

**The radicalisation of Muslim youth in Europe:
The reality and the scale of the threat**

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1) An overview of the problem

For various reasons, it is quite difficult to draw a general view of Islamic extremism in Europe. This question has not yet been really addressed by academics, and we lack scientific data. Even the real number of Muslims living in Europe is open to question. For instance in France, various figures are circulating: 4 million, 5 million, 6 million or more. But we could reasonably say that, without any doubt, the problem is real. Some concrete signs underline this reality:

- Before 2000, it was extremely rare to see a public demonstration by Islamists in the streets of Europe. Since September 11, we have seen this kind of street demonstration in countries like France and Belgium. Thousands of people took part in those demonstrations, for instance one at the beginning of 2004 in Paris, to protest the law banning the Islamic veil from public schools;
- Ten years ago, the Islamic veil was mainly worn by older women. Now at least half of the female Muslim population wear the veil. In some municipalities in France, the figure is about 80%. From field investigation we know that in most cases those girls and women didn't really choose to wear the veil but were "forced" to do so by family or community pressure. In some European cities, a Muslim girl who refuses to wear the veil leaves herself open to insults, physical aggression, sexual harassment and even collective rape. In France, those aggressions happen regularly;
- Before the end of the nineties, Islamist political parties didn't exist in Europe. Now you can find them in France or Belgium. Of course, they're still small parties, with no representation in Parliament. But, to take the case of Belgium, in May 2003 the "*Parti de la Citoyenneté et Prospérité*" (PCP, "Party of Citizenship and Prosperity") which advocates a radical Islam, won more than 8 000 votes in Brussels. If we reckon that approximately 200 000 Muslims live in Brussels, that means that approximately 4% of those people gave their vote to the PCP. Now, if we consider only old enough to vote, the figure is more than 4%. Last but not least, if we consider that most of the votes were registered in the same municipality, where approximately 50 000 Muslims live, that means that between 10 and 16% of those people gave their vote to a party advocating radical Islam;
- Police and intelligence services know that fundamentalist and hate preaching are common in many mosques;
- Youth associations acting as front organisations for the *Muslim Brothers* are extremely popular;
- Since 2000 the number of anti-Semitic aggressions has dramatically increased; these acts – hundreds of which have been recorded over the last 4 years – are mainly the work of young Muslims;

- In schools attended by young Muslims, some kinds of teaching are becoming more and more difficult. For instance it's quite impossible to teach the history of the Shoah; in biology, young men and girls openly question the theory of the origin of life and the evolution of species and humanity;
- In the same schools there is frequently a *de facto* sexual segregation. For instance, in a class room it is common to see the boys grouping themselves in one part of the room and girls in the other;
- In hospitals, the refusal of treatment by a man on a woman or by a woman on a man is becoming more and more common;
- The Islamic presence in European prisons, where the Muslim population is frequently in the majority, is a reality observed in various countries;
- Since September 11, hundreds of suspected terrorists have been arrested in Europe (in France, Belgium, Germany, Great Britain, Italy, Spain, The Netherlands etc). But each week police arrest new suspects. This demonstrates that the number of people willing to go from ideas to action is growing;
- Last but not least, dozens if not hundreds of young people – some very young – have been recruited since the summer of 2003 and sent to Iraq;

But the exact scale of the threat is still difficult to determine. The French domestic intelligence service, *les Renseignements Généraux*, has tried to establish a formula to calculate the number of fundamentalists in a given population. Based on an extensive screening of the French scene, the formula is as follows: normally, in a given Muslim population, we'd find an average of 5% of fundamentalists. And, of those 5%, 3% could be considered as dangerous. That means, if we take France and a Muslim population of 6 million people, we'd have 300 000 fundamentalists. And, of those fundamentalists, 9 000 are potentially dangerous.

The most exposed countries are France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Italy, Spain, Great Britain, and Germany. Outside the European Union, Bosnia is at high risk.

Obviously, it is in those countries that we'll find the highest number of Muslims. That doesn't mean, of course, that the average Muslim population is fundamentalist or dangerous. Most Muslims, even if the trend of a return to the religion is clear and massive, want to live a normal and decent life. But of course, the presence of a large Muslim community offers both better statistical chances of recruitment and places to hide.

But countries that don't have a large Muslim community are still not immune. I was told very recently that in Slovakia -- where there is virtually no Muslim community --, a propaganda and financing cell of Hezbollah is in place at the University of Bratislava.

2) The causes of Islamic extremism in Europe

The causes of Islamic extremism in Europe are many and various.

