

## II. RISKS OF ISLAMIST RADICALISATION

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the external and home-grown risks to which Bulgaria is exposed in the context of Islamist radicalisation – a phenomenon that is manifested worldwide. The study poses questions about the presence and the nature of ideas, organisational structures and actors that might be associated with Islamist radicalisation in the country and discusses the root causes for both potential Islamist radicalisation and for the observed resilience towards it on the part of local populations.<sup>37</sup>

Although the security threats related to international and home-grown Islamist radicalisation are on the increase in the EU,<sup>38</sup> no in-depth studies have yet been conducted with regard to how Bulgaria might be exposed to such risks. To date, only one academic publication has discussed comprehensively the threats of Islamist radicalisation in Bulgaria in the context of external developments and internal risks.<sup>39</sup> While this publication provides a general frame of discussion, no in-depth exploration of any of the outlined risks has been undertaken as a follow-up. A vast body of literature has been produced focusing on various aspects of the history and the present situation of historical Muslim communities in Bulgaria but there have been few studies on the developments in Islamic theological affiliations conducted after 1989 (coming from the fields of anthropology and Islamic studies).<sup>40</sup> One of the questions that these studies explore is whether and to what extent the processes of religious resurgence among some segments of the Muslim communities influence individual and collective expressions of religious profession along the axis

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<sup>37</sup> The analysis is based on desk research, including academic sources, governmental reports and strategies, court case files, media coverage and 10 semi-structured interviews with experts on Islam, Muslim communities and minority-majority relations as well as representatives of relevant intelligence and law enforcement institutions. The research was conducted in May and June 2015.

<sup>38</sup> This trend is identified in the last EU TE-STAT Report: Europol (2015), European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report. European Policy Office.

<sup>39</sup> Проданов, В. и Б. Тодорова (съст.) (2005) *Рискове за България от ислямски фундаментализъм и тероризъм*, ИК ИФИ-БАН.

<sup>40</sup> It deals with a range of topics such as the history of relations between the state and minorities, the post-1989 social and economic development of Muslim communities, their migratory practices, identity dynamics and mutual attitudes with the majority Christian population. Some representative studies include: Eminov, A. (1997) *Turkish and other Muslim Minorities of Bulgaria*. New York – Routledge; Желязкова, А. (1997) *Мюсюлманските общности на Балканите и в България*. София – ИМИР; Лозанова, Г., Миков, Л. (1999) *Ислям и култура*. София – ИМИР; Градева, Р. (2001) *История на мюсюлманската култура по българските земи*. София – ИМИР; Карамихова, М., ed. (2003) *Да живееш там, да се сънуваш тук. Емиграционни процеси в началото на XXI век*. Sofia: IMIR.

moderate – radical Islam.<sup>41</sup> Other, even more important aspects of the social life of Muslim communities that might be relevant to the exploration of Islamist radicalisation in Bulgaria remain under-researched. These include the impact of emigration for religious education in religious academies in countries of the Arab world by some members of the old Muslim communities in Bulgaria; the religious interactions between migrating Muslims from Bulgaria and local Muslim immigrant communities in Western Europe; as well as between local Muslims in Bulgaria and immigrating Muslims from countries of the Muslim world. Last but not least, no studies have been conducted on the spread and use of online Islamist propaganda.

Experts have identified four radicalisation risks to Bulgarian society stemming from external factors and influences. The first involves risks related to the activities of various terrorist organisations such as IS and al'Qa'ida. Bulgarian intelligence services point that the level of risk for terrorist attack by international terrorist organisations or individual terrorists on Bulgarian territory has become higher after the first and so far only terrorist attack of 18 July, 2012 committed against Israeli citizens at the Sarafovo airport in Bulgaria. The second risk is associated with the transit of foreign fighters through Bulgarian territory both to and from the Middle East. Foreign fighters returning to their home countries with strong combat experience and high level of radicalisation are considered to pose high security risk for the region in general, including Bulgaria when passing through its territory. The third risk involves the potential for infiltration by radicalized persons and terrorists through the intensified inflows of irregular migrants. The fourth risk is related to the influence that high religious educational institutions abroad might exert over Bulgarian citizens who graduate from them. The “risk” influences are related to the probability of propagation of radical ideas based on interpretations of Islam that are uncommon to the Hannafi Sunni tradition in Bulgaria.

The internal security risks identified by experts are associated with the social deprivation and exclusion of some communities which make them vulnerable to radical (religious) ideologies; the accessibility through the internet of radical propaganda; and the potential of provocation and spread of Islamophobic and xenophobic attitudes.<sup>42</sup>

A number of important components mark the policy context within which the potential for Islamist radicalisation in Bulgaria is dealt with. First, Bulgaria is the EU member state with the largest autochthonous Muslim community that has been formed over the centuries following the Ottoman conquest at the end of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Muslim communities have been part of the modern national Bulgarian state since its foundation in 1878. Respectively, Bulgarian society is the successor of centuries-long experience of interaction between Christian and

<sup>41</sup> Evstatiev, S. (2006) “Public Islam on the Balkans in a Wider European Context”, available at: [http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/00003105/01/simeon\\_evstatiev\\_final.pdf](http://pdc.ceu.hu/archive/00003105/01/simeon_evstatiev_final.pdf); Ghodsee K., (2010) *Muslim Lives in Eastern Europe. Gender, Ethnicity, & The Transformation of Islam in Postsocialist Bulgaria*, Princeton University Press; Троева, Е. (2012), „Традиционен” и „нов” ислям в България, *Български Фолклор*, 3-4/ 2012 г., с. 5-23; Иванова, Е. (2014) *Ислямизирани Балкани: Динамика на разказите*, НБВ, София.

<sup>42</sup> Strategy for Countering Radicalization and Terrorism 2015 – 2020, Draft, p. 4-5; Николов, Й., Росен Б., „Има ли пряка опасност за България”, в. *Капитал*, 9.01.2015.

Muslim populations. Second, hostility towards Islam has been key part of the Bulgarian national discourse which was developed historically in opposition to the (Islamic) Ottoman Empire. A third important component regards the ignorance about Islam as a religion and social practice among present day policy and opinion makers.<sup>43</sup> It should be added, however, that to some extent this is the outcome of the fact that little research has been conducted regarding the history of the Islamic profession in Bulgaria as a theological doctrine and practice.<sup>44</sup>

Public debates regarding Islamist radicalisation in Bulgaria, as reflected in the media, revolve around international developments and the processes of religious resurgence among some segments of the Bulgarian Muslim and the Roma Muslim communities. In the first case, Islamist radicalisation is discussed in relation to international conflicts involving the Islamic countries of the Middle East, politically motivated terrorist acts justified by radical and narrow interpretations of Islam (from the September 11, 2001 attack to the emergence of the Islamic State as the most recent and extreme example), as well as in connection to developments such as the debate on scarf wearing in France or the controversy over the Mohammad cartoons in Denmark that had global reverberations. Presently, the public discussion is mostly focused on the threats posed by the transiting foreign fighters as well as the potential threats of infiltration by radical elements within the growing refugee inflows entering the country.

In the second case, the processes of religious resurgence among segments of some Muslim communities are discussed in relation to the adoption of imported orthodox interpretations of Islam,<sup>45</sup> associated with a return to the roots of the religion as it was professed at the time of Mohammad (Islam purified from all developments afterwards) and not typical to the Islamic tradition in Bulgaria inherited from the time of the Ottoman Empire (the Hanafi Sunni tradition). The question that dominates this debate is whether the process of religious resurgence constitutes or not a home-grown threat of Islamist radicalisation.<sup>46</sup> The main themes of the public discussion include the activity and influence of foreign emissaries of Salafi Islam, the operation of some semi-authorized Islamic educational institutions in the country, and the processes of adoption of orthodox interpretations of Islam by some segments of the Muslim communities in the country.

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<sup>43</sup> Evstatiev (2006), p. 40.

<sup>44</sup> The interest of researchers in Bulgaria has been focused on the ethnic and cultural profile of Muslim minorities and the history of minority-majority relations in the context of the modern national Bulgarian state.

<sup>45</sup> The term orthodox Islam/orthodox interpretations of Islam is used in this chapter interchangeably with Salafism/Salafi interpretations of Islam.

<sup>46</sup> Numerous media articles discuss this issue. Experts such as A. Zhelyazkova, S. Evstatiev or V. Chukov draw a line between adoption of Salafi interpretations of Islam and Islamist radicalisation (some examples include: Манчева, М. „Владимир Чуков: В Рибново конфликтът е предизвикан от безработицата“, в. *Новинар* (<http://novinar.bg>), 25.03.2009; Чуков, В. (2013), „У нас ислямът не е радикален“, *Komentator.bg*, 3.01.2013; Евстатиев, С. (2014) „България може да се противопостави на ИДИЛ само с подкрепа на българските мюсюлмани“, в. *Капитал*, 5.11.2014 г.; Желязкова, А. (2012), „Връща ли се българското „Време разделно“?“, 23.09.2012, available at <http://www.librev.com/index.php/discussion-politics-publisher/1777-2012-09-23-10-40-53>).

The public debate on the threat of home-grown Islamist radicalisation in Bulgaria has two analytical dimensions that are often mixed together. The first involves the question how and why an orthodox-based religious resurgence took root in some Muslim communities in the country. The second deals with the question of whether and to what extent these processes may be considered a sign of Islamist radicalisation. The confusion of the two dimensions in public discussions indicates that religious resurgence based on orthodox interpretations of Islam is equal to Islamist radicalisation while specialists on Islam warn that this is not true.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, the approach of this chapter is to trace and distinguish the processes of religious resurgence based on orthodox interpretations of Islam since 1989 from those that potentially attain aspects that could carry risks of radicalisation.

It should be stressed that while external threats from Islamist radicalisation in Bulgaria prevail among the risks identified by intelligence services, this report focuses on the risks of home-grown Islamist radicalisation. The reasons for this choice are twofold. On the one hand, information about external threats and their manifestations in the country as well as about government actions to counteract them is classified and limited. On the other hand, the discussion about the risks of home-grown Islamist radicalisation is of high public interest. The issue is highly sensitive in the context of the management of inter-ethnic and inter-religious relations in the country given that old Muslim communities constitute 10 to 12 percent of the population and right-wing formations and parties use strong anti-minority and anti-Muslim rhetoric.

## 2. ISLAM AND MUSLIMS IN BULGARIA

### Islam in Bulgaria: demography and social status of Muslim communities

Islam in Bulgaria is professed by a share of 10% of the population who declared their religious affiliation in the latest census from 2011 (see Table 3).<sup>48</sup> Islam is professed by ethnic Turks, Bulgarian-speaking Muslims<sup>49</sup> and some Roma. Ethnic Turks are the largest Muslim community and the largest ethnic minority in the country, forming a share of 8.8% of the total population of Bulgaria (588,318

<sup>47</sup> Евстатиєв (2014).

