

IZZIVI IRAŠKE, SIRSKE IN LIBIJSKE KRIZE ZA EVROPSKO UNIJO

CHALLENGES POSED BY THE IRAQI, SYRIAN AND LIBYAN CRISIS TO THE EUROPEAN UNION

Povzetek Leta 2016 in predvsem 2017 so se na kriznih območjih Bližnjega vzhoda in Severne Afrike pojavile nekatere pozitivne spremembe. Spodbuden dogodek je bila uspešna akcija iraških in pešmerskih sil, ki jih podpira zahodna koalicija, proti tako imenovani Islamski državi, katere rezultat je bila izguba ozemlja ekstremističnih organizacij. Avtor analizira vidike kriznih območij, in sicer Iraka, Sirije in Libije, ki se nanašajo na posledice nerešenega vprašanja migrantov. Poleg kriznih območij predstavlja tudi situacijo tujih borcev in varnostna tveganja, ki jih povzročata njihova vrnitev v domovino. Navaja ukrepe, ki so jih sprejele EU in njene države članice, da bi preprečile in obvladale grožnjo, ki jo predstavlja vračanje tujih borcev.

Ključne besede *Bližnji vzhod, Evropska unija, migracije, Sirija, Libija, tuji borci.*

Abstract In 2016, but mainly in 2017 some positive changes happened in the crisis areas of the Middle East and North Africa. Encouraging event was the successful actions of Iraqi and Peshmerga forces supported by the western coalition against the so called Islamic State, the result is the loss of territory of the extremist organizations. The author analyzes the perspectives of the crisis areas, namely Iraq, Syria and Libya, referring to the effects of the unresolved migrant issue. Besides the two crisis zones, he also presents the situation of foreign fighters and the security risks posed by their return. He specifies the measures taken by the EU and its member states to avert and handle the threat represented by returning foreign fighters.

Key words *Middle-East, European Union, migration, Syria, Libya, foreign fighters.*

Introduction

The Middle East and North Africa have undergone significant changes since 2011. These changes occurred in political, economical, social and demographic aspects, accompanied by system-changes, civil wars and other violent conflicts. In consequence, the relative regional stability has ceased to exist or at least has been severely shaken. New “fault lines” emerged, alongside which the global and regional powers are making efforts to assert their own interests, while the new changes affect also the countries outside the region. I do not use the expression of “Arab spring” because this is far away from spring; anyway this remark is not used in the Middle East at all. I am convinced that the expression Arab changes can better characterize the situation in general terms, but the phenomenon is different and each country treats it in a different way. The Arab changes have caused several failed states. Syria has been destroyed, Yemen is in a civil war, Iran strives for regional hegemony, Iraq and Libya are far away from stability, and Lebanon is in existential dilemma. Turkey is on the way of Islamization and the ambitions of president Erdoğan have polarized its population. World powers try to dominate the region through investments and military forces.

On those territories where the leading political and military roles have been taken over not by state actors, ethnical, tribal and sectarian dividedness has appeared, disrupting national unity. The so created security vacuum has been filled by jihadist groups, threatening the whole region and even the outside world. The three largest regional crises zones affecting Europe are Iraq, Syria and Libya. The armed conflicts evolved in these zones have huge human, social and economic impacts. According to UN data, the number of victims in Syria is over 400,000, the unemployment rate is 52%; approximately 45% of inhabitants left their home, the number of IDPs (internally displaced people) amounts to 6.4 million. (SCPR 2016) About 4.5 million people escaped to Lebanon, Turkey and Jordan, which has imposed a great burden on the social and economic situation of these countries. The refugees have reached also Europe, bringing about the greatest refugee wave since the Second World War, testing the solidarity of the Europeans.

The fall of Qaddafi regime resulted in tearing apart some Libyan territories and causing the setting up of hostile groups and tribes, entailing several-intensity conflicts. A violent combat began for the power, natural resources, further destabilizing the Libyan situation. Also here, ISIS tried filling the created vacuum. Its intention is quite evident: strengthening its presence in Libya, destabilizing the country, obtaining strong economic positions, primarily in the oil industry. Its presence is dangerous also for Europe for several reasons. It is deployed close to Europe, fuels the refugee wave flooding towards Europe, and last but not least, after its weakening process taking place in Iraq and Syria, it seeks to find another territory for its redeployment. The migration crisis and the terrorist attacks in Europe forced the European authorities to devote greater attention to the migrants, the jihadist threat, and especially to the radicalization.

