Radicalisation Processes Leading to Acts of Terrorism

A concise Report prepared by the

European Commission's Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation

Submitted to the European Commission on 15 May 2008

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this Report do not necessarily represent those of the European Commission and are attributable only to the Expert Group

Foreword

The Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation was set up by a European Commission Decision of 19 April 2006[1] to provide policy-advice to the European Commission on fighting violent radicalisation. The members of the Group and its Chairman were subsequently appointed by the Director General for DG Justice, Freedom and Security in accordance with article 3 of the same Decision.

This Report has been drawn up in response to one of the tasks assigned to the Group and outlined in the Decision, namely that of preparing a concise Report on the current state of academic research on violent radicalisation. Neither the Chairman nor the members of the Group received any remuneration in the performance of this task.

The Group met twice in Brussels, in September 2006 and November 2007, to prepare this Report. In-depth discussions were held with regard to its structure, content and conceptual approach. Upon the request of the Group, the European Commission commissioned four background studies to help the drafting process. These are:

- *Analysis of the sources of information used to indicate empirical facts on violent radicalisation*, John Morrison (University of St Andrews, UK);

- *A review of recent academic literature on the subject of violent radicalisation*, Dr. Manuela Caiani (European University Institute, Italy)

- *Assessment of the link between external conflicts and violent radicalisation processes* Matenia Sirseloudi (University of Augsburg, Germany) ;

- *Analysis of security indicators*, Jesús Javier Castán Areso

---

[1] Official Journal of the European Union, L 111/9 of 25.04.2006

The Chairman of the Group, Prof. Fernando Reinares, was in charge of coordinating the compilation of this Report. The members of the Group who contributed to the elaboration of this document are[2], in alphabetical order:

<div align="center">

Dr. Rogelio ALONSO
Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Spain

Prof. Tore BJØRGO
Norwegian Police University College (PHS) and
Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), Norway

Prof. Donatella DELLA PORTA
European University Institute, Italy

Prof. Rik COOLSAET
Ghent University, Belgium

Prof. Farhad KHOSROKHAVAR
Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales (EHSS), France

Prof. Rüdiger LOHLKER
Department for Near Eastern Studies, University of Vienna, Austria

Dr. Magnus RANSTORP
Centre for Asymmetric Threat Studies at the Swedish National Defence College, Sweden

Prof. Fernando REINARES (Chairman)
Real Instituto Elcano and
Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Spain

Prof. Alex P. SCHMID
Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence
University of St Andrews, UK

Prof. Andrew SILKE
University of East London, UK

Michael TAARNBY
Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), Denmark

Gijs DE VRIES
Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael', Netherlands

</div>

Contents

I. Some Conceptual Caveats

According to the definition provided by the European Commission in its 2005 Communication *'Terrorist Recruitment: addressing the factors contributing to violent radicalisation'*, "violent radicalisation" involves embracing opinions, views and ideas which could lead to acts of terrorism. Actually, the term "violent radicalisation" originated in EU policy circles and was coined after the Madrid bombing of 11 March 2004. It is not widely used in social science as a concept but it obviously refers to a process of socialisation leading to the use of violence.

However, the term can be misleading because the socialisation process itself does not have to be "violent". Moreover, there is no uniform usage of the terms "radicalisation" and "violent radicalisation" in the social sciences and humanities literature. Some authors and experts refer now to violent radicalisation as a path that inherently involves concrete violent behaviour while others qualify the mere acceptance of certain ideas which condone or justify violence as an indicator of violent radicalisation. For some authors and experts, the path to violent radicalisation is an individual one whereas for others it is considered to be a collective process.

In addition, the word "violent" also needs further qualification. Socialisation into violence is not necessarily co-terminous with socialisation into terrorism. While there are various forms of violence, not necessarily of a political nature, terrorism is a special kind of political violence. Among the various expressions of terrorism, suicide terrorism stands out as a particular phenomenon. Arguably, there is only a partial overlap between the pathways to political violence in general, terrorism in particular and suicide terrorism as a special case where the perpetrator is among the victims of an attack.

Furthermore, the term "radicalisation" is problematic in that its relationship to "radicalism" as an expression of legitimate political thought, still reflected in the titles of some political parties in Europe, is confusing. Radicalism as advocacy of, and commitment to, sweeping change and restructuring of political and social institutions has historically been associated with left- and right-wing political parties - at times even with centrist and liberal ideologies - and involves the wish to do away with traditional and procedural restrictions which support the status quo. As an ideology, radicalism challenges the legitimacy of established norms and policies but it does not, in itself, lead to violence. There have been many radical groups in European political history which were reformist rather than revolutionary. In other words, there can be radicalism without the advocacy of violence to strive for the realisation of social or political change.

When it comes to "religious radicalism" within strands of contemporary political Islam or Islamism, as both ideology and movement, one can for instance find Salafist groups which are non-violent. Some of these groups are even reluctant to become involved in politics. Religious radicalism uses various strategies that may include political and reformist actions, cultural struggle and the strengthening of the community of believers through missionary work.

Violence against heretics and non-believers is not an automatic outcome of every kind of religious radicalism.

