

The Assessment of Individual Risk of Radicalization and Violent Extremism

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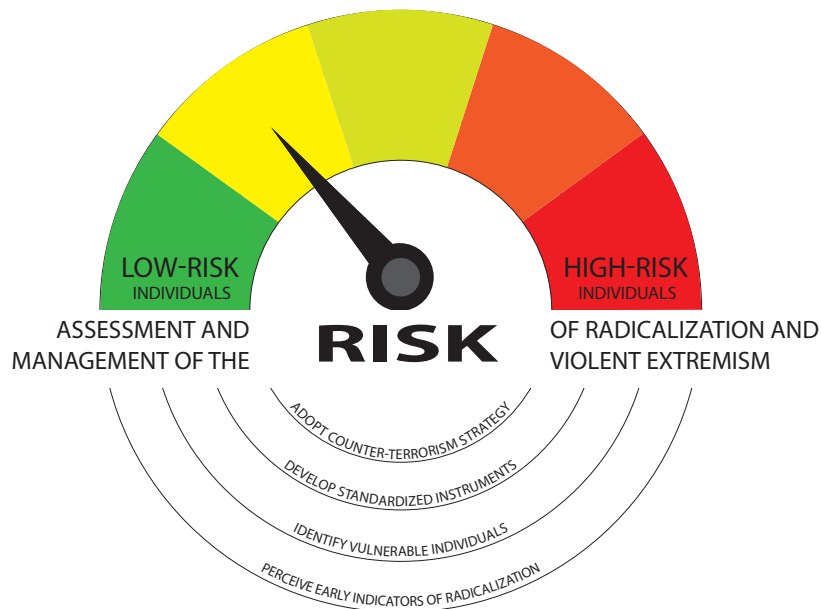
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Abstract: Modern counter-terrorism strategies include, among other preventive mechanisms, assessing the risk of radicalization and violent extremism. Undoubtedly, this is a very important preventive mechanism that should enable the timely identification of potentially dangerous individuals against whom further measures and actions should be taken to prevent them from joining terrorist groups or organizations and carrying out a terrorist attack. Although it is already well known that there is no universal profile of a terrorist, which does not support the efforts to establish reliable instruments for assessing the risk of radicalization and violent extremism, it is the fact that an increasing number of such instruments have been used in risk assessment and positive results are expected from them. The aim of this paper is to indicate the possibilities of practical application of such instruments based on the analysis of their characteristics as well as possible limitations. Such observations could be useful to national practitioners to improve risk assessment of potential threats, as well as to researchers to encourage and develop further research that is certainly a necessity in this domain.

Keywords: radicalization, extremism, individual risk, assessment.

Graphical abstract



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INTRODUCTION

The current assessment shows that the threat of terrorism in the Republic of Serbia is real. Such an assessment is a result of a number of factors, among which are the sensitive security situation in Kosovo and Metohija, the activities of members and sympathizers of radical Islamist movements and organizations, the propaganda activities of radical religious preachers or groups spreading the ideology of violent extremism, the return of terrorist fighters from conflict areas and the danger of terrorist infiltration in the conditions of mass influx of migrants and refugees (Nacionalna strategija za sprečavanje [NSSBPT], 2017). It is estimated that there is a real threat from all types of terrorism within the European Union, especially from the independent activities of terrorists with the use of easily accessible weapons. That is why the policy of the fight against terrorism is especially aimed at improving the prediction of terrorist attacks, protecting vulnerable facilities and improving response to attacks. Particular emphasis is placed on the importance of strategic intelligence, risk and threat assessment of terrorism, defining the best approaches to risk assessment and threat management of radicalized prisoners and convicted terrorists, especially terrorists acting independently (European Commission, 2020). Public opinion polls showed that 77% of respondents expect the EU to intervene more in the fight against terrorism, while 57% believe that the EU activity in this area is insufficient (Schulmeister et al., 2018).

Despite the fact that in the past two years we have witnessed the lowest number of terrorist attacks in Europe in the last decade (around 120), the fact remains that the number of attacks often varies. The year before last 25 people lost their lives, and the victims were chosen as representatives of the population identified as hostile on ideological grounds (Europol, 2021). In order to ensure a timely and adequate response to the process of radicalization which can lead to the manifestation of violent extremism, it is essential that we have valid and reliable instruments for risk assessment and risk management. The basis of such instruments should be the results of empirical research on risk and protection factors. Therefore, the first part of this paper will be dedicated to the nature of the radicalization process and the types of risk factors that condition it. Then, we will be discussing the characteristics of current instruments for assessing the risk of radicalization and violent extremism, all with the aim of determining the possibility of applying such instruments in Serbian national security and criminal investigation practice in terms of the possibility of determining the presence of risk factors, assessing the degree of threat and determining an adequate legitimate response.