<sup>48</sup> The share of the Muslim population in the country decreased according to the previous national censuses – 12.2% in the 2001 census and 13.1% in the 1992 census. This gradual decrease observed since 1992 is due to the increasing share of people who do not identify their religion in the national censuses (1992 – 0.1%; 2001 – 3.9%; 2011 – 7.1%) (НСИ (2012) *Преброяване на населението и жилищния фонд през 2011 г.* Том 1 Население. Книга 2 – Демографски и социални характеристики, с. 132. For a detailed account of the representation of Bulgarian speaking Muslims in the demographic statistics note: Иванов, М. (2012), „Помациите според българската етнодемографска статистика“, сп. *Население*, 1-2.

<sup>49</sup> Bulgarian-speaking Muslims are a community formed during the Ottoman rule when under various circumstances they converted from Christianity to Islam. Members of this community today self-identify in three different ways: some consider and declare themselves Bulgarians, others identify as Turks and a third group self-identify as Pomaks. All of them are ethnic Bulgarians, with Bulgarian being their mother tongue. In order to acknowledge the differentiating ways in which members of this community self-identify, the term chosen to refer to them in this report is Bulgarian-speaking Muslims.

persons as of the 2011 census). Roma form a share of 4.9% (325,343 persons) of the total population in the country, having various religious affiliations, including Orthodox Christianity, Evangelism and Islam (about 30% of the Roma,<sup>50</sup> according to expert estimates). The majority of Muslims in Bulgaria are Hanafi Sunni (95% or 546,004 persons) followed by a small Shi'a community (27,407 persons). Both the Sunni and the minority of Shi'a profess traditional Islam which has been developed under the influence of the Ottoman Empire and during centuries of interaction with majority Christian populations. This Islamic tradition is different from interpretations and practices of Islam in the Arab world and was termed "Balkan Islam" by Alexandre Popovic, one of the leading scholars in the field.<sup>51</sup>

**Table 3. Population of Bulgaria by denomination in 2011**

Denomination	Number	Share
Total population	7,364,570	
Those who declared religious affiliation	5,758,301	100.0%
Eastern Orthodox	4,374,135	76.0%
Muslim	577,139	10.0%
Catholic	48,954	0.9%
Protestant	64,476	1.1%
Jewish	706	0.0%
Armenian – Gregorian	1,715	0.0%
Persons who do not declare their religious denomination	409,898	7.1%
Not affiliated with any	272,264	4.7%

Source: National Statistical Institute, National Census Results 2011.

Bulgaria hosts a small immigrant community with Muslims immigrants being in the minority. The total number of legally residing immigrants in the country in 2013 was 43,215 persons. The share of Muslims from the top ten countries of origin was 23% (a total of 9,973 persons coming from Turkey, Syria and Iraq). The few research studies conducted reveal that there is little religious interaction between local Muslim minorities and Muslim immigrants in Bulgaria.<sup>52</sup>

The social and economic status of Bulgaria's Muslim minorities (Turks, Bulgarian-speaking Muslims and Roma) is lower than that of ethnic Bulgarians. In the

<sup>50</sup> Институт „Отворено общество“ (2008) *Ромите в България*. Информационен справочник, Институт „Отворено общество“ – София, с. 12.

<sup>51</sup> Popovic, Alexandre (1986), *L'Islam balkanique: les musulmans du sudest europeen dans la période postottomane*, Wiesbaden:O.Harrassowitz.

<sup>52</sup> Troeva, E. and Mila Mancheva (2010) "Gender, Migration and Religion. Immigrant Muslim Women in Bulgaria", ([www.gemic.eu](http://www.gemic.eu)).

post-communist period and in the context of country-wide economic crisis, the Muslim communities were the hardest hit. They had consistently higher levels of unemployment and had poorer access to healthcare and public education. Statistical data from 2011 reveals that the Roma and the Turkish ethnic communities both have lower levels of employment and educational attainment than members of the majority Bulgarian ethnic community. The ethnic differences in employment and unemployment are stark, with 19.4% of the Roma, 33.7% of the Turks and 46.9% of the Bulgarians being employed and 19.3% of the Roma, 11.7% of the Turks and 6.6% of the Bulgarians being unemployed.<sup>53</sup> In education, 23% of the Bulgarian ethnic population, 5% of the Turkish ethnic population and 0.3% of the Roma population have completed university education. Similarly, 47.5% of the Bulgarian ethnic majority, 26% of the Turkish ethnic minority and 6.8 % of the Roma minority have upper secondary education. At the same time, 20% of Bulgarian citizens of Bulgarian ethnicity have only lower secondary education against 43% of those with Turkish ethnicity and 35.3% of the Roma.<sup>54</sup> In 2011, of the population aged 7 and above only 0.4% of ethnic Bulgarians never attended school as opposed to 3.6% of ethnic Turks and 9.4% of the Roma.<sup>55</sup>

### Organisation of the Islamic denomination in Bulgaria

The relationship of the Islamic denomination and the state is regulated by the Denominations Act, according to which all confessional denominations (including the Islamic denomination and the Orthodox Christian denomination) are declared independent from the state (Art. 4/2) and are eligible for state budget subsidies (Art. 28). In order to be acknowledged as a legal person the Islamic denomination has to be registered in the Sofia City Court (Art. 15). The state body designated to oversee the relationship between the government and the denominations in the country is the Directorate of Religious Denominations at the Council of Ministers (Art. 35).

The structure of the Islamic denomination in Bulgaria is governed by the Statute<sup>56</sup> and attendant regulations for the functioning of its main bodies – Chief Muftiate and Senior Muslim Council.<sup>57</sup> It is led by the Chief Mufti who heads the institution of the Chief Muftiate. The Chief Muftiate represents all Muslims in Bulgaria, regardless of their ethnicity and the branch of Islam they belong to. Thus, it is

<sup>53</sup> 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>

<sup>54</sup> Национален статистически институт (2011) *Преброяване на населението и жилищния фонд през 2011 г.* Том 1 Население, Книга 2. Демографски и социални характеристики, 2-11, с. 194. <http://www.nsi.bg/census2011/pagebg2.php?p2=175&sp2=218>

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Устав на Мюсюлманското изповедание, 2011, available at <http://www.grandmufti.bg/bg/za-nas/normativni-dokumenti/881-ustavi.html>

<sup>57</sup> Правилник за организация на дейността на Главното Мюфтийство и структурите на мюсюлманското изповедание, 2011; Правилник за организацията и дейността на Висшия Мюсюлмански Съвет на мюсюлманското изповедание в Република България, 2011; Правилник за дейността на свещенослужителите (ваиз, имам-хатиб, мюеззин), 2011. available at: <http://www.grandmufti.bg/bg/za-nas/normativni-dokumenti/880-pravilnitzi.html>

in charge not only for the Sunni of the Hanafi school (the majority), but also for the Shia (also called Alevi/Kizilbashi/Bektashi) who have representatives in the Senior Muslim Council (SMC). The SMC is the highest administrative body of the Muslim denomination empowered to convene Muslim Conferences for the election of the new Chief Mufti, his deputies and the chairman of the SMC.<sup>58</sup> The highest authority of the Muslim denomination is the National Conference which has its chairman and members (Statute of the Muslim Denomination, 2011, Art. 22/1). Some of its main prerogatives include the changes and approval of the Statute of the Denomination, the election of the Chief Mufti and the chairman and the members of the SMC.<sup>59</sup> In 2015, the Chief Muftiate included 21 regional Muftiates in towns with larger Muslim communities.<sup>60</sup> In 2010, the number of imams was approximately 1,000. The number of mosques and masjids in 2010 was 1,156 and 302 respectively and the number of registered mosque boards of trustees in 2011 was 1,225.<sup>61</sup>

With regard to funding the absolute volume of the state subsidy to the Muslim denomination is gradually rising from 180,000 levs in 2011 to 360,000 levs in 2014.<sup>62</sup> However, state funding remains rather moderate and insufficient to cover the denominational needs of the Muslim community. This is one reason that prompts the openness of the Chief Muftiate to foreign funds coming either through bilateral agreements (from Turkey and Iran) or through donations from other Muslim states.

In the post-communist period the Muslim leadership appeared deeply divided by struggles for control over the Chief Muftiate. These struggles were manipulated by political parties among which the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) played an active role. The control over the Chief Muftiate and the resources which the institution was managing translated into a political capital and provided opportunities for consolidation of the Muslim/Turkish vote. As a result, since the early 1990s two High Muslim Councils have existed, each backed by a different political party and electing two different Chief Muftis. The conflicts between the two factions of the Muslim denomination went throughout the period and served to weaken the authority of the institution as spiritual leader of Muslims in Bulgaria.<sup>63</sup>

## Education

The High Islamic Institute was established in 1998 as a university preparing clerics and scholars. However, it does not have official accreditation by the Bulgarian authorities, respectively the diplomas are not recognised in Bulgaria and students

<sup>58</sup> Zhelyazkova, A. (2014) "Bulgaria", in Joselyne Cesari (ed.) *Oxford Handbook of European Islam*, Oxford University Press, p. 591.

<sup>59</sup> Устав на мюсюлманското изповедание, 2011, Art. 26/1.

<sup>60</sup> <http://www.grandmufti.bg/bg/glavno-menyu-rm.html>

<sup>61</sup> Zhelyazkova (2014), p. 591-592.

<sup>62</sup> U.S. Department of State, International Religious Freedom Reports, Bulgaria for 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014.

<sup>63</sup> For a detailed account and analysis of the history of post-communist rivalries and divisions in the Muslim leadership see Chodsee (2010), pp. 116-129.

cannot continue their studies under Master's programs in neither Bulgarian nor European universities. The Institute does not have appropriate facilities and relies on to a great extent on financial support and donations from Turkey and other Muslim countries.<sup>64</sup> According to Evstatiev,<sup>65</sup> the Institute offers an "exclusively low level of education and suffers from the lack of qualified staff," and is not capable of producing well-educated graduates.

Three secondary Islamic schools in Bulgaria (in Shumen, Momchilgrad and Russe) are accredited by the Ministry of Education and Science and grant officially recognised secondary school degrees. The schools are financed mostly by donations from Turkey and by the Chief Muftiate and teach Islam, Arabic, Turkish and English languages in addition to all mandatory classes envisaged by the national curriculum.

