

## Existing Measures Against Islamic Extremism

For several decades now, we have been facing the problem of jihadist terrorism. Despite existing efforts to tackle this issue, the number and severity of jihadist attacks have increased in recent years, prompting governments to enact new measures against terrorism as well as the underlying ideology of Islamic extremism that seeks to impose a specific interpretation of Islam onto the entire society.

This background paper provides a brief introduction to the existing measures against Islamic extremism in Europe. It describes some of the measures adopted by the European Union, as well as selected Member States: France, United Kingdom, and Germany.

## Islamic Extremism in Europe

On January 2015, France suffered its deadliest terrorist incident in more than 50 years when the satirical magazine Charlie Hebdo in Paris was attacked. In November of the same year, Paris was stunned by a series of attacks that caused mass casualties. Overall, 150 persons were killed in jihadist terrorist attacks in the EU in 2015 and 135 in 2016.<sup>1</sup> The rise of the Islamic State in 2014 and the subsequent declaration of the Caliphate attracted thousands of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) who left their home countries to join the fight in Syria and Iraq. Some of them have since returned, posing a substantial threat to European internal security.<sup>2</sup>

The current wave of terrorist attacks did not appear out of the blue. Rather, it is the result of a deeper problem with the proliferation of the ideology of Islamic extremism among European Muslim populations. Based on the research findings of WZB Berlin from 2008, 44% of European Muslims of Turkish and Moroccan origin match the definition of religious fundamentalism. 57% of Turkish and Moroccan Muslims in Europe reject homosexual friends, 45% mistrusts the Jews and 54% sees the West as an enemy dedicated to destroy Islam. 26% of European Muslims agree with all the three statements above.<sup>3</sup> 35% of European Muslims would use violence to defend their faith. This was 72% for Muslims with a high rate of religious fundamentalism.<sup>4</sup>

Of course, European governments do realize that an effective counter-terrorism strategy must include a focus on the aforementioned ideological basis from which violent extremism grows. Various measures were adopted to address this problem.

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<sup>1</sup> *EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report* [online]. Europol, 2017 [cit. 2017-11-07]. Accessed from z: <https://www.europol.europa.eu/tesat/2017/>

<sup>2</sup> BARRETT, Richard. *Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnee* [online]. The Soufan Center, 2017, 40 p [cit. 2017-11-06]. Accessed from: <http://thesoufancenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Beyond-the-Caliphate-Foreign-Fighters-and-the-Threat-of-Returnees-TSC-Report-October-2017.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> KOOPMANS, Ruud. *Fundamentalism and out-group hostility: Muslim immigrants and Christian natives in Western Europe*. 2013. In: BLAŽEJOVSKÁ, Markéta. *Co si myslí evropští muslimové a proč?* 2016. [cit. 2017-11-08]. Accessed from: <http://www.evropskehodnoty.cz/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Co-si-mysl%C3%AD-evrop%C3%AD-muslimov%C3%A9-a-pro%C4%8D1.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> DECKARD, Delia a David JACOBSON. *The prosperous hardliner: Affluence, fundamentalism, and radicalization in Western European Muslim communities*. 2015. In: BLAŽEJOVSKÁ, Markéta. *Co si myslí evropští muslimové a proč?* 2016 [cit. 2017-11-08]. Accessed from: <http://www.evropskehodnoty.cz/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Co-si-mysl%C3%AD-evrop%C3%AD-muslimov%C3%A9-a-pro%C4%8D1.pdf>

## EU-wide Measures

The prevention of radicalisation has been part and parcel of the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy and the EU Action Plan on Combatting Terrorism since 2005. The two documents are complemented with the EU Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism and the EU Action Plan on Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism. The counter-radicalisation Strategy was updated in 2008, omitting any specific references to Muslim groups. In 2014, the Strategy was updated again, stressing the importance of the NGO sector in combating radicalisation and recruitment to terrorism.<sup>5</sup>