RISK FACTORS OF RADICALIZATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Although the term radicalization can be defined in a number of different ways, what seems to be common to these definitions is that radicalization is a socio-psychological process through which individuals form beliefs that it is acceptable to use illegal violence, including the threat and the application of physical violence in order to achieve certain ideological goals, usually of political, religious, economic and social nature. Such a definition of radicalization can be found in the current strategic documents of Serbia and other countries which regulate the policy of prevention and fight against terrorism. In the



strategy of Serbia, it is a process during which an individual finds himself/herself in a situation in which he/she begins to approve of extremist beliefs, accepts violent extremism, i.e. terrorism as a possible and justified way of reaction, with the possibility of sharing values, supporting or participating in terrorist activities at the end of this process, while violent extremism implies the use of violence to achieve political goals, including but not exclusively limited to terrorism (NSSBPT, 2017). In the Finnish Action Plan, “violent radicalization” is a process that puts individuals in a position to manifest various forms of violent extremism, such as using or threatening to use violence against groups or individuals designated as enemies, persuading others to commit acts of violence or justifying them on ideological grounds (Ministry of the Interior, 2020, pp. 20–21). According to the Norwegian Action Plan, radicalization is also defined as a process through which a person increasingly accepts the application of violence to achieve political, ideological or religious goals, being characterized as cognitive development towards a stable one-sided perception of reality in which there is no room for alternative perspectives and perceptions of reality in such a way that violent actions seem necessary and rightful (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2014).

In any case, it is clear that violent extremism represents the end result of the process of radicalization, after which it is entirely legitimate to expect from an individual or a group to participate in various forms of terrorist activities. Taking into consideration that not all forms of radicalization are punishable by law, the precise definition of radicalization and violent extremism is a precondition for explicit determination of the limits of punishability on which the possibility is based of applying legally prescribed activities of state bodies to restrict freedom and rights of citizens with an aim of terrorism prevention. We should bear in mind that today many forms of violent extremism are sanctioned, not just the use or threat of use of violence. Individuals may adopt radical attitudes that are in conflict with the dominant culture which also aim at radical social changes without the use of violence or its justification. In order to designate such attitudes as violent extremism, physical participation of radicalized persons in a terrorist act is not necessary, since it can be manifested through recruitment and indoctrination of others, participation in group activities to achieve terrorist goals, undergoing training for such purposes, travel abroad in order to acquire such training, financing, organizing and otherwise facilitating such trips (Council of Europe, 2015). In the UK, mere downloading and disseminating terrorist organizations’ publications from the Internet without legitimate reasons is penalized (Jones, 2017).

Radicalization can be manifested through various changes in attitudes and behaviour of people, so in that sense we can talk about cognitive and behavioural radicalization. According to the model of the two pyramids presented by McCauley and Moskaleiko (2017), there are different levels of cognitive radicalization, starting with the lowest level of showing inclination towards terrorist goals, but not towards the means by which these goals should be achieved; then we have the next, higher level of justification of the means used by terrorists without a sense of personal obligation to take part in the violent activities of terrorists and the last and highest level of a sense of personal moral obligation to participate in violent activities. These differences in attitudes determine the urgency of preventive intervention. Review of research papers published in the period 2007–2018 indicated the existence of 62 risk factors on the individual level, which are manifested through attitudes, intentions and activities. Among them, sociodemographic factors had the weakest influence on radical intentions and behaviour, while low self-control, the need



for excitement, and especially radical attitudes had the greatest influence (Wolfowicz et al., 2020). Thus, the existence and intensity of cognitive radicalization is imposed as one of the most reliable predictors of violent extremism, and is manifested through statements, messages and interests that indicate intolerance towards other people's attitudes, hatred for the perceived enemies (WE and THEY attitudes), belief in conspiracy theories, hate rhetoric, affinity for absolute solutions such as the abolition of democracy, justification of violence and threats of violence (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2014). On the other hand, changes in behaviour can be indicative to radicalization as well - general appearance, usage of symbols, activities, selection of friends and social networks. Therefore, the signs of behavioural radicalization can be: collecting extremist propaganda material, changes in clothing style, using symbols associated with extremist ideals and organizations, dropping out of school and ceasing to participate in recreational activities, interest in extremism on the Internet and social networks, participating in protests or violent conflicts with other groups, threats and violence as a result of extremism, hate crimes, travel with the aim of strengthening radicalization and contacts with extremists, linking with persons and groups known for violent extremism and membership in such groups and organizations (Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security, 2014).

