numerous Middle Eastern businessmen of Romania do there. The October 2004 arrest of Craiova wheeler-

dealer Genica Boerica's Arab associates or the February 2005 detention of the Terom company's Arab employees of Iasi, for money laundering and financing western Islamist terrorists, most probably represent the tip of the iceberg. WAMY supports several Islamist charities in the country as the Islamic Cultural League (LICR), the Semiluna Humanitarian Society, the As-Salam Association and the Taiba Foundation. They claim to popularize Islam and to aid Romania's 70,000 Dobrogea Turks and Tatars who are irrelevant as far as radicalism is concerned.<sup>20</sup>

In Moldova the Calauza Association led by Rustam Ahsamov and Sudanese immigrant Haisan Abdel Rasul is the main *da'wa* organization of Arab students, Tatars, Chechen and Afghan refugees and other Muslim residents. It became famous in July 2002 when the police arrested and beat their leaders for their "fundamentalist" summer camp which Muslim scholars from Saudi Arabia and Moscow also attended. Moldova's authorities refused to register, for several years, the Muslim Spiritual Council headed by Talgat Masaev and the other Tatar community led by Alber Babaev, also in Chisinau. A third group in breakaway Tiraspol is harassed by the local KGB.<sup>21</sup>

If compared with Ukraine's 400,000 ethnic Muslims, immigrant Arab residents represent a tiny minority of 30,000. Due to their foreign financial resources, nonetheless they run a network of twelve regional branches called "Association of Social Organizations Ar-Raid", which expands in neighbouring Moldova too. Its proselytizing and media activities are more significant than those of two other, Saudi-led Wahhabi groups (Birlik and Sunna), which have targeted Crimean Tatars with limited success. The (mainland) Spiritual Department of Ukrainian Muslims (DUMU) of Kazan Tatars headed by Lebanese immigrant Ahmad Tamim also rejects Wahhabism. (The Crimea has its separate leadership: Medjlis and Muftiyat.) For Tatars and other post-Soviet Muslims Islam means little more than the preservation of their ethnic culture, while Ar-Raid articulates an Islamist agenda. Little attention has been paid to it and even less to the unidentified westward migrants from Asia transiting by Ukraine, where they may spend longer periods of time.<sup>22</sup>

The same applies to Belarus which is also on the way of those Muslim migrants. President Lukashenko's readiness to sell weapons to virtually anyone appears to be the main international disquietude as far as Belarus' links to terrorism are concerned. The country's estimated 50,000 post-Soviet ethnic Muslims (Azeris, Tatars, Uzbeks, Kazahs, Tajiks) are rarely radicals. Its few thousand Arab students deserve more attention, and so do those of the three Baltic republics where Islamic presence has been traditionally modest. However, foreign Arab funding enabled recently several smaller local communities to restore old prayer houses and erect or rent new ones. The majority population's distrust of Middle Easterners increased after 9/11.<sup>23</sup>

In pro-American and markedly Catholic Poland anti-Islamist sentiments may also have some religious connotation despite the historical acceptance of the country's 4,000 innocuous Tatars. The 25,000 Arab residents are much more committed to proselytism and better organized. The effect of Salafi literature published in Polish by the Muslim Students' Society cannot be great. Judging by its internal newsletter in Arabic (*Al-Hadhara*) this organization unambiguously rejects western values.<sup>24</sup>

In several Central European countries young females represent a high proportion, if not the majority, of local converts. Most are married to Arab immigrants.

Introducing Islam by indigenous women is, in a mildly racist environment, much more convincing than having this done by dubious aliens. These remain in the background of course. The choice of persuasive non-Arab national Muslim leaders can prove crucial in the media and the xenophobic public sphere. Western-minded Islamic Centre Director Vladimir Sanka of Prague is obviously more accepted by the Czech audience than a foreigner would be in this position. Only 500 are ethnic Czech among the country's 10,000 Muslims. Moreover, they are divided: Sudanese architect Muhammad Abbas Mu'tasima's pro-Salafi General Union of Muslim Students and Moneeb Hassan El-Rawy's Islamic Waqf Association of Moravia distance themselves from Sanka's moderates.<sup>25</sup>