Some of the Muslim boards of trustees (Muslim or mosque boards of trustees) run Qur'an classes, while the Chief Muftiate organizes summer Qur'an classes, as well as exams for children for the level they have reached in memorising the Qur'an.<sup>66</sup> These classes (imam courses according to Ghodsee<sup>67</sup> or religious schools of the Qur'an course type and Qur'an courses according to Evstatiev<sup>68</sup>) have no official accreditation and are often funded by various religious foundations or foreign individuals. While the curricula in these courses is in principle approved by the Chief Muftiate it is not clear to what extent the Muftiate extends its control over the curricula of some of them.<sup>69</sup> According to Evstatiev,<sup>70</sup> as with the Islamic Institute the Qur'an courses are providing education at very low level. Their graduates can become imams or hodjas only. The lack of transparency regarding the funding sources for the Qur'an courses as well as regarding the level of control over their curricula exerted by the Chief Muftiate have been the subject of occasional commentaries in the media.<sup>71</sup>

Another educational path is prompted to some extent by the lack of official accreditation of the High Islamic Institute and by the fact that the existing religious educational institutions in Bulgaria are chiefly adapted to the needs of ethnic Turks and do not correspond adequately to the needs of Muslim Bulgarians. This option involves religious education of young Muslims from Bulgaria in Islamic universities in Turkey, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Jordan (with the support of the Chief Muftiate and official funding from Turkey or informal funding from various foreign foundations). Some of the graduates from foreign religious universities have become

<sup>64</sup> Zhelyazkova (2014), p. 593.

<sup>65</sup> Evstatiev (2006), pp. 57-8.

<sup>66</sup> Zhelyazkova, A. (2014) "Bulgaria", in Joselyne Cesari (ed.) *Oxford Handbook of European Islam*, Oxford University Press, p. 592.

<sup>67</sup> Ghodsee (2010), p. 114.

<sup>68</sup> Evstatiev (2006), p. 58-9.

<sup>69</sup> Ghodsee (2010), p. 114.

<sup>70</sup> Evstatiev (2006), p. 59. A similar opinion about the low level of religious Islamic education in Bulgaria was expressed also by Mihail Ivanov, expert in minority-majority relations (Expert interview, 18.06.2015).

<sup>71</sup> Виж. напр. Йорданова, Я. (2004) „Ислямските училища не са това, което са“, в. *Капитал*, 21.08.2004; Tavanier, Y. (2005) "Bulgaria: Mysterious Mosques and Schools", 27.01.2005, Transitions Online.



the vehicle of religious resurgence among some communities of Bulgarian Muslims associated with import of Salafi interpretations of Islam, which are uncommon to the Hanafi Sunni tradition in Bulgaria.<sup>72</sup>

### Channels of penetration of Salafi interpretations of Islam in Bulgaria<sup>73</sup>

Since 1989, after 45 years of communist regime Muslims in Bulgaria started to be exposed to the outside world and the umma (the global Muslim community). The opening of borders and the freedom to travel coincided with liberation of all suppressive measures regarding the profession of religion which were dominating the atheist communist society before 1989. As a result, Muslims in Bulgaria were exposed to interpretations of Islam different from the Hanafi Sunni tradition characteristic of the Balkans. The main channels through which these new (for the region) interpretations of Islam were reaching Muslims in Bulgaria involved: 1) foreign missionaries; 2) foreign charitable aid coming from Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia or Kuwait; 3) migration for religious education by young Muslims in the prestigious religious universities of Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia; and 4) migration to Western European countries and encounters with local (immigrant) Muslim communities.

Charitable aid from Muslim countries targeted Europe for the first time after 1989. In the Balkans, activities of both emissaries and foundations were triggered by the Bosnian war, with Bulgaria being targeted together with Bosnia, Albania and Macedonia. While in the countries embroiled in the conflicts of the disintegration of Yugoslavia Islamic aid was bringing supplies and arms to the Bosnian army it was also tightly linked to proselytizing of “true” interpretations of Islam and of practices of orthodox Islamic profession. In Bulgaria, since the early 1990s, aid has been provided by Turkey and Iran through bilateral agreements and by Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait through unofficial channels (NGOs or private individuals).<sup>74</sup> Resources from the Muslim world were directed to the construction of new mosques, opening of free Qur’anic schools, Islamic centres, free boarding houses for Muslim children as well as for the translation, publication and distribution of Islamic literature. In addition, stipends were given to devout families to make the pilgrimage to Mecca and to young people to travel abroad.<sup>75</sup> These activities have

<sup>72</sup> Zhelyazkova (2014), pp. 593-594; Ghodsee (2010), p. 114; Evstatiev (2006), pp. 60-61.

<sup>73</sup> *Salafism* emerged as intellectual movement in the Al Azhar Academy in Cairo at the end of the 19th century with the aim to purge Islam of impurities introduced during centuries of religious practices (termed “traditional Islam”) and return to the Islam practiced by Muhammad and the early Islamic community. Respectively the term “*salafi*” denoted those who follow the example of the companions of the Prophet Muhammad. *Salafis* stand for purified Islam strictly following *Qur’an* and the *Sunna* which is a way to eliminate human subjectivity and thus allowing the identification the singular truth of God’s command (Wiktorowicz, Q. (2005) A Genealogy of Radical Islam, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 28:75-97, p. 75). Three branches have evolved within the Salafi movement: (i) purists who put focus on non-violent methods of propagation, purification and education, (ii) a political branch, whose followers advocate the application of the *Salafi* creed in the political arena, and (iii) *jihadi* branch whose followers take a militant position arguing that the current context calls for violence and revolution.

<sup>74</sup> Ghodsee (2010), p. 134-139; Kerem O. (2010) *New Islamic Actors after the Wahhabi intermezzo: Turkey’s Return to the Muslim Balkans*, European Studies Centre – University of Oxford, p. 19, available at: [https://wikileaks.org/gifiles/attach/126/126845\\_Oktem-Balkan-Muslims.pdf](https://wikileaks.org/gifiles/attach/126/126845_Oktem-Balkan-Muslims.pdf) (accessed on July 15, 2015).

<sup>75</sup> Ghodsee K. (2010), p. 133. The provision of financial aid to young Muslims for travel for religious education is reported also by Antonina Zhelyazkova, Expert Interview, 5.06.2015.

facilitated the exposure of members of the Muslim community in Bulgaria to the global umma and to interpretations of Islam uncommon to the region. Foreign emissaries visiting and providing lectures in mosques in the Muslim populated regions contributed to the process. However, they were not accepted by the Turkish community and after an initially better reception by some communities of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims they also dissociated themselves from these emissaries.<sup>76</sup> A growing suspicion towards foreign Islamic aid<sup>77</sup> led to measures for monitoring and rejection of the registration of some of these organisations by Bulgarian authorities.<sup>78</sup> However, the import of Salafi interpretations of Islam was perpetuated and facilitated by the return to Bulgaria of young Muslims who graduated from Islamic universities in Jordan, Egypt, Saudi Arabia. Most of these graduates returned to become imams or teachers in the network of Qur'an schools. Their number in 2014 amounted to about 30 graduates from Jordan, 30 from Saudi Arabia and 30 from Egypt and other countries of the Arab world.<sup>79</sup> Upon their return some of the foreign religious university graduates started introducing new practices related to orthodox Islam entailing the purification of local traditional Islam from so-called non-canonical practices. This process has been uneven in the regions with Bulgarian-speaking Muslims with some communities refuting the new preaching,<sup>80</sup> segments of other communities adopting it and others becoming an arena of intergenerational conflicts between old and young religious leaders. The outcome of the intergenerational tension in the villages of the third type is the establishment of two mosques with two different imams.<sup>81</sup>

### History of (violent) Islamist radicalisation

So far there has been no known involvement of Bulgarian citizens in acts of violent Islamist radicalisation or in Islamist terrorist attacks both at home and worldwide. In only one instance, a Bulgarian citizen was arrested by the Bulgarian authorities under suspicion of being indirectly linked to the perpetrators of the terrorist attack in Madrid on 11 March 2004.<sup>82</sup> On the other hand, a number of tragic events indicate that Bulgaria and Bulgarian citizens are vulnerable to acts of international Islamist radicalisation. On 27 September 2003, the Bulgarian military

<sup>76</sup> Expert Interview with Antonina Zhelyazkova, 5.06.2015.

<sup>77</sup> Николов, Й. (2004) „Първи идват емисарите“, в. *Капитал*, 14.08.2004 г.; Йорданова (2004); Tavanier (2005).

<sup>78</sup> Виж напр. Николов, Й. „България е в глобалния план на радикалните ислямисти“, в. *Капитал*, 22.09.2001.

<sup>79</sup> Ahmed Ahmediv, Chief Secretary of the Chief Muftiate shared the following data in an interview in Capital weekly (Зорница, С., „Какво патриотично има в това да изправяш хората едни срещу други“, в. *Капитал*, 28.03.2014). The number of graduates from foreign Islamic universities in 2014 amounted to 300 persons, of whom about 70% graduated in Turkey, 10% in Jordan, 10% in Saudi Arabia and the rest in Egypt and other countries of the Arab world.

<sup>80</sup> Expert Interview, Antonina Zhelyazkova, 5.06.2015.

<sup>81</sup> Троева (2012), p. 5-23.

<sup>82</sup> The Bulgarian citizen, Tony Radev, was arrested under suspicion of being linked to the perpetrators of the Madrid terrorist attack from 2004. However, he was released within a month as no proof was found of his engagement with the preparation of the terrorist act (*Bginfo.es*, „Справка за атентатите в Мадрид (2004 г.) и Лондон (2005 г.)“, 29.03.2010; Николов, Й., „Хасковската връзка в атентатите в Мадрид остава недоказана“, в. *Капитал*, 02.04.2005;/ *Mediapool.bg*, „Испания иска да разпитва отново българина Тони Радев заради атентатите в Мадрид“, 14.03.2005.

regiment in the military base of the town of Karbala in Iraq (part of the Multi-National Force in the country) was targeted by a lorry loaded with explosives. The attack took the life of five Bulgarian soldiers and injured 27 others.<sup>83</sup> In July 2004, two Bulgarian drivers were taken hostage in Iraq and subsequently executed by Abu Musab al-Zarqawi's Islamist Organisation of Monotheism and Jihad (al-Tawhid wal-Jihad).<sup>84</sup> Finally, in 2012, Bulgaria for the first time was targeted by a terrorist attack, which was plotted externally and committed against Israeli citizens visiting the country for holidays. In the attack, five Israelis and one Bulgarian were killed together with the perpetrator himself and another 35 persons were injured.<sup>85</sup> On 5 February 2013, the Bulgarian government officially named Hezbollah as the perpetrator of the terrorist act<sup>86</sup> and as a consequence the military wing of the organisation was included in the EU list of terrorist organisations.<sup>87</sup>

### 3. ORGANISATIONAL FORMS AND ACTORS

The discussion about the presence and nature of organisational structures associated with Islamist radicalisation in Bulgaria needs to be conducted with the awareness that no such acts have been perpetrated in the country, no research has been undertaken and the work of intelligence and law enforcement agencies has been associated with prevention rather than reaction. In the context of close monitoring of groups adopting Salafi interpretations of Islam and the imposition of measures to halt the channels through which such influences penetrate the country, the intelligence services admitted that there were no cells of Islamist radicals in Bulgaria<sup>88</sup> (more on this in the chapter "Legal framework and institutions").

