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Radicalisation, counter-radicalisation and countering violent extremism in the Western Balkans and the South Caucasus: the cases of Kosovo and Georgia

Alessandra Russo and Ervjola Selenica

Abstract

Scholarly attention is emerging on the globalization and proliferation of initiatives and measures in the fields of counter-radicalisation and countering violent extremism (Hayes and Kundnani 2018). A multitude of international actors endeavor to provide security norms and governance standards in that respect, including international and regional organisations, donors' communities, transnational/global networks as well as non-governmental actors, informal coalitions, platforms and think tanks. The paper aims at mapping and analysing how such many-sided assemblages function along European peripheries and, more specifically, in two under-studied countries, that is, Kosovo and Georgia, where several international actors are involved in projects to prevent and counter radicalisation and violent extremism. The paper will contrast and compare externally-driven efforts of countering violent extremism and radicalization, and trace the interests and agendas pursued by different international actors operating in the Western Balkans and the South Caucasus. Moreover, it will analyse how both concepts of radicalization and extremism and measures to counter them have been specifically 'localized' in Kosovo and Georgia, as well as grounded and embedded in their specific socio-political contexts and normative frameworks.

Introduction

The Madrid (2004) and London (2005) bombings represented a turning point in the redefinition of both the causes of terrorism and the global and national agendas to counter it. Particularly, they impacted the way in which the global war on terror, launched in the aftermath of 9/11 attacks, was redefined, formed, deformed and displayed (Bakali 2019). 9/11 attacks were a crucial turning point, following which the European Union cooperation on counter-terrorism increased leading to the development of a common EU counter-terrorism policy (Kaunert and Léonard 2018, p. 261). 9/11 was depicted by some actors as representing one collective threat that required a collective response. In the aftermath of the Madrid and London bombings, the EU and EU member states were confronted with a new form of domestic terrorist threat that was conveyed through categories such as 'homegrown terrorism'. Such categories were put in connection with individual trajectories triggered by emotional, psychological and ideological factors. A shift from fighting terrorism towards preventing violent extremism and radicalization can be traced around this time. However, a more profound paradigmatic shift occurred around 10 years later, parallel to the proclamation of the ISIS Caliphate: this paved the way to the further crystallization of concepts such as radicalisation, extremism, and prevention, as well as the consideration of a new spatiality for terrorism. The latter was embodied by mobile foreign fighters soon articulated as a securitised transnational suspect community on the move, whose allegedly unprecedented feature lied in originating from the social fabric of Western, liberal, democratic, and secular societies. Preventing and countering radicalisation and violent extremism thus configured as repertoires of discourses and actions targeting "the entire life cycle of the foreign terrorist fighters, including

radicalizing, travelling, financing, returning, disarming, prosecuting, rehabilitating and reintegrating" (Martini 2021, p. 139) - discourses that legitimized the criminalization of mobility tout court, conflating migration and terrorism; and actions that mainly focused on border control and law enforcement. This repertoire has actually gone global (Kundnani and Hayes 2018): the political rationality inspiring it circulated at different latitudes being characterized by the urgency of early detection of vulnerable (to recruitment) subjects and early intervention in pre-criminal spaces. Accordingly, this has paved the way to anticipatory and precautionary governance of risk, crisisification of policy-making and pre-emptive approaches to managing security, particularly targeting minorities and/or allegedly 'pathological' social groupings, with the aim of reforming, regulating and disciplining their conduct (Mythen and Walklate 2006; Heath-Kelly 2012; Rhinard 2019). This repertoire made of narratives and practices has been internationally legitimised and legalised: more specifically, a process of legal standardisation was enshrined by the United Nations Security Council - the quintessential site of global knowledge production as well as global norms construction (Martini 2020). Moreover, it is exactly in the framework of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) works that the notion of bringing Countering Violent Extremism/Preventing Violent Extremism (CVE/PVE) at the grassroots level, by engaging local communities, coupled with the idea of nurturing resilience through the private sector, civil society and media, as well as the involvement of families and women especially for targeting youth, gained traction. Likewise, the category of 'moderate Islam' gradually took shape, leading to calls for the training of and dialogue with religious leaders. The design and implementation of programmes at schools, in prisons, mental institutions, warship spaces, considered as possible incubators for radicalisation, were encouraged, yet considered by critical scholars as forms of policing religious and cultural institutions, as well as securitizing the health, social, welfare and education sectors (Ragazzi 2017; Novelli 2017). Along similar veins, disquiet has been broadly expressed vis-à-vis the transformation of personal, private, domestic spaces into spaces of contagion or detection of radicalisation, spaces of surveillance and control of dissent.

Globalisation of countering and preventing radicalization and violent extremism, still, has not equaled with universal convergence around the UN-sanctioned template and adoption of the hegemonic counter-terrorism paradigm: the Global Counter Terrorism Forum (GCTF) was exactly launched to overcome the resistance to it and preventing the mavericks from using UN mechanisms for the purpose of contestation. Yet, an observed pattern of proliferation and globalisation of counter-radicalisation and CVE policies and initiatives materializes inasmuch as local and international policy-makers and practitioners assemble "capacity-building and development aid; education and training; […] surveillance partnerships between policing and non-policing agencies; and targeted ideological interventions on individuals" (Kundnani A. and Hayes 2018, p. 5). Not only such global agenda offered a univocal interpretation about transitions to militant violence; it also provided international stakeholders and the donors community a rather specific frame for interventions and programmes, and a ratio for applying a common set of knowledge, skills and competences that have been geographically conceived far from the countries of implementation (Simoncini 2020.). For example, CVE/PVE programmes may lead to the territorialisation of the threat (confining it to peripheral and border areas), stigmatisation of poverty and spatial/social marginality, discrimination against some sectors of the populations and outlawing of informal economies and cross-border activities. Those trends are even exacerbated by the ongoing securitisation of development aid (Aning 2010),

especially since, in 2016, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) decided that certain CVE/PVE activities could be classified as Official Development Assistance.

Against that background, processes of translation and localisation of these global templates have been overlooked. In particular, how is such a global agenda shaped and contoured locally, the extent to which it is grounded and embedded in specific socio-political contexts and normative frameworks of 'host countries' (i.e. countries of implementation), as well as how the frames and schemes that proceed from that agenda are received and implemented by a wide gamut of local recipients (governmental institutions, religious authorities, social sector professionals, civil society associations and non-governmental organizations, networks of experts) is an under-researched topic. Our article aims at contributing to fill this gap, by taking into consideration Kosovo and Georgia, two countries that are less frequently under the spotlight when it comes to studying radicalisation, violent extremism and the actions undertaken to tackle those phenomena. Kosovo is reportedly the country with the highest number per capita in Europe of Islamist fighters travelling abroad (Kursani 2015; Kursani 2018; Rrustemi 2021); furthermore, according to a 2017 UNDP survey assessing the perceptions of radicalisation at the community level in the country, nearly three quarters of Kosovans believe there are radicalised people in their local area, almost 70% think there is a radicalisation problem within their own community, and nearly a quarter know someone who has been radicalised. However, little consensus exists on the extent of the radicalisation threat. According to a 2020 UNDP public pulse survey, unemployment (37.2%), corruption (23.5%), and poverty (15.3%) are the three paramount issues that impact Kosovans' social wellbeing; while Kosovo Serbs consider unemployment (38.5%), organized crime (13.5%), and interethnic relations (11.5%) as the most pressing issues in Kosovo (UNDP 2020, p. 4). The perception of the terrorist and radicalisation threat and data on the phenomenon vary accordingly to the type of stakeholder that is being interviewed, and there is a degree of heterogeneity of the perception of the threat among civil society and religious leaders, and even more among the local population[1].

