



RISKS OF ISLAMIST RADICALISATION IN BULGARIA: A CASE STUDY IN THE *IZTOK* NEIGHBOURHOOD OF THE CITY OF PAZARDZHIK

Working Paper, February 2017

Mila Mancheva and Rositsa Dzhekova

This report presents the results from a qualitative case study aimed at exploring the relevance of a framework of generic indicators for detection of risks of Islamist radicalization to the national context of Bulgaria.¹ The study is designed on the premise that the formulation of risk indicators in relevance to the context of Bulgaria should be based on an understanding of the actual processes that may lead to Islamist radicalisation and the root causes and driving factors lying behind it. As no such studies have yet been conducted in Bulgaria, a qualitative case study was designed and conducted to serve in attaining understanding about the vulnerabilities to Islamist radicalisation among a group considered at risk. In this respect, the qualitative case study will aid the conduct of a future discussion on the formulation of radicalisation and vulnerability indicators relevant for the context of Bulgaria.

The risk group for the conduct of the qualitative case study was identified based on desk research involving the collection and analysis of data relating to government strategies, expert policy analysis, court proceedings and related media coverage. The identified risk group regards a small sub-community of Roma inhabiting the *Iztok* neighborhood of the town of Pazardjik who profess recently adopted Salafi interpretations of Islam. It should be stressed that the choice was not made on the premise that the group follows Salafi interpretations of Islam, but based on indications that some of its members have recently manifested and expressed sympathies with radical Islamist organizations such as IS.

The aims of the qualitative case study were: **1)** to provide understanding about the root causes and the social meaning of the adoption of Salafi interpretations of Islam on the part of

¹ A framework of generic indicators for detection of risks of Islamist radicalization for the purposes of early prevention is presented in CSD (2017) *Monitoring*

Radicalisation: A Framework for Risk Indicators. Sofia: Center for the Study of Democracy.

some local Roma in the *Iztok* neighborhood in the town of Pazardjik; **2)** to provide understanding about the root causes and the social meaning of certain manifestations of sympathy with radical Islamist ideas and organisations; **3)** to provide understanding about the vulnerabilities to potential radicalisation among members of the group of Roma professing Salafi interpretation of Islam; **4)** to consult selected risk and vulnerability indicators with law enforcement and intelligence officers at central and local level.

The analysis provided in this report is based on data from various sources. Firstly, systematization is provided of the data contained in court indictment 44/2016 of the regional prosecution office in Pazardjik for the incitement of discrimination and hatred on religious grounds (art. 164 of the Criminal Code) and for propagation of war (art. 407 of the Criminal Code), as well as of the media coverage of the court proceedings along this trial and of the manifestations of the profession of Salafi interpretations of Islam by some of the inhabitants of the *Iztok* neighborhood. In addition, data from 27 semi-structured interviews has been processed and analysed.² The interviews were conducted in six different cities (Pazardjik, Plovdiv, Asenovgrad, Sliven, Nova Zagora and Sofia) with four groups of respondents: **a)** law enforcement and intelligence officers at local

and central level (eight persons); **b)** social workers engaged directly with the community at risk from the regional departments of the Agency for Social Assistance (nine persons); **c)** members of the National Network of Health Mediators with long-standing field experience in working among Roma communities (four persons); **d)** community members and representatives of civil society structures at local level (six persons). Of importance for the interpretation of the collected data were the field visits and the observations conducted in four Roma neighborhoods in the towns of Pazardjik (*Iztok*), Asenovgrad (*Lakovo*), Sliven (*Nadejda*) and Nova Zagora (*Shesti*).

It should be noted that this research is based on qualitative data about other people's observations, views, and experiences pertaining to the community professing Salafi Islam in the *Iztok* neighbourhood. These are primarily representatives of both central and local institutions whose professional duties require them to come in direct contact with members of the said Salafi community and, to a lesser extent, other inhabitants of the same neighbourhood. The study does not present the viewpoint of the group of people professing Salafi interpretations of Islam,³ as during the field visits to the *Iztok* neighbourhood of the city of Pazardzhik all local community representatives regardless of their religion and language demonstrated anxiety and a defensive attitude.⁴

² Qualitative information from two interviews conducted earlier (in 2015) for the purposes of a background study on trends in Islamist radicalization in Bulgaria, has also been used.

³ A single interview was conducted with the community's leader Ahmed Mussa on June 17, 2016 in the Pazardzhik prison. It was a biographical interview and was conducted with the provision that it would not be published or quoted in public.

⁴ Conducting research among the group of Muslim Roma professing Salafi interpretations of Islam between April – July 2016 was hampered by the heightened public attention and growing fears in the context of the ongoing court trial (Pazardzhik Provincial Court criminal case No. 44/2016), as well as of a series of resolutions enacted by the municipal

councils in a number of Bulgarian cities to prohibit the full-face veiling of women. This process culminated in the adoption of the *Act to Limit the Wearing of Clothing Partially or Completely Covering the Face* (passed by the National Assembly on September 30, 2016 and promulgated in issue 80 of the State Gazette (SG) of 2016, <http://www.parliament.bg/bg/laws/ID/42106/>). The so called 'resolutions to outlaw the wearing of burqas in public' were introduced by way of amending the respective municipalities' Public Order Ordinances. Such resolutions were passed by the municipal council of the city of Pazardzhik on April 27, 2016 (<http://www.focus-news.net/news/2016/04/27/2231229/pazardzhik-obshtinskite-savetnitsi-prieha-zabranata-za-nosene-na-burki.html>) followed by the municipal council of the city of

It should be stipulated also, for the sake of correctness, that the information presented and discussed herein regarding the activities of the 14 defendants professing Salafi interpretations of Islam, seven of whom are residents of the city of Pazardzhik, is based on evidence adduced at the trial of criminal case 44/2016. Such evidence, however, is yet to be proven in court. The judgment of the court alone and the outcome of the trial will substantiate the veracity and punishability of the evidence adduced.

Terms and Terminology

The group of Ahmed Mussa's followers are referred to herein as people 'professing Salafi interpretations of Islam', 'Salafis' or 'Salafi community'. Each of these designations should be understood as a reference to those people's adoption of a new interpretation of Islam not traditional for the Muslim denomination in Bulgaria and close to Salafi interpretations. All three terms used herein do not denote and are unrelated to terms such as radicalisation or Islamist radicalization.

The Roma in the *Iztok* Neighbourhood of the City of Pazardzhik – Demographics and Social Status

According to official statistics, the share of Roma in the country's total population is 4.9 percent (or 325,343 people). They have different religious affiliations, including Eastern Orthodox Christianity, Protestantism (Evangelism), and Islam.⁵ The various Roma

groups also speak different mother tongues within their own communities – Romani, Bulgarian, Turkish or Romanian. Owing to a tendency among some Roma to self-identify as Bulgarians (those professing Eastern Orthodoxy, Catholicism or Protestantism) or as Turks (those professing Islam), different researchers put the number of Roma in 2008 between 641,735 and 831,130 people.⁶ The majority of Muslims in Bulgaria, including the Muslim Roma, are Sunni Hanafi Muslims (95 percent or 546,004 people), followed by a small Shi'a community of 27,407 people. Both the Sunnis and the minority of Shiites profess traditional Islam, which developed under the influence of the Ottoman Empire and during centuries of interaction with predominantly Christian populations. This Islamic tradition is different from the interpretations, messages, and practices of Islam in the Arab world.

The inhabitants of the *Iztok* neighbourhood in the city of Pazardzhik belong to two of the larger Romani groups – Daskane Roma, a literal translation for Bulgarian or Christian Gypsies, who speak a Balkan dialect of Romani influenced considerably by the Bulgarian language, and the so called Horahane Roma, a literal translation for Turkish or Muslim Gypsies, who speak a Balkan dialect of Romani influenced considerably by the Turkish language.⁷ According to data from the 2011 Census, which covered certain control areas of the *Iztok* neighbourhood in the city of Pazardzhik, 40 percent of the neighbourhood inhabitants self-identified as Bulgarians, 27 percent as Turks, and 20 percent as Roma. The share of neighbourhood dwellers who

Stara Zagora on April 28, 2016 (<http://www.focus-news.net/news/2016/04/28/2231932/stara-zagora-obshtinskiyat-savet-zabrani-noseneto-na-burki-na-obshtestveni-mesta.html>) and by the municipal council of the city of Burgas on June 1, 2016 (<http://btvnovinite.bg/article/bulgaria/obshtestvo/i-burgas-zabrani-noseneto-na-burki.htmlp>).

⁵ According to expert estimates, about 30 percent of the Roma population in Bulgaria profess Islam (Институт „Отворено общество“ (2008), Ромите в България.

Информационен справочник, Институт „Отворено общество“ – София, с. 12).

⁶ Отворено общество (2008) Ромите в България. Информационен справочник. Институт „Отворено общество“ – София.

⁷ A comprehensive presentation of the various Roma groups in Bulgaria can be found in: Отворено общество (2008) Ромите в България. Информационен справочник. Институт „Отворено общество“ – София, с. 14-19.

declared Eastern Orthodox religious affiliation was 34.6 percent, while those who declared Muslim religious affiliation was 18 percent. The share of inhabitants professing Protestantism or Evangelism was relatively low, a mere 3.5 percent.⁸ Eastern Orthodox Christians are the majority of inhabitants considering themselves Bulgarian (66 percent), 35 percent of those considering themselves Roma (35 percent) and 6.5 percent of those considering themselves Turks. Muslims are more than half of those considering themselves Turks (55 percent), 6.5 percent of those considering themselves Bulgarian and 3.7 percent of those considering themselves Roma.

36.5 percent of all *Iztok* neighbourhood dwellers declared Bulgarian as their mother tongue. 31 percent of the inhabitants declared Turkish as their mother tongue and 18 percent declared Romani as their mother tongue. While the majorities of inhabitants considering themselves Bulgarian and Turkish declared Bulgarian and Turkish as their mother tongue (90 percent of the Bulgarians and 97 percent of the Turks, respectively), small shares of inhabitants considering themselves Roma declared Bulgarian and Turkish as their mother tongue (5 and 6 percent, respectively). 88 percent of them declared Romani as their mother tongue.

Educational Status

There is a marked difference between the educational level of Pazardzhik's general population and the population of the *Iztok* residential neighbourhood. Whether basic, secondary or higher education is concerned, *Iztok* dwellers lag far behind the general population. While 21 percent of the population of Pazardzhik aged 7 years and over have completed a tertiary (higher education) degree,

the share of *Iztok* neighbourhood dwellers holding such degree is a mere 4 percent. 43 percent of the city dwellers have completed upper secondary education compared to 17 percent of the neighbourhood dwellers. At the same time, the share of neighbourhood residents who have completed lower secondary education is higher (33 percent) than the share of city dwellers (19 percent). The same is true with respect to the share of residents who have completed primary education – 7 percent of the city dwellers and 25 percent of the neighbourhood dwellers. 2 percent of the city dwellers and 7.4 percent of the neighbourhood inhabitants have never attended school.

