

ROMANIA'S VULNERABILITIES REGARDING RADICALIZATION AND OBSERVED TRENDS OF THE PHENOMENON

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Abstract:

The terminology of radicalization started to be acknowledged after the 9/11 events, a turning point for international security that marked the beginning of the War on Terror. Practitioners, policymakers, and researchers in the field of countering terrorism focused more and more on the concept of radicalization as a precursor of terrorism, in the sense of being the starting point for preventing the terrorism phenomenon. In this regard, the past terrorist attacks in Europe awakened awareness about the necessity of identifying the incipient signs of radicalization as an early warning instrument for avoiding the probability of manifesting a terrorist attack.

Even though the Global Terrorism Index has evaluated Romania as one of the countries with the lowest risks of terrorism at the international level for the past decade, it is still important to improve the mechanisms for preventing radicalization. In this consideration, Romania could be indirectly impacted by factors related to the global or regional dynamics of terrorism. This paper aims to develop a pattern of radicalization vulnerabilities and observed trends in Romania. In this idea, the analysis of the past terrorist attempts in Romania emphasizes important details in terms of trends of radicalization. Furthermore, the analysis of the specific radicalization features in Romania is focused on identifying the vulnerabilities, following the case study conclusions on radicalized Romanian citizens and radicalized foreigners that were expelled by the national courts.

Keywords: *radicalization, Romania, vulnerabilities, trends, violent ideology, prevention.*

Introduction

This paper aims to develop a pattern of the radicalization vulnerabilities and trends in Romania, based on a methodology that

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includes OSINT sources and national court proceedings on judicial decisions that incriminated Romanian citizens for spreading jihadist propaganda or foreigners that were expelled. The objective of the research is to emphasize our country's specific features in preventing radicalization and meant to awaken awareness in this field.

Considering some previous research on radicalization in Romania, a proper observation is that this was rarely approached and was incomprehensively analysed, due to the assumption that Romania is evaluated as a low-risk country regarding the terrorist threat. However, improving knowledge and awareness in this field should be aimed even in a state that has low terrorism risks, and mostly because of its impacting dynamics at the regional level.

Moreover, due to the European trends on radicalization, the EU institutions elaborated strategies on preventing radicalization, which strongly emphasized the importance and the actuality of this security issue. Consequently, considering Romania's contribution to the regional and international security and its responsibility as an EU, NATO and UN member state in consolidating the core values, I consider that this research should be extended to the particular aspects of radicalization in Romania, regardless of the statistics on the low number of terrorist attempts at the national level.

In this regard, the present analysis specifically will incorporate three dimensions for developing a national pattern: the analysis of the radicalization specific characteristics regarding the past terrorist attempts at the national level, and the radicalization cases of the two categories of people – Romanian citizens and the radicalized foreigners that were expelled. In the same manner, the analysis will be focused on accomplishing two objectives in detecting and defining: the national vulnerabilities to radicalization and the trends at the national level, following the framework of the European trends.

The characteristics of the radicalization phenomenon

It is essential to frame the defining and specific elements of radicalization as a phenomenon and as a process. As a phenomenon, it is firstly important to distinguish between terrorism, defined as the ensemble of violent actions, intended or facilitated by individuals or

organized groups in order to obtain illegitimate political, social and economic objectives (Chalk, 1996, p. 22), and radicalization, which represents the precursor of terrorism and the source of supporting the illegitimate goals due to a violent ideology and also being an intrinsic process of incorporating the extremist ideology through individuals in order to render the use of violence legitimate and justified for accomplishing different objectives (Gunaratna, Jerard, Nanyang, 2013, p. 36).

The concept of radicalization hasn't yet been given a unitary definition that is commonly used by researchers in the field. On one hand, the Dutch Security Service (AIVD) considers radicalization as an increasing willingness to pursue, by undemocratic methods, changes in society that pose a threat to the democratic order, whereas the Danish Intelligence Service (PET) defines the concept in terms of an individual process by which a person accepts the use of undemocratic or violent means in order to accomplish a specific political or ideological objective (Borum, 2011). Furthermore, the Canadian National Strategy on Countering Radicalization refers to radicalization as an individual or group process by which individuals adopt an ideology and a belief system that justifies the use of violence in order to advance their cause.

On the other hand, some authors focused more on the intrinsic development within the psychological mechanism of a person by defining radicalization as a set of beliefs, feelings, and behaviours developed in a person in order to legitimate an intergroup conflict or violence and to promote commitment and personal sacrifice in defence of a cause of the radical group (Viejo and Boyé, 2017). Radicalization is equally described as a mental and emotional process that prepares and motivates an individual to pursue violent behaviour as a result of adopting extreme political, social, and/or religious ideals and aspirations (Wilner and Dubouloz, 2010).

My suggestion on the definition of the radicalization concept, taking into consideration the common elements that were identified in the previous definitions, would be: *a mental and emotional individual process triggered by a set of feelings, beliefs, and behaviours based on an extreme ideology that legitimizes the use of violence and motivates the*

individual to promote commitment for the defence of the radical group's purpose, accomplishing ideological objectives by undemocratic methods.

In order to understand the complexity of the process, the researchers tried to identify the factors that determine the predisposition of a person to become radicalized, as a result of the debate over why some people present resilience to radicalization and others don't. On one hand, the development of the radicalization process was explained in the light of social and psychological theories. The pathways towards radicalization may therefore be pursued by a person as a result of the local culture and identity, and the attempts to invoke religion or ideology are based on the perceptions of marginalization or prosecution of the global community of Muslims by Western states, as the theory of norm diffusion and localization explains (Acharya, 2013).

On the other hand, the Islamic radicalization process can be explained by starting from the conversion theory, which explains how an individual may have seeker's motivation to search for solutions to a recent life crisis within a spiritual option, develop affective ties, identify with the religious group dynamics, and then commit to the purposes of the new religious community (Borum, 2011). However, the seven stages of religious conversion are typical for any type of situation when a person changes his/her religious view due to a life-time crisis or a significant event. The pathway through Islamic radicalization is explained as a sub-type of religious conversion in the sense that the phases of the radicalization process follow the phases of a typical conversion process, with two major differences: by choosing violence and conflict reasons instead of peaceful purposes of a religious conversion and by incorporating an extreme ideology instead of the spiritual and philosophical approach within a typical conversion (Van den Elzen, 2018).

Some researchers believe there are four stages in the radicalization process (Schmid, 2011, p. 217-218). The first is *the crisis of confidence*, which is constituted by the identity crisis as a triggering factor (the person suffers traumatic events or life changes that affect his sense of identity) and as the catalyst, which is present even in the conversion theory. Also, the subject gets in contact with and chooses to identify with a new belief system of an extremist ideology, followed by a phase of adopting a different behaviour in society, characterized by a set

of atypical changes compared to the previous belief system (Schmid, 2011, p. 219).