On the other hand, Georgia is a country where the Orthodox Christian religion is practiced by the majority of its citizens and whereby the respective Church benefits from a preferential lane of political dialogue with the government and the political elites, with the Patriarch being one of the most trusted authorities in the society. Georgia has its own story of anti-terror operations launched at different times in border areas with the North Caucasus provinces. More recently, the cursus honorum realised by Tarkhan Tayumurazovich Batirashvili brought Georgia back to the center of international media attention – even though extemporaneously and according to rather orientalised/exotised narrratives: known by his nom de guerre Omar al-Shishani, Batirashvili had served in the Georgian Army and afterwards as a commander for the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. More recently, criticisms have been voiced by local and international actors about waves of discrimination against Georgian (and non-Georgian) Muslim communities and particular attention has been paid to far-right extremist actors emerging in Georgia as well as other countries in the Eastern neighborhood. In both cases, these issues are often interwoven with the extent to which the societal effects of counter-radicalisation may be overlooked.

[1] Author's interviews with, respectively, local experts, journalists and officials working with international organisations, carried out in Pristina in September 2018.

The comparison between these two cases was not designed a priori: the two authors crossed their paths while conducting individual research on, respectively, Kosovo and Georgia, and inductively reflected upon similarities and differences between the two contexts when it comes to defining the fields of counter-radicalisation and countering violent extremism. In other words, our research was nourished by moments of serendipity, affecting the methodological dimension of this paper. Therefore, the paper is based on a similar set of interviews, carried out at different times and backed by interview guides, which were not agreed upon in advance. However, we ended up having similar interlocutors, i.e. actors entering into various relations with internationally-promoted/funded projects for preventing and/or contrasting radicalisation and violent extremism. Starting from interviews, we worked backwards for mapping projects, programmes and actions dealing with those phenomena and implemented in the two countries under study; at the same time cross-checking our respective empirical material in order to see whether a broader storyline emerged bottom-up from the data.

This effort resulted in a paper that maps and analyses how externally-driven initiatives and measures in the fields of countering radicalisation and violent extremism function along European peripheries and, more specifically in Kosovo and Georgia, where several international actors have launched projects to prevent and counter radicalisation and violent extremism. The paper will contrast and compare such efforts of countering violent extremism and radicalisation, and trace the interests and agendas pursued by different international actors operating in the Western Balkans and the South Caucasus. Moreover, it will analyse how both concepts of radicalization and extremism and measures to counter them have been specifically 'localized' in Kosovo and Georgia, as well as well grounded and embedded in their specific socio-political contexts and normative frameworks. Finally, the paper will reflect upon the societal effects of such initiatives and measures in the respective contexts. All in all, the article sheds light on the external dimension of EU counter-terrorism policy - defined by Rhinard (2019) as collective securitization driven by crisification. It also intends to analyse some shifts that have characterized the evolution of EU counter-terrorism policy along and across EU peripheries, in particular its greater focus on countering violent extremism and radicalization (Rhinard 2019; see also Kaunert and Léonard 2018).

The paper is structured as follows. In the first section we build upon critical security and terrorism studies to explore the dynamics and dialectics between the local and the global in the design and reception of counter-radicalisation and CVE policies. In the second section we discuss and review the literature on the globalisation of CVE and counter-radicalisation strategies and policies through a number of international actors and identify knowledge gaps and research puzzles that we then address in the ensuing two sections. In the following two sections we analyse, respectively, the Georgian and the Kosovan cases, trying to draw tentative comparisons on the basis of a three-fold categorizations of international interventions in the fields of counter-radicalisation and P/CVE in the two countries: creation of local expertise and knowledge; support to grassroots organizations; cooperation with local authorities and institutions. Lastly, we conclude by comparing and contrasting the two case studies and link the discussion to the broader theoretical debates.

1. Theoretical Grounds and Anchorages in Relevant Scholarships

The inauguration - at different times and latitudes, within different international circumstances - of "wars on terror" has resulted in the emergence of global regimes of prohibition, enforcement and surveillance (Woodiwiss and Bewley-Taylor 2005; Andreas and Nadelmann 2006). The normative argumentation for counter-terrorism policies[2] and the public justification of their contentious practices have converged towards framing terrorism as a transnational phenomenon, thus paving the way to similar forms of problem-solving in different jurisdictions (including supranational institutions, international/regional organisations, states and local authorities). Multilaterally negotiated and internationally accepted frames have thus emerged in the area of counter-terrorism first and counter-radicalisation/CVE later. However, these frames have also been disputed and questioned, encountering local traditions and sensibilities. It has been actually acknowledged that the above-mentioned convergence and international dynamics of consensus formation may be nuanced according to differentiated political cultures on threat perceptions, audience expectations, and policy-making as such (Heller et al. 2012). In other words, the delineation of counter-terrorism models proceeds from international processes as much as they are embedded into local institutional patterns and grounded into local normative references. It is exactly in that respect that our paper aims to complement the scholarship on globalisation and proliferation of counter-radicalisation initiatives and measures that is mentioned in the Introduction.

In analysing these dynamics, i.e. the dialectics between the global and the local in the design and operation of counter-radicalisation and CVE programmes and initiatives, we premise on the necessity to unpack and problematise the functional relation between counter-terrorism measures and threats. Counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation schemes are rather to be considered as "an assemblage of governing that (it) is mobilised through particular threat representations, knowledge practices, training programmes and strategies for intervention" (De Goede and Simon 2013, p. 315). Accordingly, the above-mentioned dynamics can be explained not only by looking at instrumental and effectiveness-driven rationales but also by considering the particular models of controlling, policing, and ultimately governing communities and societies that counter-terrorism, counter-radicalisation and CVE schemes establish and enable. This line of reasoning is not new: Critical Terrorism Studies have been exactly developed against the background of some scholars' disquiet vis-à-vis those discursive practices and policy strategies which aimed to depict the 'War on Terror' as an instance of 'just violence' (Jackson 2007). However, most of the critical scholarship dealing with international terrorism and counter-terrorism has focused on Western cases and, more specifically, have looked inside Western countries to produce an emancipatory, multidisciplinary and heterodox knowledge of how the respective governments, officials, practitioners, experts, the media were involved in the social and political construction of the 'terrorist label' and propagate its use. While the existence and propagation of "local 'wars on terrorism'" (Jackson 2005, p. 167) has been acknowledged, there are limited studies (remarkable exceptions are Campana 2014 and Pokalova 2018) on how non-Western countries have received and re-shaped labels, policy schemes and political initiatives whose original elaboration has occurred exogenously and which have been then transferred though different mechanisms and channels (intervention, positive/negative incentives, assistance and capacity building, learning and

[2] Normative argumentation here means the set of discursive tools employed to define what is appropriate and legitimate to ensure security (Heller et al. 2012).

socialisation). Yet, it is exactly to those countries that a growing number of global and regional actors turned their gaze and counter-radicalisation and whereby CVE schemes have been travelling. Kosovo and Georgia have not been an exception to these trends, especially in the framework of EU's security policy making towards its Enlargement and Neighborhood areas.

2. International templates of countering terrorism, violent extremism and radicalisation

Against the background of the Enlargement strategy, the 2008 Council Conclusions on co-operation with Western Balkan countries on the fight against organised crime and terrorism identified the need to enhance cooperation between the EU Member States and the Western Balkan countries in the field of security. Following up on that, in the framework of the Initiative of sharing best practices with Western Balkan countries on national counter-terrorism arrangements, Western Balkan countries agreed to have their national counter-terrorism structures and legislation reviewed by EU-mandated experts. Then, further EU missions were hosted by some of those countries, in order to analyse their respective counter-terrorism arrangements on the basis of the EU recommendations. Since then, counter-terrorism strategies designed by Western Balkans countries have increasingly aligned with the EU model (Spahiu 2018). Finally, in 2018, a Joint Action Plan on Counter-Terrorism for the Western Balkans was signed (Council of the European Union 2018), envisioning regular exchanges, dialogues or visits; peer-review missions by EU counter-terrorism practitioners; the involvement of different venues and networks for cooperation, such as the Western Balkans Counter-Terrorism initiative.