Although there is no agreement regarding the duration of the radicalization process nor the number of stages in that process, New York City Police Department report indicates that it includes four stages: pre-radicalization, self-identification, indoctrination and jihadization (Silber & Bhatt, 2007). The name of the last stage leads us to the conclusion that the process of radicalization is formulated on the basis of analysis of the characteristics of violent extremists from the Muslim population, which can pose a problem when generalizing conclusions regarding the presence of these stages within other types of extremists (rightists, leftists, ethno-separatist, etc.) and the possible process of labelling the Muslim population due to overemphasizing the dangers of one type of extremism (Christmann, 2012). Although such an approach is suitable for formulating levels of radicalization (and therefore risk), an alternative approach that takes into account the scope and nature of the present risk and protection factors which affect an individual might be more appropriate since it allows a deeper understanding of the course and level of radicalization, as well as assessing the needs of the individuals which are subject of interest with the aim of more efficient risk management.

In literature, there are several classifications of risk factors related to radicalization. According to one of them, three groups of factors stand out: push, pull and personal factors (Vergani et al., 2020). Push factors account for the roots of terrorism, and the most prominent among them are: loss of legitimacy, state repression, relative deprivation, inequality, intergroup tensions, violence (e.g., war), unemployment and inadequate education. Pull factors include: cognitive factors (e.g., propaganda exposure, cultural matching, perception of group efficiency and morality, adventurism), social mechanisms and group processes (fusion of identity and identification, group dynamics, recruitment and leadership), emotional and material stimuli. Personal factors include: individual psychological vulnerabilities (e.g., mental health disorders, depression and trauma), personality traits (e.g., narcissism and impulsivity), demographic characteristics (e.g., age, gender and country of birth) and biographical factors (e.g., psychoactive substance abuse and criminal history) (Vergani et al., 2020).



Often, only the first two groups of factors stand out, because personal factors are listed within the pull factors. In the Report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations, push factors are described as conditions conducive to violent extremism, i.e., the structural contexts from which it arises, namely: lack of socio-economic opportunities; marginalization and discrimination; mismanagement, violations of human rights and the rule of law; prolonged and unresolved conflicts; and radicalization in prisons. Pull factors, which are key in the transformation of ideas and complaints into violent actions, include: individual background and motivations; collective grievances and victimization; distortion and abuse of beliefs, political ideologies and ethnic and cultural differences; leadership and social networks (UN General Assembly, 2015). Dean (2007) reveals the importance of eight factors associated with terrorism at three levels. At the first level (macro context or sociocultural political system) four factors have a strong effect: perception of injustice; enculturated violence; political/diplomatic failure and legitimization of violence. At the second level (micro context or psychological-personal system) there are two factors, psychological identification and psychological intensification, while at the third level (middle context or group-organizational-network system) we witness radicalization of beliefs and dedicated activation. The same author points out that it is not necessary for all eight factors to act in order for someone to become a terrorist. Macro-level factors trigger a process of delegitimization under the influence of which individuals consider the application of violence as an acceptable response to perceived or actual injustices that national or international diplomacy has failed to eliminate. It is a process of enculturated violence that has evolved in the Middle East as a result of frequent experiencing humiliation and hopelessness, and this geopolitical context has nurtured a “culture” of violence which can encourage individuals to make self-sacrifice for the greater good or higher purpose (Dean, 2007, pp. 176–178).

Despite the evident progress in identifying and classifying the factors which make individuals susceptible to radicalization, there is still a lack of empirical data which could help to single out factors which make certain persons more vulnerable. This is indicated by the research of social, psychological and physical factors that make individuals more liable to the influences of Al-Qaeda (Munton et al., 2011). Although in the West such individuals are predominantly male, young and middle-aged, married and possibly parents, in general individuals under the influence of Al-Qaeda have no specific demographic characteristics compared to other members of their communities and are similar in education, socioeconomic status and mental health as the wider population in which they live. The reasons for their participation in violent extremism should be sought in certain religious beliefs that are not the result of deep religious upbringing or education, but are the result of personal crises, exposure to extremist beliefs from close social contact and political ideology, complaints of attacks and injustice done to them personally or to their beloved ones, perceptions of injustice and violence against Muslims around the world, but also in possible benefits such as status, power, fame and honour. Family and friends can provide individuals with a connection to violent extremist groups, and they can also support and strengthen their decision to join them. In addition, group dynamics, strong interpersonal connections, charismatic leaders and individuals can play a vital role in radicalization and recruitment, with mosques and prisons being key places for recruitment, while educational institutions, cafes and bookstores are mostly meeting places (the Internet can play an important role) (Munton et al., 2011). A survey of the characteristics of foreign terrorist



