

OVERVIEW OF TERRORISM



Volume IV Issue 2/2026

SALAFI ACCENTS JIHADISM LEFT-WING AND ANARCHIST EXTREMISM

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Police officers
and a bystander try
to detain the attacker
in North London.

Source:
Still from Northern
Provisions video,
Instagram.

- ◆ The escalation of hostilities between the US and Iran is leading to a new wave of radicalization in Europe, both among followers of Shiite Islam and among those of Sunni Islam. The Harakat Ashab al-Yamin al-Islamia group is establishing itself as a key actor organizing and inciting anti-Semitic attacks on the European continent.
- ◆ When choosing tactical means to carry out a terrorist act, radicalized individuals demonstrate an increasing willingness to use radiological, chemical and biological weapons.



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OVERVIEW OF TERRORISM is quarterly bulletin of the **Research Centre for Extremism and Terrorism's**, focusing on global terrorist activity. The purpose of the bulletin is to provide information on the current state and assess the terrorism and extremism trends.

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RESEARCH MATRIX

Scope: The research is focused on the monitoring, analysis and assessment of radicalization processes, manifestations of extremism and terrorism globally, counter-terrorism and anti-terrorist actions of competent authorities, as well as other current security issues.

Sources: The information required for the purposes of the study is obtained entirely from open sources. The facts and circumstances that are disclosed, as well as the photographic and graphic material used, in no way constitute state or official secrets, as well as foreign classified information, including the information of NATO and the bodies of the European Union. When processing information, the principles of reliability, accuracy, timeliness and impartiality are respected.

Methodology: The analysis and evaluation of the information is carried out following predetermined indicators and criteria, which aim to reveal the regularities in the investigated security environment. The methodology used includes case study, cognitive methods (comparison, generalization), epistemological methods (analysis, synthesis), logical methods (induction, deduction, analogy, abduction) and structuring methods (system method).

TERRORIST ACTIVITY, EXTREMISM, RADICALIZATION – CURRENT SITUATION

Dr. Svetoslav Yordanov

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KEY FINDINGS:

- ✓ The escalation of hostilities between the US and Iran is leading to a new wave of radicalization in Europe, both among followers of Shiite Islam and among those of Sunni Islam.
- ✓ The Harakat Ashab al-Yamin al-Islamia group is establishing itself as a key actor organizing and inciting anti-Semitic attacks on the European continent.
- ✓ When choosing tactical means to carry out a terrorist act, radicalized individuals demonstrate an increasing willingness to use radiological, chemical and biological weapons.
- ✓ There is a specific selection of targets by those who prepare or carry out terrorist attacks on an Islamist basis – religious temples, diplomatic missions and legal entities with sympathies for Israel or the USA are preferred. The reason is because of the desired effect – a wide international political resonance and the formation of a public mood that the American and Israeli governments cannot guarantee the security of their own citizens in Europe.
- ✓ Cases of terrorist activity based on neo-accelerationism are being registered in European countries where such manifestations have not been known before.
- ✓ A risk profile of individuals carrying out Islamist terrorist activity is emerging, which tends to become sustainable. These are adult men who are released from prison after having already served a sentence for crimes related to jihadism. These individuals have undergone deradicalization programs and yet have not changed their ideological views, and are often even more motivated to use violence to achieve their goals.
- ✓ A “lone wolf” terrorist attack on an Islamophobic basis targeting worshippers has been registered.
- ✓ There has been an increase in the activity of ethno-nationalist movements in Northern Ireland, as a result of the increased attacks by migrants on peaceful citizens and the lack of trust in institutions.
- ✓ A new case of the use of artificial intelligence in the creation of videos with terrorist propaganda content has been registered.
- ✓ Cases of radicalized individuals planning terrorist attacks under external operational direction of structures affiliated with Daesh are increasing.
- ✓ There has been an increase in the activity of anarchist movements, which is caused by the collision between their anti-militaristic views and the policies of European governments regarding the conflicts in the Middle East and the war in Ukraine.
- ✓ The trend of joint terrorist activity by individuals with family ties persists, especially in the field of Islamist terrorism.

Events in Focus

There were examined 46 events of research interest that took place between February and June 2026 in the following countries: Austria (2), Belgium (1), Czech Republic (1), France (6), Germany (3), Great Britain (5), Greece (1), Italy (12), Netherlands (4), North Macedonia (1), Norway (1), Spain (7), Switzerland (1) and Turkey (1). For each case study, information from three independent sources was used, at least one of which was local, including official ones.

Austria

➤ On May 31, 2026, it became known^{1,2,3} that a large-scale anti-terrorist operation had been carried out throughout Austria, in which 6 people aged 14 to 45, including a 16-year-old girl, were arrested. The detainees had been carrying out propaganda in the interests of the Islamic State, inciting terrorist attacks and praising terrorism.

➤ On March 5, 2026, a mass stick fight was reported^{4,5,6} in Vienna in front of the Iranian Imam Ali Cultural Center during a memorial event dedicated to the slain Supreme Leader of Iran, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. The clash, which involved about 70 people, was between supporters of the official Iranian government and Iranian dissidents, with nine people reportedly injured.

Following the events, a parliamentary inquiry committee and subsequent investigation into the Islamic Iranian Center was initiated, with allegations that it was radicalizing youth and promoting anti-Semitism. Footage also emerged in the public domain at the Imam Ali Center, showing men self-flagelling as part of a religious practice.

Belgium

➤ On 9 March 2026, an improvised explosive device (IED) was reportedly detonated^{7,8,9} in front of a synagogue in Liège, causing material damage to the religious complex and surrounding buildings. The attack was claimed by the Harakat Ashab al-Yamin al-Islamiya group, which is known to be a proxy for the Iraqi Shiite militia Kata'ib Hezbollah, which in turn is linked to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Arrests have been made in the US and Turkey in connection with the blast and Belgian authorities are searching for two individuals believed to be the direct perpetrators of the terrorist act.

¹ 2026 [Mai 31]. Schlag gegen Extremismus: 6 Festnahmen, 14 Razzien. *Kronen Zeitung*.

² 2026 [Mai 31]. Islamistischer Extremismus: Sechs Personen festgenommen. *ORF*.

³ 2026 [Mai 31]. Umfangreiche Maßnahmen im Vorgehen gegen den islamistischen Terror im Mai umgesetzt. *Direktion Staatsschutz und Nachrichtendienst (DSN)*.

⁴ 2026 [März 5]. Neun Verletzte bei Massenschlägerei nach Khamenei-Gedenken. *Kleine Zeitung*.

⁵ 2026 [April 14]. Nationalrat will mögliche Schließung von Imam-Ali-Zentrum in Wien prüfen. *Die Presse*.

⁶ 2026 [April 16]. Ausschreitungen: Wiener Bezirk gegen Islam-Zentrum. *Kronen Zeitung*.

⁷ Warnotte, P., 2026 [Mars 9]. Explosion à la synagogue de Liège : « Quand un attentat vise une communauté, il cible l'ensemble de la population ». *Le Soir*.

⁸ Crespin, J., 2026 [Mai 28]. Attentat devant la synagogue de Liège: la police à la recherche de deux suspects. *L'Avenir*.

⁹ 2026 [Mars 13]. Explosion at Liège synagogue raises fears of Iran-linked terror cells in Europe. *Belga News Agency*.

Czech Republic

➤ On March 20, 2026, an arson attack was carried out^{10,11,12} in Pardubice against the defense company LPP Holding, specializing in the production of drones and optics, causing material damage worth hundreds of millions of Czech crowns. Responsibility for the attack was claimed by a new anti-Israel extremist group calling itself Earthquake Faction. The factory was chosen as a target because of its cooperation with the Israeli military company Elbit Systems. More than a dozen people of various nationalities were detained in the case.

France

➤ On 11 May 2026, it was reported that^{13,14,15}, following an investigation by the General Directorate for Internal Security (Direction générale de la Sécurité intérieure/ DGSI), a 27-year-old *Tunisian man* was arrested in Paris for planning terrorist attacks on the Louvre and Jewish community sites. According to authorities, the man entered the European Union illegally via the migrant route via the island of Lampedusa. He had consumed large amounts of jihadist content, sought information on how to produce IEDs, and intended to travel to Mozambique or Syria, where he would become a fighter for the Islamic State.

The Tunisian was not afraid to openly demonstrate his radical ideological leanings, and even his profile picture on social media was an image of a Daesh member beheading people. During his arrest, a fake driver's license was found on the man.

➤ On March 28, 2026, it was reported^{16,17,18} that French authorities had prevented a bomb attack on a Bank of America office in Paris. The improvised explosive device was planted by a 17-year-old *Senegalese man* who was arrested moments before detonating it. The IED was made from 5 liters of gasoline, 650 grams of explosives, and a detonator. The minor was recruited to carry out the attack on the 650 EU on the Snapchat mobile app by a 20-year-old man who was also later arrested. Two other 16-year-olds were arrested for their involvement in the act. Law enforcement authorities believe that the pro-Iranian group Harakat Ashhab al-Yamin al-Islamiya was behind the attack.

➤ On 15 March 2026, it was reported^{19,20,21} that two brothers, aged 20 and 22, of Italian and Moroccan nationality, had been arrested in northern France on charges of

¹⁰ 2026 [May 27]. Police detain another suspect over arson attack on Pardubice arms factory. *Radio Prague International*.

¹¹ Zachova, A., 2026 [March 20]. Fire at Czech–Israeli defence site probed as possible terror attack. *Euractiv*.

¹² 2026 [Duben 2]. Polská tajná služba potvrdila zatčení muže a ženy kvůli požáru v Pardubicích. *Česká televize*.

¹³ Tenre, S., 2026 [Mai 11]. Un Tunisien de 27 ans mis en examen et écroué pour avoir projeté un attentat djihadiste contre un musée parisien. *Le Figaro*.

¹⁴ Pham-Le, J., 2026 [May 11]. Man arrested over planned jihadist attack targeting the Louvre. *Le Monde*.

¹⁵ 2026 [May 11]. France arrests Tunisian suspected of planning 'jihad-inspired' attack in Paris. *France 24*.

¹⁶ 2026 [Avril 1]. Attentat déjoué contre Bank of America à Paris : une information judiciaire ouverte pour association de malfaiteurs terroriste. *Le Parisien*.

¹⁷ 2026 [Avril 1]. Attentat contre la Bank of America déjoué à Paris : un homme d'une vingtaine d'années soupçonné d'avoir recruté trois adolescents. *Le Monde*.

¹⁸ Duchene, S., 2026 [Mars 28]. Attentat déjoué à Paris: Nuñez fait "le lien" avec la guerre au Moyen-Orient. *Euronews*.

¹⁹ 2026 [March 15]. Two brothers arrested in France over 'deadly and antisemitic' plot, anti-terror prosecutors say. *Le Monde*.

preparing a terrorist attack. The men, one of whom was an engineering student, were targeting the Jewish community. They had set out to carry out attacks on French soil because they had failed to join the jihad in Palestine or Syria.

The brothers are known to have pledged allegiance to the Islamic State and maintained contacts with other terrorists. During the searches, a Daesh flag, a firearm, 9mm ammunition, a bottle of hydrochloric acid and aluminum foil were found in their possession.

➤ On 20 February 2026, it was reported^{22,23,24} that two 16-year-old jihadists had been arrested in northern France following an investigation by the DGSI. They had planned a terrorist attack against a shopping mall or concert hall in Lille. As a tactic, they intended to use stolen firearms and IEDs, with one of the minors having obtained chemical substances to use to make the bomb. The two boys had radicalized themselves online.

➤ On February 13, 2026, it became known^{25,26,27} that a gendarmerie patrolling in the square in front of the Arc de Triomphe in Paris was attacked with a knife. The attacker was shot dead by another gendarmerie officer. The perpetrator of the act was 48-year-old Brahim Bahrir, a known jihadist who had just been released from prison two months earlier after serving a sentence for stabbing two police officers in the Belgian district of Molenbeek in 2012. During his stay in prison, Brahim participated in a deradicalization program. According to authorities, about 70 people who have served sentences in France related to Islamist terrorism are released from prison every year, and it is not a precedent for them to commit a new similar crime after that.

