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Ceske Budejovice 2021

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CONTENT

Conceptualization of political extremism and radicalism: An outline of selected theoretical aspects of research

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Annotation
The presented paper follows selected approaches to the study of extremism and radicalization, which are an integral part of research into the conspiracy aspects. In our paper we deal with the specification and theoretical analysis of individual factors of radicalization and their interdependence. The aim of the paper is to synthesize the meaning of these phenomena, their conditionality, but also the differences. This research also aims to define the degree of security risk of extremism and radicalization.

Key words
Extremism, conspiracy, radicalization

Introduction
Technical terms used in security science, such as extremism and radicalism, are sometimes perceived as synonymous or confused. The fact that many scientists have linked radicalism to extremism is partly a direct consequence of the historical roots and trends of the concept.

If we look at the terms based on etymological research, the word "radical" entered the public debate in the 18th century, especially in connection with the French and American Revolutions and in the context of the Enlightenment (Schmid, 2013). The British politician Charles James Fox revived the Latin term "radix" and, emphasizing the turn to "original", used it to denote some of the far-reaching political reforms of the time. (Fadil et al., 2019) The term radicalism was used almost exclusively in the British and French revolutionary spheres, where it referred to anti-colonialism or even to antimonarchist ideas, phenomena or events, such as the independence of the United States or the Great French Revolution. In political science theories, the term radicalism later became entrenched as a phenomenon between the democratic center and extremist tendencies (Murinova, 2017).

It is noteworthy that the connotation of extremism does not appear to a greater extent in social and scientific discourse until the second half of the 20th century. Extremism is part of a long tradition dating back to antiquity in the history of political thought. In essence, it has existed since ancient times, and is

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defined by a marked deviation from the "middle", characterized as a measure of the extremes at both poles of the spectrum, which reject established rules and standards (Backes, 2006). Extremism finds its roots in Latin as "the most distant" or "most extreme" (Murínová, 2017).

One of the definitions of Slovak authors is the definition by Kotvanová (2013), according to which extremism is "an anti-systemic attitude, based on an extremely sharp ideology, which questions and destroys the existing democratic system of functioning society and attacks the system of fundamental rights and freedoms." (Kotvanová, 2013) Quite often this phenomenon is thematized in the media discourse in the typology of demonstrations by the media. Supporters of extremism oppose a democratic regime[1] in the country in which they are located. (Murínová, 2017) Political extremism is usually differentiated into right-wing in its various variations (otherwise also as the far right, ultra-right, neo-fascism and neo-Nazism) and left-wing (ultra-left). The terms mentioned above as the far right and the far left indicate a wide area of the constitutional-conformist margin, see Figure 1 below (Mikušovič, 2007). The former seeks to establish comprehensive rules that enshrine inequality, the superiority of race and specific citizenship, and authoritarianism. The ideas of left-wing extremism stem mainly from anarchism and communism, where the basis is equality and the liberation of man from government and other pressure. The aim is to build a society based on non-democratic principles,

Radicalization as a process in which its object gradually accepts radical ideology in the broadest sense of the word is unique for each individual. Radicalism questions the legitimacy of established norms and policies, which in itself does not yet lead to violence. The phenomenon includes, for example, individuals who reject the values of society but abide by the law and try to bring about change through political dialogue. However, the radicalization process tends to involve a combination of shared cognitive and behavioral characteristics or structural complaints. (European institute for peace, nd) For example, in recent years, Europe has seen attacks by both right-wing extremists and Islamist extremists.[2] (Europol, 2020) The term radical became the equivalent of extremist right-wing politics and activism, which was partly motivated by anti-socialist ideas. For this reason, we should conclude that although the term "radical" originally referred to "the noble struggle for freedom against the oppressors," in the second half of the 20th century it became a term that could, so to speak, be identified with anti-liberal views. The term is increasingly becoming a concept, referring to the extreme or extreme aspects of the political spectrum. In this sense, since the 1950s, the meaning of radicalism has become internally inadequate and dangerously intertwined with open extremism, which are two different concepts in terms of content (Frissen, 2019).

