

# **Is migration a risk factor for radicalization? Social and legal instruments for identifying and combating radicalization**

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## **Abstract**

This paper aims to analyze the correlation between migration and the phenomenon of radicalization, presenting them theoretically and examining the main models of intervention used to combat radicalization and extremism. We will start from the definition of radicalization, also highlighting its stages, and then focusing on radicalization among migrants. We will also analyze the types of prevention strategies particularly by debating the European Union's strategy, identifying the tools used and the institutions involved in the process.

**Keywords:** *migration; radicalization; the European prevention; instruments for combating radicalization; social prevention; judicial prevention.*

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## **1. About radicalization: general notions and constituent elements**

In the simplest way, radicalization is defined as the way a group responds "to a perceived threat by adopting progressively excessive measures in order to feel safe" (Clark Gill 2018: p. 114) or "the social and psychological process of incrementally experienced commitment to extremist political or religious ideology" (Horgan 2009: p. 152). As Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) and Working Group on Prison and Probation (P&P) describes it, radicalization is a "dynamic process whereby an individual comes to accept violent extremism. The reasons behind this process can be ideological, political, religious, social, economic and/or personal". RAN and P&P highlight the fact that "being radical does not mean that a person will in any way follow up with action" (RAN and P&P 2012 p:1). Julia Rushchenko gives another definition of radicalization, presenting it as a "process by which an individual or a group comes to adopt increasingly extreme political, social and religious ideas and aspirations, including the need to use violence to achieve political change" (Rushchenko 2019: p. 2)

We can also find a definition of mutual radicalization in Fathali M. Moghaddam's book: "two groups take increasingly extreme positions opposing one another, reacting against real or imagined threats, moving further and further apart in points of view, mobilizing their resources to launch attacks, and finally attempting to weaken and destroy each other" (Moghaddam 2018: p. 4). At Moghaddam we can also find a phased model of radicalization from "Three-Stage, 12-Step Model for Mutual Radicalization", which starts from sorting members into groups to extreme inter-group violence (Moghaddam 2018) to one plus five stair model into the "Starecase to the terrorist act"

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(Moghaddam 2005). In this famous model, the Staircase to the terrorist act, we find the following six stages (the ground floor and five higher floors) in the process of radicalization: The ground floor: "Psychological Interpretation of Material Conditions" (perceptions of fairness and just treatment), The first floor: "Perceived Options to Fight Unfair Treatment" (trying to find various solutions to what a person considers/perceives to be unfair treatment); The second floor: "Displacement of Aggression" (aggressive behavior that cannot be expressed to the source that produced the behavior, so anger is placed on the easiest victim, thus encouraging thinking like us-versus-them); The third floor: "Moral Engagement" (commitment to a morality parallel to the conventional one, thus justifying the means that lead to the ideal society); The fourth floor: "Solidification of Categorical Thinking and the Perceived Legitimacy of the Terrorist Organization" (entry into the secret world of terrorist organizations) and The fifth floor: "The Terrorist Act and Sidestepping Inhibitory Mechanisms" (acts of violence) (Moghaddam 2005: pp. 162-166).

For any radicalized movement, the "idea" is very important, as Graeme Wood points out in his book, "The Way of the Strangers: Encounters with the Islamic State". Beyond provocative elements such as political violence, modern political systems and economic decline, "ideology" and "ideas" matter. This is often the case of radicalizing of a certain category of Jews, Christians, and especially the case of Islamists (Hertog 2019: p. 97 apud. Wood 2017). Often, adherence to certain groups occurs as a result of the recruitment process, but these groups often use "deceptive means" (Bauza and Bouchard 2018).

An important step in the process of radicalization is the transition from the non-violent behavior of an organization to violent behavior, and for this we find many explanatory theories. According to the theory issued by Eitan Alimi, Chares Demetriou, and Lorenzo Bosi, in the book "The Dynamics of Radicalization: A Relational and Comparative Perspective", an important role in this transformation is played by increasing competition among organizations, shifts in political opportunities, and "changes in the distance between organizations and publics" and according to Gilles Kepel with Antoine Jardin in the book "Terror in France: The Rise of Jihad in the West", this transition is mainly due to influence "of the social, political and cultural conditions" in the suburbs (Alimi, Demetriou and Bosi 2015; Kepel and Jardin 2016 apud. Cremer 2019: pp. 96-97).