Of all ethnic groups residing in the *Iztok* neighbourhood, the educational status of the residents who declared Turkish ethnicity is the lowest, followed by those who self-identified as Roma. The educational status of the residents who declared Bulgarian ethnicity, even though considerably lower than that of the city's overall population, remains higher than the educational status of the other two ethnic communities in the neighbourhood (see Table 4). While the share of higher education graduates among the Turks and the Roma in the neighbourhood is less than 1 percent, the same share among the Bulgarians is 9 percent. The share of upper secondary education graduates among the Bulgarians is 34 percent, compared to less than 4 percent among the Turks and the Roma. The share of lower secondary education graduates among neighbourhood dwellers is comparable for the three ethnic groups ranging between 31 and 35 percent. There are, however, discernible differences as regards those who failed to complete primary education. Their share is 7 percent among the Bulgarians, 17 percent among the Roma, and 19 percent among the Turks.

⁸ It should be noted that 13 percent of all neighbourhood dwellers did not declare any ethnic and religious affiliation.

Employment and unemployment

Data from the 2011 Population and Housing Census in the Republic of Bulgaria indicated considerable differences in employment and unemployment rates among ethnic groups across the country. 19.4 percent of the Roma and 46.9 percent of the Bulgarians were employed, while 19.3 percent of the Roma and 6.6 percent of the Bulgarians were unemployed.⁹ A comparison of data from the same Census pertaining to the city of Pazardzhik and its *Iztok* neighbourhood shows that the neighbourhood population was in less favourable situation compared to city dwellers. While the economic activity rate (EAR) of the city's population was 66.0, the EAR of the *Iztok* neighbourhood population was 45.3. At the same time, the employment rate was 55.2 among city dwellers and nearly half that rate – 26.8 – among neighbourhood inhabitants. Furthermore, the unemployment rate among city dwellers was considerably lower (16.4) than that of the *Iztok* neighbourhood inhabitants (40.7).

Living Conditions

Data on living conditions by ethnicity of household head indicated close or relatively close values for the residents of the city of Pazardzhik and of the *Iztok* neighbourhood who declared Turkish or Roma ethnicity. This is probably due to the fact that most city residents of such ethnicity dwell in the *Iztok* neighbourhood. There were more discernible differences in the housing conditions among residents who declared Bulgarian ethnicity. This population group experience poorer housing conditions in the neighbourhood compared to Bulgarians living in the city proper in terms of average number of persons sharing one room, average floor area per person, share of occupied dwellings with no source of water

supply, and share of occupied dwellings with no sewerage (see Table 6).

The statistical data above indicate undeniably that the socioeconomic status of the *Iztok* neighbourhood inhabitants is considerably lower than that of the city dwellers. It is notable that the socio-economic profile of the neighbourhood inhabitants who self-identify their ethnicity as Turkish and Roma is less favourable than that of the inhabitants self-identifying as Bulgarian. A comparison with the dwellers of the city, however, indicates that there exist also unfavourable differences between them and those neighbourhood inhabitants who self-identify as Bulgarians in terms of education, employment, and living conditions.

An important dimension of the demographic, social, and economic dynamics of the neighbourhood relates to the seasonal and long-term labour migration to Western European countries. Statistics on this phenomenon are not available. In the talks with respondents, though, the issue of migration and of their fellow neighbourhood residents' employment abroad invariably emerges and is often associated with their improved economic status. According to observations shared by representatives of judicial institutions, some 30 to 50 percent of all neighbourhood residents are permanently absent for the purpose of employment in Western Europe.¹⁰

The Process of Penetration of Salafi Interpretations of Islam in the *Iztok* Neighbourhood of the City of Pazardzhik

The penetration of Salafi interpretations of Islam, uncommon for the Muslim denomination in Bulgaria, seems to be the outcome of a

⁹ Национален статистически институт (2011) *Преброяване на населението и жилищния фонд през 2011 г.* Том 1 Население, Книга 3. Икономически характеристики на населението, с. 56.

<http://www.nsi.bg/census2011/pagebg2.php?p2=175&sp2=218>

¹⁰ Interview with a representative of the intelligence and law enforcement institutions, May 20, 2016.

number of interconnected factors. First, familiarisation with such interpretations of Islam was made possible by dint of ongoing contacts with mosques in Austria and Germany. Their subsequent propagation in the neighbourhood was the result of the energetic proselytising activity of Ahmed Mussa, who emerged as an undisputed leader holding moral authority over an emerging congregation of believers. The concurrent creation of a network of social and economic contacts, based on ensuring employment and livelihood opportunities, seems to have worked to the benefit of the group's social dynamics and bonding. The construction in 2002 of the *Abu Bekir* private mosque also contributed significantly and played a catalytic role in moulding the congregation of believers. There are no data available about Salafi influences penetrating over the years through foreign emissaries and preachers from the Arab world proselytising locally in the *Iztok* neighbourhood.

Biographical data about Ahmed Mussa¹¹ indicate that Salafi ideology permeated the *Iztok* neighbourhood of the city of Pazardzhik based on contacts with mosques in Western European countries, specifically Austria and Germany. It was there that Mr. Mussa got acquainted with such interpretations of Islam that are untypical for the Islamic theological tradition in Bulgaria. The evidence available indicates that he emerged as an Islamic preacher during his trips to Western Europe, as well as while attending the Qur'an course at the Islamic school training imams in the town of Sarnitsa. He completed his training in 2000 and received an imam-hatip certificate. Ahmed

Mussa converted to Islam while residing in Austria in the 1990s. According to representatives of the judicial authorities, the process of propagating new interpretations of Islam in the neighbourhood started upon his return from Vienna,¹² when he started using a small room (*masjid*) for the purpose of worship. During this period, however, the *masjid* was shut down by the authorities in cooperation with the Chief Muftiate because of reported problems with the Islamic sermons. It appears that the emergence of more radical aspects in Mr. Mussa's preaching arsenal seems to have occurred as a result of his sojourn in Cologne, Germany, in 2001, where he came into contact with the *Caliphate State* radical Islamist organisation. It was upon his return from Germany that he performed one of his publicly known acts, namely the displaying in 2003 of a flag reading '*The State Is a Caliphate*' in the *Iztok* neighbourhood.¹³ This, in turn, resulted in the first criminal case brought against Mr. Mussa on charges of preaching Islamic fundamentalism, forcible change of the social and state order, and incitement of inter-ethnic and religious enmity.¹⁴ Later, in the spring of 2008, Ahmed Mussa associated himself with the unregistered Bulgarian branch of the Saudi *Al Waqf al Islami* Foundation, whose purpose was to conduct religious preaching, training, and charitable activities based on Salafi interpretations of Islam. This resulted in another charge against him. In 2012, Mr. Mussa and 12 imams, duly appointed by the Chief Muftiate, were prosecuted¹⁵ on charges of participation in an unregistered organisation whose aims are to commit crimes referred to in Chapter One of the Special Part of the Criminal Code.¹⁶ Considering

¹¹ Bill of Indictment submitted in criminal case 44/2016.

¹² According to evidence adduced at the trial of criminal case 44/2016, Mr. Mussa lived in Austria in the 1990s.

¹³ Николов, Й. „Първи идват емисарите”, в. „Капитал”, 14.08.2004 г

¹⁴ Pazardzhik Provincial Court criminal case No. 905/2004 brought on charges under Article 108(1), Article 162(1), and Article 164(1) of the Criminal Code; News.bg, „B

Пазарджик гледат дело за проповядване на ислямски фундаментализъм”, 01.11.2004 г.

¹⁵ The trial took place between 2012 and 2014. Bill of Indictment, criminal pre-trial proceedings 9/2009, Pazardzhik Provincial Prosecutor's Office case file reg. No. 1122/09. The case was tried at second instance by the Plovdiv Court of Appeal and a conviction was handed down on July 1, 2015.

¹⁶ Opposing the principles of democracy, separation of powers, liberalism, system of government, and the rule

that the Supreme Court of Cassation reversed recently the second-instance conviction against Mr. Mussa handed down by the Plovdiv Court of Appeal, these charges against him remain unproven.¹⁷ Evidence and testimonies gathered during criminal proceedings indicate that Ahmed Mussa was accepted by some of the officially certified imams in Bulgaria (graduates of higher religious institutions in Saudi Arabia and Jordan) as an influential figure having the capacity to preach Salafi interpretations of Islam among the so called Romani jamaat. He carried out such activities in return for unofficial payments.¹⁸ This fact and his training at the imam school in the town of Sarnitsa point to the establishment of close contacts and relations with official representatives of the Muslim denomination in Bulgaria, some of whom were influenced by Salafi interpretations of Islam. It seems, however, that in the course of the second trial those connections faded.

Along with their religious activities, some community members started conducting economic activity. It involves junk dealing – purchasing and selling small consumer goods, including imports from Turkey, transportation arrangements for seasonal workers travelling to Austria and Germany, as well as the operation of three *One Lev Shops*.¹⁹ Some of these informal activities are part of the grey economy. “It is actually customary for the entire community to make a living from organised trading in gold, cell phones, and small consumer goods smuggled from Turkey, such as

detergents, which are resold in a whole bunch of illegal small shops within the neighbourhood. Say, a busload of women is sent on a shopping trip to Turkey. They are given necklaces, pendants, and chainlets instead of travel money. Existing connections with smugglers, traffickers, and customs officers are solid. Vanloads of gold are imported and then resold in Western Europe for a decent profit of five to six thousand Euros”.²⁰ Such business activity provides both subsistence to the members of the community conducting it and an opportunity to lend support to their needy fellow neighbourhood residents. It allows them also to help community members overcome alcohol or drug dependence and to create an opportunity for them, while hearing the sermons provides them also with motivation to keep a more orderly life.

According to evidence adduced in the Bill of Indictment submitted under criminal case 44/2016, Ahmed Mussa played an instrumental role in the construction of the *Abu Bekir* private mosque in the *Iztok* neighbourhood in 2002. The erection of the mosque was made possible following the purchase of a plot of land by way of a public bid announced by the Municipality of Pazardzhik. The plot was purchased with financial support from two Islamic foundations and donations from Muslims living in the neighbourhood.²¹ It should be noted, however, that this was facilitated also by the local government in the context of the 1999 local elections. In the run-up to the elections,

of law, fundamental human rights, such as equality of men and women, and religious freedom by preaching the ideology of the Salafi strand of Islam and imposing Sharia state (Article 109(2)(1) and Article 108(1)(2) of the Criminal Code). The second and third charge of the indictment refer to preaching anti-democratic ideology (Article 108 (1) (2) of the Criminal Code) and propagating hatred on religious grounds through speech (Article 164 (1) (1) of the Criminal Code).

¹⁷ Ruling of the Supreme Court of Cassation No. 71 of July 28, 2016. The case was remanded for a new trial by another panel of the Plovdiv Court of Appeal.

¹⁸ Bill of Indictment, criminal pre-trial proceedings 9/2009, Pazardzhik Provincial Prosecutors' Office case file reg. No. 1122/09.

¹⁹ Interview with a representative of the intelligence and law enforcement institutions, June 15, 2015; Interview with a representative of the intelligence and law enforcement institutions, May 20, 2016.