➤ On February 12, 2026, after a hand-to-hand fight on a street in Lyon, 23-year-old far-right activist Quentin Derank was fatally injured^{28,29,30} and died in hospital two days later. The young man, who was a co-founder of the neo-fascist formation Les Allobroges, was attacked by 11 far-left activists from the anti-fascist group Young Anti-Fascist Guard. The tragic incident was preceded by other violent clashes between rival left-wing and right-wing extremist factions in Lyon.

²⁰ 2026 [Mars 15]. Terrorisme : deux frères, soupçonnés d'un projet « mortifère et antisémite », mis en examen et écroués. *Le Parisien*.

²¹ 2026 [Mars 15]. France : deux frères arrêtés après des soupçons de projet terroriste « antisémite ». *Le Soir*.

²² Pham-Le, J., 2026 [Février 20]. Un projet d'attentat à l'explosif impliquant deux mineurs déjoué par la DGSI dans le Nord. *Le Parisien*.

²³ Tenre, S., 2026 [Février 20]. Nord : un projet d'attentat terroriste déjoué par la DGSI, deux mineurs de 16 ans mis en examen. *Le Figaro*.

²⁴ 2026 [Février 20]. Deux mineurs âgés de 16 ans interpellés mardi pour un projet d'attentat dans le Nord mis en examen, l'un d'eux placé en détention. *Franceinfo*.

²⁵ Diquattro, T., 2026 [Février 13]. Attaque au couteau contre des gendarmes à l'Arc de Triomphe : « On a tout de suite compris ce qu'il se passait ». *Le Parisien*.

²⁶ 2026 [Février 14]. Attaque de l'Arc de Triomphe : le lourd passé de l'assaillant dévoilé. *Franceinfo*.

²⁷ Ayad, C., 2026 [Février 14]. L'attaque au couteau de l'Arc de triomphe illustre la difficulté du suivi des radicalisés sortis de détention. *Le Monde*.

²⁸ Schittly, R., 2026 [Février 16]. L'enquête sur la mort de Quentin D. progresse à Lyon après « plusieurs témoignages significatifs », selon le procureur. *Le Monde*.

²⁹ Aublanc, M., 2026 [Février 16]. « Au moins » six agresseurs, mais aucune interpellation à ce stade... ce qu'il faut retenir de l'enquête sur le décès de Quentin à Lyon. *Le Parisien*.

³⁰ Davalou, L., 2026 [February 18]. Eleven arrested over death of French far-right activist in Lyon as LFI comes under fire. *Euronews*.

Germany

➤ On May 11, 2026, it became known^{31,32,33} that a 17-year-old *Syrian national* was arrested in Hamburg for planning a terrorist attack. The young man had self-radicalized and was a supporter of the ideology of the Islamic State. The targets included a shopping mall, entertainment venues and a police station, and the tactical methods chosen were an improvised explosive device (IED), an improvised incendiary device (IED) and a knife. During the searches, the authorities found nitrogen fertilizer, incendiary liquid and a knife.

➤ On May 6, 2026, it was reported^{34,35,36} that a specialized police operation had been carried out against right-wing extremism. 36 searches were carried out in several German states at locations mainly linked to minors of the far-right groups Deutsche Jugend Voran (DJV) and Jung und Stark (JS). Both extremist organizations are active online, are characterized by a low level of conspiratoriness, and are responsible for multiple acts of street violence and arson in migrant accommodation facilities.

➤ On April 4, 2026, a nighttime attack was reported^{37,38,39} on a Jewish restaurant in Munich. Pyrotechnics were used, causing several thousand euros in material damage. Authorities suspect that the attack was motivated by anti-Semitic motives. A significant problem in assessing extremist acts against the Jewish community is the low rate of reporting of such incidents by victims⁴⁰, with the reasons for this being a loss of trust in law enforcement and fear of subsequent retaliation.

Great Britain

➤ On 19 June 2026, a 36-year-old man stabbed five men with a large kitchen knife at various locations in Edinburgh^{41,42,43}. The attacks were Islamophobic in nature, with the first two victims being stabbed as they left Broomhouse Mosque immediately after evening prayers. The radicalised perpetrator went on an hour-long rampage, attempting to kill Muslims at random and destroying property with a small axe.

The attack comes amid high ethnic tensions and anti-immigrant sentiment on the island, after a 30-year-old man of *Sudanese origin* attacked a health worker⁴⁴ with a knife in Belfast on June 8. The incident was filmed by bystanders, with footage circulating showing the Sudanese man straddling his victim and attempting to cut off his head as the man screamed

³¹ 2026 [Mai 11]. 17-Jähriger wegen Vorbereitung von Sprengstoffanschlag in Hamburg festgenommen. *SPIEGEL*.

³² 2026 [Mai 11]. Jugendlicher soll Anschlag im Namen des IS geplant haben. *ZDF Heute*.

³³ 2026 [Mai 11]. Spezialkräfte nehmen 17-Jährigen wegen Anschlagsplänen fest. *Die Zeit*.

³⁴ 2026 [Mai 6]. Nach Gewalttaten: Razzia gegen junge Neonazi-Gruppen. *Die Zeit*.

³⁵ Geisler, A.; Kraetzer, U.; Röbel, S., 2026 [Mai 6]. Großrazzia gegen Neonazi-Nachwuchs. *SPIEGEL*.

³⁶ Schmidt, H.; Götschenberg, M., 2026 [Mai 6]. Bundesweite Razzia gegen rechtsextreme Organisationen. *Tagesschau*.

³⁷ Hallam, M., 2026 [April 10]. Germany: Police suspect antisemitism in restaurant attack. *Deutsche Welle*.

³⁸ 2026 [April 10]. München: Angriff auf israelisches Restaurant. *ZDF Heute*.

³⁹ 2026 [April 10]. Unbekannte attackieren israelisches Restaurant in München. *Die Zeit*.

⁴⁰ Issel, S., 2026 [April 10]. Israeli restaurant targeted in suspected antisemitic attack in Munich. *Euronews*.

⁴¹ Stanford, S., 2026 [June 22]. Man, 36, is charged with terrorism-linked attempted murders in Edinburgh 'after men stabbed following prayers at mosque'. *Daily Mail*.

⁴² 2026 [June 22]. Man charged with terrorism-linked attempted murders in Edinburgh. *BBC News*.

⁴³ Martin, N., 2026 [June 20]. Terror probe into suspected anti-Muslim attacks in Edinburgh. *Deutsche Welle*.

⁴⁴ Kipling, E., 2026 [June 10]. What we know about Belfast attack and disorder. *BBC News*.

for help, choking on his own blood. Ordinary citizens intervened, and later law enforcement officers arrested the attacker.

Public discontent and street riots followed⁴⁵, with far-right groups organizing to attack immigrants and their homes, police stations, and set cars and buses on fire using improvised incendiary devices.

➤ On 30 April 2026, a random street stabbing attack was reported^{46,47,48} in North London, injuring two people of Jewish origin. Police later arrested the perpetrator, a 45-year-old man of *Somali origin*. The attacker resisted arrest by attempting to stab a police officer, and investigators said the Somali man was likely responsible for another anti-Semitic stabbing attack in London earlier in April.



Photo 1. Police officers and a bystander try to detain the attacker in North London. *Source: Still from Northern Provisions video, Instagram.*

➤ On 20 April 2026, an improvised explosive device (IED) was reportedly detonated^{49,50,51} outside a police station in the suburb of Dunmurry, near Belfast, Northern Ireland. The New IRA, a successor group to the Irish Republican Army, was behind the bombing. A 66-year-old British man from Belfast has been charged. He had ordered Chinese takeaway and when the delivery man arrived at the address, he was threatened with a gun, placed an IED in his car, based on a gas cylinder, and ordered him to drive to the police

⁴⁵ Carroll, R.; Othman, H.; Horton, H.; Vinter, R., 2026 [June 10]. Violence erupts in Belfast after protests over knife attack. *The Guardian*.

⁴⁶ Ronald, I.; Karadsheh, J.; Davey-Attlee, F., 2026 [April 30]. Two Jewish men stabbed in London in what police call terrorist incident. *CNN*.

⁴⁷ Sandford, D., 2026 [May 1]. Golders Green stabbing suspect in court on three charges of attempted murder. *BBC News*.

⁴⁸ Young, S.; Holden, M., 2026 [May 1]. UK man appears in court over stabbing of two Jewish men in London. *Reuters*.

⁴⁹ Flanagan, E.; Logan, D., 2026 [April 27]. Police release body-worn footage showing 'reckless' car bomb attack. *BBC News*.

⁵⁰ 2026 [April 20]. N.Irish police suspect New IRA planted bomb in officer's car. *Reuters*.

⁵¹ 2026 [May 2]. Man charged with attempted murder over Northern Ireland car bomb attack. *Al Arabiya*.

station. When the man was freed from his captor, he alerted the authorities, who immediately evacuated the area, avoiding any casualties.

➤ On April 17, 2026, it became known^{52,53,54} that the pro-Iranian group Harakat Ashhab al-Yamin al-Islamiya had distributed footage online showing two men dressed in protective suits operating drones that were allegedly loaded with radioactive material and were to attack the Israeli embassy in London. An immediate inspection by the authorities followed, and jars filled with a powdery substance were found in the area of the diplomatic building, which was later determined to be harmless. A 39-year-old man was arrested for involvement in the act, and he is most likely responsible for placing the suspicious objects near the embassy.



Photo 2. Footage released by Harakat Ashhab al-Yamin al-Islamiya.

Sources: Daily Mail; X, Joe Truzman; Popular Front, Instagram.

➤ On March 23, 2026, it was reported^{55,56,57} that an anti-Semitic attack had taken place in London, in which four ambulances belonging to the volunteer organization Hatzolah, which provides emergency medical care to the large Jewish community in the northern part of the British capital, were set on fire. Three individuals aged 17, 19 and 20, known to be of *Pakistani origin*, were charged as the direct perpetrators of the act. Two more individuals aged 45 and 47 were arrested for involvement in the arson. The pro-Iranian group Harakat

⁵² Haigh, E.; Leng, C.; Gardham, D. 2026 [April 17]. Drone 'targets' Israel embassy. *Daily Mail*.

⁵³ Curry, A., 2026 [April 19]. Items found near Israeli embassy are non-hazardous, police say. *BBC News*.

⁵⁴ Dodd, V., 2026 [April 21]. Seven more arrested after arson attacks on London Jewish sites. *The Guardian*.

⁵⁵ Mackintosh, T., Rawnsley, J., 2026 [March 23]. Arson attack on Jewish charity ambulances investigated by counter-terror police. *BBC News*.

⁵⁶ Castle, S., 2026 [April 4]. Three Charged With Arson in Attack on U.K. Jewish Charity's Ambulances. *The New York Times*.

⁵⁷ 2026 [April 1]. London police arrest 3 more suspects over arson attack on Jewish-owned ambulances. *PBS NEWS*.

Ashhab al-Yamin al-Islamiya, which operates in Europe, claimed responsibility for the attack on its Telegram channels.

Greece

➤ On June 6, 2026, it was reported^{58,59,60} that a 37-year-old *Palestinian man*, a member of Hamas, was arrested on the island of Crete, who was planning terrorist attacks against members of the Jewish community and Israeli targets. According to authorities, the man worked as an electrician in a hotel and had applied for political asylum in Greece. It is known that he was trained to make IEDs at a Hamas training camp in Malaysia and has links to a recently neutralized cell of the terrorist organization in Cyprus. During the searches, materials used in the manufacture of improvised explosive devices were found. Investigators do not exclude that an Israeli cruise ship, which was expected to dock at the island, was among the Palestinian's targets.

Italy

➤ On 25 May 2026, it became known^{61,62,63} that in Reggio Emilia, officers of the General Investigations and Special Operations Department (DIGOS) of the State Police (Polizia di Stato) carried out an operation in which a 22-year-old *Moroccan man* was arrested for planning a terrorist act. The young man was planning a knife attack in a public place, and was a supporter of the Islamic State. According to investigators, the detainee had maintained online contact with a jihadist who offered him financing and training to carry out a terrorist attack in Italy or another European country.

This is not the first time the Moroccan has come to the attention of the authorities, as it is known that in 2024 he was arrested in Germany in connection with investigations into his involvement in the activities of Daesh. At the beginning of 2026, he was expelled by the German authorities and returned to Italy.

The accused's lawyer maintains that his client suffers from mental health problems, although there is no official medical expertise supporting the claim.

