ISLAMOPHOBIA, EXCLUSION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM

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Over the last few years, a number of countries have been hit by violent extremist attacks that induced a shock in public opinion, due to both the number of victims and the symbolic impact they had. Repeated attacks in a number of European cities have strengthened pre-existing radical and misconceived attitudes towards Islam. A growing part of the society has been seduced by discourses amalgamating Islam, Islamism, immigration and terrorism. Conversely, Islamophobia and right-wing extremism have also in some cases fuelled the radicalisation of young Muslims towards violent extremism. Islamophobia and right-wing extremism actually constitute a threat in themselves that should not be underestimated.

Right-Wing Populist Parties and Islamophobia, Major Threats to Security and Stability

Populist Radical Right (PRR) parties (Alonso & Kaltwasser, 2014) are responsible for the surge of Islamophobia as an element of reactivation of the left-right cleavage.

Since the 1970s, right-wing parties have contributed to placing racism and Islamophobia into the political debate, thus obliging all parties, either left- or right-wing, to take a position on this topic. This politicisation has contributed to maintaining the objectivisation of the immigrant group and inside this group, the presentation of Muslim immigrants as the archetype of "the Other".

PRR parties' political thinking regarding Muslim immigrants and their descendants is profoundly determined by colonial relations, which could be defined as a fundamental inequality between white colonists and non-white colonised. Let us not forget that the French National Front was founded by French Algerian militants whose political thinking was determined by the colonial relations in French Algeria.

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The negative attitudes towards Muslims are situated in the field of identity and cultural belonging. There has been a displacement from differentiation based on racial/biological elements to differentiation based on supposed identity categories. Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (Taguieff, 1989) have evoked a new kind of racism since the 1980s, which is no longer based on a racial difference but on the supposed impossibility of different cultures and identities mixing or sharing the same territory. Racism is thus displaced from the biological to the symbolic and cultural field. According to this idea and transposing it to the French context,
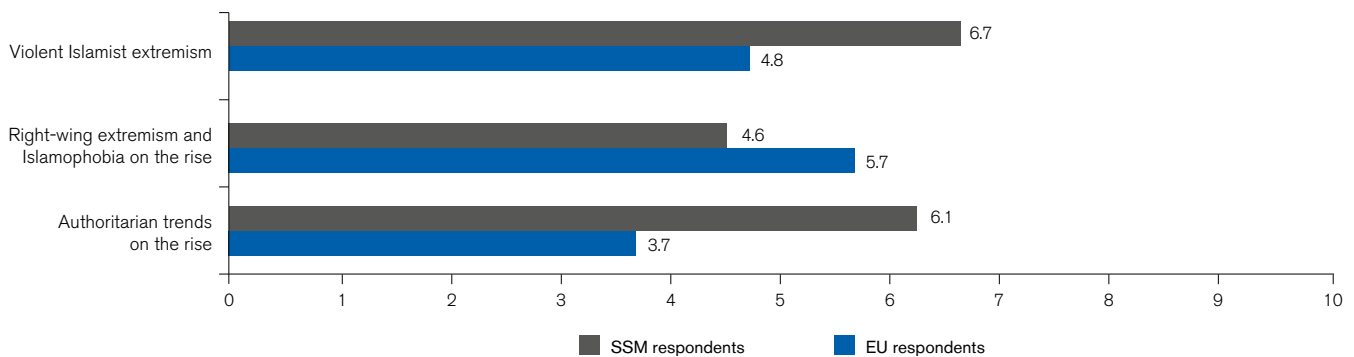
"Muslims" are thought to be incompatible with the "Republic", the latter representing the Western conception of the state.

Lately, PRR parties have gained voters and weight in a number of EU countries while the question of the modalities of the relations between EU Muslims and non-Muslims is at the centre of the public debate, and as the wave of terrorist attacks generated a reflection over the integration of Muslims in Western societies. This is a sign, therefore, that the category "Muslims" is objectivised as the debate on Jihadist-related violence often leads to questioning the place of Muslims in the EU.

Results to Question 7 of the Euromed Survey of Experts and Actors show that respondents identify Islamophobia and PRR parties as a threat in its own right to the stability and security of Euro-Mediterranean societies. Furthermore, according to the graph below, corresponding to Question 7, EU respondents even think that right-wing extremism and Islamophobia are a bigger threat to their respective countries than "Violent Islamist extremism".

Graph 1: To what extent do you consider that the following phenomena threaten the stability and security of your own country?
(mean 0-very low extent, 10-very high extent)

	SSM respondents	EU respondents
Violent Islamist extremism	6.7	4.8
Right-wing extremism and Islamophobia on the rise	4.6	5.7
Authoritarian trends on the rise	6.1	3.7

Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 8th Euromed Survey

In other words, Islamophobia and right-wing extremism are not only a threat because they may fuel the rhetoric of extremist Jihadists and offer fertile ground for the development of Jihadist-related violent extremism, they are also a threat in their own right and have the potential to harm social cohesion in European societies.