First; Muslim communities vary from one country to the next. In France, for instance, most Muslims are of Algerian descent, and as you know Algeria was a French colony for more than 130 years. In 1962, Algerian communities were established in France, and the number of Algerians grew as more came to Europe to find jobs and a better life. After a few years, in the seventies, the French government authorized the “*regroupement familial*” (the reunion of families) and so hundreds of thousands of new immigrants were transplanted into France. In Belgium, Germany and Italy Muslim immigration was not traditional, but was brought about for economic reasons: in the sixties, heavy industry and construction sites needed a work force that was extremely difficult to recruit locally. That was the beginning of immigration in those countries.

When we speak of immigration, we use the concepts of First, Second and Third generation. The First generation is made up of people who initially came to Europe to work. They are now aged 60 or more. The Second generation is made up of the children of those people. They were born outside Europe and came at a very young age, or they were born in Europe. They are aged between 30 and 50. The Third generation is made up of the children of the Second generation. They were born in Europe and they are less than 30 years old.

Sadly we must observe that, historical or not, Muslim immigration was not welcomed in Europe. Racism and exclusion were a reality, and with the beginning of economic decline in the seventies, and the slowing of European economy, problems increased.

So today, parts of the Second and Third generations make no effort to integrate into European society and adopt European humanist values. But it has to be pointed out that, until very recently (in fact in the nineties) absolutely nothing was done to help them integrate. This is the European reality and the European shame. We must live with it and we are paying for it.

To be brief, we had no problems with the First generation. Most of the problems until the very recent past were concentrated in the Second generation, and we had no real intelligence on what was going on with the Third generation. But over the last three to five years, we have been receiving a lot of very negative signals from the Third generation. For instance: violence at school, the rejection of “European values” such as sexual equality, etc.

There is not, obviously, a single explanation for the appearance of Islamic extremism in Europe. We could, nevertheless, try to work towards an explanation:

- The lack of integration and racism lead to some Muslims feeling excluded from the society in which they live;

- Some "lifestyles" (for instance polygamy or the birth rate) reinforce the rejection of the Muslim community by European society:
- The economic and social crisis hit the Muslim communities very hard. If average unemployment in France or Belgium is around 10%, it is commonly 20% within Muslim communities and even 40% among Muslim youth – the famous "Third generation". This reinforces the feeling of exclusion;
- Democracy, globalisation and a communication culture give people in Europe direct access to information. Events in Bosnia, Somalia, Chechnya, or the Israeli-Palestinian conflict lead some young Muslims to create what the French sociologist Farid Khosrokhovar called "an identity of vicarious humiliation". Feeling excluded in the country they're living in, they develop a kind of empathy with all the "Muslim victims in the world" and convince themselves that their own exclusion and the "persecution" of their brothers have the same roots: the rejection of Islam by the Western world;
- Most Muslim clerics, even those who are not radicals, come from abroad and are frequently trained in Saudi Arabia or by Saudi clerics. They have no real knowledge of the societies in which their followers live and, often, as shown by investigations in France and the Netherlands, they don't speak the local language. So they cannot take a role in easing tensions or helping integration;
- Many European Muslims reject these clerics, accusing them of preaching an "Islam of the rich" and turn to non-official mosques. But this could be a bad idea: in what we call the "Islam of cellars and garages" (after the places where these informal communities meet) clerics are for the most part self-proclaimed. Their knowledge of religion is extremely questionable;
- In all the countries concerned radical clerics took advantage of the above facts to advocate a radical Islam and to attack western values, or European and U.S. policy which they denounce as "anti-Muslim" or pro-Zionist;
- They are helped by the presence in Europe (in the universities and high schools) of refugees who fled their native country because of repression for their Islamist activities. In the universities we find cells of Islamist or terrorist movements such as the Muslim Brothers, Hezbollah or Hamas, Algerian, Moroccan, Tunisian or Turkish groups etc.
- Some of the existing groups were created out of solidarity with "persecuted Muslims" in Afghanistan, Algeria, Bosnia etc. In most cases, these movements were not spontaneous but were launched and manipulated by front organisations for the Muslims Brothers;
- The "last generation" of European Islamism was born with the war in Iraq in 2003. This very young generation is starting to show up in various judicial inquiries into terrorist activities;

3) The reality of the threat

The threat is very real and is both political and terrorist.

On the political level, Islamists are trying to subvert western society by contesting humanist values such as sexual equality, freedom of religion, freedom of speech etc. They advocate the creation of religion-based political parties, they advocate the creation of Sharia tribunals to judge civil and personal matters etc.

They know, of course that they will not win those battles, but their hope is to create or deepen the cultural and social divide between Muslims and non-Muslims. The idea in doing so is to radicalise Muslim communities.

On the terrorist level, the Islamists organize logistical and operational cells.

Here, we have quite precise facts and figures.