The following stage starts *the legitimacy conflict*, which is defined by interacting with the ideology and seeking reasons and elements in society that support the elements of the ideology. In this manner the crisis of legitimacy starts (the person constructs perceptions whereby the legitimacy of society is shaken, followed by the legitimacy of his own government). In the third stage, the person consolidates the legitimacy of the conflict that started in the second stage. It can be observed how the person starts to legitimize violence or commit to violent purposes instead of peaceful ones by hijacking the legitimacy of society and government perceived as enemies, being attached to a religious purpose, seen as a sacred cause, and being mainly influenced by the narrative of violent ideology (Jones, 2008, p. 64). In the last stage, which is the *legitimacy crisis*, the subject is dehumanized, strongly anchored in beliefs, and motivated to resort to violent actions, being in the stage of advanced radicalization (Slootman and Tillie, 2006).

In terms of the characteristics of radicalization as an individual process, the factors that predispose a person to incorporate extremist ideology and become a radical were identified in many areas of the academic literature as religious, psychological, economic, or cultural factors. In terms of the factors that predispose a person to radicalization, in the literature, opinions may vary among different authors. Regarding the pathological factor, various authors differ from recognizing that mental health issues may be taken into consideration as an element that increases the vulnerability to radicalization (Copeland and Marsden, 2020) to opinions that exclude psychiatric disorders as an indicator of creating the profile of a terrorist but rather focus on personality traits (Al-Attar, 2019) or opinions that don't recognize mental illness as being a predictor for terrorist behaviour (Gill and Corner, 2017). However, the indicator of personality disorders as individual traits of radicalized persons was recognized as a factor that determined the fragility of the person to radicalization.

Authors classified into different categories the psychological factors that predispose the individual to radicalization as psychological vulnerabilities in regards to: feelings of injustice and humiliation

expressed by the theory of deprivation, or the lack of purpose and meaning in life; self-image issues; the loss of identity sense; depression; ego splitting; suicidal thoughts; and even substance addiction. Also, friendship or admiration for a radicalized person, a dysfunctional family environment, or father figure issues can contribute to a person's psychological vulnerability (Campbello et al., 2018).

Furthermore, at the macro-level, social, cultural, and economic environment factors were frequently emphasized in the literature as indicators of the individual's predisposition to radicalization (Viejo and Boyé, 2017) as social polarization, community exclusion, stigmatization, discrimination, cultural identity issues, and poor economic conditions. However, none of these factors can be evaluated as being particularly the principal determinant of the process without analysing those factors as an ensemble with variables that fluctuate due to the individual's conditions (Schmid, 2016). In support of this idea, in the literature, it is emphasized that there is no single pathway to radicalization (Bailey & Edwards, 2017), nor is there a definitive psychological profile for explaining the causes of the phenomenon (Horgan, 2017).

Social theories explain that, even though radicalization is an individual process, it contains an important social impact that determines the individual's willingness to continue to incorporate extremist ideology and to develop the stages of the process (Helfstein, 2012) by identifying his aspirations with the group's purposes, forming cult-like affective bonds within the group, or becoming affiliated with the group's set of values and rules. Within the dynamics of the social factors involved in the radicalization process, there can be different types of developing the process and becoming radicalized. A method of getting involved in a process, understood in more traditional terms, was the one of coordinated radicalization by a terrorist organization (Horgan, 2005, p. 78), by luring and recruiting members for the organization by offering them a purpose and a sense of integration in the group.

However, the trends in radicalization at the European level (Global Terrorism Index, 2016, p. 45) including Romania, show that the method of self-radicalization is more often met in practice, and in most of the cases, the process is inspired and sustained by the extremist ideology of a terrorist organization. Regardless of the ensemble of

psychological, pathological, and social background that determined the self-radicalization process of the individual (Borum, 2004), researchers emphasize the fact that, even in this case, without the social factor of aspiring to a group objective, or without the interaction with other radical persons sharing elements of the same ideology, the process wouldn't be consumed completely (Helfstein, 2012).

A radicalized person can also undertake actions such as spreading extremist propaganda for terrorist purposes in the online environment or recruiting people to engage in terrorist activities, but at the same time, they may not pursue direct actions as preparatory acts for terrorist attacks. The explanation is the fact that violent behaviour increases in accordance with the phases of the radicalization process. So, the person may pursue indirect actions without committing acts of violence but still facilitate terrorism by violating the immigration regime, helping terrorist members escape from legal sanctions, or covering the terrorist purposes of an organization by facilitating ghost financial activities or non-governmental legitimate covers (VosFellman, Bar-Yam, Minai, 2015, p. 53-54), whether spreading jihadist propaganda. The critical moment when the radicalized person can engage in terrorist attempts or attacks is assimilated into an advanced phase of radicalization, which is characterized by deeply rooted extremist beliefs and also intense hatred feelings against the government and authorities. Therefore, the radicalized person can project his extremist views against a category of people or community that is targeted in order to consume the terrorist act (Horgan, 2005, p. 94).

In the light of the conceptual notions regarding radicalization exposed previously, this article applies the theoretical aspects regarding radicalization using the case studies of Romanian radicalized citizens and radicalized foreigners that were expelled by the national courts. The paper has two significant parts: the first one aims to emphasize the trends in radicalization in Romania by analysing the history of terrorist attempts in the country in order to find the tendencies in radicalization. The second one is dedicated to identifying Romania's vulnerabilities regarding radicalization by analysing the phenomenon at the micro-level (the cases of Romanian citizens and foreigners) in order to construct conclusions for the macro-level.

The radicalization pattern in Romania: trends and particularities

There are three criteria that I believe are useful in order to understand the radicalization trends in Romania: the regional and international context that impacted the state, the social categories that are targeted, and the objectives and interests of non-state actors or individuals in Romania.

Starting from the research on the previous up to the present terrorist attempts in Romania in the period of 1977–2023, the analysis aims to emphasize the tendencies at the national level due to the following criteria: the inspiration for affiliation to a terrorist organization, the *modus operandi*, the objectives of the terrorist attempt, the interest in a targeted location or social category, and the typology of the attack correlated to the method of radicalization.