²⁰ Interview with a representative of the intelligence and law enforcement institutions, June 15, 2015.

²¹ Bill of Indictment submitted in criminal case 44/2016. According to an official letter from the Chief Muftiate, submitted as evidence in the case file, the institution did not provide any funding for the construction of the *Abu Bekir* mosque and has no supervisory authority over it. Hence, it does not exercise any control over its activities.

Mr. Mussa managed to negotiate a deal with one of the runners for the office of mayor, Ivan Kolchakov – a construction site and building permit for the mosque in exchange for a promise to help him garner votes in his favour.²² The construction of today's mosque was in fact made possible after Mr. Kolchakov won the local elections.²³ The role played by the *Abu Bekir* private mosque in forming the local community of people professing Salafi interpretations of Islam is elucidated by the way respondents discussed the chronological order of that process. The two markers around which such chronology was discussed included the erection of the mosque along with discernible change in clothing styles. Most respondents linked the more visible increase of the number of community members and the changes in their dress style to the period following the erection of the mosque. Thus, some respondents put the start of the process as early as in the 1990s. They underscored, however, that it became more pronounced after 2000 and particularly after the mosque was built.²⁴ According to others, there were just isolated cases of conversion to Salafism until 2003,²⁵ and their number started to mushroom after that, not least owing to the erection of the mosque.²⁶ The same respondents pointed out that when the mosque was built, "there were just two bearded men and a pair of guys helping them", and there were no cases of clothing style change among women.²⁷

In the course of the process delineated above, Ahmed Mussa established himself as the leader

of the emerging Salafi community in the neighbourhood (the so called *jamaat*). He acted as an informal Muslim preacher, even though he had no official certification from the Chief Muftiate. Nevertheless, Mr. Mussa garnered robust moral authority among the emerging community of Muslim believers and was accorded unconditional respect. A devout believer, Mr. Mussa exerted influence on his adherents through his sermons, his close and constant liaison with the members of the community, and his ability to mobilize the community and catalyse the lending of support to its needy members. Ahmed Mussa leads a simple and modest life in stark contrast to the lifestyle demonstrated frequently by some formal leaders of the Roma communities during the transition period. At the same time, though, he has the authority to mobilise both financial and human resources at any point in time.²⁸

Who Are Ahmed Mussa's Adherents?

There are no exact data as to the number of Roma in the *Iztok* neighbourhood of the city of Pazardzhik who have adopted Salafi interpretations of Islam so far. Various sources, though, estimate it to range between 100 and 600 persons.²⁹ The main marker used to discuss the number of Roma converts to Salafism in the neighbourhood is the number of Muslims attending the *Abu Bekir* private mosque. Another term used by some respondents to denote them was 'Ahmed Mussa's followers'. According to a respondent residing in the *Iztok* neighbourhood of the city of Pazardzhik, the

²² Interview with a representative of the intelligence and law enforcement institutions, May 20, 2016.

²³ *Pik.bg*, Джамята „Абу Бекир“ в Пазарджик имала разрешение за молитвен дом, 04.12.2014 г.

²⁴ Interview with a Roma health mediator, April 21, 2016.

²⁵ Interview with a resident of the *Iztok* neighbourhood, April 21, 2016; A representative of the intelligence and law enforcement institutions also pointed out that a community of Ahmed Mussa's associates and adherents started forming in 2003, June 17, 2016.

²⁶ Interview with a representative of the intelligence and law enforcement institutions, May 20, 2016; According

to social workers from the city of Pazardzhik, the Salafi community in the *Iztok* neighbourhood has grown in number over the last two years (2015-2016), May 20, 2016.

²⁷ Interview with a resident of the *Iztok* neighbourhood, April 21, 2016.

²⁸ Interview with a representative of the intelligence and law enforcement institutions, June 15, 2015.

²⁹ A representative of the intelligence and law enforcement institutions placed the number of congregants attending the *Abu Bekir* mosque at 600, June 15, 2015.

number of Salafi Roma in the neighbourhood ranges between 200 and 500³⁰. According to a representative of the National Network of Health Mediators, who has direct observations of the neighbourhood, Salafism has been adopted by up to 30 extended families or up to 500 persons.³¹ The lack of precision as to the estimated number of Roma converts to Salafism in the neighbourhood shows even in the Bill of Indictment submitted under criminal case 44/2016. Witness testimonies adduced in the indictment place the *Abu Bekir* mosque attendance between 100 and 400 people. According to various witnesses, the average attendance at Friday prayer at the *Abu Bekir* mosque is 300 to 400 Muslims, while the community of people who regularly attend and listen to Ahmed Mussa's sermons in the *Iztok* neighbourhood consists of some 100 people. According to information adduced in the Bill of Indictment submitted under criminal case 44/2016, the community of Mussa's adherents could be thought of as transnationalised, considering the presence of Roma migrants from the *Iztok* neighbourhood in the cities of Cologne in Germany, Vienna and Linz in Austria, and Bordeaux in France, who listen to his sermons online.

As regards the profile of those who have adopted Salafi interpretations of Islam, according to most respondents, they are Muslim Roma self-identifying as Turks. Some respondents reported also that there were converts among the community.³² It seems, however, that the cases of conversion to Salafism from Christianity are rather isolated.³³ It should be noted that Ahmed Mussa himself

was, in his childhood, an evangelical Christian and converted to Islam in the 1990s during his stay in Vienna, where he found accommodation at a local mosque. His mother, who belonged initially to the Evangelical church, also converted to Salafism. The group of Salafis inhabit primarily the area around the *Abu Bekir* mosque. The residents of the said area enjoy a social status closer to the average within the *Iztok* neighbourhood's geographical stratification and do not belong to its more marginalised inhabitants, a.k.a. the ghetto.³⁴ The Salafi community in the neighbourhood is made up of both men and women. It unites both entire families and individual family members. Cases where only separate families within a larger kin-based group are Salafis are not infrequent. There are even cases where only the husband or the wife in a nuclear family has adopted Salafism. An interesting distinction regarding the age profile of the Salafi community in the neighbourhood was made by a respondent who pointed out that initially the adherents of Salafism were few and older, but at the time of the interview the community had expanded and was dominated by young people.³⁵

An attempt at portraying the profile of the group of 14 defendants on the basis of the information contained in the Bill of Indictment submitted under criminal case 44/2016 would help characterise the persons who, according to the prosecution and the law enforcement authorities, were involved in manifestations of open sympathy for radical Islamist organisations and ideas. It should also be noted that only seven of the fourteen defendants are

³⁰ Interview with a resident of the *Iztok* neighbourhood, April 21, 2016. Similar estimates of the size of the Salafi community in Pazardzhik were shared by a representative of the intelligence and law enforcement institutions, who shared that the number of congregants attending the Friday prayers at the *Abu Bekir* mosque ranged between 200 and 500, April 21, 2016.

³¹ Interview with representatives of the National Network of Health Mediators, June 24, 2016.

³² According to a representative of the intelligence and law enforcement institutions, June 15, 2015.

³³ Interviews with a health mediator, April 21, 2016, and a resident of the *Iztok* neighbourhood, April 21, 2016.

³⁴ Interview with representatives of the National Network of Health Mediators, June 24, 2016.

³⁵ Interview with a health mediator, April 21, 2016.

inhabitants of the *Iztok* neighbourhood of the city of Pazardzhik. Four other defendants are residents of the city of Plovdiv (the second largest city in Bulgaria) and two others are from Assenovgrad (a town in central southern Bulgaria, part of Plovdiv Province). The only female defendant is a resident of the village of Startsevo in the province of Smolyan.

The defendants' average age is 36. The majority of them are in their thirties and only four are quadragenarians. Six have completed primary education, four have lower secondary schooling, two are upper secondary education graduates, and one is illiterate. In terms of employment, 11 of the defendants are classified as unemployed. At the same time, six of them are described as occasionally engaged in economic activities on a private basis, doing piecemeal jobs in trade, construction, house-painting, transportation or services in fast food establishments. It is indicated also that four of the defendants do similar occasional jobs in Turkey, Germany, and Poland. Three other defendants have labour migration experience in Austria and Germany. Two of the defendants have previous criminal convictions. Two have received religious training at the imam school in the town of Sarnitsa. There is no information in the court case file as to whether the remaining defendants have undergone any form of religious training. Seven of them, though, carry out informal Muslim preaching activities. It is indicated that two of the defendants had substance dependence – one of them had alcohol dependence and the other one had drug addiction. Three of the defendants have criminal records reflecting charges of theft (for two of them) and inflicting bodily injury out of hooligan motives (one of them). One of these

was found in possession of a fire-worthy rifle and live ammunition without a licence to own a firearm. It is indicated that six of the defendants do not maintain or avoid contacts with persons not belonging to their religious community. Only two of these, though, are residents of the *Iztok* neighbourhood of the city of Pazardzhik.

Manifestations of Salafism

It appears that the life of the Salafi community that emerged in the *Iztok* neighbourhood gravitates around their visits to the *Abu Bekir* mosque and listening to religious sermons delivered by Ahmed Mussa and some of his associates. Preaching and religious education activities are carried out not just among men, but among women as well. The community's religious life is structured around³⁶: sermons delivered by Ahmed Mussa at the *Abu Bekir* mosque twice a week and online for his adherents from the *Iztok* neighbourhood residing in Germany and Austria,³⁷ as well as outside the mosque in its yard and in the nearby café.³⁸ There are reports of sermon delivery to women in the cities of Pazardzhik and Plovdiv, in the town of Assenovgrad, and in the village of Startsevo by Alexandrina Angelova, an adherent and an associate of Ahmed Mussa.³⁹ Furthermore, Friday daytrips are organised for women from the neighbourhood to the masjids in Plovdiv and Assenovgrad, where they attend gatherings and listen to Ahmed Mussa's sermons and lectures. According to evidence adduced in the Bill of Indictment submitted under criminal case 44/2016, the community also has a system for providing Qur'an and language training to both women and men. Ahmed Mussa conducts training for women and men in a room adjacent to his house, and two

³⁶ According to information provided in the Bill of Indictment submitted in criminal case 44/2016.

³⁷ According to information provided in the Bill of Indictment submitted in criminal case 44/2016, families from the *Iztok* neighbourhood professing Salafi interpretations of Islam reside in the cities of Cologne in Germany, Vienna and Linz in Austria, and Bordeaux in France.

³⁸ According to witness testimonies adduced in the Bill of Indictment submitted in criminal case 44/2016, Ahmed Mussa delivered sermons in the masjids in the Roma neighbourhoods of the city of Plovdiv and the town of Assenovgrad.