Since September 11, approximately twenty major terrorist attacks have been averted in Europe. Nevertheless, two terrorist actions were successful:

- The Madrid bombing on March 11, 2004;
- The murder of Dutch film-maker Theo Van Gogh in Amsterdam on November 2, 2004;

If we take the date of March 11, 2004 as a reference, we see that numerous attacks have been averted:

- In April 2004, the action of the Belgian federal police prevented two attacks in preparation, one against a Jewish school in Antwerp, the other against an inauguration ceremony open to the public of a TGV tunnel in the same city;
- In spring 2004, still in Madrid, an attack against the National Audience (the highest jurisdiction of the country, where the well known antiterrorist judge Baltazar Garzon works) was averted;
- In June 2004, an attack of the GICM in Lisbon targeted several prominent people, among them José Manuel Baroso, president of the European Commission;
- The HOFSTAD cell (responsible for the Van Gogh Murder) planned a series of attacks, in particular several targeted murders including that of Somali-born representative Ayaan Hirshi Ali – as well as attacks by booby-trapped vehicle or bomb on Parliament, the security service HQ, Schiphol airport etc. Only the dismantling of the cell following Van Gogh's murder prevented these criminal acts;

- In November, 2004, several men were arrested in Germany while preparing the murder of Iraqi Prime Minister Iyad Allawi;
- Terrorists arrested in France as part of the so-called "Iraqi connection" had planned attacks on French soil, particularly on Jewish targets;
- Etc.

This brief run-down, and the number and quality of the planned "targets" show clearly that, contrary to general understanding, striking Europe is still an objective for the Jihadists. And it is not only a question here of hitting European countries allied with the United States in Iraq, as too many Europeans think.

The attacks of March 11 were already being prepared in 2000-2001: at that time, the war in Iraq had not started, and Spanish troops were not present on the ground. When the National Audience was targeted, Spain had already withdrawn from Iraq. Besides, France or Belgium are not in Iraq and both condemned American intervention. Attacks were nevertheless planned in those two countries.

The "need" for the Jihadists to attack Europe is not innate in them, but it is bound to the essence of the old continent. Even if differences exist between the United States and Europe, these two entities, with some other countries (Australia, Canada, Japan, Korea) belong to the same "camp" -- that of a "western world" (this qualifier having no ethnocentric character, which is why we can include Asian countries) which shares the same essential democratic values. It is these values which make us the "enemies" of the Islamists. Besides, even if not present militarily in Iraq, many European nations are or were in Afghanistan, and the European Union gave a political undertaking to the new Iraq to help in its reconstruction and stabilization.

These last twelve months also saw a "qualitative" evolution of the threat: more than ever, Islamism is asserting itself as a "mutant virus". Where since 2001 (and even before) security services faced terrorist structures mostly made up of experienced Jihadists, often with Afghan experience in common, between 25 and 40 years old, more and more we now find very young people, who by definition have no "past" in Islamist circles: French Jihadists killed or arrested in Iraq are from 18 to 20 years old; Samir Azzouz, one of the members of the "cell HOFSTAD" was 18 years old at the time of his arrest and was tracked down after he tried to go to fight in Chechnya at the age of 16. What we are now awaiting is the emergence of a new generation of terrorists: kids who were 12 to 15 years old on September 11 2001, and who have taken a year or two to make the same ideological progress that leads to violence, and which took around their elders ten years or more.

These small groups are more and more often made up of people with strong local ties, able thus to count on the solidarity of local communities and families. These groups are also connected to society's marginal groups and crime circles, which increases the danger they represent: "new Jihadists" have no problem getting hideouts, weapons or

explosives. They are, despite their youth, initiated into the "underground" and have been used to thwart police traps. Occasionally, they manage even to infiltrate the law as organized crime does: one of the members of the HOFSTAD cell was employed as a translator by the AIVD, Dutch civil intelligence.

Finally, the "new" terrorist cells are even more imbricated than before: the HOFSTAD cell based in the Netherlands prepared its attacks while it was also involved in the economic planning of other attacks in Portugal or Spain. A fall in the average age, links with crime, and internationalization are all causes for anxiety among experts.

The threat against the interests of the United States from European terrorists is also very real. Of course, American interests in Europe (embassies, consulates, military personnel, hotels, American companies) are natural targets for Islamists.

But there is more: most of the Second generation people and almost all of the Third generation now hold European passports. So these people can travel freely to the United States or anywhere else they want to. I don't need to remind you that the September 11 attacks were planned in Germany, Great Britain and Spain. And I don't need to remind you of the case of Richard Reid, the so-called "shoe-bomber".

4) Links between European Islamists and Al Qaeda

I think a common mistake is to try to link each and every terrorist attack or plot to Al Qaeda.