In terms of political practice **extremism** differs from radicalism, for example, in that extremists accept violence as a legitimate means of achieving political goals without necessarily using violence themselves (Murínová, 2017).
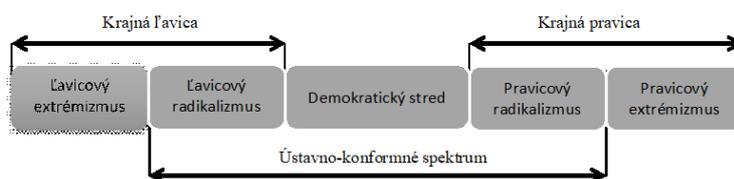
Figure 1: Constitutional-conformal spectrum according to R. Stöss modified by M. Mareš (Mikušovič, 2008)

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[1] Extremists reject the equality of citizens, differ in their attitudes in major topics such as economics, secularization of society, do not respect the main principles of democracy (sovereignty, human rights and freedoms, plurality, etc.) (Murínová, 2017).
[2] In the case of right-wing extremists, we speak e.g. about Anders Breivik in Norway or neo-Nazis in Germany (Reuters, 2011) or Islamic extremists in Brussels (The Guardian, 2014) or Copenhagen (BBC, 2015).

Extremism involves the categorical thinking we versus them, often driven by the dense closed environment of like-minded individuals. Approving the use of violence, even against the civilian population, can further alienate an individual from society. At the same time, it represents an important turning point in which an individual can psychologically prepare for the use of violence. (European Institute for Peace, nd - in our study the term violent extremism is also mentioned).[3]This phenomenon involves violent behavior based on an ideology shared with at least a limited group of individuals. Violent extremism includes willingness, as well as training, preparation and the actual conduct of acts of violence against civilians. (ICSR, 2020) Many times it has been linked to terrorism. Terrorists show signs of strong disconnection from society and tend to degrade or dehumanize (victims) their victims. Historically, individuals have turned to terrorism when they have seen no other way to achieve a specific political goal (European Institute for Peace, nd).

Although terrorism is currently usually associated mainly with the right-wing spectrum (most often religious fanaticism), by way of illustration, Greece, Italy and Spain, for example, have been the epicenter of attacks by left-wing and anarchist terrorists in their development. (Europol, 2019) The most common targets of left-wing and anarchist terrorists and extremists were private enterprises, critical infrastructure and public as well as government institutions. In the vast majority of cases, the perpetrators remained unknown. The number of arrests on suspicion of left-wing or anarchist terrorism in 2019 has more than tripled compared to previous years. Most of the arrests were linked to violent demonstrations and confrontations with security forces in Italy. The detention was due to a suspicion of preparing for and committing a terrorist attack, often in combination with membership in a terrorist group. The men arrested made up the largest group of the total number of arrests, see graphic Figure 2 (Europol, 2020).
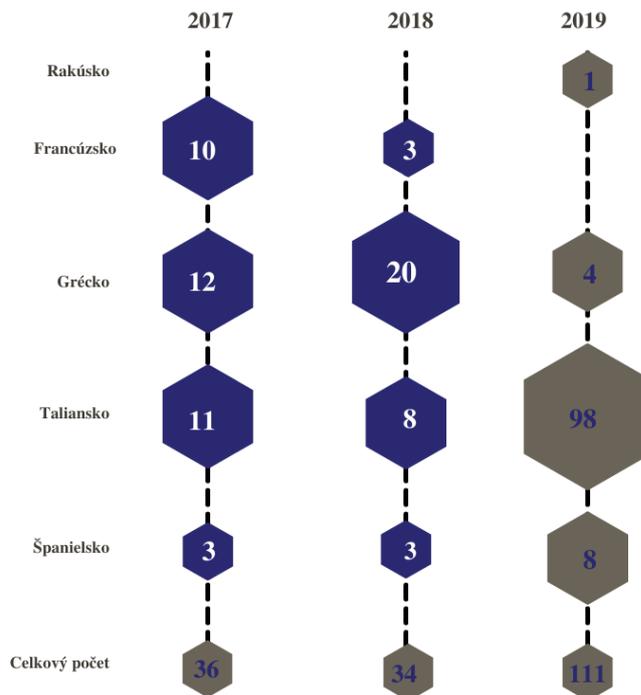
Figure 2: Attacks by right-wing and anarchist terrorists during 2017-2019 (Europol, 2020)

1 Factors leading from radicalization to violent extremism

Radicalization as a phenomenon does not necessarily lead to violence, but is one of several risk factors required for this transition process (Horgan-Braddock, 2010). It thus includes global, sociological and political factors, as well as individual and psychological causes. (European Instirure for Peace, nd) Hogan and Braddock announce that it is a process of gradually experiencing a commitment to extremist political or religious ideology (Horgan-Braddock, 2010). There is no hierarchy of factors that would

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[3] In the English original violent extremism.

automatically lead to violence. The causes vary from individual to individual. However, in the process of radicalization, there are several common factors, mediators, and events that may (but may not) result in violent extremism (Awan et al., 2011).