Similarly, when asked what the EU's priority to tackle violent extremism should be, a relative majority of respondents from Southern and Southeast Mediterranean countries identify "Countering discrimination, including on the grounds of religion or belief, race or ethnic origin" as a top priority.

### Economic and Social Exclusion, Fertile Ground for Radicalisation

In addition to the perception of a growing Islamophobia, descendants of immigrants from MENA countries in Europe are confronted with economic exclusion, as they are not able to find job opportunities fitting their academic level, which is usually higher than their parents'. This lack of opportunities is the basis of the relative deprivation that the descendants of MENA migrants feel and what allows us to place them in the *cadets sociaux* category as they are not able to reproduce or top their parents' way and level of life. The concept of *cadets sociaux* refers to a class of young people who lack economic opportunities and are unable to play a

EU respondents think that right-wing extremism and Islamophobia are a bigger threat to their respective countries than "Violent Islamist extremism".

Respondents from SSM countries consider that "Countering discrimination, including on the grounds of religion or belief, race or ethnic origin" should be the EU's top priority for tackling violent extremism.

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political role (Bayart, 1989). *Cadets sociaux*, as they are prevented from finding a place in society, tend to express their perceived deprivation through radical political positions and even to seek an alternative to the feeling of belonging to the state they were born in. For instance, relative deprivation and the impossibility of perpetuating their parents' way of life were the two starting points of the politicisation of many young Tuaregs in Mali and Niger in the 1970s and 1980s. They developed an alternative belonging to a constructed "Tuareg nation", which was one of the core elements of the Tuareg rebellion of the 1990s. This analogy with the political situation in post-colonial Mali is illustrative of how a group of excluded people can adhere to an alternative ideology with the purpose of protesting against their condition of exclusion, seen as an injustice. This idea is reflected in the graph below, corresponding to Question 6 of the Euromed Survey.

Graph 2: In addition to an enabling environment, to what extent can the following elements help to explain why an individual turns to violent extremism?
(results show the first choice out of three)
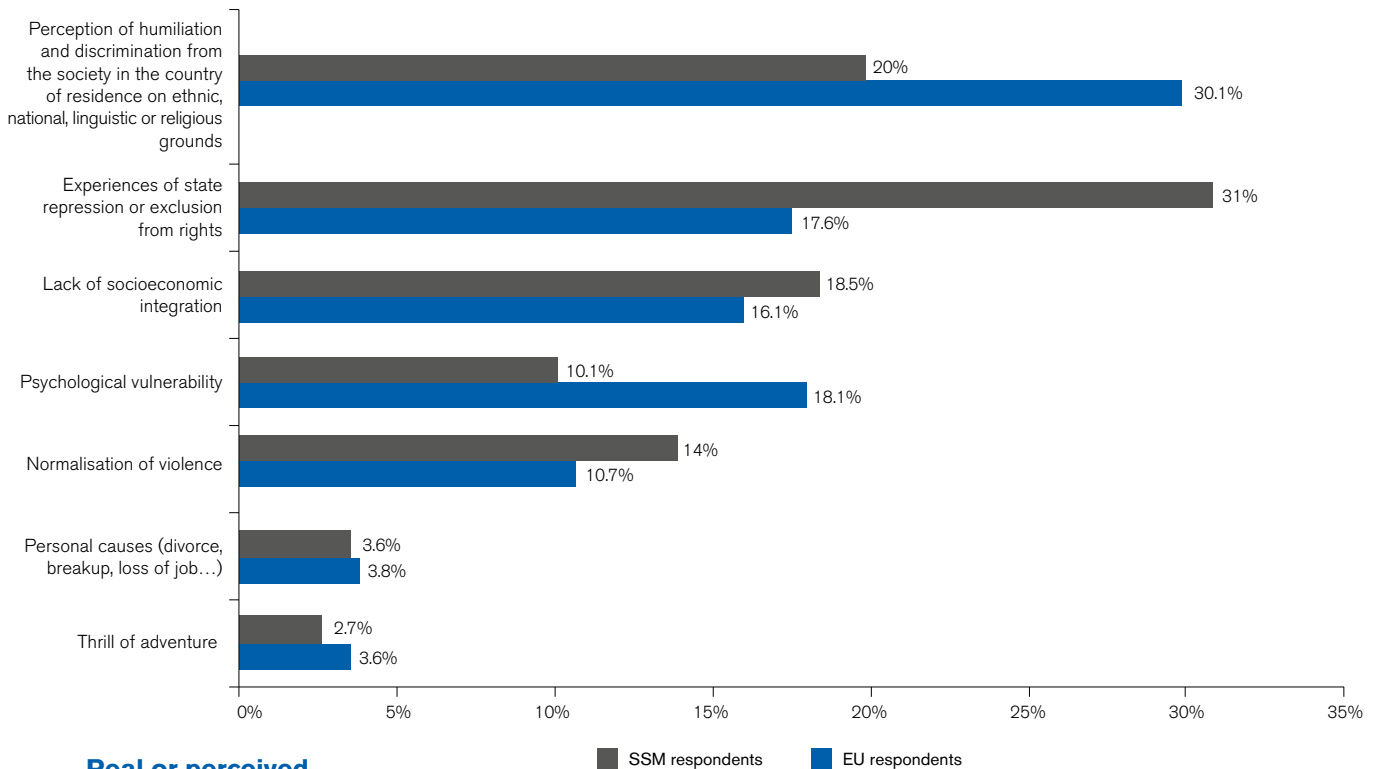
Source: Compiled by the IEMed based on the results of the 8th Euromed Survey

