

Improving Mechanisms for Preventing Radicalization and Violent Extremism in Georgia

Policy Paper





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Introduction

This report represents the analysis of qualitative research findings on violent extremism and radicalization in Georgia. The research covered the following regions: Kakheti, Kvemo Kartli, the Autonomous Republic of Adjara and Tbilisi. Within the context of the research, international practices with regards to addressing drivers of radicalization and extremism were also studied and analyzed.

Due to the limitations of the research issue, the paper reviews the involvement of Georgian citizens in international terrorist groups operating on the territory of foreign states but does not cover other manifestations of radicalization and violent extremism, including right-wing and ultranationalist group activities.

The main objectives of the research are to study and analyze the problem of radicalization and violent extremism, study potential threats and support the elaboration of a relevant governmental strategy. Therefore, the primary goal of the research is to answer the following questions:

- What is the current situation regarding violent extremism and radicalization in Georgia?
- What are the factors that contribute to extremism and radicalization and how vulnerable are certain groups to extremism and radicalization threats in Georgia?

The report studies and analyzes international experience in preventing violent extremism and radicalization and provides specific recommendations to government agencies for the elaboration of effective strategies. Besides the recommendations, a graphic illustration of the strategy is also included in the paper that may serve as policy planning and implementation guideline for Georgian authorities.

Precondition for Research

Georgia is a multicultural, multiethnic country that is undergoing a significant democratic transformation. According to the last census in Georgia, ethnic minorities make up 13.2% of the Georgian population.¹ There are also various religious minorities in the country who represent 14.9% of the population.² 10.7% of the population of Georgia is Muslim.³

A significant challenge in the development of the modern Georgian state is the full-fledged inclusion of

1. National Statistics Office of Georgia, Results of 201 Universal Population Census (Tbilisi, 2016), 8, http://geostat.ge/cms/site_images/_files/georgian/population/Census%20Release_GEO_2016.pdf (obtained on March 1, 2018).

2. Ibid., 9.

3. Please see the previous comment.

ethnic and religious minorities in Georgia's political, cultural and social life. Stereotypical attitudes assumed over time towards various ethnic and religious groups living in Georgia impede their full integration.

Since 2014, this problem has manifested itself from different perspectives in specific regions. The security vacuum and new threats caused by the Arab Spring, which took place in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in 2011, were also constituted to Georgia. According to a report issued by the U.S. Department of State, from 2013 to 2016, approximately 100 citizens of Georgia and several dozen people related to Georgia appeared to be involved in the activities of Al-Qaeda and the so-called Islamic State, in terrorist organizations operating in Syria and Iraq, and in activities of certain affiliated groups.⁴ Some of them managed to hold leading positions in these organizations, as a result of which Georgia has attracted the attention of international media and various countries several times. Besides the aforementioned, prior to 2015, Islamic State members attempted to recruit and engage citizens of Georgia in terrorist organization activities. The process was partially prevented as a result of a special operation conducted in 2015, when people related to the Islamic State were arrested and sentenced to 14 years imprisonment.⁵

According to a report recently released by the State Security Service of Georgia (SSSG), as of 2018, up to thirty citizens of Georgia are among the ranks of terrorist organizations in Syria and Iraq.⁶ If we compare foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq on a per capita basis, the number of Georgian citizens equals and in some cases even exceeds (in 2013-2018) the number of fighters from European countries (e.g., according to 2015 data, the number of fighters from the Netherlands did not exceed 250, from Belgium - 500, Germany - 600 and Great Britain - 750).⁷

The fight against terrorism is one of the main priorities of Georgia. In order to fight terrorism, the country has taken significant steps towards guaranteeing stricter border and immigration control, enforcing anti-terrorism laws, and enhancing international cooperation. Nevertheless, the country is still facing significant challenges. This is evidenced by the fact that in November 2017, international terrorist group members, including Ahmed Chatayev — head of one of the Islamic State Groups — entered Georgia. According to SSSG, Georgian citizens assisted the terrorist organization members in crossing the border into Georgia and provided them with long-term support.⁸

Despite the steps taken by the Government of Georgia, the low quality of joint and coordinated work among government agencies still remains a major challenge. SSSG is working on the issue and determines the relevant policy, which mainly fights against radicalism and violent extremism using forceful methods. According to international experience, such policies are less effective from a long-term perspective, especially for the purpose of prevention.

4. U.S. Department of State, Bureau of Counterterrorism and Countering Violent Extremism, Country Reports on Terrorism 2016, Chapter 2. Country Reports: Europe (Washington, D.C., 2017), <https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2016/272231.htm>.

5. Misha Meparishvili "The Court Found A.Borchashvili and Three Persons Guilty" Netgazeti, March 7, 2016, obtained on January 24, 2018, <http://netgazeti.ge/news/99509/>.

6. The State Security Service of Georgia. 2017 Report of the State Security Service of Georgia (Tbilisi, 2018), 14.

7. International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (London, 2015), quoted in Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, <https://www.rferl.org/a/foreign-fighters-syria-iraq-is-isis-isil-infographic/26584940.html>.

8. Statement of the State Security Service of Georgia, January 4 2018, obtained on January 24, 2018, <http://ssg.gov.ge/news/306/saxelmtsifo-usafirtxoebis-samsaxuris-ganexadeba>.

Research Methodology

The research project implementation process included two stages. “Desk” research was carried out at the first stage, which involved gathering and processing secondary data to prepare the theoretical component of the research and to conduct a situational analysis. Scientific literature on extremism and radicalization problems, laws of Georgia and leading European countries, and safety strategy papers were reviewed. The researchers studied international practices and analyzed the factors that contribute to radicalization and extremism. Based on this preliminary research, guidelines were prepared for the second stage - field research.

