Learning from Experience: Comparing Disaster Management in the Philippines and Europe

Review of EC-Funded Research for Fighting Terrorist Narratives

Niger Military Coup

Book Review - How Migration Really Works

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Contents

Foreword

Dear Reader,

We are happy to be with you in the third issue of 2023. Although we had to make difficult choices in selecting the articles to be included in the magazine, three interesting articles are waiting for you.

The first article explores the parallels between disaster management in the Philippines and Europe, highlighting the reevaluation prompted by significant events like typhoon Haiyan in 2013 and the 2021 floods in Europe. It underscores the need for Europe to learn from the experiences of disaster-prone regions and adapt its approach to better address the increasing risks posed by climate change. The focus should shift from solely prevention to resilience measures. The paper suggests standardizing procedures and involving stakeholders at various levels to improve disaster response but notes the challenge of national governments being hesitant to cede control over civil protection to the EU.

The second article summarizes EC-funded research focused on studying and combating terrorist narratives, drawing from projects funded by the EU's framework programs for research and innovation (FP1 to Horizon 2020), the European Research Council (ERC), and the Internal Security Fund Police (ISFP). It examines various terrorist narratives, including Jihadist, right-wing, left-wing, ethnonationalist, separatist, and single-issue terrorism narratives, and highlights the analytical techniques used, such as semantic analysis of online narratives. The aim is to provide insights and practical recommendations to security and intelligence practitioners across Europe to enhance their effectiveness in countering terrorism.

The last article discusses the recent military coup in Niger and its implications for the Sahel region. It highlights the socio-political context of the region, including the impact of conflicts in neighboring countries, such as Mali and Burkina Faso, and the presence of international actors like Russia. The coup led to international condemnation and sanctions from ECOWAS, with discussions of potential military intervention to reinstate the ousted president. However, military action is opposed by several nations and regional organizations, fearing it could escalate into a broader conflict. The article also raises concerns about the effectiveness of military intervention in promoting democracy and the potential for increased insurgent activity. Diplomatic efforts are emphasized as the preferred approach to resolving the crisis, with recent talks indicating a possible transition back to civilian rule in Niger.

Finally, the book review of this issue looks into a recent timely book by Hein de Haas on migration, namely 'How migration really works: A factful guide to the most divisive issue in politics.' The book delves deeply into the complexities of migration, aiming to dispel common myths and misconceptions that dominate public and political discourse.

Sincerely yours,

Beyond the Horizon ISSG

Learning from Experience: Comparing Disaster Management in the Philippines and Europe

by Jannis Figura[*]

Abstract

The 2021 floods in Western Europe laid bare how European disaster management focused too much on prevention rather than resilience measures. Governmental response plans have sent a false feeling of symbolic preparedness as many European societies expect a perfectly functioning emergency system. Research indicates that the number and severity of natural hazards, such as floods, will increase due to climate change. This puts forth a need to change public risk acceptance and improvement in response measures. Disaster-prone countries like the Philippines made that experience before. As these countries cannot defend themselves against natural hazards, they focus more on reducing the impact of their consequences. This paper compares European and Philippine disaster management. It suggests that EU disaster management should standardise working procedures to simplify cross-border communication and increase flexibility by incorporating regional, national, and international level stakeholders to bridge the need-capability gap. The main obstacle is that national governments are unwilling to surrender their sovereignty over civil protection to the EU. Thus, organisational growth on the EU level in this area is slow.

1. Introduction

Over the past years, discussions on the devastating consequences of climate change gained increasing attention in Europe. Especially after the floods of 2021, the disaster management of European countries was critically assessed. This study posits for Europe what the floods in 2021 represents is identical to what typhoon Haiyan did to the Philippines in 2013 – namely tragic events with so significant consequences that they triggered strategic level re-evaluations of disaster management. This paper examines what the Philippines learned about disaster management after Haiyan, how the European approach to floods in 2021 was evaluated, and what lessons Europe can draw from disaster-prone regions like the Philippines.
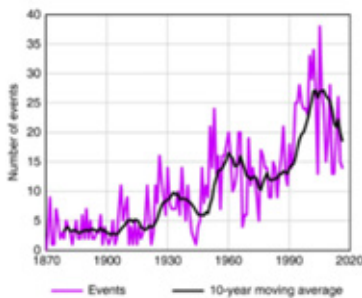
Figure 1 Annual number of floods in Europe. Retrieved from Paprotny et al. (2018).
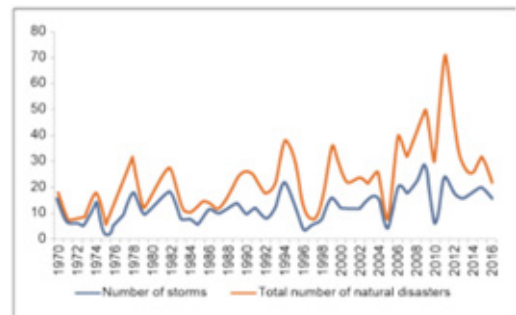
Figure 2 Annual number of natural disasters in the Philippines. Retrieved from Jha et al. (2018).

The UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) calculated that the world's temperature will surpass the 1.5ºC threshold by 2040. It further forecasted the severe impact of 2°C and 3°C global warming levels, together with identifying four key risks for Europe. Firstly, mortality will increase due to heat. Secondly, droughts will cause substantive agricultural losses. Thirdly, there will be water scarcity, and lastly, floods and sea levels will rise (IPCC, 2022). The paper at hand argues european approaches to disaster management, from regional to international levels, should be revisited and existing experience from disaster-prone places like the Philippines should be leveraged to minimise the impact of such dire scenarios on the continent.

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2. Analysis

a. The European Floods of 2021

The European Floods of 2021 affected several river basins and killed more than 200 people across the European region (UNRIC, 2022). Specifically in Western Europe, many people – from laypersons to scientists – were in disbelief at how such a magnitude of destruction could occur in one of the world's wealthiest and most techno-logically advanced regions equipped with state-of-the-art early warning systems (Cornwall, 2021). Even in the Netherlands, some flood prevention mechanisms were topped locally, despite the country's centuries of flood experience and lower precipitation than in neighbouring Belgium and Germany on the day of the floods (see Figure 3). The floods of 2021 showed that the Netherlands was traditionally prepared for flooding mainly from the seaside and large rivers. However, flash floods caused by high precipitation were not high on the agenda, and cross-border communication proved complicated too. For example, Belgium did not report to Dutch authorities about how much water would cross the border (Deltares, 2022).
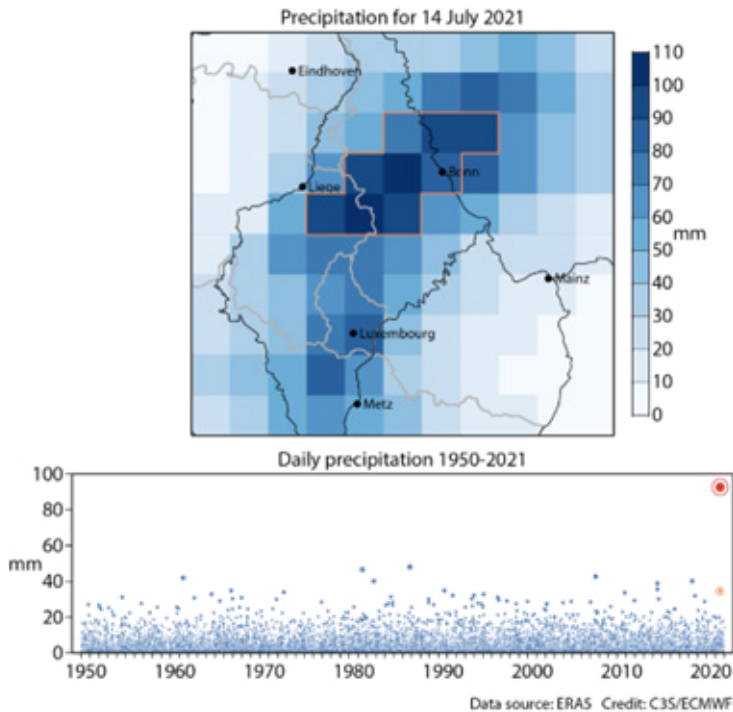
Figure 3 Location and amount of precipitation on the 13th of July 2021 (orange dot)
and 14th of July 2021 (red dot). Retrieved from Copernicus (2021).

Compared to the Netherlands, the situation was more troublesome in Belgium and Germany, which have fewer precautionary measures against floods. Furthermore, in Belgium and Germany, many of the rivers went through the Eifel-Ardennes mountains, leaving no room for rising water levels as the flat areas of the Netherlands. Even worse, they served as accelerators for streams and cause flash floods (Lehmkuhl et al., 2022). So far, the EU Floods Directive of 2007 regulates flood management in the EU, however, it focuses more on prevention rather than response. The directive leaves flood management to remain a state responsibility while it is supervised by the EU (European Parliament, 2007, p. 2).

Deltares, one of the leading Dutch research institutes on water management, concluded in its assessment of the 2021 floods that it is impossible to prevent flooding caused by large-scale, extreme precipitation in the future. Thus, governments need to improve their disaster management in case something goes wrong to limit potential casualties (Deltares, 2022). As Mathiesen et al. (2021) stated: "Europe must adapt to a new climate reality" (p.1). This matches with scientific research advocating to stop overemphasising risk avoidance. Instead, disaster oc-currence must be accepted as reality to consequently improve resilience, which allows for mitigating casualties (Comfort et al., 2010).

Assessments of the 2021 floods point towards enhancing disaster management on the EU level. The occurrence of high-impact weather extremes must be expected to rise in Europe in the future – and international cooperation needs improvement to avoid chaos when floods occur across borders, as it happened in 2021 (Deltares, 2022; Lehmkuhl et al., 2022). Furthermore, the floods showed that existing risk assessments focused too much on large rivers such as the Maas or Rhine. Several assessments discovered that smaller rivers, like Roer, Geul and Gulp,

causing floods in Limburg in the Netherlands, were neglected in crisis planning (Veiligheidsregio Zuid-Limburg, 2022). The report and then-fire chief of the region Leon Houben stated that the organisation on the ground did not match the anticipated coordination on paper, as reality is often more chaotic. It was also reported that volunteers were crucial in providing support and joining authorities in the disaster response (Erlanger, 2021).

Overall, evaluations of disaster management during the 2021 floods emphasise two principal problems already well-known within academic circles. As McConnel & Drennan (2006) state, contingency planning requires ordering threats to allocate resources for preparations, but this often simplifies risks as they are unpredictable and inherently surrounded by uncertainty. The scale of the 2021 floods was unexpected, as the precipitation levels were never seen before in the region. The disaster planning focused on large rivers rather than creeks, which caused much flooding. Furthermore, planning for crises requires synergy across institutional networks. However, in reality, involved institutions have their own agenda and different operation methods that clash with reality. National emergency plans signal a false feeling of symbolic preparedness that does not necessarily reflect operational realities. Planning must allow enough flexibility to adjust to unexpected events and leave room for improvisation (McConnel & Drennan, 2006). In fact, many involved organisations did not have clear communication channels and did not know what was expected from each other. This was true on regional and national levels but also across national borders. Therefore, many evaluations demand improvements in these areas (Deltares, 2022; Lehmkuhl et al., 2022; Veiligheidsregio Zuid-Limburg, 2022). The above-mentioned criticism does not mean that it was the case everywhere in 2021, but rather a general observation of mismanagement that was avoidable and could have reduced casualties.

Key takeaways from 2021 flood management:

☐ Flood management is a state responsibility under EU supervision

☐ The development of events in 2021 was not anticipated in preparation planning

☐ Small rivers rather than large rivers caused much of the devastating impacts

☐ Organisational management did not work as expectations did not meet reality

☐ National & international communication was problematic

☐ Improvements in emergency planning are needed in case flood prevention measures fail

b. The current European disaster management framework

Next to the EU Floods Directive, flood management in Europe is also the subject of the EU Civil Protection Mechanism (UCPM). It was established in 2001 to improve European cooperation in disaster management. "Historically, European cooperation in the field of civil protection has been slow because of national sovereignty concerns" (Blavoukos & Politis-Lamprou, 2021, p.2). The UCPM's Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) organises the support mission by providing civil protection teams, specialised equipment, and expertise (European Commission, 2022a). Countries can request assistance from the UCPM if national response capabilities are overwhelmed and emergency support is needed (European Commission, 2022b). In the UCPM framework, member states are also tasked to provide the European Commission with summaries of their National Risk Assessments (NRAs). However, the Commission reported that many governments only provided limited information or assessments were not finalised. The data shows that risk management structures and methods vary greatly across Europe. So, the UCPM is not standardised as it seems to be at a first glance. Furthermore, the NRAs tend to exclude regional initiatives on risk management planning. Thus, they often focus only on the national level, lacking detailed regional planning. Therefore, the NRAs cannot reveal all potential administrative or operational problems that only become apparent once disasters occur and it is too late (European Commission, 2017). Another shortcoming of the UCPM was the absence of reserve resources. For instance, the UCPM could not provide sufficient support during the 2017 forest fires in Europe, where multiple member states were affected by the same problem simultaneously. So, they were unable to send each other help as they needed their resources themselves (Parker et al., 2018).