The European Institute for Peace has defined four factors and causes that potentially lead from radicalization to violent extremism (European Institure for Peace, nd):

- **Structural factors** (SF). These are long-term, fixed factors that bring a sense of injustice to the minds of individuals. These include, for example, demographic imbalances, poverty, inequality, discrimination or the polarized environment and transition societies. These conditions - whether real or perceived - create a favorable environment for radicalization.[4]
- In addition, there are facilitating or accelerating causes (UF) that facilitate the radicalization process by simply accessing information and other resources (eg the Internet).
- **Motivating factors (MF)** through indoctrination they bring the individual closer to extremism. This category includes, for example, radical political leaders or radical preachers who incite hatred or intolerant beliefs or ideologies. In this phase, the environment of the individual creates the so-called the Manichaean gap between "us" and "them". By creating these black and white differences, radicalization can contribute to the fundamental polarization of society and social conflicts.
- The final decision to engage in violence requires further personal transformation. Research has highlighted the importance of triggering events (SUs) - these are key actions that have an intense emotional impact on an endangered individual. These events can encourage someone to take the last step on the path to violent extremism.[5] This is considered when an individual chooses to commit violence as a means of expressing his or her faith. (European Institure for Peace, nd) We will characterize the mentioned groups of factors in more detail in the following article, which will show how radicalization can occur and what impulses we can change, resp. eliminate imminent radical behavior.

2 Risk factors leading to radicalization

According to Frissen, not only institutions but also scientists have identified a diverse set of individual, group and socio-communication mechanisms as potential root causes of radicalization. (Frissen, 2019) Ricolfi emphasizes that the motivation to engage in suicide missions, for example, can be found in a "cocktail of feelings" that includesa desire for revenge, resistance and a sense of responsibility towards the victims. (Ricolfi, 2005) In the process of radicalization, stretch marksda several complex so-called risk factors. No single factor can be described as causal. A combination of risk factors is always needed to explain radicalization (Precht, 2007). These can be divided into three categories:

- push factors (individual or "life cycle" characteristics that increase the likelihood of radicalization),
- pull factors (characteristics of an extremist group or context that make radicalization attractive),
- catalysts (so-called event accelerators)

Push and pull factors and catalysts form the breeding ground for radicalization (see Table 2). These risk factors are typical of many individuals, but only a very small percentage of them eventually become fully radicalized (Precht, 2007). According to Pauwels, there is also no deterministic relationship between certain risk factors and violent extremism. Risk factors affect the likelihood of escalating into violent extremism, but do not in themselves explain why some individuals become radicalized and others do not in similar situations.Due to push factors, individuals are prone to radicalization, which can also be of the violent type. In particular, identity appears to be a central factor that can be a strong determinant towards (violent) radicalization. Factors that can "pull" individuals come from the external environment. Catalysts are elements that accelerate action, in this case radicalization. They mostly contribute to (violent) radicalization by confirming existing beliefs. Compared to long-term push and

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[4] At the same time, it is important to emphasize that not all individuals who have this feeling of injustice are becoming radicals.Few are inclined to violent extremismand even less to terrorism. This makes the start of the radicalization process "difficult to predict". (European institute for peace, nd)

[5] It can be the death of a neighbor, emotional events that cause anxiety in a person.

pull factors, catalysts can start and accelerate the contracted radicalization process very quickly (Pauwels, et al., 2014).