Jocelyn J. Bélanger, Manuel Moyano, Hayat Muhammad et. al., in the study "Radicalization leading to violence: A test of the 3N Model" analyze through the 3N model of radicalization the "social cognitive processes underlying ideology-based violence" (Bélanger, Moyano, Muhammad et. al. 2019: p. 1), therefore, is another way of observing the stages of radicalization development. The 3N model of radicalization reveals a trajectory with three interconnected stages: Need, Narrative and Network. The "Need" has two aspects, on the one hand, the need to be observed, to be "respected", the need of "personal significance" and "social alienation" on the other hand, represented by a loss, a dissatisfaction that produces exclusion from one group and automatically open/receptivity to enter another group with other values and principles (Bélanger, Moyano, Muhammad et. all 2019: p. 2). The "Narrative" refers to the "ideological narrative" that offers belief systems that accept the fight against different enemies (social, religious, ethnic etc.) and justifies the morality of using reprehensible acts and even of violence (Bélanger, Moyano, Muhammad et. all 2019: pp. 2-3). The "Network" refers to the fact that "once a person adhere to the ideological

narrative that morally justifies the use of reprehensible acts and even violence to restore meaning, people might be motivated to look for the presence of others who share similar principles and beliefs”, to a network (Bélanger, Moyano, Muhammad et. all 2019: p. 3). For the empirical research, Jocelyn J. Bélanger, Manuel Moyano, Hayat Muhammad et. al. developed two psychometric instruments “the social alienation scale and the support for political violence scale” and using the Likert scale, have tested through questions, concrete aspects, looking for the correlation between these predispositions. So, in the simplest way, the 3N model sees the following path of radicalization: we initially have a person who has lost his purpose in society, “losing significance (feeling socially alienated)”, then follows adherence to one “violence-justifying ideologies”, for, in the end to join radical groups (Bélanger, Moyano, Muhammad et. all 2019: pp. 1-12).

It may be that at the extreme point of radicalization, that of the aggressive action, individuals choose to act alone, being called “lone-actor”. But it does not mean that the person is not part of a group, that only means the individual has chosen to act alone, either because he has not fully integrated into the new group (called “Volatile”) or because of various technical reasons (referred to as “Autonomous”) (Lindekilde, O’Connor and Schuurman 2017).

On the other hand, the term “deradicalization” is seen as the opposite of radicalization, and is “the process of becoming less extreme or radical”, being used both for changing values and also behavior. But, we must keep in mind that, a change in behavior does not automatically lead to a change in values, just as changing values does not automatically lead to a transformation of behavior (Vellenga and De Groot 2019: p. 227).

Of course, radicalization can also have positive effects, but these are exceptional cases if we talk about situations such as those of leaders like Mahatma Gandhi or Nelson Mandela, who have become emblems of national movements, capable of provoking political change (Rushchenko 2019 :p. 2 ).

In this process of radicalization we encounter push and pull factors. Thus, among push factors we find: poor living conditions, restrictions on health, education and social assistance, tense relationships with other groups, poor policies in key areas, long periods of isolation; among pull factors we find: seeking for “confidence, esteem, membership and belonging” and we also encounter favorable factors like charismatic leaders (Rushchenko 2019: pp. 6-8). For Ozer and Bertelsen (2018), who created a research tool called “Extremism scale”, radicalization has two important features: the desire to change the values of society and the intolerance towards those who do not accept these transformations.

## **2. Radicalization of migrants**

According to many studies, closed, restricted environments, such as the inmates penitentiary system (Pricina and Ilie Goga 2014; Ilie Goga 2016), religious groups or sects, seem to favor the development of radicalization. In literature (Borum 2012; Doosje et al. 2016) we find a great diversity of radicalization manifestations like: “nationalistic or separatist; extreme left-wing; extreme right-wing; specific single issue; religiously motivated” (Ozer and Bertelsen 2018: p. 2).

Among the closed groups, which can create the conditions for radicalization, we also meet the groups of migrants.

From the analyzes made among migrant communities, it is noticed that most often there is a close connection between the emigrants from certain regions, creating communities with close ties, having frequent meetings, joint activities, creating associations, frequenting places of worship, often as a place to socialize and strengthen their identity and often tend to become somehow isolated from the members of the host society (Porumbescu 2018; Niță 2014), with whom they have tangential links, necessary for the cohabitation in the destination country.

