

RESEARCH REPORT

Romania



Introduction

This research report has been produced within the framework of the CONCORDIA project which is funded under the ERASMUS+ programme.

The project focuses on harnessing the power of digital media tools to prevent the radicalisation of vulnerable youth and is being simultaneously rolled out in Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, Romania, Cyprus, France, Finland and Ireland. The project will support key front-line workers to develop core skills to work with vulnerable youth to produce and disseminate counter-extremist narratives. It proposes bringing skills of front-liners right up to date where the production of digital media and the managing of social media platforms is concerned promoting high quality of youth work in response to the radicalization threat.



Name: Andreea Emina Panaitescu

Organisation: Association for Education and Sustainable Development

Country: Romania

Radicalisation Threat in Romania

Islam in Romania has a tradition of hundreds of years in Dobrogea, region that was almost five centuries Ottoman province (cca.1418-1878). Muslim community interests are represented by Great Mufti's Office of Muslim Community of Romania. The Mufti is the only authority recognized by the Romanian state, representing the Muslims in Romania. In recent years there are many Islamic organizations operating in Romania without the approval of Mufti Office, so illicit. According to the Romanian Intelligence Service (SRI) "Muslim Brotherhood" works in Romania undercover in "Muslim League and Culture in Romania", "Foundation Taiba - Romania", "Society Humanitarian Semiluna" and "Association As Salam" and have branches in major university centers in the country.

One of the most controversial, founded in 1999 in Bucharest by Dr. Abu Al Oula Al Ghithy, Taiba Foundation has the stated purpose of supporting Islamic life. From the beginning it was associated, by ethnic groups with Muslim traditions in Romania, with fundamentalist Islam. In a study by Gyorgy Lederer about the extremist Islamic entities in Eastern Europe, Taiba Foundation is mentioned among some others, which are sponsored by Saudi Arabia. Currently it managed to almost replace the Mufti Office in terms of influence on how Islam is practiced in Romania.

According to a press release from the Directorate for Investigating Organized Crime and Terrorism (DIICOT) on April 2011 were carried out 21 house searches in Bucharest, Constanta, Gorj, Mehedinti and Cluj. Those people were involved in actions with radicalization potential and radical Islamic proselytism, in support of channels for financing these activities. The investigators found enough evidence, so were opened criminal prosecution files for committing the crimes stipulated in Law no. 535/2004 on preventing and combating terrorism. Investigations were triggered following a request for international judicial assistance formulated by the German authorities regarding a German citizen of Egyptian origin, who had been at the time in Romania. He was condemned in Egypt, in absence, to 10 years in prison, for laundering money in the benefit of an entity with terrorist Islamic origin.

Recruitment ISIS in Romania - In 2015 two Tunisians were declared undesirable in Romania, being deported. The two Tunisian citizens were followers of the terrorist organization Islamic State Daesh and had intense extremist propaganda activities in Romania. They acted on several citizens of the same religion, for radicalization on the ideology line and for setting a group of followers of the terrorist entity mentioned. They were in focus of Romanian Intelligence Service since 2014. They were in Romania as students (Sorin Sava, spokesman for the Romanian Intelligence Service).



Also six French citizens, suspected to have had links with Al Qaeda and ISIS, were expelled from Romania, being suspected of planning a terrorist attack on romanian ground. ISIS has become extremely active lately, especially after representatives of the group threatened to commit various attacks across Europe. In the last year the Court of Appeal declared undesirable and expelled more foreigners after having received notifications from Romanian Intelligence Service.

Causes of Radicalisation in Romania

Individuals identified as being most at risk of radicalization in Romania include young people from poor families and /or dysfunctional families, vulnerable young people, sensitive to pressure and manipulation who feel misunderstood by society and deprived of rights, and members of the Muslim community.



Although in Romania, Islam is present for more than eight centuries, Mufti Yusuf Muurat - legal representative of the Muslim community in Romania - says that in recent years there are influences from the outside represented by romanian citizens sent to study in Arab countries by organizations as Taiba Foundation / Islam Today. It says that Arab countries spread radical Islam, and the young Romanian citizens are indoctrinated with radical tenets of Islam. In an interview given in 2010 for the newspaper Romania Libera, Mufti said: "We

have seen how our community is already divided. Some of them practice the religion in their own way. Some of them do not longer accept the customs and traditions of their ancestors. Unfortunately, in Romania there is a radical current.”

