

## Threats of Islamic Radikalization in the Bulgarian Society

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**Abstract:** This article reviews the trends and factors in the Bulgarian society, which directly affect the educational and social levels. Presenting facts and analyzing the many educational and social situations in which religion and religious attitudes are used and manipulated for purposes other than confessional. In Bulgaria, official denominations have equal rights and responsibilities in relation to the state's educational goals. But despite the freedom of religion, one centered on ideas and introducing into religious alternatives bordering on radicalism. The idea of the article is to trace the internal and external factors of influence, including educational factors that lead to deviations to Islamic radikalization in the Bulgarian society. Educational alternatives to radikalization prevention are considered, such as collaboration between institutions, interdisciplinary activities and initiatives.

**Keywords:** radikalization, factors, prevention, education

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### I. FACTORS AND PROCESSES - UPDATED REVIEW

*Social factor.* Historically, Bulgaria is a country in which two main religions - Christians and Islam - coexist peacefully. The Bulgarians, defining themselves as professing Islam, have long been successfully integrated into Bulgarian society. They have a positive share in its development from economic and moral point. An important trend in this respect, however, is the political international changes that occur globally. They reflexively reflect on that part of the population that feels unequal in religion, language and history. To date, Bulgaria remains less affected by the extremist activity of international Islamist groups than other Balkan and Middle European countries. This is explained by the absence of factors such as a colonial past, high immigration, which are believed to contribute to Islamist radikalization in Western Europe. At the same time, Bulgaria is a country where there is a traditionally Muslim population with deep historical roots and which has established mechanisms for regulating inter-religious relations. These two factors have a deterrent effect on the potentially negative influence that global processes of Islamist radikalization could have in Bulgaria. Nonetheless, social, migration, media and political processes are nowadays that speak of certain changes. It turns out that pressure and impact on particular marginal groups through faithful messages can be the nucleus of radikalization of many young people coming from closed, socially unintegrated groups. It should also be noted that radikalization is a process directed at the person who is pushing for protest through violent actions. The protest is directed against a certain group of people, ideas (and religious) or against the whole of society. Radikalization is linked to more ideologies, beliefs and activities, and in this sense a distinction has to be drawn from terrorism. Radical may include incidents with the Roma minority in Garmen, football hooliganism, racism (not only acts / messages related to terrorism). For acts of terrorism may be considered acts destroying order and state (eg Sarafovo). To elucidate the radical and aggressive trends in Islam, the widely-used term "radical Islam," understood as an active politicization of Islam, is used. Radical Islamists use violent means, and anyone who deviates "from the right path" is subject to jihad (a war of faith). Radical Islam - this is a political Islam, its aims are politically grounded and aim at seizing countries and territories. It can be said that radical Islamism is a consequence of specific regional and international political conflicts; Formed and developed as a process through various internal and external specific factors for each country. This threat does not exclude either Bulgaria or the Balkan region.

*The "Education" factor.* One of the leading internal factors for introducing radical ideas into the formation of the young person is the development of illiterate forms and the organization of religious education

- Islam, which is deeply hidden under the social pretext. Here are two very serious and unfavorable trends of Bulgarian education.

The first trend is the impressive self-determination of a large part of the Roma (Gypsy) population as a Turkish and its introduction into Islamic religion (with external features - bloating and wearing characteristic beards by men) for socio-economic reasons. It mainly inhabits the central and southern parts of Bulgaria. As in these regions, there is an increase in the religion of the Muslim population, the restoration of old customs and traditions, the observance of religious feasts and rituals. There is also a change in the clothing of Bulgarian Muslim women (through the Muslim Roma). Such a trend directly affects the emergence of radical movements in our country. The continuing impossibility to fully implement Roma education in Bulgarian schools combined with social helplessness of Bulgarian legal provisions allow this tendency to set its roots in Bulgarian society.