There are many actors on the EU level involved in counter-radicalisation and extremism. The Radicalisation Awareness Network Centre of Excellence (RAN CoE) serves as a platform for the exchange of experience and best practices, while also providing training for first-line practitioners engaged in counter-radicalisation and de-radicalisation efforts.<sup>6</sup> As part of its Civil Society Empowerment Programme, RAN has launched the EU Internet Forum in 2017 to bring together member states, industry, civil society and other partners to provide alternative narratives, training and other ideas to counter extremist propaganda.<sup>7</sup> The European Counter-Terrorism Centre at Europol tackles online terrorist propaganda and extremism through its newly established EU Internet Referral Unit, in cooperation with national-level units. Last but not least, the European Strategic Communication Network (ESCN) supported by the European Commission, develops strategic campaigns countering radicalization.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *The European Union's Policies on Counter-Terrorism: Relevance, Coherence and Effectiveness* [online]. European Parliament, 2017, 219 p. [cit. 2017-11-06]. Accessed from:

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/583124/IPOL\\_STU\(2017\)583124\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/583124/IPOL_STU(2017)583124_EN.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> *ibid*

<sup>7</sup> *EU Internet Forum: Civil Society Empowerment Programme* [online]. European Commission [cit. 2017-11-07]. Accessed from: [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation\\_awareness\\_network/civil-society-empowerment-programme\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/civil-society-empowerment-programme_en)

<sup>8</sup> *The European Union's Policies on Counter-Terrorism: Relevance, Coherence and Effectiveness* [online]. European Parliament, 2017, 219 p. [cit. 2017-11-06]. Accessed from:

[http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/583124/IPOL\\_STU\(2017\)583124\\_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/583124/IPOL_STU(2017)583124_EN.pdf)

## France

In May 2016, France has adopted its Anti-radicalisation and terrorism action plan<sup>9</sup>, consisting of 80 specific measures and replacing an older plan from 2014.<sup>10</sup> The new plan builds on seven key priorities:

1. Detecting signs of radicalisation and terrorist networks as early as possible
2. Monitoring, obstructing and neutralising terrorist networks
3. Combating terrorism within international networks and in its sanctuaries
4. Increasing the reach of radicalisation prevention mechanisms in order to ensure personalised measures for different populations
5. Developing applied research in terms of counter-narratives with the involvement of France's Islamic community
6. Improving protection of vulnerable sites and networks
7. Being able to react to any terrorist attack and demonstrating resilience<sup>11</sup>

The overall strategy, according to the then Prime minister Manuel Valls, acts both upstream to prevent, detect and track radicalisation and also downstream in order to combat it.<sup>12</sup>

Since the Plan's introduction, the Ministry of Education implemented various measures against radicalisation. In line with the new Action Plan the first of France's 12 planned de-radicalisation centres was opened in September 2016. However, the centre was shut down less than a year later. The centre which had the capacity of 25, and worked on a voluntary basis, hosted only 9 participants at its peak and none of these completed the 10 month-program, sparking a discussion about the efficiency of the programme.<sup>13</sup>

Another area of interest is radicalisation in French prisons, which is a major concern. In 2015, France reorganized its prison system and began to isolate Islamic extremists from other inmates. However, this approach only deepened the ties among the Islamic extremists and was soon abandoned. The focus instead shifted to tightened security and intelligence gathering in prisons. The beginning of 2017 saw

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<sup>9</sup> In French: Plan d'action contre la radicalisation et le terrorisme (PART)

<sup>10</sup> The fight against jihadism is the great challenge of our generation. *Gouvernement de la République française*[online]. 2016 [cit. 2017-11-07]. Accessed from: <http://www.gouvernement.fr/en/the-fight-against-jihadism-is-the-great-challenge-of-our-generation>

<sup>11</sup> Plan d'Action Contre la Radicalisation et le Terrorisme. *Gouvernement de la République française* [online]. 2016, , 68 p. [cit. 2017-11-07]. Accessed from: <https://www.interieur.gouv.fr/Media/SGCIPD/Files/plan-d-action-contre-la-radicalisation-et-le-terrorisme-PART2>

