

(FEW) JIHADIS WITHOUT JIHAD? CENTRAL EASTERN EUROPEANS AND THEIR LACK OF PATHWAYS TO GLOBAL JIHAD

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**COUNTER
EXTREMISM
PROJECT**

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INTRODUCTION

For the last two years, GLOBSEC has been studying the crime-terror nexus in Europe.¹ Its research team has built up a dataset of 326 individuals arrested for terrorism offences, expelled for alleged terrorist connections, or who died while staging terrorist attacks in Europe in 2015, the peak year of European jihadism. The dataset covers 11 European countries, all within the EU, who have reported the highest number of terrorism arrestees to EUROPOL, the European Police Office. The work has been geared towards establishing whether this nexus exists and then researching its nature and intensity. The research team deployed 11 experienced national teams that worked on the available data (open source, available official documents, personal interviews with stakeholders) to map out the European crime-terror nexus.

Throughout 2019, GLOBSEC, within the scope of a new project developed in cooperation with the Counter Extremism Project, mapped out and thematically analysed the pathways to jihadism of the 300+ individuals included in the original dataset. Eight such pathways were identified:

1. dissatisfaction and outrage as fuel for jihadi involvement;
2. radicalism or “thuggish” nihilism as an antechamber into global jihad;
3. previous criminal involvement as a springboard into global jihad;
4. prison as a key but understudied and misunderstood hub of jihadi recruitment;
5. “glocal” nature of recruitment into jihad as a “homegrown phenomenon fuelled by events happening outside or in the vicinity of Europe, i.e., in North Africa or the broader Middle East;”²
6. role of the family in the process of radicalisation;
7. the ongoing inflammatory character of certain places of worship (mosques) as recruitment hubs, and
8. European jihadism as a conveyor belt for sending fighters towards conflict zones in the broader MENA region (travel bureau).

The first report was followed by a more detailed study of 56 jihadists from 5 European countries. Their cases vividly demonstrate the practical ins and outs of how a pathway towards jihad looks like in the current European settings,³ or, to put it differently, what does becoming a jihadi entail and how does it happen exactly. GLOBSEC identified the four pathways—glocal, dissatisfaction and outrage, family, and crime-terror nexus—as the most “popular” vehicles for recruitment to global jihad in Western Europe with each present in at least 50% of the cases studied (28 or more). **This paper takes the established methodology of the previous two and applies it to cases of Central Eastern European (CEE) jihadis from the four countries constituting the Visegrad Group (V4), i.e., Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, and Slovakia. GLOBSEC, a Slovak but also a Central European and a Transatlantic organisation, shares the assessment that the broader West, including the V4, is threatened by global jihadi terrorism. The transnational character of this threat necessitates equally transnational responses based on sound empirical evidence. This report, to a large extent breaking ground on the scale of the radical and extremist Islamist jihadi penetration (or lack of) of the CEE and based on 20+ interviews with security stakeholders and experts in the four countries covered and on data from open sources,⁴ is aimed at offering = that evidence and situating the scale of the threat within the context of the larger ISIL activities in and against Europe.**



Pathways into Jihad are:

connected to the feelings of dissatisfaction and outrage.



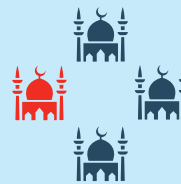
global in ambition but local in nature.

available to both radicals, "thugs" and hybrids.



about one's next of kin.

connected to criminality.



linked to certain places of worship.

prison facilitated.



fostered by "travel bureaus".

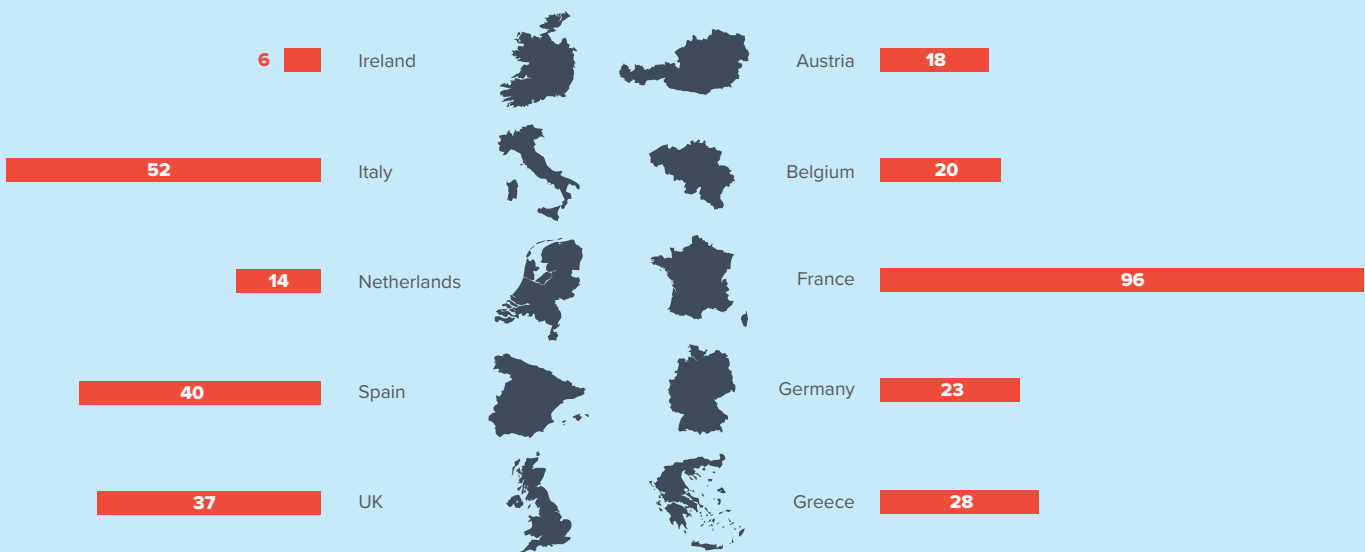
BOTTOM LINE UP FRONT

This report paints a picture of a very few well-known jihadis (16 in total: 8 Polish or Polish citizens radicalised abroad; 4 Czechs; 3 Hungarians; 1 Slovak) who aimed to continue their activities without being connected to jihad, i.e., instead supporting the jihadi ecosystem such as the presence of radical and extremist jihadi veterans, recruiters or entrepreneurs,⁵ families with histories of radical and extremist Islamist involvement, radical mosques, or the involvement of individuals from the same localities in previous terrorist activities.