The second trend is directed towards Bulgarian children of Islamic-speaking Bulgarian families - their coverage and training in the so-called gated schools. They are identified as a new danger as students are educated in non-Bulgarian self-awareness. The risk of Islamization and instillation of non-Bulgarian self-consciousness stems from the fact that in organizing such schools it is approached as a social dormitory or school-boarding house and there is no regulator on the educational and learning process. Such kind of schools raise doubts about the introduction of underage children into Islamic radicalization. The social profile of families who are willing to send their children to such boarding houses - dorms says they are very low-income, low-educated, Islamic families. The way of recruiting children in boarding schools is a typical approach and pattern of behavior, the use of the authority of local clerics and a mosque board. Closed schools are located in the village of Delchevo and the village of Bilka. Religious education is sponsored by the Islamic sect Suleimanie. The Secretary of the Chief Mufti's Office says that 170 children are passing through the dorm. In fact, the case in the village of Delchevo is just one of the examples of organized and conducted on the territory of the country by unsuspecting groups of classes with children and young people, which are parallel to the school system and hence to the educational system. During the checks carried out in private hostels for children (self-identifying their belonging to a Turkish ethnic group) in the village of Delchevo, Razgrad, Shumen, Bilka village, Coran exchange board in the Central Mosque - Madan and Rosa Family Center in Burgas were found to have no established status: they have no registration in the Ministry of Education and Science; Do not have a license to provide social services for children. A similar Islamic boarding house has been operating for 5 years in the village of Kran. The pension is a three-storey luxury building, built in a property owned by the mosque in the village. The legal basis for its operation is a contract signed with the Chief Mufti's Office. The governor explains that, under the terms of it, a member of the mufti's office three times a week teaches Koran to the children. Students arrive during the summer season for the entire holiday in the Rhodope villages. By the same model - cover by social activity, there is also a boarding house in the town of Kardzhali. In it the children are trained in the Qur'an courses.

On the territory of the Republic of Bulgaria there are three secondary general schools of education - Shumen, Ruse and Momchilgrad. The school in Momchilgrad can be said to be the most modern. All three have developed the board system. Funding for building and maintaining these schools comes from Turkey and other non-governmental Turkish organizations. Along with the general education disciplines in these schools are studied Koran, Turkish and Arabic. These schools are legitimate and students receive two diplomas - for secondary and spiritual education. They can continue their education at the Higher Islamic Spiritual Institute in Sofia. Teaching and communication at the Higher Islamic Institute and in the three medium-sized Muslim schools in the country is mostly in Turkish, which contributes to creating a sense of isolation among Bulgarian Muslims. An important addition to the growing role of such kind of schools is the fact that in the recent years they are aspired to children with higher social status. At the same time, in Madan since 1999, there is the only school in Bulgaria for boys who learn to become "hafizis" - guardians of the Koran, and "hafiz" is done after memorizing the sacred Qur'an. It turns out that such boarding schools are not new to Bulgaria, but they are already a serious threat to the national identity of young Bulgarians who profess Islam. It is a fact that such religious education (Islam) is a practice for our neighboring and close countries (Turkey, Macedonia, Serbia, Bosnia, Albania) and this model has been transferred to us.

Another high-risk educational factor is so-called Koran courses, for which nothing is commented on until recently. Most of the children attending the Qur'an courses are known to be from villages or neighborhoods, and this can be explained by the more limited social experience of rural students and the more traditionalist nature of rural communities. The latter turns these children into "more appropriate" to conduct religious education. The fact that the 2007 Immigration Coronation Course in Sarnitsa was closed suggests that there is a tendency for radical Islam to be proclaimed through these courses. It is now known that in 58 settlements in the Blagoevgrad area such coranes are formed - courses that are designed for children and students aged 7 to 15 years. Youths and girls are encouraged to continue their education in the three medium-sized Muslim schools in Rousse, Shumen and Momchilgrad, and then at the Higher Islamic Institute in Sofia. The most active form is developed in the villages of Avramovo, Osikovo, Kraishite and Valkosel. The courses in these villages also have system-maintained pages on the Internet. In the village of Chepintsi in Smolyan there are

free courses in Arabic. Students are recruited through the facebook profile "Islam Chepintsi". The course aims to build on the knowledge of children who have already attended Koran courses. In the Haskovo village of Sarnitsa there is a coran - course only for children over eighth grade. Former chief mufti NedimGendzhev, however, says that this is not a coranus course, but an "unlicensed school that trains in non-traditional Islam." According to his claims there are such in Dospat, Sliven, Sarnitsa, Lyulyakovo, Ustino. None of them are registered in the Ministry of Education and Science as a Muslim secondary school, but they are still receiving children at the moment. The network of educational institutions operating under the guise of social communities and care for children and students from Islamic families is deeply developed and seriously funded by external organizations.