Therefore, what can be discussed are the structures in association with which some Roma recently demonstrated sympathy with IS based on adopted Salafi interpretations of Islam. In addition, a brief review is provided of the structures along which the proselytising of Salafi interpretations of Islam has taken place among Bulgarian-speaking Muslims.

According to law enforcement and intelligence experts close monitoring is needed of some groups among the Roma communities in the towns of Pazardjik, Plovdiv, Nova Zagora and Asenovgrad where groups of Muslims and recent Muslim converts profess simplified interpretations of Salafism and in some instances manifest sympathy with the Islamic State. The core group of Salafi followers is composed of 50-60 persons based in Pazardjik and motivated by their leader

<sup>83</sup> Bulgarian Ministry of Defence, [http://www.md.government.bg/bg/tema\\_MissionsOperations\\_Over.html#02](http://www.md.government.bg/bg/tema_MissionsOperations_Over.html#02)

<sup>84</sup> В. *Капитал*, „Двама българи заложници на терористи“, 10.07.2004.; *Vesti.bg*, „Лазов екзекутиран, нов ултиматум“, 14.07.2004.

<sup>85</sup> *Dariknews.bg*, „Бургаският атентат“, [http://dariknews.bg/view\\_topic.php?topic\\_id=356](http://dariknews.bg/view_topic.php?topic_id=356)

<sup>86</sup> Лалов, Н., „България официално обвини Хизбула за атентата в Бургас“, *Mediapool.bg*, 5.02.2013.

<sup>87</sup> Янков, К., „ЕС постави военното крило на „Хизбула“ в списъка с терористични организации“, в. *Дневник*, 22.07.2013.

<sup>88</sup> В. *Капитал*, „Това не е клетка на „Ислямска държава“, но можеше да бъде“, 26.11.2014; Филева, Л., „ДАНС и Прокуратурата с акция за „генерална превенция“ срещу Ислямска Държава“, в. *Дневник*, 26.11.2014.

Ahmed Musa, with similar groups emerging in the Roma quarters of the other mentioned cities.<sup>89</sup> The group has no clear hierarchy, however, Ahmed Musa being its informal leader. Recruitment usually targets young persons with addiction problems who are offered support, helped to find wives and work.<sup>90</sup> According to law enforcement experts, recruitment into Salafi Islam among the Roma is also associated with financial stimulus for wearing the niqab, for example. More specifically financial stimulus is considered an initial motivating factor, followed by the development of more authentic pious attitude and feeling.<sup>91</sup>

It is important to note that the leaders of these groups have the status of informal Islamic preachers who do not have the required religious education and are not part of the structure of the Islamic denomination in the country under the Chief Muftiate. In addition, the recently constructed mosque in the town of Pazardjik is a private one that is not under the jurisdiction and the control of the Chief Muftiate. Ahmed Musa – the informal leader of the Pazardjik group – has been prosecuted three times (in 2004, 2012 and 2015) for propagating anti-democratic ideas, religious hatred and incitement of war.

There is scant information regarding the trajectory of Musa's conversion to Islam and gradual association with more radical interpretations of Salafi Islam. According to some sources Musa encountered and embraced Salafi interpretations of Islam while in Germany or Austria.<sup>92</sup> According to other sources he converted to Islam in Vienna in the 1990s but was influenced to profess Salafi interpretation of Islam while attending the Qur'an course in the town of Sarnitsa, which was closed down in 2007 by the Bulgarian authorities.<sup>93</sup> Although some reports point to Musa's arrest in Cologne on suspicion of associating with local radical Islamist circles, no further details are available regarding his arrest.<sup>94</sup>

The structures that have been associated with proselytising Salafi interpretations of Islam in Bulgaria involve foreign emissaries who operated in the country in the 1990s; various Islamic foundations and associations some of which functioning with foreign charitable donations from Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait;<sup>95</sup> and

<sup>89</sup> However, the number of persons identified to be involved in providing logistical support to transiting foreign fighters is rather limited (five to ten persons), Expert interview, representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions, 18.06.2015.

<sup>90</sup> Expert interview, representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions, 15.06.2015.

<sup>91</sup> Expert Interview, representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions, 18.06. 2015.

<sup>92</sup> According to law enforcement experts, it took place in Germany (interviews, representative law enforcement/intelligence institutions, 15.6.2015 and 18.06.2015), while some media reports claim it was in Austria (Илков, Л. "Имамът Ахмед Муса прегърнал исляма в Австрия", 24 часа, 1.12.2012).

<sup>93</sup> Обвинителен акт, Досъдебно производство № 87/2014, Преписка вх. № 2291/14.

<sup>94</sup> Филева, Л. „Проф. Евгения Иванова: Не допускам, че „Ислямска държава“ може сериозно да спечели когото и да било в България“, в. *Дневник*, 30.11.2014. His arrest in Cologne was also mentioned in an expert interview with representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions, 18.06.2015.

<sup>95</sup> Lists of selected Islamic foundations and associations in Bulgaria can be found in Ghodsee (2010), p. 206 and Троева (2012), pp. 11-12. However, no study has been conducted of the Islamic foundations and organisations in the country and respectively no information is available with regard to whether and to what extent those of them associated with proselytism of Salafi interpretations of Islam might have been promoting radical Islamist ideas.

the denominational structure of the Chief Muftiate with some imams having become proponents of new Salafi interpretations of Islam after having received their religious education in Islamic universities abroad. Some media reports point that the curricula of some Qur'an courses in the country may involve teaching of Salafi interpretations of Islam. A journalist investigation of August 2004 turned attention to the Qur'an course in the town of Sarnitsa as teaching orthodox Islam different from the Sunni Hanafi tradition. The investigation brought attention to the lack of transparency regarding the funding sources for the Qur'an courses as well as regarding the level of control over their curricula exerted by the Chief Muftiate.<sup>96</sup>

While proselytism and adoption of Salafi interpretations of Islam is a recent development that deserves attention, it needs to be clearly distinguished from Islamist radicalisation and needs to be studied as a phenomenon at the intersection of specific local social, economic, cultural and identity dynamics.

#### 4. REPERTOIRE OF ACTIONS AND IDEAS RELATED TO ISLAMIST RADICALISATION

So far, there has been no known involvement of Bulgarian citizens in acts of violent Islamist radicalisation or in Islamist terrorist attacks both at home and internationally. In only one instance a Bulgarian citizen was arrested by Bulgarian authorities under suspicion of being indirectly linked to the perpetrators of the terrorist attack in Madrid from 11 March 2004 but was released within a month as no proof was found of his engagement.<sup>97</sup> Unlike many European countries, Bulgaria donated no transnational fighters and has no cells of radical Islamists in the country.<sup>98</sup> There have been occasional reports on foreign citizens passing through the territory of the country being suspected of affiliations with international terrorist groups. Several arrests and subsequent deportations have taken place in this regard, among them that of three foreign citizens (on 16 December 2014) under investigation for terrorist activity by both the Spanish security services and Interpol;<sup>99</sup> or that of a French citizen under European arrest warrant and indictment of terrorist activity and affiliation with the perpetrators of the terrorist attack against Charlie Hebdo newspaper on 7 January 2015.<sup>100</sup> Bulgaria, together with other EU countries, has become a transit route for transnational fighters on their way to Syria or Iraq and back. According to data of the National Security

<sup>96</sup> Йорданова (2004); Tavanier (2005).

<sup>97</sup> For more details, please refer to footnote 82.

<sup>98</sup> Acknowledged by the then head of the National Security Service, Vladimir Pisanchev at a press conference on 26 November 2014, *В. Капитал*, „Това не е клетка на „Ислямска държава“, но можеше да бъде”, 26.11.2014; *в. Дневник*, „ДАНС и прокуратурата с акция за генерална превенция срещу ИД”, 26.11.2014 г.

<sup>99</sup> *В. Дневник*, „България е задържала трима, издирвани за тероризъм, на път за Сирия”, 17.12.2014.

<sup>100</sup> *Mediapool.bg*, „Заподозреният в тероризъм, Фриц Жьоли Жоашен, бе екстрадиран във Франция”, 29.01.2015; *Btv Новините*, „Стрелец от „Шарли ебдо” – стар приятел на Фриц-Жоли Жоашен”, 13.01.2015.

Agency, cited in media reports, in 2013 a total of 82 transnational fighters transited the country; in 2014 their number was 154 and in the first six months of 2015 – 96. According to the same reports some of these persons have been either intercepted at the border because lacking proper travel documents or apprehended under European arrest warrants.<sup>101</sup>

### Acts of symbolic approval for radical Islamist organisations

Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, individuals or groups of Muslim Roma (some of whom recent converts) have in certain instances manifested sympathy to more radical interpretations of Salafi Islam or even with international (radical) Islamist organisations. The first such act was reported as early as 2003 when a banner saying “The state is a Caliphate” was displayed above two houses in the Roma Iztok quarter in the town of Pazardjik, where followers of the banned Islamist organisation “Halifat” (Caliphate) were gathering.<sup>102</sup> Since 2013, there has been a trend of acts of demonstration of sympathy to fighters from the organisation “Al’Qa’ida in Iraq”, and later IS in cities like Pazardjik, Plovdiv and Asenovgrad. For example, in October 2014 a video was uploaded on the Facebook profile of the chief Islamic preacher in the Pazardjik Roma quarter – Ahmed Musa. The video showed waiters at a Roma marriage wearing T-shirts with the sign of IS and taking pictures of themselves.<sup>103</sup> According to media reports about the evidence collected in the SANS-led operation that followed (25 November 2014), members of the community possessed IS advertisement materials such as hats, T-shirts, stickers, flags, all with the IS sign; as well as video materials displaying preaching and glorifying IS and advocating for the establishment of a Sharia state.<sup>104</sup> The latest incident of this kind involves a picture posted in the personal Facebook profile of informal Islamic preacher Remzi Hasan of the town of Harmanli of himself with the flag of IS.<sup>105</sup> Other registered acts involve the display of flags (although of various colours) with the signs of IS in masjids<sup>106</sup> in Plovdiv and Asenovgrad and in the private mosque in Pazardjik in front of which informal preachers would deliver sermons (without being qualified and authorised by the Chief Muftiate). In addition, Facebook monitoring by law enforcement services identified user profiles with regular postings of IS symbols, pictures of leaders of terrorist organisations and video clips glorifying the Islamist fighters.<sup>107</sup> The gravest acts registered so far involve instances of provision of logistical support to transiting transnational fighters. In particular, some Muslim Roma in the town of Pazardjik were reported to be involved in facilitating the accommodation of transnational fighters on their way

<sup>101</sup> Стоилова, З. „Как жълтите медии съчиниха история за терористи от „Ислямска държава“, в. *Капитал*, 10.08.2015.