In analysing the previous terrorist attempts in Romania, the first particularity can be evaluated from the perspective of a state almost unanimously characterized by terrorist attempts that were undermined in time by authorities, with the exception of the 1984 terrorist attack that was the only consumed attack in Romania. In this regard, the attack was carried out by a foreign student in Romania, coordinated by the indications of the Palestinian terrorist organization Abu Nidal (Romanian Intelligence Service, 2015, p. 32). The typology of the attack was that of political reasons, in the sense that it targeted a foreign objective in our national territory: the vice consul of the embassy of Jordan. What is important to highlight about that single terrorist attack, which took place in Romania, is the fact that it targeted foreign political objectives and not national targets. However, considering the fact that Abu Nidal had never proclaimed a specific violent ideology to be fundamental for the organization's terrorist objectives and the members performed the attacks only under the coordination of the leader, it is considered that this attack doesn't show its utility for the scope of this analysis.

However, by taking into consideration the terrorist attempts, there were identified three typologies assimilated to a total of ten attempts. We identified six attempts attributed to affiliations with terrorist organizations, two lone-wolf attempts, and two isolated cases.

Regarding the cases that were planned by members of terrorist organizations, there were registered affiliations to the PKK-Kurdistan Labour Party (a Kurdish terrorist organization that targeted a Turkish citizen in Romania), to Babbar Khalsa (an Indian terrorist organization that targeted killing the Indian ambassador in Romania), and to Baader-Meinhof (a left-wing German terrorist organization) in cooperation with Black September (a Palestinian terrorist organization) that targeted occidental and Israeli targets in Romania (Romanian Intelligence Service, 2015, p. 14, p. 54, p. 60).

Thus, it is clearly seen that the members affiliated to terrorist organizations had objectives only for foreign targets found on the national territory (embassies, consulates) or foreign representatives in official visits in Romania, and the attempts were determined by political reasons rooted around the target's original state. In addition to that, it can be mentioned that members of terrorist organizations transited the national territory from the Red Army or Black September due to the geostrategic position of Romania on the transit route Europe-Middle East (Romanian Intelligence Service, 2015, p. 38, p. 60). Thus, Romania can be transited by different non-state actors as a route Europe-Middle East for objectives such as Damascus or Turkey due to its geographic position, but this aspect can't be considered as a representative argument for determining the interest of a terrorist organization in Romania.

However, another case that could be an indicator for identifying tendencies is represented by the attempt of an affiliate member of HVIM 64, a terrorist organization from Hungary, that targeted specific national objectives and on a specific date, as the celebration of the National Day on December 1st and, furthermore, advanced to Christmas Day. The attempt also targeted a public, crowded area, and the *modus operandi* involved improvised explosive devices (IEDS). Considering the particularities of this attempt, it can be said that it is one of the few attempts that are politically motivated by objectives in Romania. Moreover, the individual involved in the attempt showed strong radical beliefs against the constitutional order in Romania and an intense feeling of hatred towards the Romanian government and society. The root of its extremist ideology was based on the political justification of Hungary's

rights to territories in Romania due to the Treaty of Trianon. In this case, the reasons that justify the extremist ideology and legitimize the use of violence in order to achieve the objectives don't have any rational correlation with the actual realities of society, but they provide only the support for nourishing the hate against a government and the desire to undermine the state authority (Court Decision nr. 172/2019).

In terms of the lone-wolf attempts in Romania, it is important first to emphasize the psychology of the lone-wolf terrorism, characterized by the atypical manner of conducting a terrorist attack, the lack of self-governing ideology, and the unpredictable reasons that determine the attack (Spaaij, 2012, p. 17), as theoretical elements that were reflected in the Romanian cases.

The analysis of the lone-wolf attempts in Romania emphasized two perspectives: the first lone-wolf attempt, in 2006, was organized by a Romanian citizen, being the first attempt of a Romanian individual to commit domestic terrorist acts; the second lone-wolf attempt, in 2012, is characterized by the same traits as mentioned in the previous cases: interest in a foreign objective in Romania, planned by a foreign individual, with the difference that in this case, the individual wasn't affiliated to any terrorist organization. Comparing the two lone-wolf attempts, it can be observed that the first attempt targeted national objectives (a Romanian citizen targeting a group of people from his hometown), while the second one targeted foreign objective (the British embassy in Bucharest), planned by a foreign Iraqi citizen (Romanian Intelligence Service, 2015, p. 326).

Regarding the attempt of domestic terrorism in 2006, it should be mentioned that the Romanian citizen targeted a crowded location in the city of Timisoara, which he had previously studied. The operational method of the attack aimed for the detonation of an improvised explosive device in the crowded space, with the consequence that if the attack had been successful, it would have had the capacity to cause a significant number of casualties. The context of this event falls broadly within the European trends of the terrorist phenomenon started in 2004–2005, in terms of the methods of operation, being similar to the ones adopted in Great Britain and Spain. In the Lesch case, another important detail is the fact that the attempt had the typology of a lone-wolf attack inspired by

the violent Islamic ideology of the Bosnian Islamic Army, aiming at religious objectives.

Analysing the way of radicalization in the case of Lesch (Romanian Intelligence Service, 2015, p. 230), it is observed that he converted to Islam at the end of the 1990s, gradually following the stages of the self-radicalization process through the Internet. Early signs of radicalization could already be seen in the conversations held within the social and family environment, promoting Islamic propaganda messages and ideas. The psychological level is also observed: his need to assimilate a new identity and a new set of perceptions and values (choosing a pseudonym regarding a former Muslim soldier, member of the terrorist organization, developing intense feelings of hatred against the authorities and Romanian government, affective involvement in the objectives of carrying out the jihad).

Regarding the second lone-wolf attack, that of the Iraqi citizen in Bucharest, it is important to consider the fact that he aimed at a foreign target as an objective – the British embassy in Bucharest. The reason was the involvement of Great Britain in the fight in Iraq, which frames the event in the international context of 2012, considering the implications of the International Coalition in Iraq. The radicalization process can be described as consisting of elements such as feelings of hatred against a government and the desire to undermine authority. Also, the operational method involved cold weapons, falling within the trends of terrorist *modus operandi* on a regional scale by choosing unconventional methods in order to commit a terrorist attack.

In terms of the two isolated, atypical cases (Romanian Intelligence Service, 2015, p. 20 and 56) foiled by the authorities, they are based on a pattern of a group of students (15, respectively 100) that were not coordinated by a terrorist organization but had a specific terrorist *modus operandi* by seizing people from a location (the embassy of Sudan and the embassy of Egypt) followed by the use of improvised explosive devices (Molotov cocktails). The targeted objectives did not involve national interests or a violent ideology connected to illegitimate objectives. Mentioning these cases is, however, useful in relation to a pattern of organized action on the national territory based on a terrorist *modus operandi*, aiming specific goals through the use of force.