➤ On 20 May 2026, a 15-year-old *Tunisian* was arrested in Florence^{64,65,66} on charges of involvement in activities related to the Islamic State. It is known that the minor had maintained contact with members of ISIS on social networks, with whom he discussed specific targets for carrying out a terrorist act on Italian territory (including the Vatican), receiving instructions from them on how to make an improvised explosive device (IED) and

⁵⁸ Dimitropoulos, D., 2026 [June 7]. Crete: Palestinian arrested over alleged Hamas links and possible terror plot. *Euronews*.

⁵⁹ 2026 [Ιούνιος 6]. Κρήτη: Συνελήφθη 37χρονος Παλαιστίνιος ως μέλος της Χαμάς – Πιθανό σχέδιο επίθεσης σε κρουαζιερόπλοιο. *Kathimerini*.

⁶⁰ 2026 [June 8]. Greek authorities charge Palestinian suspect over alleged plot targeting Israeli cruise ship. *i24NEWS*.

⁶¹ 2026 [Maggio 25]. Preparava un attentato per lo Stato islamico, fermato un 22enne. *ANSA*.

⁶² 2026 [Maggio 25]. Reggio Emilia, preparava attentato per Stato islamico: fermato 22enne. *Sky TG24*.

⁶³ 2026 [Maggio 25]. Arrestato 22enne per terrorismo, "era pronto a compiere un attacco armato". *Rai News*.

⁶⁴ 2026 [Maggio 20]. Firenze, quindicenne arrestato per terrorismo. *Polizia di Stato*.

⁶⁵ 2026 [Maggio 20]. Firenze, 15enne arrestato per arruolamento nel terrorismo internazionale. *Sky TG24*.

⁶⁶ 2026 [Maggio 20]. "Sono pronto ad agire". Arrestato in Toscana minorenne vicino allo Stato Islamico. *Rai News*.

Molotov cocktails. The boy is known to law enforcement agencies, having been arrested in 2025 for supporting radical Islam and pledging allegiance to ISIS, after which he was placed in a juvenile detention center. In March 2026, his measure was changed to probation, and immediately thereafter the person resumed his contacts with representatives of the Islamic State.

➤ On 7 May 2026, it was reported^{67,68,69} that a 24-year-old man was arrested in Lecce during a DIGOS operation on charges of involvement in anarchist extremism. The man had called for attacks on detention and repatriation centres and had painted graffiti in public places with messages of support for the famous anarchist Alfredo Cospito, who is currently serving a sentence in an Italian prison. During the searches and seizures, the authorities found propaganda materials and a manual for the production of IEDs.



Photo 3. Graffiti with anarchist content.

Source: *Polizia di Stato*.

➤ On April 22, 2026, it became known^{70,71,72} that DIGOS officers from the Milan regional unit arrested a 19-year-old on charges of leading a group that carried out neo-fascist and anti-Semitic activities. Another 14 members of the organization were detained in various parts of Italy, nine of whom were minors. During the searches, propaganda materials, computer configurations, mobile devices, weapons and materials for the production of improvised explosive devices were seized.

The organizer of the right-wing extremist formation created and maintained two groups on Telegram – the Center for the Study of the Third Position and the Third Position. They praised neo-fascist and neo-Nazi ideology, distributed instructions for the production of IEDs, and called for attacks on racial, religious, and anti-Semitic grounds. A document called the “Manifesto of the Third Position” was shared on Internet channels, which revealed the ideology of the organization. The vision was to move from propaganda on social networks to “real struggle” by creating Revolutionary Action Squads in places to carry out violent acts, as well as to undertake a new “March on Rome,” which is a historical reference to the march on the Italian capital by Benito Mussolini and his National Fascist Party in 1922.

⁶⁷ 2026 [Maggio 7]. Lecce: arrestato estremista anarchico. *Polizia di Stato*.

⁶⁸ 2026 [Maggio 7]. Inneggiava alla lotta anarchica, arrestato un 24enne. *Rai News*.

⁶⁹ 2026 [Maggio 7]. Inneggiava alla lotta anarchica, arrestato un 24enne in Salento. *ANSA*.

⁷⁰ 2026 [Aprile 22]. Milano: propaganda nazifascista e antisemita, arrestato 19enne. *Polizia di Stato*.

⁷¹ 2026 [Aprile 22]. Scoperta una rete di neonazisti e antisemiti online: nove i minori, arrestato 19enne. *TG Com 24*.

⁷² Paniagua, S., 2026 [Aprile 22]. Propaganda neonazista e istigazione alla violenza antisemita: smantellata rete di giovanissimi, un arresto. *Milano Today*.



Photo 4. Some of the seized weapons and materials. *Source: Polizia di Stato.*

➤ On 13 April 2026, DIGOS officers arrested a 17-year-old in Teramo^{73,74,75}, a supporter of neo-accelerationism, who was found to be in an advanced stage of radicalization and planning terrorist attacks. On social networks, the young man had been spreading the ideology of the accelerated disintegration of society through acts of violence with the aim of creating a new social order led by super-beings. On Telegram, the minor had shared an insistent intention to kill a certain person from Bergamo with a knife.

During the searches, the authorities found propaganda materials, a 3D printer and a technical manual for the production of 3D weapons, a video on how to make a Molotov cocktail, instructions for attacking vulnerable areas of the human body, and a guide to effectively hiding from the authorities after committing terrorist attacks. On the Internet, the young man shared with his like-minded people the practices of human sacrifice and Satanic rituals. The judicial authorities determined that the violent content found in the detainee's electronic devices is from a wide ideological spectrum - neo-Nazism, jihadism, accelerationism. It is noteworthy that one of the propaganda materials combines Islamist, Nazi and occult symbols, which is a manifestation of the syncretic nature of neo-accelerationism.



Photo 5. Some of the discovered materials. *Source: Polizia di Stato.*

⁷³ 2026 [Aprile 13]. Propaganda suprematista a Teramo, un arresto. *Polizia di Stato.*

⁷⁴ 2026 [Aprile 13]. Accelerazionismo, riti satanici e come preparare una molotov: arrestato un altro 17enne radicalizzato. *Il Fatto Quotidiano.*

⁷⁵ 2026 [Aprile 13]. Giovane accusato di propaganda neonazista e terrorismo: 17enne arrestato a Teramo. *Sky TG24.*

➤ On April 9, 2026, it became known^{76,77,78} that DIGOS officers had detained two individuals, aged 19 and 22, of *Tunisian origin*, in Palermo in connection with praising Islamic terrorism and inciting jihad on TikTok and Instagram.

The propaganda material shared also includes a video created most likely with the help of artificial intelligence, in which the Islamic State flag is flown over the White House, and a Daesh fighter is shown executing several people in orange jumpsuits, among whom a person resembling the current president of the United States can be recognized. Video footage was also discovered showing the arrested Tunisians doing strength exercises and practicing throat slitting to a background of nasheeds (Islamic chants).

➤ On 3 April 2026, it was reported^{79,80,81} that a joint anti-terrorist operation was carried out in Rome between DIGOS, the Anti-Extremism and Domestic Terrorism Service of the Central Directorate of Preventive Police and the Abruzzo Cybersecurity Center of the Postal Police. A 25-year-old political science student was arrested, who was a supporter of the neo-accelerationist ideology and had incited terrorist attacks. He maintained an Instagram account with over 200,000 followers, where he shared manifestos, manuals for the production of IEDs, ammunition, 3D printed weapons, as well as instructions for sabotage against specific critical infrastructure sites and international business companies.

The young man's main goal was to prevent the development of contemporary technologies and destroy the democratic order through armed revolution, thereby reducing human civilization to a primitive state so that a “restart of the social system” could take place.

The 25-year-old student's idol was the American mathematician and university professor Theodore Kaczynski, also known by the nickname “Unabomber”, who fought modernism by sending letter bombs for 17 years to various recipients - airlines, scientists, corporate executives, lobbyists and technology experts.

➤ On March 30, 2026, it was reported^{82,83,84} that in Pescara, officers of Raggruppamento Operativo Speciale/ ROS (special operations unit of the Italian Carabinieri) arrested a 17-year-old who was planning a mass shooting at a school. The young man, who professed a right-wing extremist ideology and was a supporter of the theory of white supremacy, was inspired by the 1999 Columbine High School massacre in the United States.

During the searches, authorities found instructions for manufacturing 3D weapons and improvised explosive devices based on acetone peroxide, manuals for making chemical and biological weapons, and guides for sabotaging public facilities.

⁷⁶ 2026 [Aprile 9]. Palermo: jihad e istigazione al terrorismo, due fermi e cinque minorenni perquisiti. *Polizia di Stato*.

⁷⁷ 2026 [Aprile 9]. Palermo, fermati due tunisini per apologia di terrorismo. *TG Com 24*.

⁷⁸ 2026 [Aprile 9]. Palermo, fermati due tunisini per apologia del terrorismo: in un video incitano alla Jihad. *Corriere della Sera*.

⁷⁹ 2026 [Aprile 3]. Antiterrorismo: addestrava e istigava ad azioni sovversive, un arresto. *Polizia di Stato*.

⁸⁰ Palesse, D., 2026 [Aprile 3]. Pianificava azioni come Unabomber, su Instagram il manuale per le armi. *ANSA*.

⁸¹ 2026 [Aprile 3]. Pianificava azioni terroristiche ispirate a Unabomber, arrestato. *Rai News*.

⁸² 2026 [Marzo 30]. Arrestato 17enne di Pescara che progettava una strage neonazista in una scuola: “Voleva fare come a Columbine”, trovate istruzioni per fabbricare ordigni e armi chimiche. *Il Fatto Quotidiano*.

⁸³ Ziniti, A., 2026 [Marzo 30]. Perugia, arrestato un ragazzo di 17 anni per terrorismo: “Progettava una strage a scuola”. *La Repubblica*.

⁸⁴ 2026 [Marzo 30]. Progettava una strage a scuola, sentito oggi in carcere a Perugia: “Non lo avrei mai fatto”. *Rai News*.

The minor was a member of a Telegram group called Werwolf Division, which shared neo-Nazi ideology and glorified mass murderers.

➤ On March 23, 2026, it was reported^{85,86,87} that the well-known anarchist Giuseppe Scaca was arrested in a DIGOS operation in Catania. The 45-year-old man is wanted for serving a four-year and five-month prison sentence in connection with the production and storage of IEDs. The anarchist's criminal experience is extensive, including attacks with improvised explosive and incendiary devices against military and police facilities. The authorities have established that during the period 2021-2023, Giuseppe Scaca resided in Spain, where he was part of a local anarchist group and again produced IEDs and improvised incendiary devices.

➤ On 21 March 2026, an improvised explosive device was reported^{88,89,90} to have exploded in an old house near the Aqueduct Park on the outskirts of Rome, killing anarchists Alessandro Mercogliano, 53, and Sara Ardizzone, 35. The bomb, which was made from nitrogen fertilizers, is believed to have detonated during the manufacturing process. There is evidence that the man and woman were associated with the group of the famous anarchist Alfredo Cospito.

Among the possible targets of the extremists are railway infrastructure, a police station, and a carabinieri barracks, which were determined based on the nature of the IED – the instability of the substances from which the explosive device was constructed suggests difficulties in transportation and a close distance of the targets from its storage location.



Photo 6. Footage from the scene of the incident. *Source: Tg3.*

➤ On 7 March 2026, it was reported^{91,92,93} that DIGOS officers had arrested a 24-year-old *Egyptian man* in Brescia on charges of propagating radical Islam, membership in

⁸⁵ 2026 [Marzo 23]. Catania: arrestato anarchico, deve scontare oltre 4 anni. *Polizia di Stato*.

⁸⁶ Butera, F., 2026 [Marzo 23]. Catania: anarchico in carcere per scontare condanna. *Rai News*.

⁸⁷ 2026 [Marzo 23]. Arrestato Sciacca, esponente di spicco dell'area anarchica. *ANSA*.

⁸⁸ 2026 [Marzo 21]. Anarchici morti, tra le ipotesi un'azione su un obiettivo vicino. *ANSA*.

⁸⁹ 2026 [Marzo 21]. Anarchici morti in esplosione, verifiche su obiettivo. Piantedosi riunisce l'antiterrorismo. *Rai News*.

⁹⁰ Valeri, V., 2026 [Marzo 21]. Anarchici morti, interrogate due persone. Tra le ipotesi un attentato nel quadrante sud-est di Roma. *Milano Today*.