Fieldwork included discussions with target groups as well as face-to-face interviews. Target groups consisted of members of ethnic and religious minorities (aged 18 to 35 years) from different social classes living in Georgia. In the process of composing the groups, special attention was paid to religious educational institutions and religious leaders, as well as local civil sector, media and small business representatives. As for the selection of an audience for the interviews, we focused on organizations working on issues of minority rights in Georgia, international security and policy experts, theologians, and local leaders.

It is crucial to define some terms before discussing issues related to the fight against violent extremism and radicalization. There is no common, universal definition of violent extremism used by academic circles or international organizations. Despite the fact that even the UN does not provide an exact definition of violent extremism, the meaning given by the UN to specific terms can be interpreted based on several important documents. This paper employs terminology as defined by the UN.

The 2015 Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism says that violent extremism is an affront to the purposes and principles of the UN. It undermines peace and security, human rights and sustainable development worldwide.⁹ In addition, it indicates that violent extremism is neither a new phenomenon nor exclusive to any region, nationality or system. In recent years, terrorist groups — Islamic State, Al-Qaida and Boko Haram — have shaped our image of violent extremism and the ways to address this threat. The religious, cultural and social messages broadcast by these groups give drive to radical ideas and contribute to the occurrence of violence in various regions of the world. The UN Security Council Resolution 2178 (2014) interprets violent extremism the same way and makes explicit that violent extremism and radicalization can be conducive to terrorism.¹⁰

9. United Nations General Assembly, Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (Report of the Secretary-General) (2015), 1,

<http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view-doc.asp?symbol=A/70/674> (obtained on March 3, 2018).

10. United Nations Security Council, United Nations Security Council Resolution 2178 (2014),

<http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view-doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/2178%20%282014%29> (obtained on March 3, 2018).

Chapter 1. Description of Factors that Lead to Extremism and Radicalization

Academic researchers who work on terrorism issues sort the factors that cause violent extremism and radicalization in various ways. According to one of the dominant approaches, whose author is Magnus Ranstorp — distinguished Swedish scholar and researcher of individuals' radicalization and terrorist recruitment — the factors that lead to extremism and radicalization are divided into nine groups:¹¹

Individual socio-psychological factors, which include psycho-emotional components, such as alienation and umbrage, anger and frustration, grievance and a strong sense of injustice, rigid binary thinking, a tendency to misinterpret situations; conspiracy theories, etc.

When discussing individual socio-psychological factors during focus groups and interviews in the regions of Georgia populated by ethnic and religious minorities, it was emphasized that the vulnerable part of society had a sense of umbrage, alienation, grievance and injustice. The respondents thought that the aforementioned was mainly related to issues such as creating barriers to construction of religious and cult buildings for religious minorities, discriminatory approaches to a number of issues, generation of negative effects in the information space, political ignorance of their opinions demonstrated by the government and language barriers.

Social factors, which include social exclusion, marginalization and discrimination (real as well as perceived), limited social mobility, limited education or employment, factors of migration/displacement, criminality and lack of social cohesion.

It is noteworthy that the existence of social factors contributing to radicalization was discussed in all regions. The marginalization problem, stereotypical attitudes towards religious and ethnic minorities were also underlined. In addition, unemployment, poverty, limited education and exclusion of ethnic and religious minorities from political and social processes were named as significant problems.

Political factors, which include labeling people as the 'enemy' and 'us'. Such views can become additional driving forces in the mobilization of critical masses. Acuteness of political factors was particularly evident in the Pankisi Gorge, where a special operation conducted in December 2017 underlined the impact made by political factors.

Ideological/religious factors are mainly reinforced by belief in a sacred mission and the role of religion. Distorted interpretations helps fundamentalist clerical leaders create a sense that their religion is under siege and requires protection. Such interpretation of religious dogmas promotes the view that Western society embodies "immoral secularism" and causes the resultant disdain towards it.

11. Magnus Ranstorp, *The Root Causes of Violent Extremism* (Amsterdam: Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2016).

Participants of discussions held in the regions unanimously named the ideological factor as the main cause of the outflow of citizens of Georgia to the Middle East for the purposes of taking part in terrorist activities. It is noteworthy that as the discussion participants noted, the majority of citizens who left Georgia did not have any material interest.

Culture and identity crisis relates to cultural marginalization and alienation, which creates a sense of a lack of belonging to the parents' or relatives' society — that a person is a foreign body in the society. It reinforces Muslim solidarity.

According to research, this factor has been particularly evident in the Islamic community where the competition between Islamic fundamentalist and moderate Islamists is obvious.

Trauma, revanchism and other mechanisms, which include stress caused by different types of conflicts, wars, confrontations, ethnic and religious oppression and persecution, which often turns into the thirst for revenge and justice.

The aforementioned motives of radicalization are mainly revealed in the Pankisi Gorge, where one of the stated reasons for the departure of Georgian citizens to Syria is the desire to fight against Bashar al-Assad and his ally - the Russian Federation; a desire rooted in a motive to seek revenge on Moscow for crimes committed against the Chechen people in the 90s. These factors are not observed in other regions of Georgia.

Group dynamics involves the existence of isolated groups in a society where friendship, kinship and clan ties are strong. There is a sense of exclusion from society on the one hand and collective identity on the other hand. Moral authority usually influences activities of such groups.

Group dynamics is particularly noticeable in regions where there is a language barrier that automatically causes isolation of the local community from the rest of the society and in the regions where religious minorities live in compact settlements and have little contact with the larger community (non-Muslims).

Radicalizers usually involve moral authority, religious leaders, and preachers that prey on vulnerabilities and grievances and channel recruits into extremism through persuasion, pressure and manipulation. This mechanism is one of the most important tools for radicalization of vulnerable individuals.

Participants of the discussions held in the regions did not provide much information about local extremist leaders and authorities, although several cases of the arrests of people accused of recruitment provided enough to have a clear idea about certain "influence agents." In addition, the radicalizers were influential fighters from Georgia holding high military ranks in Syria and Iraq.