Despite the similarities, the Syrian and the Libyan conflicts are different in many respects; therefore it is essential for us to determine their specific features. In Syria,

the great and medium-sized powers have sometimes conflicting interests; and there are several armed groups that confront each other. In addition, the present and the future of the Kurds are still very uncertain. By contrast, in Libya there is some willingness for reconciliation and dialogue, although the illegal arms and man-trade, the jihadist propaganda, the dissatisfaction of the youth and the increasing presence of ISIS cannot be ignored.

We need a clear understanding concerning refugees, asylum-seekers, migrants, illegal migrants and foreign terrorist fighters. Many people leave their country in search for a better life, to have a better job. These are migrants. Refugees and asylum-seekers are those who are forced to flee because of wars, human rights violations, and persecutions. Asylum seeking is a basic human right. The expression illegal migrant is not accepted in many countries because people cannot be illegal. Instead of this some countries use the idiom undocumented immigrants or unauthorized immigrants. In my paper I do not deal with migration only with foreign fighters. The phenomenon of foreign fighters is neither new nor uniquely Islamic. I deal actually with the return of foreign fighters to Europe from the Iraqi and Syrian war. They went there for ideological or religious reasons, gained war experiences. Those who come back to Europe represent a serious security risk because they can organize terror attacks, radicalize people or help in finding would be terrorists.

1 THE IRAQI AND SYRIAN SITUATION

Since 2013, the frontlines have been more or less stabilized in both countries. In Iraq the liberation of Mosul will be crucial in 2017. It is an important task for the coalition forces to prevent the fleeing of the ISIS terrorists to Syria. In Iraq three main ethnic groups are engaged in the conflict: Sunni Arabs, who have been in control for decades and do not accept the change in the authority, the Shias who want to enforce the changes and the Kurds who do not regard themselves as Iraqis. The question of the future is how these people could be able to live together in one country in peace.

Situation is far more worst in Syria. The country can be divided in four parts: territories ruled by the regime, decreasing ISIS areas, territories controlled by the Kurds, and several areas being in the hands of several opposition forces. It is necessary to note that Syria – before the civil war – could be historically divided in two parts. One extended west of the Damascus-Aleppo axis and the other was in the east. The difference between the two can be contributed to their development level in favor of western territories. In order to really understand the Syrian power relations, it is necessary for us to point out that the country has always been ruled by a strong central power. Syria has been interwoven by many state institutions providing basic social and public services, and building the necessary infrastructures. In the less developed areas, the government ensured also working places, in the absence of a viable private sector. However, from 2005, under Assad's rule, this situation changed, the role of government diminished, the regime failed to make appropriate investments, and gave over the responsibility to the private sector to provide the population with basic

necessities. Developments slowed down dangerously, and when the government recognized it was already too late. Nevertheless, it tried to remedy the situation. In 2011, some weeks after the Tunisian and Egyptian revolutions, Bashar el Assad – with a three-decade delay – started the works of 3 million USD to divert the Tigris River, which would have made it possible for the peasants to irrigate arable lands, giving job for several thousand citizens. However, by 2016, according to Syrian sources, the war losses reached 255 billion USD, the Syrian GDP fell to the half of that in 2010, the proportion of unemployed citizens exceeded the half of active population, the poverty rate amounted to 85%. (Narbone, L. – Favier. A. 2016)

A very serious consequence of the war was the drastic split of the country, which will certainly determine Syria's future. The torn-apart territories are characterized by the following features:

- The areas controlled by the regime include the richer part of Syria. Alongside the Damascus-Aleppo axis (on the western territories), there is a relatively decent life, encompassing the coastline as well. There are some settlements out of state control, but the biggest problem after the reoccupation is the rebuilding of towns. In Aleppo (the largest Syrian city) it was not accidental that there were conducted violent combats for ruling the whole town. The situation has become more complicated by the fact that also the al Nusra Front occupied a small area in the eastern part of the city.¹ This area has been less damaged during the war and is of high importance from political, economic and cultural standpoint owing to the fact that it is much more developed compared to other areas. Aleppo suffered a significant loss of people, buildings and services. This has a serious impact on the return of refugees and IDPs. The Syrian government actually has no refugee policy.
- The war has not ruined the territories alongside the coastline (Tartus and Lattakia and their vicinity), therefore many IDPs moved there, upsetting this territory's ethnical balance, so the Alevite population can get easily into minority. Thanks to its relative richness, this region can become in the future a starting point for a rebuilding process, after the war.
- The most fertile territories, alongside the Euphrates River and the roads leading to Iraq, belong presently to ISIS. There are situated the oil-rich Deir ez Zor and Rakka, the capital of ISIS, and the scene of fierce fights, after the occupation of Mosul. The expected loss in 2017 of Rakka will represent (also ideologically) a very heavy loss for the terrorist organization.
- The third territory consists of the eastern part of Syria and a strip situated west of Aleppo, under the rule of the Kurdish PKK wing, the Democratic Union Party. Here, the majority of inhabitants are Kurds, and in some other peripheral areas, they represent the largest minority. It is necessary to note that the Kurds do not live only in this region, but several thousand of them have residence also in Damascus and Aleppo.

¹ *The al Nusra Front changed its name in summer of 2017. Its new name: Fatah as-Sam. According to its declaration, it has broken with al-Qaida, but we cannot prove this.*

- The fourth part is occupied by several opposition groups, among them also the al-Qaida-associated al Nusra Front as well. While the first three territories are directly connected and relatively continuous, that is not the case with the areas ruled by opposition groups.

In the last three years, the three above territories have practically broken away from the regime-ruled areas, and they established new administrative system and governance. The traditional economic communities have disappeared, the investors left the region, the trade and transport networks are in ruins. New institutions have come into existence, composed primarily of locals, who earlier had fought against the central leadership. The new institutions are at issue both with each other and the government, for example they have introduced at least four types of teaching and curriculum at the schools, as well as three types of currency. The Kurds have initiated numerous projects and framed many new laws in the areas under their rule. ISIS is levying taxes, carrying out investments and operates a strong police. Opposition groups have established on their territories several organs (councils) and administrative bodies, which deal with distributing foods and aids, as well as operating hospitals.²

It worth examining the type of relations existed between local administrative bodies and armed groups. In this regard, there are two opposite tendencies: cooperation and confrontation. At the beginning of the conflict, local armed groups supported the establishment of councils. The cause of this basically was that local armed groups were organized first of all from locals, who liberated the given territory. They had similar endeavors and relied on the local social system. The members of Free Army had no intention to take over the power from the local councils. However, later, as the conflict extended, the armed groups needed more and more arms and equipment, therefore they made efforts to build up their own governing structure. They even aimed at taking over the local administration and the distribution of several aids and foods, which elicited the population's sympathy. Simultaneously, several new phenomena appeared also inside the opposition: corruption, dilettantism and heavy internal debates.

All these clearly indicate the challenges the Syrians have to face after the war. One of the biggest challenges is the decentralization, mainly the Kurdish situation or "isolation". A great amount of mistrust has accumulated between certain regions and settlements. The desire for local autonomy has emerged not only among the Kurds, and not only in one or two regions, but throughout the country. It is exactly the desire for autonomy that prevents the opposition groups from uniting their forces. There is also another serious problem connected with decentralization, and that is the distribution of resources. It is not only a Syrian "specialty" that sometimes the territories which are rich in resources are at the same time the poorest regions.

² *The number of local councils has doubled since 2012, we heard about 800 such councils in 2015. Their functioning is dependent upon foreign supporters.*

It is unlikely that these territories will accept the rule of Damascus. For example, the development of Kurdish territories can be speeded up by making use of the oil resources. The locals – even before the appearance of ISIS – accused Damascus of stealing their oil in Deir ez-Zor. However, it would be a naivety to think that Damascus will give up the oil wells in favor of the regions. The situation has become more complicated also due to the fact that the minorities are afraid of Islamism; the Kurds of the Arabs; the Christians of the Kurds and the Sunni Arabs. It would be very difficult to forecast how a future government will be able to handle these contradictions.