fighters, published in July 2017, also shows that circles of friends and social networks are the most dynamic and powerful recruitment mechanism, while the Internet plays far less significant role as an independent source of radicalization than it was previously generally regarded. This research showed that economic factors, especially the opportunity to improve the economic situation, are more relevant in the recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters than it was the case in previous years. Marginalization creates vulnerability and this facilitates recruitment by terrorist organizations (UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, 2017).

A study of the characteristics of lone terrorists conducted by the US Federal Bureau of Investigation in the period 1972–2015 also showed that it is not possible to single out one characteristic or factor nor a specific combination of factors as a cause of engagement of individuals in targeted violence (Richards et al., 2019). The decision and ability to use violence as a means of achieving an ideological goal is influenced by a complex mix of personal motivators, external influences, internal stressors, levels of abilities and possibilities. Yet, most offenders exhibited a series of worrying behaviours or statements before engaging in violent action. Most of them were not isolated and had family, peers or online contacts who were in a position to notice the worrying behaviour. Although these observers were not always able to fully contextualize their observations, more than half of those who noticed the worrying behaviour made some effort to intervene or express their concerns. In this way, research and practical experience emphasize the importance of educating potential observers about warning signs and providing mechanisms through which they can point out their observations (Richards et al., 2019).

Conditions conducive to engagement in violent extremism are particularly present in the transition from adolescence to adulthood, and research conducted by Carlsson et al. (2020) highlighted the importance of three stages in the process of such involvement: weakening of informal social control, interacting with people close to extreme groups and creating meaning in relation to the group and somebody's identity that results in the individual's willingness and ability to engage in group activities, including violence. Therefore, it is justifiably observed that non-violent family ties, non-violent peers or attachment to society are factors of protection against different types of violent extremism (Puigvert et al., 2020). This is largely confirmed by a study of the correlates of violent political extremism in the United States, which found that the absence of stable employment, radical peers, a history of mental illness and a criminal past have a significant influence on participation in this type of extremism, although it is surprising to note that the influence of radical family members has not been confirmed (LaFree et al., 2018). Given that 40% of the world population is made up of young people under the age of 24, and that the number of young people aged 15 to 24 is the highest in history (1.1 billion), they must be the core part of global efforts to prevent violent extremism (UN Office of Counter-Terrorism, 2017). Although there is no coherent view on the relationship between the educational level of young people and their radical beliefs or participation in terrorist acts, it is not surprising to observe that there is an increasing risk of conflicts in countries with low levels of education since unequal access to education often becomes a source of tensions which lead to radicalization, conflicts, violence and rebellion (Sas et al., 2020). Although the research results indicate the importance of psychological and social factors for the development of radicalization, the practical operationalization of the concept of radicali-



zation may focus on the individual, ideology and group, neglecting structural factors and efforts to understand the causes of the phenomenon (Lalić & Šikman, 2018). This makes it difficult to understand the real motives that drive radicalization, while the end effects of the formal reaction are at the best limited to the immediate prevention of a terrorist act with no greater chance for success of the deradicalization process. Therefore, in addition to the cognitive and behavioural signs of radicalization, it is necessary to assess the essential sources of commitment to terrorist goals in order to determine the most appropriate approaches for the process of deradicalization taking into account the needs of the radicalized person and protective factors.