Tensions are even sharper between Zoltan Bolek's Hungarian Islamic Community (mostly converts) on the one hand and Zoltan Sulok's much less pro-western Church of the Muslims of Hungary (with a majority of immigrants) and particularly the overtly anti-western and Judeophobic Tayseer Saleh's Dar as-Salam mosque community on the other. In March 2004 Palestinian-born Tayseer had been arrested and accused of plotting to bomb a Budapest Jewish museum but he was later released. His funds of Mideastern origin remain frozen in a Hungarian bank.<sup>26</sup> Little reassuring is known of the country's several thousand Arab immigrants and those visiting imams, scholars and instructors, who preach intolerance in their prayer houses. As elsewhere, no one protects the moderates from intimidation. Mideastern and Western international Muslim institutions, as the Leicestershire-based Federation of Islamic Organizations in Europe, side with the radicals.

The not very well documented Slovak Islamic Community of Syrian-born Mohammed Safwan Hasna was denied legal recognition and the permission to build a mosque in old Bratislava. Only 150 of the alleged 5000 members are Slovak.<sup>27</sup> Eastern European authorities may be even less friendly to Islam than their western counterparts are. Slovenian Mufti Osman Djogic also complained of not being allowed to erect an Islamic centre in downtown Ljubljana despite the availability of Arab funds for this purpose.<sup>28</sup>

Information on Eastern European Muslim institutions and prayer houses may prove relevant even if potential terrorists do not necessarily attend them. Other mosque-goers may lead to violent Islamists as the ones known from post-war Bosnia. Uncovering these requires a comprehensive understanding of Salafi reasoning and the post-socialist environment which is, nevertheless, secondary to the markedly Arab ideological roots.

So far the Salafis have tended to avoid confrontation in the region. One can only speculate as to the consequences of radical Islamist violence in it. For their different modern history, Eastern Europeans are less resilient and self-reliant than Westerners are, so terrorism in their countries would probably elicit panic and backlash against Arab immigrants, but not against ethnic Muslims. Such terror attacks would, nevertheless, provoke less international attention which has been, so far, one of the western Al-Qaeda franchise groups' objectives. Coercing governments into sacrificing human rights for security has been another one, but in Eastern Europe there are fewer liberties to sacrifice.

Generalized fear can certainly do a great deal of damage to social cohesion. The divide-and-conquer game, public stress or even hysteria in the post-socialist world would benefit the terrorist cause less than these potentially do in the West. Moreover, blaming poor Eastern Europeans for marginalizing and humiliating the

world's Muslims would not sound convincing. Turning these populations against the United States is not a realistic goal either. Eastern Europe's not necessarily accountable governments, rather than the ordinary people, are usually pro-American. Vengeance for sending troops to Iraq may explain retaliation against Poland, Romania and Bulgaria. Creating chaos and carnage in the region just for its shopping centres', transportation hubs' and energy plants' vulnerability is, nevertheless, a more likely motivation.

Besides the assumed training camps, western intelligence attention to Eastern Europe has focused on the possibility of smuggling explosives, chemical poison or radioactive material from there to the West. This can occur relatively easily. Preventing or disrupting such attempts requires, among other things, more knowledge of, and contacts with, corrupt Eastern Europe's Islamists. Even if they themselves are not violent, they are often well-informed and well-connected. Transnational terror will bomb their way to the negotiating table. They can hardly be thwarted, worldwide. They must be engaged.

## **SECTION TWO: THE CHANCES**

### FAVOURABLE RESPONSES TO POST-9/11 US STRATEGIES

In the wake of 9/11, the verbal wrath and sabre-rattling of the US press and public opinion towards Islamists were fully understandable. Venting frustration was needed for moral health, whipping up patriotic fervour, justifying the defence budget, but also to counter the domestic apologists for Islamist radicalism. These, including Islamicist academics, viewed radicalism as a response to the mistakes of American policy, which had purportedly fostered social injustice and other grievances in the Muslim world. Although widely criticized in Western Europe, the half-truths and stereotypes of Arab smearing had probably no fatal consequences. A considerable part of the Arab, and even the Muslim, world thought anyway that Americans had got what they deserved.