Salafism, for instance, seeks to purge Islam of outside influences and strives for a return to the Islam practiced by the "pious ancestors", that is Muhammad and the early Islamic community. It stresses adherence to a rigorist interpretation of the Quran and the Hadith and aims at reforming the personal behaviour of every Muslim. It also involves the duty to advise other believers to change their way of life in the same sense. Salafi thinkers insist on the right of believers to interpret the fundamental texts for themselves through independent reasoning. Only one specific interpretation of Salafism focuses on the use of violence to bring about such radical change and is commonly known as Salafist Jihadism.

In general, radicalisation to any form of terrorist violence is a phased process. There are various descriptions in the relevant social science literature with regard to the number and type of phases, stages or steps within the radicalisation process. In the framework of this concise Report, "violent radicalisation" often refers to radicalisation to jihadist violence or jihadist terrorism. Yet there are, as will be stressed below, remarkable parallels between radicalisation to current jihadist terrorism and radicalisation to left-wing, right-wing or nationalist separatist terrorism. Western Europe has witnessed all these manifestations of the terrorist phenomenon since the late 1960s.

The concept of terrorism, as used in this Report, also requires some further explanation. Terrorism has been defined by the European Union's Framework Decision on Combating Terrorism of 2002 as "an intentional act which may seriously damage a country or an international organisation, committed with the aim of seriously intimidating a population, unduly compelling a Government or an international organisation to perform or abstain from performing any act, seriously destabilizing or destroying fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures by means of attacks upon a person's life, attacks upon the physical integrity of a person, kidnapping, hostage-taking, seizure of aircraft or ships, or the manufacture, possession or transport of weapons or explosives".

This is a legal definition and as such it only partially overlaps with some of the more widely used academic definitions. There are in fact hundreds of definitions of terrorism. They emphasize a variety of features of terrorism such as its often symbolic character, its often indiscriminate nature, its typical focus on civilian and non-combatant targets, its sometimes provocative and retributive aims, the disruption of public order and endangering of public security, the creation of a climate of fear to influence an audience wider than the direct victims as well as its disregard of the rules of war and the rules of punishment.

Some key elements of many definitions also refer to the fact that terrorism is usually an instrument through which its perpetrators, lacking mass support, attempt to realise a political or religious project. It also generally involves a series of punctuated acts of demonstrative public violence, followed by threats of continuation in order to impress, intimidate and/or coerce target audiences. This Report does not offer or advocate any new or specific definition of terrorism. However it is worth highlighting a few considerations which should be kept in mind in the public and political discourse on terrorism.

Firstly, since 1794 when the term "terrorisme" came into existence during the French revolution to refer to a policy of more or less arbitrary victimisation of alleged and real political opponents, the understanding of what constitutes "terrorism" has been changing.

While the term initially referred to the exercise of punitive and deterrent public violence by the state, current usage tends to associate terrorism mainly, although not exclusively and sometimes erroneously, with acts of non-state actors only.

Secondly, there are three major contexts in which the term terrorism has been used: (i) as a form of repressive state policy as under totalitarian regimes such as National Socialism and Communism; (ii) as a special shock tactic linked usually to irregular warfare; and (iii) as an extreme form of protest and agitation. Nowadays, there is a certain overlap between the last two of these contexts.

Thirdly, groups that engage in tactics of terrorism are often linked, or emerge from wider social, political or religious movements. Their repertoire of advocacy and militancy can include legal political activities as well as illegal activities and extreme forms of violence which are often referred to as "acts of terrorism". While there are grey zones and borderline cases of what is and what is not acceptable in certain political contexts, there are certain forms of peacetime political violence and wartime activities which are widely seen as totally unacceptable. These include unprovoked attacks on civilians and the taking of hostages and other forms of wilful killings. Terrorism is considered extra-normal because the violence is usually one-sided, the victims cannot save their lives through surrender and unarmed civilians are often terrorism's main targets.

Fourthly, terrorists generally stress the political character of their collective action. However, the generally political character of terrorism does not make it legitimate. A crime does not lose its criminal character merely because it is committed for political purposes. The same applies when terrorist violence is justified by religious purposes or driven by religious motives.

Fifthly, suicide terrorism is a form of attack involving the simultaneous destruction of the perpetrator and victims. It has been utilised mainly since the 1980s by an increasing number of often non-secular terrorist groups to compensate for a lack of more sophisticated military capabilities. The strategic advantage of suicide bombings includes higher killing rates than ordinary bombings and a minimised danger of organisational secrets falling into enemy hands.

While radicalism can pose a threat it is extremism, and particularly terrorism, that ought to be our main concern since it involves the active subversion of democratic values and the rule of law. In this sense violent radicalisation is to be understood as socialisation to extremism which manifests itself in terrorism.

II. Enabling environment, past and present

In any given society there will always exist a certain number of radicals. However, radicalism does not necessarily go against the law nor is it necessarily violent. Radicalism sometimes can even gain significant traction either by capitalising on widespread sympathy or by being able to draw a significant number of people to join the radical ranks. Significant radicalisation waves, including their violent and terrorist expressions, are not a new feature within European liberal democracies.

Radicalisation is a context-bound phenomenon par excellence. Global, sociological and political drivers matter as much as ideological and psychological ones. The current wave of radicalisation into terrorist violence throughout Europe which is predominantly related to

individuals and groups that use a religious discourse refers to a well-known phenomenon. The history of radicalisation into violence or radicalisation leading to terrorism is quite long and a complex one.