CURRENT APPROACHES IN ASSESSING THE INDIVIDUAL RISK OF RADICALIZATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM

The need to assess the risk of radicalization and violent extremism in the practice of the competent authorities in Serbia arises from the provisions of its national strategy for combating terrorism. The first area of the strategy (out of four) aimed at preventing radicalization envisages strengthening the safety culture of society, promoting values, early identification of factors conducive to radicalization, deterring young people from terrorism, especially through the Internet and other public media, and deradicalization and reintegration of the already radicalised persons (NSSBPT, 2017). Risk and needs assessment entail the process of systematic collection and interpretation of information about an individual in order to supply data which will provide a base for specially trained professionals so that they can assess the likelihood of their participation in harmful activities, the nature and severity of damage, as well as their needs that can reduce risk (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, 2020). There are several approaches to risk assessment of violent offenders: unstructured clinical assessment, actuarial approaches, and structured professional assessment (RTI International, 2018). Unstructured clinical assessment is based on the discretionary assessment of the assessor, which raises concerns about possible subjectivity and reduced transparency in the assessment. Actuarial approaches are highly structured and are based on predicting the risk of recidivism using statistical analysis techniques, but are less applicable to extremists due to their limited number. That is why structured professional assessment is most often used when assessing the risk of extremists because it combines the discretionary assessment of assessors and a set of the most important risk factors identified through scientific research (Copeland & Marsden, 2020).

The last decade has witnessed the intense development of instruments for structured professional risk assessment of violent extremism. Depending on the target group, some instruments are intended for individuals who have not yet committed terrorist acts (non-convicted persons) with a special subset of instruments for identifying independent attackers, while other instruments are intended for convicted terrorists to assess risk when making decisions on parole and post-release measures, with a subset of instruments designed to assess the risk of foreign fighter returnees. As examples within the first group, we can name Islamic radicalization 46 (IR-46), Identifying vulnerable people (IVP) and Terrorist radicalization assessment protocol 18 (TRAP-18), while Extremism risk guid-



ance 22+ (ERG 22+), Multi-level guidelines version 2 (MLG v2), and Violent extremism risk assessment version 2 revised (VERA-2R) stand out among the instruments that are used after the commission of terrorist acts. The IR-46 instrument was created as part of a Dutch police project, and has been used since 2010 to detect early signs of radical Islamist behaviour before committing a crime and to detect protective factors (Lloyd, 2019). With a shorter training, it can be used by practitioners from the police, intelligence services, prison services, probation services, mental health services, prosecutor's offices, and youth protection services. It was especially used for assessments by multi-agency teams in "safe houses". At about the same time, the application began of the IVP instrument developed by a group of psychologists from the University of Liverpool to assess the level of radicalization of an individual before committing a crime (Cole et al., 2010). It can be used by officials in the entire public sector without any special training. It does not include an assessment of protective factors for risk management purposes, but it is a classic checklist for detecting vulnerable people. Criteria for identifying vulnerable persons include the following: cultural and/or religious isolation; isolation from family; risk taking behaviours; sudden change in religious practice; violent rhetoric; negative peer influences; isolated peer group; hate rhetoric; political activism; basic paramilitary training, and travel/residence abroad. In addition to these criteria, the following behaviours are highlighted in the red category: death rhetoric; being a member of an extremist group; contact with known recruiters/extremists; advanced paramilitary training, and overseas combat. The authors themselves indicate that the aim of this instrument is to enable agencies to provide British citizens with the necessary skills to protect themselves from the influence of those who want to recruit them for violence, and not to negatively label people as "violent extremists" or "terrorists" (Cole et al., 2010).

The TRAP-18 instrument has been used since 2015 to assess the risk of individuals' participation in ideologically motivated violence before committing an offence, by detecting early warning signs in their behaviour. With the prior short training, the assessors are primarily law enforcement and security professionals in charge of the fight against terrorism, and it is especially used by experts in the fight against terrorism in North America and Europe. Protective factors are not covered, but are thought to exist in the absence of risk factors (Lloyd, 2019). The instrument has eight proximal warning behaviours and ten distal characteristics based on which risk is assessed and the intensity of monitoring and active case management is determined. Proximal warning behaviours are: pathway (careful planning and preparation); fixation (preoccupation with a person or goal); identification (e.g., with previous attackers); novel aggression (violence that has nothing to do with the planned attack, but is a test of personal ability); energy burst (increase in frequency and variety of target attacks); leakage (communicating the intention to a third party); last resort (necessity of violence as a signal of despair), and direct communication of the threat (to the target of the attack or police) (Meloy et al., 2012). Distal characteristics include: personal grievance and moral outrage, ideological framework, failure to affiliate with extremists or other groups, dependence on the virtual community, thwarting of occupational goals, changes in thinking and emotions, failure of sexual intimate pair-bonding, mental disorder; creativity and innovation (in attack planning), and history of criminal violence (Meloy & Yakeley, 2014). Although research has shown significant reliability and validity of this instrument due to insufficient representation of protective factors, further research is needed, and the use of other instruments such as ERG 22+, VERA-2R, HCR-



20 v3 (Historical-Clinical-Risk Management – 20 version 3) and Psychopathy Checklist – Revised (PCL-R) is recommended (Guldimann & Meloy, 2020).