As a response, the rescEU platform was established in 2019 under the UCPM to create an extra layer of reserve capacities and improve civil protection measures on the EU level. Member states can provide valuable resources to rescEU, such as firefighting planes, helicopters, medical evacuation planes, medical items and field hospitals (European Commission, 2022c). However, it is questionable whether the amount is sufficient to deal with the rising occurrence of natural disasters in Europe.

Scholars such as Blavoukos and Politis-Lamprou (2021) argue that rescEU should have been granted a stronger mandate to simplify the acquisition of new resources. The problem with the European disaster management

framework is that national governments are redundant to partially surrender their sovereignty over civil protection to the EU yet. Consequently, structures such as rescEU only grow slowly, which might prove troublesome if the frequency and magnitude of natural disasters in Europe exceed this development. The platform must wait for member states to provide new resources, such as planes or trucks, as it is prohibited to acquire these assets on its own. Among others, Finland, Germany, the Netherlands, and Sweden stated that civil protection remains individual state competence and EU institutions should follow the principle of subsidiarity in this regard (Blavoukos & Politis-Lamprou, 2021). Considering that limitations of the rescEU's resources were already shown during the wildfires in 2022, it should be seriously re-evaluated whether to transform rescEU into a lead institution with increased management capacities and resources (Tidey, 2022). This might be a necessary step to deal with the increasing amounts of natural disasters in Europe in the future.

Another promising option is the implementation of no-regret options on regional and local levels. In relation to disaster management, no-regret options are actions and investments in disaster resilience, which are justifiable no matter if the anticipated event occurs or not. So, they provide a net benefit to society either way (Siegel & Jorgensen, 2011). However, so-called no-regret actions can actually also have negative consequences as they can increase vulnerability in unanticipated ways. Dilling et al. (2015) analysed over 150 climate change-related no-regret adaptions and discovered that many of them have secondary effects and create new forms of vulnerabilities. Thus, they call for more critical assessments of no-regret strategies to minimise unanticipated events. There needs to be more research on what these measures should specifically look like and their projected effectiveness for EU disaster management. Potentially they can have a hugely positive effect on EU disaster resilience.

c. Philippines disaster management

Unlike Europe, the Philippines is already a historically disaster-prone country in general. The Philippines is located between major tectonic plates, the Pacific Ring of Fire, and a typhoon belt. Consequently, the country regularly experiences natural hazards, such as floods, typhoons, or earthquakes (Bollettino et al., 2018). According to the World Risk Index 2022, the Philippines has the highest disaster risk worldwide (Bündnis Entwicklung Hilft, 2022). Therefore, the Philippines often serves as an example of disaster management, and perhaps even European countries can learn from it. However, it is noteworthy that its management is far from perfect, and implications for Europe should be analysed carefully. Nonetheless, the country's frequent exposure to hazards makes it an informative research case, and it is possible to learn both from its successes and failures.

One of the most catastrophic events that Philippine disaster management had to deal with was typhoon Haiyan. The typhoon made landfall in the Philippines on the 8th of November 2013 as one of the strongest typhoons ever recorded. The storm surges accounted for at least 6300 deaths and had a long-lasting impact on the country's development as millions of people were displaced and infrastructure was destroyed (Lagamy et al., 2014). Haiyan triggered a Level 3 emergency, which is the highest level of response to natural disasters by the UN and authorises the use of significant additional UN resources to support national crisis management efforts (Dy & Stephens, 2016).

The typhoon was the first test for the then-young National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Council (NDRRMC), which organises Philippine disaster management. It was established by the Republic Act No. 10121 of 2010 (Congress of the Philippines, 2010). This act was supposed to strengthen institutional crisis response capabilities as the country lacked a comprising disaster management framework previously. Regional NGOs were traditionally the most important groups for humanitarian aid during crises due to their close connection with local communities. However, when Haiyan made landfall, many regional authorities and NGOs were not used to working with the NDRRMC. This dramatically changed the gover-
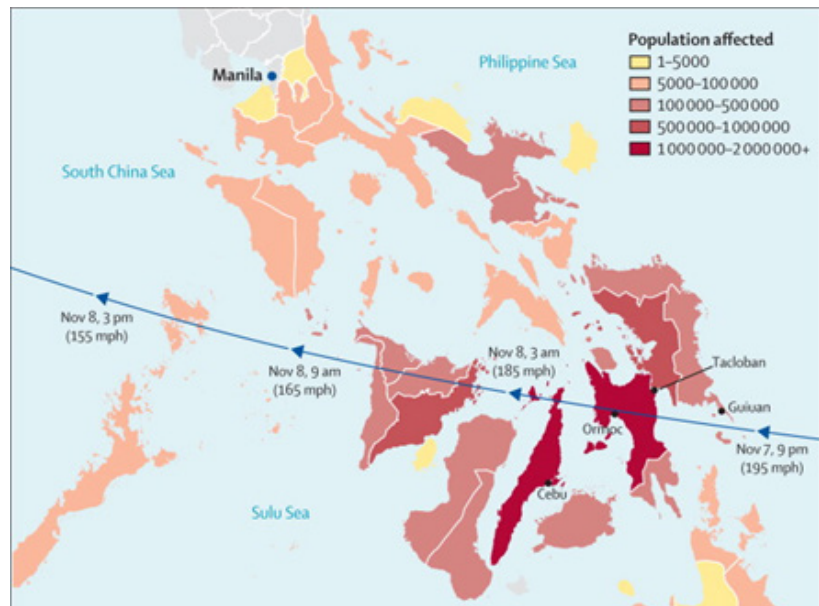

Figure 4 Path of typhoon Haiyan and the population affected. Retrieved from Chiu (2013).

nance structure and blurred accountability as it was unclear for many officials whether the government presides or regional authorities are in charge. The NDRRMC approach was still a new concept by then and officials had to get accustomed to it (Featherstone & Antequisa, 2014).

During Haiyan, it took time until the government managed to assume control and provide aid. The typhoon overwhelmed the crisis management as its magnitude was unseen before, and many poor areas of the country are hardly defendable against typhoons (Urban Land Institute, 2014). The provincial authorities provided the initial disaster support, but their resources were depleted soon, as they were also severely hit by the storm (WHO, 2015). It is worth mentioning that the Philippines is generally known for the government's limited reach to certain provinces (Breen, 2019). This is partially due to the challenging geographical structure of the 7.000 islands archipelago, which also causes trouble during disaster responses in hard-to-reach areas (Fair Tech Institute, 2022).

Throughout its history, the limited provision of services by the Philippine government resulted in the emergence of a large number of NGOs and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), which offer alternative services next to the government. Therefore, the Philippines were also described as the "NGO Capital of the World" (Jimenez-David, 2012, para. 1). These organisations provide essential aspects of public functioning and people centre-development. They drive investments in infrastructure, public utilities, and industrial development in the country. Some of the largest are key providers of disaster risk reduction services, such as the Disaster Risk Reduction Network Philippines. Government initiatives in the risk reduction field are often based on these networks' experience (UNDRR, 2019).

Assessments of the Philippine crisis management during Haiyan emphasised two main areas of improvement. Firstly, the national government was sceptical of international support, for instance, through international NGOs, and tried to pursue its own agenda through the NDRRMC instead. This lack of cooperation resulted in inefficient crisis management as meaningful resources from the international community were not distributed quickly (Dy & Stephens, 2016). Secondly, the traditionally important regional organisations and representatives, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, were often overlooked when the national government or international NGOs were present. Consequently, their valuable knowledge of local circumstances was not used. Locals' initiative was only requested in hard-to-reach areas, where quick governmental support seemed unlikely. The government asked the population to practice Bayanihan. It refers to the long history of Philippine communities helping each other, especially during natural disasters (Su & Mangada, 2016).

After Haiyan, the Philippines reformed the disaster management system through the Department of Disaster Resilience Act of 2018. It serves as the foundation of a Department of Disaster Resilience (DDR), which is supposed to have a stronger mandate than the NDRRMC, which has a supporting role. The government seeks to enhance its management capabilities, while at the same time improving cooperation with NGOs/CSOs in the disaster risk reduction process (UNDRR, 2019). Haiyan showed that relying too heavily on governmental structures results in inflexible crisis management, as it is more difficult to react to unanticipated events. The DDR is not established yet, but it will improve disaster management by creating permanent coordination centres on local, regional, and national levels. These centres will serve as contact points for international NGOs and local/regional NGOs and CSOs. It enables mixing the former's resources with the latter's knowledge (CFE-DMHA, 2021). Most reviews on the response to typhoon Haiyan acknowledge that the missing conjuncture between international and local organisations was the main weakness during the typhoon crisis management (Blanco, 2015). Furthermore, the coordination hubs simplify the process of incorporating emergent networks, which refer to those people who volunteer and create ad hoc groups to help during crises. These people can provide valuable manpower and resources (Sauer et al., 2014).

Key takeaways from Philippine crisis management:

☐   Philippine communities are accustomed to risks and have valuable local knowledge

☐   Strong emphasis on disaster resilience and adaption, rather than avoidance

☐   National and international actors have the resources that regional NGOs/CSOs need. Thus, they must be able to connect in coordination centres

☐   There needs to be a balance between institutionalised disaster management and flexibility to react to local circumstances

☐   International support has a long history in Philippine disaster response and its new disaster management simplifies the coordination process with regional/international actors

3. Conclusion and Policy Recommendations

The number of natural disasters in Europe is likely to increase due to climate change in the future. There are indicators that the occurrence and severity of natural hazards will exceed the development of sufficient resilience measures. Thus, this paper advises improving disaster management on the EU level with increased management capabilities and resources. It means that EU member states must partially surrender their sovereignty over civil protection mechanisms to the EU. However, the positive effects are (1) a fairer approach to disaster management, as some European countries are more prone to hazards than others due to their natural vulnerability and (2) a quicker response mechanism once disasters occur due to standardised working procedures.

Furthermore, European crisis management must move away from risk avoidance through prevention to risk acceptance and better emergency planning. In comparison, the Philippines has proven more successful after Haiyan in connecting with international and national NGOs/CSOs as well as accessing additional resources. Its disaster management approach has shown the importance of finding a balance between institutionalised disaster management and flexibility to react to local circumstances. The EU should consider following this example. NGOs and CSOs are usually left out of European disaster response plans as they mostly focus on governmental structures and institutions. However, the 2021 floods showed that these can fail too. NGOs and CSOs can fill these gaps that government response plans did not anticipate by providing extra resources, expertise, and manpower. Thus, this paper calls for a more inclusive and flexible approach to the management of natural hazards in Europe. A potential solution is the no-regret approach, but more research is needed to assess the actual benefits and connected costs. Lastly, national governments should improve their National Risk Assessments (NRAs) and include more regional response plans as the majority of them tend to overemphasise the national level and generalise approaches.

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Review of EC-Funded Research for Fighting Terrorist Narratives

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Abstract

This paper reports on the EC-funded research to study and fight terrorist narratives, considering the outputs of the EC-funded research projects - and the analysis techniques implemented in those projects – retrieved from the Community Research and Development Information Service (CORDIS) portal. Projects dedicated specifically to terrorist narratives and counternarratives were investigated in detail, among those funded by the EU's framework programmes for research and innovation (FP1 to Horizon 2020) as well as the European Research Council (ERC) and Internal Security Fund Police (ISFP) frameworks.

A summary of the main results is provided in the paper by means of an overview of the main terrorist narratives, considering information and data emerged from the review of selected research projects, enriched with general literature review. Five terrorist narratives are addressed: a)Jihadist violent extremist narratives, b) Right-wing violent extremist narratives, c) Left-wing and anarchist violent extremist narratives, d) Ethnonationalist and Separatist violent extremist narratives; e) Single issue-terrorism violent extremist narratives (e.g. animal rights, environmental terrorism, etc.).

Details are also provided for the most widely used analytical technique, e.g. semantic analysis of terrorist narratives disseminated online. The review attempts to build an informational bridge providing the research know-how to the pan-European network of Security and Intelligence practitioners, so that the collected information can be translated into practical recommendations, technologies and tools enabling practitioners to perform their duty against terrorism in an enhanced, optimized and more efficient manner.

1.1 Introduction

Terrorism is a complex phenomenon that dates back in the French Revolution (1789-1799) and has been characterising the European and international scene since then. Especially after 9/11, the international attention on terrorism has sharply increased as a consequence of a growing perception of security spread across the countries. Nations have developed their own counter-terrorism strategies, while international and regional organisations have worked to raise awareness, tackle the phenomenon, mitigate the effects and prevent its emergence. This paper aims at analysing the work carried out in EC-funded projects devoted to studying the terrorist phenomenon. This activity permits to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the current status of the research on this topic, while allowing to avoid duplication of effort in terrorist research;

The paper then delineates an original approach to study and fight the phenomenon. It should be mentioned that the suggested approach will take into consideration some of the activities already implemented in other projects (e.g. semantic analysis) while attempting to fill the gaps that emerged from previous research and adapting the approach to the new developments.

