



PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN  
ASSEMBLEE PARLEMENTAIRE DE LA MEDITERRANEE  
برلمان البحر الأبيض المتوسط

## **Radicalised individuals committing terrorist acts on European soil**

### ***The question of their surveillance and the legislations governing expulsions and public opinion's reaction to attacks***

*Disclaimer: this background note was prepared by PAM researchers in their personal capacity. The opinion expressed in the note are the author's own and do not reflect the view of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM)*

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## **Introduction**

On the 13<sup>th</sup> of October 2023, Dominique Bernard, a French literature teacher, was stabbed to death in the car park of the Gambetta High School in Arras, France, echoing the assassination 3 years prior of history-geography professor Samuel Paty in Conflans Sainte-Honorine. Both assassinations have been perpetrated by radicalized French Muslims with Tchechen/Ingushetia origins. Dominique Bernard's killer, an 18-year-old former student, was known by the security services and was labeled S (meaning endangering State Security).

On the 16<sup>th</sup> of October 2023, in Brussels, Belgium, 2 Swedish football supporters were shot dead by Tunisian Abdessalem Lassoued, while they were getting ready to watch a Belgium-Sweden football match on TV. The terrorist had been residing illegally in Belgium for 2 years following a negative decision for asylum, and with a deportation order already issued. Recently, the police were notified about the fact that he had faced condemnation for common law offenses and for assassination attempt in Tunisia and was facing 26 years in jail. He had arrived through the island of Lampedusa in 2011 and had been living in Norway, Italy, Sweden and Italy again before arriving in Belgium. After the shooting, he claimed to be affiliated with the Islamic State and stated that his action was intended revenge for the public burning of the Quran that had taken place in Sweden during the first half of 2023. He had been accused of trafficking in human beings, illegal stay and endangering State security.

These recent terrorist acts have revived memories of the 2015 Paris attacks, the 2016 Brussels and Nice attacks and the Berlin Christmas market attack, and sparked around Europe discussions regarding the extent to which States have failed to take action against known, dangerous individuals.

This note seeks to analyze the existing legislative framework around Europe and show how terrorist attacks have shaped laws and rules in European countries, such as France, Belgium, the UK, Italy and Germany, affecting also Schengen and free-circulation around Europe. The second part of this paper aims at considering the rise of islamophobia, and anti-semitism, and the spread of disinformation and anti-western propaganda, often prompted by geopolitical reasons in reality unrelated to the Israel-Hamas War.

### **1. The changes in the legislative frameworks following the attacks around Europe**

#### **1.1 France**

In France, Dominique Bernard's murderer, Mohammed Mogouchkov, was a foreigner staying illegally who was known for being radicalized but impossible to expel as per existing laws, according to the Ministry of Interior, as he arrived in France before he turned 13 and had no criminal record.

A similar debate had arisen already in 2015 when the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) condemned France for expelling a refugee. The Case *K.I. v. France*<sup>1</sup> concerned a Russian national of Chechen origin, who arrived in France at the age of 17 and obtained the refugee status. After traveling

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<sup>1</sup> Application no. 5560/19

to a war zone in Syria to undergo military training and joining a jihadist group, the Russian national was convicted of a terrorist offense, the French Office for Refugee and Stateless Persons (OFPRA) revoked his refugee status and issued his deportation to Russia. The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU), however, observed that both under its case-law and that of the French Conseil d'état the withdrawal of refugee status could not affect the fact of being a refugee. Whether the applicant remained a refugee should have been based on the assessment of the risks actually faced in the eventuality of his deportation to Russia. The returning of the applicant without such assessment was deemed to violate Art.3 of the Convention in its procedural aspect and his deportation was thus prevented.<sup>2</sup>

