



REPORT

EUROPEAN SUMMIT ON ISLAMIST RADICALIZATION AND TERRORIST THREAT

MONDAY MARCH 22, 2021

2nd session

ELNET
EUROPEAN LEADERSHIP NETWORK

INSTITUT
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On Monday March 22, 2021, the second session of the European Summit on Islamist Radicalization and Terrorist Threat was organized by ELNET, with the support of former Prime Minister **Manuel Valls** and in partnership with the Montaigne Institute. Prominent politicians such as **Laurent Nuñez**, Coordinator for National Intelligence and Counterterrorism, **Gilles de Kerchove**, Coordinator of the European Union for the fight against terrorism, **Sinan Selen**, Vice-President of the German Intelligence Services, took part in this event, as well as numerous European and Israeli experts such as **Boaz Ganor**, Founder and Executive Director of the International Institute for Counterterrorism (TIC), **Hakim El-Karoui**, senior fellow at the Montaigne Institute, **Anne-Clémentine Larroque**, historian of Islamism, **Seran de Leede**, historian and expert in female jihadism, associate fellow at the International Center for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT, The Hague), **Dr. Shiraz Maher**, historian and Director of the International Center for the Study of Radicalization (ICSR) at King's College, **Peter Neumann**, Professor of Security Studies at King's College, **Pieter Van Ostaeyen**, fellow at the European Foundation for Democracy.

The date of the summit coincided with the 9th anniversary of the attacks against the French soldiers and the children of the Ozar Hatora school in Montauban and Toulouse on March 11, 15 and 19, 2012, as well as with the 5th anniversary of the three suicide bombings in Belgium on March 22, 2016.

OPENING: THE STATE OF THE TERRORIST THREAT IN EUROPE

After the introduction of **Arié Bensemhoun**, Executive Director of ELNET France, and **Laurent Bigorgne**, Director of the Montaigne Institute, **Laurent Nuñez** answered to **Christophe Ayad**, journalist in charge of terrorism-related issues for *Le Monde*, on the state of the terrorist threat in France and Europe.

According to him, there is no major difference between France and Europe. France is facing an endogenous threat, which is due to the presence of terrorists on its territory, as well as on European territory. The violence of online propaganda depends on current events in France: an upsurge of individuals connecting to Syria and the remnants of ISIS has been observed. Regarding cooperation in the fight against terrorism, an evolution may be noticed. Since the attacks of November 2015, the exchange of information and intelligence between European domestic services have increased significantly.

The EU provides the legal framework and makes judicial cooperation possible. While the Brexit does not impact intergovernmental cooperation in terms of intelligence, it is however more complicated in judicial matters. France has adopted a “humanitarian” policy for French jihadists who joined ISIS, on a case-by-case basis regarding minors and children, whereas the adults must be judged on the territories where they committed their crimes. There is no European divergence about children who were born in the Islamic State: all must be repatriated.

Even before 2015, a real concern about radicalization in prison has existed. 1300 individuals are currently monitored by administrative binding measures (freedom of movement for example) without social control, as pointed out by the Constitutional Council. These individuals have been convicted by common law and not for terrorist actions. They are part and parcel of the endogenous threat.

The Balkan area is another concern: ISIS has used it as a training base for Chechen fighters and it is near to the EU geographically.

Then, **Sinan Selen** was interviewed by **Daniel-Dylan Böhmer** (*Die Welt*). According to him, Al-Qeada and ISIS have less influence, but Islamist terrorism has not disappeared: terrorists are not confined. Individuals who are mostly recruited on the web still take action. They arm themselves easily with bladed weapons. There is a real concern about the 12,000 Salafis on German territory. A charity called “The True Religion” even recruited in public. The German authorities have implemented measures in cooperation with its international partners in North Westphalia, which is the main hub for terrorism. The German authorities succeeded in countering Salafist organizations, even the main representative of ISIS in Berlin, by stopping their attempts to recruit on the web. But the threat remains because of several individuals who are still at large.

Sinan Selen insisted on the necessity to counter the influence of such those organizations, by being sure that they cannot rely on rear bases in Mali and Eastern Europe especially. He recalled that virtual and real space are interconnected.

ROUNDTABLE: WHO ARE THE EUROPEAN JIHADISTS?

David Khalfa, Director of Programs of ELNET France, presented the roundtable entitled “Who are the European Jihadists?”, which was moderated by **Gauthier Rybinski**, columnist for international politics at *France 24*.

