THE NEW DYNAMICS OF RADICALIZATION:
FROM THE BALKANS TO THE MIDDLE EAST

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The New Dynamics of Radicalization: From the Balkans to the Middle East

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INTRODUCTION

The civil war in Syria has created many significant ripple effects both regionally and internationally. The war's spillover effect and the rising radicalization that has manifested in the foreign fighters phenomena have alarmed all regional and international powers. The conflict, now in its fifth year, has inadvertently increased radicalism to the point where it has become a significant threat to the national security of countries in the Middle East and the Balkans.

Identifying the causes of radicalization to prevent its spread is the most urgent priority on the to-do list of most countries. Who is an extremist? How should we frame radicalization? What is the main motivation behind it? Does it differ from one case to another? What kind of radicalization is considered threatening? How should it be prevented? Are counterterrorism policies efficient and sufficient? Is prison the best tool for de-radicalization? How has increased radicalism in the Balkans and Middle East affected the security of these regions and what can governments and societies do to help curb radicalism and violent extremism in their countries?

The Daily Sabah Centre for Policy Studies hosted several events and round table meetings to discuss and analyze these questions. Framing the problem is necessary to find concrete solutions. Understanding what radicalization is and the roots of its process are as crucial as analyzing its outcomes. In this regard, a panel discussion on "The New Dynamics of Radicalization: From the Balkans to the Middle East" was organized by DS Centre for Policy Studies in conjunction with the Political Economic and Social Research Foundation (SETA) and the Kosovar Center for Security Studies (KCSS). It took place on Feb. 1, 2016 in Istanbul. The panel touched on many key issues, including the challenges in defining radicalism, the theoretical approaches to radicalism and the issue of foreign fighters. The panel also discussed how state and non-state actors can coordinate their efforts to prevent young people from joining groups like DAESH. The panelists included Tuncay Kardaş of the Middle East Institute at Sakarya University in Istanbul; Florian Qejaha, co- founder and executive director of KCSS; Ömer Behram Özdemir, an associate professor at Sakarya University who focuses on Turkish foreign fighters, and Skender Perteshi of the KCSS. The event was moderated by Murat Yeşiltaş of SETA.

Pınar Kandemir, Director
DS Centre for Policy Studies

> Radicalization, is defined as supporting or perpetrating the acts of violence which aim to bring permanent changes to society by threatening the existing order or political structure.

Murat Yeşiltaş - A new wave of radicalisation and the phenomenon of foreign fighters in tandem with the former have been a burning issue once more within the context of the Syrian Civil War. The emergence and spread of Daesh as a formidable armed actor in both Iraq and Syria contributed to the attraction of foreign fighters to a great extent. As Turkey is a transit point for foreign fighters to enter the conflict zone mainly in Syria and Kosovo is the home country of a number of foreign fighters, the state and experience of both countries deserve further scrutiny. In this sense, we have distinguished experts from both countries to touch upon these issues.

Our first speaker is Dr. Tuncay Kardaş. He is Associate Professor of international relations at the Middle East Institute of Sakarya University. He received his BA and MA degrees from Bilkent University in Ankara and his PhD from the Department of International Politics at Aberystwyth University in Wales in 2006. He is currently serving as the Deputy Director of the Middle East Institute of Sakarya University. He is teaching courses on global politics of security, critical terrorism studies, IR Theory. His research focuses boradly on Sociology of Security, Foreign Fighters, the ISIS, Critical Security Studies, security governmentality, visual semiotics and Turkish Foreign Policy.

Tuncay Kardaş - I would like to talk today about some of the basic assumptions or underlying features of radicalization and de-radicalization. Of course the concept of radicalization is highly contested. Some of the scholars are even saying that it is actually misguided to focus on one-dimensional studies such as radicalization and de-radicalization but my hunch, and my guess, is that it is still important not least because of the events going on in many parts of the world.

Of course there are many types of radicalization but let's start with the definition of radicalization. Radicalization, or violent radicalization, is defined as supporting or perpetrating the acts of violence which aim to bring permanent changes to society by threatening the existing order or political structure. So the main aspect of that definition is supporting acts of violence, either ideologically or physically, with an aim to change the mainstream aspects of society and political structure. This definition certainly brings to mind many other questions rather than clearing the way for better understanding. Immediately when we talk about radicalization we should think about this question: Radicalization in relation to what? What kind of radicalization is considered threatening and why are states or people so obsessed with this idea? It is in the fabric of so many different historical transformations - for example the French

Revolution - and in the experience of state formations in different parts of the world. Revolution itself is a radicalization process. So having accepted this, we should keep in mind that this definition bears into it a bias, a liberal bias which is to say that values of liberal democracy and freedom of speech are almost always contested within or outside of this framework. So having defined it in this way we should proceed to the concept of a radical individual. A radical individual is the one who is profoundly in the business of, or desires, a radical sociopolitical change in the context in which he or she lives.