Currently, in France, expulsion is an administrative measure devoted to removing foreign nationals from the territory in the event of an infringement of State security or when there is a threat. While there are certain categories of nationals who enjoy “almost absolute” protection, such as foreigners habitually residents since the age of 13, or those in France for at least for 10 years and married to a Frenchman, all exceptions are discarded in case of terrorist activities and foreigners expelled.<sup>3</sup> Recent events have reignited the discussion regarding the need to strengthen the law on expulsion. For this reason, a new legislative proposal on immigration has been prepared by the government in the past year. However, negotiations on the text have yet to start as the Macron government is trying to rally support for the text from right-wing parties leaning more towards a thorough reform of the constitution. According to French Interior Minister Gerard Darmanin, the new text would have enabled the authorities to expel Mohamed Mogouchkov. The legislative proposal was debated at the beginning of November at the Senate. The latter identified some flaws, and decided against the government’s proposal aimed at regularizing irregular workers in sectors facing manpower shortage, namely with existing barrier in finding qualified personnel. Additionally, the proposal sanctions the right of residence on a “case-by-case” basis. The legislative proposal will be debated by the National Assembly.

## 1.2 Belgium

In Belgium, rules on the expulsion of aliens in an irregular situation result from the Act of 15 December 1980 on access to the territory, stay, establishment and removal of Foreigners as well as the Royal Decree of the 8<sup>th</sup> of October 1981, adopted for the application of this Act. These two texts have been amended many times since their entry into force.

The law gives priority to the voluntary departure of aliens in an irregular situation, so that expulsion is, in principle, decided only when the person concerned has not complied with an order to leave the territory within a certain period of time. In the aftermath of the terrorist attack of 16 October, miscommunication between the offices of the “commune” of residency of the attacker and the office for foreigners was highlighted. The Belgian Minister of Justice announced his resignation four days after the attack due to the system’s failure that prevented ensuring timely detention and arresting the Tunisian Abdesalem Lassoued.<sup>4</sup> The latter was in fact subject of an extradition request by part of Tunisia in August 2022 which was never processed. He had reached Europe by passing through Lampedusa, and successively passed through Italy, Norway, Sweden and Belgium. In 2016, Italian authorities warned Belgium about the potential threat that Lassoued represented, having joined a

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<sup>2</sup> ECHR. (2021). Order for deportation of refugee after status revoked: Court accepts principle on condition of full and up-to-date prior assessment of actual risk. In [hudoc.echr.coe.int](https://hudoc.echr.coe.int).

<sup>3</sup> RÉPUBLIQUE FRANÇAISE. (n.d.). Expulsion of a foreigner from France. Retrieved October 24, 2023, from [www.service-public.fr website: https://www.service-public.fr/particuliers/vosdroits/F11891?lang=en](https://www.service-public.fr/particuliers/vosdroits/F11891?lang=en)

<sup>4</sup> Stroobants, J.-P. (2023). L’attentat de Bruxelles révèle à nouveau les carences de la justice belge. *Le Monde.fr*. Retrieved from [https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2023/10/21/l-attentat-de-bruxelles-revele-a-nouveau-les-carences-de-la-justice-belge\\_6195692\\_3210.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/international/article/2023/10/21/l-attentat-de-bruxelles-revele-a-nouveau-les-carences-de-la-justice-belge_6195692_3210.html)

group aligned with Al-Qaeda and a combat zone in Syria.<sup>5</sup> After applying for asylum in 2019, he was ordered deported the following year, but the order was never carried out.

This tragic attack shed light on some existing flaws of the Belgian justice system. In particular, in September 2023, some public prosecutors highlighted the existing chronic understaffing of his services, in contemporary to the increase in drugs and rival gangs cases. Indeed, while the Brussels' attorney should comprise 119 magistrates, at present, there are only 95.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, the political arm-wrestling between the Flemish- and French-speaking communities hampers the appointment of public and cities prosecutors officers, which seems to have also played a role in the most recent case.<sup>7</sup>