As external factors related to the emergence of radical movements in Turkey, we can identify different parties, institutions and organizations in Turkey that provide significant financial support to the Muslim community in Bulgaria. The religious education of Muslims in Bulgaria is supported by teaching materials and trained staff sent by Turkey to organize and conduct children's Islamic religion education. Without the control of the Ministry of Education and Science and all the institutions involved, this creates a huge risk of radicalization of Islam in the Bulgarian lands. Against the background of an escalating threat of militant Islamism worldwide and the fact that Bulgaria is geographically close to countries exporting Islamic radicalism, the country is becoming more and more vulnerable. Non-important external factors are the processes in the neighboring Balkan countries - Albania, Kosovo, Bosnia, Macedonia, Greece. The example of Kosovo is most prominent, where at the University of Pristina, the Faculty of Theology is fully committed to radical extremist organizations. The new trends indicate that Bulgarian students apply to Macedonia and Albania for their easy opportunity to be accepted and thus become easy targets of radical influences. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, extremist organizations al-Haramein and the Global Relief Foundation operate, using video and audio recordings, and applying so-called "Islam". Illegal organizations - the National Movement for the Republic of Kosovo, the Kosovo Liberation Army, and the National Liberation Movement of Kosovo - are operating in Albania. The purpose of their emissaries is to expand the influence of radical organizations in the rest of the region. Radical Islamic foundations and preachers easily recruit young people due to unemployment and poverty in Albania. Between 2012 and 2014, Albanian youth from different cities in Central and Eastern Albania are leaving for Syria. Some mosques go beyond the control of the Muslim community of Albania. Imams from these mosques preach radical Islam, violence and seek to recruit unemployed youths. In Macedonia, the development of radical Islam is facilitated by the political and economic instability. There are footage of Islamic radical organizations on the territory of the country and a lot of financial resources are being invested. On the territory of the Hellenic Republic there is evidence of radicalization of the local Muslim population (part of which is a Roma population that has recently adopted Islam) since 2008, and this process has spread its influence in Bulgaria as well. The country is defined as an area from which radicalization can go to other Balkan countries. The security services in Athens say there are active radical circles that are run by various Islamic groups. The trend for the expansion of radical Islam in Greek territory is confirmed by several important events. The end of 2008 riots broke out. Half of those arrested are Pakistanis and Afghans who claim to have been paid for their participation. In May 2009. There are "demonstrations of the Qur'an" - an event related to the penetration of radical Islam into our southern neighbor. Then, a group of different Islamic countries in Athens came out on the street claiming that the police had defiled the Qur'an during a routine search of the pockets of a Syrian street vendor. Later, it has been shown that a network of NGOs has coordinated and funded the mobilization of illegal immigration in Athens. In October 2010 the mass prayer of about 10,000 Muslims was held in the center of Athens without the necessary permission from the state. Among the organizers there are persons associated with the Muslim Brotherhood and I have from Egypt, who was brought to mark the end of Ramadan. Again there are charges of defiling the Qur'an by the Greek police, which speaks of a recurring scheme of organization and mobilization of several hundred radicalized Muslims. At present, it is believed that there are only 3,000 Muslims in Athens coordinated by certain non-governmental organizations in order to help Islam, not only as a religion but also as a political movement, on the public agenda. In addition, it can be assumed with a high degree of credibility that there are at least 5000 radicalized Islamists in Athens, divided into several groups: led by foreign intelligence services for national purposes; Controlled by international extremist networks; Fragmented groups without leadership but radicalized by nature.

The control and prosecution of Islamist organizations in Bulgaria have been particularly strengthened since 2008-2009. On November 25, 2014, a large-scale action was taken in the Roma neighborhoods of Pazardzhik, Plovdiv, Asenovgrad, Smolyan and Haskovo on suspicion of criminal activity, including preaching of undemocratic ideology, forcibly altering public order and propagating war. In Pazardzhik, the Imam Ahmed Musa Ahmed, the informal leader of the Muslims in the Roma neighborhood of Iztok and the members of his group, was arrested. The allegations are about spreading radical Islam, incitement to interethnic and religious enmity, participation in the unregistered Al Wakf al Islam Islam organization. Seized images and videos have been found in the captured PCs, incriminating leader Ahmed Musa and his followers in the proliferation of