2 LIBYA

The Libyan situation has been characterized by the dynamics of continuous religious fights, by the wars for oil and conflicts among the tribes, nationalist endeavors, as well as by the mutual effects of all these factors. (Varvelli, A. 2016)

Despite the repeated attempts and the international mediation and support, the Libyans have been unable to set up a functioning government, which has certainly exercised a negative impact not only on the region, but also on Europe, primarily through the migration crisis originating from Libya. The General National Congress convened in 2012 and the new parliament elected in 2014 has failed to produce success. There are two parliaments and two governments (in Tripoli and al Bayda) competing with each other for their acceptance and recognition. In order to put an end to this institutional crisis, the UN established in 2014 its Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL). Its objectives included the establishment of a unity government, the conclusion of an agreement among the rival fractions, the introduction of confidence building measures, and naturally, the elaboration and implementation of a comprehensive ceasefire agreement. (UNSMIL 2015)

In my assessment, it was a big mistake that the participants have not involved the influential armed (militant) groups in the settlement process, by saying that they were elaborating only a political agreement. The omission of opposition representatives has resulted in an inability to implement the objectives. Immediately after the beginning of the settlement process, local forces tried to take over the lead. In the wake of the 2014 elections, the new House of Representatives made attempt at eliminating the dividedness. It set up in Tobruk the “internationally recognized” parliament and a new government. However, 20 members of the re-elected House of Representatives were not willing to occupy their seats in the parliament. Also in Tripoli, the parliament nominated a new government, thus the dividedness intensified. In the meantime, also the military tensions intensified, and new fights began among the warriors supporting the different institutions. These fights have led to a humanitarian crisis and caused several thousand citizens to leave their home. According to UN assessment, “the Libyan situation has been characterized by the lack of rule of law, continuous combats among rival armed groups, daily attempts, tortures and kidnappings”. Since 2014, there have been continuous fights for obtaining natural resources and

local infrastructures. These fights have claimed the life of several thousand people, including civilians. About 435,000 locals escaped, the basic infrastructure has been ruined, the essential services have stopped functioning and the living standards have drastically deteriorated. (UNHCR 2015) This situation relates mainly to 2014. Since then, the struggle is continued in some special, but strategically important fields. It is the local fighters that take part in the combat, the participation of foreign fighters is not significant, except those who are deployed in the southern areas to fight for the possession of raw material resources. The rival armed groups erected many checkpoints, which is making the travelling very difficult.

As regards the Libyan settlement process, experts are of the opinion that there is an urgent need for local or regional mediation by such actors that have not been involved in the Libyan war. It was in this spirit that a conference took place in the Tunisian Djerba in 2015, organized by the German ministry of foreign affairs, with the support of the Peace Research Institute Oslo, with the participation of UNSMIL as observer.

From the prospective of European security, the strict control of the Tunisian and the Libyan borders are extremely important to avoid terrorism support, smuggling and organized criminal acts (including human smuggling). Before the Arab changes, these borders had been relatively safe, even if the black market flourished there. In the wake of the fall of Ben Ali and Qaddafi, the frontiers were not protected and violence became an everyday event. State control over the militias came to an end. Instead the state, non-state actors took over the lead. After 2014, a violence spiral raged, and the security vacuum was quickly filled by ISIS, particularly in Sirte and Sabrata that is close to the Tunisian border. (Meddeb, H. 2016) The ISIS members made their best to assist the jihadists arriving from Tunisia, especially after 2013, when the Ennahda government prohibited the activity of the az Ansar al Sharia Tunisian, Salafist, jihadist organization. ISIS plays an active role also in smuggling drugs, arms and alcohol. For lack of appropriate control, the border zone has become a good “hunting field” for the rivaling militias.

The Tunisian authorities – with special regard to the 2015 Sousse terrorist attack – have significantly strengthened the border, nearly making it a fortress. However, we have to emphasize in this respect that before the Arab Spring, the authorities had practically neglected the protection of this border section, as the Libyan side had been strictly controlled by the Qaddafi militia. Currently, the Tunisian side is relatively well-protected. However, this is not the case at all on the Libyan side, and we cannot expect any improvement in this regard, before the settlement of the internal Libyan crisis. All this has undoubtedly a detrimental effect on European security, since Libya is the most important route for the African refugees.