There are obviously two types of radicalization, *behavioral radicalization* and *cognitive radicalization* and in the literature these two are fiercely contested. Some people believe that the focus should be on cognitive radicalization. Others claim and believe th at the opposite is true: that it should be behavioral radicalization that we should focus on. In one way or another, under the contours of this basic definitional framework I have just given, I would like to proceed with some of the theoretical approaches of radicalization. There are obviously so many different approaches in the literature but my take on it is that we should, and can, boil it down to four or five main approaches. The first one we should start with is the sociological

approach to radicalization that focuses on the economic, social and political marginalization in a given society. This looks at how an individual goes through an experience of marginalization and how a lack of education or the experience of living in a sub-culture or counter-culture contributes to radicalization. For example if a radical Muslim lives in a European capital, the sociological approach would be the one that asks the question "How is this individual subject to hyper secularization through institutional or ideological mechanisms in his or her society?". Racism, discrimination and isolation are all macro sociological factors that contribute to the radicalization of this individual.

Obviously, as I mentioned, there are other approaches. Another one is the psychological approach which discards sociological factors in explaining how individuals are radicalized. The proponents of this approach suggest that we should give importance to personal motivations instead of sociological motivations. These include a wide range of psychological motivations from revenge seeking to status seeking. Of course, because we are dealing with psychological factors, it is very difficult to come up with a pattern of radicalization within this scholarship because psychological factors say a lot about individual differentiation, from one case to another, and so it is difficult to

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come up with an explanatory framework. For example, here an individual may seek revenge and he or she may find a way to funnel his or her anger towards leaders of his or her society or outside societies if he or she wants prestige or reputation. Thus, he or she may join these groups, not with the aim of correcting the wrongs of society, but instead to satisfy his or her own desires.

Let me also talk briefly about the other approaches. One is the *social network approach*. This approach is a little more dynamic than the sociological or psychological approaches. Its basic trust is to suggest that individuals get radicalized when they join a small network of people. Inter-group social pressures, friendship, solidarity and indoctrination would all be basic factors behind radicalization, according to this approach. This model looks at the nature of relationships within the group instead of focusing on macro sociological or micro psychological factors. Here it is who you know and not what you believe. This is not a top-down approach but is instead a bottom-up explanation to radicalization. Here, because individuals use their personal connections or kinship, they are much freer in their planning and their actions. Finally, according to this approach things like same age grouping, shared location and a common living experience within the same sociological

and cultural fabric will contribute to the radicalization process. Of course the form of radicalization changes according to different cases.

Another approach is known as 'framing the problem' or the *definition approach*. This approach posits that neither the sociological nor the psychological nor the social network approach is satisfactory when it comes to explaining why people become radicalized. According to this approach it is important to inquire how individuals frame, or are exposed to the framing of, certain problems. Here the communication style, the language, the discourse are all more important than macro sociological or micro psychological factors. What is important here is to look at how problems are framed. Obviously the context may change. For example, it would be much more influential if you framed a problem within a small, influential social network than say in a school. So the place, time and context are all important for communicating but the main aspect of radicalization remains communication and how you frame the problem. For example if there is what we call 'framing harmony' between the individual (the target) and the host, then radicalization becomes easier. Obviously grievances, angers, economic hardships are also factors that are integrated in communication but those factors do not by themselves determine the basic

aspect of radicalization. What determines the basic aspect of radicalization is how you frame those problems. If you make a connection between these problems and an individual's life experience, then sociological factors become more important. How someone conceptualizes his or her place in society is important. Obviously those four basic approaches are in and of themselves important and our common sense would tell us that the right answer lies in a combination of those four factors. Unfortunately it is not easy to find a perfect balanced combination of these factors, not only for empirical reasons but also for theoretical reasons. Once you focus on the social network approach it means that psychological or sociological factors must take a back seat in your explanation. If you focus on the problem definition approach instead of the social network approach it means that it is the communication, the discourse or the kind of grammar which is used in society that is important, rather than whether or not a social group is small or big. Thus, there are internal barriers or obstacles in having a kind of mixed approach.

De-radicalization is related to the concept, and efforts to understand, what radicalization means. If you approach the issue from a sociological perspective, the kind of menu you come up with will differ from the one you come up with if you take a psychological approach. The first step

for de-radicalization is understanding what kind of approach is taken up by the agency or society or political group. The second step involves making a distinction between two different concepts: cognitive and behavioral radicalization. Here we have two main approaches: *the Anglo-Saxon approach*, or *American approach* if you will, and the *European approach*. The Anglo Saxon approach focuses on behavioral radicalization and claims that to de-radicalize individuals, we should look at how people are getting involved in extreme behavior. Whereas in the European approach what matters is not the end result, or the action, but the belief structure or an individual's extreme views. It is very important in the European view to focus on how individuals can be distracted by radical ideologies and belief systems and how to prevent them from getting involved in these ideologies. In the Anglo-Saxon approach, because the emphasis is on the behavior or action, it is almost a taboo to question the belief system of the individual. It is often an untouchable area. Following this approach, you cannot probe the ideas or views of an individual, even if you have set out to do so with good intentions. Thus in the Anglo-Saxon system, because you are focused on the behavior, you have no other option but to prevent radicalization at the gate, whenever the action itself is committed. Here counterterrorism policies, low enforcement policies, and