<sup>102</sup> Николов (2004).

<sup>103</sup> в. *Капитал*, „Обичат Аллах и навсякъде го пишат“, 3.10.2014 г.

<sup>104</sup> в. *Дневник*, „ДАНС и прокуратурата с акция за генерална превенция срещу ИД“, 26.11.2014 г.

<sup>105</sup> *Vtv Новините*, „Имам’ от Харманли развя знамето на „Ислямска държава“ 12.02.2015.

<sup>106</sup> Arabic for a place of worship, generally referring to any building where congregations gather for prayer.

<sup>107</sup> Обвинителен акт, Досъдебно производство № 87/2014, Преписка вх. № 2291/14. The indictment has not been finalized as it has been returned twice because of procedural mistakes by the chief judge (lastly on 23.09.2015).

to Syria.<sup>108</sup> According to some law enforcement representatives, the group in Pazardjik has made some efforts to provide physical training to local boys to teach them discipline and distinguish them from the rest.<sup>109</sup> However, no further sources have been found to confirm or elaborate on this information.

The ideas that are professed and shared within this group are listed in the indictment against 14 Muslim Roma who were put on trial on 2 July 2015 on charges of propagating hatred on religious grounds and inciting war.<sup>110</sup> According to the indictment, some of the main ideas professed by the defendants include: support for the IS concept of war to establish a Caliphate; it is a religious duty of any Muslim to join the Caliphate, including to join its army; if needed local Muslims have to be ready to go and fight for IS; anyone who is not professing Salafism is apostate; those who vote are apostates; Muslims who make friends with Christians, Jews or atheists are apostates. Some of these ideas have a sounding that can be associated with aspects of jihadist ideology. Taken the fact that the court trial has not yet started it is still early to put these ideas under analysis as all presented evidence is about to be proven or not in court.<sup>111</sup>

### **Proselytising and professing Salafi interpretations of Islam**

The process of adoption of Salafi interpretations of Islam by some segments of the Muslim communities in Bulgaria is associated with activities such as proselytism of the main theological tenets of Salafism through mosque sermons, informal discussions at local cafes and possession and dissemination of related theological literature<sup>112</sup> as well as attempts to change canonical for the region Islamic practices. The process is also manifested in changes in clothing and appearance in both men and women and the adoption of Salafi style dress.

The activities of those Bulgarian-speaking Muslims who are adopting orthodox interpretations of Islam involve changes in the performance of religious rituals and customs and the dress code. These include for example prayers of men in the mosque without hats, different prayer positions, visits to the mosques by women in the month of Ramadan,<sup>113</sup> abolition of the custom of collecting money upon the death of a person in order to pay his/her religious obligations, or to count the chaplet in order to catch up for the prayers that the person did not do during his/her lifetime; abolition of the custom to dish out food at funerals, as

<sup>108</sup> Expert interview, representatives of law enforcement/intelligence institutions on 12.06.2015, 15.6.2015, 18.06.2015; Стоилова, З. „Как жълтите медии съчиниха история за терористи от „Ислямска държава“, в. *Капитал* 10.08.2015. The circle of persons involved in logistical support to transiting foreign fighters is believed to be limited to 10 persons (Expert interview, representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions, 18.06.2015).

<sup>109</sup> Expert interview, representative law enforcement/intelligence institutions, 18.06.2015.

<sup>110</sup> Обвинителен акт, досъдебно производство № 87/2014, Преписка вх. № 2291/14, Окръжна Прокуратура – Пазарджик.

<sup>111</sup> The Court Indictment has been returned by the Chief Judge for correction of procedural violations twice, on 22 July 2015 and on 23 September 2015.

<sup>112</sup> Indicated in the indictment under pre-trial proceedings (Обвинителен акт, досъдебно производство № 9/2009, Преписка вх. № 1122/09, Окръжна Прокуратура – Пазарджик).

<sup>113</sup> Mosques in Bulgaria are traditionally strictly male spaces.

well as the so called *mevlid*.<sup>114</sup> The attempts by some imams to introduce changes in the funeral rites in accordance with Salafi practices seem to have not found root among Muslims in Bulgaria as in 2011 96.1% of them declared to bury their dead according to the local Muslim tradition.<sup>115</sup> The changes in the dress code of women include the introduction of long mono-colour garments and hijab and in some instances hijab covering the face.<sup>116</sup> With regard to men a novelty is the wearing of long beard. Changes involve also abstaining from eating pork and drinking alcohol.<sup>117</sup> These changes are far from widespread. On the contrary, Salafi influences in terms of dress, polygamy and piety remain limited to specific cases of some Pomak villages and Roma settlements in Bulgaria.<sup>118</sup> Experts in Islam stress that heightened levels of religious piety and changes in clothing are not in themselves a sign of radicalisation.<sup>119</sup>

The ideas propagated by imams or informal Islamic preachers professing Salafi interpretations of Islam are presented in the indictment against 12 imams and one informal Islamic preacher who stood trial in the period 2012 – 2015. According to it, some of the main ideas professed by the defendants include: refuting the state since power comes from God and not from man; secular laws are to be obeyed only as long as they do not contradict Islam; the law comes from the Prophet; Muslims should not vote; Muslims should not make friends with Christians; women cannot have the same rights as men; women should not be greeted; Islam is holy and incompatible with other religions; many of the holidays in Bulgaria such as New Year and Baba Marta (March 1) should not be celebrated as they do not come from Islam; believers should follow specific (Salafi) style of dressing and preaching; anyone who is not professing Salafism is a non-believer.<sup>120</sup> While these ideas align with the strict Salafi interpretations of Islam they do not have the sounding of those associated with jihadist ideology. Two of the three defendants were pronounced innocent on charges under articles 108 and 164 of the *Criminal Code* and twelve of the thirteen defendants were acquitted of charges under article 109 with only administrative fines being imposed on them. This outcome indicates that the court did not find sufficient proof for most of the charges in the indictment.

It needs to be pointed that the adoption of Salafi interpretations of Islam has not led to any (violent) religiously inspired incidents involving either Christians or Muslims professing traditional Islam. Only one incident that might be of such nature has been reported. On 5 May 2011, in the Iztok quarter of Pazardjik five Muslim Roma professing Salafi Islam assaulted the evangelist Roma pastor of the same

<sup>114</sup> *Mevlid* is a custom performed by Muslims in Bulgaria on different occasions – on the 52<sup>nd</sup> day of someone's death, at the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad or on the occasion of significant public events. For detailed account see: Троева, Е., „Традиционен“ и „нов“ ислям в България, *Български Фолклор*, 3-4/2012.

<sup>115</sup> Иванова (2014), p. 177.

<sup>116</sup> Reported to have taken place in the town of Rudozem (Ghodsee (2010), p. 543).

<sup>117</sup> It is a widespread practice among Muslims in Bulgaria not to be bound by the Islamic prohibition of eating pork and drinking alcohol.

<sup>118</sup> Kerem (2010), p. 18.

<sup>119</sup> Expert interview with Yordan Peev, 23.06.2015.

<sup>120</sup> Обвинителен акт, досъдебно производство № 9/2009, Преписка вх. № 1122/09, Окръжна Прокуратура – Пазарджик.



quarter.<sup>121</sup> The motives for the incident were never clearly established; suggested motives ranged from irritation by the Muslim Roma about the insistence of the pastor to proselytise Evangelism to improper behaviour of the pastor contrasting with the stricter moral norms of Salafi Islam to some personal conflict.

## 5. INSTITUTIONAL AND LAW ENFORCEMENT RESPONSE

The institutional response with regard to countering risks of Islamist radicalisation has been dominated by the law enforcement agencies. The Mol, SANS and the prosecution have so far been the leading, if not the only, institutions enforcing measures in this regard. In the light of the terrorist act on Bulgarian territory in July 2012 and the global escalation of Islamist terrorist activity exemplified by IS, Bulgarian law enforcement and intelligence institutions started developing more systematic counter-radicalisation mechanisms. These include relevant amendments to the Bulgarian *Criminal Code* adopted in June 2015 as well as the development of the Draft Strategy for Countering Radicalisation and Terrorism (2015 – 2020). The approach that is evolving and envisaged in the Strategy acknowledges the importance of prevention measures and cooperation among various institutions in countering radicalisation.

The type of measures enforced so far by intelligence, law enforcement and prosecution services are directed at countering external Islamist threats and potential home-grown risks. Regarding the first group of measures the law enforcement and intelligence services monitor and intercept transiting transnational fighters as well as foreign citizens suspected of affiliation with terrorist organisations. In addition, SANS is currently monitoring the inflow of irregular migrants and asylum seekers and screening persons who might be fighters from Syria.<sup>122</sup> The second group of measures related to countering potential home-grown threats of Islamist radicalisation include expulsions of foreign emissaries of orthodox Islam (during the 1990s and early 2000s), arrests of persons suspected of propagating more radical Islamist-based ideas (2007, 2009, 2010, 2014); opening of three legal proceedings against Bulgarian citizens suspected of propagating anti-democratic ideas, hatred on religious grounds (in 2004 and in 2012 – 2015) and incitement of war based on adopted Salafi interpretations of Islam (court hearings started in July 2015 but the trial is under suspension as the indictment was returned by the chief judge to rectify procedural violations of defendants' rights).

The involvement of other relevant institutions (the Directorate on Denominations at the Council of Ministers and the Chief Muftiate) that can be instrumental in the introduction of soft prevention measures among risk groups has been unsystematic and minimal. So far, actions by the Directorate of Denominations have included refusal to register or renew the registration of foreign Islamic organisations while those of the Chief Muftiate have been limited to the issuance of some official

<sup>121</sup> В. 24 часа, „Роми пребиха пастор, дават им 15 денонощия арест“, 02.05.2011; Начев, М., „Пребит пастор: Биха ме жестоко талибани!“, в. *Труд*, 05.05.2011.