In analysing the attempts aiming for the establishment of a terrorist nucleus in Romania, three previous cases in this regard were discovered. The risk of a terrorist cell's existence on national territory is evaluated as a high-level risk from the perspective of developing internal vulnerabilities related to terrorism. Considering the fact that these attempts were undermined by the competent authorities in the field, the terrorist risks in Romania were maintained and evaluated only from an external perspective.

In this regard, the first attempt to establish a terrorist cell on the territory of the state is attributed to the Kurdish organization PKK in 1992 (Romanian Intelligence Service, 2015, p. 54). The members intended to finance the organization on national territory without having any objectives related to a terrorist attack against a social category or a state authority. The action falls within the context of the flow of migrants on the Asia-Europe route. Given the fact that the activity of this entity was related to an NGO, this represents another indicator and a common element that can be found in the tendencies of financing terrorism-related activities (by conducting NGOs, detaining phantom commercial companies, or developing actions of charity).

Secondly, another case of an attempt to facilitate the activity of a terrorist organization was represented by the first elements of Romania's interaction with members affiliated with Al-Qaeda in Iraq within the country. A number of Iraqi citizens in Romania facilitated in 2005 the residence visas in Romania of more than 200 people to the country, including five Al-Qaeda members and eight people with ties to the terrorist organization (Romanian Intelligence Service, 2015, p. 233). The initial reasons claimed by the foreign citizens were disguised as legal ones in order to obtain a residence visa (studies, commercial affairs, marriage to a Romanian citizen). This operational method can be characterized as a leitmotif found in most of the cases of radicalized foreigners who were expelled after a period of time.

The most relevant case for the analysis of radicalization in Romania is the attempt in 2003 (Romanian Intelligence Service, 2015, p. 198) to create a logistical support nucleus in Romania and to promote radical terrorist propaganda and proselytism by a group of students from Iasi that had a variety of nationalities from the region of Africa and

the Middle East (Omani, Saudis, Sudanese, Pakistani). In this case, it can be observed quite coherently how the method of directed radicalization operated. If the organization had achieved cohesion, the entity's goals would have been oriented towards facilitating the performance of terrorist attacks by external terrorist organizations on the national territory.

The process of coordinated radicalization operated in this case by luring and recruiting young Muslim foreigners, residents of Romania, in order to spread the extremist ideology inspired by the model of Al-Qaeda. The reason for luring young foreigners lies in their lack of attachment to Romania's values and interests. Thus, indoctrinating other foreign residents with hatred against the national authorities and the government would have been much easier to achieve compared to the attempt on Romanian citizens. Young Muslim people were also selected for two reasons: to be more receptive to the extremist interpretation of Islam but also to be eligible to fulfil the religious objectives of the group. Another specific element that was present in the radicalization process consisted of directing their hatred toward the West. This element is specific to all the narratives of the jihadist ideology and is justified by the perception of the so-called oppression of Muslims by Western states.

In this case, young people were indoctrinated through the use of Islamic propaganda through audio and video materials in order to trigger specific psycho-religious factors that usually unleash the radicalization process. Another element commonly encountered in this collectively coordinated radicalization process is the mass murder glorification and violence adoration in Afghanistan, Chechnya, Bosnia, and Lebanon in the name of the Islamic jihad. In addition to that, extremist ideology was taught to the young Muslims using tapes with radical imams' teachings. However, a particularity was the traditional manner of coordinating the collective radicalization process, in the sense that, if nowadays it is mostly met in the online environment, in this case there were available physical meetings in order to facilitate their sense of cohesion and belongingness.

It should be noted the importance given to counter-informative instruction by learning from Al Qaeda's counter-informative training specific techniques to evade illegal actions towards the authorities. The

counter-informative training was also accompanied by a guide to using improvised explosive materials, as well as being indoctrinated with the concept of becoming “martyrs”, rooted in the jihadist suicide attacks (Romanian Intelligence Service, 2015, p. 198).

This model of directed radicalization brings together most of the elements of the traditional model of radicalization that is based on specialized theories: carried out in conspiratorial houses, coordinated by the group’s leaders, who trained the members and shaped them into extremist ideologies. This model equally contains both psychological elements that exploit the conditions of personal vulnerability in order to determine their willingness to commit violent acts and ideological elements in order to justify the illegitimate actions of the group. In fact, this model involves luring members through a false sense of belonging but also offering them a false purpose in life for carrying out the jihad by exploiting individual vulnerabilities and isolating the recruited people (Jones, 2008, p. 7).

The impact that some dynamics might have on evaluating the trends in Romania was analysed while using the regional and international context as an indicator. The result of the analysis of past terrorist attempts also gradually showed the interest that a terrorist actor might have in Romania and the type of radicalization that is subsidiary. Lastly, the analysis of the past attempts in Romania emphasized important details in terms of the places and social categories in Romania that can be of interest to terrorist actors. As a result of the previous aspects emphasized by the analysis, the following elements can be considered as making up the specificities of the Romanian pattern in terms of observed trends of radicalization: If the period of the communist regime was characterized by the interests of terrorist organizations to target foreign diplomatic representatives or heads of state from the Middle East region visiting Romania, the objectives of the affiliated members of terrorist groups aimed, in the period after the 1990s, at targeting foreign interest locations (American, Western, or Israeli). Other objectives that can also predispose Romania to being a state of interest for non-state actors consist of its geostrategic position (being a buffer between the high-risk areas of the terrorist phenomenon in the Middle

East and the Western world) and the migration flow (as a transit route Asia-Europe and Europe-Middle East).

Moreover, other sources of interest can be generated by Romania's membership in international organizations with a role in maintaining military stability and peace, such as NATO, and its involvement in military operations, as well as its past experiences in Iraq and Afghanistan. The strategic partnership of Romania with the United States of America and its membership in European security organizations can equally increase the hatred narratives, specific to the violent Islamic ideology, projected against the West and US policies.

Another aspect to note is the specificity of the subsidiary activities supporting or facilitating terrorism, which renders Romania a sphere of interest for non-state actors. Consequently, it is highlighted the predisposition for illegitimate actions such as violating the border regime and facilitating illegal migration for terrorist purposes, as well as facilitating the transport of individuals suspected of terrorism. Another aspect regarding the activities of facilitating terrorism is represented by the actions of financing or offering logistical support to terrorist organizations. The actions of proselytizing and promoting jihadist propaganda are also one of the main reasons for incrimination according to the provisions of Law No. 531/2005. Moreover, the typology of the terrorist threat targeting Romania has a jihadist nature. However, isolated cases consisting of political and separatist objectives of the ethnic Hungarians against the constitutional order and the integrity of Romania were observed in the region of the Hungarian community in Romania, namely Târgu Secuiesc from Harghita.