Table 2: Overview of risk factors of violent extremism identified in the literature (Pauwels, et al., 2014)

	Individual characteristics and features	Psychopathological features
Push factors	*Individual characteristics and features*	Socio-demographic features (age, place of residence, sex, ...)
		Personality traits
	Socio-psychological mechanisms	Perceived injustice (discrimination, deprivation)
		Perceived group threat (loss of group identity)
		Perceived uncertainty
	Social mechanisms	Searching for social inclusion (loneliness)
		Searching for identity and meaning
	Emotions	Fear, frustration, hatred, anger, contempt, desire for revenge ...
Pull factors	*Extremist groups*	Meeting social and psychological needs
	The system of radical faith	Ideological recognition
Catalysts	*Trigger events*	Change of personal or social events
	Violence	The need for excitement and kicks
	Biographical availability	Lack of social ties
	Important people	Beliefs from friends, family, influencers

The factors identified by the European Institute for Peace in the previous subchapter can be explicitly extended to the views of authors dealing exclusively with radicalization. Their observations will deepen and expand the issue of variables created by Precht (2007). Based on Sageman, it is important to note that numerous analyzes of the socio-demographic environment of radicals and terrorists (ie the micro level) have shown that radicals are neither poor nor rich, that they are not exclusively men, and that education levels are not important prerequisites for radicalization (Sageman, 2004b).

One of the authors dealing with these issues is Kruglanski, who analyzed radicalization from an individual-psychological point of view. This is the lowest level (micro level), where we talk about pressure factors that force a person to change. Models in this area of research focus primarily on psychopathological, cognitive and emotional traits that contribute to the process of radicalization of the individual.[6] According to Kruglanski, studies of radicalization through psychology and psychiatry are more specifically aimed at mapping psychological vulnerabilities that make an individual prone to gradually engage in a tangle of violent extremism or terrorism (Kruglanski et al, 2014).

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[6]Previous research in this area has been carried out by Kruglansky. In his work "*Suicide Bombers' Motivation and the Quest for Personal Significance"*various motivations are defined. Several authors emphasize exceptional motivations.For example, Sageman's 2004 work on terrorist networks highlighted the desire for emotional and social support for Muslims in European diasporas who feel rejected and alienated by local societies. In 2005, Pape highlighted opposition to foreign occupation as a major motivating force. Spekhard and Akhmedova attributed this role to personal loss and trauma. Nasra Hassan concluded that the main motivation for Hamas terrorists was to enter the "Paradise... Presence in the Prophet Muhammad and harvest the harvest for participating in the Holy War." (Kruglanski, et al., 2009)

An intuitive first reaction to the discussion of violent extremism and terrorism is that perpetrators must be mentally disturbed or at least psychologically abnormal. (Silke, 2008) Studies range from analyzes of ideological indoctrination to elements such as childhood trauma, (sexual) abuse and adolescent development patterns. (Frissen, 2019) A substantial set of individual psychological causes has been widely criticized for proving inconsistent. (Borum, 2011a) Nevertheless, there are several fundamental concepts at the individual psychological level, about which there is consensus in the literature. For clarity, let's summarize them in the following points:

- Terrorism expert Kruglanski argues that the process of radicalization can vary from individual to individual. The search for personal meaning is a general motivating force that is the basis of all radicalization processes, ie "the basic desire to have meaning, to be someone, to have respect". So we are talking about the so-called searching for meaning[7](Kruglanski et al, 2014, p. 73).

- Another typical individual psychological cause, which is well substantiated in the literature and which is to some extent related to the previous one, is the cognitive opening hypothesis[8]. Cognitive opening refers to a mental state in which a person is highly receptive to certain, new, radical, or extremist ideas. It is the result of a personal crisis, disappointment or even a loss of significance (King-Taylor, 2011). Like the search for meaning, cognitive openness is considered part of all radicalization processes. Recent studies indicate e.g. to link cognitive opening with religion in a broader sense, specifically with Salafist jihadism (Frissen, 2019).

- The growing number of recorded cases leads to discourse in the discourse to claim that criminal crime coincides with terror. The analysis of terrorist profiles increasingly suggests that criminal behavior precedes many cases of current radicalization.[9] In a recent publication, Gartenstein-Ross and Blackman (2019) made very similar observations. They found that in some cases of radicalization, individuals did move from one form of violent extremism to another. They called this phenomenon "marginal fluidity"[10]. As they state, "edge smoothness" is, in fact, so common that it should be seen as an independent and important path to radicalization. Specific examples of the fluidity of margins are when individuals transform from neo-Nazism to militant Islamism (Gartenstein-Ross & Blackman, 2019).[11] Nevertheless, these findings are still too premature to fully understand this marginal path of "fluidity" of radicalization. Therefore, the phenomenon needs to be further investigated with a view to the future (Frissen, 2019).