Social media is a powerful tool, which provides connectivity for extremist groups scattered in different regions and countries. It represents a powerful platform for exchanging ideas, and exporting and importing values and ideals, while also ensuring the involvement of broad masses of society in the exchange of ideas and significantly expanding the audience of leaders and groups. This not only accelerates the process of radicalization, but also strengthens other factors that contribute to radicalization.

In all the regions, the discussion participants underlined that social networks lead young people to radicalism and extremism. This demonstrates the important role of the aforementioned contributing factor — social media and the Internet.

To summarize, it should be noted that **out of nine determinants of radicalization** identified within the research, **all nine groups of factors** are more or less identified in the regions. The discussions showed that **in all three target regions, four determinants are particularly acute: individual socio-psychological factors, social factors, ideological/religious factors and social media, plus the fifth factor - radicalizers and serious impact on vulnerable groups.** Observation of the recruitment used by terrorist groups and the aforementioned cases allows speaking out on the aforementioned.

It is noteworthy that **two more determinants – culture and identity crisis and group dynamics are also present in the target regions, and these factors were especially evident in case of specific circumstances, in particular regions and societies.** Please find above the information about these circumstances and specific regions.

The discussions showed that the remaining two factors that contribute to radicalization – political factors and trauma, revanchism and other mechanisms – have been identified in the target regions but they are less acute than the seven determinants discussed above.

Chapter 2. Research Findings By Regions

2.1 Kakheti Region – Pankisi Gorge

Within the scope of the project, the research group visited the Pankisi Gorge, Akhmeta Municipality. The purpose of the visit was to study the problems of integration, social equality, radicalization and extremism in the Kist community living in the Pankisi Gorge according to the developed guidelines; in particular, to conduct analysis of the current situation, determine the depth of the problems and contributing factors and predict the risks related to these issues.

Findings

- The quality of social deprivation is quite high in the gorge. As for economic and material factors, they play an important but not a critical role. For the local inhabitants, the main motives for joining terrorist organizations in the Middle East are religious and ideological;
- Recently the citizens of Georgia have been prevented from travelling to the Middle East to join terrorist organizations not only due to the repressive measures taken and economic and social policy pursued by the Georgian state, but because of the weakening of these organizations. Loss of territories by the Islamic State and the loss of Georgian leaders has led to a reduction in the number of local youth joining various radical organizations;
- The vast majority of the inhabitants of the gorge and the Salafist community diverges from violent Jihad and condemns terrorism, although according to information provided by local respondents, there are other relatively radical groups in the gorge as well;
- The interviews have shown that the Salafist community representatives perceive themselves as isolated from the state. This causes feelings of abandonment, which in-turn contributes to negative social effects;
Communication and trust problems exist between different interest groups in the gorge;
- Both moderate and conservative groups demonstrate a low level of trust towards government institutions due to the fact that they blame the government for their current problems;
- The passivity of the government, a lack of communication, and low sensitivity to the community's problems may become additional facilitators of radicalization;

The population of settlements adjacent to the Kist villages of Akhmeta Municipality expresses concern about positive discrimination. The local population thinks that all efforts made by the central and local governments are intended for the Pankisi Gorge, while the settlements inhabited by ethnic Georgians have been abandoned.

2.2 Autonomous Republic of Adjara (Batumi and Khulo Municipalities)

The research group also visited the Autonomous Republic of Adjara. The purpose of the visit was to identify and study radicalization risks and contributing factors in the region according to the developed guidelines.

Findings

Based on the analysis of the information obtained as a result of the visit, we may conclude that at this stage there are less serious hotbeds of extremism and radicalization in the region, although some factors that lead to radicalization do exist, thereby making the community of Adjara vulnerable to extremism and radicalization threats.

The following main findings should be outlined:

- At this stage there are no significant manifestations of religious radicalization and extremism in Adjara region;
- There are however cases of existence of potentially dangerous hotbeds of extremism, in particular, in the villages isolated from the municipal center.
- The religious education level of the moderate Muslim clerical elite is low despite the fact that a majority of them have received religious education in Turkey. In high mountainous Adjara, the clerics cannot answer even fundamental questions, such as to which Islamic school they belong;
- According to information provided by local community leaders, despite the fact that there is a century-long tradition of coexistence of Muslim and Christian communities in the region, moreover, there are Muslim-Christian mixed families in the region, some people feel offended by certain actions of the Georgian Orthodox Church on the one hand, and relatively low government sensitivity to the problems of the Muslim community, on the other;
- Interviews with media representatives have shown that the local media pays less attention to the Muslim community, which may trigger Muslims' protest in the future.

2.3 Kvemo Kartli (Gardabani and Marneuli Municipalities)

On December 13 2017 the research group visited Kvemo Kartli, where interviews and discussions with local authorities, NGOs and local media were held in the Gardabani and Marneuli municipalities.

Findings

- A majority of the Azeri population in the region are Shia Muslims, but in recent years Sunni groups have become more active. Most of them are moderate Muslims but some of them are fundamentalists;
- The presence of Shia Muslims as well as Sunni Muslims in the region is associated with external actors. The Islamic Republic of Iran is the main center of attraction for Shia Islam. Despite the steps taken by the government in relation to the institutional arrangement of the Islamic community, Ayatollah Al Khamenei, the current leader of the Islamic Republic of Iran, is considered to be the greatest religious leader for the local population while the state policy for the Muslim community is negatively assessed;
- Respondents say that the government cannot provide the youth with self-realization opportunities and therefore, local Madrasahs easily fill the vacuum, especially in the villages of the Marneuli and Gardabani municipalities.