### 1.3 The UK

The anti-terrorist legislative framework in the UK encompasses the Terrorism Act 2000<sup>8</sup>, the Anti-Terrorism Crime and Security Act 2001<sup>9</sup>, the Prevention of Terrorism Act 2005, and the Terrorism Act 2006. The 2001 Act, passed after 9/11, contained a provision for indefinite detention of terrorist suspects who cannot be deported on the grounds of the ECHR Convention which was ended in 2004 for its incompatibility with the same Convention.<sup>10</sup>

Differently, the 2006 Act stemmed from the reaction to the 2005 London bombings. In particular, the UK introduced a series of non-statutory measures devoted to criminalizing statements encouraging and glorifying acts of terrorism.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the non-statutory measures introduced renewed the emphasis on the deportation of foreign nationals as counter-terrorism measures, within the limits of Art.3 of the ECHR Convention.<sup>12</sup>

The 2017 attack in the Manchester Arena prompted the UK to take swift action and strengthen anti-terrorist protection in public places. In May 2017, at Ariana Grande's concert in the Manchester arena, a 22-year-old British National with Libyan origin, Salman Abedi, detonated a suicide bomb murdering 21 people. Following the attack, a victim's mother, began campaigning for better security in public venues regarding counter-terrorism provisions. This process led to the creation of a new law devoted to increasing preparedness for and protection from terrorist attacks. The Protect Duty, known as Martyn's Law in memory of one of the victims, has improved public safety, and national security and reduced the risk of attacks in public events by creating an obligation for responsible to implement certain measures and undergo training.<sup>13</sup>

### 1.4 Italy

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<sup>5</sup> Stroobants, J.-P. (2023). L'attentat de Bruxelles. *ibidem*

<sup>6</sup> Gadisseux, T., & Gordillo, A. (2023). Attentat à Bruxelles : "Il faut sauver la justice", lance Thierry Marchandise au politique. Retrieved October 24, 2023, from RTBF website: <https://www.rtb.be/article/attentat-a-bruxelles-il-faut-sauver-la-justice-lance-thierry-marchandise-au-politique-11276559>

<sup>7</sup> Stroobants, J.-P. (2023). L'attentat de Bruxelles. *ibidem*

<sup>8</sup> United Kingdom. The Terrorism Act 2000 [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland], 2000 Chapter 11, 20 July 2000

<sup>9</sup> United Kingdom. The Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. [United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland], 2001 Chapter 2001

<sup>10</sup> Justice. (2006, January 7). Counter-terrorism and human rights. Retrieved from JUSTICE website: <https://justice.org.uk/counter-terrorism-human-rights/#:~:text=The%202005%20Act%20allows%20the>

<sup>11</sup> Justice. (2006, January 7). Counter-terrorism and human rights. *ibidem*

<sup>12</sup> Justice. (2006, January 7). Counter-terrorism and human rights. *ibidem*

<sup>13</sup> UK Government. (2022). Martyn's Law Factsheet - Home Office in the media. Retrieved from [homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk website: https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2022/12/19/martyns-law-factsheet/](https://homeofficemedia.blog.gov.uk/2022/12/19/martyns-law-factsheet/)

Italy has a different history with regard to terrorism, which dates back before 9/11. In fact, political terrorism which connotated the so-called “years of lead” in the 1960s, and mafia wars and attacks of the 1970s, has already trained the Italian Ministry of Interior and Intelligence to confront the situation and adopt a legislative framework to punish terrorism and prevent it.<sup>14</sup>

Nonetheless, attacks in Europe fostered the creation of new provisions aligning with the international framework and more focused on the fight against international terrorism and Islamic fundamentalists. In fact, following the attacks in Paris in 2015, Italy adopted Law 43/2005, which focused on the fight against foreign fighters and with a specific focus on “lone wolves”, namely second- or third-generation immigrants who decide to join the jihad and act alone, outside the framework of a criminal organization. The Italian anti-terrorism laws all comprise some personal preventive measures regulated by the anti-mafia code d.lgs. n.159/2011. These measures are devoted to preventing those who leave national territories from joining jihadist militias on the one hand. On the other hand, they aim at expelling from national territories the foreigner suspected of terrorist activities. Moreover, Law n.43 assigned to National Anti-mafia Attorney the fight against terrorism, renominating it the Anti-mafia and “Anti-terrorism National Procurement”.<sup>15</sup>

In 2016, Italy approved Law n.153, which regards crimes regarding the financing of terrorist groups and activities, the seizure of properties and goods belonging to those groups, and acts of nuclear terrorism.