As per the Eastern Neighborhood, the ENP Action Plans for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine refer to counter-terrorism, limitedly to the establishment or reinforcement of political dialogue on terrorism-related issues. Counter-terrorism cooperation appears to be channeled by bilateral operational agreements, which have been signed by Moldova and Ukraine with Europol and Eurojust, respectively; while all six Eastern ENP partners have signed working arrangements with Frontex. In spite of the lack of any specific reference to terrorism in the 2009 joint declaration that established the Eastern Partnership, the EU has since then established fora for expert discussions, also dealing with terrorism, with several of its Eastern neighbors (Lavallée et al 2017). The 2015 turn, which has been rather evident in the case of Southern ENP partners, has been extended to the whole neighborhood through the ENP Review, which has reconsidered the relevance of counter-terrorism in that cooperation framework.

In parallel to restructuring its counter-terrorism strategies and programmes, making them instruments for outward propulsion (Brattberg and Rhinard 2012), the EU has gradually incorporated specific paradigms of counter-radicalisation and de-radicalisation. More recently, the external dimension of EU's counter-radicalisation schemes has been envisioned to assist EU's international partners, allegedly according to local circumstances and security/safety environments (European Commission 2016). For example, discussions have been held with Tunisia, Turkey and Central Asian countries, respectively, in the framework of high-level political dialogue on security and counter-terrorism (2015, 2016, 2017). Since 2017, further discussions on counter-terrorism have been planned with Saudi Arabia and Russia. Furthermore, the EU funds a package of activities grouped in the programme "STRIVE - Strengthening Resilience to Violence and Extremism", through which it supports the

International Centre of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism in Abu Dhabi (the Hedayah Centre) and the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF); likewise, the EU has invested in a series of trainings to raise awareness amongst EU staff around the world, as well as local partners, about the concept of Countering Violent Extremism and how to incorporate this concept into concrete projects.[3]

With respect to our case studies, the EU has funded a Global Project on Strengthening the Legal Regime against Foreign Terrorist Fighters in the Middle East, North Africa and South Eastern Europe (including Kosovo) - implemented by the UNODC. Furthermore, in the Western Balkans, the EU has supported the creation of both the Regional Platform for Countering Radicalisation and Violent Extremism Leading to Terrorism and Recruitment of Foreign Terrorist Fighters and the Regional Network of Coordinators for Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism. In addition, it is worth underlining that the 2015 ENP Review has emphasized the importance - in the context of counter-radicalisation efforts - of supporting civil society organisations and interacting with practitioners and academia.

However, the EU is not the only actor operating in the field of counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation in the two countries under study. When looking at the wider European landscape, it should be mentioned that preventing and countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism (VERLT) is an increasingly important part of the OSCE's anti-terrorism activities, whose ultimate objective is to uphold human rights and the rule of law while tackling these phenomena. OSCE especially explores community-based preventive solutions, such as youth and women's engagement and community policing projects, mainly through regional dialogue and capacity-building initiatives (for example, the multi-year OSCE "Leaders against Intolerance and Violent Extremism" - LIVE project especially addressing civil society leaders, including youth, women and religious figures). In parallel to it, OSCE (and ODIHR in particular) is committed to raise awareness about discrimination, racism, xenophobia and other forms of intolerance, including against Muslims and religious minorities in general. OSCE's programmes include training law enforcement personnel and educators, as well as capacity-building initiatives for civil society representatives to monitor and report on hate crimes and incidents.

Alongside the OSCE and the EU as such, the Embassy of EU member states are rather active; together with the United States (and in particular its development agency, USAID), UN agencies and a host of foundations, transnational/global networks as well as international non-governmental actors, coalitions, platforms, think tanks and consultancies are active actors supporting a wide array of initiatives. With the purpose of displaying this multiplicity of actors, interventions and agendas, the next two paragraphs focus on, respectively, Georgia and Kosovo, on the one hand presenting the contexts where the local fields of counter-radicalisation and CVE are crafted, and on the other mapping the actors inhabiting these fields.

As mentioned in the Introduction, the UN has been at the forefront of this process of legitimation and legalization of narratives and practices of counter-terrorism, countering violent extremism and counter-radicalisation. This has

[3] http://ct-morse.eu.

unfolded through a number of Resolutions,[4] Presidential Statements,[5] or other strategic documents.[6] Furthermore, it has been consolidated through institutional arrangements such as the introduction of 'Countering Violent Extremism' (CVE) as one of the Focus Areas of the Counter-Terrorism Committee, and the establishment, within the UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force, of an ad hoc Working Group on Preventing Violent Extremism. The GCTF, too, is equipped with its own CVE working group, which is co-chaired by the United Kingdom and the United Arab Emirates, and which held its inaugural meeting in Abu Dhabi in April 2012. The GCTF has also launched the Hedayah Center of Excellence in Countering Violent Extremism, based in Abu Dhabi, and funded by the United States and the European Union. In November 2014, Hedayah hosted an expert workshop on counter-narratives, which praised the implication of "victims, formers and ex-prisoners" in PVE/CVE projects; while in December it hosted the Global CVE Expo. Accordingly, when one looks at the 2015 White House Summit on Combating Violent Extremism, it may become evident that the former was more a product than a catalyst of a global agenda (Hayes and Qureshi 2016).

3. Georgia: territorialized suspect communities at the fringes of a borderland

Radicalisation in Georgia is primarily associated with the Muslim communities living in Pankisi Valley (in the Kakheti province and proximate to the Georgia-Chechnya border) which has been narrated since the early 2000s as a criminalized zone, a safe haven for al-Qaeda cells and Chechen field commanders, and, more recently, a recruitment pool for Islamic State militants (Pokalova 2020; 2021). The mainstream public discourse, as conveyed by local and international media, policy-makers and authorities, displays indeed a widespread concern vis-à-vis foreign fighters leaving from Georgia to Syria and Iraq, an alarm that has been also triggered by the mounting fame of Tarkhan Batirashvili, who almost turned into a Che-Guevara-like figure for some of the Pankisi youngsters - a reputation he achieved after joining the Syrian conflict where he became Amir Umar al-Shishani and the Islamic States' minister of war[7].

Even if the exact number of Georgian foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq is unknown, both government policies and counter-radicalisation initiatives in the country appear to be premised on the assumption that the majority of individuals from Georgia fighting in Syria and Iraq are from the Pankisi Gorge. The proximity of the North Caucasus insurgency to the Pankisi Gorge has probably facilitated the mobilization of local Kists and the

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[4] UNSC Resolution 1963 (2010); UNSC Resolution 2178 (2014); UNSC Resolution 2195 (2014); UNSC Resolution 2322 (2016); UNSC Resolution 2396 (2017).

[5] UNSC Presidential Statement 23 (2014); United Nations Presidential Statement 6 (2016); United Nations Presidential Statement 11 (2015).

[6] In 2015 the Secretary-General's Plan of Action to Prevent Extremism was released, and invited national governments and regional organisations to develop national and local plans aimed at preventing violent extremism.

[7] During his youth Batirashvili came into contact with the Chechen rebels and sometimes joined them on missions against Russian troops. After finishing high school, Batirashvili joined the Georgian Army and during the 2008 Russo-Georgian War he served near the front line in the Battle of Tskhinvali. Years after, he radicalized in prison and then left for Syria, where he commanded the Army of Emigrants and Helpers until 2013. By then a growing number of Chechens from the Pankisi commanded their own detachments in Syria. See Amashukeli 2019.

development of networks among locals and those passing through as well infrastructures for smuggling people and equipment, including weapons. Moreover, this proximity shaped Georgia's counter-terrorism operations[8], such as the one in the Lopota Gorge in August 2012, and the one in the Pankisi Gorge in December 2017, when 19-year-old Temirlan Machalikashvili was lethally injured by a special unit servicemen rushing into his house during a raid. This latter event especially sparked public outrage and initiated a reflection on the abuses and misuses of power in the framework of Georgia's counter-terrorism as well as the violations of minority rights in the country – issues that have been raised in particular by the Public Defender's Office. Other authorities, instead, treated the problem of radicalisation either as an economic matter[9] or seeking to employ the Pankisi youth in the military[10].