policing measures are more likely to surface. In the European system, because emphasis is on cognitive rather than behavioral radicalization, de-radicalization is thought to be related to alternative community building, the distraction of individuals from extreme views or preventing them from getting exposed to radical ideologies like Islamist or leftist ideologies. It is important in this approach to get involved before the individual gets involved in the action. Of course, each approach has its benefits and its downsides. In the American approach, as I said, studying the internal thinking processes of individuals is off limits. You cannot, in the name of the law or in the name of preventing radicalization, get involved in what an individual thinks. However, in the European case it is more acceptable to do so for the sake of say, democracy building, or to provide sufficient incentives to individuals to respect the value of freedom of speech even if it conflicts with an their own views. Of course it is easier to infringe individual civil rights in the European case than it is in the American case. The results of these approaches to de-radicalization obviously differ in different parts of the world.

To sum up, I think that, given the latest events, it is obvious that neither the European nor the Anglo-Saxon approach to de-radicalization is sufficient or satisfactory for law-enforcement officials or politicians to find a way forward. Not least because individuals are clever enough to find ways to escape from those Anglo-Saxon ways of de-radicalization or the European ones. Instead of finding or compartmentalizing one approach over the other, we should focus on the specific cases and be sensitive to the local, individual contexts rather than have a general framework. The kind of de-radicalization policy I am promoting here would obviously be much more difficult to follow but given the latest events of European terror acts I think we don't have any other options. Increasingly, we are seeing that radicalized individuals are sophisticated at hiding their real intentions and their plans. Intentions and planning are two areas where neither the Anglo-Saxon nor the European approach is successful. Hopefully we will have some more time to open up a discussion on what I have presented. Thank you.

Murat Yeşiltaş - Thank you very much for that theoretical introduction, it was very fruitful. Our second speaker is Florian Qejaha. He is the executive director of Kosovar Centre for Security Studies. He served previously as the head of operations between 2008-2011. He has been an assistant lecturer at various universities in Kosovo. Florian is the author of several scientific publications in the security field as well as author and co-author of several local and international publications regarding the field of security, rule of law and regional cooperation. He is an international consultant on security reform, rule of law and good governance cooperating with leading international governmental and non-governmental organizations. He is frequently invited to the prestigious research events in the Capasto Kosovo Centre for Security Studies as a senior researcher. Between 2005 and 2007 he worked at the international relations office at the University of Pristina as a coordinator. He is going to talk about the experience of the Western Balkans. His presentation title is "State of Play of Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans: Experience in Prevention and Disengagement". The floor is yours, Florian.

Florian Qejaha - Today I will touch on what I call violent extremism in the Western Balkans from an empirical perspective. Mr. Tuncay has explained very well the conceptual aspect of radicalization and extremism and I agree that there are different dilemmas on how to frame radicalization.

As you know, the Balkans is a small region compared to Turkey so everything is connected and most of the countries in the

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region are part of the former Yugoslavia. We, as a think tank, have launched a research assessment on the causes and consequences of violent extremism with a special focus on our citizens' involvement in the Middle East conflicts, namely in Syria and Iraq. Let me briefly explain the methodology. We first wanted to identify the problem because this was more or less a taboo topic in the Balkans in the sense that, while we have witnessed a quick widespread in violent extremism, there was one part of society that was too afraid to deal with it and another that was simply ignoring it. Because we are a post-conflict society we are subject to different ways of practicing religion, be it towards the eastern way of practicing or the western way. What we did is we interviewed people who had returned from Syria and Iraq, up to six of them, and we interviewed the families of the people that have their sons or daughters in Syria and Iraq. We also collected public opinion surveys because we wanted to combine qualitative and quantitative data. With this information we wrote a report, which you can find on our website.

If we want to identify causes of radicalization and especially if we want to engage in prevention measures - and I am not talking about de-radicalization - we need to make sure that local organizations and local actors are involved. What we mean by this is that in small countries

like those in the Balkans we have a large degree of international involvement. This includes trying to transplant models that the international community thinks will somehow try to identify the problems leading to radicalization. However, we have found that this is quite unsuccessful because it is essential that someone from our group get involved because we speak their language. Believe me, it can even be difficult for us in the capital of Pristina to talk to some of the communities 50 or 60 kilometres away. In many of these communities, I would be perceived the same way as someone from London. As a result, we need to make sure that we have researchers who speak the same language as those who have been recruited.