Unfortunately, the Muslim community in Romania is divided in two - Muslims represented by the Muftiat and Muslims represented by other illegal organizations; they are for many years in open conflict. Lack of government policies or any attempts to mediate the conflict meant a nonexistent education for young people about the religious radicalization or help to counter radical ideologies.

On the other hand, at the same time it was developed the current of incitement to hatred and violence against Muslims, incitement to discrimination, xenophobia and racism, as well to protests against the construction of a mosque in the capital of Romania. It indicates the persistence of fears of a potential danger of islamization of Romanian territory but at the same time it's the proof that romanians don't know how to handle the radicalisation issue nor they have the tools.

Because we are facing a general crisis in society, both system and values, people try to find other explanations for their various problems. “It is a system crisis, there is crisis in the state institutions, as well in their values. People, when they notice incoherency and inconsistency at the institutional level, they try to substitute those missing values and put in place something else. And then they need a scapegoat. This scapegoat can be the migrant, the refugee, or the corrupt politician.” said sociologist Ioan Hosu, in 2016 for www.monitorulcj.ro.

The impact of Social Media on Radicalisation in Romania

According to a study by the Romanian Audit Bureau Transmedia (BRAT), 70% of the urban population and 44% of the rural population in Romania are using the Internet. In urban areas, the daily consumption of internet has increased more than seven times, from 2002 to 2015, from 8% to 56%. Social networks have taken greater momentum in recent years, and they play a key role in proselytizing activities, radicalization and recruitment carried out by terrorist groups.

17 year old man that converted to Islam being a good example. He converted to Islam in 2014 and then he was investigated, by Directorate for Investigating Organized Crime and Terrorism, on suspicion that since 2015 has promoted, consistently, the doctrine of radical Islamist by posting in the online environment, through social networks, the opinions, writings, images, audio / video recordings of the Islamic State terrorist group, with the intention of making them known to determine winning new adherents able to resort in committing the same kind of facts as those which was promoted.

According to a survey in September 2016 Zelist Monitor (www.zelist.ro) the most popular forums generally used by the Romanians are:

- Facebook has a total of 8.4 million users,
- Youtube with a total of 850 969 users
- Instagram with 441 228 users, generating 1.7 million images per month and 2.2 million comments.
- With a total of 377 077 Twitter users have created 1.9 million messages per month.



Since 2015, Facebook is the main social network used by romanians. www.forbes.ro is detailing who are Facebook users in Romania, in 2016:

- Romanian Facebook users grew by about 9% in a year (March 2015-March 2016), represented over 95% of Romanian Internet users.
- The number of adolescents (13-17 years) decreased slightly (-3.2%).
- The number of users aged over 45 years has seen a significant increase (+ 34%).
- In the segment of 35-44 years the current number of Facebook members is 1,800,000 accounts, 300,000 more than in 2015, which represents an increase of 20 percentage points.
- At the young audience in the category 18-24 years, the number of Facebook members in March 2016 is similar to that of March 2015, with a total of 1.9 million accounts, representing 22% of total accounts.

The category of 25-34 years remains representative for Facebook, by March 2016 amassing 2.4000.000 accounts (28% of Facebook accounts in Romania).

Addressing the issue of radicalisation in Romania

Since 1992 preventing and combating terrorism has become an express responsibility of the Romanian Intelligence Service (SRI). After 11 September 2001 it was required to update the legal framework and improving operational mechanism in preventing and combating terrorism, and the Romanian Intelligence Service was designated national authority in the field of counterterrorism; In 2002 it was approved the National Strategy for Preventing and Combating Terrorism and was created National System for Preventing and Combating Terrorism, which includes 21 public authorities and institutions with responsibilities in the field, and whose technical coordinator is Romanian Intelligence Service;

Romania, as any other country from Eastern Europe, is an easy target for Islamic terrorists. There were several cases when some of the most known Arab businessmen from Romania were involved in fiscal fraud, acts of corruption, and even accused of financing terrorist activities and organizations in Gaza, Lebanon and Iraq. At the present it is less improbable to find in Romania Muslims or Arabs willing to become suicide bombers, but that did not mean that it couldn't be happening in the near future or that there aren't already actions in this direction.