## 1.5 Germany

In 2001, after 9/11, the Bundestag approved the Anti-terrorism Law (TGB), part of the Security Package aimed at targeting the existing menace of international terrorism. Such a package increased the power of security authorities, enhanced data exchange, and limited the entrance of criminal terrorists in the national territory by strengthening border controls and visa releases.<sup>16</sup> However, the provision regarding strengthening the controls retains some clauses that could undermine human rights, for example, the informative autodetermination, or the fact that all non-germans are considered as under general suspect by default.<sup>17</sup>

Following recent terrorist attacks and increasing pressures received by municipalities and regions, the Federal Government of Germany has put forward a legislative proposal to strengthen repatriation of irregular migrants with no perspective of remaining in Germany. In particular, the proposal aims to extend the period prior to the departure from 10 to 28 days, to grant authorities more time to prepare for the departure and expedite the deportation of people affiliated with criminal organizations.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, the police are granted greater power for residential search aimed to enhance identification and eliminate, in some cases, the obligation to notify in advance about deportations.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> MAECI. (n.d.). Lotta al Terrorismo – Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale. Retrieved October 25, 2023, from [www.esteri.it](https://www.esteri.it) website: [https://www.esteri.it/it/politica-estera-e-cooperazione-allo-sviluppo/temi\\_globali/lotta\\_terrorismo/](https://www.esteri.it/it/politica-estera-e-cooperazione-allo-sviluppo/temi_globali/lotta_terrorismo/)

<sup>15</sup> MAECI. (n.d.). Lotta al Terrorismo. *ibidem*

<sup>16</sup> Lenz, K. (2021). Deutscher Bundestag - Vor 20 Jahren: Bundestag beschließt das Terrorismusbekämpfungsgesetz. Retrieved October 26, 2023, from Deutscher Bundestag website: <https://www.bundestag.de/dokumente/textarchiv/2021/kw49-kalenderblatt-terrorismusbekaempfungsgesetz-870410>

<sup>17</sup> Lenz, K. (2021). Deutscher Bundestag. *Ibidem*

<sup>18</sup> Euronews. (2023). New German legislation aims to make it easier to deport asylum seekers. Retrieved from euronews website: <https://www.euronews.com/2023/10/25/new-german-legislation-aims-to-make-it-easier-to-deport-asylum-seekers>

<sup>19</sup> Euronews. (2023). New German legislation aims to make it easier to deport asylum seekers. *ibidem*

Critiques stem from the concerns that this provision may fail to obtain protection for people entitled and the fear that it could strengthen far-right populist sentiments.<sup>20</sup> The political opposition seems to support the provision, while the Greens are skeptical as they fear that this agreement will not contribute to relieving town halls and municipalities from migratory pressures.<sup>21</sup> Experts commonly agree, in fact, that repatriation will be successful only with cooperation with countries of origin.<sup>22</sup>

## 2. Public opinion and EU dis-unity

The recent terrorist attacks that took place in Belgium and France currently hold no relation with the current Hamas-Israel conflict<sup>23</sup>. However, in the eyes of public opinion, it is impossible not to bring back the bloodshed of 2016 and 2014 attacks. In the countries where such attacks are perpetrated, people are anxious, and even in the most welcoming environment tolerance leaves room for reluctance. In an interview at DW, Amelie Godefroidt from KU Leuven, affirmed that people now ask for stricter surveillance on the migration phenomenon, therefore leaning more on the far-right parties.<sup>24</sup> Europe is assisting at an inescapable increase in polarization. If the Russian aggression on Ukraine had fostered great unity within the Union, it is clear that Hamas' terrorist attack on Israel of 7 October 2023 has exposed Europe's geopolitical and internal fragility. In fact, Europe is struggling to maintain a common position and it has failed to achieve consensus. This exposes existing division among MS and the lack of a strong unity.