<sup>122</sup> Since 2013, 40 to 50 persons among the incoming asylum seekers have been identified to fall in this risk group (Expert interview, representative of law enforcement/intelligence service, 8.04.2015).

declarations, such as those in response to the opening of the 2012 – 2015 court trial and in support of its defendants or in response to IS and denouncing its acts.<sup>123</sup>

### Law enforcement response

The process of religious resurgence based on the adoption of Salafi interpretations of Islam among some segments of the Muslim communities in Bulgaria has attracted the attention of Bulgarian institutions since the mid-1990s and has been viewed by intelligence and law enforcement experts as bearing the potential for “radicalisation” of some local Muslims. State authorities imposed a more restrictive regime to the (externally funded) proliferating Muslim organisations and foundations since the mid-1990s by rejecting the renewal of registrations or subjecting them to investigations by the prosecution.<sup>124</sup> One example is the Saudi-financed organisation Al Wakf Islami which was officially registered in 1993 but a renewal of its registration was rejected by the Directorate of Denominations in 1994.<sup>125</sup> In 2002, the Sofia City Court registered the foundation “Al Wakf” but in 2004 the registration was cancelled.<sup>126</sup> In addition, Bulgarian security services deported some Muslim foreigners for their religious proselytising claiming they had been a threat to the national security.<sup>127</sup> According to security experts, more systematic deportations have been taking place since 2000.<sup>128</sup> In fact, in the aftermath of the September 2001 attacks and the precautionary measures taken by the U.S. to prevent Al Qaeda from launching operations from the Balkans, all Balkan states sought to hold off organisations and actors connected with transnational Arab Islamic networks.<sup>129</sup> The control and prosecution over Islamic organisations in Bulgaria was especially tightened since 2008/2009.<sup>130</sup>

<sup>123</sup> Декларация на Главно мюфтийство на Мюсюлманско изповедание в Република България, по повод повдигнатите обвинения срещу 13-те български граждани, изповядващи исляма, от Окръжна прокуратура – Пазарджик, 25 Септември 2012; Декларация на Главно мюфтийство на Мюсюлманското изповедание в Република България по повод антихуманните и терористични деяния на т.н. „Ислямска държава” в Близкия Изток, 12.09.2014; Декларация на Главно мюфтийство на Мюсюлманско изповедание в Република България, по повод варварския терористичен акт над редакцията на списание „Шарли Ебдо” в Париж на 07.01.2015 г.

<sup>124</sup> Троева (2012). A total of 30 such organisations operated in Bulgaria until 1994. Since then, most of them have been banned with only 5 remaining by 2004 (Николов, 2004).

<sup>125</sup> Йорданова (2004).

<sup>126</sup> Обвинителен акт по досъдебно производство № 9/2009, Преписка, вх. № 1122/09.

<sup>127</sup> According to *Capital Weekly*, between 1990 and 2004 a total of eight foreigners had been deported from Bulgaria on accusations of preaching “radical Islam” and the establishment of unregistered organisations. (Николов, 2004). For example the Jordanian Ahmad Musa was deported in August 2000 under accusations for preaching Islamic fundamentalism, preparing Bulgarian Muslims to engage in terrorism, organising seminars and youth camps that preached radical Islam and organising a Bulgarian cell of the Muslim Brotherhood. (Ghodsee (2010), p. 120).

<sup>128</sup> Expert interview with representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions, 15.06.2015.

<sup>129</sup> Kerem (2010), p. 21.

<sup>130</sup> Expert interview with representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions, 15.06.2015.

### Countering acts of symbolic approval for radical Islamist organisations

The activities of Ahmed Musa, the chief Islamic preacher in the Roma quarter of Pazardjik and the informal leader of a group forming around him, have been monitored by law enforcement since the early 2000s. He has been the subject of series of arrests and three court trials. He was put on trial for the first time in November 2004 under indictment for preaching Islamic fundamentalism, propagation of changes in the constitutional order and instigation of inter-ethnic hatred on religious grounds.<sup>131</sup> Under this trial, the regional court in Pazardjik issued a three-year suspended sentence for Musa for participation in a banned Islamic foundation, rejection of the secular state and preaching in favour of a Caliphate.<sup>132</sup> Between September and March 2012, Ahmed Musa was again put on trial under accusations for preaching undemocratic ideology, hatred on religious grounds and for being a member of the non-registered organisation Al-Wakf-al-Islami.<sup>133</sup> The verdict at appellate instance included two years of imprisonment, a fine of 5,000 leva (approx. €2,500) and enforcement of the verdict of his 2004 trial – of 3 years of imprisonment.<sup>134</sup> On 25 November 2014, SANS and the prosecution conducted an operation in the Roma quarters of the towns of Pazardjik, Plovdiv, Smolyan and Haskovo on suspicion of criminal misconduct involving preaching of undemocratic ideology, violent change of the public order and incitement of war.<sup>135</sup> The number of those arrested in the operation varies between 20 and 40 according to different media reports, most of them released on the same day.<sup>136</sup> In a press conference following the operation the SANS Chair Vladimir Pisanchev stated that there is no IS cell in the country implying that the operation was conducted as a preventive measure aimed to stop such a cell from being established.<sup>137</sup> As a result of the SANS operation, seven Muslim Roma remained in custody on charges for preaching undemocratic ideology (all seven) and propagation of a war (one of them).<sup>138</sup> Ahmed Musa was also retained in custody.<sup>139</sup> On 31 March 2015 another eight persons were arrested on charges of preaching anti-democratic ideology and incitement of war.<sup>140</sup> All of the arrested on 25 November 2014 and on 31 March 2015 were Roma from the Roma quarters in the towns of Pazardjik, Plovdiv and

<sup>131</sup> *News.bg*, „В Пазарджик гледат дело за проповядване на ислямски фундаментализъм“, 01.11.2004.

<sup>132</sup> *ТелекабелTV*, „Кой е задържаният Ахмед Муса?“, 25.11.2014.

<sup>133</sup> *Обвинителен акт, досъдебно производство № 9/2009, Преписка вх. № 1122/09, Окръжна Прокуратура – Пазарджик.*

<sup>134</sup> *Присъда, Пловдивски апелативен съд, гр. Пловдив, 01.07.2015.*

<sup>135</sup> *В. Дневник*, „ДАНС влезе в ромската махала и в джамията в Пазарджик“, 25.11.2014.

<sup>136</sup> *В. Дневник*, „Над 20 са задържаните при спецакцията на ДАНС“, 25.11.2014; *Mediapool.bg*, „Ходжи имами арестувани при антитерористична акция в четири града“, 25.11.2014.

<sup>137</sup> *В. Дневник*, „Това не е клетка на „Ислямска държава“, но можеше да бъде“; в. *Дневник*, „ДАНС и прокуратурата с акция за ‘генерална превенция’ срещу Ислямска Държава“, 26.11.2014.

<sup>138</sup> *В. Дневник*, „Съдът остави в ареста всички задържани мюсюлмани от акцията на ДАНС“, 29.11.2014.

<sup>139</sup> *В. 24 часа*, „Съдът остави окончателно в ареста обвинения за радикален ислям Ахмед Муса“, 21.05.2015.

<sup>140</sup> *Сп. Правен свят*, „Прокуратурата обвини още 8 привърженици на Ислямска държава“, 31.3.2015.

Asenovgrad. On 2 July 2015 a new court case was opened against 14 persons, including Ahmed Musa,<sup>141</sup> indicted for propagating hatred on religious grounds (13 of them) and inciting war (all 14 defendants).<sup>142</sup> As of November 2015, the case has been returned twice (on 22 July and on 23 September 2015) by the judge to the Prosecutor's Office to rectify procedural violations of defendants' rights.<sup>143</sup>

### Countering proselytism of Salafi interpretations of Islam by Bulgarian citizens

In February 2007, Ali Khairaddin and three other Muslims associated with the Union of Bulgarian Muslims were arrested in an operation conducted by the Directorate General for Combatting Organised Crime and SANS on charges of publishing "two radical Islamic websites" and propagating the establishment of a Sharia state and waging a jihad against non-Muslims. According to the charges, Khairaddin was connected to Ahmad Musa who had been deported earlier.<sup>144</sup> However, Ali Khairaddin was soon released and no further investigation was conducted against him. In 2007, the Qur'an course in the town of Sarnitsa, Velingrad region, was closed under suspicion of connection with the Islamic foundation "Al Wakf Islami" and allegations for propagation of radical Islam.<sup>145</sup> In June 2009, the regional prosecution office in the town of Pazardjik initiated pre-trial proceedings against the activities of a local branch of the organisation "Al Wakf Islami". The investigation led to joint search operations by SANS, the MoI and the prosecution in the offices and homes of imams in the regions of Smolyan, Velingrad, Gotse Delchev, Madan, Rudozem, Dospat, Sarnitsa, the villages of Kondovi and Kochan (6 October 2010). The operation, which was unprecedented in its scope led to the opening in September 2012 of a trial against 12 imams (and the Islamic preacher Ahmed Musa). The trial raised the question of possible radicalisation of local Muslims based on orthodox interpretations of Islam, with public officials, experts and minority activists fiercely arguing whether or not there is such a threat. According to the indictment, two of the defendants were charged for preaching anti-democratic ideology (Art. 108 of the *Criminal Code*) and preaching of hatred on religious grounds (Art. 164 of the *Criminal Code*), and all twelve defendants were charged for participating in unregistered organisation (one of them as leader and 11 as members, Art. 109 of the *Criminal Code*).<sup>146</sup> Two defendants were found innocent

<sup>141</sup> В. *Дневник*, „Прокуратурата е внесла обвинение срещу подсъдимите за радикален ислям (допълнена)“, 02.07.2015.

<sup>142</sup> Indictment under re-trial proceedings N 87/2014, registry file N 2291/14, Regional Prosecution Office Pazardjik.

<sup>143</sup> *News.bg*, „Прекратиха делото срещу Пазарджишките ислямисти“, 22.07.2015; „Второто дело за радикален ислям ‘зави’ към прокуратурата“, 24.09.2015, available at <http://www.desant.net/show-news/33650/>

<sup>144</sup> В. *Сега*, „Бивш мюфтия арестуван в акция срещу фундаменталисти“, 27.02.2015; *Vesti.bg*, „Бившият столичен мюфтия арестуван за пропаганда на радикален ислям у нас“, 20.02.2007.

<sup>145</sup> Троева (2012), pp. 5-23.