⁹¹ 2026 [Marzo 7]. Brescia: arrestato per associazione con finalità di terrorismo. *Polizia di Stato*.

⁹² 2026 [Marzo 7]. "Vuole arruolarsi con Daesh", 24enne arrestato per terrorismo internazionale. *ANSA*.

⁹³ 2026 [Marzo 7]. Brescia, arrestato jihadista: voleva compiere attentati contro i fedeli di una chiesa. *Brescia Today*.

a terrorist organisation and preparing to commit a terrorist act. The young man was a member of an encrypted online group called The Dangerous Ones of Egypt, which was linked to the Islamic State – Khorasan.

The jihadist was preparing an attack on a church in Bergamo. Among the targets were also stadiums and other Christian churches. He is well known to law enforcement agencies, having been detained for terrorist activity before, when he carried out propaganda in favor of Daesh and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad online. He planned to travel to Mozambique, where he would join the fighters of the Islamic State. He taught himself to make IEDs and to use firearms.

➤ On 14 February 2026, officers from the Naples regional unit of DIGOS in Caserta reportedly arrested^{94,95,96} a 16-year-old for distributing jihadist content online and pledging allegiance to the Islamic State. The boy had made online contact with Daesh fighters in Syria and had been self-taught in IED production and terrorist tactics using materials downloaded from the dark web.

Netherlands

➤ On 28 May 2026, it was reported^{97,98,99} that a man of *Arab origin* was arrested after entering the city hall in The Hague, claiming to have a bomb in his backpack. A subsequent search did not find any explosive device.



Photo 7. Operators from the Dienst Speciale Interventies take the detainee away from the city hall in The Hague.

Sources: *Het Laatste Nieuws*; *ANP*.

⁹⁴ 2026 [Febbraio 14]. Antiterrorismo, minore arrestato dalla Digos di Napoli. *Polizia di Stato*.

⁹⁵ 2026 [Febbraio 14]. Inneggia all'Isis e diffonde video violenti, arrestato minorenne. *Rai News*.

⁹⁶ 2026 [Febbraio 14]. Minorenne giura fedeltà allo Stato Islamico e diffonde video raffiguranti tecniche terroristiche. *Napoli Today*.

⁹⁷ 2026 [Mei 28]. Man aangehouden bij stadhuis Den Haag. *Politie*.

⁹⁸ 2026 [Mei 28]. Man komt stadhuis van Den Haag binnen en zegt dat hij bom bij zich heeft: geblinddoekt afgevoerd in onderbroek, geen explosieven gevonden. *Het Laatste Nieuws*.

⁹⁹ 2026 [Mei 28]. Stadhuis Den Haag ontruimd na bommelding, arrestatieteam pakt man op. *RTL Nieuws*.

➤ On 7 May 2026, it became known^{100,101,102} that an IED was activated in front of the headquarters of the progressive-liberal Dutch party Democrats 66 (D66) in The Hague. The improvised explosive device was thrown into the building through a mailbox, causing only material damage. A 37-year-old man was named as the direct perpetrator. The D66 office has been subject to right-wing extremist attacks in the past.

➤ On March 29, 2026, operators from the Dienst Speciale Interventies in Eindhoven reportedly arrested^{103,104,105} a 21-year-old man suspected of being a supporter of the Islamic State. Dangerous explosive materials were seized from the suspect's home.



Photo 8. Operators from the Dienst Speciale Interventies take away the man arrested in Eindhoven.

Sources: SQ Vision; Hart van Nederland.

➤ On 14 March 2026, it was reported^{106,107,108} that an IED exploded outside a Jewish school in Amsterdam during non-school hours (at night), causing material damage to the building's facade. The attack was part of a wave of anti-Semitism that has swept the Netherlands, with just the day before another IED detonated outside a synagogue in Rotterdam, causing a fire and inflicting material damage to the building. Four people were arrested in Rotterdam for the act – two aged 19, one aged 18 and one aged 17.

¹⁰⁰ Graaf, L.; Warmenhoven, V., 2026 [Mei 7]. Vuurwerkbom ontploft bij D66-kantoor Den Haag terwijl 30 Jonge Democraten binnen zijn, verdachte aangehouden. *De Stentor*.

¹⁰¹ 2026 [May 7]. D66 headquarters in The Hague hit by firework bomb. *Dutch News*.

¹⁰² 2026 [May 8]. Explosion hits Netherlands' largest political party's headquarters, police say. *Reuters*.

¹⁰³ 2026 [Maart 29]. Politie pakt man (21) op in Eindhoven, mogelijk link met IS. *NOS Nieuws*.

¹⁰⁴ 2026 [Maart 29]. Eindhovenaar aangehouden in terrorisme-onderzoek, mogelijk banden met IS. *Hart van Nederland*.

¹⁰⁵ 2026 [Maart 29]. Politie houdt 21-jarige man in Eindhoven aan in onderzoek naar terrorisme. *RTL Nieuws*.

¹⁰⁶ 2026 [Maart 14]. Explosie bij joodse school Amsterdam, burgemeester spreekt van aanslag. *NOS Nieuws*.

¹⁰⁷ Ferguson, D., 2026 [March 14]. 'Deliberate attack': explosion damages Jewish school in Amsterdam. *The Guardian*.

¹⁰⁸ Ruiter, E., 2026 [March 14]. Explosion damages Jewish school in Amsterdam with no injuries reported, mayor says. *Euronews*.

North Macedonia

➤ On April 13, 2026, an arson attack was reported^{109,110,111} against the Beth Yaakov synagogue in Skopje. Two men, aged 21 and 38, who authorities believe are affiliated with the Islamic State, were arrested as perpetrators. Minor material damage was caused.

Norway

➤ On March 8, 2026, a backpack-mounted IED was reportedly detonated^{112,113,114} at the entrance to the consular section of the U.S. Embassy in Oslo, causing material damage. Three Iraqi brothers, aged around 20, were arrested for their involvement in the attack, with the theory of an Iranian connection being promoted. For its part, the Iranian ambassador to Norway officially stated that Iran was not involved in the attack.



Photo 9. One of the perpetrators, caught on security cameras. *Source: Popular Front, Instagram.*

Spain

➤ On May 28, 2026, it became known^{115,116,117} that 10 people were arrested in a large-scale anti-terrorist operation by the Policia Nacional, aimed at combating Islamist terrorism in the provinces of Alicante, Barcelona, Madrid, Malaga and Murcia. The group was preparing to send weapons to conflict zones in support of terrorist groups.

¹⁰⁹ Blackburn, G., 2026 [May 1]. Arson attack at Skopje synagogue linked to so-called Islamic State, officials say. *Euro News*.

¹¹⁰ Shapiro, J., 2026 [April 13]. European Jewish leaders ‘deeply disturbed’ by Passover arson attack on North Macedonia’s only synagogue. *The Jewish Chronicle*.

¹¹¹ 2026 [Maj 1]. АНБ: Лицата кои се обидоа да ја запалат синагогата во Скопје биле поврзани со Исламска држава. *4NEWS*.

¹¹² Lapham, J., Lukiv, J., 2026 [March 8]. Explosion at US embassy in Oslo may have been terrorism, Norway police say. *BBC News*.

¹¹³ 2026 [March 11]. Three brothers arrested in Norway over bomb attack on US embassy in Oslo. *Al Jazeera*.

¹¹⁴ 2026 [Mars 8]. Eksplosjon ved USAs ambassade – har sikret videomateriale. *NRK TV*.

¹¹⁵ 2026 [Mayo 28]. Al menos diez detenidos en una macrooperación contra el terrorismo yihadista en varias provincias de España. *RTVE*.

¹¹⁶ 2026 [Mayo 28]. Al menos 10 detenidos en una operación contra el terrorismo yihadista en varias provincias. *Infobae*.

¹¹⁷ Viudez, J., 2026 [Mayo 28]. Diez detenidos en una macrooperación contra el yihadismo en cinco provincias. *El Pais*.

➤ On 15 May 2026, it was reported^{118,119,120} that Policia Nacional officers had detained an 18-year-old man in Tarifa who was in an advanced stage of radicalization. The man had pledged allegiance to Daesh, had been spreading jihadist propaganda, had praised terrorist attacks in France, and had openly declared his hatred for the Spanish state.

➤ On March 25, 2026, it became known^{121,122,123} that a joint anti-terrorist operation between the Spanish and Moroccan authorities had neutralized a terrorist cell in the territory of Tangier (Morocco) and Palma (Mallorca, Spain). The jihadist formation was composed of three individuals, and the leader of the group, who was arrested on the Spanish island, was preparing an attack in Spain. The two *Moroccans* were involved in the financing and logistical support of Daesh fighters operating in the Sahel region and Somalia. The Islamists carried out terrorist propaganda on the Internet.



Photo 10. Footage from the arrest in Palma. *Source: still from a video of the Policia Nacional.*

➤ On March 14, 2026, it became known^{124,125,126} that officers of the Policia Nacional arrested a 40-year-old man in Melilla who had recruited young Muslim women for the terrorist cause of the Islamic State. After indoctrinating them, the women were to be sent to conflict zones. The jihadist had created his own network of other female recruiters, who

¹¹⁸ 2026 [Mayo 15]. La Policía Nacional detiene a una persona que se encontraba en un avanzado proceso de radicalización yihadista. *Policia Nacional*.

¹¹⁹ 2026 [Mayo 15]. La Policía Nacional detiene a una persona que se encontraba en un avanzado proceso de radicalización yihadista. *La Razon*.

¹²⁰ Machado, A., 2026 [Mayo 15]. La Policía Nacional ha detenido en Tarifa a un joven en avanzado proceso de radicalización yihadista. *El Mundo*.

¹²¹ Vera, J., 2026 [Marzo 25]. Detenido en Palma el líder de una célula yihadista que planeaba un atentado “de gran envergadura”. *La Vanguardia*.

¹²² Lopez-Fonseca, O.; Bohorquez, L., 2026 [Marzo 25]. Desarticulada una célula yihadista que planeaba un atentado en España mediante un ‘lobo solitario’. *El Pais*.

¹²³ Zuloaga, J., 2026 [Marzo 25]. Las policías española y marroquí neutralizan en Mallorca a un lobo solitario” que planeaba un atentado. *La Razon*.

¹²⁴ Lopez-Fonseca, O., 2026 [Marzo 14]. Detenido en Melilla un reclutador yihadista reincidente por radicalizar a jóvenes musulmanas. *El Pais*.

¹²⁵ Fernandez, J., 2026 [Marzo 14]. Detenido un reclutador yihadista reincidente que captaba a chicas musulmanas. *El Periodico*.

¹²⁶ 2026 [Marzo 14]. La Policía Nacional detiene a una persona muy radicalizada que embaucaba a mujeres jóvenes para captarlas en la causa yihadista. *Ministerio del Interior*.

arranged a subsequent personal meeting between the victims and their leader. The arrested man is known to the authorities, having been convicted of similar crimes in 2018 and already served a sentence of five and a half years in prison.

➤ On March 9, 2026, it was reported^{127,128,129} that ten activists of the neo-Nazi formation Nucleo Nacional (National Core) were arrested in Madrid after a clash with members of the anti-fascist feminist organization Comision 8M during a demonstration related to International Women's Day on March 8. The right-wing extremists also attacked a police officer.



Photo 11. Nucleo Nacional activists. *Sources: El Diario; RTVE.*

➤ On March 7, 2026, it was reported^{130,131,132} that Policia Nacional officers arrested two MMA (mixed martial arts) fighters in Madrid on charges of promoting radical Islam, making anti-Semitic messages, and spreading jihadist content on social media. During the searches, authorities found fake Ukrainian identity documents.

➤ On February 5, 2026, it became known^{133,134,135} that a 37-year-old man was arrested in Madrid on charges of Islamist propaganda, glorification of terrorism and planning a terrorist act. He consumed a huge amount of jihadist content from sites associated with Al-Qaeda and the Islamic State. In order to avoid tracking by the special services, the accused used public access to the Internet, VPN networks and TOR software. According to the

¹²⁷ 2026 [Marzo 9]. Diez neonazis detenidos por desórdenes en la manifestación del 8-M en Madrid. *El Pais*.

¹²⁸ 2026 [Marzo 11]. Detenidos diez miembros de Núcleo Nacional por desórdenes públicos durante la manifestación del 8-M en Madrid. *Infobae*.