³⁹ Alexandrina Angelova is the only female defendant in criminal case 44/2016.

women teach Bulgarian and Turkish to girls. The information about the existence of self-organisation to provide training to both adults and children within the community was partially corroborated by social workers, who shared a couple of cases where their clients – women from the Salafi community in the *Iztok* neighbourhood – mentioned that they and their children received training outside of the public school.⁴⁰

As no discourse analysis has been conducted, it is difficult to provide an independent perusal of the nature and messages of the sermons. All that can be provided at this stage is the information and data collected by the intelligence and law-enforcement services and adduced as evidence in the Bill of Indictment submitted under criminal case 44/2016. According to this evidence, the sermons delivered by Ahmed Mussa in the *Iztok* neighbourhood deviate from the spirit of the Hanafi school of Sunni Islam which is traditional for Bulgaria. In his sermons Mr. Mussa often quotes and refers to Muhammad ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhab⁴¹ and focuses on the literal application of the Qur'an's message and the hadiths. Some of the religious messages communicated by the preacher convey ideas such as: power comes from Allah and not from man, Muslims must obey Allah's laws alone, Muslims should not take part in elections, and, even, those who vote are to be considered infidels, it is ordained that Muslims should not have Christian and Jewish friends, as this is an act tantamount to turning away from Allah.

Outfit is one of the main markers for professing Salafi interpretations of Islam in the *Iztok* neighbourhood. It is particularly visible and is most frequently discussed with respect to

women. Covering up with a black niqāb, including covering the head and the arms down to the wrists is characteristic for women from this community, especially for young women. Among elder women, the change in dress style is limited to wearing headscarves of different colours. There are also some extreme cases of full face veiling (with a burka) or wearing gloves to cover the body completely. Among men, the change in appearance includes growing a wide, full, and sometimes longer beard without moustache and wearing a wide unicoloured robe over wide trousers, as well as growing longer hair. The Salafi community members' outfit is among the most hotly discussed topics both in the media and at political level. It was also the first issue to be brought up by neighbourhood inhabitants or social workers in the talks about the Salafi community. The change in dress style, untypical for Muslims in Bulgaria and not rooted in local traditions, provokes suspicion and incomprehension on the part of their neighbours – both Christian Roma and Muslim Roma, and on the part of local institutions and their representatives.⁴²

A combined perusal of data collected from interviews with respondents and evidence adduced at the trial of criminal case 44/2016 indicates conflicting information about school attendance among children from the Salafi community. On the one hand, usually in the light of the Salafi interpretations of Islam professed by the community, it is often alleged that Salafi children do not attend school. On the other hand, there is discernible motivation among adults in the community to have their children educated in state-run and municipal schools. Various explanations were shared regarding the reluctance of some Salafi parents to send their children to school. With respect to

⁴⁰ Social workers from the Social Assistance Directorate (SAD) in the city of Pazardzhik, May 20, 2016.

⁴¹ The founder of the religious and political movement of Sunni Islam Wahhabism.

⁴² Interviews with a Roma health mediator, April 21, 2016; a resident of the *Iztok* neighbourhood, April 21, 2016;

social workers from the Social Assistance Directorates in the city of Pazardzhik and the town of Assenovgrad, May 20, 2016; a resident of the *Iztok* neighbourhood, June 17, 2016.

girls, the explanation was often linked to the prohibition to attend classes veiled or in a niqāb. Residents of the village of Aleko Konstantinovo, for instance, maintained that there was no need for children to attend school, as their school was in the mosque.⁴³ At the same time, though, children from the same community continue to attend school. Thus, according to teachers, children whose parents are Salafis, including Ahmed Mussa's son, attend the local school in the *Iztok* neighbourhood.⁴⁴ The fact that the Salafi community have set up a self-organised system providing Bulgarian and Turkish language training to children indicates clearly that they are well aware of the need for education. In any case, the effect Salafi interpretations of Islam have on attendance and non-attendance at lower and upper secondary school needs to be studied carefully in the future. Given the varied practices observed (both attending and non-attending school), there are probably other long established factors influencing such decisions. It should be kept in mind that school dropping out is a persistent problem plaguing Roma communities in particular. It is a complex problem rooted in the social and economic marginalisation of Roma for a number of decades.⁴⁵ In 2003, for instance, the share of school dropouts among the Roma ethnic group was nearly 21 percent compared to just 2 percent among Bulgarian children of school-age.⁴⁶

Relationships with Others

Views shared by respondents regarding the manner in which representatives of the group professing Salafi interpretations of Islam comport themselves, point to signs of insulation from the other groups in the *Iztok* neighbourhood. It appears that women tend to remain more isolated. Adhering strictly to the dogmatic requirements, women refuse to converse with men and more or less zealously cover themselves with a niqāb. They refuse to remove their niqābs and show their faces in front of male representatives of public institutions, but would do it in front of females. In some isolated cases, veiled women have refused to unveil their faces for identification purposes even in front of female representatives of public institutions.⁴⁷ There are cases of attaching privacy screens to fences or surrounding homes with brick walls to protect the women in the household from strangers' prying eyes.⁴⁸ At the same time, it could not be alleged that all relations with other neighbourhood dwellers have been completely severed. Communication lines with women from other denominations in the neighbourhood have remained nearly intact.⁴⁹ Thus, Ahmed Mussa's wife shared that she maintained normal relations with women wearing jeans at women's gatherings in the neighbourhood.⁵⁰ It is worth reiterating that

⁴³ Social workers from the SAD in the city of Pazardzhik, May 20, 2016. According to witness testimonies adduced at the trial of criminal case 44/2016, the explanation given by Salafi parents for refusing to send their children to school was that what was important for them to know was Islam.

⁴⁴ A teacher at the *Iztok* neighbourhood local school, May 20, 2016.

⁴⁵ Тилкиджиев, Н., В. Миленкова, К. Петкова и Н. Милева (2009) Отпадащите роми, София-Институт Отворено общество.

⁴⁶ МЦПМКВ (2004) Окончателен доклад по проекта „Оценка на съществуващите образователни политики и практики за предоставяне на равен достъп до обучение на деца от малцинствата и за разработване на препоръки за устойчиво решение на образователните проблеми на малцинствата ”,

МЦПМКВ – София, цитиран в: Отворено общество (2008) Ромите в България, с 28.

⁴⁷ According to a social worker at the Pazardzhik prison, Ahmed Mussa's wife has never visited him in jail as she refuses to unveil her face for identification purposes in front of female officers. At the same time, his mother, who also professes Salafism but wears a headscarf only, visits him on a regular basis. The interview was conducted on June 17, 2016.

⁴⁸ Interview with a Roma health mediator, April 21, 2016.

⁴⁹ A female resident of the *Iztok* neighbourhood, who does not belong to the Salafi community, shared that it was quite customary for her to chat with the veiled women passing by her home, June 17, 2016.

⁵⁰ The interview was given by Ahmed Mussa's wife to Christian Muhrbeck and Frank Stier for their study *Добре познатите чужденци – мюсюлманите в*

according to the indictment in criminal case 44/2016, six of the defendants do not maintain or avoid contacts with persons not belonging to their religious community. Only two of those, though, are residents of the *Iztok* neighbourhood of the city of Pazardzhik. The other four come from elsewhere. According to some respondents, the other neighbourhood dwellers have difficulty accepting and understanding their neighbours' new faith and the two groups call each other 'infidels'.⁵¹ Nevertheless, there are no reports of tension or conflicts between the religious communities.⁵² Only two incidents presumably of such nature have been reported so far. The first of them occurred on April 30, 2011, when five Muslim Roma professing Salafi Islam assaulted an evangelical pastor. The motives for the assault remained unclear.⁵³ The alleged reasons ranged from the Muslim Roma being strongly vexed by the pastor's insistence to proselytise Evangelism, through the pastor's indecent behaviour contradicting the stricter moral norms of Salafi Islam, to some personal conflict. The other incident involved a brawl between a few Salafi Roma and another male resident of the same neighbourhood. It followed a complaint by a Salafi woman that the male had scratched his private parts in public, thus showing disrespect for her.⁵⁴

It should be noted, however, that the strict compliance with the rules of behaviour set out by the Salafi dogma, in particular the prohibition on attending festive gatherings or birthday parties, and on visiting cemeteries,⁵⁵

considerably narrows the occasions and opportunities to socialise with neighbours and other neighbourhood dwellers, which probably results in the isolation of the Salafi community members from the other residents.

Manifestations of Interest in and Open Sympathy for Radical Islamist Organisations

Information adduced in support of the charges for inciting discrimination and hatred on religious grounds (Article 164 of the Criminal Code) and for carrying out war propaganda (Article 407 of the Criminal Code) brought against the 14 defendants from the cities of Pazardzhik, Plovdiv, and Assenovgrad currently standing trial (criminal case 44/2016), focuses on a number of signs of sympathising with radical Islamist organisations, in particular Islamic State (ISIS or Daesh). The alleged manifestations are grouped under four types. **First**, some of the defendants are charged with using ISIS propaganda materials, in particular ISIS flags (which they displayed in masjids while delivering sermons or just displayed in plain view elsewhere and took photos of themselves in front of such flags) and/or with spreading, selling, and wearing T-shirts, caps, hats, headbands, etc., branded with the ISIS logo. **Second**, some of the defendants are accused of using social networks, in particular Facebook, to share videos demonstrating the military successes of ISIS and containing calls for jihad, as well as photos and collages testifying to their

България, commissioned by the Sofia Bureau of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and conducted in April 2015. Available at: <http://www.kas.de/bulgarien/bg/publications/41790/>

⁵¹ Interview with a resident of the *Iztok* neighbourhood, April 21, 2016. The lack of mutual acceptance was corroborated by social workers from the Social Assistance Directorate (SAD) in the city of Pazardzhik, who shared that some Christian residents of the *Iztok* neighbourhood spoke of the Salafis and especially of women's clothing with derision, May 20, 2016. Identical information was shared about the Roma neighbourhood in the town of Assenovgrad by social workers from the local SAD, May 20, 2016.

⁵² Interview with two representatives of the intelligence and law enforcement institutions, April 21, 2016.

⁵³ Вестник „24 часа“, Роми пребиха пастор, дават им 15 денонощия арест, 02.05.2011 г.; Начев, М., Пребит пастор: „Биха ме жестоко талибани!“, в. Труд, 05.05.2011 г.. According to a representative of the intelligence and law enforcement institutions, the brawl was a domestic violence incident. The interview was conducted on June 17, 2016.

⁵⁴ Interview with a Roma health mediator, April 21, 2016.