Theirs is a story of **misfits** or individuals who turn to radical and extremist Islamist behaviour but might have been attracted to another nihilistic and violent

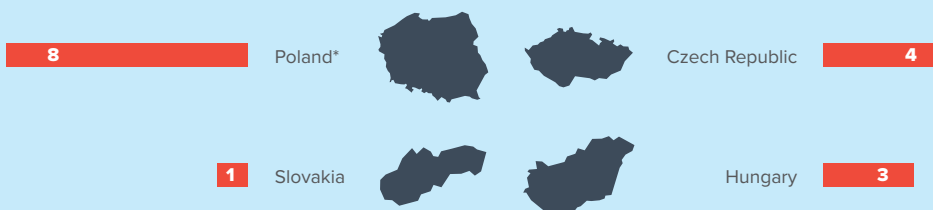
ideology given their (perceived) social and individual grievances. To be exact, the majority of their very low numbers usually gravitate to global radical Islamist terrorism down the **dissatisfaction and outrage pathway**. Unlike their Western peers, however, **they often have no stories to share of personal discrimination or oppression for their beliefs because some hide their new faith** (they are mostly converts, nevertheless their religious dedication is very shallow) **and new-found fascination with radical and extremist Islamist jihadism**.⁶ That is not to say they cannot find other reasons for feeling outraged or rebelling against the world in which they feel isolated and lost—usually due to personal, sometimes psychological problems. In this sense, **radical and extremist Islamist jihadism is merely**

2015 Jihadis by country (as included in GLOBSEC crime-terror nexus dataset)



Source: <https://www.globsec.org/projects/criminals-terrorists-back/>

Known V4 jihadis



*includes holders of dual citizenship, radicalised abroad

a tool, not a deeply held conviction. Others make the most of the jihadi ecosystems in Western Europe and are radicalised abroad and have only notional links to their V4 countries of origin. The very few “homegrown” cases are in fact wannabe self-made and jihadi entrepreneurs who have to improvise their pathways into global radical and extremist Islamist jihad and cannot rely on the support of more experienced peers, who simply are not available. Through trial and error, they, e.g., make the journey to the Turkey-Syrian border to opt into global jihad but regularly they fail to get there or are unhappy with the reality of living amongst the radical and extremist Islamist jihadis (be it in the MENA region or the South Asia).

All in all, **the pathways and travails of CEE radical and extremist Islamist jihadis reveal the parochial mask of European jihadism.** It is embedded in certain communities, often in small towns or even villages, in Western Europe and these are, in turn, connected, for example, to global radical and extremist Islamist jihad by sending its members to, e.g., fight as foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) in Syria/Iraq or other radical and extremist Islamist jihadi battlefronts (Somalia, Yemen). At the same time, however, and despite the seeming lack of logistical barriers, representatives of the very same European radical and extremist Islamist jihad are so far largely unable or unwilling to connect with the few wannabe radical and extremist Islamist jihadis from Central Eastern Europe, thus condemning them to improvisation in their radical and extremist Islamist jihadis exploits.

(LACK OF) PATHWAYS TO RADICAL AND EXTREMIST ISLAMIST JIHAD IN CZECH REPUBLIC & SLOVAKIA



 **CZECH REPUBLIC**



 **SLOVAKIA**

INTRODUCTION

For a jihadi ecosystem to function, it requires the presence of a Muslim community amongst which the radical and extremist Islamist jihadis can operate. Each of the following three subsections will start with a short primer on the size of this community, followed by the given country's past experience with terrorism.

The Muslim community in today's Czech and Slovak Republics began to form before World War II and continued to develop with the granting of scholarships to Arab students (coming mainly from Libya, Iraq, Syria, and Egypt)⁷ between the 1960s and 1980s.⁸ Many of the students married Czech or Slovak women, which established themselves and their community in the then Czechoslovakia.⁹ By 1990, there were about 1 000 Muslims and the community continued to expand with Muslims from the Arabic-speaking nations, as well as Russia, Ukraine, the central Asian states, the Balkans, Pakistan, Turkey, Malaysia, and Indonesia.¹⁰ The Muslim community of today numbers between 5 000 and 20 000¹¹ and

between 2 000 and 5 000¹² members in the Czech and Slovak Republics, respectively.

Prior to 1989, Czechoslovakia was said to have provided "training facilities" and temporary shelter for members of Middle Eastern terrorist groups.¹³ Interestingly, some of the Middle Eastern "guests," sometimes acted against their communist hosts, for example, when the Palestinian extremists of Force 17, whose members were studying in Czechoslovakia, attempted to carry out an attack at the Davis Cup tennis match between Czechoslovakia and Israel.¹⁴ After 1989, the Czech Republic and Slovakia saw relatively little international terrorist activity with the alleged 2001 terrorist plot to target Radio Free Europe's HQ based in Prague as a prominent, yet rather isolated, example.¹⁵ In 2006, the Czech security services managed to foil a planned radical and extremist Islamist attack on the Prague Jewish Quarter¹⁶ and the following year, the Czech security services, warned by U.S. intelligence services, faced down the risk of attack against airport infrastructure and actual airplanes, similar to an earlier attack on Glasgow airport.¹⁷ The only incident in Slovakia considered a terrorist attack (but not prosecuted as such) is the 2011 Košice bombing of a McDonald's restaurant by an animal rights activist.¹⁸

In neither country can one find a strong base for the radical and extremist jihadist scene to develop and the threat of a radical and extremist Islamistjihadi attack remains very low. According to the EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT), **the number of failed, foiled, and successfully executed attacks between 2006 and 2018 in the Czech Republic stands at 1 and Slovak authorities reported to Europol 0 such cases. During the same period, only 8 individuals (3 Czechs and 5 Slovaks) were arrested for terrorism-related activities (not all had been radical and extremist Islamist jihadists).**¹⁹ In the previous two reports related to the issue of pathways to global jihad, GLOBSEC has identified 8

pathways to radical and extremist Islamist jihad. In a similar vein, the upcoming part of this report will be dedicated to the case studies of the Czech and Slovak jihadists—7 individuals in total (6 Czechs and 1 Slovak).

CASE STUDIES

Samer Shehahed²⁰ is a Czech national of Palestinian origin, born and raised in Prague, the capital of the Czech Republic. As will be shown below, his case stands out in a sense compared to the other individuals in our sample as he, to some extent, could be considered a radical and extremist Islamist jihadi **entrepreneur**. Despite differences within the Muslim community about Samer's position, role, and influence, he served as an imam in the Prague mosque. Due to his controversial statements and speeches, he had to step down after four years.²¹ Samer's case also differs in a sense that he himself did not play an active role in trying to commit a terrorist attack or leaving for Syria or Iraq. Instead, to use the terminology of the previous reports, his main pathway to radical and extremist Islamist jihad seems to be closely linked to the position of a **travel agent** providing **travel bureau** services, i.e., for others in his milieu, in this case, a Czech who wanted to partake in global radical and extremist Islamist jihad by joining the war in Syria, allegedly in the ranks of Jabhat al Nusra. This alleged service got Shehahed arrested in 2017.