Concerning the social categories that are targeted, the analysis showed that the people most likely to be victims of terrorist attacks are represented by diplomatic personnel from the embassies of strategic partners (USA, Israel) or the embassies of Western states in Romania that are involved in the fight against terrorism, according to current trends. Other people likely to be targets of attempted terrorist attacks are the foreign citizens residing in Romania as well, who have a nationality specifically targeted by the objectives of a terrorist organization abroad (for example, the PKK in relation to Turkish citizens or Hamas in relation to Israeli citizens).

The objectives of strategic interest on the national territory, in the sense of the cities with the greatest predilection for being targeted as locations for the occurrence of radicalization or of the attempts to terrorist-related activities, are primarily represented by the cities proximate to the borders or in the transit route to regions with high terrorism risk according to the trends in terrorism expansion. For example, the trends from 2011-2019 showed Syria and Iraq as areas of high risk due to the expansion of ISIS in their territory, but according to the trends from 2020–2023, the areas of North-West Africa and the Sahel and areas of Central and South Asia indicate the expansion of the Islamic State (Global Terrorism Index, 2023, p. 42-43). The areas that could therefore be considered vulnerable are approximated, either in relation to the migration flows as a factor that can impact Romania in a predetermined period, as a transit route, or in correlation with the areas that are assimilated as being spheres of interest for terrorist groups.

Consequently, the pattern of the Romanian cities considered sensitive in this regard is determined by their geostrategic positioning (Timișoara, Constanța, Oradea), the criteria of the universities and study opportunities (Iași, Sibiu, Bucharest, Cluj, Timișoara), or in relation to the areas of interest for the Muslim community and the existence of Islamic Centres (Iași, Constanța, Bucharest, Craiova, Deva, Cluj, Timișoara). At the same time, for the purpose of financing the terrorist organization, an NGO can be targeted in order to create the appearance of a legitimate activity in the same manner as a centre dedicated to charity work. The accommodation centres for disadvantaged or vulnerable people (orphanages, centres for homeless people, rehabilitation centres) can as well be targeted as locations with categories of vulnerable people to radicalization and recruiting or sharing extremist ideology. These people are estimated with a high degree of vulnerability based on psycho-social factors, which predispose the individuals to being triggered by some traumas that can unleash the radicalization process.

In addition to that, it can also be added that the trends in radicalization in Romania follow the model of the European trends in radicalization as a manifestation of the phenomenon at the regional level. In this manner, in the majority of the radicalized cases, whether terrorist attempts or not, ISIS was the terrorist organization that inspired the

radicalization process and is the main source of inspiration in the actions of spreading extremist propaganda. At the same time, religious ideology is the most frequent extremist ideology, framing the trends in Romania in accordance with European trends (Global Terrorism Index, 2023). It is also important to mention that the reports regarding the tendencies of the terrorist modus operandi in the European space have shown the preponderance of jihadist suicide attacks, the use of explosive materials by improvised incendiary devices (IIDS), improvised explosive devices (IEDS), and fire accelerators, but also the unconventional use of cold weapons in pursuing terrorist attacks (EUROPOL, 2023), this modus operandi being similarly available in Romania's cases.

Another common element between European trends and Romanian trends in radicalization is attributed to the cyberspace in terms of promoting extremist propaganda, too. In addition to that, it was also revealed in the literature that recent European trends in radicalization can't be evaluated anymore in the traditional manner and that the virtual role in the process is predominant (Whittaker, 2022). Moreover, the *Romanian Cyber Security Strategy* emphasizes the importance of reducing the risks of spreading terrorist propaganda in cyberspace, which has been identified as an increasing trend of the phenomenon.

Furthermore, the following part of the article focuses on identifying Romania's vulnerabilities regarding radicalization by starting from a micro-level analysis of individual vulnerabilities, constituted in the first part by the cases of Romanian radicalized citizens and in the second part by the cases of radicalized foreigners that were expelled. Starting at this point, the article aims to identify the elements of vulnerability at the macro-level and to express the conclusions of the analysis in terms of Romania's vulnerabilities regarding radicalization.

A micro-level analysis regarding Romanian citizens' vulnerabilities to radicalization

Before proceeding to the analysis of the cases of radicalization among Romanian citizens, it should be specified that only the cases that presented a process of radicalization were taken into consideration. In this regard, a person may be incriminated by a court decision for

facilitating or favouring terrorist activities, but at the same time, this fact doesn't automatically imply that the subject is already radicalized or is in the process of radicalization.

The criteria used in the analysis consisted of selecting identifying data available in the court decisions that incriminated acts provided for by Law No. 535/2005, such as average age, sex, religious orientation, level of education, or profession or occupation at the time of radicalization, as well as the city of residence at that time, criminal record, psychiatric record, or traits of personality disorders. In addition to the attempt to build a prototype based on these criteria, the analysis also considered the psychological and social factors that predisposed the person to radicalization. In this sense, the selected period in the analysis of the cases of radicalization was between 2006 and 2021, considered the starting point for the first case of a radicalized Romanian citizen (Romanian Intelligence Service, 2015, p. 230).

Following the analysis of the court decisions in Romania, it emerged that during the period 2008-2021, a number of seven Romanian citizens had gradually developed the process of Islamic radicalization until an advanced phase, but prior to the step of engaging in terrorist attempts (Pitești Court of Appeal, Decision no. 21/2018; Bucharest Court of Appeal, Decision no. 79/2019; The High Justice Court, Decision no. 54/2022; Decision no. 68/2021; Decision no. 342/2017; Craiova Court of Appeal, Decision no. 110/2017). The cities where the radicalization took place were Mioveni, Timișoara, Cluj, Craiova, and Drobeta Turnu Severin; some of them were cities already previously identified as areas of interest for terrorist-related activities, therefore this confirms the hypothesis.

According to the classification criteria listed previously, it turned out that, out of the seven Romanian citizens, six were men and only one was a woman (Decision No. 54/2022), with an average age between 18 and 43 years at the time of the radicalization. Likewise, the modality of radicalization was self-radicalization in the online environment, with the exception of only one case (Pitești Court of Appeal, Decision no. 31/2018) that assimilated coordinated radicalization. Due to the qualitative analysis based on these criteria, it was observed that the theory that the Internet operates as a conductor for the consumption of

radical propaganda (Whittaker, J. 2022) is applicable. Also, the young age of the radicalized people and the predominant self-development of the radicalization process support the idea that it is essentially a mental and emotional process, determined by intrinsic reasons.