In the 1890s, for instance, during a time of unprecedented prosperity but where the majority of the population was being excluded from participating both politically and economically, a large-scale workers movement ensued creating a broad wave of radical individual and collective action throughout Europe demanding recognition and a place as full partners in society. Anarchist and other revolutionary fringe groups plugged into this widespread mood in order to advance their cause by, sometimes, using terrorist methods that were however widely condemned by both workers parties and trade unions.

Decades later, in the interwar period, the Depression that followed the 1929 Great Crash created widespread social and economic crisis that ruined even large parts of the middle classes and caused prolonged mass unemployment. This environment became conducive to polarisation, conflict, xenophobia and also anti-Semitism. A rising tide of radicalisation benefited especially fascist groups whose following grew because they seemed to be able to offer a new order to many people experiencing great personal uncertainty and general disillusionment towards the existing social order. Such groups made use of terrorist tactics to disrupt democratic governments. They were subsequently absorbed into fascist or national-socialist movements, primarily in Italy and Germany.

Following World War II and the reconstruction of Europe through to the 1960s, the successive anti-colonialist movements which challenged European overseas presence witnessed worldwide radicalisation which was facilitated by a sense of shared injustice and resistance against colonial rule and interference. This momentum continued with the May 1968 student revolt and the New Left movement which radicalised further as a virulent anti-establishment and anti-Vietnam war force. Again, a sense of injustice encapsulated, among others, by the Palestinian issue and the Vietnam War became powerful ideological rallying points uniting diverse groups across borders and even continents. In many countries, right-wing terrorist groups emerged, claiming they were defending the traditional values of family, nation and order that were contested by those who protested. In Italy, among others, these right-wing underground organisations killed hundreds of citizens in bomb massacres that targeted the population at large. In several European countries and in the US, groups of vigilantes and nationalist militias used terror against ethno-nationalist and anti-racist activists. This created a favourable opportunity for small anti-establishment, left-wing, right-wing and ethno-nationalist loyalist fringe groups to emerge or re-emerge in Europe espousing violence and terrorism.

Since the end of the Cold War, a few of these terrorist groups still exist albeit in a state of extreme marginalisation and general decline (as is the case of ETA for instance). However, international opinion surveys indicate that there is, partly due to globalization, a widespread dissatisfaction due to very rapid changes in society together with a tide of resentment against American unilateralism and, more generally, Western supremacy. The former contributes to polarisation within societies while the latter tends to stimulate processes of radicalisation with both forces boosting one another. Racist violence has targeted migrant populations and ethnic minorities in many European countries, while terrorism has also developed within fundamentalist religious groups of various creeds.

At the global level, polarising tendencies and radicalisation processes can be witnessed within many religious, ethnic and cultural population aggregates. Within this global mood that is also characterised by widespread feelings of inequity and injustice a very acute sense of marginalisation and humiliation exists, in particular within several Muslim communities worldwide as well as among immigrant communities with a Muslim background established in European countries. These perceptions and feelings are often underestimated by Western observers. Today's religious and political radicalisation should however not be confounded. The former is closely intertwined with identity dynamics, whereas the latter is boosted by the aforementioned feelings of inequity whether real or perceived. Both expressions of radicalisation processes are thus the result of very different individual and collective dynamics.

The widespread feeling of humiliation and uncertainty basically rests upon a whole array of widely diverging specific local circumstances. As in the past, it offers fringe groups an opportunity to justify their recourse to terrorism. However, as all opinion polls indicate, such terrorist violence is condemned by large majorities in most countries of the Muslim world as well as within Muslim communities inside Europe.

From the late 19th century to the present day, all such diverse significant political radicalisation waves that resulted in terrorist action share a number of structural features. Firstly, they all thrive in an enabling environment which is essentially characterised by a widely shared sense of injustice, whether real or perceived, among concerned segments of the population or whole societies. Sentiments of injustice, exclusion and humiliation have always been powerful forces in politics and prime movers for change.

Nothing creates so fertile a breeding ground for political radicalisation than the feeling of belonging to the camp of those left behind in the progress of mankind but at the same time upholding potent and aspirational symbols of empowerment. When people resent injustice they tend to be more prone to radicalisation. A typical characteristic of such an environment conducive to radicalisation processes is deeply engrained mutual distrust which offers a favourable framework for depicting the adversary in Manichean terms and in an 'Us versus Them' paradigm.

A second common characteristic of all forms of radicalisation leading towards violence is that it always takes place at the intersection of an enabling environment and a personal trajectory. Not all individuals who share the same sense of injustice or are living in the same polarised environment turn to radicalism and even less so to violence or terrorism. Concrete personal experiences, kinship and friendship, group dynamics and socialisation into the use of violence are needed to trigger the actual process.

It must be stressed that violent radicals or terrorists are not mentally disturbed people as psychiatric and psychological studies have made abundantly clear. In other words, those who engage in terrorist activity are essentially unremarkable in psychological terms.

A third common feature of radicalisation processes is that the actual use of violence involves only a very limited number of individuals. It is always the action of a few within the larger group or community whose fate is claimed to be at stake and whose plight they invoke to try to justify their acts. They form small groups that present themselves as a self-declared vanguard. In all past processes of radicalisation the number of individuals who choose

violence as their preferred method has been extremely low. Violent radicalisation is indeed only at the far end of a wide array of possible radical expressions.