In Shehahed's case, there is no evidence of a turbulent childhood or disturbed youth, with no hints of discrimination or development of outrage against the state. People perceived him as a humble, modest, and practicing Muslim. He met his wife, of Czech origin, later named Chidídža, in a city close to Brno, the Czech Republic's second-largest city, and at a later stage they moved to Saudi Arabia where he was studying Islamic law.²² In line with Islamic law, he also played the role of a decision-maker with regards to "divorce processes" within the Muslim community in Prague.²³ Without any doubt, he was a very controversial person—some strongly admired him (as a religious authority) and others clearly distanced themselves from him.

The former imam began to be monitored by the Czech intelligence services sometime before 2014.²⁴ Purportedly, in reaction to this he left with his family to Austria. Later, after hiding in Mauritania, he was caught by Jordanian police in 2017 and sent back to the Czech Republic where he was accused of participating in a terrorist group, supporting and promoting terrorism, and terrorism financing. He now faces up to 15 years in prison and is being prosecuted for helping his brother **Omar** and sister-

in-law **Kristýna Hudková** to get to Syria where they are said to be fighting on behalf of Jabhat al-Nusra. Kristýna, later Fatima, crossed the Turkish-Syrian border with his alleged help and married Omar (they had never met before).²⁵ Omar was a fighter that was trained in Syria on how to use weapons, produce bombs, learnt combat tactics and subsequently trained others.²⁶

The latter part of Samer's story suggests that radical and extremist Islamist "jihadism" was to some extent **a family affair**, since his immediate family members (brother and sister-in-law) became actively involved as well. At the same time, he could theoretically be considered an **entrepreneur**, a proactive ideologically passionate member, often with higher education, acting as a radicaliser and a charismatic leader.²⁷

Shehahed's alleged entrepreneurial nature did not, however, end there. **Dominik Kobulnický (25)**, a Slovak living in the Czech Republic, later arrested for planning a terrorist attack and spreading ISIL propaganda, met Shehahed multiple times at the mosque in Prague. Interestingly, Shehahed claimed that he never developed a rapport with Kobulnický and consequently could not have even attempted to "radicalise" him, as he suspected the Slovak of being linked with the Czech security services (in this case, the Security Information Service, or BIS).²⁸ At the same time, Kobulnický claimed that Shehahed was his teacher and he had taught him the basics of Islam but never attempted to radicalise him.²⁹ Regardless of Shehahed's role in Kobulnický's alleged radicalisation, and any potential role people whom the latter man had met at the Prague mosque could plan in it,³⁰ he currently stands accused of supporting terrorist organisations—ISIL and the Caucasus Emirate—and faces up to 15 years of imprisonment.³¹

Kobulnický was born in a small village in the East of Slovakia, to a religious family. According to his mother, he was as a good and well-behaved student.³² He has an IT background (vocational education) and worked at McDonald's. While in 9th grade (15 years old) he began his conversion to Islam and subsequently identified with ISIL, adopted a dress code reminiscent of ISIL members whom he studied in the organisation's videos.³³ He also confirmed that if he had then been asked to join ISIL he would have done so. After graduation, he moved to Prague and in 2015 officially converted to Islam and became a practicing Muslim. According to the information available, Kobulnický's radicalisation preceded his move to Prague and was mostly online in nature, with very little input from external mentors or radical and extremist Islamist jihadi entrepreneurs. His more

or less public displays of ISIL fandom (pictures of him posing at the Pardubice railway station in front of a map of the old Czechoslovakia with the text: “Islam will dominate the world”, him being dressed as an ISIL fighter with an ISIL flag were found on his Facebook profile)³⁴ led to an interest from the Czech security services and his 2017 arrest. The police found in his flat in Prague 4 kgs of explosives along with explanatory videos how to make a bomb.³⁵

While in court, Koblunický later confirmed his original intention to commit an attack at the Prešov (Slovakia) bus station. However, he also stated that he had given up on the idea after visiting a mosque in Hradec Kralove, northern Czech Republic, and learning more about Islam.³⁶ Experts diagnosed him with a personality disorder and described him as moderately intelligent, with very high risk of behaving in an anti-social manner.³⁷ He maintained minimal social contacts and allegedly opted to change or redeem his life via conducting a spectacular terrorist event. His case was a case of **dissatisfaction, or to be more exact, loneliness, which might have made him as Peter Nesser calls it, a “jihadi misfit,” i.e., an individual who is not necessarily zealous but joins the jihadi milieu in an attempt to find a substitute for their longing for companionship and friendship.**³⁸

Similarly to Koblunický, the Czech **Ján Silovský**, could be seen as another **misfit** who opted for radical and extremist Islamist jihad while being dissatisfied with his life at the time. He was raised by his older sister and one parent, his mother, in a smaller town in the west of the country.³⁹ He is known as a very helpful and non-conflict individual, however, he also a victim of bullying at school. After completing vocational school, he worked as an auto mechanic.⁴⁰ According to a psychologist who evaluated his mental health, he suffered from depression, anxiety, and had a track record of wrist slitting. He also expressed his sadness at being single and feelings of being detached from the real world. He later converted to Islam but first wanted to embrace Christianity more profoundly. Silovsky kept his conversion secret from his mother and later gravitated in a more radical direction as he expressed support for ISIL and its territorial expansion.⁴¹ He donated money to Islamic charities and in 2016 was caught by the Turkish police at Istanbul airport with a flight ticket to Gaziantep in his hand, from where he planned to go to Syria.⁴²

During his court hearing, he confirmed he had wanted to go to war, fight for the ISIL and its radical and extremist Islamist ideology against the US and Russia.⁴³ Eventually, he said he was desperately hoping to get killed in Syria. He also confirmed that he had no contact in Turkey or Syria,

respectively, and was thinking of “randomly” joining ISIL.⁴⁴ He was sentenced to six years in prison and ordered mandatory psychiatric treatment. Silovský, unbeknown to himself, **might have become a jihadi entrepreneur, as he is rumoured to have had at least one follower**, a student from a business academy and hotel school said to be inspired by him. Currently, the police are investigating this person for his alleged pro-ISIL sympathies, which were spotted by his teachers.⁴⁵ Subsequently, the police found ISIL videos, email, and intercepted mobile communication, allegedly confirming the activities.⁴⁶