1.2 Definitions

Terrorism. This paper adopts the definition provided by the United Nations General Assembly in the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy (Resolution A/RES/60/288 adopted on 8th September 2006) [1]. The resolution states that *"acts, methods and practices of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations are activities aimed at the destruction of human rights, fundamental freedoms and democracy, threatening territorial integrity, security of States and destabilizing legitimately constituted Governments"*. In addition, it is mentioned that *"terrorism cannot and should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group"*, thus refraining from associating these characteristics as the main qualities of terrorism".

Violent extremism. The expression violent extremism has quite a vague definition, and it is often used interchangeably with terms like terrorism or fundamentalism. A research paper by Alex P. Schmid highlights multiple and sometimes contradictory definitions of violent extremism, choosing to assign this expression the meaning

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of *"an ideology that accepts the use of violence for the pursuit of goals that are generally social, racial, religious and/or political in nature"* [2]. The difference between terrorism and violent extremism is not often so noticeable: terrorism can, indeed, be considered as a form of violent extremism. For the sake of clarity, this paper recalls the definition adopted by the Radicalisation Awareness Network [3], which define violent extremism as *"as acts of violence committed for ideological reasons. The nature and scale of the violence is what distinguishes extremism from terrorism."*

Ideology. The word ideology is neutral and recalling the definition of the Collins Dictionary, it is *"1. a body of ideas that reflects the beliefs and interests of a nation, political system, etc. and underlies political action; 2. (philosophy, sociology) the set of beliefs by which a group or society orders reality so as to render it intelligible"* [4]. Ideology can, then, be applied and used in several fields, as it indicates *"a common and broadly agreed upon set of rules to which an individual subscribes, which help to regulate and determine behaviour"* [5]. The analysis presented in this paper adheres to the broad academic consensus, which recognises that terrorism is fed by extremist ideologies and that, in general, any action against terrorism requires to address the root causes of extremism ideologies themselves [6] [5].

Narratives and Counter-narratives. Generally speaking, narratives go beyond an idea, a figurative concept, a story: they are *"discursive systems of meaning-making that are linked to the material world surrounding us"* [7]. People resort to narratives to better understand reality: narratives, indeed, help reducing the complexity of the phenomena, while images and storytelling allow gaining a more accurate understanding of the circumstances. Narratives are the plot, thus being also defined as a *"record or interpretation of experience"* [8]. Considering terrorism, narratives are useful strategic communication means that allow terrorists to spread their message and reach a broader range of audiences. On the one hand, narratives, indeed, can bring the message to those that are still unaware of it, thus resulting in the recruitment of new believers or joiners of the cause. On the other, they can deepen the devotion to the ideological position and create a sense of community, thus functioning as a glue that strengthens the belonging to a group. Terrorist narratives, hence, *"…reflect a system of stories that purport to provide a coherent worldview supporting individuals or groups in their illicit violence and incitement to violence"* [9].

Counter-narratives are, quite intuitively, a means to undermine the efficacy of narratives in reaching their ultimate goal. Usually, the effect/utility of a counter-narrative is to empower and give agency to marginalised voices, allowing them to use their own storytelling to present an alternative point of view [10]. With regards to terrorism, counter-narratives are one of the primary means to prevent and tackle the emergence of terrorism and violent extremism, as well as the radicalisation process. They are employed by governments, think tanks and civil society organisations and, according to the UN CTED, share the following key features:

☐ They challenge terrorist messages, chiefly offering an alternative positive alternative;

☐ They are meant to jeopardise the ability of the violent extremist (terrorist) message to efficaciously target the audience, by resorting to ideology, ideas, facts, or even humour;

☐ They are direct communication strategies, fitting within a political, policy and military context [9].

Counter-narratives are *"intentional and direct efforts to deconstruct, discredit and demystify violent extremist messaging, whether through ideology, logic, fact or humour"* [11].

1.3 Sources and Method

The last three security strategies outlined by the European Commission always refer to the threat of terrorism. In 2010, the *EU Internal Security Strategy in Action: Five steps towards a more secure Europe states "Prevent terrorism and address radicalisation and recruitment"* as the second objective [12]. The 2016 strategy from Federica Mogherini – the EU Global Strategy – describes terrorism as a *"plague [for] North Africa and the Middle East, as well as Europe itself"* [13]. The last EU strategy announced by President Ursula von Der Leyen reiterates the urgency to tackle terrorism, a cross-border threat still far from being eradicated [14].

Since 1984, the European Commission has been funding the so-called Framework Programmes (FP) for research and technology development, projects that aim at fostering scientific and technological research in order to enhance the European technological and innovation levels. Currently, the FPs are at their ninth edition (Horizon Europe is FP9 – the name has been changed to Framework Programme for research *and innovation*).

With regards to research on terrorism, it is possible to delineate the funds that the European Commission has devoted to this topic. By searching in the CORDIS (COmmunity Research and Development Information Service) all projects related to "terrorism" across the nine FPs and related research frameworks, the results indicate 55 projects. Seven projects were funded under the FP6, fourteen under the FP7 and thirty-four under H2020 (FP8) [15]. It should be noted that these numbers include projects on terrorism implemented both under the "Security" domain of application (existing since FP7) and other domains (e.g. Mobility, People, Transfer, etc.).

Seven projects were funded under the FP6, fourteen under the FP7 and thirty-four under H2020 (FP8) [15].

It is quite relevant to notice the increase in the budget dedicated to this topic. FP6 counts a total of around €8.4 million for seven projects (the overall budget of the programme was €17.5 billion for the period 2002-2005); FP7 projects on terrorism are worth around €27 million (the overall budget for FP7 was over €50 billion in 2007-2013

timeframe), while the projects financed during H2020 reached a total amount of around €70.4 million (overall budget for H2020 was €77 billion for the period 2014-2020). Horizon Europe (FP9) has a total budget of €95.5 billion with the cluster "Civil Security for Society" dedicated to security topics, thus including calls on terrorism. For the first two years (2021-2022), the work programme has allocated around €87 million to the destination "Fighting Crime and Terrorism". However, it should be considered that also other calls (and thus budget) under different destinations and clusters could address terrorism or terrorism-related topics.

These figures prove that the attention toward security topics has sharply increased in the last two decades mostly due to the challenging and volatile international environment, especially after 9/11 events. As mentioned, terrorism has assumed multiple forms, and it is clear, at the European level, the need to keep studying terrorism and new methods to tackle and prevent it, to make sure that they effectively manage to meet the challenge. In addition, it is worth noting that the European Union encourages synergies among the different research frameworks to enhance the information knowledge and cross-fertilisation, which are valuable resources to understand the complexity of a phenomenon that has diverse facets as well as implication at multiple levels (e.g. societal, economic, political, military, etc.).

Here we present relevant findings deriving from the analysis of past and current EU projects addressing the topic of terrorist narratives and counternarratives.

To frame the analysis, preliminary research has been conducted through the CORDIS portal. The Community Research and Development Information Service (CORDIS) is the European Commission's primary source of results from the projects funded by the EU's framework programmes for research and innovation (FP1 to Horizon 2020) [16]. Projects funded under two other relevant frameworks have also been investigated, the European Research Council (ERC) and Internal Security Fund Police (ISFP).

"Terrorism" has been selected as the "Field of science" in order to conduct the first selection: fifty-three results were found. At this stage, each project has been looked into in terms of specific topics, and only those related to narratives and counternarratives have been taken into further consideration, thus resulting in a total number of twelve projects.

1.4 Results

Table 1 below reports core information for each project. Focus has been directed towards the key outputs of the project and the use/development of technologies (if applicable).

Many projects refer to the analysis of terrorist narratives and on the production of counter-narrative campaigns. Also, some of them mention the analysis of online narratives (e.g. narratives spread on social media and other online channels of communication). These are highlighted in bold in the table.

In the following paragraphs and sections we provide an overview of the main terrorist narratives, and on the main technological innovations used to characterize them.

Table 1 - EU-funded projects on terrorist narratives and counternarratives

PROJECT ACRONYM	BRIEF DESCRIPTION	FRAME-WORK	KEY OUTPUTS	TECH-USED
ESCN[17]	Creation of innovative communication responses to terrorism and violent extremism	ISFP (2016-2017)	**strategic communication** best practices to counter VE/Terrorism	N/A
DECOUNT[18]	Creation of online counter-narratives for deradicalization through online resources, videos and videogames	ISFP (2018-2020)	video-game; online campaign; videos	video-game tools; **online (text/video) analysis** of extremist propaganda
Project Grey[19]	Identification of local & polarised hot topics and personas, after which a coalition of social workers and social media campaigners will use their expertise to intervene in a holistic approach: infiltrating filter bubbles, 1-on-1 interventions and promotion of nuanced views through social media campaigns	ISFP (2018-2021)	grey narrative; big data dashboard ; training for social workers	Big Data Dashboard

EUROTO-PIA[20]	Creation of counter narratives by an international video campaign and a "call to action" campaign- to counteract right wing and Islamic extremism propaganda on social media	ISFP (2018-2020)	**online campaigns**	video-production
CICERO[21]	Creation of a counter-narrative communication campaign aimed at preventing radicalisation leading to violent extremism, accompanied by a methodology for evaluating the campaign's effectiveness	ISFP (2019-2021)	**counternarrative communication campaign;** training for stakeholder; campaign's evaluation methodology	**online sentimental analysis**
RETHINK[22]	Prevention and fight of radicalization by providing an alternative narrative that deconstruct extremist rhetoric, in order to change violent behaviour, through social media campaigns	ISFP (2018-2019)	**online counternarrative campaigns;** best practices handbook	N/A
Resilient and united [23]	Prevention and fight of extremism and radicalization in Portugal through innovative multi-level communication campaign providing alternative or counter narratives and sharing moderate voices;	ISFP (2019-2020)	multi-level communication campaign; micro-documentary; films	Web Portal
	Establishment of a multi-stakeholder network to offer strategic advice & skills enhancement of professionals working with the public		mobile; **web communication** technologies	
Counter-act [24]	Contribution to behavioural changes which dissuade societal groups susceptible and vulnerable to radicalisation and terrorist content online by providing positive, alternative and credible narratives	ISFP (2019-2021)	online communication campaign	N/A
PRoTECT [25]	Developing training materials related to the protection of public spaces for municipalities and LEAs; Putting in place and implementing a pan European technology capability assessment tool for cities	ISFP (2018-2021)	training material; practical recommendations	Soft Target Site Assessment tool
DSMM [26]	Assessing the effect of social media narratives on the (de) securitisation of Muslims in France and the UK	H2020 (2016-2018)	policy briefs; social impact analysis	machine learning; **social network analysis and discourse analysis**
TRIVALENT [27]	Identification and study of the main radicalising narratives circulating in European countries in order to identify their characterising elements and the ways they are disseminated, so to elaborate various kinds of measures for contrasting their spreading, including the production of dedicated counter-narratives	H2020 (2017-2020)	**communication strategy for prevention**; IT tools for early warning of violent **radical narratives online**/ offline; training curricula; policy recommendations; IT tools to foster communication/co-operation between LEAs and CSOs	predictive software service "Alerts to radicalisation turning points" on the dissemination of violent extremist content on social media IT chatbot

INSIKT [28]	Providing a novel solution for LEA analysts to detect terrorist propaganda on all social media by identifying radical content, suspicious messages and radicalization process, with the help of sophisticated text mining algorithms and deep learning	H2020 (2017-2020)	SOCMINT solution (detection of terrorist propaganda on all social media); social data mining platform	AI (**text mining** algorithm, deep learning, etc.) : natural language processing : **social network analysis**
UrbTerr [29]	In-depth comparative analysis of memory discourses and responses to terrorist attacks in four European countries (Germany, Spain, France and the United Kingdom)	ERC (2019-2024)	comparative analysis of memory discourses art performances	N/A
DEM-OSERIES [30]	Exploring a corpus of TV 'security series' from conception to reception to assess their capacity at enabling a democratic empowerment of viewers, confronting cultural and social upheavals underway, and developing a collective inquiry into democratic values and human security	ERC (2020-2024)	investigation of TV series as a means of soft power	tweets and web analytics **image and text analysis**

1.4.1 Overview on terrorist narratives

Here we provide an overview of the main terrorist narratives, considering information and data emerged from the review of selected projects listed in table 1, enriched with general literature review. Five terrorist narratives are typically addressed:

Jihadist violent extremist narratives;

Right-wing violent extremist narratives;

Left-wing and anarchist violent extremist narratives;

Ethnonationalist and Separatist violent extremist narratives;

Single issue-terrorism violent extremist narratives (e.g. animal rights, environmental terrorism, etc.).

The first three categories are indicated as priority ones in the latest European TESAT (Terrorism Situation and Trend Report, 2021) [31], the latter two categories have been consistently included in TESAT report since 2012, hence it is deemed relevant to embrace them in the analysis.