<sup>12</sup> *Manuel Valls, 9 May 2016. In: The fight against jihadism is the great challenge of our generation. Gouvernement de la République française*[online]. 2016 [cit. 2017-11-07]. Accessed from: <http://www.gouvernement.fr/en/the-fight-against-jihadism-is-the-great-challenge-of-our-generation>

<sup>13</sup> JACINTO, Leela. France's 'deradicalisation gravy train' runs out of steam. *France 24* [online]. 2017 [cit. 2017-11-07]. Accessed from: <http://www.france24.com/en/20170801-france-jihad-deradicalisation-centre-closes-policy>

the creation of the Bureau of Central Intelligence for Prisons<sup>14</sup> under the Ministry of Justice. France is also using state approved imams in its prisons to act as elements against radicalisation.<sup>15</sup>

Other projects in this respect include the Stop-Jihadism campaign<sup>16</sup> that was launched in 2015 as an online educational platform to help citizens spot and report signs of radicalisation. The campaign also gives advice on what to do in case of an attack.

Through the 2015 legislation sometimes referred to as the ‘French Patriot Act’, state powers were significantly expanded, forcing internet and phone service providers to provide data to the Domestic intelligence agency (DGSI) upon request.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, in October 2017 a new bill was signed into law by president Macron, transposing measures used during the state of emergency and making them part of the administrative and criminal law.<sup>18</sup> This includes many provisions that evade formerly required judicial approval, such as for example the obligation of checking in at police stations up to three times a day or temporarily closing public spaces such as mosques.<sup>19</sup> France also actively leads a dialogue with internet giants in order to secure the removal of online extremist content.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Le Bureau central du renseignement pénitentiaire ou BCRP

<sup>15</sup> France: Extremism & Counter-Extremism. *Counter Extremism Project* [online]. 2017 [cit. 2017-11-06]. Accessed from: <https://www.counterextremism.com/countries/france>

<sup>16</sup> *Stop Djihadisme* [online]. Gouvernement de la République française [cit. 2017-11-06]. Accessed from: <http://www.stop-djihadisme.gouv.fr>

<sup>17</sup> HECKER, Marc a Élie TENENBAUM. France vs. Jihadism: The Republic in a New Age of Terror. *Security Studies Center*[online]. Institut français des relations internationales (Ifri) 2017 [cit. 2017-11-07]. Accessed from: [https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/hecker\\_tenenbaum\\_france\\_vs\\_jihadism\\_2017.pdf](https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/hecker_tenenbaum_france_vs_jihadism_2017.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> RAJ, Kartik. Welcome, France, to the “New Normal”. *Human Rights Watch* [online]. [cit. 2017-11-08]. Accessed from: <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/11/01/welcome-france-new-normal>

<sup>19</sup> ASGEIRSSON, Erika. French Anti-Terror Bill Threatens to Extend State of Emergency Abuses. *Just Security* [online]. 2017 [cit. 2017-11-07]. Accessed from: <https://www.justsecurity.org/43771/french-anti-terror-bill-threatens-normalize-state-emergency/>

<sup>20</sup> Counter-terrorism: G7 cooperates with Internet giants. *Gouvernement de la République française* [online]. 2017 [cit. 2017-11-07]. Accessed from: <http://www.gouvernement.fr/en/counter-terrorism-g7-cooperates-with-internet-giants>

## United Kingdom

Countering home-grown radicalisation is among the UK's top priorities. Already in 2003, the UK began implementing a comprehensive Counter terrorism strategy also known as CONTEST. One of its key pillars is to respond to extremist ideologies and those who promote them, provide support and advice to prevent radicalisation, and work with a wide range of sectors where there are risks of radicalisation.<sup>21</sup>

The British government funds a variety of activities including sports, debates and other programs that encourage community engagement combating extremism. The government works also on community projects with religious organizations, schools, universities and other institutions.<sup>22</sup> In British schools, teachers look for signs of radicalisation and refer them to the police. Individuals at risk of radicalisation are then referred to Channel – a multi-agency that provides support at an early stage to individuals who are at risk of being drawn into terrorism.<sup>23</sup> A total number of 3955 cases were referred to Channel in 2015.<sup>24</sup>