¹²⁹ 2026 [Marzo 9]. Detenidos diez miembros de Núcleo Nacional por desórdenes públicos durante la manifestación del 8-M en Madrid. *Europa Press*.

¹³⁰ 2026 [Marzo 7]. La Policía Nacional detiene a dos expertos en artes marciales mixtas MMA por su vinculación con el terrorismo yihadista. *Policia Nacional*.

¹³¹ 2026 [Marzo 7]. La Policía Nacional detiene en Madrid a dos expertos en artes marciales por su vinculación con el terrorismo yihadista. *El Confidencial*.

¹³² 2026 [Marzo 7]. Detenidos en Madrid y enviados a prisión dos expertos en artes marciales mixtas vinculados al terrorismo yihadista. *RTVE*.

¹³³ 2026 [Febrero 5]. La Policía Nacional detiene a una persona afín a DAESH que utilizaba redes WIFI públicas para descargarse contenidos terroristas. *Policia Nacional*.

¹³⁴ Cedeira, B., 2026 [Febrero 8]. Un yihadista de Daesh, detenido en Madrid: "Me tengo que contener para no clavarle un destornillador a un policía". *El Espanol*.

¹³⁵ Duran, L., 2026 [Febrero 5]. Detenido en Madrid un yihadista que usaba redes wifi públicas para descargar propaganda de Daesh. *El Mundo*.

authorities, the process of radicalization of the person was registered as early as 2016, when he was investigated for terrorist crimes, but was subsequently acquitted.

The detained terrorist is known to be a second-generation immigrant from North Africa, to have led a reclusive lifestyle, to have a criminal past involving street violence against Muslim women and non-Muslims, and to have also shared his intention to stab a police officer with a screwdriver.



Photo 12. Footage from the arrest in Madrid. *Source: still from a video of the Policia Nacional.*

Switzerland

➤ On May 28, 2026, it was reported^{136,137,138} that a 31-year-old man of *Turkish origin* stabbed three Swiss citizens at random at the Winterthur train station, shouting “Allahu Akbar”. According to investigators, the attacker was a “lone wolf” terrorist who was already known to law enforcement for his propaganda in favor of the Islamic State in 2015. Interestingly, just days before the attack, the perpetrator had been questioned at a police station and subsequently examined in a psychiatric facility, but after being found not to pose a danger to others he was released, which points to serious shortcomings on the part of the authorities.

Turkey

➤ On April 7, 2026, it was reported^{139,140,141} that an attack had been carried out on a police post in the square in front of the Israeli consulate in Istanbul. Three men got out of a rented car, pulled out long-barreled weapons and opened fire on the police. They returned fire, killing one terrorist and seriously wounding the other two, who are known to be brothers. Two of the police officers were slightly injured.

Authorities determined that the attackers were members of the Islamic State, and nine more people were subsequently arrested for involvement in the terrorist cell.

¹³⁶ 2026 [May 28]. Three wounded in Swiss train station stabbing labelled ‘act of terror’. *Al Jazeera*.

¹³⁷ 2026 [May 28]. ‘Terrorist’ knife attack wounds three at Swiss train station. *Le Monde*.

¹³⁸ 2026 [May 28]. Three stabbed in attack at Swiss train station. *Swissinfo*.

¹³⁹ 2026 [April 7]. Shooting near Israeli consulate in Türkiye declared ‘terror’ attack. *Al Jazeera*.

¹⁴⁰ 2026 [Nisan 7]. Son dakika... Beşiktaş’ta polis noktasına silahlı saldırı girişimi! 3 şüpheli etkisiz hale getirildi. *Hürriyet*.

¹⁴¹ Gökmen, E., 2026 [Nisan 11]. Beşiktaş’ta polis noktasına yönelik terör saldırısına ilişkin 9 şüpheli tutuklandı. *Anadolu Ajansı*.

POLITICAL MEASURES AGAINST THE ACTIVITIES OF LEFT-WING AND ANARCHIST EXTREMIST GROUPS IN THE EUROPEAN UNION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE CONTEMPORARY SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract. The publication explores the nature of contemporary left-wing extremist and anarchist organizations. It focuses on the drivers of left-wing extremist and anarchist activity, and proposes political measures to counter their activities.

Keywords: left-wing extremism; anarchist extremism; terrorism, drivers of extremism, violent extremism

Introduction

The contemporary security environment is determined by the processes of globalization, the development of high technologies, the weakening regulatory role of international organizations, the activity of civil society and the struggle between states to exploit limited natural resources, but also by emerging asymmetric threats that are projected at the local, regional and global levels.

In recent years, national security systems have faced new challenges following the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic in late 2019, the coming to power of the Taliban in Afghanistan in August 2021, the outbreak of the war in Ukraine in February 2022, the Hamas attack on Israel in October 2023, the subsequent exacerbation of the Israeli-Palestinian and Israeli-Lebanese conflicts, the regime change in Syria in December 2024 and the escalation of the military conflict between the US and Iran in February 2026.

The above-described dynamics have affected the processes of radicalization of large ethnic and religious groups of people on the territory of the European Union, as well as the activity of various terrorist and extremist organizations, including those on the far-left spectrum and that of anarchism.

During the Cold War, far-left and anarchist terrorist organizations such as the Red Brigades, the Red Army Faction, the Revolutionary Organization of November 17, Direct Action, the Popular Forces of April 25, and various national anarchist federations were responsible for a series of bombings, political assassinations, kidnappings, and sabotage in Italy, West Germany, France, Greece, Spain, Portugal, and other European countries. Although these organizations no longer officially exist in the 21st century, the far-left and anarchist ideology is alive and continues to win the hearts and minds of people, and the sporadic acts of violence committed by some extremists are a reminder that a contemporary assessment of the threat and an adequate response from the competent institutions are needed.

In general, contemporary left-wing and anarchist extremism is poorly researched, and the scientific community has not agreed on generally accepted definitions of these concepts.

In analytical reports of security and public order services, left-wing extremism and anarchism are considered united in a common section, since they have a similar ideology, although they differ in their organizational structure, thematic campaigns, and choice of targets for attack.

The weak scientific and research interest is determined by the lower activity of left-wing extremist and anarchist organizations compared to right-wing extremist and jihadist terrorist organizations, as well as the lack of a major terrorist act with many human victims in recent years, committed by far-left or anarchist groups. The fear of some scholars of public and scientific cancellation when critically analyzing contemporary manifestations of left-wing extremism related to the Antifa and Black Lives Matter movements is also a factor, as these organizations often exploit topics related to the protection of the rights and freedoms of minority subcultural and ethnic communities and racial groups for their own purposes.

The *purpose* of this publication is to study the essence of contemporary forms of violent left-wing extremism and anarchism, as well as to outline political solutions for their effective counteraction. Two *main research tasks* are identified: analysis of the modus operandi of far-left and anarchist formations in the context of the current security environment; proposal of political measures to counter the activities of left-wing extremists and anarchists.

The *object* of the study is far-left and anarchist groups on the territory of the European Union, and the *subject* of the study is the political forms of counteraction by the responsible institutions against the violent manifestations of organizations professing far-left or anarchist ideology.

The study is disciplined by examining cases from the last ten years, information about which is available in open sources.

Scientific methods such as “case study”, systematic analysis, comparative analysis and study of official documents (Europol reports) were used.

1. Modus operandi of contemporary left-wing extremists and anarchists

Left-wing extremism and anarchism should be seen as inextricably linked ideologies, as both seek to replace the current social order, functioning on the basis of a market economy and democracy, with a classless system of government in which human rights, freedom, and equality are absolutized. Both ideologies share the view that this transformation cannot be achieved by constitutional political means, but through widespread revolution, even if violence must be used.

According to the theoretical formulation of the Europol (2025) experts, left-wing terrorist organizations seek to replace the existing legal, economic and social order with a communist society of the Marxist-Leninist type, in which resources and goods are distributed evenly among people, and social justice prevails. Anarchists oppose any form of power and hierarchy in human relations, legal regulation and the dominance of capital in economic relations.

Since the different types of extremist groups on the left-wing political spectrum, although they have similar ideology, differ in their thematic campaigns, genesis and spread, organizational structure, choice of targets and tactical methods, and readiness to commit a terrorist act, the following classification of left-wing extremist organizations can be proposed:

- *Marxist-Leninist*. They represent classic left-wing extremism and seek to change the political, social and economic system through the methods and means of universal revolution.

The ideas of Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin on the fight against imperialism, social injustice, the exploitation of human labor and the uneven distribution of material goods between different social strata are based on their doctrine.

It can be argued that in this type of left-wing extremist organizations of the Marxist-Leninist type, two trends have formed (Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz 2026): *classical Marxist*, which is more moderate and seeks primarily to fight for the minds of people and change their consciousness, which will lead to revolutionary conditions for changing the system; *Trotskyist*, which is more radical and prone to violence and direct attacks on the foundations of capitalism and democracy, striving to export revolution and international solidarity in the fight against the existing order.

Representatives: Red Brigades/ Brigade Rosse (Italy), Revolutionary Organization November 17/ Επαναστατική Οργάνωση 17 Νοέμβρη (Greece), Red Army Faction/ Rote Armee Fraktion (Germany), Red Aid/ Rote Hilfe (Germany), etc.

- *Anarchist*. According to their ideological understanding, anarchists seek to forcibly impose a social model based on a weak or completely absent function of the state in enforcing a systemic order and determining the development of human societies. They are against authoritarian and totalitarian rule, organized forms of oppression and the present market economy. Within the countries in which they operate, they try to create mini-communities, the so-called “free autonomous spaces” (Europol 2023), in which they live by their own rules without fulfilling any legal obligations such as paying taxes or obeying orders from the authorities and some of the inhabited premises also serve as secret quarters.

Representatives: Informal Anarchist Federation/ Federazione Anarchica Informale (Italy), Conspiracy of the Fire Cores/ Synomosía Pyrínon tis Fotiás (Greece), Iberian Anarchist Federation/ Federación Anarquista Ibérica (Spain), etc.

- *Anti-fascist*. The ideology of anti-fascist extremism (Lekerf 2025) is based on the fight against fascism, far-right extremism, sexism, white supremacy, colonialism, and the authoritarian role of the state, often taking pro-Palestinian and pro-Kurdish positions. There are also newly emerging anti-fascist groups whose main goal is to carry out violent physical attacks against members of neo-Nazi organizations.

Representatives: Antifa/ Antifa (Germany, Italy, France, Spain, etc.), Engel – Guntermann Group (Germany), Italian Antiracist Coordination/ Coordinamento Antirazzista Italiano (Italy), Antifascistko action/ Antifascistisk action (Sweden), Young Struggle (France), Unite Against Fascism (Great Britain), Stand Up To Racism (Great Britain), etc.

- *Hybrid*. Hybrid left-wing extremism is associated with the violent defense of thematic and campaign causes or the protection of the rights of a certain minority group, such as: protection of the rights of clean arable land and forests, fight against patriarchal domination, technofascism and overexploitation of resources by transnational companies, etc. Ideologically, hybrid left-wing extremism is close to anarchist and anti-fascist organizations, but also supports the ideas of biocentrism and eco-anarchism (Tosso 2026).

Representatives: Workers' Struggle/ Lutte Ouvriere (France), Earth Uprisings/ Les Soulevements de la Terre (France), Vulkan Group/ Vulkangruppe (Germany), etc.

When examining the contemporary development of left-wing extremism, two groups are of research interest – the anti-fascists from Engel – Guntermann Group and the Vulkan Group, which can be defined as a hybrid-type left-wing extremist organization.

The Engel – Guntermann Group has become famous in the media space (Knight 2023) after a series of planned attacks in the period 2018-2023 in several East German states and in Hungary against members of neo-Nazi organizations. The attacks on right-wing extremists are characterized by precise organization, a high level of conspiracy and deliberate cruelty, and the victims are ambushed both during demonstrations in private clubs and bars or in front of their homes. A preferred tactical means is the use of blunt objects such as hammers and batons, causing medium and severe bodily injuries. According to the German authorities, the leaders of the anti-fascist organization are Johann Guntermann, who is currently on trial (Fischer 2026), and Lina Engel, who is already serving a 5-year prison sentence.

The Engel – Guntermann Group is characterized (Jokinen 2024) by a command core and a cellular peripheral structure with predominantly horizontal connections, although the leaders have a circle of close associates who are trained and have accumulated street fighting experience. The attacks are extremely precise, meticulously planned and carried out with tactical ingenuity with the attacking squads consisting of an operational leader, a scout and stormtroopers, and often the group's own ringleaders also exercise violence.