1.4.1.1 Jihadist terrorism narratives

Traditionally, Europe has faced three types of terrorism: nationalist terrorism (e.g. IRA), right-wing terrorism (e.g. Neo-Nazi), and left-wing terrorism (e.g. Red Brigade). The phenomenon of Jihadist terrorism has emerged only in the 1990s, thus associating a religious motivation with the employment of violence against civilians. However, the awareness and perception of Jihadist terrorism as a security threat started to spread after the dramatic events of 9/11, where the capabilities and intentions of this type of terrorism was revealed at a global level. European countries began to feel unsafe, although the threat of Jihadist terrorism was still seen as an external one.

The bombings in Madrid and London, and the other several attacks that caused bloodshed to European cities in the 2000s, actually, proved that the threat was not so external, as most of the perpetuators had been living in these cities for several years, some of them belonging also to second generation of immigrants [32].

Jihadism is here defined as *"a violent sub-current of Salafism, a revivalist Sunni Muslim movement that rejects democracy and elected parliaments, arguing that human legislation is at variance with God's status as the sole lawgiver"* [31]. Although lots of people – especially in Western countries – tend to associate Islam to terrorism, attributing violence as a fundamental element of the religion, this understanding is quite imprecise. Even fundamentalisms, indeed, do not directly imply the use of violence; by contrast, there are some fundamentalisms that are completely peaceful. Jihadist terrorism, hence, derives from the combination of two elements: Islamist ideology and the idea of Jihad. The word *Jihad* denotes different meanings and has two different forms: jihad as a quest and jihad as a fight. With reference to the first meaning, jihad delineates the *"inward-seeking"*, the process that each human being should undertake to become a better person and, thus, a good Muslim. Jihad as a fight indicates, by contrast, the use of violence against the *infidelis*. The person that engages in this second type of Jihad is called

mujahid or *jihad terrorist* [32].

The following paragraphs describes the narratives Islamist terrorists use to legitimise their violent actions.

1.4.1.1.1 Narrative 1 – Islam is under attack from a global non-Muslim alliance

"*Islam is under attack*" is one of the master narratives of Jihadist terrorists. Jihadists depict their religion as the target of a non-Muslim alliance that gathers Christians, Jews, Buddhists and Hindus, and also secularists from all around the world to discredit Islam and its beliefs. Some jihadists also include Shiites and Sufis in this non-Muslim alliance, as they are seen as apostates [31]. This narrative of victimhood and self-defence has also been widely adopted for recruitment purposes.

1.4.1.1.2 Narrative 2 – Endurance and resilience in the face of hardship and strategic setbacks

This narrative is quite reverberating, and it is often used to highlight the achievements obtained by the Jihadists despite the actions taken by "the others" to stop or jeopardise their activities. For example, in March 2019 the Islamic States was defeated in Baghuz (Syria) by the US-backed Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF). This offensive lasted six weeks and managed to recapture the town of Baghuz, which represented the last territorial stronghold of the IS in eastern Syria. It was widely seen as the beginning of IS downfall, with SDF representatives declaring *"the total elimination of so-called caliphate and 100% territorial defeat of Isis [the IS group]"* and the then-US president Donald Trump pointing out the group's loss of power and prestige [33].

In October 2019, the killing of the leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi in a raid launched by the US special forces seemed to be the finishing blow on the group. However, Abu Ibrahim Al-Hashimi Al-Qurasyi was appointed as the new Caliph, thus opening what would have been called the new phase of the group. This new phase narrative was used in the initial statement after the appointment of the new caliph and relied on two major pillars: fighting the Jewish and conquering Jerusalem. However, this narrative was later overshadowed, while priority was given to the magnification of the territorial and military successes in other regions, such as Africa or South and South East Asia. The Battle of Baghuz was, hence, far from being the end of the IS and its caliphate. Islamist terrorism, indeed, managed to re-adapt to the challenges and the mutated environment, pursuing its expansion and conquest within and beyond Iraq and Syria [34] [31].

This narrative is also confirmed by an audio speech by IS spokesman Abul Hasan Al-Muhajir reports, "if the Islamic State loses some towns and cities in some of its wilayat, Allah grants its conquest in other wilayat in imbalanced hit-and-run battles in which they drag the enemy with all that he owns" [34].

1.4.1.1.3 Narrative 3 – Islam will outlive its enemies through a war of attrition

The *"war of attrition"* narrative is closely linked to the previous one. The core idea is that notwithstanding possible backlashes, the *mujahidin* will continue their battle and the group will outlive its enemies. The motto *"baqiyah wa tatamaddad"* (remaining and expanding) still holds relevant: the *baqiyah* component is reiterated by the operational propaganda sustained globally, such as the *"Battle of Attrition"* campaign launched in several series from June 2019 and 2020. The campaign reported numbers of attacks and involved provinces, thus contributing to stress the power of the group. With regards to the *tatamaddad* part, the narrative of expansion is still relevant, although there have been no updates on new territories in the region. However, as mentioned, the group has managed to get grip in South Asia and Africa, while exploiting ethnicity and socio-economic dynamics in European societies to foster radicalisation of migrants and second generation of migrants, thus feeding the West vs Islam polarisation [34].

1.4.1.1.4 Narrative 4 – Set captives free

There is another narrative that was more often used in the past by the Islamic State, but was lately less promoted. This narrative calls for the liberation of captives, i.e. IS operatives and leaders under detection. The liberation is carried out by means of attacking prisons and fomenting prison riots. Jihadists, indeed, attack prisons, achieving a twofold objective: on the one hand, they free representatives of their group who are, hence, able to resort to their activity and keep sustaining the group's fight; on the other hand, it serves for propaganda purposes, as it shows the power of the group, its ability and the care for the "companions". Jihadists have resorted to this narrative again, especially after the IS territorial losses and the Covid pandemic. As an illustration, the 226th issue of Al-Naba' – the official weekly newspaper of the Islamic State – strongly stressed for the *mujahideen* to free the Uighurs from China's concentration camps, as well as captives in refugee and detention camps across Syria. Beside the propaganda on the journal, IS also confirmed the importance of freeing Jihadists in action: in August 2020, IS Khurasan attacked the central prison in Jalalabd (Afghanistan), managing to free hundreds of detainees. In October, another attack was carried out in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, ending up with more than 1.300 escaping the prison. These actions are of major significance as they prove to jihadist members and potential new

joiners that the group truly takes care of "brothers and sisters", while reassuring those that have been captured that IS will not abandon them. Both these aspects contribute to feeding the glue that keeps the group united, and that can attract new adherents to join the effort. [34]

1.4.1.1.5 Narrative 5 - COVID-19 as a God punishment

This latest narrative has emerged only recently after the Covid-19 pandemic broke out. The novelty of this narrative also confirms a distinctive trait of terrorist movements, i.e. their ability to adapt to the changing environment. This holds true for both the *modus operandi* (e.g. the adoption of social media and multiple communication channels to disseminate the messages and strengthen recruitment efforts) and narratives. Covid-19, the global pandemic that has debilitated countries and societies worldwide since the end of 2019, as been exploited as an instrument to justify actions against the *infedelis.* According to Jihadists, Covid-19 is divine retribution against China. In Islam, the theme of reward and punishment (*al-thawab wa al'iqab*) is quite central: rewards are associated with pious actions, while punishment is for impious deeds. Stemming from this basic assumption, Jihadists attribute the responsibility of natural and man-made disasters to *infidelis*, apostates, and polytheists, especially if they are known to have committed crimes at the expense of Muslims. In this light, Covid-19 was divine punishment initially against China, and lately extended to Iran and Western countries. According to this narrative, God has mostly hit "idolatrous" nations, keeping the faithful safe; hence, Muslims should show no mercy to disbelievers and apostates to remain safe. Pursuing Jihad would ensure believers the protection from the disease. All in all, this narrative called for a two-fold official line of the IS: i) Muslims are encouraged to keep following those measures that would protect them from the virus; ii) mujahideen are called to keep intensifying their operations, exploiting the windows of vulnerabilities that the situation offered. During the past two years, indeed, several attacks have been conducted in Middle East, Africa, Southeast Asia and also Europe, confirming the opportunistic approach of IS [34].

It is interesting to note how also the West has its own narratives when referring to Jihadist terrorism and these often match and complement the Jihadist discourse.

Islamophobia, for instance, the "*irrational fear of, aversion to, or discrimination against Islam or people who practice Islam*" [35] is significantly spread. Nowadays, it is quite common to hear this expression, as racism and antagonism towards the Islamic population have sharply increased, especially after 9/11 events. However, islamophobia is not a new phenomenon; instead, it is strongly rooted in colonialism and the idea of superiority and hegemony of Western culture and values over "others". However, the main difference is related to the discriminating factor: if in the past the diversity was perceived in relation to ethnicity, the new Islamophobia has emerged along the terrorist threats and thus associating diversity with bad behaviour. Since the end of 1970s, hence, the idea of "Arab bad guys" started spreading in Western societies, which saw Palestinian militant organisations and leftist Arab regimes as core examples of this attitude, fostering racism. After 9/11, the "Arab bad guys" progressively became the "Muslim bad guys" thus automatically conferring a violent relevance to the religion itself and its observants and blurring the demarcation between non-violent Islamist movements and violent jihadi organisations [36].

The **Eurabia narrative**, instead, reflects a far-right conspiracy theory: the Arabs would be trying to replace the European population by conducting an "Islamic Reconquista of Europe" [36]. According to this theory, a European elite (political, academic and otherwise) is cooperating with Arab countries to facilitate Muslim immigration to Europe, thus increasing the total Muslim population and managing to make Europe an Islamic colony. One of the leading representatives of the Eurabia theory is Gisèle Littman, a British-Egyptian writer also known as Bat Ye'or. In her vision, the conspiracy is led by French elites, who had implemented a secret plan to sell out Europe to the Muslims in exchange for oil. In her books, she also describes "*Europe's evolution from a Judeo-Christian civilisation, with important post-Enlightenment secular elements, into a post-Judeo-Christian civilisation that is subservient to the ideology of jihad and the Islamic powers that propagate it.*" [37] The Eurabia narrative perfectly matches with the rethoric of al-Qaeda and ISIS, who wanted to reconquer Al Andalus, the old Islamic region of the Iberic peninsula.

Finally, the **"us versus them" narrative**, which is quite strongly anchored in Western discussions. This narrative is also linked to Islamophobian concepts, as it presents elements of hate and hostility against Muslims. Every event or situation, indeed, assumes an "Islamic significance" and the religious-cultural dimension is instrumentally used to explain any conflict. This view has led to an increase in hostility against Muslims in general, independently of their affiliation to extremist groups. Consequently, social fragmentation has increased, accompanied by hate crimes and acts of violence against the Muslim population [36].

1.4.1.2 Right-wing violent extremist narratives

In the last two decades, the extremist threats began to crystallize on the new flank of the political spectrum - the right one. According to the Global Terrorism Index 2020, the number of far-right attacks in Oceania, Western Europe, and North America has increased by 250% since 2014, while the number of deaths caused by these attacks has increased by 709% over the same period [38]. One of the possible motives for such a trend can be partly due to the reaction to terrorist attacks run by Islamist radicals (counter-jihad movement) in Western countries. Howev-

er, the deeper reasons for the growth of right-wing radicalism are associated with the processes of strengthening the role of Islam in the world and increasing the share of the population from Arab and African states in Europe due to powerful migration processes, which began to be perceived as an existential threat to the West countries.

A significant role in the consolidation and strengthening of the global ultra-right community was played by the digital environment, which opened up opportunities for spreading radical ideology and communicating with like-minded people on a global scale. The far-right has flooded major social platforms with extremist contents, and created or taken over alternative media outlets, thus creating a vast virtual ecosystem of right-wing extremism. In addition, the changed digital space, in which post-truth, fake news and echo chambers began to triumph, increased the vulnerability of society itself to the influence of far-right narratives.

The right direction of extremism covers a set of radical ideologies and violent actions, which are based on the idea of the domination of a certain nationality or race, which is threatened by representatives of other races and nationalities. The legitimacy of the use of violence is substantiated in order to protect against these threats.

The defeat of fascism and its public condemnation in post war Europe did not lead to its eradication. Shortly after the end of the Second World War, it saw a new resurgence in Europe and other countries of the world, to a lesser extent in the form of an organized political movement with the clear objective to seize power and more in the form of subversive movements aimed at keeping the tension high in the polarized cold war reality. The ideologies of political or social movements that arose after the Second World War, professing the views of the National Socialism or close to them, or declaring themselves followers of the NSDAP, received the general name of neo-Nazism. Neo-Nazism borrows elements of Nazi doctrine, including chauvinism, fascism, xenophobia, and anti-Semitism. Radical neo-Nazis are characterized by a commitment to violent actions, up to terrorist attacks.

The definition of right-wing extremism used by EUROPOL notes such a significant feature of it as hatred of minorities: "*right-wing extremist ideologies feed on hate subcultures, usually fighting against diversity in society and the equal rights of minorities. Right-wing extremists are typically characterized by racism, authoritarianism, xenophobia, misogyny and hostility towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ) communities and immigrants*" [39].