Chapter 3. International Experience in Countering Violent Extremism

Countering violent extremism (CVE) strategies play a crucial role in combatting terrorism in the international arena. Like with violent extremism, it is difficult to choose an accurate definition that does not allow for interpretations. The aforementioned United Nations Security Council Resolution 2178 (2014) underscores that countering violent extremism includes the prevention of radicalization recruitment and mobilization of individuals into foreign terrorist groups.¹² Countering violent extremism is an essential precondition for addressing the threat to international peace and security posed by terrorists.

Despite the challenges related to defining the term, understanding the strategies developed by different countries allows us to determine what we mean by countering violent terrorism. This approach implies governmental and civic initiatives and programs that address factors that promote violent ideology. In addition, countering violent extremism involves all the activities that strengthen the resilience of society towards radicalization and extremism.

Development of CVE strategies will presumably maintain a special role in countering terrorism for as long as extremists hidden behind violent ideologies represent a major challenge to world security. The aforementioned United Nations Security Council Resolution also hints at encouraging members states to engage local communities and relevant non-governmental actors in developing CVE strategies. In addition, the resolution calls upon the member states to address the conditions conducive to the spread of violent extremism by empowering youth, women, religious and cultural leaders, enhancing the education system, integrating minorities, promoting social inclusion, etc.¹³

The analysis of the policies implemented by various countries and organizations allows us to conclude that international practice combines three main CVE attitudes — prevention, disengagement and deradicalization. Let's briefly review each of them:

- Prevention policy combines systematic preventive measures to eradicate the drivers of violent extremism at the initial stage and prevent the emergence of new and more destructive groups;¹⁴
- Disengagement policy implies implementation of programs that promote the role of radicalized individuals, change their function and cause them to distance themselves from violent acts. It is noteworthy that, in some cases, the aim of the removal policy cannot be left out of the violent movement by extremists. In this approach, the main focus is made in the first stage to distance from the actions of persons;

12. United Nations Security Council, United Nations Security Council Resolution 2178 (2014), 6.

13. See the previous comment

14. United Nations General Assembly, Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, 2.

- Disengagement policy involves implementation of such programs that encourage radicalized individuals' role/function change and ensures their disengagement from violent acts. It is noteworthy that in some cases the purpose of the disengagement policy may not be leaving the violent movement at once. This approach focuses on disengagement from activities at the first stage;¹⁵
- Unlike the disengagement approach, deradicalization focuses on initiatives aimed at not only physical cessation of some violent acts but also making change at the cognitive level. It implies changing opinions about violence. As a result, involvement in extremist movement is reduced to the extent that the individuals are no longer at a risk of engagement in violent acts.¹⁶

Taking into account the growing radicalization threat faced by Georgia, certain steps are being taken to counter violent extremism in the country. Nevertheless, the country still lacks strong and effective counterterrorism mechanisms. By this, we mean a unified strategy, which would combine joint tasks and initiatives for prevention of radicalization developed by the government and civil society. To some extent, it is due to this fact, that the government focuses on punitive measures to tackle this challenge.

It is crucial to develop a strategy for countering violent extremism and implement anti-radicalization programs to address national security challenges. This has also been confirmed by this research, whose findings showed that there are various factors contributing to radicalization in the country and that society is vulnerable to radicalization and extremism threats. Before developing the strategy, it is crucial to study and critically understand international practice in countering violent extremism. Only after this can the elements of successful programs be adapted to the Georgian context.

Within the scope of the research, countries and international organizations were selected that have a successful history of addressing violent extremism and radicalization threats so as to study relevant international experience. It should be noted that it is not recommended to copy programs implemented by the countries mentioned below without taking the local context into consideration. Moreover, financial resources needed for the implementation of similar strategies and action plans must be considered. Although implementation of the strategies and action plans is related to the allocation of financial resources, it is important to start active cooperation and experiencesharing with partner countries based on international experience.

3.1 United Kingdom

The United Kingdom of Great Britain is a EU member state that has been actively fighting against violent extremism for many years. In July 2011, the UK Government developed Contest, which is a major strategic paper for Great Britain in fighting terrorism.¹⁷ The strategy is organized around four workstreams, around

15. John Horgan and Kurt Braddock, "Rehabilitating the Terrorists?: Challenges in Assessing the Effectiveness of Deradicalization Programs," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 22, no.2 (March 2010): 280, <https://pdfs.semanticscholar.org/d4f4/d9a663a2a9bf1a7f02dfd2cd87bea22a8f22.pdf>

16. See the previous comment

17. Government of Great Britain, *Contest: The United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering Terrorism* (2011),

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97994/contest-summary.pdf (Accessed on March 6, 2018).

which counterterrorism activities of the country are implemented. These approaches are as follows: Pursue, Prevent, Protect and Prepare.¹⁸

The main approach of the strategy is prevention. Within the Prevent component, various programs are implemented that aim at stopping people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. Before this approach was announced as a priority, the UK Government had concluded that it was impossible to significantly reduce the violent extremism threat based only on coercive and punitive measures. The state fights against terrorist ideology and the extremist narrative — which are in some cases circulated by non-violent organizations operating in accordance with the law - through the programs envisaged by the Prevent strategy. Having widened the scope of Prevent, it is more focused on the goal of social integration, whose successful implementation is considered a precondition for empowering community and social welfare.¹⁹

The strategy has three main objectives: respond to the ideological challenges of terrorism and the threat from those who promote this ideology; prevent individuals from being engaged in terrorism and ensure that they are given appropriate support; work with a wide range of sectors to neutralize risks of radicalization, which includes the involvement of the educational system, religious institutions, civil society, local government, healthcare system and other relevant institutions in the aforementioned activities.²⁰ In order to achieve these goals, community campaigns, mentoring, counseling programs, posters campaigns and non-formal education programs are funded.²¹

It is quite difficult to assess the Prevent strategy. Despite the fact that a number of projects included in the strategy are being implemented successfully, critics often refer to the disproportionately religious identity based selection of the target audience, which can split society and promote radicalization in the Muslim community. For example, in 2015/16, out of 7,631 individuals, 4,997 (65%) who were involved in a terrorism prevention program represented a vulnerable group in relation to Islamic radicalization.²²

Government officials indicate that Prevent is a key part of the counterterrorism strategy: since 2012, over 1000 people have received support through the Channel program²³, which safeguards those at the highest risk of radicalization. More than 150 attempted journeys to the Syria and Iraq were disrupted in 2015. To build resilience in communities against radicalization, 142 projects were implemented in 2015-2016 - reaching over 42,000 participants.²⁴

18. Government of Great Britain, Contest, 6.

19. UK Secretary of State Office, Prevent Strategy (2011), 24-25, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf (accessed on March 6 6, 2018).