In many studies, we find that first step in the process of radicalization, refers to personal failure, the loss of social purpose, and precisely that obvious xenophobia, encountered in many countries of massive destination of emigrants, can lead to the sense of lack of integration and lack of social and professional fulfillment. In countries of destination, we often find prejudice and discrimination against migrants in workplaces, schools, hospitals, public spaces. Moreover, immigrants seem to have fewer rights than the citizens of the host country. At the same time, they face an alteration of identity and values. All these aspects, can create "personal crises or "disorienting dilemmas" that act as "transformative triggers" and "turning points" (McAdams and Bowman, 2001) or provide "cognitive openings" and a "readiness to change" (Winter and Feixas 2019: p. 2) and naturally, can affect the identity of the emigrant.

After the changes brought about by the context presented above, we also find the second step of radicalization, good integration in the receiving group, and in the case of migrants most often these groups are just formed by the emigrants of their countries of departure. The process of joining certain groups is described by the "theory of social ideology" (Tajfel and Jones 1979) and unfortunately these groups may also be some with extremist values and principles. It is precisely the integration into a radicalized group that is, in fact, the biggest problem that arises today, because of the extremist street movements, vandalism and even acts of terrorism. Another problem in the age of globalization comes from the fact that integration into these extremist groups can be done very easily, socialization not being necessarily face-to-face, as it is done with the help of technological means (mobile devices, wireless networks, social media, websites etc.) (Ștefănescu and Ștefan 2018; Altieri and Cifaldi 2018).

Also, "personal construct theory" (PCT) (Kelly 1955; Kelly 1970) shows us that people and groups are building their own "hierarchically organized systems of bipolar personal constructs (like good and bad) in which some elements are more important than others" (Winter and Feixas 2019: p. 2). These constructions are, in real life experiences validated or invalidated, forming a "Experience Cycle". As a result of these personal experiences that have invalidated an idea considered "good", an individual has three options: either to reformulate, refine the concept (the path chosen by the majority); either choose to maintain his theory and avoid situations that invalidate it; either chooses to enter a group that accepts his ideas as good and tries to turn the majority so that his construction becomes "the ultimate truth" (Winter and Feixas 2019: p. 3). This third variant, known as confrontation/ hostility, is also chosen by emigrants who are radicalizing themselves, going to the third stage, to violent and much blamed actions by most societies.

Lately, I noticed a new phenomenon. In the qualitative research, based on the use of the interview, undertaken with Romanian emigrants who have long been abroad in countries such as Spain, Italy, France, Germany or the United Kingdom, I have noticed an opposite radicalization, namely extreme hatred towards Romanians, feelings of

rebellion and contempt which are turning against their own conationals, which makes them to break relations with the Romanian groups and to lose themselves in the host society, refusing to adhere to the Romanian values and culture. All these people are assimilated or isolated (strategies in the process of acculturation) (Ilie 2013: pp. 84-86). But it is somewhat strange how the actions of the conationals (exemplified by respondents through delinquent acts, begging, antisocial behavior) lead to radicalization against their own nation. The process of radicalization, from my research, has now stopped at the stages of isolation from their own group and adherence to another group, without going to violent actions.

So it seems that marginalization of groups of any nature, and in particular of the emigrant communities, can lead to an increased risk of radicalization. Why does majority discriminate minority? Well, the scapegoat theory is very relevant in this context. Someone must be responsible for the evil produced in society, and usually, the guilty ones are the immigrants. In the current global context, the hysteria is even greater, as the media constantly promotes news about terrorist attacks, about migrants who leave natives without jobs and commit crimes. And yet, why do not policy makers appeal to actions that focus on integration? A simple answer is offered by Tinka M. Veldhuis, even though her book refers to radicalization in the prison environment, but I think it can be extended in other environments: "Fear". This fear is a key element in political decision making when it comes to social classes that are at risk of marginalization and hence to radicalization (Veldhuis 2018). It can be easily observed that the fear-based policies tend to maintain marginalization and exclusion of some social categories, considering that it avoids disturbing the general situation and the risk of transmitting extremist ideologies, when in fact the groups remaining isolated increases the risk of radicalization inside and more, they attract other people excluded and desirous of a new affiliation, thus, there is no way to mitigate extremist beliefs.

### **3. Social and legal instruments for identifying and combating radicalization**

We note that "radicalization" itself is not a crime but a process that can take different forms in various environments, and precisely that is why it is important that the intervention is done in the initial stages, before tragedies are reached. And here we are talking about a risk assessment and the need to oversee those at high risk of radicalization, but not only here, we should stop. We should try to limit segregation, exclusion through integrationist policies.