From a military point of view it is worthy of attention that the United States has opened a new front in August 2016 in Libya, codenamed as Odyssey Lightning against ISIS, with the purpose to assist the internationally recognized government in its fight against the terrorist organization. The commanders coordinate their operations with

all of the efforts made by several organizations to fight against the Afghan Taliban, the local and the Iraqi ISIS. The United States provided the Libyan government with intelligence data and conducted air strikes on ISIS positions. (Pomerleau, M. 2016) It supports the operation also from Tunisia. To that end, in virtue of an agreement, it deployed American soldiers to Tunisia, where the cooperation is focused mainly on exchanging intelligence information.

3 PROBLEMS WITH THE FOREIGN FIGHTERS

The Middle East crisis zones have – among others – two negative impacts on Europe: they flood Europe with migrants and “send” foreign fighters to Europe, whose number is likely to increase after the war. For these problems to be properly handled, it would be necessary – in my opinion – for EU states to pay greater attention to the following persons and events:

- Persons who travel to the crisis zones and combat as foreign fighters;
- Those who go to the crisis areas get military training and combat experiences and return to the EU member states;
- Connections between foreign fighters and terrorist attacks;
- Persons who wanted to go to the crisis zones, but were prevented from doing so, but are willing to commit terrorist attempts. In this regard, we have to deal with the risk that the returned fighters can help also the lone wolfs by their experiences and can assist in activating sleeping cells. This possibility has been emphasized also in the Europol 2015 TE-SAT report. (EU TE-SAT 2015)

The problems of foreign fighters came up first in 2012, after many fighters had travelled first to Syria, then to Iraq to combat against Assad or participate in the Iraqi combats. Between September 2014 and September 2015, 30,000 persons travelled to the crisis areas from 104 countries. (Carlin, J. P. 2015) Their travel and terrorist activities directly affected some European countries. They organized or executed terrorist attacks there, or used some countries in Europe as transit country for the fighters who were the citizens of another European country and planned to departure to the operational areas. In 2014, among their motivations had a significant role their desire to help establishing the Islam Caliphates and the “adoration” of the utopist Islamist propaganda pursued to that end. We have to mention also the other motivations such as the thirst for adventure, the possibility to participate in combats, and the religious fervor. If we analyze the radicalized persons, we can note that the anti-West feelings had also a role. Other individual motivations were the fear of being punished for some criminal act, marginalization and the desire for belonging to a terrorist organization.

A Serbian expert colleague told me that from his country also gypsies went to Syria, and the jihadist recruiters are active also in the Serbian gypsy communities. He also mentioned that he learned from some Dutch reports that the foreign fighters, who are in the operational areas, try to pursue recruiting activity inside their circle of acquaintances.

Foreign fighters use primarily their own identification documents, but also false papers. Several countries, among others Czech Republic indicated that some Bosnian citizens bound for Germany used false identification cards. It happens – although sporadically – that they use the documents of dead people. The foreign fighters first enter generally Turkey. However, according to Polish authorities, when they return from Syria, they sometimes choose the Istanbul-Belgrade-Madrid-Warsaw route. I am of the opinion that they will follow the above practice also in the future.