Individual outrage or dissatisfaction, the second most popular pathway to radical and extremist Islamist jihad according to GLOBSEC’s second report on the issue,⁴⁷ is not, however, the only entry ticket into terrorist militancy for Czech or Slovak wannabe radicals. **Markéta Všelichová** and **Mirek Farkase** seemed to have embraced the **glocal pathway**, i.e., a situation in which a given individual might have been induced into militancy, not jihadi in nature but focused on radical and extremist and Islamist jihadis, locally or even on one’s own but then chooses to act upon his/her convictions abroad. The duo was arrested in November 2016 on the Turkish-Iraqi border. In this area, they had been cooperating with the local Kurdish minority and the organisation Victims of War Aid, which was originally founded by Marketa.⁴⁸ At the time of their arrest, the Turkish authorities found flyers, materials, but most importantly Facebook pictures. In these pictures they were dressed in uniforms of the People’s Protection Units (YPG). The YPG operates in Syria and is considered by Ankara to be an armed wing of the PKK (Kurdistan Workers’ Party) operating in Turkey, also listed as a terrorist organisation. When arrested, Marketa and Mirek claimed to be humanitarian activists travelling for the purpose of establishing a field hospital for Kurds in Syria and Iraq.⁴⁹ Several Turkish media argued that this duo allegedly admitted to belonging to the Kurdish militia—in the case of Marketa in charge of carrying out logistics and Mirek allegedly as a sniper.⁵⁰ Despite Czech authorities attempt to try them at home, the Turkish Supreme Court sentenced them to 6 years and 3 months.⁵¹

(LACK OF) PATHWAYS TO RADICAL AND EXTREMIST ISLAMIST JIHAD IN HUNGARY



INTRODUCTION

Islam has had a presence on the territory of modern Hungary at least since the times of the Ottoman empire in the 16th century.⁵² More recently, Muslims began to appear in Hungary between 1968 and 1989 when students from Soviet-friendly Arab and African countries arrived there, started families with locals, and founded formal communities through universities.⁵³ Currently, the Muslim community in Hungary officially comprises circa 5 500 individuals.⁵⁴

Communist Hungary, as a member of the Eastern Bloc, provided safe haven for certain terrorist organisations, mostly Middle Eastern in makeup, deemed sympathetic to the “anti-imperialist” camp, such as the Abu Nidal Organisation, the Grey Wolves, Carlos the Jackal and his group,⁵⁵ and the Japanese Red Army.⁵⁶ After 1989, Hungary was not exempt from terrorist violence. In 1991, an Armenian terrorist group, ASALA, unsuccessfully attacked the Turkish ambassador to Hungary.⁵⁷ That same year, the German Red Army Faction assaulted a bus of Jewish emigres travelling to an airport to be flown to Israel with a stationary vehicle-borne-improvised explosive device (VBIED). The explosion managed to cause light injuries to four emigres and seriously wounded two police officers.⁵⁸ More recently, extreme-right wing violence against other nationalities is a more common phenomenon with recent attacks on Roma resulting in 9 deaths.⁵⁹ Four extremists in Hungary were arrested for these killings.⁶⁰ Three were sentenced to life imprisonment and the last received a sentence of 13 years.⁶¹

The past decade saw activity by a variety of groups professing radical right wing extremist ideologies with its members generally prosecuted for violent acts or hate crimes but very rarely as terrorists despite having an ideological motivation with political aims. The only case to carry this label so far was the one involving 16 members of the Hungarian Arrows National Liberation Army (Magyar Nyilak Nemzeti Felszabadító Hadsereg) who were arrested in 2009 for planning terrorist attacks on members of parliament. There were four planned attacks in total, three of which were foiled by Hungarian authorities and the fourth abandoned by the offenders.⁶² In 2013, a series of news appeared about the possible involvement of members of a neo-Nazi group, Hungarian Guard Movement, in the Syrian conflict on the side of government forces.⁶³ Although coming from dubious sources, the Hungarian Counter-Terrorism Centre (TEK) has admitted it is probable that some have gone to the war as mercenaries. On the opposite side of the conflict was a Syrian-Hungarian was fighting for the rebels.⁶⁴ Additionally, some sources also mention two Aleppo fighters belonging to Suqour al-Sham who had lived in Hungary for 20 years and left their families to join the conflict.⁶⁵

In 2015, 63-year-old Péter M., a chemist with a degree in philosophy who regularly voiced xenophobic views along with his desire to shoot people of Jewish and Roma origin, and his 65-year-old partner Gyula B. were arrested in a plot to kill Prime Minister Viktor Orbán.⁶⁶ Both men were convicted prior to this arrest for aggravated assault on an official, a road traffic offense, drug abuse, and unauthorized firearm offense. The court convicted Péter to 13.5 years and Gyula to 7.5 years.⁶⁷ Last but not least, on the night of 24 September 2016, a homemade bomb exploded in one of the busiest streets in Budapest.⁶⁸ Two police officers suffered life-threatening injuries and one bystander was hurt. The main suspect, László P., sent an email to the Ministry of Interior detailing the bomb used in the attack and drafted another demanding one million euros in cash under the threat of detonating more bombs.⁶⁹ After his arrest,

court-requested psychologists diagnosed László with severe self-esteem and relationship disorders, described him as having an infantile personality and as someone who enjoys the attention.⁷⁰ Another set of experts said he was also suffering from Asperger's syndrome and finally, he was called a sociopath by his defence lawyer.⁷¹ László was sentenced to a life sentence with a release date of no earlier than after serving 30 years.⁷²

Ever since Hungary has been reporting terrorist arrests, convictions, and the number of successful or foiled or abandoned attacks to the EU, the country has maintained a low threat level. **Between 2006 and 2018, Hungary arrested 18 people for terrorism and recorded 4 attacks** (the majority not by radical and extremist Islamist jihadists).⁷³ The previous two reports on *The Input: Pathways to Jihad* illustrated 8 pathways that individuals in Western Europe usually undergo to join radical religious groups. Fewer pathways have so far been registered in Hungary, mostly due to the absence of a jihadi ecosystem in the country. What follows is a rundown of their presence in the third of the four V4 countries covered in this report, featuring three individuals.

CASE STUDIES

Viktor F and Daniel Sz are two young men in their early 20s who first met online back in 2014. For 3 months they exchanged messages on the topic of joining ISIL until Viktor, the more risk-taking and enterprising of the two, decided to travel to Syria. He secured the money, purchased a low-cost flight ticket to Turkey, and found a Syrian contact who promised him he would get him across the Turkish-Syrian border. He landed in Istanbul in January 2015 but no contact ever met him. Despite this setback, Viktor persisted and decided to use public transport until he reached the border area. With the little money he had left, he stayed in cheap hotels or would spend the night on the street. Just wandering around and sitting on a bench near the border, he eventually became of interest to the Turkish police and was arrested. He was imprisoned for two months before being returned to Hungary and eventually arrested there. Viktor had previously been treated for bipolar disorder and depression. After his return, in 2016 he attempted to commit suicide and later ended up in a mental hospital.⁷⁴ He was a loner with no other friends, no job, no contact with one of his parents, depression and bipolar disorder looking for a sense of purpose. His defence lawyer used this line of argument in trial, pointing to the fact that Viktor's real motivation was trying to belong somewhere.⁷⁵ **This pathway was identified in the first *Input* report as a hybrid one based on Nesser's archetype of a misfit.**⁷⁶ In short, it is someone who embraces radical

and extremist Islamist jihadism as a response to a string of personal or mental issues.