Then came the official US rebuttal of the Jihadi claim that America was the enemy of Islam. This is precisely what most Islamists still do believe, that by supporting Israel and corrupt "apostate regimes" in the Muslim world, by its very existence and might, the US is the main obstacle in the way of *mankind's conversion to Islam* by persuasion or by force. This bellicose objective or at least the expansion of the lands under Islamic rule is stated in the Holy Book.<sup>29</sup>

In this sense, today's terrorists are wired deep into the origins of Islam and follow a Koranic blueprint to its logical conclusion: the overpowering and humbling of the West. It can always be argued that Salafis use the religious message as an ideological cover, quote the Koranic verses out of context or that the Koran does not really mean what it says. Most Muslims are, nevertheless, fully aware that the bombers are part of a tradition that springs from Islam's warlike origins, when the contemporary world was a theatre of battles to be waged with zeal until the infidels' submission to the will of God, which the word "Islam" means in Arabic.

Bolstering the so-called *moderate* Muslims was the next step in the American campaign of ideas. The Koran itself says: "We have willed you as a community of moderation."<sup>30</sup> Suggesting pluralistic interpretations of the Holy Texts and attempting to adapt religion to modern mores will persuade only a few as long as

the principal Muslim religious authorities stick to their rigid literalism and anti-western worldview. Although the late ideologists of today's Salafism (Mawdudi, Banna, Qutb, Faraj, Azzam) were not Wahhabis, their virulent discourse is not far from that of the main theological academies of Saudi Arabia. No revision of the Koran or revamping of the faith can be expected from these. However, any moderate Muslim deserves support if he or she dares to challenge them.

The idea of democracy promotion, since the Iraqi war, has been a more inspiring and far-reaching strategy. It has apparently sensitized the Arab world and improved America's image among progressive Muslims, who tended to be secular anyway. If, nevertheless, secularism, tolerance, free speech, human rights (of women too) and the primacy of the individual are assumed to be democracy's lifeblood, then its Middle Eastern future is still unclear and depends heavily on the US's success in Iraq. Failure would boost global Jihad.

Eastern Europe's most ethnic Muslims responded favourably to every stage of the evolution of American strategy even if many failed to understand the war on Saddam's Iraq. They expressed compassion and solidarity after 9/11 and condemned the attacks without ifs and buts. (The Bosnian authorities fully cooperated with the CIA investigators and extradited the Algerian suspects.) Most post-socialist "Muslims" do not really care about the interpretation of Islam. They may even be too moderate (inauthentic) by Middle Eastern standards. However, some of their intellectuals and (Hanafi and Sufi) religious leaders can be involved in anti-Salafi campaigns. Strong pro-American feelings can be explained by the Cold War in the cases of Albania, Bulgaria's Turks and the former Soviet peoples of Islamic ancestry, while Bosniaks and Kosovars gratefully remember the courageous interventions of 1995 and 1999.

Since President Clinton, among Balkan Muslims and democrats the American liberals have been popular. Addressing the alleged root causes of Islamist radicalism was, nevertheless, the main solution they proposed for terrorism during the 2004 US presidential campaign. They meant Third World poverty and the Muslim rage provoked by purported US unilateralism and arrogance. This current liberal reasoning is bound to change. It endangers global security, not only that of America which makes the greatest sacrifice in the struggle against mankind's common enemy, just as she did during the Cold War.

The recent Balkan bombing revisionism of certain US analysts is another alarming phenomenon. For Serbian sympathies or irresponsible conclusions from a 1999 domestic debate in Israel,<sup>31</sup> some question America's unselfish Balkan interventions, which she has been so applauded for by the Balkan's Muslims and non-Muslim anti-Milosevic democrats as well. Serbia threatened stability in the whole region at that time. As a controversial Canadian army general put it: "We bombed the wrong side."<sup>32</sup> This misinterpretation of modern history can do much harm, also because it baselessly portrays Bosniaks and Kosovars as Islamist fundamentalists.

## THE AUTHORITIES' INCOMPETENCE

As far as potentially violent Islamism in Eastern Europe is concerned, except for Russia, only the Bosnian Arab camps of the 1990s are documented because well-known Mudjahedin were trained in them. Very few of the holy warriors were of Eastern European origin. Those camps have been closed for years now, but

preparation for urban guerrilla warfare and the concocting of home-made explosives or poison do not require easily noticeable facilities. Simple apartments suffice for this purpose, not necessarily in Bosnia where Arab residents tend to be watched. Preparation includes psychological and ideological training which may, in principle, justify the criminalization of support for schools, courses and holiday camps that indoctrinate youth or even children to grow up into bombers, accomplices and sympathizers.