The most prominent far-right organization in Europe is the Identitarian Movement, which advocates ethnic segregation and claims that "white" Westerners have the right to defend "their" nations from foreign peoples and cultures [40]. "Identitarians" advocate "re-emigration", which, according to experts, refers to the mass deportation of all European residents with migrant origin or non-white skin [41].

EUROPOL speaks of this movement in the context of extremism. In particular, it is noted that the Identitarian Movement of Austria (Identitare Bewegung Österreichs, IBÖ) has established itself as the most active right-wing extremist group. It has a charismatic leader, Martin Sellner, who is one of the most prominent European activists in the identitarian movement. Together with its similar organizations in Europe, the IBÖ promotes resistance to the perceived "Islamization" of the Western world. In Portugal, one of the most active identity groups is the Identity Shield (Escudo Identitario). According to the authorities of this country, the activities of neo-Nazi groups are closely connected with groups and organizations of the European identitarian movement.

Special mention should be made of the ideological basis of the "Identitarian movement", which is the so-called theory of great replacement. According to researchers from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, this theory has become the ideological mainstream of right-wing radicalism in Europe and has received wide support among European right-wing politicians [42]. It was this name (Great Replacement) that was put on the cover of the New Zealand terrorist Brent Tarrant's manifesto.

The ideological basis of contemporary right-wing extremism in the West is not monolithic. Right-wing extremist ideology is heterogeneous and has many currents, united by the rejection of diversity and the rights of minorities. The main elements of the violent right ideology are the belief in the superiority of the "white race" and the notion that the violent actions of individuals who are part of the "leaderless resistance" serve to fuel the "race war". This confrontation is seen as inevitable in order to stop the supposed "system" plot to replace the white population through mass immigration [36].

These elements are reflected in the main narratives, which are reported below.

1.4.1.2.1   Narrative 1 – The superiority of the White race

Right-wing extremism is fuelled by the concept of White Suprematism, i.e. the belief that the "white race" has certain inherent physical and mental characteristics that make it superior to other races. Besides being genetically superior to other people, White people have their own culture, which is superior to other cultures. Consequently, it is believed that Whites should dominate people of other backgrounds, especially where they can coexist. Ideally, however, Whites should live on their own in a society consisting only of Whites [43].

While not all white supremacists are militant, white supremacy tends more than other forms of right-wing extremism to inspire acts of serious violence or terrorism. This is due to the explicit encouragement of this ideology of hatred and violence against minorities [36].

1.4.1.2.2 Narrative 2 – Western culture is threatened by mass migration

Another mainstream narrative embraces the concept of cultural nationalism: "Western culture" is believed to be threatened by mass migration to Europe and lack of integration by certain ethnic and cultural groups. Cultural nationalism focuses on the rejection of certain cultural practices, such as the wearing of a face-covering veil (*burqa or niqab*) or attempts to impose Islamic law in Western countries.

In addition, the mass migration from the "non-white" world and perceived demographic changes pose an existential threat to the "white race" and "Western culture" (White or ethnic nationalism). White nationalism advocates, hence, the creation of a "white" homeland, either by separating pre-existing countries or by (forced if necessary) repatriation of ethnic minorities. Much of this rhetoric is present in the identitarian movement [36].

1.4.1.2.3 Narrative 3 – Us versus Them

This narrative is a *fil rouge* between the previous two narratives. The idea of superiority of the White race and the threat posed by other ethnic and cultural groups implicitly entails a separation between the Whites and the "Others", a comprehensive term that includes all those not belonging to the White race and, consequently, inferior.

1.4.1.2.4 Narrative 4 – Covid-19 as a responsibility of China and globalism

As already mentioned when discussing the Jihadist narratives, Covid-19 comes into play also with regard to the right-wing extremism, although with a different meaning. As an illustration, Timothy Wilson, a right-wing extremist acting alone in the US, encouraged other people to deliberately spread Covid-19 to politicians, police officers and those attending synagogues. Other discourses recall conspiracy theories: the Russian Imperial Legion, for instance, believes that Covid-19 was man-made, while others attributed its creation specifically to Jews or the Chinese. Right-wing extremist narrative creation also incorporated Covid-19 to buttress existing narratives decrying globalism, immigration, and modern society in general. Moreover, conspiracy demonstrations against Covid-19 countermeasures (masks, lockdowns) began in May 2020, with some elements claiming that Covid-19 was a globalist conspiracy [44]. Other narratives also include those related to Science Denial groups with respect to 5G phone networks: such narratives are exploited to escalate hysteria. As it will be shown in the following section, similar concepts can be found also in some left-wing narratives.

1.4.1.3 Left-wing and anarchist violent extremist narratives

Left-wing terrorism is one of the three types of terrorism that have traditionally threatened Europe, together with nationalist terrorism (e.g. IRA) and right-wing terrorism (e.g. Neo-Nazi). Between 1970 and 1980, 93 % of attacks and 58 % of deaths occurred in relation to this type of terrorism, with attacks chiefly perpetuated by small cells of revolutionary Marxist or anarchist terrorist groups. A change of course was registered in the mid-1980s, but lately a new resurgence of these activities rebegan in the EU since 2000s. Yet, they have had a noticeable resurgence in the EU over the 21st century. 414 attacks inspired by left-wing and anarchist extreme ideology took place from 2006 to 2020, mainly resulting in vandalism and destruction of property. The terrorist groups mostly involved in the attacks include the New Red Brigades (Nuove Brigate Rosse), the Revolutionary Organization 17 November (Epanastatiki Organosi dekaefta Noemvri), the Black Bloc, the Revolutionary Struggle (Epanastatikos Agonas), the Sect of Revolutionaries (Sekta Epanastaton), the Informal Anarchist Federation (Federazione Anarchica Informale), the Militant Popular Revolutionary Forces (Mahomenes Laikes Epanastatikes Dynameis), the Militia Group Popular Justice (Organosi Politofylakis Laiki Dikeosyni), the Conspiracy of Cells of Fire (Synomosía ton Pyrínon tis Fotiás), the Revolutionary Self-Defence Organisation (Organosi Epanastatikis Aftoamynas), the Armed Revolutionary Forces (Enoples Epanastatikes Dynameis), and Individuals Tending to the Wild (Individualidades Teniendo a lo Salvaje) [44]. Today, according to the latest data from TESAT, the greatest number of terrorist attacks in Europe can still be associated with left-wing or anarchist groups [31].

Left-wing violent extremism is quite challenging to analyse and understand as it is a complex phenomenon that planges its roots in multiple ideologies, thus making it more difficult to label it. Left-wing extremism, indeed, is closely linked to the anarchist doctrine but has also taken inspiration from other ideologies, like Marxism-Leninism, Trotskyism, Proletarian internationalism, Stalinism, Maoism, anti-militarism and eco-socialism. The compresence of these diverse elements confers left-wing extremism a hybrid nature that uneases the capacity to define it and also to structure appropriate strategies to counter and prevent the phenomenon.

According to RAN, "*left-wing extremism is a broad term encompassing many types and differing from one country to another*" [45]. However, it is possible to delineate some elements that underpin this complex ideology, and that are also mirrored in the narratives used to justify the violent actions.

First of all, contemporary left-wing extremism is closely linked to the anarchist doctrine against the abolishment of the capitalist profit [46]: anarchists believe that the State must be destroyed in order to eradicate capitalism, while left-wing extremists believe that capitalism must be destroyed in order to eradicate the bourgeois State

– as claimed by Marx and Engels in their 1848 Communist Manifesto. Later, Marxism evolved into new political ideologies: Trotskyism, Marxism-Leninism, Proletarian internationalism, Stalinism and Maoism. Secondly, the aversion to state and state institutions is, hence, correlated to the loathing of police forces and the distrust in the justice system. Another core element is the enmity to right-wing parties, as they mostly represent and promote opposite values and ideals. Left-wing extremists show solidarity towards immigrants and sensitivity towards environmental topics [47], often coupled with other political beliefs such as pacifism, internationalism, feminism and eco-socialism.

The 2021 EU TE-SAT [31] reports that most left-wing and anarchist terrorist attacks and plots in Europe in 2020 occurred in Italy (24 out of 25). In most cases, the attacks caused damage to private and public property. The report also notes that *"In addition to longstanding issues, such as anti-fascism, anti-racism and perceived state repression, left-wing and anarchist extremists in 2020 addressed new topics, including scepticism about technological and scientific developments, COVID-19 containment measures and environmental issues"*. In ten attacks, the target was represented by telecommunication infrastructures (3G/4G/5G repeaters or cell towers, plus relays or cables). Left-wing and anarchist extremism-related arrests in Europe in 2020 were also linked to foreign terrorist groups such as the Turkish Devrimci Halk Kurtuluş Partisi-Cephesi, and to foreign fighters for the independence of the Kurdish state.

The following paragraphs describe the narratives that left-wing and anarchist terrorists use to legitimise their violent actions.

1.4.1.3.1 Narrative 1 – An unjust social order

The most recurrent narrative in today's left-wing extremism is related to the existence of an unjust social order that creates social inequality and hinders specific segments of society. This unjust social order and the negative consequences it poses to society legitimises the violence. This narrative consequently embraces other socioeconomic issues such as anti-globalisation and anti-capitalism [48].

The Stand Up group, a German left-wing social movement officially launched in September 2018 with the goal to unify left-wing efforts and set the agenda for a future leftist federal government, provides a good example of this narrative. In one her speeches, Sarah Wagenknecht, one of the co-initiators of the movement, pointed out the link between three elements: austerity measures, growing social inequality and the crisis of democracy. *"Despite economic growth, 40 percent of residents have less net income than 20 years ago; democracy is no longer working"*: on the one hand, the economy does not seem to be able to properly serve people; on the other, the democratic order is held responsible of this inefficiency [49].

1.4.1.3.2 Narrative 2 – The state as an oppressive institution

This narrative is closely related to the previous one as it conceives the state as an oppressive actor due to its structure and institutions as well as decision-making class that does not truly pursue the interests of all citizens but only favours some classes. This narrative often exploits the term "fascism" to demarcate a type of action, or a type of government deemed hostile, unfair, and authoritarian [45]. The opposition to the police is also a key driver in this discourse, partly due to the discredit towards the institution, partly to the instrumental use of clashes with police forces. Such clashes, indeed, despite the specific reasons leading to the event, facilitate the acceptance of violent actions also by those non-violent left activists, thus reinforcing the basis of the left-wing extremist groups [50]. Clashes with the police are also instrumentalised in the "Us *versus* Them narrative".

1.4.1.3.3 Narrative 3 – Us versus Them

The comparison and contrast with the "Others" is an idea already found in the Jihadist and right-wing narrative. The Us versus Them concept is embraced also by left-wing extremists who reflect this dichotomy at several societal levels: proletarians against bourgeoise, natives against perceived internal enemies in a given country, Left's righteousness against the Right enemy, etc. This narrative takes inspiration from Marxism and post-Marxism traditions, deeply fuelled by the concept of antagonism [51].

1.4.1.3.4 Narrative 4 – Conspiracy theories

Conspiracy theories are often used in left-wing extremist discourse and sometimes also represent a meeting point with other extremisms, such as the right-wing one. It seems, indeed, that people with an extremist mindset (independently from its orientation) are more prone to conspiracy theories. The most spread are related to 5G and Covid-19. Left-wing extremists generally show reluctance towards innovation: they firmly oppose the 5G communication network (several telecommunication infrastructures – including repeaters, repeater bridges or cell towers or other components of the telecommunication's network (e.g. relays or cables) – have been often targets of violent attacks. The conspiracy theories about 5G received a boost in 2020 due to new discourses that connected technophobia with the emergence of COVID-19 and anti-vaccines positions [45]. According to this position, there would be a correlation between 5G and the Coronavirus, as the former would weaken the human

immune system, thus making people vulnerable to the disease. Still related to the Covid-19, some ideas mainly circulated in Germany and Argentina, stating that Covid-19 countermeasures imposed by governments would be only a mechanism for oppressing poor people [44].

1.4.1.3.5   Narrative 5 – The Anti-narrative

Left-wing and anarchist extremist narratives generally exploit anti-establishment sentiments in order to develop anti-narratives such as anti-capitalism, anti-liberal democracy, anti-elite, anti-racism, anti-fascism and so on, raising awareness against what is considered to be an unfair social order and fomenting revolutionary feelings. In this way, the narratives justify the use of violence in the name of noble ideals (so-called *excess of virtue*), because "*something terrible will happen if we do not immediately act against the order of things*".

It should be noted that although these anti-something narratives are quite common among different left-wing and anarchist extremist groups, there is no consensus about what should be built after the possible success of the hoped-for revolution. They pursue the primary strategic goal of exacerbating social and political tensions *to accelerate systemic collapse* [45].