Combating radicalization should be a national priority in youth work, but organizations do not have the skills or knowledge to address the subject in a targeted manner. Youth counselors from high schools recognize that social networks are the main threat when we talk about radicalization and emphasizes the need to develop additional skills in this area.

Supports identified as being needed by front line staff include:

Programs to combat radicalization - it is appropriate and necessary the development for awareness programs regarding radicalization issue. It is necessary to promote positive behavior among members of both communities, Muslim and non-Muslim. This positive behavior must be a constant in the youth's life and education.

Development of digital / social media for front-line staff. Modern society is found in an information structure based on accelerating information and communications technology; essential to the success of the information society is adopting information and communications technology in all fields. Regarding digital technology, young people are often more experienced than those who work with them.

Summary

In Romania radicalization threat it is political, social, religious and ideological. This country, although she lives with Muslims for centuries, in recent years becomes less tolerant with the Muslim community and vice versa.

Amid a general crisis in society, both system and values, young people are most vulnerable. Showmanship seems to be the answer to rebellion against family or youth system. Most people feel marginalized, are full of anger, sadness or frustration and they revenge on their families or on the society which refuses to accept them. Acute lack of shared values leads many of them to no longer identify with their own nation. Left without an alternative, they try to find common ground, however small that may be, could be religion. Most often, however, this "refuge" coincides with a radicalized form of religion.

"It's about certain individuals who associate for the pleasure to be part of something great. It is a subculture of young people (...) and social groups play an important role" says Rik Coolsaet, expert in political Islamist militants.

In the group with most risk of radicalization in Romania are included

- Young people from single-parent families,
- Young people from dysfunctional families,
- Young people marginalized by society or the community they live in,
- Young people from the Muslim community who are exposed to radical sermons,
- Young people who feel that their beliefs or ideology are threatened .

Shares potentially radical Islamic and proselytism, most often begin online. Social networks and large Internet providers, that allow circulation of powerful extremist messages, plays an important role. Hence the need to develop skills in this area in an effort to combat radicalization. Supports identified as necessary by front-line staff include:

- 1. Targeted programs to combat radicalization**
- 2. Developing digital skills for front-line staff**
- 3. Developing social media for front-line staff**

References

The following websites and articles were consulted in researching this text:

The following websites and articles were consulted in researching this text

www.wikipedia.org (Accessed: 17th and 18th November)
https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamul_%C3%AEn_Rom%C3%A2nia
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islam_in_Romania

The Romanian Intelligence Service (Accessed: 17th and 18th November)
<http://www.sri.ro/prevenirea-si-combaterea-terorismului.html>
<https://www.sri.ro/fisiere/studii/cadrullegislativ.pdf>

The Supreme Council of National Defence (Accessed: 17th and 18th November)
<http://csat.presidency.ro/>

The Directorate for Investigating Organized Crime and Terrorism (Accessed: 22nd and 23rd November)
<http://www.diicot.ro/index.php/arhiva/1626-comunicat-de-presa-08-12-2015>
<http://www.diicot.ro/index.php/arhiva/491-comunicat-de-presa3-20042011-491>

www.zelist.ro (Accessed: 17th and 18th November)
<http://www.zelist.ro/blog/overview-social-media-in-ro-septembrie-2016/>
<http://www.zelist.ro/monitor/>

Petre Barbu, Forbes Staff, www.forbes.ro (Accessed: 17th and 18th November)
<http://www.forbes.ro/cine-sunt-cei-85-milioane-de-utilizatori-romani-de-facebook-59158>