On January 3, 2026, members of the Vulkan Group carried out sabotage (Tagesschau 2026) using improvised incendiary devices against a gas-fired power plant in Berlin, damaging power lines and cutting off electricity to 45,000 households and over 2,000 businesses and public facilities. The city's rail transport was blocked, the normal working process of many hospitals was disrupted, and digital connectivity was disrupted. The left-wing extremist group chose the target of its attack because of its use of fossil fuels, ideologically exploiting the idea of caring for the planet Earth.

The extremists from Vulkangruppe are also responsible for several arson attacks against Elon Musk's Tesla car manufacturing factory in Germany (Deutsche Welle 2024), and the billionaire himself is described by them as a technofascist and a rich man who exploits people and destroys nature through his transnational company.

The Vulkan Group's attack on a scientific institute (Fürstenau 2026) in the field of information technology is also known, accusing it of developing an application for population control during the Covid-19 crisis.

Vulkan Group is characterized by a decentralized organizational structure, public accountability for its actions through the publication of manifestos and letters to the media, and their anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist and eco-anarchist ideology motivates them to carry out sabotage against industrial, transport, energy, digital and scientific infrastructure.

2. Drivers for left-wing extremist and anarchist activity

Table 1 presents the activity of far-left and anarchist groups on the territory of eight European Union (EU) countries for the period 2017–2024, reported on the basis of terrorist acts carried out by them, foiled or thwarted by the competent authorities, as well as the number of arrests of individuals involved in left-wing extremist activity. The primary database is extracted from Europol's annual reports (Europol 2020; 2021; 2022; 2023; 2024; 2025) on the analysis of the current situation on the territory of the EU related to terrorism and extremism.

Table 1. Far-left and anarchist activity in the European Union
(Source: composed by the author based on Europol data)

Country	YEAR								Activity indicator	Total
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024		
Austria	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Attacks	0
	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	Arrests	1
Belgium	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	Attacks	1
	0	0	0	0	6	1	0	0	Arrests	7
France	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	Attacks	2
	10	3	0	11	3	0	0	0	Arrests	27
Germany	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	Attacks	2
	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	1	Arrests	5
Greece	8	6	2	0	0	4	1	3	Attacks	24
	12	20	4	14	1	3	2	20	Arrests	76
Italy	7	10	22	24	0	12	30	18	Attacks	123
	11	8	98	24	6	12	10	6	Arrests	175
Portugal	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	Attacks	0
	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	Arrests	1
Spain	7	3	2	0	0	1	1	0	Attacks	14
	3	3	8	2	3	0	1	1	Arrests	21
Total	24	19	26	25	1	18	32	21	Attacks	166
	36	34	111	52	19	19	14	28	Arrests	313

From the data presented, it is clear that for the entire eight-year period, the most acts of violence by left-wing extremists and anarchists were in Italy (123), followed by Greece (24) and Spain (15). The statistics show that the level of acts of terror is highest in 2023 (32) and lowest in 2021 (1).

In terms of arrests, the leader is again Italy (175), followed by Greece (76) followed by France (27) and Spain (21). The most arrests were made in 2019 (111), followed by 2020 (52) and 2017 (36).

When analyzing the information, there is a weakness related to the fact that according to the official data announced by Europol, a clear distinction cannot be made between the activities of left-wing extremists and anarchists, and that the statistics do not include the entire spectrum of their manifestations on the territory of the EU.

The high rates of arrests and attacks in Italy, Greece and Spain can be attributed to the activity of anarchist organizations, as it is known that these countries form an anarchist axis called the Mediterranean Triangle (Farinelli, Marinone 2021), where this form of extremism is predominant, while for the two dyads Germany-Austria and France-Belgium (formed on the basis of the factors of a common border and language), the leading one nowadays is left-wing extremism of the anti-fascist and hybrid type.

It can be concluded that left-wing extremist and anarchist activity was highest in 2020 and 2022, since then it was registered on the territory of the largest number of countries (5), and the total values of the studied events are relatively high - respectively, in 2020, 25 attacks and 52 arrests occurred on the territories of France, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain, and in 2022, 18 attacks and 19 arrests were reported on the territories of Belgium, Germany, Greece,

Italy and Spain. Although the total value of the indicators is also high in 2019 (111 arrests and 26 attacks) and in 2023 (14 arrests and 32 attacks), the conclusion cannot be justified that the greatest left-wing extremist activity was established on the territory of the EU then, since the majority of it is in Italy and of a dominant anarchist nature.

If the periods of highest far-left and anarchist activity are attributed to important geopolitical events, the ideological drivers that provoked extremists to violent manifestations can be discovered.

In 2020, the active phase of the Covid-19 pandemic began and governments were forced to introduce restrictive measures for the population such as periodic lockdowns, mandatory wearing of masks in public places, observance of social distancing, limited access to parks, shops, etc. These restrictions are related to the design of authoritarian power, restriction of civil rights and freedoms, imposition of control and monitoring of the population, including through the use of high technologies. Large groups of people spent their time in the online space, where various theories about the origin of the virus, transnational companies profiting from the crisis, attempts to reduce humanity or its total control were spread. A fertile ground was created for the activation of groups dedicated to the fight against capitalism, fascism and state domination, which explains the activity of left-wing extremists and anarchists in 2020, who saw an “enemy at the gates”.

The low activity in 2021 of the studied organizations can be explained by the introduction of vaccination passports and the imposed public access control regime, which is a prerequisite for collecting personal data and establishing the identity of extremists, especially after their intensive activity in 2020.

In February 2022, Russia attacked Ukraine and began active military operations. An international reaction, political statements, extensive media coverage of the clash followed, and somewhat forgotten narrative and diametric oppositions such as fascism-antifascism, communism-anticommunism, East-West, democracy-totalitarianism, pacifism-militarism were stimulated. All this has activated both peaceful demonstrations and violent protests, in support or disapproval of the actions or the other side of the conflict. Conditions have again been created that push the far-left and anarchists to new manifestations of violent extremism, which explains their higher activity in 2022.

Of scientific interest is the relationship between the activity of far-left and anarchist extremism and the political orientation of the Prime Minister of the respective country. If we consider the anarchist Mediterranean axis, in Greece the most attacks were committed in 2017 (8), in Italy in 2023 (32), and in Spain in 2017 (7).

In Greece, in 2017, Alexis Tsipras was in power who is a socialist governs during the debt crisis, defends the working class and is a pacifist. In general, his politics are left-wing and ideologically close to some of the views of the far-left.

In Italy in 2023, Giorgia Meloni is in power, who has right-wing and conservative political views, is a national sovereignist, takes pro-NATO and pro-Ukrainian positions and opposes the excessive bureaucratic intervention of the EU in economic relations.

In Spain in 2017, Mariano Rajoy is in power, who is a conservative, a supporter of the central government with right-wing economic views, and opposes the autonomy of Catalonia.

It is evident from the researched information that there is a correlation between the political views of the Prime Minister and the manifestations of violence by left-wing extremists and anarchists, but this driver is not decisive for their overall activity.

3. Political measures to counter left-wing extremist and anarchist activity

Political measures to counter left-wing extremist and anarchist activities must respond to external geopolitical and geoeconomic challenges, take into account the specifics of the national security system and take into account the trends of left-wing extremism and anarchism in the medium and long term. When forming the measures, the principles of *balance of political decisions*, *expediency* and *strategic vision* should be observed.

The political aspects of countering extremist and terrorist activities can generally be focused on the field of legal and regulatory framework, international cooperation and sectoral policies. Based on the analysis, the following political measures to counter left-wing extremist and anarchist activities can be derived:

1. Designation as terrorist of certain left-wing extremist and anarchist organizations, groups or individuals for whom there is sufficient evidence that they pose a threat to the security of the EU Member States and the European Union as a whole.
2. Effective use of the mechanisms and instruments of the international and European legal framework for the implementation of mutual legal assistance, extradition and the European arrest warrant which are related to crimes committed by members of left-wing and anarchist organizations.
3. Enhanced exchange of intelligence information on a bilateral and multilateral basis with regard to individuals and groups professing left-wing and anarchist ideology for whom there is evidence that they are planning or preparing to commit a terrorist act.
4. Legislative changes concerning the increase in penalties for crimes related to attacks against critical infrastructure and strategic sites.
5. Policy for respecting human rights in the fight against left-wing extremism and anarchism, in accordance with international legal and normative documents for the protection of civil and political human rights.
6. Policy for introducing topics in the relevant subjects at the high school stage of students' education that address the destructive effect of radical ideologies on social systems.
7. Policy for encouraging the participation of security and public order officials in international conferences, seminars, training and experience exchange programs on issues related to countering left-wing and anarchist extremism.
8. Policy for developing scientific potential in the field of research related to countering left-wing extremism and anarchism.
9. Policy for organizing explanatory and information campaigns during the construction of large-scale infrastructure and business facilities that could cause public discontent and activate left-wing extremists and anarchists.
10. National media policy for not providing a platform to individuals propagating left-wing extremist and anarchist ideas.

Conclusions

Although the activity of left-wing extremists and anarchists is lower than that of right-wing extremists and jihadists, there are risks of a geopolitical, social, economic and environmental nature that are capable of pushing new groups of people to recognize radical ideas as their own and to join already existing left-wing extremist and anarchist organizations or to create new ones. Deviations in the activity of left-wing extremists and anarchists may also be directly dependent on the intensity of the activities of organizations from the diametrical right-wing extremist spectrum.

The focus of the competent authorities should be directed towards monitoring and disrupting the activities of left-wing extremist and anarchist organizations of the anti-fascist and hybrid type, since in the conditions of the contemporary security environment they are the most difficult to predict, demonstrate a resolute readiness to exercise violence and cause material losses, while at the same time creating a socially acceptable image of fighters against evil and defenders of just causes.

Often, the indirect damage from a planned extreme act can be much greater than the desired effects. The destruction of a given element of critical infrastructure destroys not only itself, but also interrupts the public goods that it would provide. It should not be forgotten that the interrupted power supply leads to the inability of medical equipment in hospitals to function and to the possible loss of human life, and the suspension of the work process of a certain business company provokes financial difficulties and unemployment.

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BULGARIA – A PERIPHERAL ZONE OF THE SALAFI-JIHADIST SPECTRUM

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Abstract. This article examines Bulgaria's stance toward the Salafi-jihadist spectrum, challenging the "traditional versus alien" Islam dichotomy that dominates public and institutional discourse. The analysis draws on Prof. Simeon Evstatiev's concept of "milletic secularism", researcher Joas Wagemakers' typology of Salafism, and a working definition of terrorism. Empirical examination includes the channels of religious influence exerted by various external actors, the trial of the thirteen imams in Pazardzhik, the transit of foreign fighters, and the attack at Sarafovo Airport. The article contributes to a broader understanding of the competition between diverse actors and the systematic conflation of two phenomena in Bulgarian public and institutional discourse – doctrinal presence and the operational terrorist threat.

Keywords: Bulgaria; Salafism; milletic secularism; radicalization; terrorism; foreign fighters

Introduction

Recently, the topic of the Islamic presence in the country and the external factors influencing it has been increasingly at the forefront of the Bulgarian public debate. The discussion began on July 18, 2012, with the bombing at Sarafovo Airport, and later that same year, a trial began in Pazardzhik against thirteen Muslim preachers accused of spreading anti-democratic ideology – a case that continues to this day. Thus, public discourse on the Islamic presence has centered on the "traditional versus alien" dichotomy of Islam, which the renowned Bulgarian scholar of Arabic and Islamic studies Prof. Simeon Evstatiev examines not as an analytical category but as a social construct stemming from the distinctive Bulgarian model of managing religious diversity.

This study does not call into question the existence of foreign doctrinal, financial, and institutional influence on Bulgarian Muslim communities; rather, it defends the thesis that Bulgaria is a peripheral zone for the Salafi-jihadist spectrum in three main respects – doctrinal (reception, rather than production, of Salafi thought), financial (a recipient, rather than a source, of funding), and network-based (a transit corridor). The aim of this analysis is to demonstrate that Bulgarian public and institutional discourse exhibits a systematic conflation of the concepts of doctrinal presence and operational terrorist threat, which significantly complicates judicial practice.