A final consideration is worth attention: the use of internet. Section 2.2.1 has highlighted the importance of social media and communication means for the Jihadist terrorists both for recruitment purpose and for disseminating their message and mission to a broader audience. Differently, it appears that left-wing terrorists rely less on the use of interest to spread narratives but tend to exploit their personal contacts [45]. These groups, indeed, chiefly opt for "propaganda by deeds" as the lack of elaborated narratives in online posts suggests. Nevertheless, like other forms of extremism, the internet is still used as a means to build alliances other individuals and groups, to recruit new members, and to claim responsibility for attacks" [31].

1.4.1.4   Ethnonationalist and separatist violent extremist narratives

Ethnonationalism is neither a new phenomenon nor a merely European one. For instance, the Zealots in Judaea incited the population to rise against the Roman Empire and expel it from the Holy land by means of violence. However, the correlation between terrorism and ethnonationalism appeared only in the 1960s and 1970s, with the number of ethno-national/separatist terrorist groups active internationally growing from three in 1968 to thirty in 1978. In this period, indeed, the activities of groups such as Begin in Israel (National Military Organization - Irgun), Makarios in Cyprus (National Organization of Cypriot Fighters - EOKA) and Ben Bella in Algeria (Front de libération nationale - FLN) gained notice at international level for the success of their violent actions. The Palestine Liberation Organization's (PLO) terrorist activism between 1968 and 1980 further confirmed the relevance and dangerousness of these groups [52]. Today, although the attention is chiefly focused on religious terrorism (especially after 9/11 and the emergence of al-Qaeda and later ISIS), ethnonationalist and separatist terrorism is still eradicated. In Europe, examples are the Irish Republican Army (IRA) within the United Kingdom, Euskadi Ta Askatasuna (ETA) within Spain or the Kosovo Liberation Army (UCK) in Kosovo; the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PPK) in Kurdistan and the Karen National Liberation Army (KNLA) in Myanmar testify the presence of these groups also at the global level.

However, it should be acknowledged that the number of terrorist attacks associated with ethno-nationalist or separatist groups has significantly decreased, at least in Europe in the last few years. As can be seen from the Europol "European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report" [31], this type of violence the predominant in the continent in 2018 while in 2020 it has significantly decreased, although not fully disappearing from the scene. Expressions of ethnic violence are chiefly present in Northern Ireland and Spain. In Northern Ireland, the threat from the Dissident Republican (DR) groups is still evaluated as "Severe", meaning that an attack is highly to happen. The Covid-19 had initially managed to slacken the activities of these groups, they are now getting back to the previous level of action. In Spain, ETA is still anchored in the society, although officially inactive since 2009. However, Spain has registered a rise in violent separatist activity in 2020, compared to previous years. Most of the attacks are in support of ETA prisoners and the claim for a total amnesty [31].

Therefore, today ethnonationalist and separatist terrorism is not the predominant form in Europe. Nevertheless, it is worth including this category in the analysis. Even if the number of attacks has declined, the intrinsic factors that feed these actions can be still present in our societies and it cannot be excluded a *priori a revival* of this type of terrorism, especially considering the latest events in Ukraine that strongly embrace the ethnic element as one of the drivers of the conflict.

Before analysing the core narratives behind ethnonationalist terrorism, it seems appropriate to clarify the meaning of term "ethnonationalism".

Ethnonationalism – also called ethnic nationalism – is a form of nationalism that considers ethnicity as the criterion to define the nation and the nationality. The concept of nation itself is quite broad and disputed. Lefebvre discussed this ambiguity, pointing out several elements that could characterise the notion of nationalism and nation [52]. First, a common language, race, or religious beliefs. Second, the nation as Benedict Anderson's *"imagined community"*, limited in scope and sovereign in nature. According to Anderson, the nation is imagined because it reflects a sense of communion or "horizontal comradeship" between people who often do not know each other

or have not even met. They imagine belonging to the same collective, conferring it a common history, traits, beliefs, and attitudes. It is limited because it has boundaries that demarcate the difference with other nations, while sovereign because its legitimacy is not derived from divinity as kingship is — the nation is its own authority[53]. Third, a nation could be defined also by a group identity, evolving from particular circumstances, historical continuity, geographical contingency and myths. It can also be forged by sentiment, a political rhetoric, an ideology, or a movement. A nation could be seen as a cultural community with its own specific collective identity represented by a shared language, values, myths and symbols. Lastly, a nation could be framed by an ethnic bond or a blood lineage. In truth, the expression nationalism does not have a negative or positive connotation: however, the instrumental use of this concept to justify or motivate violent acts and terrorist actions has facilitated the attribution of a negative connotation.

All these aspects should be taken into consideration when addressing ethnonationalist narratives, as these can be easily mirrored in the abovementioned elements. Ethnonationalist, independentist and separatist terrorism is, therefore, mainly linked to *a movement to recover linguistic, cultural, ethnic, social, religious or historical rights* and to the feeling among members of that group and supporters that they are oppressed or denied rights, especially the rights lost in the course of history, always with conflicting readings of the history of that nation or society.

Such as the concept of terrorism itself, the term *Ethnonationalist terrorism* and its implementation are highly controversial issues. What constitutes an illegitimate regime and what types of violence and war are acceptable against such a State are matters for discussion. Groups described by some as "nationalist terrorists" tend to be considered "freedom fighters", committed in a legitimate but asymmetrical war. Ethnonationalism, in this framework, links the ethnic identity with the necessity to form a nation, that is, to gain access to political autonomy within established borders [54].

Based on the aspects analysed above, it is possible to identify five main narratives.

1.4.1.4.1   Narrative 1 – The cultural identity

This narrative is linked to the idea of the nation as a cultural community. People belong to the same nation by virtue of a collective identity, based and driven by a common language and shared values, myths and symbols. If the liberal view of national identity understands the belonging to a nation in terms of living within the country's border, regardless of ethnic, racial or religious features, ethnonationalism associates the nation with a "*shared heritage, which usually included a common language, a common faith, and a common ethnic ancestry*" [55]. This narrative is also linked to the abovementioned concept of "imagined communities".

1.4.1.4.2   Narrative 2 – The blood lineage

Blood ties are another element used to spark emotive power and deepen the bond between people. In this case, the nation is understood as an "*extended family*" where all its members have the same blood lineage [55]. This concept can be found also in the political discourse of XVII and XVIII Europe, when the concept of nationalism became more relevant. In the context of national formation, blood represented a metaphor for race, ethnicity, and sexuality that enacted loyalty, belonging, and national consciousness. The blood ties explained the difference from the "Others" and legitimise their authority [56].

1.4.1.4.3   Narrative 3 – The chosen trauma

This narrative is closely linked to the first two, and to the idea of the demarcation "Us vs Them". The *chosen trauma* refers to a collective memory of a calamity or a significant atrocious event that has affected the community/group's ancestors. This chosen trauma triggers a "self-defence mechanism" that leads the group to create an "enemy-other", somehow associated with the origin of the trauma. The memory of the trauma feeds feelings of anger and humiliation that in turn, foment rage and hate against this "enemy" and eventually lead to ethnic violence [52]. This trauma works as a glue that keeps together the group and motivates the aggression.

A significant example is provided by Branimir Anzulovic in analysing the Serbian ethnonationalism. In [57], the author argues that the primary intention of the Serbs in the modern era had been to take control of the neighbouring countries in order to re-establish the old Serbian empire. The political aggression has been channelled against the Croats, thus recalling the notion of rivalry and demarcation "us vs them". According to Anzulovic, the Serbs have been trying to recreate the Great Serbia, by leveraging on multiple elements, including the vindictive ideas of the Kosovo myth, a call to avenge the Serbian defeat at the 1389 Battle of Kosovo, the eventual loss of independence and centuries-long enslavement under the multinational and religiously tolerant Ottoman Empire, with the view to attaining a "Heavenly Serbia". This *chosen trauma* has, then, been used to justify any violent action perpetuated in the name of the Greater Serbia and with the purpose of re-establishing it. An ethno-nationalist/separatist movement would, hence, legitimize itself by relying "*on the grievances of a collective memory to regain economic, political and cultural rights [and] by rejecting subordination and cultural assimilation*" [58].

1.4.1.4.4 Narrative 4 – The "enemy other"

This narrative underlines the previous ones as it can be easily linked to the idea of "*Us vs Them*". This concept can also be found in other types of extremisms, would that be of religious or political inspiration. The "enemy-other" can be triggered by the abovementioned *chosen trauma* but also by a sentiment of social inequalities, economic oppression or exploitation. The '*enemy-other' "becomes the repository of collective self-loathing, rage, and anxiety that legitimise the ethnic violence*" [59].

This narrative reminds the Jihadist narrative 1 (Islam is under attack) illustrated in section 0, which draws a clear demarcation line between the real Muslim and "the Others" who are attacking it.

1.4.1.4.5 Narrative 5 – The protection of own people abroad

This narrative is mostly associated with actions perpetuated by state actors, which intervene in territories outside their nation – mostly infringing upon the national sovereignty of other countries – in order to protect "their people", i.e. minorities living in other countries. Such actors legitimise violent actions by virtue of their obligation to free people that share the same blood, culture, language and are often oppressed by the state where they live. The same motivation underpins actions to "free" a portion of territories that are claimed to be part of its own nation; the violence here is fuelled by the goal of re-establishing a previous order. This type of narrative easily brings to mind Adolf Hitler and his Third Reich, as well as the actions perpetuated by the Russian Federation in Ukraine back in 2014 and nowadays [60].

1.4.2 Single issue-terrorism violent extremist narratives

The notion of "single-issue terrorism" embraces forms of terrorism that "*focuses on a specific, singular issue instead of more encompassing social, political, or religious change. Examples of single-issue terrorism include acts of violence, such as assassinations, committed by anti abortionists, animal rights activists, and environmentalists who represent the outer edges and extreme fringes of broader movements*" [61].

For instance, the paragraph below describes an example of single-issue terrorism, the ecoterrorism.

The term "ecoterrorism" was first introduced by Ron Arnold in a 1983 article, where it was defined as "*a crime committed to save nature*". The term became a household name in the 90's with the increased activity of groups like Earth Liberation Front (ELF) [62]. Nevertheless, it is difficult to identify eco-terrorist movements in Europe with relevant structures and means of attack.

On the one hand, social awareness of climate change and the possibility of structural crises related to overpopulation or south-north migration has generated a dangerous fusion between extreme right-wing terrorism and environmental narratives. As identified by Europol, according to eco-fascism these crises can be attributed to overpopulation, mass immigration influx (please see D2.3, point 2.5.3, for more information regarding how it affects several EU Member States), and the inability of democratic systems to address them [31].

On the other hand, anti-system movements have used the crisis of the Covid-19 to generate feelings and dynamics of denial of the authority of governments and organizations associated with public order and security. In particular, the most or less successful attacks on telecommunications infrastructure and in particular on 5G deployment will be highlighted here.

Conspiracy theories suggesting a connection between 5G technology and Covid-19 have been key to some incidents. In the Netherlands, thirty telecommunications towers have been destroyed since April 2020 [63]. Seven suspects were arrested, but there seemed to be no link between the various fire incidents and there was no indication of common organisation, coordination, leadership or even ideological motivation.

According to [31], no terrorist attack in 2020 can be associated with single-issue terrorism. Single-issue movements in the EU are today mostly peaceful: they support their ideas and pursue their goals by means of peaceful demonstrations and online activities. For this reason, ideologies and narratives characterising these forms of terrorism will not be investigated in detail. However, it is important to remind that this typology of terrorism exists and may resort to violence again.

1.4.3 Online semantic analysis

As seen in the previous section, the EU research on terrorist narratives revolves in part around the study and detection of online content promoting extremist narratives.

The research of online extremisms narratives involves different phases for the individuation of each type of extremism. First, it is important to define the precise extremism that will be searched for. Then, several documents should be collected from online repositories, websites and social media. Finally, collections have to be analysed with semantic tools, in order to extract the information characterizing the given narrative. Information Extraction

consists of a complex process that involves several phases and studies of the specific domain.

In this frame, sentiment analysis has proven to be a very efficient tool. Sentiment analysis is part of larger semantic research, which can individuate main features and behavioral aspects of each type of terrorism. This analysis includes the research of emotions, behaviours, motivations, discussions and arguments justifying a given narrative.

As an example, here we consider the analytical services offered by the tool CIAPI (Cogito Intelligence API) by Expert.AI, an Italian software house specialized in the analysis and management of unstructured information through a semantic approach, that is partner in many of the considered EC-funded research projects.

The offered services include several components: Named Entity extraction (people, organizations and places), Text mining of entities (semantic reasoning and inferential entities), and Relationships extraction.

Text mining and Named Entity Recognition (NER) are tasks related to information extraction, which aims to locate and classify a text's atomic elements into predefined classes (entity types) such as names of people, organizations, locations, monetary values, percentages, etc. This elaboration is useful for the identification and inference of custom entities and background knowledge facts. Other entity types that are often useful are dates, quantities, currencies, time references, etc.