Daniel, the younger of the two, researched topics such as Al Nusra and Anders Breivik on the internet and used the Norwegian terrorist's name along with Adolf Hitler's as aliases. He was also expelled from school for alleged violence against animals.⁷⁷ His case became of interest to the Hungarian security services when in the summer of 2016 he sent a threatening Facebook message to Gábor Vona, a former leader of Jobbik, Hungary's far-right political party. Daniel, allegedly "inspired" by the 2016 Nice truck attack and using another alia, calling himself "Hungarian Mohammad", claimed he would get a van to kill so that everyone learnt his name.⁷⁸

Both individuals immersed themselves in radical content online and then sought an offline contact who would help them travel to the war zone. At the same time, their religious conviction was practically non-existent and they seemed keener on the martial element of life within and under ISIL. Both, however, were deeply unhappy with their life and referred to themselves as "hopeless".⁷⁹ Consequently, **their attempted pathway to radical and extremist Islamist jihad was that of dissatisfaction and outrage.**⁸⁰ In the end, both arrestees were convicted in March 2018. Daniel was acquitted of the charge of preparing a terrorist attack and received a two-year sentence for threatening to commit a terrorist act.⁸¹ Viktor received a four-year sentence for preparing a terrorist attack.⁸²

The next Hungarian case differs immensely from these of Daniel and Viktor while it is not unusual to switch sides in a conflict, but it is quite peculiar to change ideology from neo-Nazism to radical and extremist Islamist jihadist in one year.⁸³ **Thomas Usztics has gone from an extreme right-wing supporter radicalised by his uncle in 2008 to a radical and extremist Islamist jihadist who travelled to join the Taliban with his new wife in September 2009.**⁸⁴ He was born in Hungary in 1985 but moved with his family to Berlin, where he grew up. He finished high school with mediocre results, which he followed with an apprenticeship to become a track builder. After his uncle nudged him on the path of right-wing extremism, he started smoking hashish. Thomas wanted to change himself and ended up purchasing a Quran for himself. He claimed it helped him stay away from drugs—an attempt to redeem himself via the **dissatisfaction and outrage pathway** to radical and extremist Islamist jihad.⁸⁵ During his conversion to Islam, however, he was introduced to radical circles through a friend. He started visiting radical mosques (**mosque pathway** to global jihad) and meetings in private homes, introduced to the

host by his friend whom he acquired in the radical and extremist Islamist⁸⁶ milieu (**family pathway to global jihad**) in a Berlin quarter called Wedding.⁸⁷ Although there is no publicly available data on how he radicalised further in these places, the result was that he felt ready to join the radical and extremist Islamist jihad abroad relatively quickly after his conversion. Using fraudulent sales on eBay as a way of financing his activities (**criminal pathway to radical and extremist Islamist jihad**⁸⁸), he saved up enough money to travel to join the fight. With his wife Stefanie and another couple, they journeyed to Hungary, then Turkey and Iran from which they would finally arrive in Waziristan to join the German Taliban Mujahideen (DTM), a movement that some perceive as a propaganda tool founded by the Islamic Jihad Union, a splinter group of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan.⁸⁹ This crowned his development on the glocal pathway to radical and extremist Islamist jihad, i.e., a situation in which an insular group or cell (in this case, operating locally in Berlin) effectively sent him to a battlefield of global radical and extremist Islamist jihad within the ranks of a parochially named outfit.

Thomas appeared in several videos calling among other things on German Muslims to join them in the fight or help financially and celebrating victorious attacks on a NATO base.⁹⁰ However, he quickly became disillusioned by the strict rules and hygienic conditions in the conflict zone. Apparently, he was also appalled by the treatment of women in the camp. The final straw was seeing friends die on the battlefield.⁹¹ These experiences changed his mind and he contacted his parents to try to go back to Germany with Stefanie. However, the Turkish authorities noticed the fake passport she was using during their return trip and arrested them both in 2010. Stefanie was already pregnant at the time and ended up giving birth in detention. She was released half a year later in June 2011 while Thomas had to wait longer and finally, with pressure from the German Foreign Ministry, he too was released in 2012.⁹² Upon his return to Berlin, he was tried and in December 2012 he received a 4 year and 3 month sentence for membership in the DTM, training to commit terrorist acts and uploading violent extremist propaganda to the internet.⁹³

A TRANSIT COUNTRY?

Given its geographic location, **Hungary has also been a country of arrests for terrorists and terrorist suspects who do not originate from this Central European country.** The country borders the Balkans on one side, and Austria on the other, geographically the most eastern of the Western European countries. As shown by the GLOBSEC reports on the crime-

terror nexus in Europe, Hungary possesses a certain radical and extremist Islamist jihadi infrastructure, e.g., the arrests of 48 individuals accused of radical and extremist Islamist jihadi activities in 2015.⁹⁴ To some extent, the aforementioned arrests neatly capture the “transit” reality as far as the threat of terrorism is concerned for the V4 countries. In short, their lack of radical and extremist Islamist jihadi infrastructure and meagre numbers of wannabe radical and extremist Islamist jihadists on their soil do not mean, however, that some elements of the jihadi ecosystem—people, goods, entities—will not travel through their borders or reside in their territories for a short period of time.