Complementing the above is the Al Furqan Programme, which is used to challenge the views of radicalised individuals in UK prisons. Much like in France, this is being done with the help of state-approved imams.<sup>25</sup>

Considerable attention is being paid to extremist content online. The UK Counter Terrorism Internet Referral Unit is a special Police unit that acts to prevent proliferation of online terrorist material and extremist content on the internet. Much like in Germany, the state may fine companies which fail to remove illegal online material from their websites.<sup>26</sup>

At the end of 2016, the Investigatory Powers Act became law, granting the government unprecedented online surveillance powers. Information such as browsing history or private communications from the past 12 months can be accessed by security services if the situation requires it.<sup>27</sup> The powers enshrined in the new bill are controversial and a judicial review is currently under way at the European Court for Human Rights.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> *United Kingdom: Extremism & Counter-Extremism* [online]. Counter Extremism Project, 2017 [cit. 2017-11-06]. Accessed from: [https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/country\\_pdf/GB-09282017.pdf](https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/country_pdf/GB-09282017.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> *ibid*

<sup>23</sup> *Channel Guidance*. UK: Home Office, 2012, 34 p. Accessed from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/channel-guidance>

<sup>24</sup> HALLIDAY, Josh. Almost 4,000 people referred to UK deradicalisation scheme last year. *The Guardian* [online]. 2016 [cit. 2017-11-06]. Accessed from: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/mar/20/almost-4000-people-were-referred-to-uk-deradicalisation-scheme-channel-last-year>

<sup>25</sup> SILKE, Andrew. Jihadis cannot be turned unless they are ready, professor warns. *The Telegraph* [online]. 2014 [cit. 2017-11-08]. Accessed from: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/terrorism-in-the-uk/11068834/Jihadis-cannot-be-turned-unless-they-are-ready-professor-warns.html>

<sup>26</sup> UK should fine social media companies that fail to take down extremist content, says former intelligence chief. *The Telegraph* [online]. 2017 [cit. 2017-11-06]. Accessed from: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/05/29/uk-should-fine-social-media-companies-fail-take-extremist-content/>

<sup>27</sup> TRAVIS, Alan. 'Snooper's charter' bill becomes law, extending UK state surveillance. *The Guardian* [online]. 2016 [cit. 2017-11-07]. Accessed from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/nov/29/snoopers-charter-bill-becomes-law-extending-uk-state-surveillance>

<sup>28</sup> STONE, Jon. Safeguards on Britain's mass spying programme 'clearly defective'. *The Independent*. 2017. Accessed from: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/mass-spying-snowden-echr-ripa-investigatory-powers-act-gchq-cia-leaks-a8042701.html>

## Germany

In July 2016, Germany adopted its new Strategy to Prevent Extremism and Promote Democracy. According to the document it is the first “harmonised strategy for the national optimisation of the prevention of extremism” of such kind. The Strategy is based on the cooperation of actors on federal, state and local levels and focuses on the locations crucial for the prevention of extremism and the promotion of democracy, including on the internet.<sup>29</sup> On March 2017, building on its existing prevention measures and the aforementioned Strategy, the federal government created the National Programme to Prevent Islamist Extremism, with five key areas of focus:

1. Places of prevention (educational institutions, mosques etc.)
2. Prevention on the internet (strategic communication and alternative narratives)
3. Prevention through integration
4. Prevention and de-radicalisation in prisons and probation assistance
5. Increasing effectiveness, expanding research<sup>30</sup>

As for countering radicalisation in prisons, the Federal Agency for Civil Education funds the Violence Prevention Network (VPN), set up over a decade ago to work with individuals convicted of violent crimes. The VPN provides a 23-week programme in small groups while still in prison, one year support once out of prison, and support for the individual’s family before and after release.<sup>31</sup>

Already in 2004, the government set up the Joint Counter-Terrorism Centre (GTAZ) as a multi-agency platform for better cooperation between police and intelligence services. The GTAZ consists of several working groups, including a working group on de-radicalisation.<sup>32</sup>