One could thus say that it is one of several possible expressions of protest, one which however uses methods that are considered unacceptable and illegal in a liberal democratic society. Today, radicalisation towards terrorism is thus not a prevalent phenomenon among a majority of citizens of, and newcomers to, the European Union. Regular surveys conducted throughout Member States demonstrate this point. Nonetheless, the fact that radicalisation leading to terrorism is a fringe phenomenon should not lead us to underestimate it but should instead contribute to properly frame the problem. This is particularly so given the potential growth of the phenomenon.

Therefore, the considerable variety of previous experiences of radicalisation into violence within the European Union ought to inform the analysis on the process of radicalisation into violence of individuals and groups who advocate an extremist interpretation of Islam, as well as of other forms of radicalisation leading to terrorism. The study of those who endorse or engage in the current wave of global terrorism should benefit from the lessons learned in preventing and countering past and present terrorist phenomena. This applies despite differences in the political and social contexts within which radicalisation into violence has occurred over the last decades.

Previous experiences of protracted processes of radicalisation leading to terrorism should therefore offer some useful guidance. For example, although segments of certain nationalist movements have opted for violence and terrorism to pursue their objectives, this has not been the case in all expressions of nationalist separatism that have occurred in Europe. In other words, nationalist separatism does not always or necessarily lead to violence or terrorism. In the same way allegiance to Islamism or other ideologies does not necessarily lead to violence and terrorism. The endorsement of violent acts will be determined by the radicalisation of certain individuals within particular sections of a political, social or religious collective.

Although a number of contributing factors may be singled out as facilitators for the emergence of radicalisation processes leading to terrorism, it is impossible to identify one single root cause. The convergence of several possible contributing variables can usually be found at the origin of the radicalisation process. Since terrorism and radicalisation leading to it may arise for a number of reasons, precipitant factors vary according to each individual experience of and pathway to radicalisation. A considerable variety of contributing or facilitating factors can trigger the radicalisation process in varying degrees at the intersection of personal history and that enabling environment.

As there is no set hierarchy of facilitating factors that lead towards radicalisation into violence the examples described here are not listed in any particular order. The enabling environment may for instance contain historical antecedents of political violence or, on a more contemporary level, concrete experiences of civil war or brutal encounters with unjust authority. Excessive repression by state authorities is likely to contribute to a climate of mutual distrust among those affected and assists in creating an atmosphere in which disparate social aggregates will be inclined to antagonism and entrenchment instead of conflict resolution.

Further examples of facilitating factors would be linked to profound social changes such as the breakdown in social bonds of individuals caught between different cultures and

generations. Alienation or the sense of a personal identity crisis can furthermore increase or add to sentiments of frustration. This in turn may be linked with the experience or the perception of prevalent social injustice that creates barriers for entry into mainstream society. Finally, lack of integration and the experience or perception of discrimination on the basis of ethnic or religious origins can be other significant facilitating factors.

III. On the actors and their motivations

One of the most significant understandings gained from academic research over recent years is that individuals involved in terrorist activities exhibit a diversity of social backgrounds, undergo rather different processes of violent radicalisation and are influenced by various combinations of motivations. This is relevant not only with respect to the more recent expressions of Islamist terrorism but also as regards right-wing, left-wing and ethno-nationalist manifestations of such violence previously experienced in a number of European countries.

For example, the individuals behind the London and Madrid bombings differed in terms of origin, cultural background, educational level, integration into British and Spanish society, family status and criminal record. The same holds true for all those convicted in Europe for offences related to Islamist terrorism over the past years. Substantially diverse are also the social characteristics of the otherwise mainly young males who joined ETA and similar terrorist organisations formed in Europe during the sixties and seventies.

In spite of these differences in social characterization, the disparate groups they belonged to and the various structural situations within which all these individuals evolved, the fact is that all convicted terrorists entered a path towards violent radicalisation and became involved in terrorist activities. This empirical evidence underscores the apparent heterogeneity across the spectrum of violent actors.

This understanding has led many researchers to make two conclusions. Firstly, that profiling in order to establish concrete segments of the population affected by violent radicalisation processes and to identify possible terrorists does not work. Secondly, that as a result of the variety observed in processes of radicalisation into violence, it is futile to try to develop strategies for preventing these processes as no such measures will be able to fit them all.

It is impracticable to attempt profiling for the purposes of identifying specific individuals vulnerable to radicalisation into violence by narrowing down from a wider population. However, profiling of dimensions, processes and pathways has somewhat shown more potentially promising results. An understanding of these various processes and pathways may open up possibilities for identifying preventive interventions which may be used to inhibit and disrupt processes of radicalisation into violence and terrorism.

Several case studies on violent and terrorist collective actors (including underground ethno-nationalist organisations in the Basque region of Spain, perpetrators of xenophobic violence in Germany as well as Jihadist cells active in several European countries) have been able to identify a limited number of types of persons involved in each case. These types are characterised by different background factors, paths towards radicalisation and individual motivations.