I recognize that this concept of violent extremism is quite broad and that we have a tendency to link it to Islam, especially in some of the more Islamaphobic circles. In Kosovo we have three ways of practicing Islam. We have the secular society, the Hanafi school of thought which is derived from the Ottoman Empire, and the conservative way of practicing Islam which came to Kosovo recently. Finally, we have a small group of people derived from the conservatives who have the potential to use force. These are the people who are violent extremists in the sense that they are the ones who have the potential to use force in order to reach certain goals in

both political or social life. We were more concerned with this small group of people which happened to be the ones who have the potential to use force. We have around 300 people in Kosovo and 1,000 in the Western Balkans who have gone to Syria and Iraq and we have the same number of individuals who are still present in our region. From a security perspective we see this as problematic. To make a long story short, we have endorsed the recent conceptual shift which tends to promote more counter violent extremism instead of anti-terrorism which we have found in law enforcement efforts. Until two or three years ago in the Balkans we had more efforts in counterterrorism which had actually put people who seemed to be different into the 'terrorist shelter' - if I can say that - without the final say of the courts. We believe there is a need for a soft approach in countering violent extremism.

When I say soft approach I mean the efforts to prevent the further spread of violent extremism to other parts of the population. What we have identified with our research is the characteristics of the people who have been subject to violent extremism. These are young, like-minded people, many of whom have a secondary education. Around 35% of them have criminal backgrounds meaning that they have been attracted by recruiters who have promised them quick access to the jihad and to paradise and allow them

to forget their past. In addition, these people tend to be those who struggle with difficult economic conditions, are isolated from their communities, have access to internet and are very vocal on the internet, namely on social media and youtube. As part of our efforts towards prevention we think that in terms of a de-radicalization approach we need to engage the youth, in particular because this is a target in our region. If we leave them in the hands of unknown people they will be penetrated by recruiters. We have seen many cases like this already. What still concerns us, in terms of the narrative being used, is that we still see elements of conspiracy saying that DAESH is inventions of the US or Israel and that, as a result, we do not need to deal with this because it is all constructed by foreign powers. We think that this conspiracy theory negatively affects our prevention efforts because young people begin to believe that these groups are being constructed by major powers and they get discouraged. Another element we have been dealing with is battling social media. This is a difficult battle that we will not be able to win in the next few years. I had the opportunity to attend the White House Summit in New York and it was mentioned that there are 90,000 tweets on violent extremism in a 24 hour day and hundreds are in our Albanian language. This makes it difficult to do enough to counter these narratives. None of us in the Balkans, and I can say this with confidence, have created

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these counter narratives. But we do know that oftentimes in these narratives, references to the Koran, and to Islam more generally, have been misused and we have identified this in close cooperation with the Islamic community.

Another problem that is hampering us in terms of countering violent extremism is the rise of what we call the extremist seculars. These people also try to counter violent extremism but they do so using Islamaphobic narratives and this is problematic because it activates other extremist groups. This makes it difficult for the state, the society and for us as a think tank in terms of contributing to efforts in prevention.

In terms of re-integrating people who return from Syria and Iraq we believe prison should not be the only option for re-integration. We now have a law that can imprison anyone who has come back from Syria and Iraq whether they were combatants, the cook or the cleaner with up to a 15 year sentence. We think that the state and society in Kosovo needs to have a better re-integration system for people who really want to re-integrate. We have found that some people who have gone to Syria have been shocked by what they have seen and want to come back home. However, they often have a difficult time returning because, while they want to be re-integrated into society, the society

will not admit them. They are instead marginalized. We do not think that prison is the ultimate option. We have clear indication that the main recruiters - what we call the head of the snakes - are in the prison themselves and are just poisoning the rest of the prisoners. We also believe that with our correctional services, which are very weak, we may end up creating more problems. Another aspect which is Western Balkan centric, and I am not sure if this can be related to the Middle East or not, is the shift from extremist nationalism to extremist Islam. With the departure of extremist nationalism from the Balkans, people are no longer identifying their traditional enemy and have instead turned to another form of extremism which now has the flavour of religion. We think that some people have found that what their fathers and grandfathers did in the past against invaders was heroic and so now they want to do the same or they want to differentiate themselves from the rest of society. We see this as a crucial problem that we need to deal with. Generally speaking, the Balkans, compared to Turkey, has been quite late to tackle this — we have just recently started dealing with this not only in terms of policy and legal frameworks but also in terms of identifying the real problem.

To sum up, we think it is essential that there is cooperation between academic communities, civil societies and the Islamic

community. Actually many people ask me why we include the Islamic community, because we don't identify violent extremism in the region as being religious-based. However, in Kosovo and in the Balkans the prevailing violent extremism, at least for the time being, is the one that refers falsely to Islam. Thus, we have to make sure that we work with the Islamic community and credible imams, even ones with suspicious pasts, to prevent the spread of violent extremism to other parts of society. I will stop here and look forward to your questions or comments.

Murat Yeşiltaş - Thank you very much for your presentation. Our third speaker is Ömer Behram Özdemir. He graduated from the international relations department at Canakkale Onsekiz Mart University in 2009 and received his masters degree in international relations from Sakarya University in 2012 with the thesis title "Secession and Nationalist Movements in Europe: the Cases of IRA and NATA". Now he is studying Middle East Studies at Sakarya University where he is a PhD candidate. He will talk about Turkish foreign fighters in the case of Syria and Iraq. This is also part of an on-going research effort at Sakarya University's Middle East Institute under the supervision of Professor Tuncay Kardaş. The floor is yours.