However, the landscape of Georgian radicalisation and extremism is far more complex than the design of government responses. As ethnicity, religious affiliation, and region of residence are related in Georgia, Muslim communities in the country are far from being an homogeneous group: for example, Georgian Muslims, Kist Muslims and Azerbaijani Muslims live in different political, social and historical contexts. Whereas the country has an overwhelming majority of Orthodox Christian population, Georgia's Muslims account for the 10,7% of the total (2014 Census), are distributed across the Georgian territories (although deep-rooted communities are concentrated in the Kakheti region, the Autonomous Republic of Adjara and Kvemo Kartli) and see the cohabitation of different religious and ethnic sub-groups[11]. Against that background, when aiming at preventing religion-based radicalisation and extremism by governing religious representations and regulating the rights of religion, such complexity seems to be disregarded. In 2011 the Georgian government founded the Administration of Muslims of All Georgia (AMAG), declaratorily with the mission of serving the interests of the Muslim communities of Georgia. Although originally established by the government, the Administration has a declared status of a non-governmental organisation. Further, in 2014, Georgia established the State Agency on Religious Issues in order to devise specific policies on religion (Chitanava and Gavtadze 2020). These bodies, though, are

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[8] An international consensus has frequently formed over the portrayal of Georgia as a source of foreign fighters and a transit route from Russia (and Central Asia). In June 2015, during a two-day Counterterrorism Expert Conference on Countering the Incitement and Recruitment of Foreign Terrorist Fighters, organised by the OSCE in Vienna Georgia was mentioned in these terms (albeit not present). The conference revolved around the need to prioritise preventive measures, rather than law enforcement and punitive measures. The first naming Georgia was Oleg Syromolotov, the Russian deputy foreign minister responsible for counter-terrorism, and a former deputy director of the Federal Security Service (FSB), followed by the representative of the OSCE office in Bishkek and finally by the representatives of, respectively, the US State Department's Bureau of Counterterrorism and the International Crisis Group.

[9] For example, during a visit to Pankisi in 2014, Prime Minister Garibashvili stated: 'we have studied the potential and resources of the Gorge and we want to create enterprises here…create new jobs'. A month later, the President's adviser visited the Gorge and once again emphasised economic development: 'we need to implement projects which will give new opportunities to the Gorge's youth and prevent them from leaving the area' (Agenda.ge 2014a; 2014b).

[10] During a visit to Pankisi in early January 2016 Georgian Defence Minister Tinatin Khidasheli offered local youth the option of contract-based service in the Georgian Armed Forces.

[11] While most ethnic Georgians affiliate with the Georgian Orthodox Church (GOC), a few ethnic Russians are members of several Orthodox groups not affiliated with it. Ethnic Azerbaijanis are predominantly Shia Muslims and form the majority of the population in the southeastern region of Kvemo-Kartli. Other Muslim groups include ethnic Georgian Muslims in Adjara and Chechen Kists in the northeast, both of which are predominantly Sunni. Ethnic Georgian Sunni Muslims are also present in Samtskhe-Javakheti. Ethnic Armenians belong primarily to the Armenian Apostolic Church and constitute the majority of the population in Samtskhe-Javakheti. See: US Department of State 2020.

not entrusted with legitimacy by Muslim community leaders and are criticised by non-governmental organisations too[12], as instruments of government control via the appointment of AMAG religious leaders, the management of the State budget for the construction and maintenance of Muslim religious buildings in the country, and the selective transfer of land (for building such places of worship) to AMAG rather than local religious organisations. As a matter of fact, the ownership and construction of mosques as well as restitution policies are among the sources of discrimination reportedly felt by Muslim communities in Georgia (case of Batumi, Mokhe, cemetery of Adigeni, minarets in Chela[13]), along with education policies, i.e. the promotion of GOC theology in public schools and the use of related iconography and symbology; the refusal by the municipal authority to provide water and sewage connections to a Muslim boarding school in Kobuleti, where a pig's head was also nailed to its door; the denial of permission to opening Muslim higher education centres for training imams.

A further layer of complexity is represented by the emergence of other forms of extremism in the country: the constellation of far-right actors in the country - some of which formally registered as political parties or NGOs – whose fil rouge weaving them seems to be the appeal to patriotism, commitment to traditional values, and anti-migrants/anti-foreigners discourses[14].

It is in these milieus that discrimination against Georgian Muslims and other (ethnic, religious, gender/sexual) minorities have manifested at the societal level, while, in turn, the impact of discrimination on pathways to radicalisation is often overlooked. Criticisms against weakly visible and effective actions undertaken by Georgian institutions to contrast instances of discrimination and Islamophobia have been voiced by local NGOs, civil society organisations, activists as well as international organisations such as the Council of Europe (CoE) and the CoE-related European Commission against Racism and Intolerance. Against that background, over the last 5 years Georgian governments and security authorities seem to have privileged policies fostering the creation (and the spatialization) of a Muslim suspect community, frequently in cooperation with a number of donors (such as the European Union, the OSCE, the US Agency for International Development) that are rather active in supporting and financing counter-radicalisation and CVE initiatives in Georgia. This political rationality is also reflected in the *National Strategy of Georgia of 2019-2021 on Fight against Terrorism*, which expresses a special concern from foreign fighters and returnees (while the document makes clear that "the state of Georgia deems it unacceptable to link specific religion and/or ethnicity, nationality to terrorism and/or extremism", p. 12).

Accordingly, on the one hand Georgia is being monitored regarding its endeavors to establish strategies and normative frameworks to ensure the protection of minorities and the promotion of tolerance and equality; on the other, it hosts multiple international actors that are increasingly active in the field of counter-radicalisation and countering violent extremism (CVE).

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[12] Author's interview with Georgian officials working in national institutions as well as representatives of local NGOs, Tbilisi, May 2019.

[13] This trend also involved an Armenia church in Tbilisi (Tandoyants Church).

[14] Further, it is worth mentioning the under-researched process of nationalistic, right-wing radicalization that has brought a number of Georgians joining volunteer units engaged in the combats in Ukraine on the pro-Kiev side (Dolidze et al. 2018; Stephan 2018).

3.1 The international encounters the local in uncharted security fields

A number of Georgia-based international agencies have primarily directed its support to collecting data and producing knowledge about the phenomenon. For example, in 2017 USAID financed Georgia's first Violent Extremism Risk Analysis (then conducted over the Spring 2018); by a similar token, the Open Society Foundation Georgia has supported the publication of a research conducted by the Georgian Center for Security and Development ("Improving Mechanisms for Preventing Radicalisation and Violent Extremism in Georgia", in the framework of the project "Joint Efforts for a Better Future"); the Georgian Center for Security and Development also carried out a comparative research on Georgia and Azerbaijan "The Roots of Violent Extremism and Radicalization in Azerbaijan and Georgia" funded by Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung[15]; and finally the Embassies of, respectively, the Netherlands and Sweden in Tbilisi have financed the Caucasus Research Resource Centers to carry out a study on "Countering Violent Extremism in Georgia".

In spite of the commitment of its Member States, and of its long history of engagement with Georgia and the wider region, the EU has promoted rather circumscribed activities, through the programme "STRIVE - Strengthening Resilience to Violence and Extremism", and the support provided to the International Centre of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism in Abu Dhabi (the Hedayah Centre) and the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF), as mentioned above. Even though local communities are allegedly not informed about the activities carried out by Hedayah and other international organisations in the country[16], this resource stream has recently financed two projects, both focusing on a special category of vulnerable subjects, i.e., the youth, and aiming at contouring an expertise field in the country, liaising international consultants with Georgian research centres.