A typical example of this reality is Belgian-born French citizen **Salah Abdeslam**, and the only surviving operative for ISIL from the Paris attacks in November 2015, who was active in Hungary. Abdeslam reportedly completed two trips during which he picked up FTFs from the Hungarian capital who are believed to have travelled from Syria through the Balkan route using refugees as cover.⁹⁵ In both trips it was subsequently confirmed that Abdeslam had driven the suicide bombers later involved in the 2015 Paris and 2016 Brussels attacks from Budapest to the operational base in the Belgian capital.⁹⁶

Two years later, in 2017, Hungarian police detained two women, an 18-year-old Belgian and a 19-year-old French citizen, under European Arrest Warrants for terrorism-linked activity.⁹⁷ On January 12, 2017, the two women were arrested as they were trying to cross from Roszke, Hungary, into Serbia on a bus from Vienna to Sofia⁹⁸ after one of the women submitted a fake passport at the border checkpoint.⁹⁹ The women were traveling to Damascus to join extremist groups related to ISIL.¹⁰⁰

Using a fake passport was also detrimental to another pair of travellers. On December 30, 2018, Hungarian authorities arrested an alleged ISIL commander, Farhoud Hassan, at Budapest’s Liszt Ferenc Airport.¹⁰¹ He was accompanied by an unidentified woman who was found to be carrying a fake passport. Being an asylum-seeker in Greece in 2017, Hassan held a special refugee passport that granted him access to air travel to much of Europe. He ended up being convicted by the Hungarian authorities for human smuggling and was given a suspended 18-month sentence with an expulsion order for three years. While Hassan was in custody and awaiting deportation, Belgian intelligence informed Hungary that he had acted as the “emir” for ISIL and had committed atrocities that included beheading victims. Not only was he an alleged ISIL commander and member of the group for three years¹⁰² but he was also involved

in a number of terrorism-related crimes including appearing in multiple propaganda videos,¹⁰³ aiding in the orchestration of terrorism acts,¹⁰⁴ directed executions, and unlawfully incarcerating people while causing the individuals severe physical and psychological harm.¹⁰⁵ Hassan's initial sentence of three years in prison for human trafficking and expulsion from Hungary¹⁰⁶ has been revoked and he is currently being prosecuted under Hungarian Law for crimes against humanity along with terrorism.¹⁰⁷ The prison sentence of the accused's crimes ranges from 10 years to life imprisonment.¹⁰⁸ Hassan has denied all the allegations.¹⁰⁹

(LACK OF) PATHWAYS TO RADICAL AND EXTREMIST ISLAMIST JIHAD IN POLAND



— POLAND

INTRODUCTION

Like in the Hungarian case, Poland has had a Muslim presence in the form of the Tatar community for the last 600 years. This does not translate into the presence of a sizeable community in the country nowadays, as it is estimated that somewhere between 15 000 to 25 000 Muslims actually live in Poland. This number might not, however, fully account for the presence of converts or some of the post-1989 arrivals of “new Muslims” (unlike the “old,” i.e., the Tatars)¹¹⁰ or Muslim refugees (e.g., 80 000 Chechens who passed through Poland and mostly later settled in Western Europe).¹¹¹

Poland is not seen as a “primary target for extremist organisations.”¹¹² This fact is reflected in the **very low number of terrorist attacks (between 2006 and 2018: 1) or arrests (between 2006 and 2018: 33).**¹¹³ This assumption is correct given the sporadic events of a quasi-terrorism nature perpetrated on the country’s soil, e.g., in the last few years, Poland witnessed an attempts at the first bombing by a solo actor,¹¹⁴ alleged attempts at eco-terrorism¹¹⁵ and anarchist militancy,¹¹⁶ and arrests of individuals suspected of involvement in far-right militancy (TE-SAT 2015 mentioned 14 such arrests for 2014). Nonetheless, radical and extremist Islamist jihadi terrorism, due to its international character and the proximity of the Western European hotbeds of Islamist or jihadist radicalism, remains the key terrorist threat to the country. At the same time, however, Poland, like its southern V4 neighbours is at most, as was argued by Mareš, a transit country for “a number of individuals connected with terrorism.”¹¹⁷ This was allegedly the case with Mourad T., a Moroccan individual, **allegedly an envoy for Abdelhamid**

Abaaoud, the leader of the Paris-Brussels 2015 attack cell, whose task was to scout transit routes for the radical and extremist Islamist jihadis through Central and Eastern Europe.¹¹⁸ To some extent, the transit nature was also personified by the Chechen cell, discussed below, which provided logistical support to a militant entity in the North Caucasus. In this instance, they might have used the country’s territory for nefarious means, but once again, their actions concentrated on a foreign country and not on Poland. Furthermore, as will be shown below, **the case of Poland’s radical and extremist Islamist jihadis are more often cases of jihadis with Polish passports than instances of homegrown radicalisation.**

CASE STUDIES

Twenty people “directly connected” with Poland travelled to Syria and some “actively involved themselves in armed activities in the ranks of Islamic terrorist organisations.” On top of that, another few dozen foreigners, mostly of Chechen origin, with the status of a permanent resident of Poland, also left for Syria.¹¹⁹ Given Poland’s size, **such numbers pale in comparison to that of the Western European countries and their FTF input into global radical and extremist Islamist jihad. Furthermore, in the Polish cases the key issue is the scale and strength of such “connections,” which are in many cases loose and suggesting pathways to radical and extremist Islamist jihad that are hardly homegrown in nature.**

At least four individuals to some extent emulated the radical and extremist Islamist jihadi pathway of Christian Ganczarski (infamous Al-Qaeda member sentenced in 2009 to 18 years for leading the bombing in the Tunisian city of Djerba), i.e., **they converted to Islam while living in Germany, to which they and their families migrated during their childhood.**¹²⁰ In 2015, Jacek S, described later by ISIL as a German fighter with the nom de guerre of, Abū Ibrahim al Almani, took part in a suicide attack on Iraqi forces in the city of Baiji.¹²¹ He spent his last 10

years in Germany and eventually became a German citizen. There are indications that his pathway to radical and extremist Islamist jihad was the result of his earlier involvement in crime (**criminal pathway**), namely the possession of drugs, and thus, he might have been an easier target for ISIL recruiters based in Germany, seeking individuals intent on redeeming themselves (**dissatisfaction and outrage pathway**).¹²² Another example, Adam al N., a Polish-Jordanian who grew up in Germany and later worked in Poland, an alumnus of a set of radical and extremist Islamist jihadi organisations in Syria (including Ahrar al Sham, Jabhat al Nusra, and ISIL),¹²³ eventually ended up arrested and sentenced to four years for his terrorism activities in Jordan.¹²⁴ Little is known of the process of his radicalisation which, again, took place abroad. However, given the fact that he first gravitated to radical and extremist Islamist jihadi organisations that request an introduction from an individual known to them and then carefully vet the potential recruit, he must have been known to radical and extremist Islamist jihadi entrepreneurs based in Germany. These then sent him on his way to Syria (**travel bureau pathway**). The third and the fourth examples are siblings. The sister acted as a fundraiser for FTFs, including her Algerian-German husband, who died in Syria, while the brother, an FTF, died in February 2015 near Kirkuk, Iraq.¹²⁵ In both cases, the family connection (**family pathway**) played a decisive role in their recruitment to the cause of global radical and extremist Islamist jihad.