- A well-established concept at this level is also the process of self-radicalization[12]. As Frissen points out, self-radicalization (the name is also self-radicalization) can be thought of as a process in which an individual radicalises in isolation at home.[13] through the pursuit, acceptance, and mastery of extremist ideology (Frissen, 2019). This phenomenon has become known as "bedroom radicals" or

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[7]English original - significant quest. The motivational analysis of suicidal terrorism is rooted in the concept of the search for meaning. It is proposed that heterogeneous factors be identified as personal causes of suicidal terrorism (eg trauma, humiliation, social exclusion), various ideological reasons that justify it (eg liberation from foreign occupation, defense of a nation or religion) and social pressures. (Kruglanski, 2009)

[8] From the English original cognitive opening.

[9]An analysis by Basr and the 2016 team found that 65% of the people in their database were in fact involved in violent crime before being radicalized as terrorists. One example referring to the link between crime and terror is the el-Bakraoui brothers and the network responsible for the attacks in Paris and Brussels on 13 November 2015 and 22 March 2016 (Basra, et al, 2016) Also Van Ostaeyen (2016) he said that "the history of Zerkani's potential newcomers to petty crime and gangsterism naturally provided them with better trade operations in covert operations that helped them travel easily to and from Syria." (Van Ostaeyen, 2016)

[10] English original fringe fluidity.

[11] These authors argue that before an individual can make a real transition, there must be sufficient ideological convergence between the margins. However, as they add, it is still not clear how much "overlap" is exactly necessary to allow such a transition. One hypothesis is that a shared external group is crucial. It is clear that the rejection of the center, the common foundations, and especially the common hostility toward Jews, lie at the epicenter of cases of Nazi-jihadist "fluency." (Frissen, 2019)

[12] English original self-radicalization.

[13] The process of self-radicalization can be understood as a process in which individuals with minimal (perhaps even no links to terrorist networks) are drawn into extremism or terrorism through a bottom-up rather than a "top-down" recruitment process. (Frissen, 2019)

"bedroom radicals" (Ahmed-George, 2016). In this context, it is said that self-radicalization is mainly driven by online information search behavior, which means that individuals actively seek out radical and extremist content on the Internet and increasingly align their personal worldviews with views on literature and videos they reflect. The Internet and current information and communication technologies are seen as tools that play a crucial role in this (Frissen, 2019).

- One last but very strong aspect at the individual level from a psychological perspective is Dean's development of tools for assessing neurocognitive risks (RAT for short). This RAT[14]The tool is designed to facilitate the early detection of individuals who may have the potential to engage in violent extremist acts such as terrorism (Dean, 2014). However, Frissen emphasizes that the neuro-biological data in this state of knowledge are still too embryonic to thoroughly predict and explain radicalization[15] (Frissen, 2019).

If we move on to the last group of factors, which are catalysts, compared to push and pull factors, they can start very quickly and accelerate the radicalization process. These are, for example, triggering events that give the impression of intense injustice. Silke emphasizes that they can provoke great anger and a strong desire for revenge and retaliation (Silke, 2008). Some events can be so impressive that participating individuals need to rethink their place in society. (Pauwels, 2014) The risk assessment of radicalization via the Internet offers four considerations that not only enrich our understanding of progress in radicalization in the online world, but also guide us in identifying relevant (already mentioned) factors and indicators (Neo et al., 2017). These are the following points:

1. The first reflection on the individual examines the motivations and belief systems that encourage the individual to engage in behavior related to online radicalization (eg identification of complaints based on perception). Motivation can take many forms and provide important information about an individual's susceptibility to terrorist stories.
2. The second consideration of the online environment defines the informational, instrumental, and emotional support that the Internet provides to the individual, while interacting with radical content and like-minded individuals online.
3. The third consideration is the interactions between the individual and the online environment. Factors in this consideration are compiled based on how individuals interact in terrorist online communities.
4. Finally, the last consideration of the security element examines the factors that reduce the likelihood of an individual advancing on the path of radicalization. The theoretical argument is that not all individuals become radicalized after being exposed to radical online propaganda.