Usually, the varieties of these types of persons can be distinguished from one another as each type tends to have a different socio-economic background and tends to relate to ideology and politics in different ways. As just mentioned, they may also vary in so far as their main motivations to engage in violence and terrorism are concerned. Nevertheless, although these case studies have dealt with very different types of terrorist groups there is considerable overlap between the types of individual actors.

A problem with typologies or profiles based on static ideal types is that many individual activists do not fit in them or else fall between ideal types thereby rendering them indistinct. Typologies which work well for one type of group or movement may not work equally well when applied to another movement. In addition, it is important to remember that sociological and demographic traits of members, as well as types of members, may change significantly over time within a single terrorist organisation.

Terrorist groups may also be described as consisting of diverse mixtures. Thus, some groups may have a larger proportion of leaders and followers from the socially well adapted segments of society. Other groups may start out with only a few of these as leaders and a larger proportion of marginalised and rather apolitical followers, some of whom may gradually become more politicised. These different types of individuals will usually perform different and complementary roles within a group.

Thus, the concept of static profiles appears incapable of explaining the considerable variety of individual actors involved. Instead it is possible to identify several positions which individuals may, to various extents, move towards or away from within processes of radicalisation or de-radicalisation, although some of their individual traits and qualities may tie them more firmly to certain positions than to others.

One particular type of radicalisation process characterises ideological activists who play leading roles in terrorist cells. They are often charismatic persons motivated by idealism and a strong sense of justice. Jihadism or other varieties of political violence are embraced through an intellectual process where the need to take action gradually becomes a political or religious duty. These individuals are often resourceful, educated, well integrated and are sometimes even considered as role models in their communities.

One particular variety are experienced Jihadi veterans whose participation in armed struggle at some of the war theatres for Jihad such as Afghanistan, Chechnya, Kashmir or Bosnia earns them a certain heroic image as well as combat experience. They may also serve as linkages to the global jihadist movement. It is worth noting that combat experience, whether from an individual standpoint or that of the family/peer group of the former combatant, has been an important factor in the radicalisation paths of ethno-nationalist activists or the first-generation of right-wing terrorists after the Second World War.

Another variety tends to embrace violent forms of militancy through a combination of loyalty to the leader and political activism. Although often intelligent, skilful and socially well adapted, individuals of this variety may also be impressionable and easily manipulated by other respected group members.

For some youths the experience of belonging to a group and being accepted by peers or leaders is of primary value, sometimes overruling most other considerations. The kind of group they end up in and the cause they end up supporting is often a matter of chance. These

followers may neither hold any particularly extremist worldviews nor exhibit any pronounced political attitudes, at least not initially. Moreover, their backgrounds are not characterised by socio-economic problems, unemployment or dropping out of school.

The search for community and group solidarity plays an important role in attracting them to these groups. When it comes to readiness for violence, group-dynamic aspects as for instance conformity and the need to impress others are decisive. They do not display on their own any fundamental readiness to violence or general hatred to specific enemies. However, they may be quite willing to carry out acts of violence in order to prove themselves in the eyes of others in the group or may take part in order not to leave the others in the lurch. They are rarely initiators of radicalisation into extremist ideology or violence but are, by definition, supporters and followers.

Socially or politically frustrated youngsters may go through quite different paths of radicalisation into militancy and terrorism. Usually they personally experience discrimination, unfair competition with other groups over scarce resources or an absence of prospects for a good future. For some this feeling of rejection from society turns them into bitter enemies of their host society to which they no longer experience any meaningful form of bond. They may have limited education or other forms of social capital and may suffer from unemployment and economic hardship. They do not hold any firm extremist ideas or ideologies, at least not initially. Violence against enemies is legitimised less by reference to ideology or political strategies than by diffuse feelings.

At the extreme end of this dimension are criminal and marginalised individuals who are characterised by even more negative social backgrounds and careers and especially by having a long and often varied criminal record. They tend to be school drop-outs and unemployed. The family background is particularly problematic: broken families, parental substance abuse, the use of violence as a means of discipline and communication within the family, family members killed in war or other traumatic experiences. They are action-oriented, aggressive and have a high readiness for violence.

However, violence is not in this case a means to a political struggle but rather an everyday element in handling conflicts. This type of activist is not an idealist but embraces violent activism to cope with personal problems. This pattern of recruitment and radicalisation into Jihadism has been referred to as a form of personal salvation, "self healing" or conversion. In spite of their troubled backgrounds and lack of discipline, such persons may be an asset to the group due to their high readiness for – and experience with – violence and competence in other forms of criminal activities in order to generate funding for terrorist projects.

What follows from the understanding that terrorist groups may consist of different types of individuals who undergo diverse paths of radicalisation is not that it is futile to develop strategies of prevention to target all these diverse types but rather that it is necessary to develop several specific measures which may fit each separate type or dimension and to be prepared to adapt to changes. Some of these types are affected by social and economic interventions, others by psycho-social factors and by ideological and political issues. Thus, preventive strategies have to be tailored to the specific drivers behind each main type of activist and the specifics of the various groups.

IV. A rallying ideology

Ideology appears as a constant feature in the radicalisation process related to various forms of terrorism. Indoctrination constitutes a relevant factor in the radicalisation of a small but significant minority of persons dissatisfied with the socio-political context in which they live. This, in turn, contributes to consolidating violent ideas and attitudes and eventually generates a sub-culture of violence.