Foreign fighters began appearing in Syria in 2012, still before the setting up of ISIS. Between September 2014 and September 2015, their number drastically increased and reached 30,000 persons. They arrived from 104 countries. Experts warned at that time that this phenomenon will pose a real threat to Europe and also to other regions. (Van Ginkel, B. – Entenmann, E. 2016) From among the EU member states, the main originating countries are: Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Germany, Netherlands, Spain and Great Britain. The Europol 2016 TE-SAT report assesses the number of fighters coming from the EU as 5,000 persons. (EU TE-SAT 2016) The data (as in general) cannot be considered as really precise and authentic, even if they are confirmed by several sources. The reason for this is that member states determine differently the definition of foreign fighters. It has happened e. g. that they confused the foreign fighters with the terrorists, neglecting the fact that not every foreign fighter is at the same time a terrorist. Sometimes, the authorities have no precise data, or do not make distinction among those fighters who are in operational areas, who have already returned or are dead. Two countries, Greece and Hungary don't provide data, thus these are missing from the joint EU database. Most foreign fighters come from Belgium, France, Germany and Great Britain. If we count them in proportion to the population, most of them are from Belgium. (In the examined period, 2,838 persons derive from the above four countries.) From among the all foreign fighters 30% returned to their home; and 14% of them died. Most fighters (near 100%) are from great cities or from the surrounding areas. The proportion of women fighters is 17%. About 6-24% of foreign fighters converted to Muslim religion. We have no information about whether some of them are or not citizens of more than one country. However, we have information about their very quick radicalization, which is confirmed by the Europol 2016 TE-SAT report as well. (EU TE-SAT 2016) At the beginning, ISIS tried to entice the radicals by an intensive propaganda campaign and deterred the foreign fighters from returning to their home country. (If somebody did so, he was severely punished.) ISIS allows the women fighters to travel alone, which is in stark contrast to the al-Qaida's "order", according to which they can travel only with a companion. However, when the women enter ISIS territory, they have to obey this order. Many women go out to join their husband, but some of them would like to get married abroad. ISIS rigorously expects the women to obey their husband and educate their children according to ISIS ideology. They have to proudly tolerate the hardships in the operational area, and also the eventual death of their husband. They can receive armed trainings, and are expected to make service as nurses to treat the wounded fighters. Foreign fighters can have – besides their wife – woman slaves and can "use" them sexually as well. These slaves are not Muslims, demonstrating

to the Muslim wives that they occupy a higher rank in the community. Women have important role in radicalization, recruitment and implementation of auxiliary (e. g. financial) tasks. As I mentioned, they got military training, but in general, they do not participate in combats.

There are foreign fighters not only in ISIS, but also in the ranks of the Jabhat al Nusra Front. Authorities have revealed such fighters in Netherlands, Finland, and Great Britain. Their favorite terrorist method was to deploy VBIED (vehicle borne improvised explosive device).

From the second half of 2016, less and less foreign fighters travelled to the crisis zones. This can be contributed to the intensification of coalition attacks, the severe counter-terrorist measures and last but not least to the ISIS's weakening, especially in 2016. In 2015, about five fighters returned every month to Netherlands. Spain has also submitted reports to Europol on the diminishing number of foreign fighters. As regards Italy, there was not any change to this effect.

However, foreign fighters travel not only to Iraq and Syria, but also to Afghanistan, Chechnya, Libya, Mali, Somalia and Yemen; and their number is not diminishing. (At least this was the case in 2015; I had no data on 2016 at my disposal when I prepared this study.)

It has turned out that the attempts committed in Paris and Brussels have been carried out on the basis of foreign experiences. This can be proved also by the fact that also the al-Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula participated in preparing the perpetrators for the attempt against Charlie Hebdo.

3.1 EU initiatives to meet the challenges posed by foreign fighters

The EU counter-terrorism strategy covers also this problem in such a way that it takes into consideration the special features of this issue. The essence of this strategy is: prevent, protect, pursue and respond. Although it was adopted in 2005, it has been applied to foreign fighters only from 2014. It was the meeting of EU interior and justice ministers where a decision was taken on applying the new strategy also to foreign fighters. The main elements of this decision were the following: preventing radicalization and extremism, pursuing effective information exchange (also with third countries), revealing the preparation of extremists for going abroad to become foreign fighters. As regards the information exchange, it was an important step the establishment of the European Counter-terrorism Center in the Hague, in the framework of Europol, in January 2016. The EU improved also its cooperation with third countries, particularly with the countries bordering Syria and Iraq. Still in 2013, it improved also the Schengen Information System, in such a way to make it possible for the border guards and security forces to quickly obtain update information on suspected foreign fighters. In 2015, the EU interior and justice ministers adopted a directive on punishing more severely the extremists who received terrorist training, and those who participate in financing

terrorism. All these measures have – without doubt – enhanced, to a great extent, the efficiency of the joint efforts against foreign fighters.