20. Ibid., 7.

21. Successfully implemented projects: “Preventing Extremism Together,” “Radical Middle Way,” “Channel Project,” “Newsnite,” “E-safety awareness course,” “Not in My Name.”

22. UK Secretary of State Office, Statistical Bulletin 23/17 (2017), 4, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/677646/individuals-referred-supported-prevent-programmeapr2015-mar2016.pdf (accessed on 6, 2018).

23. Channel programme, which has been implemented since 2007 forms a key part of Prevent. Through multi-agency approach the programme aim to identify and provide support to individuals who are at risk of being drawn into terrorism.

24. UK Parliamentary Archive, Written Question 51248 (2016), <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-question/Commons/2016-1031/51248/> (accessed on March 6 2018).

3.2 The Kingdom of the Netherlands

The Netherlands' National Counterterrorism Strategy 2016-2020 describes global jihadism²⁵ as the foremost threat²⁶ posed by extremism and terrorism to the Netherlands. According to the paper, prevention of violent extremism is also a key approach used in the Netherlands. It includes preventing fear of extremism and terrorism in society, preventing recruitment, neutralizing the threat posed by terrorist groups by weakening them and preventing violent behaviors.²⁷ Additionally, the Prevent counterterrorism strategy includes the following areas of intervention: Procure, Protect, Prepare and Prosecute.

The Comprehensive Action Plan to Fight Jihadism, a paper issued in 2014, combines preventive measures to empower communities, increase resilience of the society towards radicalization and prevent individuals from being drawn into terrorism.²⁸ The paper discusses the importance of research projects funded by the Government of the Netherlands within which drivers of violent extremism are studied. According to the results of this research, a sense of economic or social isolation can make a group of people vulnerable to radicalization. When this factor is accompanied by provocative actions, such as the death of a beloved person or confrontation with the government, the process of radicalization of the individual becomes simpler.

Having understood the factors that lead to violent extremism in the country, the Government of the Netherlands uses a multidisciplinary approach to counter violent extremism. The Government will develop individual action plans for persons suspected of being involved in extremism or sensitive to violent extremism. With the support of the Office of National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism, local governments work closely with the police, the prosecutor's office, social workers, child protective services, education workers and community leaders to develop action plans.²⁹ As noted above, within the multidisciplinary approach, priority is given to preventive measures, among which we should mention the availability of mentoring, counseling, workplace training programs and other social services.³⁰ Similar programs also facilitate rehabilitation of former extremists. According to this model the Government of the Netherlands considers repressive measures, including arrest and criminal prosecution as extreme steps to be taken only if preventive measures do not bring the desired result. Terrorist fighters returning to their homeland undergo terrorism threat assessments. Afterwards, some of the fighters are charged and some of them become beneficiaries of rehabilitation programs.

25. Office of National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism of the Netherlands, National Counterterrorism Strategy 2016-2020 (2016), <https://english.nctv.nl/binaries/LR-100495-rapportageEN-V3-tcm32-251878.pdf> (accessed on March 8, 2018).

26. Terrorism Threat Assessment for the Netherlands (46); <https://english.nctv.nl/binaries/DTN46%20Summary-tcm32-294322.pdf> considers that terrorism threat is real and threat level is 4 on 1 to 5 scale.

27. *Ibid.*, 13-15.

28. Office of National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism of the Netherlands, Comprehensive Action Program to Fight Jihadism, (2014), <https://english.nctv.nl/binaries/def-a5-nctvjihadismuk-03-lr-tcm32-83910.pdf> (accessed on March 8, 2018).

29. As mentioned above, in the Netherlands the main threat of extremism is Jihadism and the related process of radicalisation. Consequently, community leaders, who are involved in the development of action plans to counter violent extremism, are mainly religious leaders of the Muslim community, including Imams, the administration of mosques. They are allies of the government in the battle against extremism and prevention of radical understanding of Islam.

30. Office of National Coordinator for Security and Counterterrorism of the Netherlands, Comprehensive Action Program to Fight Jihadism, 16-20.

It should be also noted that Social Stability Expertise Department functions under the Ministry of Social Affairs and Employment of the Netherlands. This is an expert group that provides local authorities and communities with recommendations on addressing problems of violent extremism. Moreover, there is the Division of Family Assistance in the Netherlands that provides assistance to radicalized individuals' parents and family members and the Exit Facility, which offers former radicals reintegration into society.³¹

3.3 Germany

Similar to the Netherlands and the UK, the preventive approach is also a priority in Germany. The Federal Government Strategy to Prevent Extremism and Promote Democracy discusses right-wing extremism, left-wing extremism and Islamic radicalization as the main threats of violent extremism posed to the country.³² This paper determines the following government action areas for prevention of extremism: development of political and civic education, working with civil society, provision of mentoring and consultation services, active work on media and Internet platforms, research funding and international cooperation.³³ It is noteworthy that together with the prevention policy, the Federal Government of Germany underscores the disengagement approach. Several CVE programs, including Exist to Enter, Hayat and Violence Prevention Network are based on the idea that the main goal of countering extremism is to address radicalized individuals involved in violent acts. Therefore, the resources directed against violent extremism are used not only in relation to persons who only share violent ideology, but are actively involved in radical activities.³⁴

The Exit to Enter program, which is especially successful, offers people informal education or employment that helps them to distance themselves from radical groups. The program does not directly fight against violent radicalism. Instead, it promotes initiatives that ensure gradual neutralization of the factors contributing to extremist network development.