Al Qaeda had an "historical role" to play: to build an international terrorist coalition uniting dozens of organisations. Now that this has been achieved, an "International Islamist Terror" exists. And it is very effective. Information, arms and funds are exchanged among groups Moroccan, Algerian, Chechen, Pakistani, Saudi, Iraqi and other organisations. Often these organisations collaborate in very sophisticated projects. The only role of Al Qaeda is to set the general framework of the Jihad, designate targets and give lawful authorization (*Fatwa*) to act. Of course all those organisations or most of them are or were linked to Al Qaeda at one time or another. They take part in the global Jihad "*against the Jews and the Crusaders*" but they concentrate also on their own local problems – just as Al Qaeda concentrates mainly for the moment on Afghanistan and Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and, of course, the United States.

Most of these cells were linked in the past to regional organisations such as the Algerian GIA or GSPC and the Moroccan GICM. But since 2003, with the appearance of the "new Jihadists", we can see the arrival of new cells which are mostly not connected to those organisations, and are directly implanted in European society.

5) Ability to carry out attacks

All of these groups and cells must be considered able to carry out terrorist attacks. The fact that the majority of attacks in recent years failed means that police and intelligence services are working well, and not that the groups concerned are unable to carry out

attacks -- even though we can sometimes see a kind of amateurism in their *modus operandi*, at the level of the security of the operations they plan to carry out.

More worrying: some of the failed attacks in Europe (in France and in Great Britain) were WMD attacks intending to use chemical products to produce high casualties.

The intelligence we have – notably the fact that some suspected terrorists have shown great interest in recent years in nuclear facilities – suggests they are also thinking of using a “dirty bomb”.

6) Europe scores some successes but continues to act in a disorganized manner

Faced with these changes to the threat Europe, as a geopolitical entity, seems hardly any better-armed that it was a year ago. Certainly, the official rhetoric is everywhere the same: the fight against terrorism is a priority and numerous means are being deployed to face it. The reality is sometimes very different. For obvious reasons, I will not dwell on this aspect of things.

At the level of the European Union, progress was certainly made with the appointment of Gijs de Vries as antiterrorism coordinator, but the means he has been given are derisory and his mission essentially symbolic: in reality, antiterrorism remains a matter for the member states. Some work well, but others are not sufficiently aware of the reality of the danger. In any case, a major effort is needed to harmonize legislation and introduce more successful cooperation.

7) The threat will not diminish in the foreseeable future

Since March 11 2004, European intelligence and law enforcement services have been keeping up the pressure. Dozens of arrests have been made in Spain, France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany and some other countries where GICM (*Groupe Islamique Combattant Marocain*) networks were broken up. These arrests prevented several attacks, some of which could have had dramatic consequences.

The paradoxical result of this efficiency in the antiterrorist fight has been to anaesthetize part of European public opinion which, though shaken a year ago by the Madrid bombs, now thinks the threat is behind us "because nothing else has happened". Besides, the massacre of March 11 having been attributed to the fact that Spain was at the time an ally of the United States in Iraq, many people think being a national of a country which is not militarily present in Iraq is a guarantee against terrorism in itself.

Three different elements lead us to believe that the threat will not diminish by in the predictable future.

- The situation in Iraq is still a powerful factor for mobilization

The elections at the end of January marked an important stage in the evolution of Iraq,

but the toughest part of the job has still to be done. The stabilization of Iraqi society must be stopped at all costs -- from the point of view of the Jihadists. Europe and NATO are committed to supporting this stabilization. To divert Europe from its commitment by the use of violence, and to isolate the new government and the coalition troops, is a strategic objective for the Islamists;

- Developments in Morocco are of real concern

The most well-established Islamist organisation in Europe -- and the most dangerous -- is at present the GICM. The group suffered losses in Europe and in Morocco, but the battle is far from being over in this country where numerous reforms are still needed to fight terrorism. Developments in Morocco in years to come will have a major influence on the situation in Europe. If terrorism is not eradicated, if it remains vigorous, the consequences will be seen on the old continent, and it would be because of the importance of Moroccan communities established there, within which terrorists can recruit new sympathizers.

- The " new generation " of Islamist terrorism in Europe is only starting to appear

This " new generation " of terrorism which we hinted at above has hardly begun to appear on the terrorist scene. Recruits come from the "Third generation" of immigration, who we know has identity problems and feels itself the victim of imperfect integration. These problems can push many young people towards violence. We are then confronted with a new situation where diffuse and informal networks of young people who were born in Europe, who know it well and who have scores to settle, could serve as a relay to more structured international organizations, or even try to lead its own "jihad" to take revenge for the real or supposed humiliations felt by these young people.

Given the current situation I have tried to describe to you, it's hard to be optimistic. The threat both against Europe and from Europe to the United States will remain at a very high level for the foreseeable future. And I'm afraid that a tragedy will be necessary to force the European authorities to face the reality of the problem and to really address the problem posed by Islamism.

The question, in my view, is no longer "if" a tragedy will happen, but "when" it will happen.