The first project ("Identification of Media Channels and Messages Contributing to Radicalization of Georgia's Youth") has been jointly implemented by the Media Development Foundation (MDF) and the Georgian Institutional Development Center (GIDC) and translated into the "Research on Needs and Information Sources of Muslim Youth Community". While this is an important step towards understanding on which media outlets young Muslims draw, the project seems to implicitly convey the equation between radicalisation/extremism and religious identities. The second one ("Study of Relationship of different Socio-Cultural Parameters, Education and Violent Extremism in Youth") has been conducted by the Institute of Social Studies and Analysis and has resulted in the "Study of Vulnerability towards Violent Extremism in Youth in Georgia": in this case, both "Religious Fundamentalism" and "Right-Wing Authoritarianism" were named as possible value orientations of youth supposedly leading to vulnerability to radicalisation/extremism. However, the research design and the data collection seem to suggest religion as a focal variable in the process; and overall the recommendations stemming from the study seem to mostly target Muslim communities, whereas little attention is paid to the possible linkages

[15] The report was part of a broader project on "Enhancing Countries (Georgia-Azerbaijan) Capacities in Countering Violent Extremism", whose aim "was to create a pool of trained professionals in the government media and the civil society".

[16] This statement reflects a survey conducted by the Caucasus Research Resource Centers about the level of trust of Pankisi residents, the Adjaran eco-migrant community and an Avar community in Eastern Georgia, vis-à-vis local and national authorities, NGOs and international organisations.

between discrimination against them, disenfranchisement of marginalised individuals and groups and trajectories of radicalisation[17]; or to the possible linkages between state/police violence and trajectories of radicalisation[18].

In parallel to the above, a few projects were funded by international donors to boost the understanding of far-right extremism formations in the country. Already in May 2018, a report was released by the Georgian chapter of Transparency International, titled "Anatomy of Georgian Neo-Nazism"[19]. However, this focus became more visible especially in the last 2 years (2019-2020) when studies about illiberal actors, neo-Nazi groups and ultra-nationalism were supported by different international donors[20] yet in response to local events - especially the murder of the 25-years old human rights activist Vitali Safarov, supposedly on xenophobic grounds (even though the Tbilisi court dismissed the hate crime motivations in the case).

In addition to the production of knowledge about radicalization and extremism, international donors aimed at supporting grassroots organisations and the civil society[21]. This second category of projects particularly targets

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[17] There are few remarkable exceptions. In 2015 the Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center has launched the project "Addressing the Problems of Integration, Marginalization and Radicalization of Muslim Communities in Georgia", implemented between Jan. 2017 and Jun. 2018 within the framework of Eurasia Program supported by the Open Society Foundations. It interestingly aimed at researching political and social exclusion of Georgian Muslim communities, their representation in political bodies and public service as well as other issues such as employment, and how oppression, discrimination and exclusion influence social development. In 2017 the Human Rights Education and Monitoring Center prepared a report titled "Overview of Cases on Restriction of Religious Freedoms and Discrimination", in the framework of the project "Increasing Access to Justice for Discriminated Religious Communities", financed by the program "Promoting Rule of Law in Georgia, implemented by the East-West Management Institute and financially supported by USAID.

[18] For example, the Embassy of the Netherlands in Georgia funded a project ("Building Trust and Confidence between Police and Society"), implemented by the Georgian Center for Strategy and Development, to support of the community-oriented policing reform and increase public trust towards the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia, for improving the relation between the society and the police. Along similar lines, the EU has launched a programme ("EU4Security, Accountability and Fight against Crime in Georgia") promoting a bottom-up approach to the security sector reform and including a component on enhancing the oversight over the security sector. In both cases the reference to a PVE/CVE dimension is rather weak if not absent at all. However, it must be mentioned that in February 2021 the Democracy Research Institute launched the project "Supporting Security Sector Reform in Georgia", funded by the National Endowment for Democracy, with the mission of advocating for institutional reforms and reducing the risks of abuse of power in the State Security Service and, relatedly, at the same time, preventing radicalization in the Kvemo Kartli and Pankisi regions. PH International too has realized two projects, funded by the US Department of State, Bureau of International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, and implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Georgia and Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia, focused on community policing in Adjara and Samtskhe-Javakheti respectively.

[19] https://transparency.ge/en/blog/anatomy-georgian-neo-nazism.

[20] "In the Slavery of Hate: Monitoring of Neo-Nazi Groups' Activities in Georgia", a study presented by the Center for Participation and Development to the members of the Council of National Minorities under the Public Defender's Office in June 2019 and that was supported by USAID within the "Promoting Integration, Tolerance and Awareness Program in Georgia"; "Understanding the Ultra-Right Extremism and Nationalism and Fight against it in Georgia", funded by the Embassy of the Netherlands and implemented by the Democracy Research Institute, that initiated a monitoring of social media channels of ultra-nationalist and far-right groups and their leaders (Oct. 2019-Sep. 2020); "Exposing the roots of illiberalism in Georgia", funded by Open Society Foundation Georgia and implemented by the Georgian Institute of Politics (2020); "Countering Ethno-Nationalist Narratives in Georgia", funded by the Embassy of Norway in Tbilisi and implemented by the Democracy Research Institute (Dec. 2020-Jul. 2021).

[21] That is the case, for example, of OSCE's activities: in 2017 Georgia was involved in ODIHR's Prosecutors and Hate Crime Training (PAHCT) programme and hosted both a PAHCT workshop as well as another workshop proceeding from ODIHR's activities to promote tolerance and non-discrimination by strengthening the ability of civil society groups to identify and report hate crimes. The latter in particular had a regional scope and indeed addressed civil society representatives from Central Asia.

youth and reiterate the territorialisation of vulnerability to radicalization and extremism, by focusing on specific regions of Georgia – where religious minorities reside (Kakheti, and especially the Pankisi Gorge and more specifically its ethnic Kist residents who are deemed among "the most vulnerable regional communities in Georgia"[22]; as well as Adjara, Guria, Kvemo Kartli); on the other hand a few projects also target specific professional groups such as journalists and teachers. One of these projects actually has a peculiar multi-stakeholder (or multi-interlocutor) approach, having both a grassroot-oriented dimension and an establishment dimension: "Enhancing the Capacity of Georgia in Preventing Violent Extremism and Radicalization" exactly has a state-level component and a community-level component. As per the first, it includes capacity-building actions targeting the Interagency Commission for National Counterterrorism Strategy; the Academy of the Ministry of Internal Affairs (for community policing initiatives) as well as the Parliament, the Crime Prevention Center and local self-government bodies. As per the second, it targets representatives of the media sector, civil society organisations, teachers as well as the academic sector trying to establish P/CVE studies in Georgia in collaboration with Universities in Tbilisi, Batumi, Telavi. This example seems to be, at least by the time of writing, rather unique in the landscape of donors' activities in our field of study, in Georgia, for the variety of interlocutors the GCSD reached. On the other hand, according to some local observers, stockpiling projects related to radicalisation and extremism contributed to a widespread argument that these policy concepts have been brought in the country by international donors, that Georgia's P/CVE is moulded after donor-driven agendas, with a significant role acquired by international consultancies and consultants working for international organisations, and that NGOs (being there implementers, intermediaries or beneficiaries of these projects) are becoming grant-eaters and end up being discredited[23].