radical Islam. It was also found that in this closed Roma community, transit-travel jihadists for Syria and from Syria to Western Europe were also seen, and attempts were made to recruit militants for an Islamic state. According to the investigation, detainees in Pazardjik are not a "cell" of IDIL and are not funded by it, but are only followers of it and the action has been taken to prevent the creation of such a cell. The parallel operation in Stolipinovo (Plovdiv) is against alleged supporters of ID. At the same time, in the Roma neighborhood "Loznitsa" (Asenovgrad), the building of the prayer house in the Roma neighborhood is subject to a large scale inspection. On the issue of Roma communities and radical Islam, former Chief Mufti Nedim Gendzhev says that the Gypsy neighborhoods have the origin of radical Islam. It has been established that the number of preachers who graduated in Bulgaria is negligible compared to those who received their religious education in the Arab world. Gendzhev insists on the appointment of imams who have graduated from Bulgarian secondary schools. He recommends evicting 90 preachers sent to us by foreign denominations. It also alerts about 450 closed mosques in which everyone can enter, including refugees, and no one will know what is being preached there. According to other experts, it is necessary to closely monitor certain groups among the Roma communities in the cities of Pazardjik, Plovdiv, Nova Zagora and Assenovgrad, where some Muslims are interested in the radical views of Islam. It is also claimed that in these communities the bonding of Roma to elements of radical Islam is linked to financial incentives, for example, to wear a knife and a burka for women and beards in men. According to Chief Prosecutor Sotir Tsatsarov, burqas are a demonstration of dangerous currents in Islam. It is believed that the severe social and economic marginalization of the Roma, their low level of education and the share of illiterates among the young Roma population are at the root of their susceptibility to radical Islamization. The risks of deepening these processes are increasing through propaganda published online. With the help of the Internet, the preaching of radical and extremist ideologies becomes extremely easy and comprehensive. It makes it easier to connect even with the farthest parts of the world.

Extremist groups are very skillfully and purposefully using the Internet space for their propaganda, creating multiple sites, social networking profiles and video clips from which interested people can get the information they want. Used: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, YouTube. The Ask.fm network is very often used, where extremist groups can get more information about their functioning. The WhatsApp and Viber apps details. Soon on the Bulgarian Television - BTV, a documentary "British Bride of Jihad", screenwriter and director Fatima Salaria was screened. The film presents life's facts about how more than 60 young Britons are lured by marriage, social media and religious utopias. In a conversation with friends and family of some of the girls, the film presents the tactics of "brides hunting." In Britain, there are more cases of attracting British youth from radical Islamists. Not a few teenagers become activists of an Islamic state and go to Syria to become wives of IDI fighters. Punctuation is done exclusively through the Internet. Hero is a promoter of IDIL - a young woman from a good Pakistani family who becomes a jihadist. In this show, the model of recruiting and recruiting girls in teenage age - a time when adolescents are looking for themselves, looking for personal realization and self-assertion - is very clearly and specifically outlined. There is a workable scheme that uses religious sects, inhumane movements, secret societies whose actions do not receive critical global visibility, and their threat and victim statistics may outweigh the humanitarian crisis data from wars around the world (excluding direct bombs Strikes) (Romanova, Z., 2017). The problem addressed in the film is very deep - here nationalities, families, education are beyond the limits of invulnerability and protection. Education is a factor that rather reveals opportunities to move to radical actions and ideologies. It is true that there are no such cases reported in Bulgaria at this time, but it is true that the young generation grows, educates and educates through the global Internet network. And all this leads to the conclusion that the building of sustainable productive partnerships between educational institutions, local authorities, religious and ethnic organizations are emerging as the main priorities for counteracting Islam radicalization in the Bulgarian society.

## II. EDUCATIONAL ORIENTATIONS FOR PREVENTION (NEXT CONCLUSION)

In monitoring the organization and structuring of schools in which Bulgarian children are introduced into alternative religious ideas bordering the radical ones, the serious deficits emerge, not only in the Bulgarian school, but also in the Bulgarian family itself. Obviously, the social problem is one of the leading family issues that is being manipulated and used for ideological purposes. The manifestation of these deficits is determined by two key factors:

- family education and school education and education as key to retreating adolescents from various suggestions of radicalization;
- the need for institutional (including school) and inter-institutional preventive action for the radicalization of the younger generation.

The social aspects outline a new pedagogical reality in which the educational interactions are related to the changed social function of the Bulgarian education, which should be activated in a preventive and pro-diffusion way. In modern societies, new movements, migrations, different kinds of communication, and the understanding of fundamental truths are clearly and visibly emerging. Against the backdrop of the widespread

outlook, religious education and education (as far as they are in the Bulgarian school and society) should develop a new intercultural and interreligious thematic system. The time has come for religions in Bulgaria and educational institutions to lay their hands on and accept the useful and vital knowledge of religion to accept a constructive, interactive, inter-religious educational context. In today's global world where radicalism as a form of behavior and action represents a serious threat to the security and life of ordinary people, religious education is an important generator of moral survival. The question of the place of knowledge about religion in modern education is becoming more pluralistic, multiple and preventive. If the "for" and "against," why, "and" religion in school debate has been raised years ago, this issue now has very different educational and supranational dimensions. His metamorphosis is today sought to answer the question of how to incorporate this educational and cultural heritage into a situation of multicultural and multiethnic society; In a situation of threat of radicalism and fundamentalism. Educational guidelines that act preventively and constructively on radicalization can be summarized into two main themes:

