

INTRODUCTION

Since 11 September 2001, “old” and “new” forms of radicalisation related to religion-inspired, right-wing, left-wing, ethno-nationalist, separatist and single-issue extremism, have undergone dynamic development and are to be found in most European countries. Over the last decade, Islamist radicalisation has become an issue of particular concern for many European governments. Exemplified, until recently, by the terrorist attacks in Madrid (2004) and London (2005) the phenomenon has reached new dramatic dimensions with the violent attacks in Paris from 7 January and 13 November, 2015. The current situation in Syria and Iraq and the emergence of the Islamic State have led to new forms of radicalisation, especially the phenomenon of transnational fighters traveling to and from conflict zones, who are believed to pose serious security threat to many member states. Also worrying for many countries in Europe is right-wing extremism. The terrorist attacks in Norway in July 2011 testified to the highly destructive capacity of this phenomenon. At the same time, lawful manifestations of discontent by movements such as Pegida in Germany bear the potential to escalate into violence.

Preventing and studying radicalisation has become not only European but also a global priority, giving rise to a wealth of publications that explore its motives and causes, as well as the processes whereby individuals and groups come to espouse radical ideas and engage in violent actions. Islamist radicalisation and right-wing extremism have attracted a large amount of research. In the context of resurgence of “old” and rise of “new” forms of radicalisation there is limited understanding of the factors contributing to violence, both among policy makers and academia. Furthermore, there is a lack of consensus in the literature not only on the root causes that lead to radicalisation, but on the very definition and conceptualisation of this phenomenon and its link to terrorism. Policy debates on how to confront different types of radicalisation have been ongoing in many states in the EU. Yet, in many member states decision-makers lack the appropriate evidence to guide policy actions, especially in the field of Islamist radicalisation. Radicalisation has generally been understudied in the countries of Central, East and Southeast Europe although extremism and political radicalism have long existed in most countries in the region.

The terrorist act in Bourgas, Bulgaria on 18 July 2012 was a stark demonstration that the country and its citizens are vulnerable to acts of international Islamist radicalisation. The first such incident to be perpetrated after the 2005 London underground bombings ended a period of relatively low-level jihadist activities with little or no impact on European security. It sounded a wake-up call not only to national authorities, but also to European and allied governments and to the public at large. The terrorist attack in Bulgaria called for an update of the national policy approach to counter-terrorism and the 2008 National Counter-Terrorism Plan. In response to the changing external security environment, the Bulgarian

government has adopted a number of security measures to better monitor, prevent and respond to potential terrorist threats and radicalisation processes, and to counter more effectively the transit of transnational fighters through its territory. While the government response so far has been mainly focussed on better equipping security agencies to enforce counter-terrorism measures and controls, a new national strategy and action plan drafted in 2015 envisage also the designing of “soft” policies and measures for early identification and prevention of radicalisation before it turns to violence, including through multi-agency and community engagement.¹ While this is undoubtedly a development in the right direction, any soft policies and measures need to be designed on the basis of monitoring of groups at risk and investigation of the complex social dynamics and motivating factors that serve as drivers to potential radicalisation; such monitoring and investigation are not currently performed. This need was voiced by Mr. Gilles de Kerchove, the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator at a round table hosted by CSD in January 2015. Mr. Kerchove stressed the importance of prevention and the need to develop local capabilities at the front-line to recognise early signs of radicalisation processes with the engagement of civil society and local communities.

Although the security threats in relation to international and home-grown Islamist radicalisation are on the increase in the EU,² no in-depth studies have yet been conducted with regard to how Bulgaria might be exposed to such risks. So far, there has been no known involvement of Bulgarian citizens in acts of violent Islamist radicalisation or in Islamist terrorist attacks at home or abroad. However, a worrying trend of symbolic approval of the acts of international Islamist organisations has recently been registered among segments of some isolated and marginalised Roma communities. Logistical support which transiting transnational fighters have received from members of some local Muslim communities is even more alarming. Right-wing extremist groups and individuals are rather vocal when engaging in both lawful (demonstrations and marches) and illegal (violent) acts ranging from hate-filled rhetoric and verbal harassment to unprovoked attacks against foreigners, minority members as well as Muslim or Jewish places of worship. Since the late 1990s, football hooliganism has increasingly become a major channel for manifestations of violence, xenophobia, ethnic and religious intolerance, as well as extremist and radical attitudes.