Semantic reasoning is an innovative function that extends and amplifies the Text mining feature. For the entities related to the Intelligence and Security domain, indeed, it is possible to automatically infer information that is not present within the text. As an illustration, Text Mining will extract Barack Obama as a People entity and a World Leader entity, but Semantic Reasoning will go a few steps further to show that Barack Obama → president, Barack Obama → politician, Barack Obama → head of a state, Barack Obama → United States of America.

For the objectives of the intelligence and crimes projects, in addition to extracting entities, Text Analysis Service will also extract the possible "relationships" which can exist between these entities thanks to a dedicated module. A relationship is here defined as the logic that groups the entities co-occurring within a given scope (sentence), in order to show conceptual connections between them. The outcome is a triplet consisting of two entities and the type of connection that links them.

The Writeprint feature provides semantic, grammatical, structural and statistical text indexes with the purpose of authorship assessment and profiling. Moreover, Writeprint can outline the readability level of a document and predict the grade of education needed to understand it.

1.4.3.1   Example of Online Analysis Results

This section reports the results of the analysis of online extremist narratives with the Cogito Intelligence API using the taxonomies of intelligence and emotions. The analysis regarded almost 80,000 documents, for three different types of extremisms: Islamist, Far-Right and Far-Left, and was performed within the EU-funded project CICERO (Analysis of Islamist, extreme-right and extreme-left narratives spread online, 2019) [64].

1.4.3.1.1   Islamist extremism analysis

A total of about 10,000 documents were collected for this case in the CICERO project. Most of the documents and RSS-based articles gathered come from a web crawl for websites and social media channels. The analysis of the documents has shown the following results:

- The most debated cluster of contents is the one related to group identity. Between 20% and 50% of the documents contain topics and discussions about group identity in one form or another.
- Only a few sources have a clear intent of discrediting other groups.
- References to moral obligation and sowing discord are present in a minority of documents.
- Religiously inspired terrorism, propaganda and ideology are core elements.
- Most of the sources talk predominantly about religious topics.
- Very few references to Judaism compared to much more references to Christianity.

As for emotions, the most recurrent emotions are spirituality, hatred and desire, followed by action, anger, forgiveness, repulsion and satisfaction.

1.4.3.1.2   Far-Right extremism analysis

A total of 63,500 documents were collected for this case in the CICERO project. Most of the documents and RSS-based articles gathered come from a web crawl for websites and social media channels. The analysis of the documents has shown the following results:

- The most debated cluster of contents is the one related to group identity.
- Around 30% of the sources have a clear intent of discrediting other groups and underling moral obligation.

- A clear minority of documents refers to sowing discord between groups (around 5%).
- Very few documents deal with religious motivations (2,5%), although targets of attacks are very often religious sites (a confirmation of similarities with Islamic terrorism).
- Attacks on civilians and properties.
- Hatred and repulsion towards some categories (Muslims, socialists, immigrants).
- High correlation with religion and belief topics as well as explicit mentions of recruitment and radicalisation, probably because Far Right groups tends to assimilate Islam and terrorism.
- Only the Web search (using Google) results for anti-immigration also discuss Islam as a topic, because in Far-Right extremist narratives, immigration is sometimes presented as an Islamic invasion.
- Web search results using Google and keywords strongly associated with core themes of white supremacy propaganda discuss Judaism and Christianity.

As for emotions, the most recurrent emotions are hatred, action and desire, followed by spirituality, anger and repulsion.

Far-Right sources tend to stress negative emotions like hatred but also 'neutral' emotions like impoliteness, desire and success. The case of impoliteness is interesting and probably associated with the anti-political-correctness movement. By contrast, some Italian sources have not shown significant signs of extremist content based on our analysis, showing negative emotions like fear rather than hatred.

1.4.3.1.3 Far-Left extremism analysis

About a thousand documents from far-left sources have been gathered and analyzed in the CICERO project. Most of the documents and RSS-based articles gathered come from a web crawl for websites and social media channels. Below are the main results:

- References to the anarchist sphere and to the categories of "Marxism-Leninism" and "anti-fascism".
- The main discussed topics regarded left-wing and anarchist extremist activities and about terrorist attacks on civilians and properties.
- Variety of other topics: politics, judicial trials, release of prisoners, labour, government, direct democracy, and communism.
- Targeting this group is crucial to address a wide range of grievances and issues related to all these areas possibly focusing on the importance of European liberal democratic values.

As for emotions, the most recurrent emotions are hatred, action and desire, followed by spirituality, anger, repulsion, satisfaction and forgiveness.

The most recurrent topics about religious and both extremist and non-extremist content related to the extreme-left narratives are: key terrorist groups, religious belief, religious conflict, recruitment. It is worth noting that none of the sources refers to religions other than Christianity, which means other religions do not constitute issues or grievances for people discussing left-extremism within the sample.

Table 2 below summarises the findings

Extremism / Category	Islamist extremism	Far-Right extremism	Far-Left extremism
Group identity	Between 20-50% of documents	Most debated cluster of contents	Reference to anarchism, Marxism-Leninism and anti-fascism
Discredit other groups	Only a few sources	Around 30% of sources	-
Moral obligation	Reference in a minority of documents	Around 30% of sources	-
Discord between groups	Reference in a minority of documents	Around 5% of sources	-

Category / Extremism	Islamist extremism	Far-Right extremism	Far-Left extremism
Core elements/topics	Religiously inspired terrorism Propaganda Ideology	Attacks on civilians and properties (mostly religious sites) Repulsion and hatred towards specific categories of people (Muslims, socialists, immigrants)	Attacks on civilians and properties Politics Judicial topics Democracy and government Communism
Reference to (other) religions	Predominant reference to Christianity A few references to Judaism	A few references to religious motivation (2,5% documents)	Only reference to Christianity
Most recurrent emotions	1. **Spirituality** 2. Hatred 3. Desire	1. **Hatred** 2. Action 3. Desire	1. **Hatred** 2. Action 3. Desire

1.5 Foreseen future improvements

The state of the art of the semantic analysis of textual contents concerns the definition of rule-based algorithms for extracting information relevant to a given domain and for recognizing topics related to pre-defined taxonomies. The primary result of this process is the production of one or more semantic engines that allow the extraction of the main information and entities from a text.

The evolution of the semantic analysis could involve the analysis of texts characterized by particular writing styles, such as acronyms, slang words, abbreviations, and words out of the formal vocabulary. In addition, writing style is a peculiar characteristic of the author of a text that can be indicative of a set of information regarding the author that cannot be recognized by just analysing the content.

The scenario of improvements described above can lead to the definition of two macro-areas of future developments:

•   The Semantic natural language process can be improved to recognize all the obscure words with unclear meanings, such as slang words, acronyms and abbreviations. It will focus on designing and evolving natural language processing (NLP) heuristics, so to enable text analysis with words out of the formal vocabulary.

•   The Stylometric analysis could be used for identifying the diverse socio-cultural styles in writing, so as to recognize the composer of a message or document and group different messages by their style formatting. Such process can normalize different nicknames into a single individual person or a specific group, in order to discover messages related to propaganda activities and proselytes.

The definition of the stylometric features is the result of a deep grammatical study of a given language that can provide a set of hundreds of parameters, containing grammatical usages, peculiar usages (emojis, slangs, etc.) and so on.

Stylometric parameters obtained are encoded with a value representing their relevance within a text. By analyzing an entire dataset of documents, it is possible to retrieve a matrix of features in which each row represents a document while each column contains the related value of a stylometric parameter.

The encoded dataset can be easily used for training machine learning models and/or used with neural network algorithms in order to create classifiers for raising and inferring new information. Indeed, the dataset used for training should be tagged with further information that can be named "target class value", so the resulting classifier will be able to assign a value of the target class to the input text.

Examples of possible target classes can be: Author, Gender, Age Class (20s, 30s, etc…), Mother Language, Nationality, and Deceptive/truthful.

1.5.1 Conclusions and recommendations for practitioners

As the previous sections show, a lot of work has been carried out to study terrorism, its multiple forms and characterizing features. This work embraces different methods and techniques, ranging from literature review and desk research conducted at the academic level to research projects financed under the European framework, to the use of technological solutions to address specific issues (e.g. online text analysis to detect terrorist contents). The authors would like to stem from this to further enhance knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon by the network of security and intelligence practitioners across the EU.

As part of the development of an original way to approach the fight of terrorist narratives, the model hereby presented proposes to exploit the network of pan-European intelligence and security practitioners to develop requirements, standardization needs and expectations on such technologies and tools. The aim is not only to enable the transfer of knowledge, but to promote the adaptation of the technologies used in past research projects so that they are operationally exploitable by practitioners.

In the first place it will be necessary to select the practitioners which are most interested in the discovery and contrast of terrorist narratives, so to represent the nucleus of the working group. Then, the group should be nurtured with the information summarized in this document and participants should be allowed to learn more about any topic or technology described here. After this, the group should engage in a discussion about desires, expected benefits, defects, obstacles and similar themes, at high level. The moderators/guides of the group should then try to summarise the outcomes of the discussion, compile a list of common topics and invite selected representatives (i.e. technology providers) of external research projects to join the discussion, assess feasibility issues and help practitioners clear their minds and resolve doubts. At this point, high-level desires and obstacles may be transduced into proper requirements and needs.

This approach aims to provide the missing link between research projects that develop technologies to find and combat terrorist narratives, and the authorities/practitioners that could actually use those technologies to prevent and fight terrorism.

Disclaimer

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Niger Military Coup

by Joshua Perkins [*]

Background

- The Sahel region of Africa has the fastest growing population in the world. Poverty, food crisis, and armed conflict threaten the area as the number of refugees of internally displaced people reaches <u>over 4.1 million</u>.

- The conflict in Ukraine exacerbates the food crisis in the Sahel region. Russia recently held a Russia-Africa summit where Putin promised to <u>give 6 countries from Africa free grain</u>, to include Mali and Burkina Faso. This comes following Russia's termination of the Black Sea grain deal, which provided 725,000 tons of grain to numerous countries. Russia's offer of free grain for limited countries can be seen as an effort to capitalize on and to curry favor with an already unstable region. Following the French troops withdrawal from Mali, an estimated <u>1,000 Wagner PMC</u> troops filled the void, furthering Moscow's regional influence.

- In 2013, the French military launched Operation Serval <u>to counter jihadist activity</u> in Northern Mali. This operation evolved into the longer lasting Operation Barkhane in August of 2014, which ended in 2022. The impacts of the counter jihadist operations strike a familiarity with US-led counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan. Both operations started with high rates of initial successes but resulted in long conflicts with local security forces unprepared to meet the challenge at hand. The withdrawal of French forces has resulted in instability in the region amidst increasing civilian casualties, with numbers nearly <u>doubling from 2020 to 2021</u>.

- <u>In August 2020 and May 2021</u>, Mali witnessed two military coups. The US and France have contributed with millions of dollars for counterterrorism efforts to Mali, which resulted in Mali's military spending <u>doubling from 2012 figures</u> but other government functions remained weak. Aid from <u>international actors</u> must focus their support toward regional governance in order for Mali to stabilize.

- In January and later September of 2020, Burkina Faso was scene to <u>two coups</u>. Lt Col. Damiba held the first position of power, which was taken by Captain Ibrahim Traore later in 2022. Burkina Faso has spent nearly 80% of its 63 years of independence under military rule. There is a plan to transition to civilian power in 2024, but to ensure that the <u>government stabilizes</u>, <u>focus needs to be given to local communities</u>' involvement in the decision-making process.

- On July 26, 2023, Niger experienced a coup. Since the original deadline of August 6 midnight to reinstate the democratically elected president has passed, leaders of ECOWAS have reconvened to discuss future actions in response to the coup in Niger. A decision was reached to <u>deploy a standby force</u> to the border of Niger if military action was to be pursued. Ivory Coast plans to commit about 850 – 1,100 troops to the force with Nigeria, Benin, and others contributing also. In defiance of ECOWAS, the military junta of Niger have created a new government with a prime minister and a military council.

Introduction

On July 26, 2023, Niger experienced a coup led by General Abdourahamane Tchiani, the head of the presidential guard. The democratically elected president of Niger, Mohamed Bazoum, has been detained since that day.

International condemnation has ensued following the coup. The US decided to pause foreign aid to Niger but emphasized that <u>humanitarian and US personnel</u> aid would continue to be given.

Following the coup, the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) has imposed sanctions on Niger. The effects of such sanctions can be devastating as <u>45% of funding</u> for the country comes from abroad.

Furthermore, ECOWAS has made demands for President Bazoum to be reinstated. A deadline of August 6 at midnight was given but the military junta has failed to comply with the demands. With the deadline having passed, military intervention is being considered using a "standby force." With Ivory Coast, Niger, and other countries contributing to the force, Mali and Burkina Faso reaffirm their stance that military intervention into Niger would be a <u>declaration of war</u> on all three countries.

<u>International support for ECOWAS</u> was given from two of the region's biggest partners, the U.S. and France. The United States emphasized its support for a non-violent course of action which would bring back the deposed president. France has expressed its full support for ECOWAS. Another <u>economic bloc, ECCAS</u>, has given its full support to ECOWAS in its efforts to restore democracy.