⁵⁵ Interview with a resident of the *Iztok* neighbourhood, April 21, 2016.

identification with a transnational community of 'Warriors of Allah' (e.g., photos of them making mujahedeen gestures and/or with the ISIS flag, or a photo collage with Osama bin Laden). The Facebook profiles of those defendants contained uploaded photos and videos showing leaders and ideologists of terrorist organisations, videotaped addresses by leaders of militant groups engaged in the war in Syria and Iraq, including sermons delivered by the leader of ISIS and pronounced Caliph, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. Furthermore, evidence has been adduced that some defendants were in possession of video materials, stored on digital media, containing war propaganda and related to Islamist terrorist organisations. It should be noted that most of the materials in question contain the visual symbolism of ISIS. **Third**, the leader of the Salafi community, Ahmed Mussa, is charged with integrating in his sermons appeals in support for ISIS, as well as certain ideas characteristic of the so called jihadist doctrines.⁵⁶ The evidence adduced at the trial point to a trend towards politicising Ahmed Mussa's sermons and highlighting the Muslim – West antagonism, characteristic of the representatives of the so called global jihad movement. Some of the ideas professed by Mr. Mussa included calls to his followers to fulfil their religious obligation to join the caliphate and its army. (Such calls were made after Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi announced the establishment of a caliphate.) He also urged the faithful to be ready to enter the battle in Syria and fight on the side of ISIS, as well as to collect cash to assist ISIS fighters. Ahmed Mussa is also accused of professing that there was a need to stand up to the war waged on the Muslims by their enemies, especially Obama and Bush. **Fourth**, some of the defendants are accused of providing logistical support to transiting

transnational fighters on their way to Syria. According to representatives of the intelligence and law enforcement institutions, there is no evidence of providing support to fighters transiting in the other direction – from Syria to Western Europe.⁵⁷ Representatives of the intelligence and law enforcement institutions shared conflicting opinions as to the motivation for this type of involvement. Some regard it as conscious behaviour, which is evidenced by the use of a clandestine network to smuggle ISIS fighters illegally across the 'green border' with assistance from people smugglers.⁵⁸ Others believe, however, that the main motive for this type of involvement on the part of the Roma in the city of Pazardzhik is economic, given that assisted fighters compensate their benefactors in kind, leaving behind their vehicles or cell phones. According to some of the respondents, the Roma involved in such logistics were unaware of the real nature of their illegal activities.⁵⁹ At the same time, though, a question that merits particular attention and examination is how the respective clandestine network representatives were contacted, as contacts were essential in carrying out such criminal activities regardless of the motives.⁶⁰

If proven in court, the above acts and appeals could be accepted as evidence of the defendants' identification with some of the postulates of Islamism and global jihad, especially the ones asserting extreme antagonism between 'the Muslim world' and 'the West' and a need for a war to be waged by the Muslims, who are 'victims' of 'the West', the ones calling for the establishment of a new

⁵⁶ For information on the main ideas of the so called 'global jihad movement', please refer to the CSD publication *Monitoring Radicalisation: A Framework for Risk Indicators*. Sofia, 2017.

⁵⁷ Interview with a representative of the intelligence and law enforcement institutions, June 15, 2015 .

⁵⁸ Interview with a representative of the intelligence and law enforcement institutions, June 18, 2015.

⁵⁹ Interview with a representative of the intelligence and law enforcement institutions, June 17, 2016 .

⁶⁰ Interview with a representative of the intelligence and law enforcement institutions, June 12, 2015 (E. T.).

caliphate as a political and religious State body governed by Sharia law.⁶¹

It is important to note that the evidence gathered by the intelligence and law enforcement services do not indicate that Ahmed Mussa's adherents established or maintained connections with active radical Islamist organisations. According to indirect information sources, however, Ahmed Mussa was associated with an international group, based in Graz and Cologne, disseminating ISIS ideology.⁶² According to the same source, Mr. Mussa travelled 10 times to Graz in the period from 2013 to 2014 and engaged in personal contacts with the group's local branch leader. It appears that the acts detected by the law enforcement agencies were influenced by contacts with radicalised persons in Austria and Germany. It appears also that those acts represented an independent trajectory of development in some Salafi community members aspiring to symbolic connection and identification with the transnational Muslim community. In doing so, they resorted to rhetoric that abounded at the time and was particularly topical and manifest in the media and in the social networks in the wake of ISIS establishment in April 2013 and the proclamation of a 'Caliphate' in June 2014.

It is noteworthy that according to information adduced in the Bill of Indictment submitted under the criminal case, the felonious activities of some Salafi community members in the city of Pazardzhik commenced after the start of the second trial against Ahmed Mussa in 2012 (criminal case 330/2012) and following the

escalation of the conflict in Syria and Iraq from the summer of 2013 onwards. It worth investigating further to what extent the highly publicised criminal trial of 2012 and the public exposure of the figure of Ahmed Mussa, on the one hand, and the escalation and radicalisation of the conflict in Syria in the wake of ISIS' emergence, on the other hand, contributed to an escalation of criminal activity among some Salafi community members in the *Iztok* neighbourhood. It is also relevant to mention that, according to some respondents, in the wake of the raid carried out by the State Agency for National Security (SANS) in 2014 and after the start of the trial, the practice of loud proselytising by Mr. Mussa's adherents in the streets of *Iztok* neighbourhood was discontinued.⁶³

Factors Contributing to the Emergence of a Community Professing Salafi Interpretations of Islam

The emergence within the *Iztok* neighbourhood of the city of Pazardzhik of a community of people professing Salafi interpretations of Islam, untraditional for Bulgaria, is the outcome of a set of factors, each weighing into the process. The main critical factors include: 1) the establishment, as a result of labour migration to Western Europe, of connections with the transnational umma of devout Muslims and the ensuing familiarization with interpretations of Islam uncommon for this country; 2) the emergence of a powerful leader enjoying strong moral authority in the community; 3) creating

⁶¹ Sharia, or Islamic law, originated in the Arab Muslim Caliphate in 7th century and develop completely by the 12th century. It is a totality of legal, moral, and religious norms of Islam, enshrined in the Qur'an and the Sunnah, covering all aspects of orthodox Muslims' lives. Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Sudan are the countries where Sharia plays a dominant role in most areas of national law. In most Muslim-majority countries, with the exception of Turkey, Sharia does not have a dominant role, but elements of it are present, to a significant extent, in one or more areas of the law of the land.

⁶² БНР, „Ахмед Муса е част от международна група, разпространяваща идеите на „Ислямска Държава“, 23.12.2015 г. A reference was made in the Bulgarian National Radio newscast to a report by the Austrian State Prosecutor's Office forwarded to the Pazardzhik Provincial Prosecutor's Office under the treaty on mutual legal assistance between the authorities of the Member States.

⁶³ Interview conducted with two residents of the *Iztok* neighbourhood (spouses) on June 17, 2016.

and maintaining robust social cohesion within the community based on active religious life by dint of common rituals and practices, mutual assistance, and opportunities for involvement in economic activity; 4) an opportunity to lead a religious life in a mosque of their own; 5) an opportunity to outgrow the stigma of the Roma identity by claiming affiliation and identification with the transnational Muslim community.

As mentioned earlier, another factor that played a crucial role were the contacts established by Ahmed Mussa with mosques in Vienna and Cologne. It was there that he made up his mind to convert to Islam and to become an Islamic preacher. There is hardly any doubt that the influences of the uncommon for the Islamic tradition in Bulgaria Salafi interpretations of Islam in the *Iztok* neighbourhood came from Western Europe. It appears that they were made possible through the networks of labour migrants and the opportunity for shelter and support provided by local Muslim communities of previously settled immigrants and their mosques. This could be also the result of the little-known and unstudied practice of the so called pilgrimage tourism – a type of tourism, where Bulgarian Muslims travel, individually or in groups, and stay at various mosques in Western Europe in the framework of charitable activities.⁶⁴

The emergence of a leader with Ahmed Mussa's qualities played an important role in the process of shaping the community. Mr. Mussa's leadership is an achievement in the context of a gaping deficit of morally legitimate leadership within the Roma communities, which has two aspects. First, during the transition period, some local Roma leaders lost their' credibility and moral reputation within their communities (as in many cases these were based on activities

such as usury.). This opened a niche for leadership stemming from religious morality and trust.⁶⁵ In addition, as Roma people have little or no access to Eastern Orthodox Muslim structures, exercising leadership through any of the two traditional religions in the country is practically impossible. Therefore, the emergence of leaders in the Roma community through the authority of religion proved possible through Evangelism, and in the case of the *Iztok* neighbourhood – through Islam in its Salafi interpretation. It is in the context of such deficits that the investment of trust in Ahmed Mussa and the formation of a robust and cohesive community around him can be explained.

Almost all interviewees called attention to the strong mutual assistance principle among the members of the Salafi community in the *Iztok* neighbourhood or to their cohesion. At the same time, though, they shared also the view that adopting and professing Salafism in the neighbourhood is contingent on offering and accepting financial or other material benefits. There are three ideas about the key role material incentives play in adopting and professing Salafism in the *Iztok* neighbourhood of the city of Pazardzhik. Most commonly, people think that money is involved. Others suppose that Salafi community members receive aid in-kind through donations. Yet others think that members are attracted by the strong group solidarity among the Salafis giving them access to material incentives.

Quite a few respondents shared the opinion that members of the Salafi community in Pazardzhik received cash directly 'from abroad' to change their appearance and dress style (growing a beard or wearing a niqāb).⁶⁶ Considering the absence of evidence in support

⁶⁴ This type of pilgrimage tourism was mentioned by A. Zhelyazkova in an interview conducted on June 5, 2015.

⁶⁵ Interview with Slavyanka Ivanova, independent expert, August 1, 2016.

⁶⁶ Interviews with: a Roma health mediator, April 21, 2016; social workers from the Social Assistance Directorate (SAD) in the city of Pazardzhik, May 20, 2016; social workers from the SAD in the town of Assenovgrad, June 2, 2016; representatives of the National Network of Health Mediators, June 24, 2016.

of such hypothesis, it remains hearsay, even though it was shared repeatedly by nearly all respondents. It should be noted that some of the respondents underscored that they had 'heard it through the grapevine' but had not seen anything themselves. At the same time, though, the respondents found such hypothesis plausible considering the improvement witnessed in the living conditions of certain Salafi community members, such as home renovations and better home furnishings,⁶⁷ spending noticeably more when grocery shopping at the local food stores,⁶⁸ and not applying for monthly social assistance benefits at the local branches of the Social Assistance Agency.⁶⁹

According to other respondents, who also shared the opinion that material benefits attracted some Roma to Salafism, such benefits were received not as direct cash but rather in the form of in-kind donations from mosques in Western Europe,⁷⁰ and from conducting economic activity within the neighbourhood. Thus, according to Yashar Mustafa, a member of the small Salafi community in the neighbourhood, charitable gatherings are held on a regular basis where clothes, food or cash donations are given away to the needy regardless of their faith.⁷¹ It should be noted that the improvements witnessed in the housing conditions of some Salafi community

members in Pazardzhik could be explained also with the frequent trips abroad for employment purposes taken by men from the community to countries in Western Europe, in particular Germany, Poland, etc.⁷² Similar improvement in the economic situation among Roma groups practicing temporary labour migration has been witnessed countrywide.⁷³ The occupations that some members of the Salafi community in Pazardzhik engage in (buying and selling goods, including from Turkey, running shops selling gold or phones, imported or sold second hand from Western Europe, transporting labour migrants in private vans to countries in Western Europe)⁷⁴ are yet another plausible explanation for the improvement witnessed in their material condition.

As to the principle of strong group support and mutual assistance within the community, it obviously plays an important socialising role and intensifies the sense of belonging to the group. Support within the community may involve provision of aid in-kind (meat, coal) to poorer members, or help with home renovations,⁷⁵ as well as provision of medicines and care to Salafis experiencing health issues.⁷⁶ A telling example of this was a case shared by respondents involving a person who adopted Salafism after becoming immobilised as a result of illness. Salafi community members kept assisting that person with getting down from a higher floor of

According to a resident of the *Iztok* neighbourhood, if there were some monetary benefit, it benefited just a few people from the community, who then motivated the rest, April 21, 2016.