The crisis has clearly sharpened the division between the Global South and the West, and clearly between the EU and its Southern Neighborhood, and it represents an opportunity for extremists to destabilize Europe and exacerbate polarization.<sup>25</sup> In fact, through dedicated social media campaigns anti-Israel and anti-Western may spread, mobilizing large communities of Arab immigrants. Similarly, right-wing populist parties may exacerbate polarization by establishing the idea of a direct correlation between migration and Islamic terrorism, to promote stricter migration rules. In fact, while the EU Commissioner for Internal Affairs, Ylva Johansson, retains that the highest risk of radicalization regards people who are already in European territories, rather than people reaching Europe in the latest migration flows<sup>26</sup>, far-right political exponents seek to justify their stricter migration policy aims with claims highlighting the link between terrorism and irregular migration. Victor Orban, the Hungarian PM, affirmed that he hoped that *“more and more people here in Brussels will see that there is a very clear link between terrorist acts and migration”*<sup>27</sup>, justifying their lack of support for migration as a lack of support to terrorism as if the two things were directly linked. Similarly, the Italian Matteo Salvini called what has been labeled by media as an anti-Islam protest, a protest to *“defend the Western Values”* and *“reaffirm the pride of multiculturalism but not*

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<sup>20</sup> tagesschau.de. (2023). Nordrhein-Westfalen: Asylpolitik: Lassen sich Abschiebungen durch ein neues Gesetz beschleunigen? Retrieved October 26, 2023, from tagesschau.de website: <https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/regional/nordrheinwestfalen/wdr-asylpolitik-lassen-sich-abschiebungen-durch-neues-gesetz-beschleunigen-100.html>

<sup>21</sup> tagesschau.de. (2023). Nordrhein-Westfalen: Asylpolitik. ibidem

<sup>22</sup> tagesschau.de. (2023). Nordrhein-Westfalen: Asylpolitik. ibidem

<sup>23</sup> Joyner, E., (2023), “Belgium: Terrorist shooting underlines tense mood in Europe”, DW. Available at:

<https://www.dw.com/en/belgium-terrorist-shooting-underlines-tense-mood-in-europe/a-67127823>

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>25</sup> Dempsey, J. (2023). Judy Asks: Does the Hamas-Israel War Make Europe Vulnerable? Retrieved from <https://carnegieeurope.eu/strategieurope/90849>

<sup>26</sup> Rainews. (2023, October 26). Terrorismo, Johansson: rischio enorme di attentati in Ue. Retrieved November 7, 2023, from RaiNews website: <https://www.rainews.it/articoli/2023/10/terrorismo-johansson-rischio-enorme-di-attentati-in-ue-89c8ae14-8719-49e5-b25f-b94b020977f0.html>

<sup>27</sup> Marin, L. (2023, October 26). Hungary's Orban says “link between terrorist acts and migration.” Retrieved from France 24 website: <https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20231026-hungary-s-orban-says-link-between-terrorist-acts-and-migration>

*suicidal*".<sup>28</sup> Leveraging on the existing fear of terrorism, and exacerbating Islamophobia, extreme-right wing populist are probably setting the basis of their political campaign for the European election of 2024 while achieving other goals regarding the strengthening of migration controls and the suspension of Schengen. As a matter of fact, besides advocating for stricter controls regarding the arrivals of migrants by boat, Salvini advocated for stricter controls of the often overlooked Balkan Route<sup>29</sup>, justifying the establishment of border controls with Slovenia to avoid the infiltration of terrorists, as justified by the Italian Minister of Interior Piantedosi.<sup>30</sup> Italy is not the only country to have suspended Schengen to face the terrorist threat. Slovenia, Austria, Germany, Denmark, Czechia, Poland, Slovakia, France and Sweden have all reintroduced border controls due to the rising terrorist threat.<sup>31</sup>