The next two are Polish nationals who also possess other nationalities—in these cases Tunisian (Karim Labidi) and Sudanese (Wail Awad)—and are said to have left Poland to join ISIL in Syria. Both are sought by Interpol and their whereabouts are currently unknown.¹²⁶ Very little is known of their pathways to radical and extremist Islamist jihad but these also might have begun before their arrival to Poland. They share the “distinction” of being on Interpol’s red notice with Jakub Jakus or Abu Khattab al-Bolandi, probably Poland’s most well-known FTF, allegedly deceased since 2017.¹²⁷ Jakus is connected to Dawid L., who is still on trial in Poland for his FTF activities in Syria.¹²⁸ Just like the aforementioned cases, L’s radicalisation is **connected to a period of residing abroad, in a country that possesses a wider radical and extremist Islamist jihadi history and infrastructure than Poland**, in this case, Norway. Dawid emigrated there with his parents at the age of 14, and converted to Islam five years later, allegedly “to impress” a Muslim girl he loved.¹²⁹ Her rejection of him resulted in his stiffening dedication to his new faith (**dissatisfaction and outrage pathway**) and later involvement in activities of the Profetens Ummah (The Prophet’s Ummah), a Norwegian Salafi jihadist organisation, to some extent reminiscent of

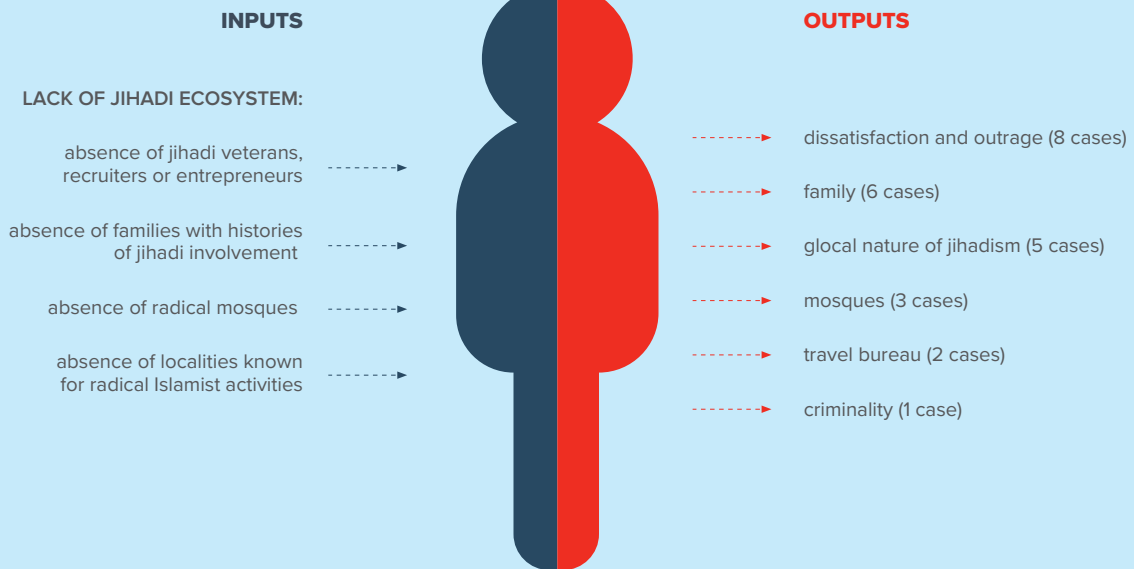
the infamous Sharia4UK. Later, he met his future wife online and then married her at a mosque in Warsaw. Afterwards, the couple moved to Radom, a city in central Poland, where Dawid L had lived before moving to Norway. In March 2014, both left for Syria via Turkey, allegedly under the cover of continuing their Islamic studies. A year and a half later, they both flew from Stambul to Norway, and in November 2015, while attempting to travel to Poland, they were both arrested at the Oslo airport and extradited to Poland. L’s wife was later released and as of August 2019 he is still awaiting a verdict in his trial where he stands accused of joining a foreign terrorist organisation—the Jabhat al Nusra-linked Harakat Fajr ash-Sham al-Islamiya.¹³⁰

L and Jakus had known each other from Norway where they met in 2012, the latter emigrated to the country for economic reasons. Jakus arrived in Norway already a Muslim. It was from Norway, however, that he went, “with a group of friends ... travelling through the whole of Europe in a van,” first to Turkey, and then on to Syria. He allegedly was a “top student, calm guy, no radical convictions, certainly not one for brawls.” Nonetheless, as a “questioning” type, he stumbled upon Islam in high school and secretly converted. While in Norway, he moved in Islamist circles where L, via participation in Profetens Ummah, was also present.¹³¹ To some extent, the restless **Jakus resembled Nesser’s misfit**, the non-belonging and curious individual but at the same time, appears much more entrepreneurial in his activities than a typical European ISIL member. His radical and extremist Islamist jihadism did not develop as a safety valve for frustration or as a “project” with which he is attempting to substitute his longing for acceptance. Once again, however, **foreign radical and extremist Islamist jihadi infrastructure played a key role in radicalising the two Poles and spurring them on their ways to global jihad.**¹³²

Hardly anything is known about the remainder of the 20 alleged FTF cases attributed to Poland. Interestingly though, as much as the previous cases had been mostly connected (apart from Labidi and Awad) to Polish migration to Western European countries and radicalisation while “out there,” there are some indications that, e.g., members of the Chechen diaspora in Poland are being “religiously radicalised” due to their contact with countrymen involved in the Syrian radical and extremist Islamist jihad, with cases of individuals either deported¹³³ or arrested for membership in terrorist organisations.¹³⁴ The landmark case in this respect was the 2017 sentencing of three Chechens for fundraising activities in Poland on behalf of the Caucasus Emirate (the verdict is currently being appealed).¹³⁵

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

(Lack of) pathways to jihad in the V4



In its first report related to pathways to radical and extremist Islamist jihad, GLOBSEC identified 8 such pathways (described as INPUTS) and 4 OUTPUTS, effectively outcomes for Western European radical and extremist Islamist jihadis, i.e., arrest for a terrorism offence, death while preparing or staging a terrorist attack, expulsion from Europe for alleged terrorist associations, becoming a fugitive from justice.¹³⁶ As this report has shown, such conclusions would be unwarranted in describing the situation in the V4 countries, which only seem comparable at first.