1. Essence and typology of Salafism

Salafism represents a theological and dogmatic-juridical orientation within the Sunni branch of Islam, characterized by specific interpretations in the fields of creed (aqidah/عقيدة)

and jurisprudence (fiqh/فقه). According to Evstatiev, “the Salafis, who trace their historical lineage to the ‘people of the hadiths’ (ahl al-hadith/أهل الحديث), identify as Sunnis and are convinced that they profess the most authentic and earliest version of Islam, which was believed in and practiced by the ‘righteous predecessors’ (as-salaf as-salih/السلف الصالح)” (Evstatiev 2018).

In his work, Evstatiev quotes the renowned Islamic scholar Loimeier, according to whom “on one hand, supporters of Salafism, using doctrinal differentiation, symbolic distancing, and social separation, draw the boundaries between faith and unbelief” (Loimeier 2016). On the other hand, however, Salafi dogmatics possesses the ability to achieve internal identity consolidation within communities with a similar religious orientation. With its direct approach to the original religious sources, the Salafi orientation serves as a unique guarantee of belonging to “the victorious group” (at-ta’ifa al-mansura/الطائفة المنصورة), which in the afterlife will be “the saved sect” (al-firqa an-najiya/الفرقة الناجية) (Evstatiev 2018).

There is an ongoing debate among contemporary scholars regarding the typology of Salafism and the methods used to classify its various forms. According to the prominent Dutch scholar Joas Wagemakers, the first type of Salafis are the quietists, whom he suggests may be the largest group worldwide. Quietist Salafis do not believe in the value of engaging in parliamentary activity; they prefer to refrain from participating in political debates and social activism, and do not engage in policy-making – neither on local issues nor on international matters (Evstatiev 2018, p. 440). In this case, Wagemakers examines political quietism based on the premise that the doctrine of Salafi adherents is viewed as homogeneous in its core tenets, yet at the same time, differences exist among the Salafis themselves regarding their interpretation of certain issues.

The Dutch researcher’s characterization of them as a heterogeneous group is not based on any significant doctrinal differences, but rather on a situational aspect of their political behavior. As a result of this criterion, Wagemakers distinguishes three categories of quietists, but for the purposes of this study, we adhere to the basic three-way division (Evstatiev 2018, 441).

“Political Salafis” constitute the second category, and they, too, do not share uniform views among themselves. Not only do they believe in the necessity of political participation, but they can also be characterized as exceptionally sophisticated in their views on politics—including international politics – and are strongly influenced by activist groups such as the “Muslim Brotherhood” (Evstatiev 2018). Compared to the quietists, political Salafis are much more knowledgeable about issues related to domestic politics, as well as those in the sphere of international relations. According to Wagemakers, the political approach of this type of Salafi necessitates dividing them into two subgroups; however, the scope of this study does not require this further subdivision.

The third type in the typology of the Dutch researcher Wagemakers is the Jihadi-Salafis. According to him, this group is the least understood of the three currents of the Salafi movement. Wagemakers notes that the tendency in analyses following September 11, 2001, to view Jihadi-Salafis “simply as Salafis” or, more generally, as “Muslims waging jihad” is “far too simplistic” (Evstatiev 2018, p. 442). According to Evstatiev, this is inappropriate, since there are other Islamic groups engaged in jihad, such as the Palestinian Islamist organization “ Hamas” or the Lebanese “Hezbollah,” which is Shia.

According to Wagemakers, broadly speaking, the difference between the Jihadi-Salafis and other Muslim jihadist groups lies in the type of jihad they wage. From this, he distinguishes three types of jihad – classical (defensive), revolutionary (against apostate regimes as a result of takfir), and global jihad (against Western targets, similar to the terrorist actions of al-Qaeda) (Evstatiev 2018). What distinguishes the Jihadi-Salafis from the quietist Salafis and the political Salafis is that they support “revolutionary” jihad and, in most cases, “global jihad” as well. Jihadi-Salafis did not emerge, as some prominent Islamic scholars claim, during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, although the Afghan jihad did play a role to some extent in the movement’s formation. The movement’s roots are ideologically linked to the tenets of Sayyid Qutb as early as the 1960s and 1970s.

2. “Traditonal versus alien” Islam dichotomy in Bulgaria

Wagemakers provides us with a comprehensive description of the categorization of Salafism on a universal level; however, the method by which the Salafi presence in the Bulgarian context is typologized and interpreted requires an additional analytical tool. According to Simeon Evstatiev, in order to understand the specificities of how Islam is perceived in Bulgaria, we must examine the concept of milletic secularism. Derived from the Ottoman millet system, milletic secularism refers to coexisting, divergent, and competing transnational collective identities, loyalties, and frames of reference within the boundaries of a single nation-state (Evstatiev 2019). According to this model, what clearly distinguishes it from other trajectories of secularism is that one of these identities plays a dominant role, serving as the constituent foundation of the state order. This model resembles the way religious communities functioned in the Ottoman millet system, but in reverse. Today, Muslims constitute a minority in a pluralistic society, and the secular state is governed on the basis of non-Muslim procedures and values, symbolically overarched by Orthodox Christianity.

Milletic secularism privileges the identity of the constituent nation within this strict hierarchical structure, allowing for “controlled toleration” through non-interference in the internal affairs of other communities, provided that they do not undermine the position of the constituent nation. According to Evstatiev, the model described unfolds various categorizations along the “traditional” versus “alien” dichotomy, granting “traditional” status to those communities that have coexisted for centuries (Evstatiev 2019, pp. 101 - 102). This explains why milletic secularism entails an inherent suspicion toward such “new” or “alien” transnational religious identities and loyalties, which call into question the established order and social hierarchies. Given Evstatiev’s argument that the “traditional-alien” dichotomy is a social construct that does not distinguish between violent activity and doctrinal presence, it is necessary for the purposes of this study to apply a precise criterion explaining this distinction, such as the definition of terrorism.

Terrorism is a complex phenomenon that intertwines ideological, social, religious, ethnic, psychological, and other elements; moreover, the literature on terrorism consistently treats it as a form of violence alongside war, guerrilla warfare, crime, and so on. There is no universally accepted definition of terrorism, but a generalized definition can be derived from its known international definitions: a politically motivated activity, criminalized under domestic and international law, that uses violence against citizens to achieve its goals

(Marinov, Stoykov & Ivanov 2023). Given the characteristics of political motivation and the use of violence against citizens, religious financing and preaching – although they may seem “alien” within the milletic model – remain outside the legal scope of terrorism. This discrepancy between legal classification and public understanding requires an empirical examination of the “peripherality” thesis. If it proves plausible, this means that external influence should manifest itself primarily in financial and doctrinal forms, rather than in the creation of a local terrorist infrastructure. The following sections provide an empirical examination of “alien” religious influence in Bulgaria, which is channeled through two starkly contrasting avenues – the Turkish and the Saudi.

Ankara has gradually begun to restore its influence among the Muslim population in Bulgaria following the fall of the communist regime, as evidenced by the signing of a protocol in 1998, regulating the provision of financial support to the Chief Mufti’s Office by Turkey through the Directorate of Religious Affairs (Diyanet – Diyanet İşleri Genel Müdürlüğü) (Evstatiev 2019). To this day, this protocol remains a subject of contention for Bulgaria, as the Turkish religious institution has assumed an unprecedented role in Turkey’s domestic, regional, and international politics during the rule of Recep Erdoğan’s party (Justice and Development Party – Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) (Evstatiev 2019). This document, which is alleged to have been suspended by the Bulgarian authorities in 2017, regulates the financial support for the Bulgarian Muftiate, as well as the dispatch of Turkish teachers, including imams and lecturers, to Muslim religious schools within the borders of Bulgaria.

In recent years, Ankara’s main religious activity in Bulgaria has centered on the establishment of the so-called İlahiyat Lisesi (Islamic religious schools), which have been founded in Ruse, Momchilgrad, and Shumen, with the assistance of the Turkish Religious Foundation (Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı, TDV) and the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı, TİKA). The curriculum at these Islamic schools is developed in coordination with educational institutions in Turkey. In addition to providing the necessary logistical support for these schools, the Turkish government also organizes various social activities in an effort to strengthen cooperation between Bulgarian and Turkish education professionals (Telci & Peneva 2019).

Another Bulgarian educational institution that receives significant financial support from Turkey is the Higher Islamic Institute in Sofia (Yüksek İslam Enstitüsü), founded in 1990, which provides higher education in Islamic studies; the Diyanet provides scholarships and covers the costs of the institute’s other activities (Telci & Peneva 2019, pp. 246 - 247). Although all Muslim educational institutions operating in Bulgaria receive financial support and educational materials from the Turkish Religious Foundation, they are nonetheless under the control of the Chief Mufti’s Office in Bulgaria. The Bulgarian government intervenes minimally in the activities of Islamic schools, as they have the status of private educational institutions; nevertheless, they are registered under the National Education Act. In addition, Ankara sponsors Turkish imams who are sent on study trips to Bulgaria to teach courses on Islamic doctrine in cities and villages; such visits most often take place during the summer school break.

There are systematic efforts to strengthen Turkish influence in Bulgaria through religious channels. A telling example is the continuous financial assistance for the construction of mosques and Islamic schools, the coverage of their utility bills (electricity,

water, and gas), as well as the payment of salaries to religious leaders and teachers. However, the Turkish government does not limit itself to the aforementioned activities but also ensures that the basic operational and administrative needs of the Chief Mufti's Office and its regional branches are met. Ankara is also allocating nearly 3 million Bulgarian lev for the restoration of the Tombul Mosque in Shumen and the "Banya Bashi" Mosque in Sofia.

Bulgaria's stance toward the Turkish religious presence perfectly illustrates "controlled toleration" – Diyanet's activities in the religious sphere are accepted, but any indications of interference in domestic politics are met with a firm response. There are two cases that illustrate the Bulgarian state's opposition, but they stem from concerns about interference in domestic affairs, not from religious disputes. These include the expulsion of Adem Yerin, the coordinator of the Turkish religious foundation, in 2009, and the declaration of Ugur Emiroglu, the religious attaché at the Turkish embassy, as *persona non grata* (Telci & Peneva 2019, pp. 250 – 251). Of course, this did not lead to a lasting deterioration in relations between Bulgaria and Turkey, but there is a significant difference in the trajectory of Riyadh's influence.

Following the collapse of the communist regime in Bulgaria, Saudi Arabia immediately began its religious activities within the Bulgarian Muslim community, sending various Wahhabi clerics in 1992 to teach their "correct" version of Islam. These Islamic nongovernmental organizations, funded by the Saudi authorities, registered as foundations and proceeded to build mosques and religious institutions in various villages throughout the country, with their primary goal being the spread of Wahhabi ideology, which contradicts the form of Islam traditionally practiced by Bulgarian Muslims. Initially, Bulgarian authorities accepted Saudi funding due to the difficulties faced by state institutions. However, once the government realized the real danger posed by the activities of these organizations – some of which supported the spread of extremist ideas and led to the radicalization of the Muslim community – Sofia decided to shut them down. Organizations such as "Dar al-Irshad" (دار الإرشاد) and "Al-Waqf Al-Islami" (الوقف الإسلامي) were shut down, but the Saudi government continues its religious activities in Bulgaria through new, officially registered nongovernmental organizations such as "Taiba" (طيبة) and "Nedwa" (الندوة) (Telci & Peneva 2019, p. 251).

The two organizations divide their activities, with "Taiba" focusing on funding and building new mosques and religious schools and sending Bulgarian scholarship recipients to study the Quran, the Hadith, and the Arabic language, while the "Nedwa" organization provides financial support for the Hajj and Umrah pilgrimages to Mecca and Medina (Telci & Peneva 2019). It is interesting to note that "Taiba" continues its activities in the country, even though in 1997 the organization's leader, Abdulrahman Takan, was expelled from Bulgaria for anti-state sermons. The Saudi-funded Islamic nongovernmental organizations listed above are registered by the Bulgarian authorities, but there are also illegally operating entities, such as the "Igase" organization, which is alleged to have illegally published books and opened schools (Telci & Peneva 2019, pp. 252 - 253).