As regards the most recent threat posed by international terrorism, a Jihadi Salafist ideology that promotes violence as a way to achieve the creation of a new caliphate as well as to recover territories that were once under Muslim rule is utilised to form a common bond. This aspiration is shared by activists of a varied socio-demographic profile and facilitates their cohesion. This ideological aspect based on an exclusive, violent interpretation of the Islamic faith, is a powerful motivational factor that serves to justify criminal actions. These acts are presented as necessary and inevitable responses to the alleged wrongs suffered by an imaginary community of believers.

The Jihadist Salafist ideology legitimises a twofold confrontational strategy by the inciters and perpetrators of violence which is aimed at states and societies with Muslim majorities stigmatized as "apostates" and against non-Islamic countries depicted as "infidels". The adherence to an ideology that combines political and religious components to become an effective motivational factor is strengthened by the influence of other rational, emotional and identitarian variables.

Ideology is also used to reduce potential moral inhibitors and justifies the resort to extreme actions such as suicide terrorism and indiscriminate high-casualty attacks. Given the strategic benefits that can be derived from the resort to a particularly extreme tactic within the repertoire of violent actions, the ideology also provides a framework to justify such a course of action from a rational-choice point of view.

Several ideologies have served as a unifying theme for activism and commitment of individuals in search of motivational reinforcement or incentive that attract them to the group, leading them to the point of commitment to the violent cause. Just as it was the case with other European nationalist, right wing and left wing terrorist groups that arose in the sixties and seventies, some Muslim extremists nowadays find useful rhetorical narratives in a specific Jihadist ideology to justify purely criminal acts that otherwise would lack any support from society in general or the population of reference in particular.

Cognitive frameworks derived from nationalism, Marxism, fascism, religious fundamentalism and other ideologies have been used to build collective identities in which violence constitutes a prime component. Such cognitive frameworks and collective identities are also used by those who are in positions of leadership and who guide the individual through the radicalisation process as it promotes the development of solidarity, strengthens ties and creates loyalty.

Clearly, the espousal of a particular ideology does not guarantee that a radicalisation process will ensue. Many other elements and their interplay must be present for the individual to progress through the personal and social transit that radicalisation into violence entails. In fact, previous studies of several European terrorist groups have made clear that ideology had a varying degree of relevance in that process. Moreover, individuals in need of an ideological

framework very often develop an instrumentalised cut-and-paste interpretation of a given ideology in order to justify their recourse to violence.

In previous decades, ideologies tended to produce violent and terrorist repertoires in Italy and Germany when political opportunities triggered activation and escalation. In depth interviews with IRA members support the analysis that the political situation and the social juncture at the time rather than ideology was a decisive variable in the process of radicalisation. The same can be said of Italian or German militants of left-wing and right-wing underground organisations.

In a similar vein, the reason why many right-wing and skin-head youths joined racist groups was not because they were particularly endeared to racist ideologies but rather because of the attraction that stems from the fulfilment of a number of social and psychological needs such as identity, community protection or simply excitement. It has been demonstrated that some of them gradually adopted racist views once inside the group whereas others left the group after a brief interlude with the collective.

However, from the early seventies until the late nineties the majority of those individuals who became members of ETA took up the ideas of an ethnic nationalist ideology prior to joining the Basque terrorist group to the exclusion of those who were not seen as nationalists. The ideology of groups like ETA and the IRA also incorporate traditions of violence which operated as societal and cultural facilitators for terrorism.

Therefore, grievances manifested within an identifiable segment or minority within a given population are not in themselves necessary and sufficient causes neither for the development of processes of radicalisation into violence nor for actual engagement in acts of terrorism. Nonetheless, the probability increases in those instances where ideologies are highly influential and political opportunity structures are initially permissive to expressive and coercive violence. Consequently, the political and social environment in which the primary and secondary socialisation of the individual takes place is likely to weigh heavily on the processes of radicalisation.

The relevance of charismatic leaders in the radicalisation process has often been emphasised since they provide inspiration and also promote cohesion and ideological conformity in addition to internal discipline within violent and terrorist groups. These figures are also considered of great importance in ensuring the eventually successful passage from low-risk to high-risk activism. However, other research on terrorism minimises the importance of these individual actors in the actual process of radicalisation.

Nevertheless, the individual decision to approach and actually join a terrorist group involves a number of different causal factors that can be effectively manipulated by those who control the radicalisation process, depending on each individual's personal circumstances. They can provide appropriate rationalisation in order to exploit emotional factors such as hate, revenge and frustration. These emotions are fueled and reinforced in order to bring about acceptance of violent extremist positions.

A recurring element in the radicalisation process of some terrorists who have been active in Europe has been their direct contact with persons involved in armed action in conflict zones such as Afghanistan, Bosnia and Chechnya. These figureheads are presented as role models and their prominent stance enables the development of tangible links of solidarity with a

broader Muslim community. This type of relationship makes it possible for those involved in the radicalisation process to overlook the fact that very often such 'figureheads' had not personally suffered any major wrongs in the European democratic societies they lived in.