Donor	Recipient	Project Title and Description	Targets
East-West Management Institute (USAID)	Georgian Young Lawyer's Association	Building Resilience and trust – reducing violent radicalization and extremism in Georgia through building resilience of youth in Pankisi Gorge (Nov. 2018 – Sep. 2019).	Youth, Pankisi
East-West Management Institute USAID)	Kakheti Regional Development Foundation	Reducing radicalization and estrangement of youth in the Pankisi Gorge by engaging them in informal educational and recreational activities (Apr. – Sep. 2019).	Local youth from villages of Duisi and Sakobiano
PH International supported by the the Global Engagement	Georgian Center for Strategy and Development (Georgian partner) + Center	Countering Violent Extremism Organizations Recruitment in Georgia, Azerbaijan and	"vulnerable residents of Azerbaijan, Georgia and

Moreover, on the occasion of the 2017 OSCE-wide Counter-Terrorism Conference, youth representatives from OSCE's participating states were invited to share concrete experience and good practices in engaging and empowering youth to prevent and counter VERLT. In that context, the initiatives of the Duisi-based Center for Civic Activities and Pankisi Community Radio WAY (supported by the Open Society Foundation Georgia and the East West Management Institute) were presented.

[22] This wording belongs to the description of the project "Initiative for Empowering Local Communities in Georgia", within the broader programme "Countering Violent Extremism Organizations Recruitment in Georgia, Azerbaijan and Macedonia | 2018 – 2019", funded by the Global Engagement Center under the US State Department, coordinated by PH International and implemented by Georgian Center for Security and Development.

[23] Author's interview with representatives of NGO, Tbilisi, May 2019.

Center of the State Department of the USA	for Economic and Social Development in Azerbaijan and Moonshot CVE in Macedonia	Macedonia | 2018 – 2019 Initiative for Empowering Local Communities in Georgia (GCSD in partnership with Civic Education Teachers' Forum and the Georgian Charter of Journalistic Ethics produced two manuals).	Macedonia"; reference to youth. Target regions in Georgia: Adjara, Guria, Kvemo Kartli and Kakheti (Pankisi). "GCSD targeted various cohorts of the most vulnerable regional communities in Georgia, focusing on ethnic Kist minorities in Kakheti".
Hedayah Center (in the framework of STRIVE Global Program funded by the EU) in collaboration with Search for Common Ground	Georgian Center for Strategy and Development	GCSD conducted online trainings on prevention of violent extremism and radicalization and prepared a training curriculum.	Civil servants and CSOs.
Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs	Georgian Center for Strategy and Development	Enhancing the Capacity of Georgia in Preventing Violent Extremism and Radicalization	Representatives of the media sector, academia, civil society and civic education teachers.
Chevening Alumni Programme Fund (the UK).	Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies	"Media and Violent Extremism in Georgia" is a special training program.	Journalists and media professionals.
UK Good Governance Fund, British Embassy Tbilisi.	Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International Studies	Supporting Participatory and Inclusive Governance in Mountainous Guria and Adjara: the purpose of the project was to address the issue of non-inclusive local governance that contributed to the disenfranchisement of local communities which in turn left them more vulnerable to outside propaganda and influences.	youth in Guria and Adjara.
SALTO EuroMed, SALTO EECA, SALTO SEE and SALTO Inclusion and Diversity Resource Centres, National Agencies of Erasmus+: Youth in Action, European Solidarity Corps of France, Germany, Italy, and Belgium, European Union and the Council of Europe Youth Partnership		Training Course "Competencies of Youth Workers in Preventing Violent Radicalisation and Extremism" within the project "Youth Work against Violent Radicalisation and Extremism": research about youth worker competences needed for working with young people on issues related to violent radicalisation and extremism and development of a tool kit for practical youth work.	Youth

Still, donors are not only establishing connections with civil society organisations and the non-governmental sector, but also secure a direct line of communication with national institutions and political elites via their support to P/CVE actions in the country. In particular, in June 2019 the OSCE organized its first national seminar in Georgia on a 'whole-of-society' approach to preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalisation that lead to terrorism[24], involving government officials, policy makers and practitioners to support the drafting process of a

[24] https://www.osce.org/secretariat/423044.

national action plan on P/CVERLT. In addition to relevant security sector actors, the ombudsperson offices and representatives from the ministries of health, education and department were invited. Even before that pivotal event, in the framework of OSCE's counter-terrorism endeavors, it is worth mentioning that Georgia is represented in the OSCE Mobile Training Team, which was established by the Border Security and Management Unit of the OSCE Transnational Threats Department in 2016[25].

Furthermore, it is worth mentioning that the EU and its member states have supported the strengthening of the Public Defender's Office, with a special attention paid to its anti-discrimination interventions as well as its capacities in the regions of Kakheti and Samegrelo-Zemo Svaneti.

Lastly, interviewees have more than once referred to an initiative having taken place in November 2016, when representatives of the Georgian Orthodox Church visited Brussels as part of a project supported by the British Embassy's Good Governance Fund. The study visit - organized by the Center for Development and Democracy – included the NATO Headquarters, the European Parliament, and the European Economic and Social Committee. This appeared particularly relevant as an indication of a common assumption about GOC's implicit responsibility vis-à-vis far-right radicalisation and its potential role in de-radicalisation endeavors.

4. Kosovo: from building multicultural liberal peace to fighting radicalization and violent extremism

Over the last two decades, international actors have promoted in Kosovo a model of post-conflict peace underpinned by the primacy of respect and promotion of minorities' rights through territorial de-centralisation and multiculturalism as well as an emphasis on marketisation and privatisation for economic reconstruction (Selenica 2018).

Even though a jihadi threat in the Balkans related to the question of Islam and foreign fighters[26] was first articulated during the nineties in the context of the Bosnian war, following the influx of mujahideen fighters from Afghanistan in support of the Muslims fighting factions in Bosnia-Herzegovina, it was in the aftermath of the Syrian civil war that international priorities in Kosovo started to shift towards CVE and PVE. This came as a result of the growing number of Kosovo's foreign fighters participating in the Syrian war between 2013-17, making jihadism and Islamic radicalisation a key focus of international and local actors in Kosovo. Since 2013, Kosovo foreign fighters and Islamic religious extremism have dominated the debates and agendas concerning radicalisation and violent extremism in Kosovo, and as a result other forms of political and ethnic based extremism such as Serbian nationalist and political extremism in the North of Kosovo have been overlooked (Kursani 2018, p. 3). The foreign fighters phenomenon has been declining in the period between 2018-2020, and two new threats are attracting donors' funding and governmental actions on CVE and counter-radicalisation: first, the possibility of returnees and second, the radicalisation in prison of foreign fighters and imams serving charges of terrorism.

[25] The OSCE Mobile Training Team is composed of 17 selected border and counter-terrorism experts from OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation; it conducts training courses on identifying foreign terrorist fighters.

[26] Foreign fighters refer to those travelling to and participating in the Syrian and Iraqi conflicts. In the case of Kosovo foreign fighters, most of them have travelled to Syria and only a small part to Iraq.

Two key explanatory factors for paths of radicalization and the foreign fighter phenomenon have dominated the debate in Kosovo. First, the presence of religious foreign foundations from Saudi Arabia and Gulf states as well as Turkey that through a combination of donations, imams and private mediators have been instrumental in trajectories of radicalisation and recruitment of young Kosovars (Kursani 2018). In particular, many local analysts, experts and researchers, highlight the fact that these Gulf backed foundations have introduced in Kosovo a form of Salafi/Wahhabi puritan form of Islam that stands in contrast with the locally rooted Hanafi form widespread among the local population (Demjaha and Peci 2016; Kursani 2015; Shtuni 2016). However, as Kursani has found in a British Council-funded report, recruitment of violent extremists has occurred through physical and virtual links, and indeed "there is little (if any) evidence that the often-mentioned cases of Middle East funded religious based NGOs directly recruited people into violent extremist ideological groups, or exacerbated the phenomenon" (Kursani 2018, p. 4). While there is often disagreement on the definition of radicalisation and violent extremism and their underpinning causes, international and local media have often if not solely identified violent extremism with Islamic extremism and with religion more broadly.[27] The second explanatory cause that is often cited concerns the socio-economic conditions, in particular, high levels of poverty combined with youth unemployment and low levels of education (Gjinovci 2016; European Commission 2016). A recent study has downplayed the role of education and has identified in the poor socio-economic conditions an exacerbating rather than a driving factor (Kursani 2018, p. 22-3). However, unemployment and social immobility seem to play an important role as the unemployment rate of foreign fighters is double the rate of the rest of the Kosovo population (Ibid., 25).