In fact, **the reality is almost the opposite: the pathways, or the roads by which Western European radical and extremist Islamist jihadis travel towards jihad (INPUTS), effectively become the OUTPUTS of this process in the V4. In short, the process in Western Europe is about the variety of ways in which one could potentially become a radical and extremist Islamist jihadi and then consequently plan, prepare attacks, fundraise for the likes of ISIL, etc.**

As for the V4, given the lack of a radical and extremist Islamist jihadi ecosystem (presence of

veterans, recruiters or entrepreneurs, families with histories of radical and extremist Islamist jihadi involvement, radical mosques and stories of previous radical and extremist Islamist jihadi involvement of individuals from the same localities), **the overall goal is not what role one would play amongst the radical and extremist Islamist jihadis but more whether he or she would successfully locate an extremely rarely available pathway to radical and extremist Islamist jihad at all.** Consequently, both low demand (very few wannabe radical and extremist Islamist jihadis present in the V4) and difficult operating conditions locally, lead to a reality in which the pathways are barely relevant to the study of jihadism in Europe: dissatisfaction and outrage (8 cases in the V4); family (6 cases); glocal nature of jihadism (5 cases); mosques (3 cases); travel bureau (2 cases); criminality (1 case). Again, these numbers pale in comparison to those in Western Europe and vividly depict this part of Europe as a region with (a few) radical and extremist Islamist jihadis who are searching, mostly in vain, and improvising radical and extremist Islamist jihad, or as an outlet for their relatively shallow radical and extremist Islamist jihadi convictions.

Two issues stand out as far as the findings of this report and sustainment of this state of affairs are concerned: the first, focuses on the **internal aspect of countering terrorism in the V4**, and the second, on its **external factors**. The internal issues depend on the ability and willingness of the V4 to **preventively frustrate bottom up attempts for the radical and extremist Islamist jihadi ecosystem to appear and flourish in the region**. This effectively entails a strict policy of **not accepting radical and extremist Islamist jihadi veterans as migrants or refugees, barring others from successful completion of, e.g., public engagements, fundraising tours, or fact-finding missions on behalf of radical Islamist congregations, rigid vetting of founders and sponsors of mosques and Islamic centres, monitoring of individuals travelling to and from countries seen by the jihadist terrorist organisations as alleged frontlines in “their” radical and extremist Islamist jihads and expulsions of foreign individuals associated with these entities who attempt to operate in the region**.

The external factors necessitate the development of vigorous—and not only via Brussels—liaison connections between the security structures of the V4 countries and their Western counterparts oriented towards two goals: a) **jointly nullifying Western radical and extremist Islamist jihadis’ attempts to “branch out” into the neighbouring CEE; and b) a similar process targeting the very few wannabe V4 or CEE radical and extremist Islamist jihadis making the most of the radical and extremist Islamist jihadi ecosystems in Western Europe**. Such connections should go beyond the operational character and this could entail going outside the format of Europol or the EU’s Working Party on Terrorism. In effect, experts and also “civilians” from both countries with wide radical and extremist Islamist jihadi ecosystems and the likes of V4 nations could meet within the safe confines of the e.g. newly founded Polish Terrorism Prevention Centre of Excellence as well as the Hungarian Counter Terrorism Centre (TEK) affiliated National University of Public Service. On one hand, this would allow for presentations on how such an ecosystem and pathways to terrorism work in countries of Western Europe and how these could potentially harm neighbouring CEE countries. Simultaneously, these meetings would also provide the V4 participants with an opportunity to elaborate on their efforts to contain the potential future development of radical and extremist Islamist jihadi milieus in their countries. Such exchanges and conversations would rekindle the spirit of the GLOBSEC Intelligence Reform Initiative (GIRI), a research and advocacy effort aimed at “continuous build-up of capacities and capabilities to address existing [counterterrorism] problems by

implementing best practises already utilised in some nations, through existing institutions and innovative technologies.”¹³⁷

If these “internal” and “external” points were to be followed, then the V4 or the larger CEE could remain in the position of a region with very few, misfit-like, wannabe radical and extremist Islamist jihadis who rather unsuccessfully attempt to reach their goals.

ENDNOTES

- 1 See: <https://www.globsec.org/projects/criminals-terrorists-back/>.
- 2 See: <https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/The-Input-Pathways-to-Jihad.pdf>, p. 18.
- 3 GLOBSEC utilized a codebook of 55 variables for each of the 60 individuals covered in this study. Source wise, see: https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/GLOBSEC_WhoAreTheEuropeanJihadis.pdf, p. 6.
- 4 The majority of our interviewees wished to remain anonymous. They included on one hand journalist, think tankers and academics researching terrorism and counterterrorism, and security stakeholders from e.g. the police forces, ministries of interior, defence and foreign affairs.
- 5 See: P. Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism in Europe: A History*, London: Hurst, 2016.
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- 7 See: <https://www.radio.cz/en/static/muslims-in-czech-republic/>.
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- 17 See: Rekawek, "Referenced ...".
- 18 See: https://korzar.sme.sk/t/2655/kausa_terorizmu_v_kosickom_mcdonalds.
- 19 See: [https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports?rt\[\]=282](https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports?rt[]=282).
- 20 In some of the cases covered by this report full names of the (wannabe) jihadis are known, in others, only the first letter of their surname. The report reflects this state of affairs.
- 21 See: <https://svet.sme.sk/c/20955659/samer-shehadeh-prazsky-imam-terorizmus.html>.
- 22 See: [https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports?rt\[\]=282](https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports?rt[]=282).
- 23 See: https://www.idnes.cz/zpravy/domaci/imam-samer-shehadeh-jordansko-podezreni-terorismus.A181110_438609_domaci_brzy.
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- 30 See: <https://www.novinky.cz/krimi/clanek/mel-jsem-vrazedne-mysleni-rekl-soudu-muz-obzalovany-z-planovani-teroristickeho-utoku-40269599>.
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- 34 See: <https://www.novinky.cz/krimi/clanek/mel-jsem-vrazedne-mysleni-rekl-soudu-muz-obzalovany-z-planovani-teroristickeho-utoku-40269599>.
- 35 See: https://www.lidovky.cz/domov/slovak-u-soudu-poprel-plan-na-teroristicky-cin-v-cesku-driv-chtel-utocit-v-presove.A190128_115240_In_domov_form.
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- 37 See: <https://www.topky.sk/cl/11/1795731/Znalci-o-Slovakovi-ktoreho-sudia-v-Prahe-za-terorizmus--Exot-obdivujuci-islam-ajej-tuziaci-po-manzelke>.
- 38 See: Nesser, *Islamist Terrorism...*, *op. cit.*
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- 47 See: <https://www.globsec.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/The-Input-Pathways-to-Jihad-vol.-2.pdf>.
- 48 See: <https://euractiv.sk/section/vonkajsie-vztahy/news/turecko-dvoch-cechov-odsudili-na-sest-rokov/>.
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- 60 See: https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/tesat2010_1.pdf.
- 61 See: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-23586440>.
- 62 See: https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/tesat2010_1.pdf.
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- 64 See: <https://24.hu/kulfold/2013/09/02/sziria-a-pokol-testkozelbol/>.
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