The ERG 22+ instrument has been used since 2011 in prisons and probation services in the UK as a tool for structured professional risk and needs assessment of people convicted of terrorism and other crimes resulting from violent extremism, regardless of their ideological affiliation, gender and organization. The subject of the assessment is the engagement of persons, intentions and abilities based on 22 risk indicators (assessors may take into account additional indicators that they consider important), and each factor is assessed as strongly present, partly present or not present. Access to the instrument is limited to psychologists and probation officers who can apply it after a short training (Lloyd, 2019). The ERG was created by two forensic psychologists, commissioned by the National Offender Management Service, mostly based on practice with Al-Qaeda-inspired prisoners. Although intended for convicts, the same indicators are used to assess the vulnerability of non-convicts, called the Vulnerability Assessment Framework. Because of that, as well as due to the dominant focus of risk indicators on current attitudes and opinions of persons without sufficient insight into their content, context, past and future (which is a characteristic of HCR20 and VERA-2R instruments), this instrument has been criticized (Augestad Knudsen, 2018). Although initially based on a small number of case studies and a limited number of studies, an analysis of a sample of 171 convicted extremists nevertheless did show that ERG 22+ is promising as a tool for risk assessment and needs formulation. Five areas have theoretical meaning (identity and external influence; motivation and ideology; ability; criminal behaviour; status and personal influence), while two require improvement (mental health and excitement; camaraderie and adventurism). The generalization of the conclusions from this study is hampered by the fact that it included only extremists identified as Islamists and a small number of females in the sample (Powis et al., 2019, 2021).

The MLG instrument was developed by a group of psychologists to assess the risk of participation in group violence (including terrorism) of persons over the age of 14 and risk management, before and after perpetrating a criminal offence (Hart et al., 2017). It contains 16 risk factors that are classified into four groups: individual, individual-group, group and group-social factors. Their presence is assessed on a three-point scale (absent, partially/possibly present and present), and their relevance on the scale is low, moderate or high. The instrument is in open access mode and can be used by judicial, security and health care officials without prior training. It is suitable for assessing the risk of various forms of group violence, not just terrorism. Its structure is modelled in accordance with the third version of the HCR-20 instrument, which is assigned to assess the risk of violence in general (Hart et al., 2017). Apart from this instrument, the VERA-2R instrument is regarded as an example of a very useful instrument. Its first version was introduced in 2009 and is available to the public without special training, while access to the second and current third licensed version is limited and requires prior training for its implementation (Hart et al., 2017). It is used in Europe, North America, Australia and Asia to assess and manage the risk of violent extremists before and after perpetrating criminal offences, and can be used by the police, security and intelligence services, health institutions, judicial authorities and law enforcement agencies. Risk indicators are derived from two previous tools for structured risk assessment of violence in adolescents and adults (HCR-20 version



2 and Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth - SAVRY) with the addition of recognized characteristics of persons associated with violent extremism and terrorism. It determines the extent of the presence of risk factors and protection factors, and practitioners are recommended a combination of general violence risk assessment tools and violent extremism risk assessment tools (Logan & Sellers, 2021). The current third version from 2016 contains 34 indicators related to violent extremism, classified into five areas: beliefs, attitudes and ideology; social context and intention; past, activities and capacity; commitment and motivation, and indicators of protection, that is mitigation of risk. There are also 31 additional indicators of general violence, radicalization, jihadism and terrorism, which are divided into five areas: criminal past; personal history; radicalization; personality traits; and psychiatric characteristics (Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2018). The presence of each indicator and the overall level of risk is assessed on a three-point scale (low, medium or high).