<sup>146</sup> Обвинителен акт, досъдебно производство № 9/2009, Преписка вх. № 1122/09, Окръжна Прокуратура – Пазарджик. The charges are under art. 108/1, art. 109/1 and 2, and art. 164/1 of the *Criminal Code*.

on the first two charges (preaching of religious hatred<sup>147</sup> and anti-democratic ideology<sup>148</sup>). All twelve defendants were released from criminal liability on the charge of membership or leadership of unregistered organisations and were sentenced to pay fines.<sup>149</sup>

It should be pointed out that the trial of 2012-2015 raised a heated public debate centred around the question whether the religious proselytism of the twelve imams, based on Salafi interpretations of Islam, was a sign or act of Islamist radicalisation. While some experts and far right politicians claimed that these were indications of radicalisation,<sup>150</sup> other experts on Muslim minorities and Islam claimed that the activity of the twelve imams pointed to heightened religiosity associated with profession of Salafi interpretations of Islam as well as of proselytism of Salafi Islam.<sup>151</sup> At the opening of the trial, the Chief Musftiate issued a declaration in support of the defendants stating that the charges (threatening the national security and the constitutional order) were “inhuman,” given excessive media coverage and based on claims that are manipulative. Worries were shared that such charges undermine the reputation of the religious institution of the Muslims and hopes were expressed that competent, independent and just decision would be taken by the Bulgarian judicial system.<sup>152</sup> The Movement for Rights and Freedoms issued a declaration with similar contents. The party insisted that the charges were given excessive media coverage and were the outcome of lack of sufficient competences in theology. The declaration noted that in the context of the voiced concerns that certain imams graduate from Saudi Arabia the High Islamic Institute in Bulgaria remained without accreditation and thus prevented Bulgarian Muslims from studying in their home country.<sup>153</sup>

<sup>147</sup> Verdict issued by the court of first instance (Пазарджишки окръжен съд, Присъда, 19.03.2014 г., гр. Пазарджик).

<sup>148</sup> Verdict issued by Plovdiv appellate court (Пловдивски Апелативен Съд, Присъда, 01.07.2015, гр. Пловдив).

<sup>149</sup> The court of first instance and the appellate court sentenced one defendant to a fine of 4,000 levs, two defendants to pay 3,000 levs each and nine defendants to pay 2,000 levs each.

<sup>150</sup> Some examples include: Expertise by expert witnesses Agop Garabedian, Antoni Galabov, Klara Stamatova under the court trial against the 12 imams – Court of First Instance, Regional Court – Pazardjik; Алексиев, А., „При делото в Пазарджик по всичко личи, че имаме работа с убедени ислямисти“, 5.07.2013, [www.librev.com](http://www.librev.com); Yordan Peev, his opinion in his capacity of expert witness under the court trial against the 12 imams – Court of Appellate Instance, Regional Court – Plovdiv, reported in *Epicenter.bg*, „Делото срещу 13-те имами продължава на 23 юни с разпит на ново вещо лице и свидетели“, 07.04.2015.

<sup>151</sup> Some examples include: Expert witness testimonies by Simeon Evgatiev and Ivan Dulgerov in the trial against the 12 imams – Court of First Instance, Regional Court – Pazardjik; Евстатиев (2014); Желязкова (2012); Opinions expressed by Mihail Ivanov and Pavel Pavlovitch (as quoted in: *Novini.bg*, „Павлович: Имамите в Пазарджик няма да бъдат осъдени“, 28.09.2012); Чуков (2013).

<sup>152</sup> Декларация на Главно мюфтийство на Мюсюлманско изповедание в Република България, по повод повдигнатите обвинения срещу 13-те български граждани, изповядващи исляма, от Окръжна прокуратура – Пазарджик, 25.09. 2012, available at: <http://web-archive-bg.com/page/3085970/2013-10-26/http://grandmufti.bg/bg/2011-07-19-19-47-51/2803-deklaratziya-na-glavno-myuftiistvo-na-myusyulmansko-izpovedanie-v-republika-balgariya-po-povod-povdignatite-obvineniya-sreshtu-13-te-balgarski-grazhdani-izpovyadvashti-islyama-ot-okrazhna-prokuratura-pazardzhik.html>

<sup>153</sup> Available at: <http://www.vesti.bg/bulgaria/politika/dps-s-deklaraciia-protiv-islamofobiata-5194311>

It needs to be stressed that the approach to preventing and countering Islamist radicalisation in Bulgaria should involve a range of civil institutions at the central and local levels with law enforcement institutions to come into play as the last resort of institutional response. In this respect, it is highly recommended that strategies be developed for facilitating and improving the dialogue between the Islamic denomination (represented by the Chief Muftiate) and the Bulgarian institutions. In particular, the Directorate of Religious Denominations at the Council of Ministers needs to develop strategies for communication and regular dialogue with the Muslim religious leadership and should also serve to facilitate the dialogue between Muslim religious leaders and the other state institutions. In addition, the Chief Muftiate needs to take more proactive role in the Muslim community in the context of the global radicalisation challenges, for example by way of taking official positions on key issues related to the Islamic profession and by tightening the control over the Islamic denomination throughout the country. In the context of the global radicalisation challenges Bulgarian state institutions may consider well informed policies of empowerment of the Chief Muftiate in order to help reinforce the resilience of Muslim communities to imported interpretations of Islam.

## 6. ROOT CAUSES AND MOTIVATIONS

The root causes and motivations are considered in this report through the community approach which brings into analysis issues such as communities' social, religious and identity dynamics. The approach is applied with the awareness that it is criticised by some scholars in the field of Islamist radicalisation because of its limitations and analytical risks. The criticism of these authors is based on the argument that the circumstances and conditions of whole communities are not sufficient to explain the violent Islamist behaviour of usually isolated individuals or groups of individuals.<sup>154</sup> However, this approach seems useful for the case of Bulgaria for two reasons. The criticisms of the community approach analysis are usually voiced when it is applied to the understanding the genesis of violent acts of Islamist radicalisation. In Bulgaria, however, no acts of such kind have been committed. The issue of the risks of Islamist radicalisation in the country is presently tied to processes of religious resurgence based on the adoption of Salafi interpretations of Islam. The genesis and root causes of such processes can best be analysed and understood in the context of community dynamics.

### Acts of symbolic approval of Islamist organisations

So far, little or no research has been conducted to trace macro or micro level factors that contribute to the adoption of Salafi interpretations of Islam by segments of some Roma communities and what pushes and pulls some of them into manifesting sympathy with Islamist ideas and organisations. The factors that are presently being discussed relate to social and economic circumstances as well

<sup>154</sup> PISOIU, D. (2014) "Radicalisation", in Joselyne Cesari (ed.) *Oxford Handbook of European Islam*, Oxford University Press; DALGAARD-NIELSEN, A. (2010) "Violent radicalisation in Europe: What we know and what we do not know," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 33:9.

as to identity dynamics. Experts in the field of minority studies and Islam point to the role of identity dynamics played in the process. According to Zhelyazkova<sup>155</sup> the Roma in Bulgaria display unstable religious identity and share history of conversions from Islam to Orthodox Christianity and Evangelism. In the context of their severe marginalisation in the Bulgarian society the Roma from the Iztok quarter of Pazardjik started adopting Salafi interpretations of Islam because it provided them with a transnational identity that gives them symbolic status of a different magnitude.<sup>156</sup> The same factors appear to motivate some of them for performing demonstrative acts that serve to signify and reinforce their new identity and association with the larger transnational Islamic community.<sup>157</sup> It should be noted that at the same time the Salafi interpretation of Islam is adopted by the Roma at a rather superficial level and is not associated with deeper internalisation of the religious doctrine.<sup>158</sup>

The severe social and economic marginalisation of the Roma, their low educational attainment with shares of the young Roma population being illiterate are considered to play an important role in the process as well. These factors are believed to make them susceptible to simple truths and respectively to simplified Salafi interpretations of the religious doctrine. The prospect of improvement of the social and financial status and of being accepted within a peer group seem to play a role in the recruitment into the Roma Salafi circle. According to law enforcement information, some young persons with drug addiction problems have joined these groups after having been offered support and helped to find wives and work.<sup>159</sup> In addition, in some cases initial motivations for adopting Salafi Islam among the Roma involve financial stimulus for wearing the niqab, for example.<sup>160</sup> Becoming part of the group of Muslim Roma professing the Salafi interpretation of Islam in the Iztok quarter of the town of Pazardjik is associated with three important changes in the male social practices which are considered by the women as being a significant improvement in the life of the family and the community at large. These practices stem from the adherence to required religious norms and include abstaining from alcohol, no resort to violence towards female partners and bringing earned money into home and family.<sup>161</sup> An educated guess would also point to the accessibility of radical Islamist ideas through the internet.

It needs to be stressed, however, that in-depth sociological and anthropological research should be conducted in order to establish the factors that make some individuals from the Roma community receptive to Salafi interpretations of Islam and inclined to manifesting sympathy with IS. While such studies would have to assess the role of factors such as poverty and marginalisation (relevant at community level) they should focus on the investigation of individual characteristics,

<sup>155</sup> Expert interview with A. Zhelyazkova, 05.06.2015.

<sup>156</sup> Expert interviews with A. Zhelyazkova (05.06.2015) and Y. Peev, (23.06.2015).

<sup>157</sup> Йорданов, Р., „Държавата загуби контрол над гетата. Интервю с Антонина Желязкова“, в. *Стандарт*, 27.11.2014.

<sup>158</sup> Expert interview with Y. Peev, 23.06.2015.

<sup>159</sup> Expert interview, representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions, 15.06.2015.

<sup>160</sup> Expert interview, representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions, 18.06. 2015.

<sup>161</sup> Expert interview, A. Zhelyazkova, 05.06.2015.

the community dynamics (peer pressure, need of group belonging, social and economic benefits) and the structural factors (spread and accessibility of the ideas of Islamist radicalisation; reception and reaction of the broader society, including discrimination and racism towards the Roma) that play into this process. Such studies should look into the role of women in the process of adoption of Salafi interpretations of Islam. Finally, such studies would also need to establish the factors that make other Roma from the very same localities, Orthodox Christians and Evangelists, resilient to such influences.

### **Proselytising and professing Salafi interpretations of Islam among Bulgarian-speaking Muslims**

The factors that contributed to the adoption of orthodox interpretations of Islam by some Bulgarian-speaking Muslims have been researched and discussed by a number of scholars, either anthropologists working among Muslim communities or specialists in Islamic studies.<sup>162</sup> The same studies also explain why such a process has not taken place among the Turkish community and the factors that prove Muslim communities in Bulgaria generally resilient to Salafism.