Germany’s policy favours a decentralised approach to combating extremism with broad support to the NGO sector and a limited role of the government.<sup>33</sup> In 2011, a counselling hotline on radicalisation was set up by the HAYAT network. Since 2012, there is also the Counselling Centre on Radicalisation<sup>34</sup> which provides support to individuals concerned about the radicalisation of their relatives and connects them to relevant authorities, be it imams, teachers, or the police.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> *Federal Government Strategy to Prevent Extremism and Promote Democracy*. Berlin: Bundesministerium des Innern, 2016. Accessed from: <https://www.bmfsfj.de/blob/115448/cc142d640b37b7dd76e48b8fd9178cc5/strategie-der-bundesregierung-zur-extremismuspraevention-und-demokratiefoerderung-englisch-data.pdf>

<sup>30</sup> *National Programme for Preventing Islamist Extremism*. 2017. Accessed from: [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/national-strategy-for-preventing-islamist-extremism\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/national-strategy-for-preventing-islamist-extremism_en.pdf)

<sup>31</sup> *Case study report: Violence Prevention Network (VPN)* [online]. Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2010 [cit. 2017-11-06]. Accessed from: <https://www.counterextremism.org/resources/details/id/118/violence-prevention-network-vpn>

<sup>32</sup> *Gemeinsames Terrorismusabwehrzentrum (GTAZ – Joint Counter-Terrorism Centre)* [online]. Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz [cit. 2017-11-06]. Accessed from: <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/en/fields-of-work/islamism-and-islamist-terrorism/gtaz-en>

<sup>33</sup> POHL, Johanna a Alastair REED. *Tackling the Surge of Returning Foreign Fighters* [online]. International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague (ICCT), 2017 [cit. 2017-11-06]. Accessed from: <https://icct.nl/publication/tackling-the-surge-of-returning-foreign-fighters/>

<sup>34</sup> Beratungsstelle Radikalisierung

<sup>35</sup> Germany: Extremism & Counter-Extremism. *Counter Extremism Project*. 2017. Accessed from: [https://www.counterextremism.com/countries/germany#domestic\\_counter\\_extremism](https://www.counterextremism.com/countries/germany#domestic_counter_extremism)

As outlined in its new Programme, the government is placing emphasis on countering jihadist propaganda online. As early as 2007, the government launched the Joint Internet Centre to identify, monitor and analyse Islamist extremist and terrorist structures and activities on the internet at an early stage.<sup>36</sup> In 2014, the government banned all activities promoting the Islamic State, closing a legal loop hole which made it difficult to prosecute supporters of the group.<sup>37</sup>

More recently, in June 2017, the Bundestag passed a bill allowing the government to access encrypted messaging services in certain criminal investigations.<sup>38</sup>

## Conclusion

Irrespective of the future of the Islamic State, jihadist attacks will likely continue to occur in the near future and spread fear throughout the European continent. Islamic extremism, which serves as the ideological basis for this form of violence, remains widespread among the European Muslim population.

The above description is by no means exhaustive, and merely indicates recent major changes to the counter-extremism architectures of European states. There are grounds for discussion over the effectiveness of some of the existing measures against Islamic extremism. At the same time, it is necessary to identify gaps within the existing framework and close them with new measures which effectively counter this form of extremism while respecting the fundamental rights and freedoms of European citizens.

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<sup>36</sup> *Gemeinsames Internetzentrum (GIZ – Joint Internet Centre)* [online]. Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz [cit. 2017-11-06]. Accessed from: <https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/en/fields-of-work/islamism-and-islamist-terrorism/giz-en>

<sup>37</sup> GANDER, Kashmir. Isis crisis: Islamic State banned in Germany. *Independent* [online]. 2014 [cit. 2017-11-06]. Accessed from: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/isis-crisis-islamic-state-banned-in-germany-9730289.html>

<sup>38</sup> BRECHENMACHER, Victor. German government to spy on encrypted messaging services. *Politico* [online]. 2017 [cit. 2017-11-06]. Accessed from: <https://www.politico.eu/article/german-government-to-spy-on-encrypted-messaging-services/>

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