Direct contact with prominent charismatic figureheads of Al Qaeda has been another valuable channel for fueling violent radicalisation within certain Muslim collectives in Europe. Actually, the Al Qaeda leadership fused operational instructions on how to organise terrorist cells with powerful ideological narratives and managed to reinforce the individual commitment of their followers, including their motivation to kill in pursuit of their ideological objectives.

Previous experiences of combat in Afghanistan, Iraq and other conflict zones have contributed to aggrandizing these leaders' reputation in extremist circles. This allowed some individuals to find attractive role models which are not very different from the ones that other activists belonging to older European and Latin American terrorist groups had also resorted to in the past. Now and then young radicals have looked to ex-combatants as figures to revere, causing in many of them a desire to emulate their devotion and dedication to the cause.

Propaganda is a key part of the radicalisation process as it offers doctrinal arguments that serve to legitimise extremist positions. By disseminating propaganda, radicals achieve a wider audience for the violent opinions and demands supported by both real and imaginary grievances that are aimed at persuading minds and shaping wills through aggressive rhetoric. An exaggeration and exacerbation of tensions between the in-group and those defined as the "enemy" is thus achieved.

Comparative analyses of different violent phenomena make clear that a combination of variables is commonly present in the propaganda material used by different radical collectives. In order to supply motivations and encouragement for those engaged in the radicalisation process the propaganda employed by radical and terrorist groups tends to be framed around considerations that can be defined as ideological, utilitarian, emotional and identitarian.

A common pattern in separatist and other radical movements has been the reluctance of militants to openly admit how influential certain emotions were in their decision to join radical organisations. It can be argued that their political motivation would probably appear less relevant if those emotions were to be seen as motivational factors. Revealing primary motives of a different sort could in the end raise questions about their real commitment to the political and/or religious ideology, a core element in the groups' constant process of demonstrating their legitimacy.

It is possible to identify clear mechanisms of denial resorted to by those who engage in terrorism in order to reduce cognitive dissonance. Propaganda provides a useful tool for this purpose. Group-thinking and group dynamics within a clandestine collective and essential in producing the cohesiveness necessary for the survival of the organisation favour the subordination of individuality to a group identity. They also favour erroneous decision-making processes that, however, usually contribute to the continuation of the radicalisation process.

Terrorist groups portray terrorism as a useful and necessary means of achieving the objectives pursued. Irrespective of their ideology, terrorists present their enterprise as representing an

honourable and prestigious response that would provide personal and collective gains for those who take part in it.

Through video and audio recordings, books, magazines, speeches available on Internet and a variety of other sources, violent actions are framed in a way that justifies and advocates them. Similar means have been used in the past subject to the evolution of technological innovations. The Internet now constitutes a particularly relevant tool used for propaganda, discussion and recruitment.

Terrorist propaganda seeks to de-humanize the targets of violence. De-humanization of "the enemy" and exaltation of violence are constant features of the indoctrination process undertaken through propaganda. Propaganda allows for the reinforcement of the bonds between the radicalising individual and the group. By mixing emotional and rational considerations together, propaganda enables the radical to conclude that there is only one solution – violence which is portrayed as inevitable and at the same time as an effective means to the end pursued.

Terrorist propaganda allows for psychological defence mechanisms of "neutralisation" or "moral disengagement" to be deployed so that the individual can engage in a responsibility and guilt transference process. As a result, the propaganda material is usually rich in self-serving historical comparisons and heroic terminology that help to create a fantasy world for a fantasy war. Radicalisation into terrorism is thereby placed into an acceptable framework which serves to re-define good and evil.

V. Conclusion

Violent radicalisation, as has been noted at the beginning of this concise Report, is not a term widely used in the social sciences and humanities. It refers to a process of socialisation leading to the use of violence. Yet the academic usage of this term is far from uniform. For some authors and experts, it is understood as a path involving concrete violent behaviour, while others qualify the acceptance of ideas which condone or justify violence an indicator in itself of violent radicalisation. For some authors and experts, the process of violent radicalisation is an individual trajectory whereas others see it more as a collective phenomenon.

Socialisation into violence does not completely overlap with the focus of this Report which is socialisation into terrorism. Nevertheless consensus among academics exists that radicalisation to any form of violence, including terrorist violence, is a gradual or phased process. One finding of this Report is that there are remarkable similarities between radicalisation to current Islamist or jihadist terrorism and radicalisation associated with left-wing, right-wing or ethno-nationalist terrorism in Western Europe since the 1960s.

The Report also concludes that radicalisation leading to acts of terrorism is context-specific. Past and present waves of violent radicalisation which lead to terrorism among mainly young people share certain structural features. Firstly, radicalisation thrives in an enabling environment that is characterized by a more widely shared sense of injustice, exclusion and humiliation (real or perceived) among the constituencies the terrorists claim to represent. Secondly, radicalisation always takes place at the intersection of that enabling social environment and individual trajectories towards greater militancy. Thirdly, terrorist violence (and in particular suicide bombing) stands only at the far end of a wide repertoire of possible

radical expressions and only a small number of radicals become terrorist extremists. Indeed, even radicalisation into violence short of terrorism is not a prevalent phenomenon among the vast majority of citizens of the European Union and only a tiny minority of newcomers succumb to it.