The problem remains: can the European Union, the state, a national or international institution or organization intervene in the process of radicalization, to stop it before it reaches the climax, a violent act or a terrorist act? Are there really the levers for identifying and reducing the phenomenon? There are some interventions of secret services by means of information to identify and intervene in the process of recruiting and promoting extremist messages and also the police surveillance, but it does not seem to be sufficiently developed to stop radicalization. Moreover, the intervention of the army and the police in the camps of extremist cultures is very often used and transmitted in the media as the only escape for "us".

In principle, the main action against the phenomenon of radicalization is prevention. In the process of prevention are involved a number of actors such as: personal networks (involving families, friends), civil society (NGO's, community members, former combatants etc), national authorities (governments, local authorities, social services), criminal justice actors (prison, probation, prosecution and police

forces, intelligence agencies), international organizations (like EU or UN) and networks (Hadayah, RAN, GFCE. Global Forum on Cyber Expertise, ESCN. European Strategic Communication Network etc.) (DERAD 2018). We can talk about multi-level prevention. There is a "Social prevention" (improving living conditions to mitigate risk) (Serban and Puglisi 2018; Ilie Goga 2014), a "Time-up prevention" (early stage prevention for children and immigrant families) a "Judicial and security-based prevention" (laws are tightened, by increasing sanctions for certain types of crime and increasing the number of policemen who have the capability of supervision and action in risky situations) and a "Situation of infrastructure (PSI)" (creating risk mitigation strategies by "specific offense-related interventions, taking action on 25 "soft" and "hard" techniques") (DERAD 2018). In the European Union, emphasis is placed on "soft" prevention, and it is understood that collaboration must exist between international and national organizations, it is imperative to "collaborate with civil society, communities, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and the private sector. This requires a joint effort at local, regional, national, European and international level" (Revised EU Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism 2014). The new prevention model creates a bridge between traditional preventive security (judicial institutions, intelligence agencies etc.) and early targeted social prevention (through civil society, social work etc.), thus, the strategy is based on five pillars on five pillars: "Information-based police activities; Disengagement initiatives; Partial decentralization of operations; Information exchange agreements; Public-private cooperation" (DERAD 2018).

From the point of view of political actions, a series of national and international structures for fighting extremist and especially terrorist actions have been created, mostly during the last decade. Each state and international organization has created its own strategy to fight against radicalization, but especially terrorism (focusing on jihadist convictions persons or right-wing/ left-wing extremists), and in this situation migrants are demonized in political discourses, all these ending up with extreme public actions such as triggering civil and armed wars, exit from international organizations (i.e. Brexit).

Prevention of radicalization within the European Union approach is part of the counter-terrorism strategy, although we must take into account a very important aspect, unlike terrorism, radicalization is not a crime but a risk factor or an indicator of a potential danger. That is why the step taken from radicalization to extremist and violent acts is extremely important, but it creates difficulties in the intervention process. In recent years, from a political and legislative point of view, in the European community we find a series of documents aimed at preventing radicalization, such as: the European Security Strategy – A secure Europe in a better world of December of 2003; the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy of 2005; the Internal Security Strategy (RISS) from March 2010; the new 2015 Internal Security Strategy for the period 2015–2020; the Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS) from June 2016 and the Council of Europe Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2018-2022) of May 2018.

A problem remains related to the social intervention, of each of us or of the majority group in relation to the minority: the migrants, the convicted persons, the extremely religious people. What does each of us do: choose to break the barrier and relate, or choose to label, move away and eventually act in a discriminatory manner? And now there comes the fear, which makes the legislative and executive power run away from integration-enhancing actions, as we mentioned above, and yes, this fear

makes most of us to walk away and not to take the risk, choosing personal comfort at the expense of greater discomfort, that of society. Maybe it would be preferable for the action to come from each of us and more: is enough to signal an irregularity observed in the interaction with a person going on the road of radicalization, but we should firstly interact with that person and care about what is happening. And of course, it would be better if the actions were to come from the decision makers and the main social actors.

Yes, I think that migrants are at high risk of radicalization, and then the intervention of organizations and the state should be much broader, but not just in the area of identifying risk and supervision, to act when the risk of criminality becomes imminent or worse, after committing an extreme act. Of course, even here the situation is delicate, because the surveillance cannot be done only on ethnic, religious or national basis, because we are already talking about discrimination in this area. There should be more intervention in the area of integration of migrants, in the direction of creating levers for a good acceptance of migrants in educational systems, on the legal labor market, in access to health and social services. So, social prevention, based on improving negative environments and social conditions, could prevent the radicalization. Also, prevention activities addressed to children and families of immigrants is very important, as it tries „somehow”, to ”eliminate the risk from the roots”, leading to greater integration into the host society.

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