On the other hand, in the case of coordinated radicalization, the analysis showed that this radicalization process started outside the country, in France, and the subject returned to Romania already in an advanced phase (Pitești Court of Appeal, Decision no. 31/2018). In this case, the applicability of the social theories (Helfstein, 2012) that emphasize the impact of interaction and identification of the subject with a set of values of the radicalized group as factors that determine the initiation of the radicalization process can be observed. Apart from the unanimous inclination towards the specific ideology of ISIS spread online, the similarity between the cases of the radicalized Romanian in France (Pitești Court of Appeal, Decision no. 31/2018) and the radicalized woman that lived in France for some years (The High Justice Court, Decision no. 54/2022) highlighted that the interaction of these two subjects with radicalized people in France initiated the radicalization process in a foreign country, so therefore, they returned to the country already in an advanced phase of radicalization.

In this idea, it should be mentioned that, in recent years, France has recorded the most terrorist attacks in Europe and also a high number of radicalized people (Global Terrorism Index, 2023, p. 36). The development of the radicalization process in an advanced phase was determined by a fertile environment for radicalization and the influence of the social circle with members who participated in terrorist attacks or fought in Syria in 2012 and 2014.

Likewise, regarding the level of education, the references from the court decisions showed a medium level of education in all the cases. In regards to the psychiatric record, it should be specified that all the subjects had discernment, with the exception of only one case with a low level of discernment (Decision No. 307/2018), but were present factors of psycho-social vulnerability: traits of personality that highlighted the tendencies of instability, impulsivity (Decision No. 307/2019, Decision No. 342/2017), or social vulnerabilities caused by uprooted family environments or the absence of parental authority (Decision No.

342/2017). The inspiration for the violent Islamic ideology was ISIS's ideology and methods of operation. Regarding the criteria of mental health illness understood in terms of vulnerability to radicalization, the article shares the opinion that mental illness issues, even though they may come as elements in the psychological profile of radicalized persons, can't be assimilated as primal reasons for predisposing a person to radicalization. On the other hand, it is confirmed by the analysis that personality traits play a much bigger role in assimilating radical beliefs and the tendency to violence (Misiak B. et al, 2019).

Furthermore, the actions taken by radicalized people were based on similar ideological prototypes: accessing and spreading online videos and imaging materials with an exacerbated degree of violence (beheadings, executions, burning alive the "infidels"), conducting public instigation to hatred and promoting speech against Western states and the USA, trying to attract new followers to join the cause of jihad, and proclaiming actions in the name of Allah. Another aspect worth mentioning is that, usually, the process of radicalization lasts from one to two years until the incrimination of the person in all of the cases.

Regarding the religious orientation prior to radicalization, it should be noted that two citizens out of seven had the Muslim religion from birth (Decision No. 307/2019), but the rest of them converted to Islam at some point, that is, prior to the initiation of the radicalization process. There is a notable gap of years between the two events, a fact also confirmed by the hypothesis that Muslim people by birth were radicalized in a vulnerable period of life. By observing the psychological factors that contribute to people's vulnerability to radicalization, several critical moments can be highlighted: the conversion to Islam as the initial moment, followed by a stage of assimilation of the new religious identity, and the incorporation of the customs and rigors of the Islamic religion. For this reason, the conversion theory has more applicability in these cases than the theory of radicalization as a sub-type of religious conversion (Van den Elzen, 2018), for the fact that the moment of initiation of the radicalization process does not coincide with the moment of conversion to Islam.

So, the moment of conversion to Islam is not the trigger for radicalization but an identity crisis influenced by previous psycho-social

factors. In this manner, the cause of a life-crisis event initiating the process of radicalization, cumulated with other psychological and social factors, can explain the development of the radicalization process as a transformational process (Wilner, Dubouloz, 2010). At the same time, in terms of the criteria for evaluating the psychological vulnerability of the subjects, such as self-image, isolation, social maladjustment, problems with authority, predisposition to antisocial acts, and emotional instability, it was observed that they build their self-image and the new identity by taking on a religious pseudonym (Decision nr. 342/2017, Decision 307/2019), changing habits and behaviour in accordance with religious ideas (Decision nr. 342/2017, Decision no. 54/2022), as strong indicators for occurring the first phase, the *crisis stage*, of the radicalization process.

In some cases, they presented tendencies of isolation in society or social maladjustment in the social or occupational environment (Decision 307/2019, Decision 342/2017), distance from society's values, tendencies of aggression (Decision No. 54/2022) and violence in the intra-personal environment, problems with authority (history of previous convictions (Decision 31/2018, Decision No. 54/2022, Decision No. 307/2019), school absenteeism (Decision No. 342/2017), family or occupational aggression), these signs usually happening in the *legitimacy conflict* of the radicalization process. Equally, the subjects showed resistance and feelings of hatred directed against Western society, government authority, and Christianity, specific elements for "legitimizing violence" against the national government (Decision 79/2019, Decision nr. 31/2018, Decision nr. 342/2017).

The advanced phase of radicalization, identified as the legitimacy crisis, was detected in the cases of repeated acts of spreading jihadist propaganda daily (Decision No. 54/2022), increasing as the subjects most often perceived life and everyday reality as unsatisfying; they manifested the loss of the fear of dying or the fear of killing (Decision No. 342/2017) in order to accomplish the fulfilment of the "sacred purpose" in jihad. It should also be noted that, in terms of following the model of the "martyr" presented by ISIS violent ideology or Al Qaeda, predisposed people to sacrifice for the cause of jihad are represented by people with low self-image and a damaged sense of identity. For this reason, the

person lacks a defined purpose in life and feels the need for a purpose, which he finds in joining a cause perceived as sacred by detaching himself from human values and existence and by embracing the sacrifice in exchange for the afterlife.

In terms of accessing and spreading through the social media platforms the jihadist propaganda, the analysis of the court decisions showed that it included violent materials containing photos and videos of beheadings, burning people alive in the name of Allah, public collective shootings, or manifestos justifying the extremist ideology. The materials glorified terrorist attacks, marked with specific symbols by the actor who proclaimed the attack. In order to explain the symbolism that can be met in the photos of the jihadist propaganda and attributed to a terrorist attack, it can be emphasized that it contains specific numbers as hatred symbols to encrypt motivational phrases from the violent ideology, with quotes from the Qu'ran that are misinterpreted in extremist terms in order to legitimize violence and glorify terrorist attacks.