According to Telci and Peneva, writing in *Insight Turkey*, a journal published by the pro-government SETA foundation, Turkey and Saudi Arabia have fundamentally different motives for providing various services to the Muslim community in Bulgaria; while Ankara approaches Bulgarian Muslims on the basis of shared cultural and historical similarities, as

well as a close ethnic identity, Saudi Arabia, for its part, is engaged in spreading its religious ideology – Wahhabism. This is the reason for the differing reactions of Bulgarian institutions to Turkish and Saudi initiatives within the local Muslim community. Bulgarian Muslims view Riyadh's activities as an attempt to promote Wahhabi teachings among them, while Turkish initiatives are perceived as better aligned with their needs, both ideologically and practically (Telci & Peneva 2019, pp. 252 - 253).

The difference in the approaches of the two Muslim countries has an institutional dimension. While Ankara's funding flows through the official structures of the Chief Mufti's Office of the Republic of Bulgaria, Riyadh's funding flows through its non-governmental organizations; specifically, the Pazardzhik case against the "Al-Waqf Al-Islami" (الوقف الإسلامي) is the only judicial attempt to classify the Salafi movement within Islam under criminal law.

3. Case studies

The trial of the "thirteen imams", which began on September 18, 2012, at the Pazardzhik District Court, concerning the preaching of Salafi interpretations of Islam, is the only legal precedent in which this orientation of Islam has been the direct subject of criminal prosecution in Bulgaria. The defendants are district muftis and imams, most of whom are of Roma origin, though there are also Pomaks among them. Their informal leader is Ahmed Musa Ahmed, against whom criminal proceedings have been initiated for the second time following a conviction for similar acts in 2004. The charges brought by the Bulgarian court cover three counts: under Article 108, paragraph 1, of the Criminal Code – preaching an anti-democratic ideology through speech; Article 109, paragraphs 1 and 2 – forming and participating in an organization whose purpose is to commit crimes under Chapter One of the Criminal Code and under Article 164, paragraph 1 – preaching hatred on religious grounds, with the charges being linked to membership in the Saudi foundation "Al-Waqf Al-Islami" (الوقف الإسلامي), whose funding and logo are mentioned in the indictment (Supreme Court of Cassation of Bulgaria 2016). The comprehensive expert panel appointed for the case consists of Arabists Simeon Evstatiev and Ivan Dyulgerov, theologian Klara Stamatova, historian Agop Garabedian, sociologist Antoni Galabov, and computer expert Alexander Kirkov (Sadebni reportazhi 2014).

The history of the case encompasses two separate, though at first glance overlapping, proceedings. The first main case resulted in a first-instance judgment, in which, on March 19, 2014, the defendant Ahmed Musa was sentenced to one year of imprisonment and a fine (Supreme Court of Cassation of Bulgaria 2016). This judgment was overturned by Decision No. 71 of July 28, 2016, of the Supreme Court of Cassation (SCC), which remanded the case for reconsideration (Sadebni reportazhi 2014). Subsequently, following a second appellate ruling, the SCC concluded the proceedings with Decision No. 38 of April 25, 2019, whereby the charges under Articles 108 and 109 of the Criminal Code were dismissed due to the expiration of the absolute statute of limitations, and only the conviction under Article 164 remained in force – one year of imprisonment and a fine of five thousand Bulgarian lev for preaching religious hatred (Supreme Court of Cassation of Bulgaria 2019). The second proceeding, concerning the sermons delivered by Ahmed Musa during the period 2013–2014 and the dissemination of the ideas of the "Islamic State," resulted in an eight-year prison

sentence for Musa in 2019, which, however, was overturned by the Supreme Court of Cassation in Decision No. 60161 of April 11, 2022; as of mid-2026, the case is in its third round of proceedings, having begun in January with a review of the improperly drafted indictment (Svobodna Evropa 2022).

The reasoning set forth in Decision No. 71/2016 highlights the most significant issue regarding the criminal classification of Salafism in Bulgaria, which represents the most fully developed judicial position. The judges of the Supreme Court of Cassation note that: “The prosecution has asserted – and the court has uncritically agreed – that the anti-democratic ideology preached by the defendant A. is called Salafism. Yet this ‘ideology’ is not among those indisputably established as anti-democratic. Moreover, Salafism has been expertly defined as a religious movement” (Supreme Court of Cassation of Bulgaria 2016). Thus, the court raises the question of whether these preached views are not protected by the freedom of religion under Article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Article 37 of the Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, and emphasizes the need “to distinguish the criminal activity of each of the defendants from the religious activities carried out by most of them in the capacities to which they were appointed – as muftis, imams, vaizes (preachers), and others”. Furthermore, it notes that the arguments presented do not constitute a criminal law analysis, and the connection between the content of the distributed books and anti-state activity remains unclear.

Also telling are the Supreme Court of Cassation’s observations that the “differences” identified by the lower courts relate “primarily to the ceremonial practices and rituals of daily life and family life in ‘traditional’ Islam as practiced in our country”, whereas “in the modern democratic world, diversity of religious beliefs is not treated as a crime” (Supreme Court of Cassation of Bulgaria 2019). The court faces the same structural problem as Evstatiev, who analyzes it theoretically while also serving as an expert witness in the same case. The attempt to reproduce the “traditional-alien” dichotomy of Islam, characteristic of milletic secularism, in legal terms proves unsuccessful due to the prosecution’s inability to operationalize this boundary. This confirms Prof. Evstatiev’s thesis that the dichotomy is a social construct without clearly defined content.

The results of the proceedings conducted over the past 17 years bear out the thesis of the present analysis – there is not a single final court ruling convicting a defendant on the charge of anti-democratic ideology, criminal prosecutions under Articles 108 and 109 have lapsed due to the absolute statute of limitations, as the Bulgarian court has failed to officially and definitively confirm that Salafism is an ideology that undermines democratic foundations and values. The only effective conviction was handed down under Article 164 – a crime against religious denominations, not against the republic (Supreme Court of Cassation of Bulgaria 2019). The subject matter of the case against the thirteen imams is doctrinal – related to sermons, the distribution of books and pamphlets, and membership in an organization – rather than operational, since nowhere in the charges are activities mentioned that involve the preparation or commission of a violent act as defined above. Actual operational manifestations related to terrorist activity on Bulgarian territory are the subject of this study in the following two sections.

It is only recently that issues related to radicalization and violent extremism have come to be viewed as potential threats to Bulgarian society. This is happening primarily in light of

reactions around the world and within the EU to so-called home-grown Islamist radicalization, the activities of terrorist organizations such as the Islamic State (IS) and al-Qaeda, and the issue of foreign fighters, for whom Bulgaria is becoming a transit zone on their way to and from conflict zones in the Middle East (Dzhekova et al. 2016).

There are as yet no known cases of Bulgarian citizens participating in acts of Islamist radicalization within the country or abroad, but recently there has been an alarming trend of symbolic approval of the actions of international Islamist organizations among segments of some isolated and marginalized Roma communities, as is the case in Pazardzhik (Dzhekova et al. 2016, pp. 8 - 9). However, the number of individuals caught providing logistical support to foreign fighters passing through the country is quite low (between five and ten people).

When compared to the countries of the Western Balkans, Bulgaria is not a source of transnational fighters. This assertion is supported by data from the Soufan Center, according to which 431 people have traveled from Kosovo to Syria and Iraq, 330 from Bosnia and Herzegovina, approximately 150 from Albania, 140 from North Macedonia, 50 from Serbia, and 30 from Montenegro (Barrett 2017, p. 11). These figures reflect not so much the absolute number as the concentration of this type of fighter. According to independent counts by BIRN, Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina rank first and second in Europe in terms of proportion of the population (Dzhekova et al. 2016, p. 34). Bulgaria's absence from these data is particularly telling, given its geographical position at the crossroads between the Middle East and the Western Balkans. At the same time, the researchers note that the region itself lacks the critical mass required for the development of a sustained jihadist infrastructure (Dzhekova et al. 2016, p. 37).

The ways in which Salafist ideas take root in Bulgaria differ significantly from the mechanisms of military recruitment in the Western Balkans. A report by the Center for the Study of Democracy identifies three main types: preaching by foreign missionaries; humanitarian aid provided by Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Jordan, and Egypt, as well as the provision of scholarships for Bulgarian Muslims to study at Islamic universities abroad. As of 2014, only about 300 Bulgarian citizens had graduated from an Islamic higher education institution abroad, but it is important to note that 70% of them received their education in Turkey, with about 10% each in Saudi Arabia and Jordan (Dzhekova et al. 2016, p. 37, note 79). This means that even the main channel of doctrinal influence is dominated by institutions associated with official Hanafi Islam in Ankara, rather than with Salafi centers in the Gulf.

Against the backdrop of the thousands leaving the countries of the Western Balkans – in contrast to the mere 5–10 confirmed cases of fighters transiting through Bulgaria – the country is emerging as a transit corridor rather than a breeding ground. The only terrorist attack carried out on Bulgarian territory was not the result of this network of transit fighters, nor was it linked to the Salafi-jihadist spectrum.

On July 18, 2012, an explosive device planted by Algerian citizen Mohamed Hassan Al-Husseini detonated outside Sarafovo Airport near Burgas next to a bus carrying Israeli tourists. As a result of the attack, five Israeli citizens and the Bulgarian driver Mustafa Kyosov were killed, and 38 people were injured (Lex.bg 2020). Four years later, the Specialized Criminal Court brought charges against two individuals – Meliad Farah and Hassan Al-Hajj Hassan – who were accomplices of the main perpetrator, in September 2020, they were sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. During the

investigation, it was established that the Lebanese Shi'ite organization "Hezbollah," supported by Iran, had provided the explosive device and logistical support for the attack at Sarafovo Airport. It is important to note that the verdict itself does not name the organization; rather, the act is defined only as "aiding terrorism," and the link to "Hezbollah" is based on the evidence gathered and the official position of state institutions.

Unlike the Pazardzhik trial, whose subject matter remained entirely doctrinal, the Sarafovo attack meets both criteria of the working definition of terrorism – political motivation and violence against civilians. Nevertheless, Sarafovo falls outside the scope of the analyzed spectrum, since "Hezbollah" is a Shi'ite organization – it is one of those groups that Prof. Evstatiev defines as jihadist but non-Salafist, and which fall outside Wagemakers' typology. Moreover, Evstatiev categorically notes that the armed actions carried out by such organizations do not make them Salafi. Thus, the terrorist attack in Sarafovo was not the result of external doctrinal influences, nor of a transit network, but of a group with no connection to Bulgarian Muslim communities, and the choice of Bulgaria as the site for such a terrorist operation was dictated by its logistical accessibility, not by favorable ideological conditions.

Conclusions

The evidence examined above lends support to the thesis that Bulgaria functions as a peripheral zone of the Salafi-Jihadist spectrum. From a doctrinal standpoint, Salafi thought is received in the country but does not originate there, as this influence is introduced through foreign missionary activity, the distribution of religious literature, and educational migration. Following the collapse of the communist regime in Bulgaria, the Chief Mufti's Office faced serious financial difficulties, relying on external funding for which competing projects vied. Furthermore, compared to the thousands of fighters who have left neighboring Western Balkan countries, Bulgaria has provided logistical support to an extremely small number of fighters passing through the country, indicating that the country serves as a transit corridor rather than a breeding ground for radical Islamist ideas.

This shows that religious influence over Bulgarian Muslims is not the domain of a single state, but rather a field of competition among various state actors. On the one hand, there is official Turkish Hanafi Islam, which operates through the structures of the Chief Mufti's Office, and Saudi non-governmental organizations. There is a significant difference in their approach, institutional logic, and main objectives, though this distinction is systematically obscured by the "traditional versus alien" dichotomy of Islam. A telling example is that the educational channel of influence is dominated by Turkish, rather than Arab, structures.

The inability of this dichotomy to capture reality is clearly evident in judicial practice. Seventeen years have passed since the Pazardzhik case, and not a single conviction for preaching an anti-democratic ideology has become final, as the Supreme Court of Cassation refuses to equate the Salafi movement of Islam with such an ideology, and the only final court decision concerns Article 164, paragraph 1 – an offence against the religious denominations rather than against the state. The prosecution attempts to draw a distinction between "traditional" and "alien" Islam, but this proves unsuccessful, as this distinction is legally irrelevant – it is a social construct without a clearly defined meaning.

Suspicion toward “alien” transnational identities places a significant burden on public discourse, judicial practice, and the assessment of actual risk due to the conflation of two distinct phenomena – doctrinal presence, which is empirically demonstrable yet legally not punishable, and the operational terrorist threat, which is legally defined yet empirically scarce and originating from other actors.

NOTES

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