The process of adoption of Salafi interpretations of Islam is tied to a religious resurgence among some segments of Muslim communities in Bulgaria and it is the outcome of a number of factors. Given the two important channels through which this influence took place – the international Islamic charitable establishment<sup>163</sup> and proselytism by local imams who graduated from religious academies abroad – the factors that opened these channels need to be discussed. The training of local imams abroad is the outcome of the low level of Islamic training in Bulgaria which in addition serves the needs of members of the Turkish community at the expense of those of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims. The language of training and communication in both the Islamic Institute and the three secondary Islamic schools in the country is often Turkish which contributes to creating sense of exclusion among Bulgarian-speaking Muslims.<sup>164</sup> In addition, these Islamic educational institutions teach “Turkish” interpretation of Islam insisting on the preservation of the Ottoman heritage which contradicts the re-Islamisation process among the Bulgarian-speaking Muslims who start looking for alternative ways to attain religious education.<sup>165</sup> Another important factor relates to the weakness of the Muslim leadership, torn by politically motivated struggles throughout the 1990s and the early 2000s. The process led to the neglect of the religious needs of the Muslim community especially those of the Bulgarian-speaking Muslims and perpetuated the “theological vacuum”<sup>166</sup> created in the communist period. This “vacuum” was filled by penetrating orthodox

<sup>162</sup> Ghodsee (2010); Троева (2012); Evstatiev (2006) pp. 62-65.

<sup>163</sup> The international Islamic charitable establishment penetrated not only into Bulgaria but into the whole of the Balkans since the Bosnian war. The process was the outcome of an official policy by Saudi Arabia that is in global competition with other Islamic world centres like Egypt, Pakistan and Indonesia. For a detailed account of charitable aid to Muslims in Bulgaria provided by countries such as Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait see Ghodsee (2010), pp. 130-158.

<sup>164</sup> Expert interview with M. Ivanov, 18.06.2015.

<sup>165</sup> Evstatiev (2006), pp. 62-65.

<sup>166</sup> Ghodsee (2010), pp. 116-129; Evstatiev (2006) pp. 62-65; Евстатиев (2014); Expert interview with M. Ivanov, 18.06.2015.



interpretations of Islam, on the one hand, and by a process of seeking leadership outside the country, especially by some Bulgarian speaking Muslims.<sup>167</sup> Another important factor involved the social and economic hardships related to the post-communist transition and experienced with particular severity by some Muslim populated regions such as Madan, Rudozem, Smolyan. The abrupt economic downturn experienced by some communities of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims will be associated with loss of status especially for men. This loss entailed an uneasy shift in gender roles which imported Salafi interpretations of Islam promised to reverse.<sup>168</sup>

The role played by identity dynamics in this process is also seriously discussed. Scholars that resort to this explanatory paradigm delve into identity dynamics as explaining both receptiveness and resilience to Salafi interpretations of Islam. Bulgarian-speaking Muslims, for example, have adopted three identity affiliations throughout the history of the modern Bulgarian national state – Bulgarian, Turk and Pomak. According to Troeva<sup>169</sup> the formation of the identity of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims is influenced by their surrounding population – if surrounded by ethnic Turks they tend to self-identify as Bulgarians and if surrounded by ethnic Bulgarians they tend to self-identify as Turks. Tendencies among the first group (inhabiting predominantly the Eastern and Northern Rhodope Mountains) involve preservation of traditional Balkan Islam, declarations of atheism or even instances of conversion to Christianity. Tendencies related to the second group (inhabiting predominantly the Western Rhodope Mountains) involve a process of resurgence of religion and adoption of orthodox Islam to the expense of centuries-long traditional Islamic interpretations and practices. This process takes place predominantly in the regions of Gotse Delchev, Madan and Rudozem where Bulgarian-speaking Muslims self-identify as “Turks”, “Pomaks”, “Muslims” and differentiate themselves from Orthodox Christian Bulgarians.<sup>170</sup> In the context of the unstable ethnic identity of the Pomaks, the Islamic religion becomes the most important identity component for some of them.<sup>171</sup> At the same time Islam is providing a space of “spiritual competition” between them and ethnic Turks – a competition that some Bulgarian-speaking Muslims consider to have won by the adoption of “true” Islam based on Salafi interpretations of the religion which made them better Muslims.<sup>172</sup>

It is important to point out that the issue of Islamist radicalisation has become the subject of instrumentalisation by the Muslims themselves in the context of the struggles for leadership of the Chief Muftiate that took place throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. On the one hand, since the late 1990s the Muslim leadership around Nedim Gendzhev started to claim that foreign emissaries supported by the rivalry Chief Muftiate were promoting Saudi-influenced Islam in Bulgaria – thus arguing against the legitimacy of the rivalry Muftiate and implying the importance of their own Muftiate as a guardian of traditional Islam in the country. On the

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<sup>167</sup> Евстатиєв (2014).

<sup>168</sup> Ghodsee (2010) pp. 25-26.

<sup>169</sup> Троева (2012), pp. 5-23.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.; Zhelyazkova (2014), pp. 577-578.

<sup>171</sup> Евстатиєв (2014).

<sup>172</sup> Expert interview with M. Ivanov, 18.06. 2015.

other hand, the rival Chief Muftiate<sup>173</sup> used the threat of Islamic fundamentalism to enforce their claims for reinstating the *vakuf*.<sup>174</sup> They argued that if the financial independence of the Chief Muftiate is not secured (by way of restoration of vakuf properties), Islamic fundamentalism would be embraced by many Muslims in Bulgaria as it brings vast resources into the country.<sup>175</sup> This reality and the approach by the divided Muslim leadership have played a negative role as regards the penetration of orthodox interpretations of Islam in the country. First, it hindered the effective prevention of such processes. Second, the very authority of the Muftiate as a spiritual leader of the denomination was weakened so that some Muslims in Bulgaria started looking for spiritual leadership elsewhere.

### Factors serving to discourage the adoption of Salafi interpretations Islam

Explanations about the resilience of the ethnic Turks to Salafi interpretations of Islam are related to the solid ethnic identity that they display as the largest Muslim minority in the country that is supported by neighbouring Turkey, as well as by their political party (MRF) which is secular-oriented. In addition, ethnic Turks receive aid from the Turkish state which appears to be a serious competitor to Islamic aid provided by countries like Jordan or Saudi Arabia.<sup>176</sup> It seems that in the post-communist period both the Chief Muftiate and the Islamic educational institutions in the country were attending to the needs of ethnic Turks to a greater extent than to the needs of Bulgarian-speaking Muslims. Factors that serve as resilient forces for both ethnic Turks and Bulgarian-speaking Muslims include the communist history of atheism and the preservation of secular preferences among members of both communities.<sup>177</sup> An important role is played by the pro-Bulgarian identity affiliations of some of the Bulgarian-speaking Muslims. In addition, the economic migration to countries of Western Europe and the U.S. served as a powerful tool to restore and maintain status at home in the times of post-communist collapse and massive loss of status due to the dismantling of

<sup>173</sup> Since 1997, under Mustafa Handzhi, since 2000 under Selim Mekhmed, since 2003 under Fikri Sali Hasan (History of the Chief Muftiate, available in Bulgarian at <http://www.grandmufti.bg/bg/za-nas/istoriya.html>, accessed on 10.06.2015).

<sup>174</sup> Also spelled *waqf* – a type of mortmain property (usually land or building) donated for Muslim religious or charitable purposes.

<sup>175</sup> The account of Kirsten Ghodsee implies that the issue of Islamic fundamentalism was instrumentalised by Nedim Genzhev for his own benefit in the context of deep “political machinations”, dominating the national leadership of the Islamic denomination. (Ghodsee (2010) p. 122).

<sup>176</sup> Expert interviews with A. Zhelyazkova (5.06.2015), M. Ivanov (18.06.2015) and Y. Peev (23.06.2015); Троева (2012); Ghodsee (2010), p. 140. The stable identity of the ethnic Turks and their more secular orientation and better integration are considered by law enforcement and intelligence experts to serve as factors contributing to the resilience of this community to imported interpretations of Islam (Expert interview with a representative of law enforcement/intelligence institutions, 15.06.2015).

<sup>177</sup> A representative sociological survey conducted in 2011 revealed that 41% of the Muslims in Bulgaria declare not to visit mosques and 59.3% declare not to pray at all. Those that declare to be “deeply religious” are 28.5%. The highest share of “deeply religious” is among Muslim Bulgarians – 32% (Иванова, 2014). Comparison with a similar survey conducted in 1994 shows no increase in the share of deeply religious Muslim Bulgarians – 32% (Tomova, I., Specifics of the Religiousness of Muslims and Christians in Bulgaria, in Zhelyazkova, A. (ed.) Relations of Compatibility and Incompatibility Between Christians and Muslims in Bulgaria, Sofia – IMIR (no year of publication), p. 374.

industrial and mining enterprises established in Muslim populated regions of the country.<sup>178</sup> Finally, emissaries and preachers from the Arabian Peninsula were at an ideological disadvantage with regard to local (Bulgarian and Balkan) Muslims. Bearing the purist and authoritarian spirit of Salafism they approached local Muslims with ignorance of their religious syncretism and local conventions and lack of understanding for the fabric of interfaith relations that have been developed and tested for centuries. This posed a serious hindrance to their proselyte messages and prevented a deeper influence into the social and cultural fabric of Muslim communities.<sup>179</sup> Experts share the view that the long Hannafi Sunni tradition of Bulgarian Muslims makes the majority of them – Turks and Bulgarian-speaking Muslims – resilient to imported Salafi interpretations of Islam and make those of them who adopted such interpretations resilient to potential affiliation with any radical and even less with the militant aspects of this interpretation.<sup>180</sup>

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<sup>178</sup> It is likely that the same factors may serve as a force of resilience among Roma communities. If this is the case, it would be all the more important to study the factors that lead some members of the Roma community to express sympathies to IS.

<sup>179</sup> Kerem (2010), p. 20. This argument is expressed also by Simeon Evstatiev in his expert testimony at the trial against the imams. He claims that the Islamic exhortation spread by Saudi Arabia (by way of charity and education) is still rather limited to local cultural roots in the Arab Peninsula and is being “exported” before it could develop and offer a more inclusive interpretations of Islam. (Експертиза на доц. Д-р Симеон Евстатиев и гл. ас. Иван Дюлгеров – арабисти, по делото за разпространение на анти-демократична идеология – на първа инстанция в окръжен съд Пазарджик).

<sup>180</sup> Expert interviews with A. Zhelyazkova (5.06.2015), M. Ivanov (18.06.2015) and Y. Peev (23.06.2015).