The success of the program is largely due to the fact that the German Federal Government takes into consideration socioeconomic circumstances to counter violent extremism. Individually tailored mechanisms exist for program beneficiaries who leave extremist groups. Participation in the program and the services offered are most attractive for 25-year-olds. Thanks to the program, at this stage of life many extremists stray from the path they had chosen at an early age. In addition, the German Government has made a long-term financial commitment to implement the program that contributed to successful implementation of the Exit to Enter program.³⁵ As a result, since 2000 (when the program was launched) approximately 500 individual

31. See the previous comment

32. Federal Government of Germany, Federal Government Strategy to Prevent Extremis and Promote Democracy, (2016), 9-10, <https://www.bmfsfj.de/blob/115448/cc142d640b37b7dd76e48b8fd9178cc5/strategie-der-bundesregierung-zur-extremismuspraevention-und-demokratiefoerderung-englisch-data.pdf> (accessed on March 9, 2018).

33. Ibid., 17-26.

34. Peter Romaniuk, Does CVE Work? Lessons Learned from the Global Effort to Counter Violent Extremism, Global Center on Cooperative Security, (2015), 27, <http://www.globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/Does-CVE-Work-2015.pdf>.

35. Petra Boumaiza, "Labor-Market Oriented Exit-Support Work to Combat Right-Wing Extremism: the XENOS Special Program, "Exit to Enter" (Ausstieg zum Einstieg)," in Right-Wing Extremism in Europe: Country Analyses, Counter Strategies and Labour-Market Oriented Exit Strategies, eds. Ralf Melzer and Sebastian Serafi (Berlin: Druck- und Verlagshaus Zarbock GmbH & Co. KG, 2013), 306325, <http://library.fes.de/pdf-files/dialog/10031.pdf>.

cases have been successfully completed and the recidivism rate has been decreased by 3%.³⁶

3.4 Denmark

Denmark's comprehensive approach to countering violent extremism is based on the idea that the threat of extremism and radicalization does not merely represent a security issue. On the contrary, the radicalization process has social implications in terms of social cohesion, active participation of individual citizens in the socio-political life of the country, and the welfare and development of society. Thus, local, regional and central government units work in a coordinated manner to prevent extremism and radicalization.³⁷

Like Germany, after the first wave of efforts against radicalization, Denmark also gained experience that at the initial stage CVE strategy should rather contradict activities than - values. In accordance with this approach, the Danish Government became less involved in the ideological fight against extremists; taking into consideration that civil society does it better. Instead, the Government focused on addressing individuals who are at a risk of engagement in violent acts. This approach has allowed Denmark to develop innovative measures to counter violent extremism.

The Aarhus model is the most noticeable among the CVE programs being implemented in Denmark. The local government of Aarhus, the second largest city in Denmark, has developed a policy against joining the Islamic State and Al-Qaeda. The city offers radicalized residents specific counseling and mentoring services tailored to individuals. Moreover, the Exit program is available for those who support or are ready to carry out violent acts. The Aarhus model is also focused on rehabilitation of fighters returning from Syria and Iraq. Rehabilitation programs include parents, family networks, social workers and teachers who provide support to young people. Within the rehabilitation program, those who return to Denmark are provided with consultation and mentoring services and can participate in workshops and trainings.

The model has created trust between the government and the social environment in which extremists live. This factor greatly contributes to its success. In case of evidence against the returned fighters, the Government assists them instead of pursuing legal prosecution or isolation. The Exit programs of the Aarhus model are also oriented on the Government's minimal intervention. Instead of imprisonment, Danish authorities offer radicalized individuals employment opportunities.

It is noteworthy that this approach is based on the assumption that the radicalization process varies across individuals. Therefore, the programs offered by the Government are individually tailored to beneficiaries. As a result, in 2014 and 2015, only four people left Aarhus to go fight in Syria and Iraq whereas in 2013 the number of such people was 31.³⁸

36. Brochure Exit Program, 2nd Edition, 3, <http://www.exit-deutschland.de/english/> (accessed on March 9, 2018).

37. Ministry of Immigration, Integration and Housing Denmark, Preventing and Countering Extremism and Radicalisation: National Action Plan (2016), 12-17, <https://ec.europa.eu/homeaffairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation-awareness-network/docs/preventing-counteracting-extremism-radicalisation-en.pdf> (accessed on March 11, 2018).

38. Kelly Cobiella, "Denmark DeRadicalization Program Aims to Reintegrate, Not Condemn," NBC News, May 24, 2015, accessed March 11, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/storyline/isis-terror/denmark-deradicalisation-n355346>.

3.5 United States of America

In the United States the CVE strategy is based on a different approach. As illustrated above, in Europe, a community-based approach is used to counter violent extremism and radicalization. Different public groups are actively involved in the implementation of the programs developed by such principle. In Europe, a greater emphasis is placed on similar types of programs to address the aforementioned security challenges.

Programs based on the principle of soft power are also used in the United States. These are relatively largescale programs in which public groups are actively involved. Despite this, we cannot say that the community-based approach is the preferred approach in the US. On the contrary, great emphasis is placed on using coercive methods, which are the main means of ensuring national security. This is confirmed by American strategic papers, which reflect the government's visions for countering radicalization, such as the Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism.³⁹

This paper is a main guide to countering violent extremism in the U.S. It is mentioned even in the introduction that active use of coercive methods and legal mechanisms to counter terrorism remains the government's priority. However, the United States Department of Homeland Security, which developed the strategy in October 2016, believes that it is necessary to promote a proactive, community-based prevention approach.⁴⁰ This is the purpose of the aforementioned paper, which sets out the main goals of the United States for the prevention of violent extremism.