DISCUSSION

The analysis of available domestic literature shows that the importance of training and the need for its implementation by the police and other institutions for the risk assessment of radicalization and violent extremism is recognized in Serbia, but it still seems insufficient to encourage the development of an authentic instrument for domestic needs or opting for the existing instruments that are applied in other European countries. With the support of the OSCE Mission within the project “Support to the Prevention of Violent Extremism and Terrorism in Serbia” a guide was developed for professionals who often come into direct contact with citizens in their activities (educational, social and health workers, police officers, religious leaders, tax officials and other inspectors) with the aim to help them perceive early indicators of radicalization. These indicators are described through changes in communication and relationships with other people, changes in physical appearance, behaviour, online activities and living space (Vidaković et al., 2020). Such guidelines provide specific guidance to practitioners in the field to identify vulnerable individuals, however, application of specially defined instruments is essential for risk assessment and management. This is indicated by the incentives for the development of a comprehensive integrative theory of the development of radicalization starting from three general approaches in studying this process and their concepts (approach focused on structural contexts, approach focused on risk factors and approach to development or flow of radicalization) (Jugović & Živaljević, 2021). The development of a standardized instrument (one or more of them) for the assessment and management of the risk of radicalization by members of the police and other relevant services in Serbia is still pending and as in other countries it will not be an easy task. This task should be the result of the analysis of experiences in the application of similar instruments in other countries and the result of research on risk and protection factors in identified radicalised persons in Serbia and its surroundings. In this way, indicators of radicalization specific to domestic conditions can be more precisely defined, bearing in mind that terrorist acts have not been carried out in Serbia, following the example of attacks conducted in European cities in the last two decades.



Research on the moving forces of these phenomena in Serbia has played an important role in assessing the risk of radicalization and violent extremism. Research conducted by Center for Free Elections and Democracy (CeSID) (2016) indicates that the main drivers of radicalization are reflected in social fragmentation within ethnic groups and lack of opportunities for young people, especially the role of global and regional policies that contribute to conflict development. Young Bosnians and Albanians perceive religious discrimination, while the minority population, as well as the majority, perceive themselves as victims of injustice. The banalization of violence in the media was not perceived as an important risk factor, while a sense of relative security in the local environment was perceived as an important factor of protection. Survey of the views of people in Sandzak area, conducted by the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights in 2016, showed that almost 20% of respondents consider the use of violence to defend their religion justified, while 1 in 10 respondents justify going abroad to participate in a war. The survey highlighted unemployment as the biggest problem in the community (40%), a markedly low level of trust in neighbours and representatives of institutions (5% in teachers, police and local government and 2% in the judiciary), as well as perceptions of discrimination in a not so small number of respondents (e.g., religious affiliation 14%, political 13% and ethnic 11%) (Ilić et al., 2016). Although the number of violent extremists in Serbia is not large, it is estimated that the deteriorating economic situation, the spread of corruption and the poor work of institutions can encourage joining extreme ideologies and groups of those who are unable to achieve their life goals (Petrović & Stakić, 2018).

Domestic experiences in countering terrorism are mainly related to ethno-nationalist and separatist terrorist activities in Kosovo and Metohija, but the migrant crisis raises concerns about the spread of violent extremism throughout the Western Balkans (Mijalković & Popović Mančević, 2020; Đurđević & Vuković, 2016). Also, terrorist attacks in neighbouring Bosnia and Herzegovina before 2012 and a large number of its citizens who subsequently travelled to Syria and Iraq to join the terrorist organization Islamic State indicated the danger of spreading radicalization (Šikman, 2020). It is estimated that approximately one thousand fighters from the Balkans joined terrorist organizations in the battlefields in the Middle East, while on the other hand stopping the spread of violent extremism was hampered by lack of proper and quality preventive measures, inexperience and poor results in trying to deradicalize extremists (Simeunović, 2018). In the Western Balkans, the role of members of the police, intelligence services, religious organizations and the media is seen as very important for recognizing extreme ideologies, groups and processes (Prislan et al., 2018). In this process, it is essential to enable continuous partnership cooperation of police officers with other local entities, such as schools, social and health services, which can provide information to the police on the radicalization of individuals. Improving the community-oriented model of police practice is a logical step in effectively assessing the risk of any form of violence, not just violent extremism (Milidragović et al., 2020). It is a question of time when the need to prescribe procedures for mandatory assessment of the immediate danger of violent extremism will be recognized, modelled on the Law on Prevention of Domestic Violence, which establishes the obligation to assess the immediate risk of domestic violence and circumstances which ought to be administered (Zakon o sprečavanju nasilja u porodici, 2016).



The existing instruments for assessing the risk of violent extremism which have already been mentioned provide an opportunity to single out the circumstances that should be taken into account by assessing officials, but despite research into risk factors for radicalization and violent extremism and their systematization in risk assessment instruments, we get the impression that practitioners in the field (in Serbia and abroad) are still insufficiently familiar with these factors, which can make it difficult to identify and monitor potential attackers. Such an observation is present even in those European countries where an early warning system for a potential terrorist threat has been established, most notably the Netherlands¹ and the United Kingdom, which pay special attention to training local officials to detect such threats. Sufficiently precise risk indicators are not defined and this leaves much room for discretionary appraisal when assessing a threat, and incorrect assessment can create a sense of discrimination, undermine police legitimacy and ultimately encourage radicalization itself (Van de Weert & Eijkman, 2020a). In these countries, in addition to the police, a significant role in risk detection is given to other officials, such as security coordinators, youth workers, social workers, health workers, and even teachers. Local security officials emphasize violent rhetoric that calls for intolerance and discrimination as the most common risk indicator, but in practice in most cases such speech does not result in acts of violence or the intention to commit or incite violence (Van de Weert & Eijkman, 2020b), which clearly indicates the need to identify other indicators contained in current risk assessment instruments.