Niger: The Sahel region's next domino?

Military leaders have met in Nigeria to discuss plans for action against the usurpers in Niger. Military action will

be considered as a last resort, according to ECOWAS defense chiefs. Nonetheless, a potential military operation is not supported unanimously from those inside and outside of ECOWAS. Algeria and Chad have expressed their concerns of a broader regional war. Likewise, within Nigeria there are doubts about the effectiveness of military action.

In the meantime, Nigeria has responded by cutting power supply to Niger. This has resulted in blackouts for the country under coup. Other measures include sanctions from ECOWAS, the suspension of imports and exports of goods, banks closing, and food prices inflating. General Tchiani is using these actions imposed against the country as fuel to the fire against a wider anti-west sentiment.

The issue of insurgencies also complicates the situation. Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger have seen an expansion of insurgency activity since 2013, when France began conducting counter jihadist operations in the Sahel region. The operations resulted in France withdrawing troops from Mali and setting up future operations in Niger with 1,500 troops.

Relationships between Mali and France have deteriorated since France moved its troops to Niger. Since then, anti-France sentiment has taken root and mass demonstrations have occurred in opposition of Paris. While anti-France sentiment may be organic, current coup government leaders use the resentment to legitimize their power.

Likewise, Burkina Faso has seen a withdrawal of French troops amidst a growing jihadist insurgency in the country. Approximately 40% of the country is under the control of extremist groups. Following the departure of French forces, the military leader has acknowledged Russia as a strategic ally and will continue to receive major weapon shipments from them. Suspicions were cast that Wagner would move into Burkina Faso, as it did in Mali, but the military leader remains adamant that they fight alone.

A pattern is emerging in the Sahel region with Niger this time falling under control of coupists in the past 3 years. Just as in the other regional examples, the coup was followed by explanations featuring strong anti-French and, more broadly, anti-West rhetoric. Showcasing their commitment to coup and to solve their problems without international intervention, Niger has revoked an agreement with France to maintain troops in the country.

Another major gain at stake is the strong US military presence in the country that started to build up since February 2013 to curb expansion of jihadi terrorist organizations into Chad and Gulf of Guinea. Extending over three drone bases with a total of 1100 troops, an order of leaving of American troops would create a security vacuum that would reverse a decade-long gains in countering militant groups and mean no longer training Niger soldiers.

Facing a potential military intervention by ECOWAS, the military junta has sought out aid from PMC Wagner forces to fill a possible security vacuum. The head of Wagner, Yevgeny Prigozhin, has signaled his support of the coup and offered to provide some assistance.

Sadly, making bedfellows with Wagner PMC will do little to increase stability of the region. After French forces left Mali, Wagner filled the void in providing security. In May 2023, reports have circulated about Wagner forces committing atrocities, to include torture, of civilians in Mali.
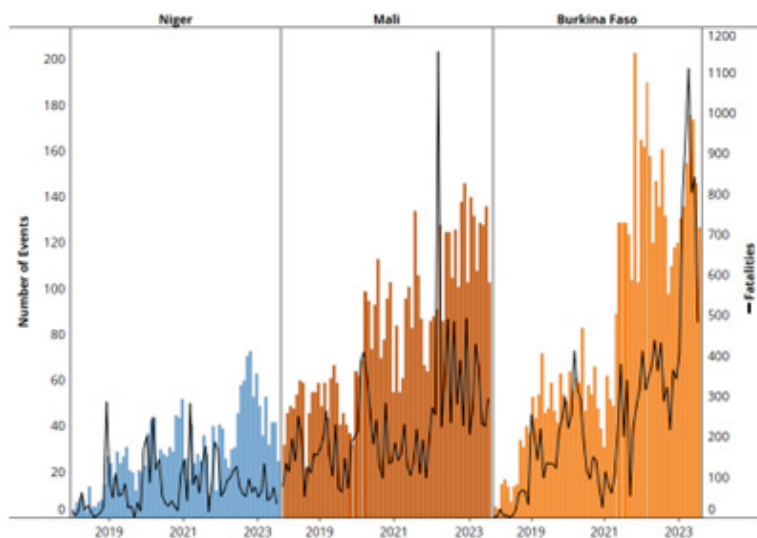

Figure 1: Source ACLE

Wagner's tactics are indiscriminate and often result in high casualties of civilians. For instance, Wagner forces in the Central African Republic have been linked to 70% of battles over mining sites. These attacks have resulted in numerous civilian casualties, with one such attack leaving 42 dead, many of which were civilians. Wagner operations in Mali reveal a worse reality. According to ACLED reporting, upwards of 69% of all Wagner operations result in civilian targeting.

Compared to the violence in Mali and Burkina Faso, the situation in Niger has seen a recent downward trend of civilian targeting by almost 50% in the past six months. As a result of this decrease, there was a decrease in civilian deaths by 16%. While

counterinsurgent operations have recently increased in Niger, it has done so without an increase in civilian violence. Unlike its neighbors, Niger is fairing better in the fight against insurgencies.

Based on the past conduct of Wagner forces in Africa, inviting the private military company into Niger will not improve the security circumstances. Wagner PMC has a pattern of violence against civilians and seizure of resources from the country. Additionally, the price to pay for Wagner security is alleged to be $10 million a month, a costly amount for a country presently reeling from sanctions.

Beyond the possible involvement of Wagner forces in Niger and the prospect of military operation against the military junta, the stakes of military intervention have been raised. Fellow ousted countries, Mali and Burkina Faso, stated that military action would be considered an act of war and offered their troops in solidarity to Niger.

The junta in Niger, despite calls from US, France and regional powers, has not reversed its decision to cede government to the former president. On the contrary, they have decided to prosecute the deposed president for treason. Besides, preparations against a contingent military intervention are underway such as concentration of more troops in the capital and closing of the airspace. Furthermore, the military junta has created a new government establishing Ali Mahaman Lamine Zeine as the prime minister. The junta has also threatened to kill President Bazoum in case of a military intervention.

ECOWAS had led a military force of 7,000 to the border of the Gambia as a show of force to Yahya Jammeh, who refused to step down from power after election in 2017. ECOWAS could be attempting a similar tactic with the use of the standby force. But it should be noted that Niger's military that has been for years trained by the US and French forces is far more superior than that of Gambia.

The size of the standby force has yet to be determined, but Ivory Coast is committing 850 - 1,100 soldiers. Nigeria has a fighting force of over 220,000, a size that is 4 times larger than the military forces of Mali, Burkina Faso, Guinea, and Niger combined. However, while Nigeria has a greater military in terms of size and modern equipment in addition to a lengthy shared border, the country must deal with its internal security. 80% of the states in Nigeria conduct counter insurgency operations against Boko Haram. This means that much of Nigeria's fighting power is actively tied up.

UN backing is being pursued by ECOWAS to legitimize their use of military action. In a previous statement, head of the UN Office in West Africa and the Sahel, Léonardo Santos Simao, has expressed his hopes that military action would not be pursued. In addition, Mr. Simao has stated ECOWAS retains the power to determine what course of action is best. While it seems that the UN Security Council has defaulted to regional authority for the matter, the African Union's Peace and Security Council has decided they are opposed to military intervention.

On Saturday August 19, ECOWAS delegation went to the capital of Niger and talked with the military junta. The delegates also managed to meet with the deposed president, marking the first time since the coup this has happened. Following the meeting, General Tchiani announced that civilian order would be restored in three years. This is the first successful diplomatic talk with the military junta since the coup and it signals a potential for future development.

Conclusion

Proposed military action risks a greater conflict in the Sahel region. Many nations are opposed to the use of force and the AU Peace and Security Council likewise opposes military intervention. With Niger receiving the backing of Mali and Burkina Faso, the stakes are raised to regional war. The impacts of such conflict would leave even more displaced in a region that already has 4.1.

Furthermore, there are complications of using a military force to bring about democracy. While the region has faced numerous coups in recent years, this type of action could send the wrong message and ultimately fail to stabilize regional governments.

Finally, insurgencies have been overtaking the countries in the Sahel. Continued conflict only increases the likelihood of insurgents becoming active in new areas. Wagner's presence in the region is increasingly sought after as a fighting force against insurgencies. The results of such a partnership would lead to more violence against civilians.

Fortunately, diplomatic efforts with a delegation from ECOWAS resulted in a meeting with the military junta, as well as a separate meeting with the deposed president. Following the meeting, General Tchiani announced a planned transition back to civilian power in three years. This may signal the beginning of continued talks between ECOWAS and the military junta. While diplomatic options remain viable, they should be the primary course of action.

Book Review - How Migration Really Works : The Facts About the Most Divisive Issue in Politics by Hein de Haas

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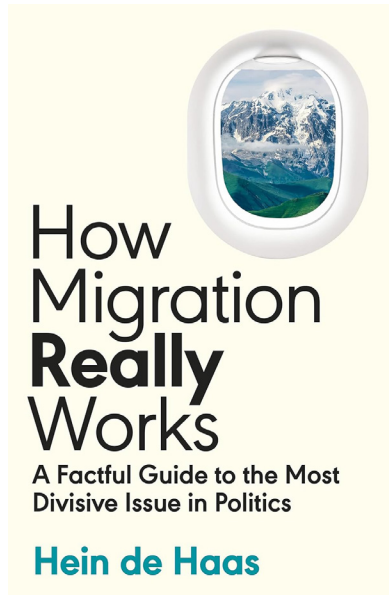
How Migration Really Works by Hein de Haas is a comprehensive and thought-provoking exploration of the realities of global migration. De Haas, a distinguished sociologist and migration expert, delves deeply into the complexities of migration, aiming to dispel common myths and misconceptions that dominate public and political discourse.

The book is a comprehensive analysis of global migration trends, debunking common myths and misconceptions about immigration. The author uses over three decades of research to challenge widely held beliefs from both political spectrums.

He argues that many perceptions about migration are incorrect. In his book, he addresses in total **22 migration myths**, providing evidence and data to counteract false narratives, mostly propagated by both political extremes.

For instance, he notes that global migration is not at an all-time high and that climate change will not lead to mass migration. He also points out that immigration mainly benefits the wealthy and that border restrictions often lead to increased migration rather than reducing it. On the other hand, he discusses how the notion that immigrants undermine the welfare state is unfounded, showing that immigrants often contribute positively to the economy through taxes and other means.

This book comes very timely just before this 'super-elections year' not only in Europe but also in the world, when we see also an increase of political extremes in many countries. It has a potential to have an impact on public opinion if presented well at their level. Immune 2 Infodemic project uses the main findings of de Haas for immunising people against mis/disinformation about migration topic. It created aha moments for many people during the interactive workshops.

My key takeaways from the book can be summarised as follows:

Global Migration Trends: De Haas argues that contrary to popular belief, global migration is not at an unprecedented high. He provides historical context and statistical evidence to show that the proportion of international migrants relative to the global population has remained relatively stable over the past six decades.

Economic and Social Impacts: The book explores how migration often benefits the wealthy more than the general working population. De Haas critically examines the economic contributions of immigrants, dispelling myths about their alleged drain on welfare systems and highlighting their fiscal contributions through taxes.

Border Restrictions and Migration: One of the more paradoxical findings discussed is that stricter border controls can actually increase migration. De Haas explains how restrictive policies often lead to more permanent settlement of migrants who would otherwise move back and forth between countries.

Climate Change and Migration: De Haas addresses the widely held belief that climate change will lead to mass migration. He argues that the impact of climate change on migration is likely to be less dramatic than often portrayed, with most climate-induced displacement occurring within countries rather than across borders.

Migration Myths: Each chapter tackles a specific myth, such as the idea that immigration undermines the welfare state or that migrants primarily move to exploit social benefits. De Haas supports his arguments with robust empirical research and comparative analysis of migration patterns across different regions.

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One of the strengths of the book is its balanced, evidence-based approach for challenging the simplistic and often sensationalist views that dominate public discourse on migration. Despite the complexity of subject matter 'migration', De Haas writes in an accessible and engaging style. He breaks down intricate concepts and data into digestible parts, making the book suitable for both academic audiences and general readers interested in understanding migration beyond media headlines.

The book covers a wide range of topics related to migration, including economic impacts, border policies, climate change, and social integration. By addressing such a broad spectrum of issues, De Haas provides a holistic view of migration that helps readers appreciate its multifaceted nature.

The book's commitment to debunking myths and presenting inconvenient truths might be uncomfortable for readers with strong preconceived notions about migration. This, however, is also one of its strengths, as it encourages critical thinking and informed debate and fosters a more informed and less polarized debate about migration.

In conclusion, How Migration Really Works is a significant contribution to the field of migration studies. Hein de Haas's rigorous and balanced approach provides readers with a detailed, fact-based understanding of one of the most contentious issues in contemporary politics. Its strengths in debunking myths and offering a comprehensive view of migration make it an essential read for anyone interested in the topic. Furthermore, it is a great guide for organisations who aim to depolarise the migration debates which is peaking recently in whole Europe.

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