The U.S. Department of Defense works with relevant public groups for the fulfillment of the mission. NGOs, charitable organizations, research and academic institutions, social service providers and private sector are considered as partner groups. Within the interagency approach, federal, state and local authorities as well as respective law enforcement agencies are involved in the fight against radicalization and violent extremism. In the United States, based on the research results, the local community is considered to be the most effective among the aforementioned groups as it can safeguard individuals from radicalization and ensure disengagement from violent extremism. Family members, neighbors, colleagues and teachers can recognize and address drivers of extremism at an early stage. Thus, the strategy concentrates on empowering the local community and other relevant public groups.⁴¹

The paper defines four major national goals for prevention of violent extremism:

- Enhance understanding of the evolving violent extremism threat and develop effective ways to counter threat;
- Raise public awareness by disseminating information to community partners;
- Support community-based efforts to counter violent extremism;
- Enhance coordination of DHS CVE activities

39. U.S. Department of Defence, Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism (2016), <https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/16-1028-S1-CVE-strategy.pdf> (accessed on March 13, 2018).

40. Ibid., 1.

41. Ibid., 13.

It is noteworthy that the objectives whose implementation is a precondition for achieving relevant goals and task deadlines are set in the paper.⁴²

3.6 International Organizations – the EU and OSCE Experience

Prevention is also a dominant approach to countering violent extremism in the EU. The paper adopted by the EU in 2014 - Preventing Radicalization to Terrorism and Violent Extremism: Strengthening the EU's Response — proposes preventive measures for Member States to respond to related security challenges.⁴³

The document briefly reviews new trends of terrorism and the related challenges faced by Member States. Based on this, preventive actions are set out in the paper. The actions intended for the Member States include the following: developing national strategies to prevent radicalization; funding of research projects and research dedicated to preventing radicalization; better use of the Radicalization Awareness Network resources; training of relevant practitioners to prevent radicalization; development of 'exit strategies' by Member States to help individuals leave violent extremism; empowering victims of radicalization; cooperation more closely with civil society and the private sector and fighting against the extremist narrative.⁴⁴

As practice shows, international organizations develop a comprehensive counter-radicalization approach focused on prevention. The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) also points to the necessity of implementation of such practices in Member States. Some OSCE participating states developed a community-based approach to tackle the problem, which implies community support and active engagement. The approach combines the initiatives tailored to the local environment, which besides traditional actors attracts a wide range of participants from civil society, business groups and media. Thus, the efforts of the public institutions and the aforementioned actors are united around the common goal, which implies implementation of preventive measures.⁴⁵

Together with community-oriented prevention approach, the community policing approach is quite popular among the OSCE Participating States. The execution of such policing functions is based on the idea of partnering with local law enforcement and community groups. This cooperation involves proactive solution of problems and more massive involvement of the society in strategic actions for prevention of violent extremism. The success of the approach depends on the degree of mutual trust between the government and society and their the successful cooperation. The OSCE believes that successful implementation of community-based prevention and community-based policing methods as a part of a comprehensive approach is the main precondition for successfully fighting against violent extremism.⁴⁶

42. Ibid., 4-14.

43. European Commission, Preventing Radicalization to Terrorism and Violent Extremism: Strengthening the EU's Response (2014), [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2014-2019/documents/com/com-com\(2013\)0941-/com-com\(2013\)0941-en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2014-2019/documents/com/com-com(2013)0941-/com-com(2013)0941-en.pdf) (accessed on March 14, 2018).

44. Ibid., 4-12.

45. Ibid., 61-74.

46. Ibid., 75-93.

Conclusion

The research findings, discussions held, and the analysis of sociopolitical processes in the target regions in recent years make it clear that the aforementioned nine factors contributing to radicalization are more or less identified in Georgia. As noted above, five determinants (socio-psychological factors, social factors, ideological/religious factors, radicalizers and social media) are particularly acute in the target regions. Two determinants (culture and identity crisis and group dynamics) acquire relevance in specific circumstances and the remaining two (political factors and trauma, revanchism and other mechanisms) are less acute. On the basis of the aforementioned, we can conclude that some parts of society are vulnerable to threats of radicalism and extremism. Thus, if relevant catalysts were to be activated, a combination of these factors could affect the security environment of the country.

To conclude, it is crucial to have a single governmental, coordinated and timebound strategy that excludes inconsistent and spontaneous policy to minimize factors contributing to radicalization. The Government of Georgia must determine a coordinating body that will oversee the implementation of the policy against radicalization and extremism. The analysis of international experience suggests that it is crucial to have a body whose main function is the coordination of relevant governmental and public institutions in the fight against violent extremism. The competence of this body will include determination of the country's strategic anti-terrorist approach, adoption of relevant documents, development of programs tailored to specific circumstances and individuals, and the involvement of various public groups in the strategic decision-making process related to the prevention of violent extremism.

The activation of community groups has been revealed the particular importance of approaches accurately selected by the Ministry of Education and Science of Georgia due to the fact that one of the main causes of this challenge faced by the government is low access to quality education in target regions. It is recommended to improve formal education programs as well as to provide non-formal education services to vulnerable groups. In addition, it is important to focus on addressing social deprivation and self-realization challenges and improve the socio-economic background whilst taking into consideration available resources.

Recommendations and the State Strategy Outline

The Georgian Center for Security and Development has developed a package of recommendations and a strategy outline on the basis of conducted research and international experience that will help the government in elaborating an effective strategy to counter extremism and radicalization.

State Strategy

It is recommended to develop a governmental strategy that will reduce violent extremism and radicalization through the enhancement of coordination among state institutions and the implementation of prevention programs. The strategy should be based on a community-based approach. In the process of developing the strategy, it is crucial to cooperate with international partners, international organizations and civil society. (Please find the strategy outline and objectives in the attachment).