The development of deradicalization programs and their importance in encouraging the development of instruments for assessing and managing the risk of radicalization and violent extremism should not be overlooked. However, the question arises during the practical implementation of the deradicalization program as to how realistic it is to expect activity holders in the field to assess risk in accordance with the guidelines for the application of the existing risk assessment instruments? It is not certain that a community police officer or other local officer will always be able to directly apply a risk assessment instrument, especially if their application requires special training. However, indicators that are easier to observe, which are contained in instruments whose application does not require prior training and which are designed to identify people vulnerable to radicalization before the crime is committed (e.g., the IVP instrument), may be useful to field officials. It is realistic to expect that the assessment will be carried out by specially designated police, state or local officials, due to the need to collect additional data from other entities and their records, and often from the need to interview family members or friends of the person at risk, provided that they are willing to cooperate. Separation of competencies for risk assessment from competencies for conducting preventive interventions towards a person at risk is justified due to the need to build and maintain a professional relationship based on trust with a convicted person who is set free and in the process of reintegration within the local community. These are the cases of risk assessment for the person covered by the deradicalization program, in which the role of members of various professions (teachers, social workers, medical staff) is important. Nevertheless, the role of these professionals is to provide data and point out all relevant observations to the person assigned to assess the risk of violent extremism, in order to determine the need to implement new and adapt the

¹ The police officers enter their observations in a special Report on Countering Terrorism, Extremism and Radicalization, which is available to the intelligence and security service, the prosecutor's office and the immigration service.



existing preventive interventions (Walkenhorst et al., 2020). The still insufficient amount of empirical research on risk factors indicates that the knowledge, experience and expertise of assessors remain critical for the identification of high-risk individuals (Copeland & Marsden, 2020). Although it seems that terrorist threats are difficult to predict, one should keep in mind all those factors that are unequivocally related to the possibility of exhibiting violent extremism, and especially signs that indicate the will to commit a crime and preparatory action. This is also indicated by the experience after the terrorist attack in Vienna on November 2, 2020. The attempt to procure ammunition for an automatic rifle in Slovakia without authorization, observation of extreme strengthening of religious beliefs of the attacker during parole and posting a photo of the attacker with a weapon on Instagram a few hours before the attack unfortunately did not encourage a detailed investigation to revoke parole and prevent a terrorist act (Mehra & Coleman, 2020).

CONCLUSIONS

The need for timely identification of high-risk individuals, who are so radicalized that they can be reasonably expected to carry out terrorist attacks or provide support to attackers with the use of risk assessment tools is sufficiently recognized by the scientific and professional public. Although efforts aimed at defining risk assessment instruments in the last two decades have led to visible results, that is the emergence of a larger number of such instruments, this process is still ongoing and is now focused mainly on researching their validity, reliability and usefulness. The still insufficient base of empirical research on risk factors points to the need to improve the existing instruments. Expressed complexity of the process of radicalization, which is manifested through the interaction of several risk and protection factors at the individual, group and social level makes it impossible to predict terrorist attacks with complete certainty. However, the existing knowledge and risk indicators in current assessment tools, which are specifically used in Western European countries that face a greater terrorist threat, provide a good basis for identifying people vulnerable to radicalization, especially those who manifest certain forms of incriminated extremism without the use of physical violence. Improving the existing training of police and other officers whose participation is unavoidable in deradicalization processes, introducing new trainings and their continuous implementation should enable the recognition of warning signs of cognitive and behavioural radicalization, so that adequate preventive measures can be taken in a timely manner. These processes are closely connected to the efforts aimed at defining a standardized instrument (one or more of them) for the assessment and management of the risk of radicalization by professionals in Serbia, as well as with the development of deradicalization programs. The development of such an instrument should be the result of analysis of experiences in the application of similar tools in other countries and the result of research on risk and protection factors in identified radicalized persons in Serbia and its immediate surroundings.



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