- Pedagogical discourse on effective inter-religious dialogue. The effectiveness of interreligious dialogue, in its various educational manifestations, is in fact knowledge - constructive, deeply moral knowledge. That knowledge, which primarily raises the respect for the cultural, social and educational contributions of its own traditional religion, and hence the recognition of these axelological elements in other religions as well. It turns out that the long-standing cohabitation / belief of several religions in one national territory is not a guarantee of developing a dialogue when there is no education. Such cohabitation usually generates a habit, everyday behavioral norms, reconciliation, related to the traditions, rituals, crafts, but not to their reconciliation. Today, such empirical content of tolerant behavior is not an effective form of dialogue and interaction. And under the pressure of the global processes under consideration, this age-old inter-religious coexistence does not resist radical fundamentalist pressure. That is why the fact of religious knowledge is a serious necessity.

- Religious knowledge has a fundamental preventive function. The concept of "religious knowledge" is distinguished from the deep faith of the religious man, from the religious relations in the confessional community, from the faith (as a subject of study). In the context of the prevention that inter-religious dialogue can build, it is perceived that religious knowledge is a modern educational trend that accompanies confessional faith and praxis. It promotes the moral inclusion and education of many generations who have formed far from faith in God and religious morality; Helps to prevent religious radicalization. Religious knowledge builds the civil discourse of religious aeology. It provides an educational opportunity to address a range of legal and social issues; Civil and international law issues; Case studies open to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Convention on Human Rights and a number of up-to-date European documents. The scientific research of contemporary educational practices for the teaching of religious knowledge (Bogomilova, N., 2010) outlines a similar matrix for teaching religious knowledge as an educational philosophy. As a prerequisite for the development of interreligious dialogue not only between religions but also between generations and nationalities (Neminska, R. 2015).

Educational prevention is one of the important guidelines by which adolescents gain knowledge, form skills and attitudes. Today, terrorist and radical groups are looking for their adherents in people who have an education above average, specialists in their own professional field (but remaining value and religion unrelated, disappointed and unrealized). In other words, one of the new goals of school education is to develop and form such attitudes in the younger generation that are conducive to constructive, stabilizing and humane-value behaviors. Such a trend would minimize the destructive application of knowledge, would give the chance to avoid political and religious radicalization associated with engaging youngsters in terrorist activities.

The Counter-Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism Strategy (2015-2020) of the Council of Ministers is an aid to this issue. It states that "responsibilities and activities to prevent and counteract radicalization should be gradually integrated into the day-to-day work of the front-line employees. The potential effect of this process is to increase the likelihood of early identification of radicalized or vulnerable elements in society. Creating conditions for engaging new actors in these efforts, both in state institutions and in the non-governmental and private sectors. The prevention and counteraction of radicalization and terrorism are addressed through a multi-institutional approach. It seeks to interact with representatives of civil and professional organizations, non-governmental and private organizations, incl. Religious and community leaders in the neighborhood. The process is aimed at building working mechanisms for cooperation and dialogue; Developing mechanisms and indicators for identifying, monitoring and assessing the risks of radicalization of certain segments in society; Building an early warning system through the leading role of employees in direct contact with risky groups of the population, Front-line officers - police, teachers, health, social workers. An important place in the Strategy is dedicated to the elaboration of special programs to counteract radicalization in its various forms. The programs are developed jointly with non-governmental organizations, religious and ethnic communities and are aimed both at addressing the vulnerabilities of certain individuals and groups, and in counteracting various extremist ideas and manifestations, Racism, xenophobia, hate crimes, and others. The need and importance of training and raising the knowledge and skills of first-line staff, including teachers, is clearly emphasized. Modern educational

supports, which can help to prevent radical influences and terrorist diversions, are directed to the pursuit and development of critical thinking and judgment through adolescents, education, sports; Raising their awareness of democratic values and offering alternative role models; Perspectives for development and field of action and realization. Counteraction to extremist propaganda, ideas and mechanisms is achieved through educational communication and the expression of counter-arguments and positive messages in interaction with non-governmental organizations and the media.

The minimization of preconditions that create a favorable environment for penetrating and adopting radical and extremist ideas and beliefs is mainly related to the education of adolescents and the positive messages that they master as models of communication; Fostering cultural, inter-ethnic and inter-religious dialogue, as well as more effective efforts to ensure social equality and social inclusion of vulnerable groups (including immigrant communities). Or, as Mr. Rosen Plevneliev, president of Bulgaria, says by 2016 "terrorism is where education has failed."

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