Alongside the rise of Islamophobia, anti-Semitic sentiments have also re-emerged in Europe following the breakout of the Israel-Hamas war. Incidents targeting the Jewish community in Europe and symbols recalling anti-semitism have become more common, reaching unprecedented levels since the Second World War. In fact, since October 7<sup>th</sup>, over 590 anti-semitic incidents have been recorded in France, while Germany has witnessed an increase of 240%, surpassed by the 300% increase in Austria.<sup>32</sup> For instance, around 60 Stars of David, the symbol used to label and recognize Jewish throughout the Nazis era, were drawn in the 14<sup>th</sup> Arrondissement in Paris. Investigations were open to clarify the situation and establish whether the graffiti retains an anti-semitic connotation or not.<sup>33</sup>

In a similar manner, the turmoil in the Middle East could herald a rise in extremist activity around Europe. One of the biggest concerns is that the Jihadist actors will seek to exploit the Hamas attacks and the reaction of Israel to foster the action of "lone wolves", individuals who are radicalized and inspired by Jihadist groups, but not operationally or formally linked to them.<sup>34</sup> It is not by chance that organizations regularly monitoring online Jihadist and Islamist extremist activities have recorded a sharp increase in the call for attacking Western and Jewish actors, while having noticed the use of the Hamas conflict as a recurring theme.<sup>35</sup> The risk of "lone wolf" attacks has raised security concerns around Europe and, more in general, the Western World. On 31 October, testifying before the US Senate, FBI Director Christopher Wray stated that the Hamas-Israel War has caused the terrorist threat to rise and will serve as an inspiration to its allies, while the fear of "lone wolf" attacks has been reiterated by some security analysts. Given the nature of their attacks, often random and disorganized, and the lack of their formal links with Jihadist groups, it is impossible for Western

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<sup>28</sup> TGCom24. (2023, October 18). Matteo Salvini: in piazza il 4 novembre a difesa dei valori occidentali. Retrieved October 30, 2023, from Tgcom24 website: [https://www.tgcom24.mediaset.it/politica/matteo-salvini-novembre-manifestazione-lega-valori-occidentali\\_71477245-202302k.shtml](https://www.tgcom24.mediaset.it/politica/matteo-salvini-novembre-manifestazione-lega-valori-occidentali_71477245-202302k.shtml)

<sup>29</sup> TGCom24. (2023, October 18). Matteo Salvini: in piazza il 4 novembre a difesa dei valori occidentali. *ibidem*

<sup>30</sup> IlSole24Ore. (2023, October 25). Migranti, trattato di Schengen sospeso per tutto l'inverno: stretta sui controlli al confine con la Slovenia. Retrieved October 30, 2023, from Il Sole 24 ORE website: <https://www.ilssole24ore.com/art/migranti-trattato-schengen-sospeso-tutto-l-inverno-stretta-controlli-confine-la-slovenia-AFx0ttNB>

<sup>31</sup> European Commission. (n.d.). Temporary Reintroduction of Border Control. Retrieved from home-affairs.ec.europa.eu website: [https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/schengen-borders-and-visa/schengen-area/temporary-reintroduction-border-control\\_en](https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/policies/schengen-borders-and-visa/schengen-area/temporary-reintroduction-border-control_en)

<sup>32</sup> Psara, M. (2023, October 25). Antisemitism at levels unseen in decades, says top European Rabbi. Retrieved November 1, 2023, from euronews website: <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2023/10/25/antisemitism-in-europe-reaching-levels-unseen-in-decades-says-top-rabbi>