Although there is no universally accepted definition of (violent) radicalisation there is a wide consensus among scholars that this is a context-bound phenomenon with sociological and political drivers playing as much a role as ideological and psychological ones.³ Radicalisation is understood in a broad way as “the process whereby individuals come to hold radical views in relation to the status

¹ *Стратегия за противодействие на радикализацията и тероризма 2015 – 2020 г. Проект.* Available at <http://www.strategy.bg/PublicConsultations/View.aspx?lang=bg-BG&Id=1771> (accessed on 28.08.2015).

² This trend is identified in the last EU TE-STAT Report: Europol (2015), *European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report*. European Policy Office, available at: <https://www.europol.europa.eu/content/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-2015>

³ European Commission’s Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation (2008) *Radicalisation Processes Leading to Acts of Terrorism*, p. 7.

quo.”⁴ A radical stance is characterised by a “growing readiness to pursue and support far-reaching changes in society that conflict with, or pose a direct threat to the existing order.”⁵ Scholars often distinguish between violent and cognitive radicalisation. While cognitive radicalisation is associated with the process of adoption of radical ideas per se, violent radicalisation occurs when an individual takes the additional step of employing violence to further the views derived from cognitive radicalism.⁶ According to US intelligence experts,⁷ radicalisation is “the process of adopting an extremist belief system, including the willingness to use, support, or facilitate violence, as a method to effect societal change.” A broader definition of violent radicalisation refers to the phenomenon as the “process of socialisation leading to the use of violence.”⁸

The present publication considers radicalisation to be a complex relational process, which implies the identification of its transformative stages and drivers that may or may not lead to violence. The following notions are viewed as key to studying the radicalisation process as a differentiated and nuanced one:

- There is often a close association between radical or extremist views and attitudes, on the one hand, and the use of violence, on the other, although these two do not necessarily go together. Individuals and groups may espouse radical and extremist views without necessarily deploying aggressive tactics in action. At the same time, involvement in violent acts is not necessarily premised on or driven by adherence to radical beliefs and frames of thinking, but it may be motivated by personal or group loyalty or peer pressure.
- Radicalisation is best understood as a dynamic, multi-stage and multifaceted phenomenon that occurs at the sequence of individual vulnerabilities (biographical exposure) and the interactions with an enabling environment, and is therefore always a context-specific phenomenon.
- When analysing factors of radicalisation, it needs to be asked why, when and how individuals and groups decide to enlist in organisations that advance radical views; and why, when and how some of these individuals (alone or with others) engage in violent acts that (may) involve physical destruction or threat to the safety and lives of human beings. In searching the answer to these questions one should consider the micro (individual), meso (social milieu/group dynamics) and macro (broader societal and political environment) levels of analysis.

Focusing on Bulgaria, this publication addresses knowledge gap regarding the main risks and forms that radicalisation takes in the country in the context of internationally growing radicalisation challenges. The publication explores the manifestations of four different forms of radicalisation – right-wing and left-wing radicalisation, Islamist radicalisation and football hooliganism. Analysis is provided

⁴ Bartlett, J., Birdwell, J. and M. King (2010) *The Edge of Violence*, London: Demos, 2010, p. 1.

⁵ Dalgaard-Nielsen, A. (2010). “Violent Radicalization in Europe: What We Know and What We Do Not Know,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 3(9), 797:814, p. 798.

⁶ Vidino, L. and J. Brandon (2012) *Countering Radicalisation in Europe*, ICSR, King’s College, London, p. 9.

⁷ Allen, C., “Threat of Islamic Radicalization to the Homeland,” Testimony before the U.S. Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Government Affairs, 14.03.2007, p. 4.

⁸ European Commission’s Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation (2008), p. 5.

of their organisational structures and actors, their ideas and ideology and the motivations and root causes that explain their genesis and manifestations (non-violent and violent). In addition, a critical review is provided of the policy approaches, the legal and the institutional frameworks to monitor, tackle and prevent radicalisation in Bulgaria, including identification of existing gaps. This analysis is intended to guide further investigation of indicators and risk factors as the knowledge base for the design and the pilot application of a radicalisation monitoring tool.