Ömer Behram Özdemir - We should start by looking at the foreign fighter issue in Turkey not just from the beginning of the Syrian civil war but from the early 1920s. Turkey has had a past with foreign fighters and this has not been limited to the PKK or other Islamic battalions. Different groups with different ideologies produce different types of foreign fighters. In the 1970s, foreign fighters were mostly the extremist leftist individuals who worked in coordination with the Palestinian Liberation Organization and were mostly trained in Lebanon. However, the most popular issue of our modern age, the Islamist foreign fighter issue in Turkey, started after the invasion of Afghanistan by Soviet forces. When we look at the Islamist tradition of foreign fighters (or the mujahideen as we call them in the Turkish tradition or the jihadists as they are called in the Western literature) we see several scenarios like the Afghanistan experiment, which had two phases. First, there was the fight against the Afghani invasion then the fight against the US invasion. There was also the Bosnia experience which included foreign fighters from Turkey who joined Bosnian forces to fight the invasion from Serbia. The fight in Ogaden, an ethnically Somalian region now located between Ethiopia and Somalia, also saw the presence of some Turkish foreign fighters in the 1990s. And of course, the fights against Russian forces in Chechnya is another battle front that Turkish citizen foreign fighters engaged in.

When we look at who the Turkish citizens are who join the fight in Syria, we have a very different case and a different set of ideologies.

This past history has created some popular figures who have participated as Turkish foreign fighters. For example, in the battle of Chechnya we had Cevdet Döğer and Serdar Elbaşı who became important commanders of the front while they were fighting against the Russian Army. Selami Yurdan, the first Turk who was killed in action in Bosnia became a popular figure amongst Turkish Islamist foreign fighters along with Bilal Yaldızcı who was the first Turk killed in action in Afghanistan fighting against the Soviet invasion. These are all popular figures in the history of the Turkish Islamist foreign fighter tradition.

Today we focus mainly on the case of the Syrian civil war. When we look at who the Turkish citizens are who join the fight in Syria, we have a very different case and a different set of ideologies. While I will focus mainly on the Islamist groups, I must say that we also see many Turkish individuals who prefer to join Jabhat al-Nusra, Al-Qaeda's branch in Syria. In addition, there are of course many who join the Islamic State, known as DAESH. Others prefer Islamic battalions such as Ahrar al-Sham or the Kurdish Islamic Front. We also have Turkish nationalist individuals who prefer to join Turkmen rebels in Idlib, Latakia and Aleppo and of course pro-PKK individuals who join the YPG, the branch of the PKK inside Syria. When we look at these individuals' backgrounds more deeply and look at their ethnic origins we see that we have, in certain places, people who are ethnically Turks, Kurds and Zazas. When we look at which cities the foreign fighters come from, they are mainly metropolitan cities like Ankara and Istanbul which are at the top of the list because of their big populations and cities like Bursa and Konya that are bigger, industrial cities. But we can also observe that small cities with specific sociological backgrounds are also at the top of the list when it comes to having foreign fighters fight in the Syrian civil war. For example, we have Adıyaman, Bingöl and Diyarbakir. The commonalities between these cities is that they contain high Kurdish and Zaza populations, they have undeveloped economies and they have historical ties with cities in Syria. For example, many individuals from these cities have relatives in Syria. These cities also have strong tribal ties and, of course, business ties especially when it comes to the tradition of smuggling. When we look at these southeastern cities, we observe that ethnicity can divide these individuals. Some of them belong to the Zaza community, for example the recruits coming from Adıyaman, Bingöl and Diyarbakir are mostly from the Zaza community. The Islamic State and Jabhat al-Nusra recruits come mainly from Diyarbakir and are mainly from the Hani region which is known for its Zaza population. We can say that Turks, Kurds and Zazas are the main ethnic groups of

Turkish citizens who join fighters in Syria, and who join the Islamic battalions.

When we look at the differences between foreign fighters there are some problems that we need to address. However, because these are all different cases, we need to come up with solutions for each case. For example, Turkish citizens who have joined Nusra are fighters that are well known for their ideological backgrounds because Jabhat al-Nusra has a selective method of selection when they are recruiting people to their organization. For example, you need to pass ideological exams, religious exams and you have to have military, social media and other high tech capacities. These recruits have strong ideological backgrounds, military skills and of course past jihadi experiences. When we look at open sources as well as Turkish foreign fighters who have been killed in Syria we see that nearly 90% of the experienced Turkish foreign fighters prefer Jabhat al-Nusra over other rebellions. Only one or two, based on the information from open sources, who were killed in Syria preferred

the Islamic State. For the Syrian case, most of the foreign fighters have had past experiences fighting on the Afghan and Chechnya fronts. In addition, other cases like the Ogaden case, which I mentioned before, have seen foreign fighters, many of whom have been killed, with past experiences in Bosnia. We can say that many of the experienced Turkish foreign fighters prefer Jabhat al-Nusra and other Syrian battalions. Among the Jabhat al-Nusra fighters there are Turkish citizens who are gaining some command posts like the late fighter, Abu Yusuf al-Turki, who was an elite sniper trainer who was sent from Afghanistan to northern Syria by the Al-Qaeda central commander and was killed by the United States airstrikes. We can observe that many Turkish nationalists are among elite sniper units and have weapons expertise and from the open sources we can tell that most of those who are weapons experts are from the Bingöl province and the Idlib province. When we look at the Islamic State fighters, the case is a little bit different. They have lower military capacity and weaker jihadi pasts when we compare them to Nusra recruits and they are being used as canon fighters by the Islamic State's command post. They also prefer to join the Islamic State with their families.