<sup>33</sup> LeMonde. (2023, October 31). Paris prosecutor opens investigation after Stars of David found tagged on buildings. Le Monde.fr. Retrieved from [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2023/10/31/paris-prosecutor-opens-investigation-after-stars-of-david-found-tagged-on-buildings\\_6216629\\_7.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/france/article/2023/10/31/paris-prosecutor-opens-investigation-after-stars-of-david-found-tagged-on-buildings_6216629_7.html)

<sup>34</sup> Dettmer, J. (2023) As the Middle East strains, fears of extremism rise, POLITICO. Available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/as-the-middle-east-strains-fears-of-extremism-rise/> (Accessed: 07 November 2023).

<sup>35</sup> Dettmer, J. (2023) As the Middle East strains, fears of extremism rise. *ibidem*

security agencies to guarantee total security. However, European governments and security agencies are preparing for tackling the eventual rise of terrorist waves in Europe, particularly in a pre-Christmas period, by increasing surveillance and taking precautionary measures to tame down the risks to the minimum levels.<sup>36</sup>

Regarding public opinion, it is clear that a significant divide is impacting both European and Western societies. People mobilized to support both Palestine and Israel and protests broke out all around the world, comprising virtually every major city in Europe. In fact, while the Western governments seem to support Israel and show solidarity regarding Hamas terrorist attacks, the Israeli response has also prompted pro-Palestine rallies all around the world, particularly in the Arab, and Muslim countries, but also in Europe. Pro-Palestinian marches and protests took place in Rome, Italy, where a huge Palestinian flag was displayed during a protest, rallies took place also in Brabant, Denmark, and Berlin, Germany. At first, Germany and France banned pro-Palestine demonstrations, while other European countries have increased security in front of mosques and synagogues, fearing attacks.<sup>37</sup>

### **3. Disinformation, misinformation, and Anti-Western Propaganda**

While social media can become a substantial tool to keep track of unfolding events, since the breakout of the Israeli-Hamas war the flood of misinformation has been unprecedented, involving the use of older images and videos unrelated to the war, and false claims. Disinformation refers to the deliberate spread of false information, while misinformation refers to the unwilling spread of false information believed to be true.<sup>38</sup> Both disinformation and misinformation have been spread around social media with regard to the Israel-Hamas war.<sup>39</sup> One of the most evident examples circulating around most social media portrayed, according to the captions, an Israel attack in Gaza, which appeared engulfed by red flames. In reality, the video was filmed in Algeria, during a celebration for the victory of the football championship in July 2023.<sup>40</sup> Similarly, a video displaying a young Palestinian boy lying in a pool of blood on the ground and encircled by IDF forces circulated in X, former Twitter, and TikTok. The video is unrelated to the ongoing war and it is actually a clip from a Palestinian short film, called *Empty Place*.<sup>41</sup>

Another video went viral on X, showing Hamas thanking Ukraine for the sale of weapons provided by the West, followed by a tweet of Dmitry Medvedev, the deputy chair of the Russian Security Council affirming that “*the weapons handed to the Nazi regime in Ukraine are now being actively used against Israel*”.<sup>42</sup> While the video seems to have been diffused by an X account retaining links with the Wagner group, there is no evidence of weapons provided to Ukraine being diverted to third parties, such as Hamas.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Dettmer, J. (2023) As the Middle East strains, fears of extremism rise. *ibidem*

<sup>37</sup> Reuters. (2023, October 14). Tens of thousands rally around the world in support of Israel and Palestinians. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/14/tens-of-thousands-rally-around-the-world-in-support-of-israel-and-palestinians>

<sup>38</sup> Ganguly, M., & Farah, H. (2023, October 11). How Israel-Hamas war disinformation is being spread online. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/media/2023/oct/11/how-israel-hamas-war-disinformation-is-being-spread-online>