In the United States similar charges were raised against the Holy Land Foundation for financing Hamas. In many countries in Europe it is, nevertheless, perfectly legal to instigate hate for Jews, Americans, democracy, secularism or praise terror. The main chance to avert the ensuing violence is to keep an eye, usually by agent penetration, on those perfectly legal activities even though any Muslim informant of non-Muslim intelligence agencies is regarded by the Salafis as an apostate worthy of death. In the West vigilance appears to yield results. In the post-socialist East investigation has focused, due to American pressure, on bank transactions and immigration control. This cannot be very effective for the Salafis now transferring money mostly by informal ways and for the region's porous borders and generalized corruption, which affects the police themselves. They would be reluctant to inspect mosques even if they were professionally able to do so, which they are not given their unfamiliarity with Arab language and culture. Moreover, many are Islamophobic, which does not facilitate cooperation with the distrustful and Salafi-intimidated, but usually still pro-western, indigenous Muslim dignitaries. Visas, residence permits, government officials can often be bought at modest prices.

Tracking the money trail can be more effective in developed countries as in the US with rich traditions of financial investigation, fight against money laundering and a relatively transparent banking system. Freezing accounts, stemming the flow of funds, denying potential terrorists the means to travel, communicate and procure equipment may actually constrict the space in which they operate, even in Eastern Europe. The 2001 crackdown on Arab charities in Bosnia was certainly salutary. Fewer similar actions took place in the region's other countries. The smuggling of weapons, people, drugs and counterfeit goods can also contribute to financing terrorism, in principle, but much less than these do in Central Asia or even Western Europe. Albanian Mafiosi are not Islamist at all.

In addition to corruption and widespread organized crime, a number of post-socialist authoritarianism's further features also facilitate the Islamist radicals' task. Trust in law enforcement and government administration is limited for the lack of civic, democratic, human rights traditions and independent judiciary, despite the hypocritical official rhetoric about these for western consumption. The region's other woes such as existential instability, the lack of prospects and security, social and ethnic tensions, the authorities' unaccountability and contempt for civil society may also hamper the investigation of those who hate and snarl in the dark. Misery is not expected to be eradicated soon. Despite the high number of disenchanting Eastern Europeans and the spiritual void following the collapse of socialism, the immigrant Salafi missionaries persuaded only a few. However, the destructive role of these few can be disproportionately significant.

The immigrant Islamists of Eastern Europe are not guest workers or rundown-suburb marginals. Many are students or graduates of low-tuition universities, professionals or, often shady, businessmen. They are ideologically similar to their western counterparts and often connected to organizations as Takfir, the European branches of the Egyptian Gama'a Islamiya, the Muslim Brotherhood or the Algerian

GIA. The flow of cadres, funds and information between East, West and Middle East is obvious.

It is risky to neglect certain countries or parts of the world for their assumed low affectedness by the transnational radical networks. All elements will be needed in piecing together the global mosaic. Terror-related costs in the future will probably be much higher than those of today's preventive measures which should follow, discreetly, the paths of Mideastern-funded religious indoctrination: proselytism, foreign preachers, weekend courses on Islam, charities, humanitarians, immigrant associations, their links to each other and to their counterparts abroad. This kind of attention requires international vision and much more professionalism than the monitoring of bank accounts does. It may shed light on many new Islamists or on old ones who avoided the intelligence services' vigilance, which is not difficult in Eastern Europe. I do not only mean the fewer Afghan, Chechen and Bosnian war veterans, but an increasing number of recently-immigrated Jihadis about whom little is known.