In sum, the EU has taken the following measures to avert the threat posed by foreign fighters. (Van Ginkel, B. – Entenmann, E. 2016)

Time	Event
2005	Nominating an EU counter-terrorist coordinator
2005 Nov.	Adopting EU counter-terrorism strategy
2011 Sep.	Establishing EU network for monitoring radicalization
2013 Jul.	22-point proposal by EU interior and justice ministers for keeping an eye on foreign fighters
2014 Aug.	Decision of EU interior and justice ministers on suppressing the activity of foreign fighters; preventing the acts of extremist persons; pursuing information exchange with third countries; disclosing and preventing suspicious travels, and taking procedures against foreign fighters
2015 Jan.	Riga meeting of the above EU ministers aimed at elaborating a counter-terrorism strategy concerning Syria and Iraq, with special attention to foreign fighters
2015 Feb.	Declaration of EU Council on the fight against terrorism. Its main elements: protecting citizens and EU values, preventing radicalization, cooperating with foreign partners
2015 Jun.	Adopting EU internal security strategy: 2015–2020
2015 Jul.	Setting up the EU Referral Unit (EU IRU). (It is fully operational from 01 Jul 2016.)
2015 Oct.	Taking a binding resolution by the European Parliament on the importance of a joint EU strategy on preventing extremists from being radicalized and recruited to become foreign fighters
2015 Nov.	Elaborating proposals by EU institutions on preventing radicalization and extremist activities leading to terrorism
2015 Dec.	Approving a proposal by EU interior ministers on preparing air passenger lists, which has been later adopted by the European Parliament
2016 Jan.	Opening the European Counter-terrorism Center in the Hague

3.2 Measures taken on national level

In the wake of EU measures, also such nations took preventive steps that were less affected by the activities of foreign fighters and eventual terrorists, but found it important to prevent radicalization and terrorist acts. They have taken even such serious measures that entailed expatriation as well. Under the effect of the Paris attempts, several countries – in the spirit of combating transnational crimes – have strengthened their security and intelligence organizations. They have increased the severity of border guarding and introduced a new record system and a new investigation procedure. 22 states qualified the participation in terrorist groups as a criminal act; 23 member states labeled the propagation of terrorist attacks as a punishable activity, and 20 of them punish also the recruitment of terrorists. The participation in terrorist training is considered to be a criminal act in 23 member states. At the same time, the travelling abroad to become foreign fighter constitutes a crime only in nine member states, but they are going to punish also this activity.

I am firmly convinced that, besides the general national measures, it would be necessary for each nation to elaborate a concrete comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy, since the threat level is different in each country, especially in terms of radicalism and extremism. Also the prevention can be realized primarily at national level. Even the counter-terrorist training, the treatment of extremists released from prisons and the handling of returned foreign fighters can be efficiently carried out only at national level.

Conclusion The two large crisis zones in the Middle East (Syria and Libya) have been exercising a significant negative impact on the whole region and Europe as well. There are three essential factors that are certainly connected with each other: the Syrian and Iraqi conflicts, the refugee wave and the intensification of terrorist acts in Europe. The loss of territory if the so called Islamic State contributed to the growing number of terrorist attack in Europe in 2017. The year of 2016 was characterized mainly by military rather than diplomatic initiatives, which has not brought nearer a real solution to the conflicts. Disagreements between the great powers have only increased rather than diminished. The NATO-member Turkey has been making consultation rather with Russia and not with the United States, probably owing to the Kurd issue. It would be an interesting event if Turkey were to begin negotiations on joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization; in the case it could not pursue its talks with the EU.

The greatest challenge in Europe is represented by the refugee wave, which is likely to continue for a long time, if Europe does not take really effective counter-measures to prevent illegal migration. However, migration itself can be attributed to too many factors, thus, it is nearly impossible to put an end quickly to this phenomenon.

Besides the Syrian and Iraqi crisis, also the Libyan internal chaos severely influences the European migration situation. Unfortunately, there is no any sign in Libya of some real reconciliation among the confronting parties. Therefore, also the EU is incapable to have substantial talks with Libya.

In 2016 the international coalition has taken effective measures against ISIS, and as a consequence, the size of territories occupied by the terrorist organization has been significantly reduced. This process will certainly continue also in 2017, and we hope that the radical forces will be pushed into background in the region.

Simultaneously with the weakening of radical militant forces in the Middle East, an opposite process can begin in Europe, where the activity of returning foreign fighters and European extremists may become much more intensive. If this comes really true, the number of terrorist attempts committed in Europe will probably increase. A bad news is that the majority of terrorist attack in Europe is committed by people born in Europe, some of them having European citizenship.

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