⁶⁷ Interviews with: social workers from the SAD in the city of Pazardzhik, May 20, 2016; representatives of the National Network of Health Mediators, June 24, 2016.

⁶⁸ Interview with a Roma health mediator from the city of Pazardzhik, April 21, 2016.

⁶⁹ Interview with social workers from the SAD in the city of Pazardzhik, May 20, 2016.

⁷⁰ Interview with a representative of the intelligence and law enforcement institutions, June 17, 2016.

⁷¹ The interview was given by Yashar Mustafa to Christian Muhrbeck and Frank Stier for their study *Добре познатите чужденци – мюсюлманите в България*, commissioned by the Sofia Bureau of the Konrad

Adenauer Foundation and conducted in April 2015. Available at: <http://www.kas.de/bulgarien/bg/publications/41790/>

⁷² Five of all 14 defendants in criminal case 44/2016 are alleged to have travelled abroad, in particular to Germany, Poland or Turkey, to take seasonal jobs or to engage in buying and selling for profit.

⁷³ Interview with a representative of the National Network of Health Mediators, June 13, 2016.

⁷⁴ Interview with a representative of the intelligence and law enforcement institutions, June 15, 2015. According to information provided by a health mediator, information of such activities is contained in the Bill of Indictment submitted in criminal case 44/2016, April 21, 2016.

⁷⁵ A health mediator, April 21, 2016.

⁷⁶ A resident of the *Iztok* neighbourhood, April 21, 2016.

his residence in his wheelchair to attend the mosque, which, without doubt, provided him with an opportunity to socialise and feel accepted while suffering from a disease depriving him of the ability to move on his own.⁷⁷ A more thorough research on the manifestations of Salafism in the *Iztok* neighbourhood of the city of Pazardzhik should focus on the Salafi converts' community life, forms of communication, interaction and motivation for involvement and belonging to their community.

It could be said that available qualitative information on the forms of productive economic activity and employment within the community, as well as on the mechanisms of social assistance among its members, points to the operation of a social and economic network used by the community of believers to interact, as well as to include and engage new members.

Identity-trajectory also plays a role in the formation of a community of Salafi believers in the *Iztok* neighbourhood. In other words, the process observed should be interpreted also as a reaction to the traditional discriminatory attitude towards the Roma population in this country. A not inconsiderable part of Roma community members in Bulgaria identify themselves as Turks, Vlachs or Bulgarians mostly to escape the Roma stigma. The residents of the *Iztok* neighbourhood in the city of Pazardzhik embracing Salafi interpretation of Islam identify themselves as Turks of the Muslim religion and with Turkish as their mother tongue. According to representatives of the National Network of Health Mediators, who have direct and long experience in a number of

Roma communities in Bulgaria going back to the 1990s, discriminatory attitudes towards the local Roma community are quite typical for the municipality of Pazardzhik. There is also a lack of adequate Roma integration policy and there are no targeted social programs to facilitate their integration.⁷⁸ At the same time, the labour migration experience amassed in recent years allows local Roma to experience prejudice-free relations marked by equal treatment in contrast to the attitudes they are systematically subjected to in their native country.⁷⁹ Inefficient social work in a number of Roma neighbourhoods and the absence of strong government institutions there makes it possible for religious movements to penetrate the communities and gain trust relatively fast.⁸⁰ Adopting Salafism provides an opportunity to outgrow the Roma stigma and affiliate with a wider Islamic community that is transnational and provides identity beyond the marginal status and the discriminatory attitude at home.⁸¹ The community members' conviction and hope that their faith is Islam's 'purest' and 'humblest' tradition add a positive self-awareness which probably contributes to self-assertion and improves self-confidence.

When discussing what motivates some Roma neighbourhood dwellers to adopt Salafism, the role that faith has to play in the process should not be overlooked, either. Opinions concerning the sincerity of faith among Salafi Roma were quite controversial. According to some respondents, faith is absolutely irrelevant in this process and serves only as a pretext which justifies the material and social motives for adopting Salafism.⁸² The same respondents

⁷⁷ A resident of the *Iztok* neighbourhood, April 21, 2016.

⁷⁸ Some respondents mentioned cases where Roma were denied service at local eating establishments (a representative of the National Network of Health Mediators, June 24, 2016; a resident of the *Iztok* neighbourhood, April 21, 2016).

⁷⁹ A representative of the National Network of Health Mediators, June 24, 2016.

⁸⁰ A representative of the National Network of Health Mediators, June 24, 2016.

⁸¹ A representative of the National Network of Health Mediators, June 24, 2016. The same thesis was expressed by A. Zhelyazkova in an interview conducted on June 5, 2015.

⁸² Social workers from the Social Assistance Directorate (SAD) in the city of Pazardzhik, May 20, 2016; social workers from the SAD in the city of Plovdiv, June 2,

maintain that the extreme marginalisation suffered by that community and its low education render it easily susceptible and prone to manipulation based on various (religious) influences.⁸³ Other respondents assert that the reasons for embracing this interpretation of Islam, which is a novelty in Bulgaria, differ at the individual level and depend on individual circumstances and attitudes. While material incentives might be the dominant reason for some, others could be enthused by personal pain, by purely faith-related or social motives.⁸⁴ There are respondents who think that adopting Salafism stems from a sincere religious feeling, revealing the need for a mainstay in a life of hardships and practically no institutions to support the Roma community.⁸⁵ Such hypothesis is confirmed by the Salafi community members' behaviour characterized, for instance, by regular mosque attendance and adherence to prescriptions for righteous behaviour (e.g., abstinence from alcohol and smoking). According to health mediators, religiosity among the Roma is more pronounced than among the Bulgarians. The main indicators supporting such thesis include a stricter observance of religious rituals and dogmas on the part of the Roma, regular attendance at places of worship, Evangelical churches or mosques, and the establishment, as a whole, of passionate religious communities characterised by active social connections and relations of mutual assistance.⁸⁶ Taking all this into account, it appears that the group of believers around Ahmed Mussa lead an active religious life,

having its own ritualistic rhythm, motivated by conviction and the trust in belonging to the 'better and purer' Islamic faith.⁸⁷ This aspect of the life of the community and the individual motivation to join it should not be ignored, but should be viewed as essential to a proper understanding of the entire process.

It could be argued that the process of establishing a community professing Salafi interpretation of Islam in the *Iztok* neighbourhood is the outcome of the dynamics between the Roma's marginalisation and ghettoisation, on the one hand, and their cosmopolitisation as a result of labour migration to countries in Western Europe, on the other hand. Some of the *Iztok* neighbourhood inhabitants have joined the migrant flows and have acquired experience in more than one country outside Bulgaria, where they feel liberated from the Roma stigma typical of their native country. They have established contacts with new communities in the destination countries and have gained experience as people who are not necessarily subjected to discriminatory treatment. These opportunities for getting employment have resulted in improvement in their financial situation and material circumstances at home. At the same time, though, the discriminatory attitude towards the Roma in the city of Pazardzhik has remained unchanged. Both in Pazardzhik and nation-wide, no effective and consistent policies aimed at integrating these communities have been developed. As a result, the share of Roma who are either illiterate, or have little

2016; social workers from the SAD in the town of Assenovgrad, June 2, 2016.

⁸³ Social workers from the SAD in the city of Pazardzhik, May 20, 2016. This statement was made in reference to Roma converts to Salafism in the village of Aleko Konstantinovo near Pazardzhik.

⁸⁴ This opinion of a resident of the *Iztok* neighbourhood has been recorded almost verbatim, April 21, 2016.

⁸⁵ "Those people from *Iztok* (neighbourhood) have neither jobs, nor education, the state has abdicated and all they have is prayer and food", a representative of the intelligence and law enforcement institutions, June 17, 2016. A similar view was expressed also by a resident of

the *Iztok* neighbourhood, April 21, 2016: "Everyone is searching for something in the hope that if they pray, their lives will improve". A representative of the National Network of Health Mediators also shared the view that religiosity among the Roma was higher, June 24, 2016.

⁸⁶ A representative of the National Network of Health Mediators, June 13, 2016.; A representative of the National Network of Health Mediators, June 24, 2016.

⁸⁷ A resident of the *Iztok* neighbourhood, April 21, 2016: "Everyone is searching for something in the hope that if they pray, their lives will improve".

formal schooling rises, as, respectively, does the share of long-term unemployed. Susceptible to religious influences, the Roma are liable to invest their trust in various religious denominations offering socialisation, spiritual guidance and a value system. This role was played earlier by Protestantism or Evangelism and more recently by interpretations of Islam that are novel in this country. They offer an attitude of respect through faith, as well as space for association, community affiliation, and communication.

In any case, a thorough analysis of the motivation and the reasons for adopting Salafi interpretations of Islam by the Roma in the *Iztok* neighbourhood should be based primarily on field work and in-depth-interviews with community representatives. The information on this issue presented in this report is based on the observations and attitudes of their neighbours and representatives of local institutions.

Processes of Adopting Evangelism and Salafism among Roma – Some Possible Analogies

A familiarisation with existing research on the conversion of Roma in Bulgaria to Evangelical Christianity indicates some similarities to the process of adopting Salafi interpretation of Islam in the *Iztok* neighbourhood, especially in regards to the factors generating these processes, as well as to their impact on Roma's personal and community life and their self-awareness. Some of the authors, who tackle the

dynamics of Roma's conversion to Protestantism since the 1990s, explain the phenomenon by pointing to factors such as Roma's ghettoisation and social marginalisation and to the subsequent opportunity Evangelical churches provide for the social reorganisation of the communities at risk and for maintaining one's mental balance.⁸⁸ A review of the analyses on the subject, put forward by Magdalena Slavkova and other authors, points to four main motivations for embracing the Evangelical faith by various Roma communities.⁸⁹

The leading motivation, it is proposed, is that Evangelical churches promote a religious life in one's own social environment. They also give Roma believers the opportunity to read the Holy Writ in their mother tongue, whether Romanes or Turkish.⁹⁰ We cannot but draw an analogy to the *Abu Bekir* mosque, which has been functioning as the community's dedicated temple since it was built in 2002. The process of founding Roma Evangelical churches is perceived as positive and desirable in the context of ethnic discrimination and Roma's restricted access to leadership positions in the Christian religious institutions during the years of transition. Thus, the desire and ambition of prominent Roma to pursue leadership positions and empowerment, which cannot be realised within the Orthodox Church is an additional motivation.⁹¹ A similar constellation can also be observed in the case of the Salafi community in the *Iztok* neighbourhood. Roma people are certainly underrepresented in the structures of the Muslim denomination and can hardly access training at the Islamic religious educational

⁸⁸ Марушиакова, Е., В. Попов (1993) Циганите в България. София – Клуб 90, с. 166-166; Томова, И. (1998) Роми. В: Кръстева, А. (ред.) Общности и идентичност в България. София – Петекстон, с. 343. – цитирани при Беновска-Събкова, М. и Велислав Алтънов, Евангелската конверсия сред ромите в България: между капсулирането и глобализацията.

⁸⁹ Magdalena Slavkova is a leading researcher into the topic. See: Славкова, М (2007) Циганите евангелисти в България. София – Парадигма.