Real or perceived relation between the individual and the rest of the society or the state is key to understanding what drives an individual to violent extremism.

EU respondents gave crucial importance to perception of humiliation and discriminations (30.1%) for explaining how an individual turns into a violent extremist. Respondents therefore agree that the real or perceived relation between the individual and the rest of the society or the state is key to understanding what drives an individual to violent extremism.

As one can see with the responses to Question 6 of the Euromed Survey, the economic exclusion is often coupled with the impossibility of reaching recognition in society. Descendants of MENA immigrants feel that their parents' acculturation efforts did not lead to their full integration into the society, as many "non-Muslims" keep seeing them as not fully French and identify them as a homogeneous group that does not want to lose its identity and embrace the French one, as if there were a monolithic "Muslim" identity with characteristics totally opposed to the French or Western one.

This feeling of exclusion coupled with the refusal to consider them as fully French citizens partly contributed to making young people seen as Muslim adopt an alternative identity. Their perceived condition as Muslims and their supposed belonging to the Muslim cultural area induced their embracing of a transnational ideology that fits in with their feeling of belonging to the "Muslims" category.

Violent Extremism, Post-Colonialism and Justification of Violence

Radicalisation towards violent extremism is to some extent the consequence of the failure of EU countries to integrate a generation of young Europeans. These young Europeans whose parents or grandparents migrated from MENA countries refuse acculturation as the only option to be considered a full citizen.

Radicalisation is a process whose source is a feeling of deprivation. One chooses – or is seduced – by violent radical political options because the access to some key resources is forbidden or impossible. Radicalisation always happens in reaction to a situation or against a group that are no longer judged bearable. Therefore, this has to be taken into account when one wants to identify the causes of radicalisation.

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However, violent extremism is obviously only the most radical and violent option among a wide range of political options to contest the current conditions of integration that can be gathered under the generic expression of "speaking Muslim", i.e. mobilising a Muslim-related cognitive system strongly influenced by post-colonialism to analyse the situation of excluded Muslim descendants and build an alternative toolbox for political action.

"Speaking Muslim" means adopting a language and a cognitive system opposed to the acculturation and assimilation discourse, still commonly used as a synonym of integration by a significant part of the EU countries' population. Muslim-related rhetoric allows the people who use it to create an alternative international community characterised by the use of this cognitive system and the mobilisation of political causes in the so-called "Muslim world".

"Speaking Muslim" allows an alternative international community to be created, characterised by the use of this cognitive system and the mobilisation of political causes in the so-called "Muslim world".

The association of this discourse, perceived as being endogenous and the subsequent embracing of transnational causes perceived as a transposition of one's own situation, is used as a tool of propaganda and recruitment by Daesh, an organisation that, via Internet and the social networks, builds a discourse about a clash of civilisations with a strong anti-colonial component.

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It is widely known that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been internationalised and some "Muslim youths" in EU countries give their support to the Palestinians as they analyse the conflict as a colonial one. "Speaking Muslim" is therefore regarded as endogenous rather than religious.

Violent extremists produce a discourse that legitimises violent action as another, and even the most efficient one, way to fight against inequality, exclusion and the perceived permanence of colonial relations.

The most important difference between the adoption of this Muslim-related cognitive systems and violent extremism is that violent extremists produce a discourse that legitimises violent action as another, and even the most efficient, one to fight against inequality, exclusion and the perceived permanence of colonial relations between Muslims and non-Muslims, as French sociologist Xavier Crettez (2016) analysed it. According to him, radicalisation can be thought of as a process towards the acceptance of violence as the only solution to ensure the triumph of one's cause.

To conclude, Islamophobia can be analysed as an element of instability and a threat to EU so-cieties. Islamophobia is a key element to understand why some young descendants of MENA countries' immigrants are embracing a post-colonial ideology based on a perceived common belonging to the so-called "Muslim world". But right-wing extremism is dangerous per se as it sometimes promotes itself as a radical violent discourse against a significant part of the popu-lation. In this sense, right-wing extremism and Jihadist violent extremism may be two sides of the same coin. It is only by promoting inclusive policies and open societies, i.e. by reforming non-Muslims' attitude towards Muslims, that these tensions can be overcome.

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