As I mentioned, if this foreign fighter issue becomes a national security concern for all other countries (it is of course a concern for Turkey) the threat created by each case is different. For example, when it comes to the threats of YPG foreign fighters, it is easier for the Turkish army to face them under the PKK branch because they have knowledge of urban warfare, which they have experienced fighting the Islamic State in Northern Syria. According to the Atlantic Council's latest report, 49% of the YPG losses in Northern Syria are Turkish citizens; this is a huge number and is much larger than the losses of the Syrian Kurds. This has the potential to create a Turkish security threat of urban warfare, which can breed from the fight in Syria. When we look at Islamic State fighters and the Islamic State commandership this is also a threat for Turkey. Independent attacks are also a threat because, unlike the Jabhat al-Nusra fighters, they have disciplined relations with the Islamic State centre. As we know, Jabhat al-Nusra is recognized as a terrorist organization by Turkey but hasn't yet targeted Turkey in action or in discourse. But when we come to the Nusra cases, we see a high presence of Kurdish Zaza fighters and it could be created right if they decide to fight the Turkish PKK because they have experience with urban warfare and the use of heavy weapons like tanks. This is unlike the Islamic State components, because there isn't a direct claim of war against Turkey. Jabhat al-Nusra fighters are not creating the same levels of threats

for Turkey as the Islamic State and YPG fighters are. I would love to take your questions after this.

Murat Yeşiltaş - Thank you so much for your presentation. Our last speaker is Skender Perteshi, he is attending the masters program in management at ISES University. He received his bachelor's degree in international relations from the aforementioned college. He has been working at the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies since 2009 and was the author and co-author of several publications related to the security field. His interests include reform in the security sector, defense reform, violent extremism and radicalism. He is going to talk about Kosovo practices in the prevention of violent extremism and radicalism. The floor is yours.

Skender Perteshi - Violent extremism is a relatively new phenomenon in the Western Balkans and it has been a big challenge for the society and the institutions to deal with this level of risk. Because it is a new phenomenon the state and society have had some challenges in understanding it and since many people from Kosovo have joined fighters in Syria, we as a state and society had to understand why this was happening especially in terms of finding the difference between the religion in society and the violent extremism. This violent extremism was also a challenge for the West to address. We,

in the Western Balkans, had to deal only with the consequences and not with the ideology of why people were, and are, joining the conflict. For example, in 2001 we only had al-Qaeda, which had 2,000 fighters at the time fighting for their ideology, but what the West did was use heavy weapons to fight al-Qaeda. This was the wrong approach because now we have all these other extremist groups like ISIS, al-Nusra, Boko Haram so we need to redefine our work in our approach to violent extremism.

In Kosovo, the authorities have taken some measures to address the phenomenon of violent extremism. They have approved a law which prohibits Kosovo citizens from engaging in a foreign conflict without the authorization of the state. The government of Kosovo has also approved the National Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism. Until now Kosovo institutions have arrested more than 130 citizens which were suspected to have participated in the foreign conflicts in Syria and Iraq as well as those who have supported and recruited citizens to join the fight.

I want to talk about some factors that influence someone's decision to join a conflict like the one in Syria. There is no single factor that we can say is the main factor that influences someone to join a conflict or become an extremist. For example, in Kosovo the religion or

Another factor is isolation. Kosovo is the only state in the Western Balkans that does not have the free-visa regime that allows its citizens to travel to the EU and many of the citizens who have joined the fights in Syria and Iraq were rural-dwellers who had never left the country except to go to Turkey as a means of getting to Syria.

ideology to fight to establish the DAESH - which was one of the main factors in the Middle East - has influenced some Kosovo citizens to join the fight. This is because in Kosovo, citizens learn about religion from the wrong imams who spread extremist ideologies. Another factor we should look at is the poor education system in Kosovo because many citizens in the region were not encouraged to critique the ideologies that were influencing them to join the extremists. Another factor is isolation. Kosovo is the only state in the Western Balkans that does not have the free-visa regime that allows its citizens to travel to the EU and many of the citizens who have joined the fights in Syria and Iraq were rural-dwellers who had never left the country except to go to Turkey as a means of getting to Syria. Another factor that may influence someone to join the conflict is the lack of trust on the part of citizens in their state's institutions. For instance, among the citizens of Kosovo, only 30% trust the Kosovo government and are satisfied with the work of Kosovo institutions. This lack of trust in state institutions was exploited very well by extremist groups to spread their ideology. Another reason why the extremist ideology was spreading in Kosovo was because of bad governance. There are huge challenges regarding corruption, rule of law and poor economic developments and these challenges may have somehow created a good environment for extremist

groups to spread their ideology.