Ioan Hosu, Sociologist, www.monitorulcj.ro (Accessed: 17th and 18th November)
<http://www.monitorulcj.ro/actualitate/52148-cat-de-puternic-este-fenomenul-de-radicalizare-in-romania>

www.libertatea.ro (Accessed: 17th and 18th November)
<http://www.libertatea.ro/ultima-ora/exclusiv-el-este-craioveanul-de-17-ani-banuit-ca-are-legaturi-cu-isis-familia-este-in-stare-de-soc-detalii-despre-planurile-pe-care-le-avea-update-video-1195549>

www.mediafax.ro (Accessed: 17th and 18th November)
<http://www.mediafax.ro/social/cum-s-a-convertit-la-islam-tanarul-din-craiova-suspectat-de-propaganda-jihadista-14912498>

www.realitatea.net (Accessed: 17th and 18th November)
https://www.realitatea.net/studiu-cat_1849608.html

www.stirileprotv.ro (Accessed: 17th and 18th November)
<http://stirileprotv.ro/stiri/actualitate/nucleu-extremist-depistat-de-sri-in-romania-doi-studenti-tunisieni-adepti-ai-statului-islamic-declarati-indezirabili.html>

www.adevarul.ro (Accessed: 17th and 18th November)
http://adevarul.ro/news/societate/video-documentar-romania-musulmana-tablou-complet-islamului-noi-1_564e2c727d919ed50e628fe5/index.html
http://adevarul.ro/news/eveniment/de-megamoscheea-bucuresti-nu-antidotul-fundamentalismului-explicatiile-musulmane-romano-turce-arabii-nu-vor-asculta-imami-turci-1_55a502a1f5eaafab2c909496/index.html

www.inliniedreapta.net (Accessed: 8th, 9th November)
<http://inliniedreapta.net/musulmanii-de-pe-stadionul-dinamo-si-multiulturalismul-european/>
<http://inliniedreapta.net/monitorul-neoficial/comunitatea-turca-din-romania-finanțata-de-extremiști-islamști-și-amenințata-de-ambasada-arabiei-saudite/>

www.b1.ro (Accessed: 17th and 18th November)
<http://www.b1.ro/stiri/eveniment/bogdan-diaconu-al-doilea-mars-impotriva-construirii-unei-moschei-la-bucuresti-romanii-nu-accepta-invazia-islamului-147498.html>

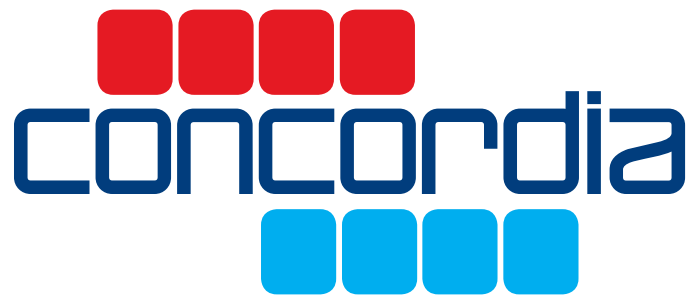
www.gandul.info (Accessed: 17th and 18th November)
<http://www.gandul.info/stiri/moscheea-mantuirii-neamului-seful-cultului-musulman-in-romania-noi-suntem-aici-de-secole-stramosii-nostri-au-luptat-in-razboiul-de-independenta-din-1877-impotriva-imperiului-otoman-14563359>

www.hotnews.ro (Accessed: 17th and 18th November)
<http://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-esential-21249597-comisarul-european-gunther-oettinger-retelele-socializare-nu-sunt-controlate-defaimarile-instigarile-ura-pune-intrebarea-daca-nu-este-nevoie-control.htm>

www.semneletimpului.ro (Accessed: 17th and 18th November)
<http://semneletimpului.ro/social/minoritati/imigranti/romania-islamofoba-frica-de-refugiati-un-stil-de-viata.html>

www.parlamentor.ro (Accessed: 17th and 18th November)
<http://www.parlamentor.ro/youth-parlamentor/de-ce-aleg-tinerii-calea-radicalizarii-marturia-unei-adolescente-racolate-de-isis-2762>

www.romania-actualitati.ro (Accessed: 17th and 18th November)
http://www.romania-actualitati.ro/radicalizarea_si_alte_provocari_strategice-77706



Erasmus+

This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.
This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Project Number: 2016-1-DE04-KA205-013704

