

[Go to main page News](#) 'Islamist terrorism is the biggest threat in Europe'

'Islamist terrorism is the biggest threat in Europe'

Published: 30 August, 2012, 10:28

Edited: 30 August, 2012, 14:45



Islamist terrorism and the radicalization of young Muslims has taken center stage in Europe. With schools, universities and even sport clubs becoming hotbeds of Islamism, experts argue that some European countries have willingly allowed it.

Claude Monique, an expert on counterterrorism and extremism and the director of the European Strategic Intelligence and Security Center, told RT that while European intelligence was engaged in battling a bigger threat – communism and the former Soviet Union – it ignored what has become a defining threat of the modern age.

RT: *Terrorism in Europe: We've seen acts of terror from Breivik in Norway to Mohamed Merah in Toulouse, and we have also seen riots based on ideology. Based on what you've seen so far, where is the biggest threat coming from?*

Claude Monique: I think that we have three different threats today in Europe. The biggest one clearly is still Islamist terrorism. Why it is the biggest? Because we have a large number, thousands of people involved – not in special interest actions but in extremist actions, and are able to become terrorists in the future. We don't have thousands of such people on the right wing, for instance.

So we have thousands of people who have a very clear political and religious agenda. We have a radicalization process which is ongoing for years now, so I think clearly, Islamist terrorism is the biggest threat in Europe.

After this, we have two different threats. The first one is right-wing terrorism like Breivik, but if we accept the Breivik case, we didn't have real large-scale act of terrorism from the right wing for 20 years.

And the last threat would be the left-wing terrorism. Which for the moment doesn't exist in Europe, but it existed 20 years ago – we have clear signs that in Italy, in Greece, we have some anarcho-Marxist groups at work, but very small and on a very low scale

RT: *Different though their ideologies may be, these three groups are extremes. You mentioned the radicalization process, and how difficult it is to intercept. Where is the radicalization process actually happening? Are we talking about schools, universities, mosques, prisons? How do we identify it?*

CM: Radicalization is going on through different channels. First of all, it is going on in areas, in the cities, in municipalities, in the sports facilities, in the gym clubs, in the football clubs, of course in schools.

So that is the base. After this you have different ways or different places, like prison of course, and universities.

Most of the radicalization is done at a young age and it's done in the streets, it's done in the municipalities, in some schools. When people come to university for instance, those who are radicalized are already radicalized, and the others will probably not be radicalized. It's a minority, we must understand that clearly, radicalization could be a concern of maybe ten to 15 percent of the young Muslims in Europe.

RT: *In terms of the demographic grouping, is there a specific group in a society that is more susceptible to such radicalization?*

CM: It's difficult to say, because we would probably think that a poor young boy who feels excluded is more likely to be radicalized, because it's common sense. But we have also people who have university degrees. We have people who are fully integrated.

If you take for instance the perpetrators of the July 2005 terrorist attack in London, they were fully integrated. One of them was the son of a shop owner, he was working in education, he had a job, he was apparently fully integrated. And he was radicalized.

And if you are in a personal crisis, this crisis being social, being cultural, being familial – a family crisis, a crisis with your girlfriend – you are weak, and you could be radicalized exactly as you could be radicalized in a Christian extremist sect.

RT: *Going back to the biggest threat you mentioned – the Islamic extremism here in Europe. The justice minister of Belgium said that she has been told by the state security that Saudi Arabia is funding around 10 schools in Belgium that are teaching radical Islam. How would you assess this threat?*

CM: We must understand that in a part of Europe – in Belgium, in the Netherlands, in Germany – we have large Muslim communities today, but [those countries] didn't have Muslim colonies in the past.

France had Algeria, Morocco, Tunisia. France has colonies, so most of the Muslims in France came from those ex-colonies

Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany did not have those colonies, so the majority of Muslims came in the 60s and the 70s because most of Europe was in need of workforce to build new infrastructure.

Those people came but everybody at the time thought they would just stay for two years, three years, just for work; after, they will return to their countries. Of course, they didn't.

The Belgians, as the Dutch, didn't understand the problem very well, and they were looking desperately for someone who could help them

And the Saudis told the Belgian authorities: "No problem, we'll take care of it," as they also said to the Netherlands. So they sent money, they sent people, and this was of course a hidden agenda. Their idea was of course to radicalize people.

Islam seems to be a unique thing. It is not a unique thing. You have an Islam of Asia, you have Islam of North Africa, Islam of the Gulf, Sunni, Shiites and so on. And clearly the Wahhabi Islam from Saudi Arabia has nothing to do with the Islam of the Moroccans, of the Turkish.

But this Islam was imposed on those people by the Saudi with the help of the Belgian and Dutch authorities, and this was imposed for 20 years, 25 years. And for 25 years, 30 years, the Saudis were funding, were sending people. For instance, in the Netherlands, in 2003 after the murder of Theo van Gogh, Dutch security monitored all Muslim clerics in the Netherlands and they found that 60 to 70 percent of them were unable to understand, read or speak Dutch.

So very clearly they cannot be a factor of integration. They cannot. They cannot understand the society in which they live, in which their followers live. They cannot help them with good advice, because they don't know. And most of them were coming from outside, from Saudi Arabia or Gulf States, with no knowledge of the language, no knowledge of the society.

RT: *You were in the French intelligence service. Did you or those in the authorities not see that was coming, the signs coming from the Saudi Arabia at the time?*

CM: At the time – this was true for the French intelligence, for the US, for all the Western intelligence – we were not very interested in those cases. The big enemy was the Soviet Union and communism. So, we had no real interest in monitoring Saudi Arabia. It was something going on, but invisible.

RT: *Well, you have, for example, the State Security in Belgium warning against the threat that Saudi Arabia poses in terms of imposing extreme ideology on people in Europe. But on the other hand, Saudi Arabia is painted as an ally of the West. How do you reconcile this?*

CM: The ambiguity of the situation is that the Saudi Arabia is clearly an ally of the West because it was against communism, it was against the former Soviet Union and so on, against Iran today for obvious reasons. So it is an ally, and at the same time, it could be considered an enemy because they have this hidden agenda.

But even inside Saudi society at the highest level, you have two tendencies. In the royal family in Saudi Arabia, you have people who are genuine and honest advocates of working with the West and modernizing Saudi Arabia, and we have other princes saying 'No!,' we must keep, stand firmly in our beliefs, and we are still the Saudi and Wahhabi.

RT: *Looking at what some governments in Europe are doing, for example imposing a ban on the burqa, or minarets or other such laws, do you think they actually work? Or do they just create a backlash from the general Muslim community, who are not extremists?*

CM: Both, I think both. First of all, I think we must help and support the average Muslim guy or woman who is just trying to live a normal life and who wants to have a better future for his or her children. And clearly those people are demanding that we take a firm position against the extremists.

They are worried for their children. When you are a Muslim parent in Belgium or France, and you see Muhammed Merah and you see that a young boy of 21, 22 had bad connections, went to an extremist mosque, or wanted to go to Pakistan, I suppose you're afraid and you want the help of the state. And the help of the state is to set some limits.

At the same time, very clearly, it is a way of radicalization for some people. But these people would be radicalized anyway. It's just an occasion, it's just a pretext, but if it is not the burqa, it will be the obligation of Halal food in the school; if it is not this, it will be the mixing of boys and girls in school, or another subject. But a part of this community is moving to radicalization, the ten to 15 percent. The question is how to protect the rest, and of course how to contain the extremists.

© Autonomous Nonprofit Organization "TV-Novosti", 2005 - 2011. All rights reserved.