4.1 Global templates and local reception of CVE and counter-radicalisation policies in Kosovo

The field of counterterrorism, counter-radicalization and CVE in Kosovo is tackled through a combination of law-enforcement coercive tools with softer, preventative measures that target increasing sections of the society considered at risk of radicalisation, which is in line with European trends of the last fifteen years (Heath-Kelly 2013; Ragazzi 2016). Youth, education, women, Muslim authorities and communities have been incorporated into strategies, policies, projects and narratives of counter-radicalisation and CVE in

International actors have supported three types of actors in the fight against terrorism, violent extremism and radicalisation: (1) support to local authorities through the funding and provision of expertise in state structures such as the police, the Anti-Terror Unit,[28] the Ministry of Justice and Rule of Law bodies, and the Ministry of Interior (US Embassy, European Union, OSCE); (2) support to civil society for the collection of data and the production of knowledge on push and pull factors of radicalisation and violent extremism as well as the organization of awareness campaigns and activism for the development of critical thinking (OSCE, Embassy of Netherlands and British Council); (3) support through and to grassroots initiatives and local communities targeting entire sections of the Kosovo society such as youth, women, local media, civil society organizations, local

[27] Author's interview with researcher 2, Kosovo Centre for Security Studies, Prishtina, 28 September 2018; See also Augestad Knudsen 2017.

[28] Author's interview with an investigative journalist, Prishtina, 24 September 2018.

communities, parents, teachers, imams, families of returnees and detainees (USAID, EU, OSCE, US Embassy, Embassy of Netherlands).[29]

During the drafting of the national plan for the prevention of extremism, tensions emerged between the US approach more centered on punishment and prosecution and the European one more focused on re-socialization.[30] The Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020 was adopted by the Kosovo government in 2015 and was mainly based on the EU approach to counter-terrorism.[31] The Strategy has been revised and it now focuses more on prevention and the development of critical thinking through awareness campaigns among youth and their families.

In terms of low-enforcement efforts, Kosovo local authorities have tightened the fight against foreign fighters and violent extremists over the last 7 years: first, by arresting 130 individuals with charges of terrorism (Perry 2016, p. 36); second, by amending the law in 2015 and removing the obligation for Kosovo judges to prove that someone has effectively participated in a terrorist group. In line with other European countries' legislation, it is now enough to have participated in a foreign conflict.[32] While these amendments have lowered the threshold for terrorist charges and led to convictions of weak evidence (Qafmolla 2016), they have often entailed a criminalisation of subjects whose de-radicalisation could go through programs of disengagement, social re-integration and rehabilitation.

Besides feelings of frustration and alienation, these repressive measures may be counter-productive versus other counter- and de-radicalisation projects as they may further exacerbate radicalisation dynamics in prisons, a key priority for an increasing array of actors and programmes in Kosovo (Silke 2014; Williams 2016). A study on the radicalisation in prison based on interviews with prisoners charged of terrorism reveal "a common sense of angst, alienation, and of injustice that many interviewed and observed former foreign fighters and religious authorities feel with the decision of state authorities to imprison them" (Kursani 2018, p. 16).

Recent internationally-funded projects have focused on the radicalization in prisons through the production of counter-narratives delivered mainly through local imams; the social reintegration of returnees based on the German and Danish models;[33] and the development of referral mechanisms (US, Italian and Dutch Embassies; USAID, British Council, UNDP, IOM, OSCE).[34] The whole-societal approach that characterizes international and local projects and programmes on CVE and counter-radicalisation in Kosovo can be seen in the creation of referral mechanisms in Kosovo municipalities. One of these being the development of a pilot referral mechanism initially

[29] Author's interview with an investigative journalist, Prishtina, 24 September 2018; Author's interview with researcher 1, Kosovo Centre for Security Studies, 26 September 2018; Author's interview with researcher 2, Kosovo Centre for Security Studies, 28 September 2018.

[30] Author's interview with an investigative journalist, Prishtina, 24 September 2018.

[31] Author's interview with an investigative journalist, Prishtina, 24 September 2018; Council of the European Union 2005.

[32] Law No. 05/L-002, 12 March 2015. See also Annex 3, Azinovic e Jusic 2015.

[33] Author's interview with researcher 3, Kosovo Centre for Security Studies, 26 September 2018.

[34] Author's interview with researcher 1, Kosovo Centre for Security Studies, 26 September 2018.

in Gjilan, based on the UK and Danish model, and which is expected to be applied to every Kosovo municipality.[35] The pilot referral mechanism has comprised municipality authorities, imams, police officers and has envisaged the active friend-to-friend and family involvements.[36] Based on this project, several families have denounced their children to the police.[37]

4.2 A whole-societal approach against extremism and radicalisation

The targeting of local actors, sectors and communities within counter-radicalisation and CVE programmes in Kosovo has mainly been assessed against their effectiveness for counter terrorism, CVE and counter-radicalisation purposes. There is no engagement on what societal effects this targeting has entailed. Similar to the UK's dynamics of counter-radicalisation as highlighted by Charlotte Heath-Kelly (2013), the Muslim community in Kosovo has been targeted by state authorities in two ways. First, as a community 'at risk' and 'risky' of radicalisation and violent extremism and thus subject of coercive measures that have led to the arrest of more than 40 imams for charges of terrorism, some of whom already released due to weak or lack of evidence while in pre-detention.[38] Second, as a frontline actor in the fight against radicalisation and extremism, through the inclusion in the government's strategy against violent extremism and radicalisation of the Kosovo Islamic Council (BIK) – the main religious authority of the Muslim community – in the organisation of awareness raising campaigns and counter-narratives in partnerships with the Kosovo police and the Ministry of Education.[39] These partnerships have been translated on the one hand into "weekly lectures in 800 mosques targeting young Muslims and describing the phenomenon of radicalization as foreign to Islam," and on the other, on teaching against violent extremism in prisons as part of a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Justice.[40] The involvement of BIC within counter-radicalisation and countering violent extremism measures has exposed the Muslim institution to violent threats.[41] Moreover, following the advent of foreign fighters phenomenon, a demonisation of Islam fuelled by the local media have led to rising Islamophobia and a collective discrimination of the Muslim community in Kosovo.[42] The equivalence between violent extremism and religious Islamic extremism among local and international media and implicit in governmental policies have negatively affected Muslims in Kosovo, leading to their stigmatisation.[43]

Similar to the Muslim community in Kosovo, education and youth have been ambiguously framed and targeted as being both vulnerable categories and sectors 'at risk' of radicalisation but also potentially at the forefront of

[35] Author's interview with a local official working with an international organization active in CVE, 26 September 2018.

[36] Author's interview with a local official working with an international organization active in CVE, 26 September 2018.

[37] Author's interview with a local official working with an international organization active in CVE, 26 September 2018.

[38] This was the case of the two imams from Mitrovica, that were arrested and later released for lack of evidence to keep them in pre-detention, Enis Rama dhe Ekrem Avdiu, on September 24, 2014 https://www.oranews.tv/kosove-lirohen-imamet-enis-rama-dhe-ekrem-avdiu, last accessed 4 May 2021.

[39] Author's interview with a prominent local imam, Kosovo Islamic Council, Prishtina, 26 September 2018.

[40] Ibid.

[41] Ibid.

[42] Ibid.