I will talk more about the profile of the Kosovo citizens who have joined the wars in Syria. Usually they are young citizens, between the ages of 18 and 26, who come from families that have not practiced traditional Islam. They often have a lack of information regarding the religion of Islam and so they learn about the religion through the teachings of the wrong kinds of imams and end up believing that by going to Syria they are helping to establish the DAESH. They are individuals who live in very poor economic conditions in Kosovo. They are usually unemployed and so do not have any sustainable workplace. They also tend to be citizens who were marginalized by the society and by the state's institutions. Around 40% of the citizens who have joined the conflict in the Middle East have criminal backgrounds.

As a think tank, we work to raise awareness among the young citizens and students in Kosovo in order to explain violent extremism to them and the risks associated with this phenomenon, with the ultimate goal of convincing them not to join the conflict in the Middle East. We have organized many roundtables in the municipalities which have been influenced by extremist groups and extremist ideologies, like the municipalities on the border with Macedonia and Serbia. These regions in Kosovo are influenced the

most by extremist groups. We have also worked and organized debates with high school students in these municipalities because these young people are the main targets for ISIS recruiters and al-Nusra recruiters. It is also worth noting that it was only in 2015 that the Kosovo police and civil society managed to prevent more than 35 citizens from joining the conflict in the Middle East. I will finish here, if you have any questions regarding the case of Kosovo or Kosovo foreign fighters and their participation in DAESH I will respond.

MURAT YEŞİLTAŞ - Thank you very much, I would like to thank all of the panelists for their invaluable contribution to this panel and I think the panelists are ready for your questions, criticisms and comments. So if you could please introduce yourself before you ask your question, we will take questions now.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

Samir Hafez

My name is Samir Hafez and I am from Syria and I am an activist in Syria I would like to point a question to Mr. Özdemir. You are always mentioning the Turks who are fighting inside Syria as Islamic groups but nobody ever mentions who is fighting against the freedom fighters in Syria like Mihad Jurat which is creating some very serious problems to both the Syrians and the Turkish and the Turkmen too. He has made large efforts to do something and so why do we always forget to talk about those who are really fighting the freedom fighters in Syria? Thank you.

Al Qi

My name is Al Qi and I am from Indonesia. Our experience in Indonesia is that when terrorists are jailed or imprisoned, this is not effective in terms of preventing radicalization. How can we come up with a method that makes radicalization less effective? I think that prison is not the best tool for de-radicalization.

Dr. Alidi

I am Dr. Alidi from Syria and a professor at Damascus University. I have been out of the country since the uprising in Syria. I don't know if what I am going to say is pertinent to the presentations made however the title of the event is an attractive title. But what I noticed from the presentations made and my point is not addressed to any particular panelist but is rather a general statement that I hope will be taken into account in future research is this: we are looking at the outcome of what is happening in terms of radicalization rather than looking at the roots, rather than looking at the political strings or political backgrounds that exist in creating radicalization and resulting in radicalization. From a historical perspective, you definitely know as researchers that the West, and in particular the United States, does not seem capable of living without an enemy - there has to be an enemy so that it can mobilize or activate its economy at different levels. For over half a century, communism was the one and now Islam in general has been selected to be the suitable and nice enemy. So there had to be certain strategies devised that had to be established in order to satisfy the process of controlling the world, and that is the creation of a new enemy — Islam. Research centres all over Europe and in the United States in particular must have worked very hard on creating the radicalization, making extreme what is normal etc. What we are noticing these days is the extremist case, no wonder Mr. Obama is giving the US 15 years to defeat DAESH. This time period is no doubt as long as it is in order for the country to enjoy the presence of an enemy. Now again, to make a long story short, what we have in Syria is a very cunning regime that has become capable of utilizing this

radicalization to smear the reputation of its own people by accusing them of being terrorists. This turned into a magnet for inviting radicalized individuals from all over the world. So, in short we need to talk about the roots of a particular thing or this particular phenomenon before we talk about the outcome that could be misleading to us as researchers.

Bülent Aydın
Thank you very much for your presentations. I want to say something about scholars. We know that scholars have good positions in society and they are well respected in societies. So how can we use scholars to prevent extremism and radicalization? My question is for Mr. Qejaha.

Yusuf Selman İnanç
My question is for both Florian and Skender. What do you think Turkey and Kosovo can do in particular against extremism? Thank you.

Yunus Çolak
My question is for Tuncay Kardaş. Last week a member from one of the Turkish nationalist movement parties died in Bayırbucak when he was fighting against Russia and the Assad regime and my question is can we identify him as a radical? If not, can we see the terms of radicalism as being related to politics because Assad and Russia will identify him as a radical.

Abdullah
Do you think radicalization can be a direct result of policy failures both on the macro and the micro levels? Government failures and the failures of the international community - this was evident in the latest attacks in Europe. Some people can be radicalized and can join ISIS from thousands of kilometres away so is it a direct result of government's failures or the international community's failures?