#### POTENTIAL ALLIES

Most Arab and other former Mudjahedin of Bosnia are as bad guys today as they were in 1992-1995. They did not change. The context did. Nonetheless, the United States covering them and allowing them to smuggle their weapons was the right thing to do, while the arming of the Bosnian and other Serbs by Ukraine, Greece and the Mossad was not. The fact that hundreds of Mudjahedin had stayed on after Dayton led Serbian and pro-Serbian analysts to foretell an imminent danger of Islamist radicalization in the Balkans. In 1999 they extended their allegations to Arab and Iranian sympathies toward the Kosovo Liberation Army, although these were limited and un-reciprocated. In order to denigrate their Bosniak and Albanian foes Serbian propagandists have been, for more than a decade, stretching the truth in good English which may be the reason why their exaggerations spread. Unfortunately, some Americans also took part in this campaign of deception.<sup>33</sup>

The deplorable ethnic bias of many Bosniak and Albanian politicians, Balkan kleptocracy or post-socialist authoritarianism should not be mistaken for Islamism. The well-known accusations against the MPRI, Holbrooke, DIA General Hayden, the "Train and Equip" programme, Izetbegovic and the KLA have little significance today.<sup>34</sup> The Serbian patriots had to be stopped, not only for the Bosniaks' and the Albanians' sake. More importantly now, the character of Islamist infiltration into Europe has changed since the 1990s. Although Iranian influence is always worth monitoring, it is certainly much smaller than the Serbs claimed it to be in the early 1990s when Iranian weapons and several hundred Republican Guards were actually sent to Bosnia.<sup>35</sup> Illegal migration through, and radical Arab presence in, the country were and are genuine causes for concern, but similar phenomena have become common in Eastern Europe since then and few seem to care. The Mudjahedin's useless Bosnian passports, 1995 spy stories or even the rise of Islamic awareness among Bosniaks, let alone their nation-building on the basis of cultural memory have little relevance as far as today's terrorists are concerned.

No regional coordinator of Islamist *da'wa* is currently as well known as Dr. Elfatih was in his time. Middle Eastern funding seems to be directly channelled to the various Islamist groups' mostly Arab leaders. These try to recruit native, culturally Muslim or other, Eastern Europeans of inconspicuous appearance. The potential is

vast, despite the cultural gap. Indigenous Muslim dignitaries are often paralyzed by fear and the constant need of Arab money. Otherwise they would probably shed light on these endeavours.

Secular ethnic Muslim opinion leaders such as Albanian, Bosniak, Bulgarian Turkish artists, scholars and other popular figures of public life may be more convincing and effective as far as information, persuasion and the denunciation of Salafism are concerned. The West should not alienate its allies by Balkan bombing revisionism or similar uninspiring provocations which serve, particularly if they come from Jewish authors, the radicals' interests as did the Serbian army's Israeli mortar bombs. The besieged Sarajevans noticed the Hebrew markings on the unexploded ones.<sup>36</sup>

Although Judeophobia is a major theme of the Islamists' discourse, they have not really succeeded in finding common ground with Eastern Europe's many anti-Semites, who tend to dislike Arabs too. There seems to be no comprehensive strategy for the Islamization of post-socialist Europe. The only such Saudi publication, from 1992, reflects a surprising degree of ignorance as to the region's history and cultures.<sup>37</sup> This is probably the Salafis' weakest point. In the beginning they did believe that their mission would entail the Eastern Europeans' mass conversion to Islam, and at least the Bosniaks', the Albanians', the Turks' quick "re-Islamization", their embracing Wahhabi puritanism.

Arab aid blackmail, arrogance, condescension, cemetery vandalism (the demolition of Bosniak and Albanian tomb stones which the Wahhabis regard as idol worship), the construction of bare, stark Wahhabi-style mosques in contrast to ornate Ottoman style, intolerance toward women's liberties and Sufi or inter-confessional traditions revolted most Balkan Muslims. However, the Salafi missionaries did persuade a number of young people. Even a few thousand of these, along with the more convincible Arab immigrants, would be too many since born-again Islamists can most be expected to volunteer for Al-Qaeda-inspired operations, anywhere. They will probably do so without warning. There may not be enough time to disrupt their attack, not necessarily only on American and Jewish targets. Radicals feel secure in Eastern Europe, where they hardly need to keep a low profile. They are difficult to detect for the lack of appropriate forums and committed specialists to assess and discuss the threat they pose. Those who would be able to unmask the radicals do not really come forward. Understandably, few trust the local police services.