Coordination and Joint Approach

- a) It is recommended to develop a coordinated and joint approach of state institutions to tackle violent extremism and radicalization due to the fact that addressing this challenge is beyond the capability of ministries or public institutions;
- b) It is recommended to determine a coordinating body in the process of formation of a joint approach and development of strategy that will oversee the integration of measures taken, and the implementation of projects and activities by various agencies;
- c) It is crucial to enhance coordination between the central and local authorities in terms of addressing radicalization and violent extremism and enhance the role of local government in the implementation of primary prevention activities;
- d) In vulnerable regions, local governments and self-governing bodies should significantly improve their communication with local interest groups through involvement of their representatives in the aforementioned process. It is recommended to pay more attention to youth initiatives.

Raising Public Awareness and Enhancing Resilience

- e) It is recommended to implement educational programs and activities in different regions focused on the promotion of critical thinking, tolerance, pluralism and secularism in young people to address violent extremist ideology;
- f) It is important to raise the level of teaching the Georgian language where there is a language barrier;
- g) It is recommended to prepare special textbooks for teachers and increase their capacity through trainings and workshops to address radicalization and violent ideology. Diligent work performed by teachers will hinder potential development of violent extremism at its initial stage with preventive mechanisms, particularly in vulnerable regions. In addition, it is recommended to increase the function of teachers to assist their students with development of resilience towards the extremist narrative and acquire socio-emotional skills.
- h) It is recommended to support additional sports and cultural events on the basis of coordinated activity and need analysis, which will support the process of national integration and protect/represent the identity of all ethnic and religious minorities.

Enhance Cooperation with Different Actors in the Process of Strategy Development

- i) It is recommended to establish close communication with local community representatives, leaders and propose joint activities to address factors contributing to radicalization;
- j) It is recommended to enhance cooperation with local NGOs, charitable organizations and initiative groups — those who have a high level of trust and acceptance among the local population.

Strategy of Preventing Violent Extremism and Radicalization
(Structure)
2018-2020

Precondition:

The purpose of developing a government strategy should be the reduction of violent extremism and radicalization risks in Georgia. Among other important issues, the Strategy should tackle the issue of participation of Georgian citizens in international terrorist groups operating on the territory of foreign states. The Government of Georgia that aims at preventing radicalization, promoting national integration, reducing related risks and achieving social stability should consider the need for developing a unified approach to the prevention of violent extremism. Despite the fact that the Government's continuous priority is counterterrorism and a law enforcement based effort to counter violent extremism, a changing environment creates the need for an active, community-based approach, preventive policy - "preventive power" and relevant interventions.

Principles of the Strategy:

This Strategy may be based on the following main principles:

- To counter violent extremism and radicalization, alongside law enforcement and intelligence activities, more attention should be paid to the preventive approach based on the principles of soft power, enhancing civic integration and resilience, and increasing public awareness;
- Violent extremism and radicalization, as well as the involvement of Georgian citizens in international terrorist organizations, have many causes and are not limited to any specific region, religion and/or ideology;
- It is crucial to protect human rights, freedoms, justice and equality guaranteed by the Constitution of Georgia in terms of the Strategy.

Goal:

The government strategy should be aimed at reducing violent extremism and radicalization in Georgia through enhanced coordination among state institutions and the implementation of preventative programs. The Strategy's goal is to determine priority objectives and a government vision that is based on the best international experiences and local needs.

Objective 1. Perpetuate the study of factors contributing to violent extremism and radicalization

- Receive information based on research that will increase the awareness of state institutions on the existence of potential factors contributing to violent extremism and radicalization. This will also facilitate planning effective programs and activities;
- Plan government activities based on periodic reports from various local and international research organizations.

Objective 2. Enhance coordination among government institutions to counter violent extremism and radicalization

- Integrate measures, projects and activities implemented by various agencies to counter violent extremism;
- Establish an interagency working group, which will work on planning a community-based approach to counter violent extremism and radicalization, and whose mandate and work will be predefined;
- Enhance coordination between the central and local authorities to counter radicalization and violent extremism;
- Enhance the role of the local government in the implementation of primary preventive activities.

Objective 3. Raise public awareness and enhance public resilience

- Implement educational programs and activities focused on promotion of critical thinking, tolerance, pluralism and secularism among young people;
- Support various sports and cultural events that will promote the process of national integration and protect/represent the identity of all ethnic and religious minorities;
- Enhance strategic communications by the government to increase resilience. This implies the rejection of extremist ideas and messages, and the acceptance of a positive, proactive narrative;
- Take effective steps against stereotypes and misconceptions about ethnic and religious minorities.

Objective 4. Enhance cooperation between the government and various actors to counter local violent extremism and radicalization

- Hold working group meetings with local and international organizations to exchange information and disseminate knowledge;
- Support regional organizations and initiative groups, including through provision of trainings and guidelines, to enhance their capacities;
- Establish close communication with local community representatives and religious leaders, and offer joint activities to address factors contributing to radicalization;
- Hold regional dialogue and regular meetings in Tbilisi with the participation of local community representatives.

Objective 5. Enhance international cooperation to address violent extremism and radicalization

- Enhance cooperation with international partners and international organizations to exchange information and experience;
- Learn and analyze the international best practice of countering violent extremism and radicalization and adopt this experience to the Georgian context;
- Study relevant programs or their elements, adapt them to the local context and implement them.

Monitoring the Implementation of the Action Plan of the Strategy

- Conduct periodic monitoring of the compliance of the Action Plan with the Strategy objectives and discuss it at working group meetings;
- Discuss Strategy progress and challenges with various actors, including NGOs and international partners;
- Conduct periodic surveys in the regions to determine the effectiveness of the activities.

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