[43] Author's interview with researcher 1, Kosovo Centre for Security Studies, 26 September 2018.

counter-radicalisation and CVE measures. In the case of education, the risk that it may function as a driving factor for CVE in Kosovo is identified in the often-mentioned link between poor education and foreign fighters phenomenon despite studies showing no correlation between the two, with foreign fighters having on average slightly higher levels of education (Kursani 2018a). It is the potentiality of education to act as a counter-radicalisation and CVE force that is strongly reiterated and emphasised as expressed in the 40 percent of activities in the government's CVE strategy to be implemented by the Ministry of Education (Office of the Prime Minister 2015). On the one hand, a proliferation of training sessions for raising awareness has targeted all sectors of education. These have been implemented by governmental and non-governmental actors characterized by a lack of coordination and a confusing understanding of violent extremism and radicalisation. On the other hand, education, together with other social services, public administration and intelligence, has been identified in the plan as a crucial sector for early identification of radicalisation; an alternative to radicalism; an arena for critical engagement against violent extremism; a key sector for fostering tolerance and providing with global knowledge on religion (Office of the Prime Minister 2015, p. 19-23). More specifically, the CVE implementation plan includes a range of key educational activities for the prevention of violent extremism and radicalisation:

> Review of historical-educational curriculum, civic education and other respective subjects to emphasize the historical importance of religious tolerance in Kosovo, and to educate young people on what it means to be a good citizen; This activity should also include a review of textbooks and re-training of teachers, as needed; (*This activity will be implemented in coordination with Public Institutions, including Government, MEST, Municipalities, Municipal Education Departments, parents' community, Religious Communities, field experts, etc*). (Office of Prime Minister 2015, p. 22)

Youth has recently become the key target for most of the international initiatives on the topic.[44] Radicalisation in Kosovo is considered as mainly a youth phenomenon (Malm 2016). A UNDP report has confirmed that most of the foreign fighters that travelled to Iraq and Syria were between 21 and 30 (Xharra and Gojani 2017). USAID's current 'Up to Youth' programme in partnership with Global Communities (2019-2024), focuses on youth mobilization, building skills for the youth, enabling environment for youth, positive youth developmental approach.[45] Moreover, Kosovo is part of the Western Balkans Counter-terrorism Initiative (Wbcti) framework against intolerance, violent extremism and radicalisation (Council of the EU 2015; Selenica 2019; Kudlenko 2019). Within this framework, strengthening youth resilience is a crucial objective and key in the fight against violent extremism and radicalisation. Some of the projects have included 'Youth Against Hate: Empowering Youth to Combat Hate Speech in Local Communities,' 'Active Youth for Secure Community,' 'Civil Society Countering Violent Extremism-Strengthening Civil Society to Build Youth Resilience to Violent Extremism.' Resilience is a rarely defined but common concept in discourses, strategies and policies against radicalisation and violent extremism in European states and increasingly beyond. It comprises a range of discourses, practices and policies that aim to consolidate the inherent properties or 'adaptability' of individuals and societies with regard to challenges and traumas related to terrorist acts or threats of radicalisation (Heath-Kelly 2015, 71).

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[44] Author's interview with an investigative journalist, Prishtina, 24 September 2018; Author's interview with researcher 1, Kosovo Centre for Security Studies, 26 September 2018; Author's interview with researcher 2, Kosovo Centre for Security Studies, 28 September 2018.

[45] https://www.usaid.gov/kosovo/news-information/fact-sheets/youth-activity, last accessed 5 May 2021.

5. Conclusions

CVE and counter-radicalization policies were conceived and developed within the EU and EU member states as a response to the Madrid and London bombings. Almost two decades later, they have been criticised for creating 'suspect communities' and for stigmatizing entire Muslim minorities in EU states with their particular focus on Islamic extremism and their particular targeting of Muslim communities (Ragazzi 2016; Ragazzi, Davidshofer, Perret and Tawfik 2018; Fadil, De Konging and Ragazzi 2019; Kundnani and Hayes 2018; Kundnani 2009; Pantazis and Simon 2009, 2011). As the Kosovo and Georgia's cases show, they have now been exported beyond the EU frontier and localised in rather different contexts yet according to similar templates.

The unintended consequences of such policies in terms of social cohesion and discrimination have not been sufficiently researched, and their local reception and implementation little problematised. Put differently, while counter-radicalisation and CVE policies in Kosovo and Georgia have been often scrutinised in terms of their effectiveness for fighting radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism, their effects in terms of social inclusion and cohesion have been largely overlooked.

In the case of Kosovo, for over two decades, international actors have been monitoring the country for its capacity and efficiency to respect minorities, human rights and multiculturalism. As the attention of the international community has shifted from protecting liberal multiculturalism to countering violent extremism and radicalisation, the Kosovo state is expected to enforce a form of 'policed multiculturalism', which relies on the active engagement of entire sections of the Kosovo society to monitor itself against the threats and risks originating from its own body, an expectation in line with current policies in EU states as identified among others by Ragazzi (2016). Ragazzi's concept of 'policed multiculturalism' helps to capture a specific form of 'government through communities' for countering radicalisation and extremism in Kosovo and account for the shift from a form of liberal multiculturalism that governs communities through separation to a form of multiculturalism that actively encourages and engages communities to govern risks and threats originating from within through co-optation and referral mechanisms (Ragazzi 2016). The simultaneous 'policing through arrest' and co-opting of religious imams as part of counter-radicalisation projects undermines their legitimacy versus their own constituencies and risks creating resentments and alienation among the broader Muslim community and thus Kosovo society. Building on Ragazzi's work, we argue that such an approach has a differentiated effect on Muslim communities, by simultaneously empowering specific imams and disempowering others (Ragazzi 2016). Youth and education are also framed according to a securitised logic. Youth are framed as at risk of radicalization and thus potentially risky as well as tools for preventing radicalization and violent extremism. Their agency is being undermined and denied in this representation that constructs them negatively as 'at risk' and risky or instrumentally as means to an end. Similarly, the instrumentalisation of education to serve counter-radicalisation goals may hamper trust and generate resentment and exclusion thus further fuel radicalisation and obstruct and clash with its broader transformative function.

In the case of Georgia, similarly to Kosovo as well as other contexts[46], the prioritization of counter-radicalisation and CVE agendas appears to trigger a cycle of threat inflation and, at the same time, catalyze internal conflicts, tensions and cleavages. Counter-radicalisation and CVE initiatives appear to be established in the absence of consensus over the nature and the gravity of the problem, without fully taking into account communities' needs and sensitivities and often premising on the assumption that radicalisation and violent extremism are unquestionably present there and represent serious security risks - in other words, the existence and the scope of the problem are not questioned. Secondly, counter-radicalisation and CVE initiatives and projects may be driven by donors' and international actors' rationales, while local beneficiaries, intermediaries and implementators are focused on intercepting funding opportunities, with the ultimate result of seeing non-governmental sector diverted away from long-term human and societal security, community development, governance, justice etc. Third, a mismatch can be arguably witnessed between local grievances and threat perceptions on the one hand and how drivers of discontent are framed from the outside on the other. In Georgia, local communities expect international organisations to design their interventions in the fields of healthcare, infrastructure development, poverty eradication, unemployment, youth empowerment, education, support to micro, small, and medium sized enterprises[47] - while many of the projects and initiatives in those areas have been swept away by the pervasive counter-radicalisation and CVE agendas.

By contrasting and comparing the two cases we could trace a process of saturation and professionalisation of the fields of counter-radicalisation and CVE - a process that is sustained by the resources injected by international donors and organisations and that effectively embodies global-local encounters in the definition of security norms, policies and practices; this intuition leaves us with a footprint to follow for future research on the topic: who represents 'the local' and who represents 'the global' in this dialectics? What role is carved out for international consultants and private for profit actors involved in the organisation of talking shops, trainings, and technical assistance? And, lastly, how all the above impacts on the legitimacy (and re-/de-legitimation) of local actors embracing such international templates?

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[46] Tricot O'Farrell and Street 2019 and Pierobon 2020 both on Kyrgyzstan.

[47] See the periodic surveys "Public attitudes in Georgia" carried out for NDI by CRRC Georgia (https://caucasusbarometer.org/en/datasets/).

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