The analysis of the cases also showed that the jihadist propaganda shared by the radicalized persons contained common elements such as violence adoration, mass murder glorification, and the copycat effect of previous martyrs, elements explained in the literature as being specific elements in perpetuating the idea of "legacy" of the claimant of the terrorist attack (Vidino, Marone, and Entenmann, 2017, p. 31–32). In addition, another element identified in the actions of spreading jihadist propaganda was that it can be promoted not only in the online environment but also inserted in video games with themes of Islamic Jihad (Decision No. 54/2022, Decision No. 342/2017), that are meant to engage people in psychological addiction, disengagement from reality and isolation, weaponry attraction, and violent behaviour.

A micro-level analysis regarding the resident foreigners' vulnerabilities to radicalization

The criteria taken into consideration in order to identify the pattern were: nationality, average age, sex, education or profession at the time of radicalization, immigrant status, origin from high-risk areas, the reason for obtaining the residence visa in Romania, the residence city in Romania, as well as the terrorist organization of inspiration. The analysis

selected the period starting in 2003 as the first attempt to establish a terrorist nucleus on the territory of Romania until the year 2023.

In the period 2010–2022, the Bucharest Court of Appeal expelled 63 foreign citizens based on the facilitation of terrorism, the violation of the explosive's regime, and the dissemination of terrorist propaganda materials and religious proselytizing. From the total number of expelled foreigners, the analysis showed that the predominant nationalities were: 10 Afghans (Decisions no. 113/2019, no. 2048/2016, no. 3450/2013, no. 6055/2012, no.133/2010, no. 1812/2021), 9 Palestinians (Decisions no. 4648/2012, no. 91/2019), 8 Tunisians (Decisions no. 2903/2018, no. 1654/2015, no. 904/2015, no. 933/2015, no. 3015/2017, no. 2339/2013, no. 6386/2012), 7 Syrians (Decisions no. 177/2020, no. 124/2012, no. 2966/2017), 5 Pakistanis (Decisions no. 1668/2018, no. 904/2015, no. 6906/2012, no. 4520/2012), 4 Chinese (Decision no. 7228/2012), 3 Algerians (Decision no. 904/2015), 3 Germans (Decisions no. 672/2017, no. 542/2013), 2 Iraqis (Decisions no. 2774/2016, no. 57/2019), 2 Turks (Decisions no. 928/2021, no. 546/2011), 2 Iranians (Decision no. 1112/2021), 2 Moroccans (Decisions no. 386/2019, no. 904/2015), 2 Jordanians (Decisions no. 3491/2015, no. 3310/2012), 1 Yemeni (Decision no. 4911/2017), 1 Kurd (Decision no. 1826/2012), 1 Egyptian (Decision no. 5971/2011) and 1 Hungarian (Decision no. 927/2014). Also, all the incriminated individuals were men and were inspired by the extremist ideologies of ISIS, Al-Qaeda, the Taliban Movement in Afghanistan, and Hamas.

At the same time, considering the reasons for granting residence visas in Romania, it is observed that the majority of visa applicants were students at the faculties of medicine and pharmacy in Bucharest, Iași, Timișoara, and Oradea. Compared to the rest of the people, four visas were granted for commercial activities, five people obtained the visa due to marriage with a Romanian, 12 people entered the country illegally, two people sought asylum, and two were refugees. Regarding the cities that were chosen for residence in Romania, there were Bucharest, Timișoara, Iași, Oradea, and Cluj. Another aspect important to mention is the ties these people have developed with the Islamic League in Romania.

Also, two repetitive elements were identified: the origin of the foreigners was from areas with a high degree of terrorism risk, such as

the Middle East and the region of Africa, as well as the reasons for granting visas, which consist in most cases of granting visas for studies in the field of medicine and pharmacy. Another characteristic is the marriage with Romanian citizens shortly after the granting of the visa or establishing residence. Also, in all the cases, the foreign citizens were born-and-raised Muslims. At the same time, another aspect that is relevant for the analysis is the period of residence in Romania, which in most cases stretched from one year to up to 20 years. In this regard, the majority of foreigners were integrated into society and not at all in transition to the territory. Moreover, some of them had families with children who were Romanian citizens.

For these reasons, the analysis showed the applicability of the theory of norm diffusion and local culture in the cases of the foreigners that were expelled. Most of the radicalization cases in Romania are generated by foreigners coming from another cultural region, predominantly the Middle East that has another set of cultural habits and perceptions about Western society highly anchored in the collective mindset, concerning life norms or rules. This opinion is also supported in the literature by the fact that it is more likely for radicalization to happen among young immigrants or refugees due to community violence, histories, and cultural stressors from their country of origin (Sieckelinck et al., 2015). Therefore, the vulnerabilities to radicalization regarding the foreigners can be approximated by taking into consideration as predisposal factors the areas that they came from as having a different cultural background compared to the Western region (Butt and Tuck, 2014). Also, the macro-system theory implies that the political, social, and cultural indicators that shape the society to which a future radicalized individual initially belongs contribute to an increased vulnerability to radicalization in terms of the belief systems and radical ideas that justify violence (Viejo, Boyé, 2017).

By also taking into consideration the macro-level indicators for the foreigners as having another cultural and socio-economic background, the article shares the opinion that the main individual vulnerability seen in most of the cases of the foreigners might have a root in the lack of awareness regarding the true essence of Islam. This fact is sustained by the argument that in the cases of the foreigners that were

expelled, the background is defined by born-and-raised Muslims, coming from other cultural regions where they might have already interacted with radical beliefs or a set of different values that were not democratic as in Western society. This assumption is also supported by the concept of “faith reinterpretation”, specifically for those who are Muslims by birth and who develop a motivation in which they alter the religious tradition through introspection, finishing by following an extremist form of Islam (FBI’s Counterterrorism Division, 2006).

In addition to that, an important step in avoiding vulnerability regarding the predisposition to radicalization is an authentic interpretation of the texts from the Qur’an, which is contrary to the Islamic extremist ideology promoted by radicalized individuals or terrorist organizations (ElSayed Amin, 2014, p. 2). For this reason, avoiding the texts or materials interpreted by radical imams in contradiction with the essence of the Qur’an combined with an authentic knowledge of religious teachings is the first step for Muslim persons to eliminate an incipient vulnerability.

On the other hand, regarding the theory of crisis psychology (Horgan, 2005, p. 78), where the main vulnerabilities are evaluated in terms of the level of integration of the Muslim community in a foreign country, Muslims connection to a new society’s values, and the perceptions of persecution they feel in a Western territory, the article doesn’t share this theory as having applicability in Romania’s cases of expelled foreigners. By analysing the cases of the foreigners, it can be undeniably observed that they spent a long period of time in the country, had stable jobs or businesses, and had families with children who were Romanian citizens.