⁹⁰ Славкова, М (2007) Циганите евангелисти в България. София – Парадигма, с. 172-178.

⁹¹ Донкова, Ж. (2014) Явлението „Етническа църква“ в България – интеграционен механизъм или самосегрегация, в: Мизов, М. (съст.) Възходът на национализмите. Ромската интеграция, София – Авангард „Прима“, с. 231.

institutions in Bulgaria. The fact that seven of the fourteen defendants standing trial, including Ahmed Mussa, are informal preachers reveals a desire to work and exert influence in the community, in this case, through religion.

The second important motivating factor is the 'attractiveness' of the religious practice of Evangelical churches, seeking to respond to the psychological and emotional needs of the believers and providing a scene for being expressive and spontaneous. In addition, Evangelical pastors are show an active interest in their congregations' lives, discussing with them their daily concerns and providing guidance and advice. Music and dance are often integrated into services, with some Pentecostal churches even resorting to the so-called charismatic practices, such as speaking in tongues and falling into trance. There are testimonies for some similar practices in the Salafi community, such as Mr. Mussa falling into an odd state during sermon, delivering sermons on topics pertaining to the quotidian lives of believers, and telling stories or making promises for miraculous healings.⁹² Last but not least, he engages in direct daily interaction with the community of believers.

The third and equally important motivating factor is that Protestant churches provide the opportunity to establish a sound personal relationship between believers, based on mutual understanding and assistance, a sense of belonging and community life.⁹³ Researchers place charitable activities of the Protestant churches, such as distributing material aid to the poorest members of society in moments of crisis, as the least important motivation. In this sense, the authors define the role of the church as socialising. , The process of attracting

Protestant church (Evangelical or Adventist) followers, also through numerous charitable initiatives and social programs, leads to the socialisation of part of the inhabitants of the Roma populated neighbourhoods.⁹⁴ The available data about the religious community in the Pazardzhik neighbourhood reveals an analogous motivating process that is related to the constant mutual support within the community, to the believers' sense of responsibility for other community members' needs, and to the space of sharing and belonging they experience around the basic markers of religious life in and around the mosque.

The traditional manifestations of charity associated with Islam in and outside Bulgaria, such as offering charity dinners (iftar) or organising in-kind donation drives at mosques in Western Europe, are undoubtedly conducive to the socialisation of the members of the community.

It should be noted that some of the serious scholars of Evangelical Christianity among the Roma emphasize that the role of the financial aid from international sources is often exaggerated. The same authors deny the thesis that external financial support is the main motivation for joining Protestant churches. According to them, the process is caused by a complex of factors. Among these, the Protestant missionaries' proselytism comes first, and the intensity of one's emotional experience during worship and one's faith that healing is possible carry equal weight.⁹⁵ In light of the, widely held, but unsubstantiated opinion that the adoption of Salafi interpretation of Islam in the *Iztok* neighbourhood is contingent on direct payments in cash, it is worth

⁹² Interview with a representative of the intelligence and law enforcement institutions, June 18, 2015.

⁹³ Беновска-Събкова, М. и Велислав Алтънов, Евангелската конверсия сред ромите в България: между капсулирането и глобализацията, с. 16.

⁹⁴ Донкова, Ж. (2014) Явлението „Етническа църква“ в България – интеграционен механизъм или

самосегрегация, в: Мизов, М. (съст.) Възходът на национализмите. Ромската интеграция, София – Авангард „Прима“, с. 228.

⁹⁵ Славкова, М. (2008) Циганите евангелисти в България. София – Парадигма, с. 256.

emphasizing the complexity of factors that facilitate this process. The hypothesis that material stimuli are a key factor in adopting Salafi interpretation of Islam by Roma in the *Iztok* neighbourhood should be treated with caution. Linking the process of establishing a small local community on the basis of religion primarily to economic stimuli carries the risks of distorting the nature of the actual transformations taking place in the community, as well as the dynamics that drive and unite it. This in itself could hamper the understanding of the process and of the complex factors that have generated it, as well as the rational formulation of effective policies.

Observations on the influence that Protestantism has exerted upon the Roma population are very similar to those on the influence of the recently adopted interpretation of Islam on some Roma in the *Iztok* neighbourhood. In regards to Evangelical Roma, some authors identify a series of positive changes in their behaviour, values, and everyday lives, such as their struggle against alcoholism and drug dependency and their imposition of sobriety as a standard to live by. In the quotidian existence of Evangelical Christians, smoking and drinking alcohol are regarded as sins that need to be overcome. Men often testify that after they receive the baptism, they no longer get embroiled in brawls and beatings. In an effort to observe the commandment that they should love their neighbours as themselves, the believers stop uttering maledictions and expletives. After embracing Evangelical Christianity, believers change their vocabulary, avoiding obscenities and frequently mentioning God or Jesus Christ.⁹⁶ The same process could be observed in the *Iztok* neighbourhood in Pazardzhik among Ahmed Mussa's followers, who start abstaining

from alcohol, and change their attitudes towards their wives. They perceive themselves to be righteous Muslims affiliated with a transnational community larger than their local Roma community. According to the believers themselves, the new religion has influenced them positively, as it has improved conjugal relations, and has contributed to curbing criminal activity in the neighbourhood and enhancing order and solidarity in the community.⁹⁷

Factors Influencing Manifestations of Sympathy to Radical Islamist Organisations

It is important to stress that the discussion of factors contributing to the formation of a community that adopted the Salafi interpretation of Islam is not a discussion about the factors leading to Islamist radicalisation. Viewing any community of believers/proselytes as an indication of Islamist radicalisation being present is misleading for both the understanding of the processes which have catalysed the emergence of this community and the understanding the potential risks of Islamist radicalisation.

The most recent empirical studies in Western Europe and beyond suggest that the factors contributing to Islamist radicalisation are not necessarily associated with the adoption and internalisation of a given religious branch or interpretation of Islam, and even less so when it comes to IS recruits and FTFs. The speed with which people are now often radicalised to violence under the influence of IS in Western Europe, means that many do not actually become particularly religious or observant at

⁹⁶ Славкова, М. (2004) „Турските цигани в България и евангелското движение“, в: Българска Етнология, бр. 3: 17.

⁹⁷ The interviews were given by Ahmed Mussa's wife and by Yashar Mustafa to Christian Muhrbeck and Frank

Stier for their study *Добре познатите чужденци – мюсюлманите в България*, commissioned by the Sofia Bureau of the Konrad Adenauer Foundation and conducted in April 2015. Available at: <http://www.kas.de/bulgarien/bg/publications/41790/>

all. Adherence to Salafi traditions is therefore not a necessary precondition for Islamist radicalisation.

It is also important to highlight that despite numerous attempts of external penetration or 'import' of Salafism and the exposure of part of the local Muslim population to Salafi interpretations of Islam since the 1990s (through education abroad or via foreign religious emissaries and foundations active in the country) up until the emergence of IS as a new actor on the global Islamist scene, there have been no known signs of similar risk behaviour associated with openly expressing support for the ideas and causes of terrorist organisations.

The factors discussed above that potentially contributed to the formation of a Salafi community (social segregation, discrimination, stigmatisation, seeking for new meaning and social identification, strong group solidarity and support, integration within the community through participating in informal economic activities, shared identity and religious practices, cosmopolitanisation through increased travel to Western Europe and exposure to new religious practices and ideas abroad) are likely to have played a role in creating vulnerabilities to penetration of more radically charged ideas channelled through the internet, the local informal leader or through contacts with Islamist influences abroad. In particular, the rise of a strong spiritual leader who enjoys a high degree of moral authority and trust and is able to mobilise support can be viewed as a vulnerability factor that can potentially make certain members of the community increasingly receptive and more easily manipulable by simplified interpretations and answers to important questions about life, adapted to be accessible

and to resonate with an uncritical and uneducated audience.⁹⁸

However, such a vulnerability alone is insufficient to explain the newfound and openly demonstrated fascination with and sympathies for the ideas and causes of IS among a limited number of individuals in the *Iztok* quarter of the town of Pazardjik. Given this, the key question that needs to be subjected to more rigorous study in the future is of those specific factors, which have contributed to the interest or support on the part of some members of this community of the ideas of Islamist organisations.

In order to better understand the complexities and dynamics of this development, it is important to look at the timeframe in which a certain mobilisation on the part of the followers and closest associates of Ahmed Musa was registered, which resulted in the sudden visibility and intensification of symbolic acts of approval for IS, change in rhetoric towards accommodating some of the ideas of the jihadi branch of Salafism, consumption and dissemination of online content expressing approval or glorification of IS, its fighters or the jihadi cause (including online materials related to violence), and the open and pro-active propaganda activities among the community.⁹⁹ According to the court files this happened mostly since late 2012 and the beginning of 2013, which coincides with two major events internationally and domestically.

Undoubtedly, the key trigger for the emergence of such behaviour is the rise of IS as a new actor on the Islamist scenewhose powerful propaganda machine operates both online and through recruiters among Muslim communities in Europe. The evidence provided within the third trial indictment against Ahmed

⁹⁸ Interviews with law enforcement and intelligence representatives, June 15 and 18, 2015.

⁹⁹ According to evidence brought under criminal case 44/2016.

Musa and his 13 followers shows clearly that they have been exposed to the propaganda of IS online, but possibly also through direct contacts between Ahmed Musa with radical mosques and individuals in Western Europe, but also Turkey.¹⁰⁰

The external influences and contacts to which Ahmed Musa and the group have been potentially exposed is another key factor that deserves more attention. While there is evidence that Ahmed Musa preached online to followers in Germany and Austria. i.e. members of the Iztok Salafi community living permanently or temporarily abroad),¹⁰¹ much less is known about the community's contacts with radical Islamist mosques and organisations abroad.

Ahmed Musa's contacts with radical Islamist circles mainly in Austria and Germany date back to the early 2000s. In 2004 he was convicted for being part of a radical Islamist organisation active in Germany. There are some indications that during the incriminating period of the third trial against him (2013-2014), he maintained contacts to a radical Islamist organisation in Germany and Austria, charged with propagating the ideas of IS.¹⁰² Furthermore, the information that Ahmed Musa personally and his close associates provided logistical support to foreign terrorist fighters from Western Europe and the Balkans on their way to Syria via Turkey, also raises the question of the scope and nature of links maintained by the group with Islamist circles and a transnational community that enabled

the establishment of contacts with the transiting foreign fighters.¹⁰³

The second potentially relevant contributing factor for the sudden change in behaviour of the group towards openly expressing sympathies for IS and its ideas may have been the opening of the second trial against Ahmed Musa in September 2012, as this is reportedly the point when their online propaganda activity of the group in relation to disseminating and consuming materials related to jihadist activities in Syria and Iraq has intensified.¹⁰⁴ The increased public and media attention surrounding the start of the trial may have fuelled the glorification and martyrdomisation of Ahmed Musa among the community, as well as the feeling of "us versus them" within the group.