Conclusion

Overall research on radicalization now generally recognizes that radicalization (or extremism or terrorism) is not the result of psychopathology, such as depression or mood disorders, nor is it exclusive to emotionally disturbed individuals or lunatics. After all, as Pauwels emphasizes, carrying out a terrorist attack requires a high level of self-control, discipline and rationality (Pauwels, 2014). Psychotic behavior, trauma, or personality disorders make individuals less suitable for working in a highly demanding organization (Sageman, 2008). This does not mean that these individuals are never part of extremist movements, but only exceptionally and are usually denied a central position in it. Only for the so-called of lone wolves and loners, the picture may differ. Radicalization is an individual long time frame and within it there can be a radical change in personality traits. However, in the words of psychiatrist Jerrold Post, it is not individual psychopathology, but group, organizational and social psychology with a special emphasis on collective identity that provides the strongest lens through which to understand terrorist psychology and behavior (Post, 2007).

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[14]This work is important because Dean (2014) suggested that RAT is able to reliably distinguish between violent and nonviolent radicalization by distinguishing individuals who only talk about violent extremism from those who are determined to take violent action. (Dean, 2014)

[15]According to Frissen, the studies carried out have tried to understand what happens in the brain during the process of radicalization. It is typical of the paradigm of individual psychological research that most studies in this area have a solid foundation in the tradition of radicalization of the faith. At the end of the study, some researchers argued that given brain data should be considered neuro-biological support for Kurglanski's (2014) meaning-finding hypothesis, as personal meaning or self-worth may be associated with self-presentation, sensitivity to reward, and sacred values. (Frissen, 2019)

That is why the group-level model is given as an alternative to an individual-centered approach. Studies following this research agenda emphasize concepts such as collective identity, collective complaints, their norms and values, and group recruitment. Indeed, according to Spears, numerous studies have suggested that social ties, interpersonal networks, and intergroup influences are central to the radicalization of individuals, and can be said to be pull factors. It is the collective identity that can be very generally understood as the subjective feeling of identifying people with a group (Spears, 2008). More specifically, collective identity can be defined as the process by which social actors recognize themselves and other actors recognize them as part of wider groupings and develop emotional ties to them (Della Porta-Diani, 2006). Collective identity is constructed on the basis of known symbols, worldviews, lifestyles and stories. Studies in this area of research claim that collective identity creates strong bonds between sympathizers in the group, while differentiating itself from members from other social categories. (Singerman, 2004) As a result, collective identity has become a crucial precursor to engaging in (collective) action and (violent) radicalization. (Della Porta-Diani, 2006) In this case, the pull factor can be easily identified as a factor of extremist groups that often saturate basic social and psychological needs (Bjørgo, 2002, 2012): First, it is not very likely that someone will join to an extremist group when he is satisfied with the current personal or political situation and when the social status quo does not provoke his frustration. Secondly, extremist groups need to offer something

Wiktorowicz proposed a "supply and demand chain" applied to an extremist group, where, on the one hand, complaints such as insecurity, group threats and a lack of social integration, which form the breeding ground, are perceived. Sometimes these demands can be so urgent that personal resistance to violent extremism begins to fall apart and create so-called cognitive opening. This suggests that individuals are becoming prone to new ideas and perspectives, including extremist views that would otherwise be immediately rejected. If the nature of the (perceived) complaints coincides with what some extremist groups have to offer, radicalization can take place. (Wiktorowicz, 2004) Pauwels emphasizes that the use of language and symbols places radical demands on a certain interpretive framework. At the same time, they seek to align their frameworks with perceptions and complaints, which already exist in the target population. Successful extremist frameworks offer alternative and simple ideological explanations for perceived wrongs, point to causes and consequences, and emphasize one's own political and social effectiveness. They are very well aware of the complaints of potential members and offer them a response by placing these feelings in a broader extremist picture. These groups are attractive to seeking and frustrated individuals because they seem to offer answers to all their questions and problems (Pauwels, 2014). Also, the particular ideology of an extremist group is usually not a central factor leading to violent extremism. The real reasons for joining an extremist group are, in principle, of a social nature. In fact, most individuals who join an extremist group[16] (Sageman, 2004).

The main focus of interest in the current wave of radicalization research is the role played by the Internet, conspiracies and their role in the radicalization process. According to some authors, the Internet and social networks have the main responsibility for the radicalization of individuals (Alava, et al, 2017). In any case, radicalization is an increasing security challenge. Thanks to new technologies and the growing polarization of society, this is a serious threat throughout the European Union.

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[16] According to Roy (2008), the success of organizations like Al Qaeda is not based on their development as a political organization drawing on a particular ideology, but rather on the creation of a story.

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