In the same manner, theories state that there is a link between radicalization and the set of misconceptions of society against Muslim people, in the sense that it determines the revolt and frustration towards the authorities and the injustice of Western states, so therefore, it creates the legitimacy to pursue violent actions and behaviours against the authority (Borum, 2004, p. 19). However, this theoretical assumption to explain vulnerabilities to radicalization is not sustained in the cases of the radicalized foreigners in Romania. The analysis showed that most of the foreigners showed regret when the Court declared the decision to

expel them from the country in order to leave Romania. Also, the foreigners emphasized that they were completely integrated into Romanian society and didn't feel persecuted or unaccepted at all by Romanians.

In terms of psychological factors, it was observed that the predilection of foreign students who come to study in Romania is to be lured by the jihadist propaganda because of the lack of purpose, being in search of an identity and a direction in life, and at the same time, being receptive to new mentalities, life directions, orientations, or experiences. Thus, this is a huge psychological factor that can become a vulnerability to be exploited by terrorist groups in their recruitment.

The macro-level deductions in terms of Romania's vulnerabilities to radicalization

In order to emphasize the macro-level deductions in terms of national vulnerabilities regarding radicalization, the starting point should be the definition of national vulnerabilities expressed in the Romanian National defence Strategy 2020-2024 as functional-systemic deficiencies that can be exploited to materialize threats or risks, weakening the resilience of the state as well as the ability to protect, defend, and promote national values, interests, and objectives.

The micro-level analysis of the cases of radicalization in Romania showed the fact that most of the cases of radicalization are constituted by foreign immigrants coming from high-risk areas in terms of terrorism manifestation – the Middle East and Africa. Also, it has revealed a young average social category of radicalized persons. However, in terms of Romanian radicalized persons, self-radicalization and spreading jihadist propaganda happened in the online environment, whereas in the cases of expelled foreigners, the social interaction within the groups (being available even after the collective expulsion) accelerated the radicalization process. Considering the fact that the cases of the foreigners showed a high level of stability in the Romanian society, such as a long period of residence, employment stability, and having a family with Romanian citizens, the factors should be approximated more in terms of increasing awareness of the phenomenon than combating its manifestation.

Consequently, the national vulnerabilities can be approximated in terms of the low level of security culture and awareness in terms of radicalization among civil society. Another aspect is also the fact that there are neither mentions nor substantial documents in terms of risks to radicalization at the national level, in order to help the civil society, become aware of incipient signs such as radical speech, attempts to be lured or recruited by terrorist members to inflict the ideology, elements of jihadist violence in online games, or anti-Western speech on the online platforms. Considering the impact of the online factor, it is equally important to mention the cyber vulnerabilities that were exploited in spreading jihadist propaganda and jihadist video games in order to accomplish anti-democratic objectives by the radicalized persons. In this manner, by taking into consideration the fast dynamics and the variety of cyber instruments, competent institutions must be currently adapted to evaluate new methods to control the spreading of the phenomenon and reconsider their instruments to prevent and combat it in the cyber area.

In addition to that, a low level of cooperation and dialogue between the national authorities and the Muslim representatives, figures as a vulnerability that can contribute to the acceleration of the phenomenon in the long term. Thus, the Muslim representatives of the communities in Romania can be included as guidance figures in programs in order not only to dispel misconceptions about Islam oriented towards Romanian society but also to dispel errors of religious interpretation or radical speech that can affect the perception of the Muslim community. Moreover, **the legislation in the national security area must be adapted** to the needs of the state, and reinforcing the competences in the counter-terrorism area can also contribute to creating adapted instruments in the area of preventing radicalization.

Conclusions

The analysis showed that radicalization in Romania follows, in terms of trends, the elements that other European states are confronting with: online radicalization, predisposition to self-radicalization instead of the traditional type of coordinated radicalization, radical propaganda

inspired by ISIS ideology, and a young average age of radicalized persons. Regarding this aspect, the prevention efforts should be oriented to constantly finding adaptive manners to decrease the probabilities of manifestation in the areas where this phenomenon is more likely to appear: virtual space, targeting young social categories, but also in regards to the instruments that are usually used in the self-radicalization process: social media platforms and violent jihadist games.

Hence, a recommendable aspect is to multiply the number of awareness programs regarding radicalization in Romania. These programs should be addressed to the civil society in order to increase awareness regarding the risks and manifestations of the phenomenon, especially in the national educational environments (universities, schools, and high schools), considering that young people and students are predisposed, as social categories, to radicalization. The education about the risks generated by radicalization is equally an effective tool to get the civil society familiarized to identify the early signs of radicalized people (extremist narrative, attempts at coercion, or incitement of civilians to violence based on widespread propaganda), whether to increase awareness in terms of radical content met online that incites violence, undermining the official powers, or hatred speech against Western societies, proclaimed in the name of Islam.

In terms of decreasing the macro-level vulnerabilities to radicalization, as the analysis showed that most of the radicalized cases in Romania consist of Muslim resident foreigners, it is necessary to increase the dialogue with the religious communities and the Muslim representative figures in order to offer more substance within the Muslim community regarding the dangers of Islam fundamentalism and the radical interpretations. In addition to that, increasing the dialogue between national authorities and the Muslim community would contribute to dismantling perceptions of persecution or discrimination against Muslims, frequently used in radical narratives.

Considering the fact that an objective of the Islamic and Cultural League in Romania is to “*eradicate*” the misconceptions about Islam in Romania and to dismantle the urban myths that assimilate Islam with Islamic fundamentalism, it can be emphasized that this objective could also be oriented to increase awareness regarding the extremist

interpretations offered to the Quran by the terrorist organizations within the Muslim community. However, it is advisable on the part of the Muslim community in Romania to demonstrate responsibility for the fulfilment of the objectives proposed by the Islamic associations in the country, based on the assumed exercise of the rights of religious freedom. The practical dismantling of urban myths and misperceptions towards Muslims is realized by ensuring transparency to society and authorities in Romania about the interpretation given to the Islamic teachings.

By taking into consideration the important role that the religious guidance of Muslim people has in order to give them a sense of belonging in the community and to raise their awareness about the dangers of adopting a radical approach to Islamism, the involvement of the religious figures of the muftis within mosques can be a huge factor in decreasing the vulnerability to radicalization in the Muslim community. On the other hand, the role of imams should demonstrate their involvement in strengthening the discernment of the Muslim community regarding a balanced and authentic interpretation of the texts of the Qur'an. Also, it is essential to warn the community against the misleading interpretation of key concepts in Islam spread by radical materials. This fact is also supported in the research area as being an important factor in decreasing the probabilities of radicalization in the Muslim community.

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