Printed sources on radicalism in the region are scarce. Distinction should be made between Islam in Eastern Europe (ethnic and minority studies)<sup>38</sup> and radical Islamist activities in it. Little has been printed on the latter other than the immigrant Arab organizations' newsletters, more or less sensational press articles and the indigenous Muslim institutions' publications. These can certainly be more instructive than Eastern Europe's official intelligence surveys are. However, comprehensive field research should become the primary source of information.

#### A PROJECT TO IDENTIFY THE RADICALS

In principle, Eastern Europe's radicals ought to be monitored by the authorities of their countries which may become able to do this efficiently in the future. Until then, the European Union should provide guidance and advice in this respect, also to those post-socialist countries that are not yet members of the Union.

Most western police services already scrutinize Islamic religious institutions, practise profiling and constant observation in certain cases to prevent and deter. Fierce imams have been deported from France, Germany and recently the UK for preaching hatred and intolerance. Anyone should be expected to endure personal inconvenience, even some degree of humiliation, in the name of heightened security. Western specialists of Islam have been involved in these preemptive disruption efforts.

Following the 11 March 2004 Madrid bombing I launched an initiative to identify the radical Islamist networks in post-socialist Eastern Europe. I am not an intelligence specialist, only an Arabist with several years of experience in Arab countries. As a NATO Fellow<sup>39</sup> I have published on Islam in Eastern Europe for the last fifteen years. In the course of this research I encountered many Middle Eastern radical proselytizers, and so did several other native Eastern European scholars of Arabic and Islam. My project consisted of the latter's involvement in observing and documenting, in English, in each of their respective countries, the radical organizations which operate overwhelmingly in Arabic.<sup>40</sup>

The proposal also envisioned engaging dialogue with indigenous Muslims and non-violent Islamists, which my Foundation<sup>41</sup> has been about anyway, as well as the creation of an office of coordination for the envisaged workshops and publications. This enterprise would gradually be expanded to the Russian Federation too, where the Carnegie Endowment has already sponsored similar inspiring research. However, we expect to continue to tackle primarily the Balkans and Central Europe, including Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova and the Baltic States, while proposing cooperation to those outstanding Arabist experts in Russia.

Senior European Union officials rejected my proposal. Its starting budget was obviously modest by western standards so bureaucracy may not be the only reason for this. The EU's position on the anti-terror war was brutally summarized by High Representative Javier Solana: "Europe is not at war." Many Europeans prefer to appease the radicals and tend to dismiss as Islamophobia, paranoia or prejudice, any criticism of the continent's Muslim movements. This attitude may be explained by fear, opportunism, irresponsibility, ignorance or the influential French elite's anti-Americanism. The Council of Europe held a big Islamophobia seminar in this spirit in June 2004 in Budapest.<sup>42</sup> This capitulatory attitude of official, and a considerable part of civil, Europe is disappointing. Islamists will not reward it in the long run. It is unfortunately not far from that of my adopted country, Canada, where radicalism should be further discouraged, also as a security risk. It has gone global. So should be its inspection.

Sooner or later the strategists of terror may seek soft targets, wherever. As Al-Qaeda's Ayman Zawahiri put it: "Inflict the maximum casualties against the opponent, for this is the language understood by the West."<sup>43</sup> Further attacks in Europe may be related to radicals who reside in its Eastern portion. Many ethnic-Muslims there realize that "condemning terror" is not sufficient: active contribution to the identification of its proponents is required. Eastern Europeans of Muslim extraction will not mind the close scrutiny of Islamist radicals. This and the association of Jihad with Islamism will not be viewed here as "culturalism", racism, offences against political correctness or civil liberties. It is often and rightly argued that interacting with Muslims in the West requires cultural sensitivity. Less so in the post-socialist world.

Most official European documents ignore the Muslims of Eastern Europe, which many Westerners still do not consider as part of Europe, without stating this overtly of course. Europe's geographical frontiers are at the Urals, the Caucasus and EU membership candidate Turkey. Westerners should acknowledge the tremendous difference between Eastern Europeans of Muslim descent and the West's radicalizing immigrants: "Homesick young men drift to familiar settings, like mosques, to find companionship and alleviate their loneliness." Sageman also observed<sup>44</sup> the lack of evidence of a comprehensive top-down recruitment programme as far as western terrorism is concerned. He pointed out bottom-up initiatives as the Madrid bombing was. This kind of initiative can also be expected from Eastern Europe's extremists.