Hakim El-Karoui explained that he built an unprecedented database of more than 1,460 jihadists active between 2010 and the end of 2019 in four European countries (France, the United Kingdom, Belgium and Germany). He published the result of his work with a book entitled *The Jihad Activists*. He assessed that 700 French people wanted or succeeded in joining terrorist organizations, which represents about 30% of the 2,500 French jihadists estimated over the period. One may find common sociological patterns: social homogeneity, attraction for radical rhetoric because of psychological vulnerability, poor economic affordability. A religious and ideological approach highlights the role of Salafism for half of French jihadists at least. Recruitment and commitment take place at the local level, in precarious working-class areas. However, in the United Kingdom, the sociological difference is striking: the majority of jihadists come from a high and educated social background, without great religious rigor. Salafism represents a religious break. They studied in Syria, Egypt, Yemen. They later became ISIS executives. One may consider two scenarios for the future: armed jihadism and ideological jihadism.

Boaz Ganor distinguished three types of profiles: the lone wolves, the independent local networks and finally the organized networks. The first ones radicalized themselves, without operational or logistical support from any terrorist organization. The second ones mainly rely on family and friend circles. The third ones benefit from networks abroad or on European territory.

Boaz Ganor also predicted an upsurge in attacks at the end of the pandemic, especially from the Shiite community against Israel and the United States, and stemming from States-sponsored terrorism.

Anne-Clémentine Larroque rejected the notion of the lone wolf, referring to the example of Mohamed Merah who was connected to the vast network of Toulouse. This phrase used by the media was false. Counterterrorism as a criminal policy has been adopted since 1996 in France, which is an exception in Europe. Qualifying legally misdeeds of ideologues is difficult because of the lack of evidence. The associative and cultural organizations that support them are legal. However, they have an impact on the socialization of jihadists. Those centers clearly contribute to feed the anti-republican discourse.

Seran de Leede revealed that about 100 Dutch women joined ISIS. The average age is 20 years, the majority of them are binational, mainly with Moroccan nationality. They are more recruiters and smugglers of weapons rather than wives of fighters even if they call themselves “the wives of jihad”. Motives are different between women and men. Those women consider themselves as protectors of the community of believers, "the umma." Contrary to what many think, their commitment symbolizes the rejection of domestic responsibility and true liberation. Many of them thought they would regain possession of their religious and sexual life, after a past of harassment.

Shiraz Maher made the difference between the younger recruits and the older ones: the first tended to join ISIS, the latter other organizations. He also refuted the notion of lone wolves. According to him, a real connection can be established between those who left and those who were already there. Unfailing loyalty to the Islamic State and the belief in the romantic and humanitarian aspect of the fight are their main characteristics.

Peter Neumann first pointed out that many people convicted in Germany for terrorism were already in jail when they were 17-18 years old. At least a hundred jihadists will be freed in the coming year: "Germany did not take many measures to avoid this, and we do not have exact figures on the number of jihadists in jail. We are witnessing the rise of solidarity between attackers, who are themselves radicalized, and have mental problems". Peter Neumann emphasized that prisons are "schools of crime". According to him, German federalism is a problem because of a lack of European and domestic coordination, as evinced by the example of the attack on the Christmas market in 2016: the terrorist was able to cross borders and länders without difficulty.

Pieter Van Ostaeyen explained that a database was set up, bringing together more than 1000 jihadists, when groups that followed Sharia law in Belgium joined the Middle East. According to him, they were 300 jihadists in 2015, 454 in 2016 and these numbers have been declining since. In 2020, there were only 27 cases: a correlation thus exists with the fact that ISIS no longer controls territories. The majority of Belgian fighters have disappeared, there are 103 Muslim extremists in jail in Belgium, 33 are not Belgian. Now, the Islamic State is no longer able to organize attacks, its leadership does not inspire as it did in the past few years and the threat level in Europe is low. Currently, the hotspot of terrorism is in Africa.

CLOSURE : HOW TO IMPROVE EUROPEAN COORDINATION IN THE FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM?

According to **Gilles de Kerchove**, the threat remains high and has changed a lot: “Over the past five years, we have significantly reduced our vulnerabilities collectively: border police, internet (regulatory approach), emergence of high-tech /disruptive tech etc. The tipping point was the attack on Charlie Hebdo. Countries received the order to do more in three areas: law enforcement, prevention, and cooperation with neighbors”. The role of agencies like Europol is more important today.



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Gilles de Kerchove explained that the list of European fighters who left for Syria did not exist. A lot of pressure was needed to communicate about it. Now, common databases have been implemented. The European fight against terrorism rests on the full sharing of information, the lists of European citizens members of ISIS are transmitted and shared. However, a challenge arises: that of collecting and analyzing intelligence, especially in a context of the rising of data protection as well as of over-information. The European Commission is currently studying the use of AI to manage data, but it looking for a balance between strategic, security and industrial challenges. **Gilles de Kerchove** also bet on the upsurge of cyber attacks after the pandemic.