Beyond the external pull factors such as the IS propaganda machine, the questions remains as to the individual motivations and push factors in this process. When discussing factors at individual and group level for sympathising with a terrorist organisation and openly demonstrating support for its ideas and cause (albeit at a fairly superficial level), there is a need to look beyond the traditionally offered explanations of spiritual vs. material motivations, or the decisive role of a single radical preacher. The actions registered by the authorities are likely to have been motivated also by individual 'demand' on the part of the members of the community, namely by personal trajectories and the need to connect

¹⁰⁰ According to evidence brought in the indictment of criminal case 44/ 2016, part of the IS advertisement materials distributed in the neighborhood were bought in Turkey.

¹⁰¹ Court indictment for criminal case 44/2016

¹⁰² БНР, „Ахмед Муса е част от международна група, разпространяваща идеите на „Ислямска Държава““, 23.12.2015 г.. A reference was made in the Bulgarian National Radio newscast to a report by the Austrian State Prosecutor's Office forwarded to the Pazardzhik Provincial Prosecutor's Office under the treaty on mutual judicial legal assistance between the authorities of the Member States.

¹⁰³ The evidence presented in the court indictment suggest that this support includes transport facilitation, supply of mobile phones and accommodation to at least three confirmed foreign fighters travelling via Turkey to Syria. The potential contact with 'smugglers' was also mentioned in relation to facilitating the transportation and passage of foreign fighters by Ahmed Musa and some of his most trusted fellows (Interview with a representative of the intelligence and law enforcement institutions, June 15 and 18, 2015).

¹⁰⁴ Court indictment of criminal case 44/2016, p. 8.

with and feel part of the transnational Muslim community, to respond to individual grievances, seeking and needs, for which the widely accessible and popular rhetoric of IS provides a suitable venting channel at this given moment in time. A potentially relevant factor at group level is the increased feeling of social 'prestige' through the projection of a particular image by the group (as a result of its demonstrative association with IS) to the rest of the community, and as the result of being suddenly looked upon as different, 'important', even 'scary' and surrounded by a degree of mysticism. This may have contributed to further cohesion and mobilisation within the group, combined with the perceived 'external' attack on their religious leader through the 2014 court trial.

There are indications that the widespread negative public perception of the activities of IS have led Ahmed Musa to be very careful when bringing up sensitive topics such as the 'caliphate' or 'jihad' during regular prayers and preaches, but spoke about these only in front of a closed circle.¹⁰⁵ The arrests in November 2014 of several members of the group and the charges brought against them in court seem to also have diminished the 'attractiveness' of the group among the community members and their activities became much less visible. For example, the sale of IS-related articles outside the mosque and the open calls towards members of the community to adopt the ideas of the group seem to have subsided after the arrests.

The factors discussed here as potentially contributing to certain members of the Salafi community in the *Iztok* neighbourhood of Pazardzhik to express sympathies for the ideas and actions of IS need to be subjected to further study through in-depth field work among the community itself. Only then can the

combination of factors and processes be understood in their complexity.

¹⁰⁵ Court indictment НОХД 44/2016, p. 29

List of References

Донкова, Ж. (2014) Явлението „Етническа църква“ в България – интеграционен механизъм или самосегрегация, в: Мизов, М. (съст.) Възходът на национализмите. Ромската интеграция, София – Авангард „Прима“.

Марушиакова, Е., В. Попов (1993) Циганите в България. София – Клуб 90, с. 166-166;

Томова, И. (1998) Роми. В: Кръстева, А. (ред.) Общности и идентичност в България. София – Петекстон, с. 343. – цитирани при Бенювска-Събкова, М. и Велислав Алтънов, Евангелската конверсия сред ромите в България: между капсулирането и глобализацията.

МЦПМКВ (2004) Окончателен доклад по проекта „Оценка на съществуващите образователни политики и практики за предоставяне на равен достъп до обучение на деца от малцинствата и за разработване на препоръки за устойчиво решение на образователните проблеми на малцинствата”, МЦПМКВ – София, цитиран в: Отворено общество (2008) Ромите в България, с 28.

Национален статистически институт (2011) *Преброяване на населението и жилищния фонд през 2011 г.* Том 1 Население, Книга 3. Икономически характеристики на населението, с. 56. <http://www.nsi.bg/census2011/pagebg2.php?p2=175&sp2=218>

Николов, Й. „Първи идват емисарите”, в. „Капитал”, 14.08.2004 г

Обвинителен акт по Дело НОХД 44/ 2016 г. на Окръжен съд, Пазарджик по обвинения за подбуждане на дискриминация и омраза на религиозна основа (чл. 164 от НК) и за провеждане на пропаганда към война (чл. 407 от НК).

Отворено общество (2008) Ромите в България. Информационен справочник. Институт „Отворено общество” – София.

Славкова, М. (2008) Циганите евангелисти в България. София – Парадигма.

Славкова, М. (2004) „Турските цигани в България и евангелското движение“, в: Българска Етнология, бр. 3: 17.

Тилкиджиев, Н., В. Миленкова, К. Петкова и Н. Милева (2009) Отпадащите роми, София-Институт Отворено общество.

„24 часа”, Роми пребиха пастор, дават им 15 денонощия арест, 02.05.2011 г.;

Начев, М., Пребит пастор: „Биха ме жестоко талибани!”, в. Труд, 05.05.2011 г..

Act to Limit the Wearing of Clothing Partially or Completely Covering the Face, State Gazette

(SG) issue No. 80 of 2016, <http://www.parliament.bg/bg/laws/ID/42106/>.

Christian Muhrbeck and Frank Stier (2015) *Добре познатите чужденци – мюсюлманите в България*, Konrad Adenauer Foundation. Available at: <http://www.kas.de/bulgarien/bg/publications/41790/>

News.bg, „В Пазарджик гледат дело за проповядване на ислямски фундаментализъм“, 01.11.2004 г.

Pik.bg, Джамята „Абу Бекир“ в Пазарджик имала разрешение за молитвен дом, 04.12.2014 г.

Appendix

Table 1: Population of the Iztok neighbourhood by ethnicity and religion

Ethnic group	Religion					
	Total number of the ethnic group	Eastern Orthodox	Protestant	Muslim	Declined to self-identify	No answer
Total	15,198	34.6%	3.5 %	18.2 %	8.6 %	29.7 %

Bulgarian	5,923	65.9 %	3 %	6.5 %	5.5 %	14.8 %
Turkish	4,151	6.5 %	5.5 %	54.7 %	8 %	---
Roma	2,988	35 %	4.4 %	3.7 %	18.9 %	30.2 %
Declined to self-identify	91	3	---	---	79	---
Undeclared	2,029	18	---	---	0	1,999

Source: National Statistical Institute (NSI), data made available upon official request, 2016

Table 2: Population of the Iztok neighbourhood by ethnicity and mother tongue

Ethnic group	Mother tongue					
	Total number of the ethnic group	Bulgarian	Turkish	Romani	Declined to self-identify	No answer
Total	15,198	5,543	4,765	2,717	87	2,064
Bulgarian	5,923	90 %	8 %	1 %	0.01 %	0.6 %
Turkish	4,151	0.07 %	97 %	0.02 %	---	---
Roma	2,988	5 %	6 %	88 %	---	---
Declined to self-identify	91	3	4	---	78	--
Undeclared	2,029	18	17	---	0	98 %

Source: NSI, data made available upon official request, 2016

Table 3: Residential population of the city of Pazardzhik aged 7 years and over by ethnicity and educational level

Ethnic group	Total	Higher education	Upper secondary	Lower secondary	Primary education	Incomplete primary	No schooling
Total	66,977	21 %	43 %	19 %	8.6 %	6 %	2 %
Bulgarian	54,255	25 %	49 %	17 %	5 %	3.5 %	0.5 %
Turkish	4,246	0.6 %	5 %	33 %	33 %	18 %	9 %
Roma	3,016	0.25 %	4 %	34 %	31.5 %	18 %	12 %
Declined to self-identify	323	25	53	49	35	--	--
Undeclared	4,815	14 %	34 %	23 %	16 %	9 %	3 %

Source: NSI, data made available upon official request, 2016

Table 4: Residential population of the *Iztok* neighbourhood aged 7 years and over by ethnicity and educational level

Ethnic group	Total	Higher education	Upper secondary	Lower secondary	Primary education	Incomplete primary	No schooling
<i>Total</i>	13,478	3.9 %	16.9 %	32.7 %	25.2 %	13.3 %	7.4 %
Bulgarian	5,484	8.9 %	34.3 %	31 %	14.6 %	7 %	3.8 %
Turkish	3,628	< 1 %	3.4 %	32.5 %	34.5 %	19.2 %	9.2 %
Roma	2,605	< 1 %	3.7 %	34.8 %	31.7 %	17 %	11.8 %
Declined to self-identify	76	---	---	---	25	10	---
Undeclared	1,669	24	164	587	486	256	134

Source: NSI, data made available upon official request, 2016

Table 5: Residential population of the city of Pazardzhik and its *Iztok* neighbourhood aged 15 –64 by ethnicity and economic activity

Ethnic group	Total		Economic activity rate		Employment rate		Unemployment rate	
	city	<i>Iztok</i> nbhd ¹⁰⁶	city	<i>Iztok</i> nbhd	city	<i>Iztok</i> nbhd	city	<i>Iztok</i> nbhd
<i>Total</i>	51,103	10,758	66.0	45.3	55.2	26.8	16.4	40.7
Bulgarian	41,059	4,314	71.1	58.2	61.5	41.3	13.5	29.1
Turkish	3,414	2,928	38.7	37.4	18.4	15.2	52.5	59.5
Roma	2,483	2,100	36.0	36.8	18.9	17.3	47.5	53.0
Declined to self-identify	145	61	41.4	24.6	35.9	16.4	13.3	33.3
Undeclared	3,754	1,339	55.1	34.8	43.7	20.9	20.7	39.9

Source: NSI, data made available upon official request, 2016

Table 6: Living conditions in the city of Pazardzhik and its *Iztok* neighbourhood by ethnicity of household head as of February 1, 2011

	Ethnicity of household head		
	Bulgarian	Turkish	Roma
Average number of persons sharing one room			
City of Pazardzhik	0.94	1.69	1.86
<i>Iztok</i> neighbourhood	1.20	1.69	1.86
Average floor area per person (m ²)			
City of Pazardzhik	22.45	10.41	10.06
<i>Iztok</i> neighbourhood	16.47	10.22	9.97

¹⁰⁶ For brevity's sake, the abbreviation 'nbhd' stands for neighbourhood.

Occupied dwellings with no source of water supply			
City of Pazardzhik	0.03 %	3.4 %	6.6 %
Iztok neighbourhood	3 %	3.4 %	6.6 %
Occupied dwellings connected to an on-site sanitation system (a cesspit, a septic tank, or a soak pit)			
City of Pazardzhik	1.3 %	19.6 %	27 %
Iztok neighbourhood	5.3 %	22 %	28 %
Occupied dwellings with no sewerage			
City of Pazardzhik	0.007	19.2 %	13 %
Iztok neighbourhood	7 %	21.7 %	13 %

Source: NSI, data made available upon official request, 2016



Co-funded by the Prevention and Fight against Crime Program of the European Commission, Directorate General Home Affairs. This publication reflects the views only of its authors, and the European Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.