A data bank on the region's Islamist organizations should be created. National borders hardly matter since the radicals themselves ignore them. Some infringement on individual rights will be inevitable. The probable cooperation of most indigenous Islamic institutions, or at least their tacit approval, will neutralize any *human-rights* criticism. It remains to be seen who will coordinate this task.

In addition to their above-detailed incompetence, the national authorities of Eastern Europe are often reluctant to cooperate with each other for their anachronistic ethnic bias. If the West tells them what to do, they usually listen. Without western backing not much can be expected from private professional organizations such as ours. They are resourceless and ineffective in an authoritarian environment. I am not aware, in actual fact, of any similar independent civil initiative.

The United Nations and the European Union appear unlikely to contribute to such efforts. Since 9/11 these institutions have debated at length over the definitions of terrorism and the harmonization of legal approaches to it. These are probably not useless, but far from sufficient. In this context the UN and the EU practically did not dare to mention Islamist radicalism, let alone Islam, if not to combat the alleged *Islamophobia* of those who did. It is frustrating to debate with undeservedly influential international bureaucrats, whose knowledge of Islam is rather limited. Seeking allies in this debate raises America's controversial relationship with the Islamic world and the various expressions of anti-Americanism worldwide. Both have far-reaching repercussions on Eastern Europe and Islamism in it.

## "MODERATE" MUSLIMS

If the United States is the world's lone policing force, as it seems to be, the American policy makers' responsibility as to the containment of Islamist radicalism is tremendous. The latter should never be completely separated from the potential of terror. The related terminology should also be adapted.

For instance, if religions are *good* and *peaceful*, and Islam is a religion, then one might assume that Muslims cannot be *bad* or *violent*. If they are, they must not be real Muslims, which is a doubtful syllogism. The Jihadi holy warriors mete out death to innocents for the sake of a presumed divine expectation with utter conviction and purity of heart. Of course, they regard themselves as Muslims. Many other Muslims also view them as such for the fantasy of Islamic supremacy and the infidels' terrorization are Koranic concepts.<sup>45</sup> It is difficult to portray radicalism as a distortion of Islam. However, this should be attempted with

reference to intra-religious pluralism because even partial successes can be meaningful in this probably very long struggle.

Islam can hardly be de-politicized. It is much more than a mere faith or spirituality, which is the solution of the above good-bad paradox. Its authentic religious conceptualizations can, in actual fact, threaten the rest of the world. Publicly acknowledging this may offend sensitivities, which should be avoided if possible. Nonetheless, believing one's own rhetoric, simplifications, generalizations and commonplaces can prove misleading. So can be even correct statements if the arguments behind them are inaccurate. For example, turning moderate Muslims against Salafis is a common and self-evident concept. What degree of anti-Westernism, Judeophobia or other expressions of intolerance can be accepted from those moderates, who are too often assumed to constitute the "overwhelming" or "silent" majority of the world of Islam? What does *moderate* exactly mean, beyond wishful propaganda? According to Bernard Lewis, Muslims "are basically decent, peace-loving, pious people, some of whom have been driven beyond endurance by all the dreadful things we of the West have done to them".<sup>46</sup> The high proportion of the resentful and the hateful justifies this sarcasm.

Professor Lewis's courage set an example for the scholars of Islam and Arabic, who are often reluctant to contribute to anti-terror efforts, not necessarily because earlier they covered up and apologized for the Salafis. (Some did and do just that.) For many, academic ethics require intellectual and even emotional commonality with, or at least openness to, principled Islamic reasoning. The memory of the Orientalists who served colonial endeavours is still powerful, and so is Edward Said's criticism of the western bias misunderstanding and distorting the Eastern Other.<sup>47</sup> However Islamicists and Arabists, rather than intelligence and military specialists, ought to comment on the Muslim and Arab mind.

Post-socialist Muslims are moderate because their religiosity is weak, in most cases. Fortunately, Islamic law does not sanction, except for rare cases, the excommunication (*takfir*) of any nominally Muslim person. The whole Islamic world considers Balkan and post-Soviet Muslims as brothers, often as straying, misguided or heterodox ones, who should be instructed about the faith they or their fathers abandoned. This was precisely the declared mission of Salafi infiltration into those lands in the form of humanitarian relief or otherwise.