Imet Itik
I have a question regarding Iran. What is the role of Iran in terms of the erratic behaviour of the military in Syria because as you know there are many foreign fighters who have erratic behavior and my second question is should Turkey have special forces that are responsible to intervene in erratic conflicts like the YPG and YPS in the south of Turkey?

Murat Yeşiltaş - Thank you very much for your comments. Okay we can start first with professor Tuncay Kardaş.

Tuncay Kardaş - My share of answers is a bit smaller so maybe I'll be quicker. One direct question was about the person who got involved in Bayırbucak and who got killed last week - one of the nationalists with a nationalist ideology. Well, again, this example that you give shows that it is difficult to define someone as radical simply because he does something out of his

own conviction. But if normal boundaries of political action is any criteria then it is clear that this person was radicalized in the sense that he took up arms against another country without the consensus of his own country whose political bonds should have otherwise stopped him. Because he was a citizen and because his state was not at war, this shows us that he was radicalized beyond the confines of political ideology. So nationalism is surely one macro sociological factor behind it but it doesn't explain why other nationalists do not take up arms against the same regime in Bayırbucak. So the trouble in explaining radicalization in this case, and the fact that this individual was radicalized because of his nationalist ideology, is fragile and not realistic. The reason is because there are literally thousands of nationalists who do not take up arms, who do not go to fight. So underlining the reason is problematic. So if you are interested in the reasons for radicalization you need to go beyond ideology as the root cause of radicalization. Surely it plays a role in convincing that person to go down a radicalized path but it is not the only reason, we should look at other motivations, contexts, individual experiences etc. That would be my answer.

Florian Qejaha - Thank you for your questions. On the question of whether violent extremism is the failure of internal politics and the international community: of course it is. Internal politics have a role because, based on the characteristics of the people who have become radicalized, you cannot find the traces of the state in these zones. You can find a lack of cultural facilities, sport facilities, lack of state-social systems, poor education systems, isolation etc. We have found cases where, when kids start to act differently from what their parents acted like when they were their age, they are marginalized by their parents. They are kicked out of their homes and become susceptible to brainwashing. It is also a failure of major international politics as well. When you look at the Iraq case you see that it was partially a failure of the international community in terms of how to deal with the Middle East. And it still is. Many people do not know how to deal with this situation and we are debating on how to approach Syria. As long as we have a Middle Eastern crisis we will have the potential for violent extremism. When you look at the history, there are few connections between the Balkans and Syria and Iraq but now because we have some connections as long as we have a crisis in Syria we will have violent extremism. We can minimize the potential for violent extremism but we cannot solve the problem.

On the question of Turkey-Kosovo we think it is essential from a think tank perspective to cooperate with one another because Turkey is kind of the

gateway for our people to reach Syria and Iraq. You can see that there are more contacts between people in Kosovo and some groups that were operating here in Turkey. Unfortunately we found that 90% of the foreign fighters were going from Pristina to Istanbul. The question then arises: how do we improve police cooperation and the exchange of information? Around 40% of our people who are violent extremists join Jabhat al-Nusra and the rest join DAESH. Recently there has been a new move to raise awareness. Families even report their sons and daughters to the police. Cooperation between Turkey and Kosovo is essential. On the issue of how to use scholars: they should be used namely in identifying the causes of violent extremism and the characteristics of the people who are susceptible to this phenomenon. In our case we did not identify the roots until last year. The ones who identified these roots were academics, theologists and experts. In terms of communicating with local communities, scholars like sociologists, for example, are also important to deconstruct the problem. In terms of prevention, I mentioned that we do not think prisons are the best solution. There needs to be long-term investments in the communities and coordination between the state, NGOs and communities in many different areas.

Ömer Behram Özdemir - Thank you Mr. Hafez for your question about foreign fighters fighting on the side of the Assad regime. I was not sure whether to include these fighters in my presentation because these cases are much more hidden when we compare them to YPG recruits. When we talk to security sources in Ankara they say that yes, hundreds of Turkish citizens, some from extremist leftist groups, are joining pro-Assad militias or national defence forces. We do not however have open source intelligence about these Turkish recruits and we rarely find open source intelligence so it makes these discussions difficult. But yes there are fighters who are fighting against Syrian rebels mainly in Damascus and Latakia. When looking at foreign fighters in Syria, the most popular ones to look at are the foreign Sunni fighters like those involved in the Islamic State, the Syrian rebels, YPG fighters and Iranian coordinated foreign fighters inside Syria. We are talking about huge numbers here - more than 14 or 15,000 Shia militias fighting against Syrian rebels. These are all being coordinated by Iran. We also have some involvement from Iraqi militias, Afghan refugees who have been sent to fight in Syria and some from Hezbollah. When we look at the Sunni foreign fighter issue like al-Qaeda and the Islamic State, it is a little bit different from the other pro-Assad militias that are being coordinated by some Middle Eastern governments and these are much more professional.

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