There is not any single root cause for radicalisation leading to terrorism but a number of factors may contribute to it. Precipitant ('trigger') factors vary according to individual experience and personal pathways to radicalisation. For instance, historical antecedents of political violence, excessive repression by state authorities in the recent past and profound social changes (in Europe or in the country of origin) may, under certain conditions, contribute to a polarized social climate in which confrontation rather than conflict resolution becomes the preferred option. Yet personal experiences, kinship and bonds of friendship, as well as group dynamics are critical in triggering the actual process of radicalisation escalating to engagement in acts of terrorism against civilians.

Individuals who have been involved in past and contemporary terrorist activities exhibit a diversity of social backgrounds. Many underwent non-uniform processes of radicalisation towards terrorist violence and were influenced by various combinations of rational, emotional and identitarian motivations. This complex diversity has led many researchers to conclude that profiling in order to identify potential terrorists at an early stage on the trajectory towards terrorism is very difficult which, if true, poses a great challenge for prevention strategies.

However, several studies on a variety of violent and terrorist collective actors in Europe, among them ethno-nationalist groups, perpetrators of xenophobic violence, as well as jihadist cells and networks, have managed to identify certain types of persons likely to be involved in each of these cases. These types of participants share certain backgrounds, pathways towards radicalisation and sources of motivation. At the same time it has to be emphasized that for each extremist collective or terrorist organisation, the demographical and sociological traits of its members, as well as the types of militant participants, may well change significantly over time.

Ideology appears as an important and constant factor in the radicalisation process towards terrorism. Ideological indoctrination plays a crucial role in turning a small but significant minority dissatisfied with existing social and political arrangements into militants. Ideology contributes to the acceptance of violence as a method to bring about political change and also leads to the creation of a subculture of violence. Ideology is used to reduce potential moral inhibitors and to justify the resort to extreme methods from a broader repertoire of methods of waging political conflict. Cognitive frameworks derived from certain exclusive ideologies have been used to build collective identities based on narratives of violent struggle.

The espousal of a particular ideology alone does not guarantee that radicalisation towards terrorist violence will ensue. Whether individuals tend to adopt ideologies of violence mainly once they are inside a terrorist group or whether they are more likely to join an underground organisation precisely as a result of beliefs previously acquired is still a matter of debate among academics. Either way, ideological propaganda is a key ingredient in the radicalisation process, as it offers doctrinal arguments which serve to legitimise extremist positions. Terrorist propaganda always de-humanizes the targets of violence and through the mixing of half-truths and lies often manages to reinforce the commitment of vulnerable young people to terrorist causes.

The challenge for the European Community will be to match the radicals' ideological violent narrative with a persuasive non-radical narrative that stimulates non-violent conflict resolution, tolerance (except towards the intolerant) and the appreciation for diversity.

VI. Recommendations

The European Commission Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation recommends further research on radicalisation leading to terrorism with respect to the following approaches, areas and themes:

i. Comparative studies on the different types and developments of radicalisation processes leading to terrorism in different European countries, including differential analysis on how surrounding societies and prevailing discourses influence those processes.

ii. Empirically based studies on individuals involved in terrorist groups or terrorism activities within Europe with focus on their origin and socio-demographic characteristics so as to identify differences as well as similarities.

iii. Studies on individual motivations to join terrorist organisations or networks and the way rational, emotional and identitarian motivations may combine for certain categories of people who become radicalised into violence.

iv. Long-term studies of radicalisation processes that enhance knowledge on how radical groups turn to violence and terrorism, become active and how they evolve and adapt over time. Factors such as ideology, strategic considerations, tactical operations and member profile are not static elements but change over time.

v. Studies into possible changes in the time span of radicalisation processes. That is, studies on the speed of violent radicalisation processes and factors contributing to acceleration and deceleration.

vi. More attention is needed towards the nexus between terrorism and counterterrorism as a potential driver for further and wider radicalisation towards violence and terrorism. To what extent and under which conditions does counterterrorism produce more terrorism?

vii. Research is required into the strategies of indoctrination, mobilization and training adopted by the terrorists and their leaders within terrorist organisations, with special focus on the role of internet.

viii. Further research is needed on the significance and impact of foreign conflicts, such as for instance those in Iraq, Afghanistan or Somalia in the case of contemporary Islamist terrorism and their effect on stimulating radicalisation towards violence in Europe.

ix. More substantive and theoretically informed research is needed with respect to the institutions and organisations where radicalisation leading to terrorism does occur, particularly in schools, religious settings, prisons and also armies.

x.   Analysis of past and current counter-radicalisation strategies and initiatives. This would enhance the ability to identify specific actions which have been successful, mindful of the differences between Member States in terms of the actual state of radicalisation.

xi.   Research on exit strategies is called for. In this respect, the conceptual distinction between de-radicalisation as a cognitive process and disengagement as a behavioral process which implies discontinuing involvement in terrorism is particularly relevant.

xii.   Utilising the existing scientific knowledge on criminal gangs, religious sects, youth street gangs, as well as the processes of group dynamics influencing decisions towards violence, is likely to increase our understanding of radicalisation trends related to the entry and exit of groups prone to use terrorism.

xiii.   Evaluation studies of de-radicalisation programmes eventually introduced by the authorities of European states and elsewhere, such as those targeted towards extremists in prisons, should be carried out in order to help provide evidence on what works and what does not in this respect.