Comparison between religions can be delusive. Practically all, except for certain smaller sects, renounced legally compulsive control over their followers' individual and social lives, but Islam has changed relatively little throughout history. This applies, to some extent, even to secular Turkey where the majority voted for an Islamist party after decades of Kemalist rule.

The post-socialist world's "Muslims" tend to be different. Their religious leaders' prestige is relatively low, similarly to that of their Christian counterparts. The "inter-religious dialogue" between these as promoted by the State Department in the Balkans from the mid-1990s represented only a minority. This very American idea sounded strangely to many in the secular post-socialist context, but it did no harm as a piece initiative. The participation of agnostic Balkan intellectuals would have made it more substantial. Non-Muslim religious officials should normally not be involved in the Islamism dialogue we propose which will not be about religions in general, only about an alarming aspect related to one particular religion. This approach will be more appealing to Eastern Europeans, Muslims and others, even if some still associate Islamism with Bosniak nationalism.

## EUROPEAN ANTI-AMERICANISM AND TRANSATLANTIC SOLIDARITY

It is imperative to discern Bosnian or other post-socialist ethnic bias, nationalists, demagogues, authoritarian politicians, Mafiosi and petty crooks from Islamist radicalism although these occasionally interacted. The distinction's necessity is underlined by the genuine danger Salafi preachers represent, both regionally and as parts of global networks. The systematic study of their religious activities, humanitarian and other local organizations (Active Islamic Youth, shady Albanian groupings), the youngsters they indoctrinate in Eastern Europe or Mideastern schools is long overdue. The surveillance and financial punitive measures that were taken in the United States against a number of its Islamist charities have been, so far, unimaginable in Europe.

Transatlantic disunity is particularly harmful. Jihadis will always strive to drive wedges between democracies. Despite all US public diplomacy and image improvement campaigns the leftist, third-worldist, anti-globalist, secularist, environmentalist, pacifist, French patriotic forms of anti-Americanism have been on the rise. Criticism is everybody's right. It may even be justified. Many in the US may share it. Common interests, priorities and objectives are to be found, not further points of contention. The voices of Eastern European pro-Americanism should also be listened to.

Western Europe's mishandling of its Islamists is highly significant for the rest of the world. Europe's predicted Islamization is probably not imminent, although the anti-immigrant far right is already on the march. The French elite may understand the Arab world better for the colonial past and their similar feelings about the US. Europe's abdication before Islamism in pursuit of short-sighted benefits involves entry into a treacherous terrain. This impacts greatly on its Eastern countries, which are supposed to follow the West's example. They should remember: It was not *détente* that brought down the Soviet Union.

Most Eastern Europeans, including Muslims, were influenced by the anti-clerical French Revolution and secular *république*. It did and does symbolize Europe's progressive heritage. Despite the shock of many over the EU's lack of vision or pusillanimity towards the sworn Islamist enemies of that very heritage, it is still difficult for most Europeans to reach out to the American conservatives as prospective allies. There is no alternative. Europe should not mind any more if these are convinced that non-secular America is the best place on earth with a sacred mission to make it happier, in their own way. They will probably act more responsibly than the EU bureaucracy and particularly the UN personnel did, which had a poor record in the Balkans in the 1990s and no apparent capability of genuine self-criticism.

Huge material resources are at the disposal of these organizations. Some of their officials have become alienated from the real world. They tend to be particularly ignorant of Islamism in Eastern Europe, where Islam is basically not a racial issue as they learned it to be. Ignorant people are not necessarily persuadable. Eastern European officials may be even worse, but cooperation with them cannot be avoided. There is little hope other than that the American ones are much better.

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<sup>40</sup> Most sources on radicalism in the region are not in English of course. Many are not even printed. This paper's notes outline only a few references for the English speaking reader understanding some French.

<sup>41</sup> The Budapest-based *Alice Lederer Foundation* is committed to democratic and secular principles, despite its particular attention to the world of Islam. The Foundation regards as a civic duty to contribute to the fight against terror and those who recruit supporters for Islamist extremism, in Europe or elsewhere.

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