<sup>39</sup> Ganguly, M., & Farah, H. (2023, October 11). How Israel-Hamas war disinformation is being spread online. *ibidem*

<sup>40</sup> Khatsenkova, S. (2023, October 10). Misinformation further inflames the Israel-Palestine conflict. Retrieved from euronews website: <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2023/10/10/misinformation-further-inflames-the-israel-palestine-conflict>

<sup>41</sup> Ganguly, M., & Farah, H. (2023, October 11). How Israel-Hamas war disinformation is being spread online. *ibidem*

<sup>42</sup> Ganguly, M., & Farah, H. (2023, October 11). How Israel-Hamas war disinformation is being spread online. *ibidem*

<sup>43</sup> Ganguly, M., & Farah, H. (2023, October 11). How Israel-Hamas war disinformation is being spread online. *ibidem*



As a matter of fact, Russia has been a long-standing pioneer of disinformation spreading on X, and the breakout of the Israel-Hamas war has represented an invaluable opportunity to spread misinformation, disinformation and anti-Western propaganda. Western diplomats and experts have referred to the Hamas' attack on Israel on October 7<sup>th</sup> as a "gift from heaven" to the Kremlin for what concerns its war against Ukraine and its open confrontation against the "collective West". Particularly, on 8 November 2023, reliable media sources reported the questioning of a Moldovan couple who spraid graffiti with the Star of David on several buildings in Paris. French Police are investigating the involvement of Russian elements at the origin of these actions with the aim of instigating antisemitic/Israeli sentiments and unleash violence in the city, deepening thereby the conflict and tensions among different religious groups.<sup>44</sup>

The Israeli-Hamas War clearly diverted the global attention from the Russian aggression of Ukraine, in terms of support and condemnation. Indeed, as soon as Hamas attacked Israel, caught unprepared, Putin launched a 10-day attack to retake the territory around Avdiivka, in the Donbas region of Ukraine. Such an attack would have gained all the global attention and condemnation a month ago, while it struggled to make it to the news.<sup>45</sup> Similarly, assistance to Ukraine may be weakened now that Western aid, particularly from the U.S., is rushed in support of Israel against Hamas, considered a terrorist organization by both the U.S. and the EU.<sup>46</sup> The unlimited support of the West to Israel despite the brutality of the latter's retaliation, put into question the Western condemnation of Russia's breach of International Law. In a similar manner, comparisons were soon struck between the condemnation of Russia as an invader and Israel's occupation of Gaza, or the harsh condemnation of the Russian decision to bomb Ukraine's energy infrastructure and Israel's endorsement despite their decision to cut electricity in Gaza.<sup>47</sup> The West is loudly accused of retaining double standards, not only mining its credibility, but also undermining Russia's crimes committed in Ukraine.

Besides representing an obvious diversion of attention and support for the West from Ukraine, the Hamas-Israeli conflict may significantly contribute to Putin's goal of disrupting the current geopolitical order.<sup>48</sup> In a very zero-sum-game fashion, Putin may increasingly collaborate with Iran to revert to mine the existing balance.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, the current war contributes to disrupting the Western previous efforts to isolate Russia and gather support for the Ukrainian cause from the global south.<sup>50</sup> The Arab public opinion and several Middle Eastern Governments for the Palestinian cause, and against Western-backed Israel, may foster the isolation of the Western bloc and reinforce Russia.<sup>51</sup>

If that is the case, Russia retains a clear interest in fostering anti-Western propaganda and exacerbating internal turmoil to mine Europe's and the West's stability, and the Hamas-Israel war represents a major opportunity to destabilize Western society and mobilize communities of Arab

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<sup>44</sup>[https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/russie/evenements/evenements-de-l-annee-2023/article/russie-nouvelle-ingerence-numerique-russe-contre-la-france-09-11-23?xtor=RSS-1&debut\\_sssra=20&page\\_courante=3#pagination\\_sssra](https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/dossiers-pays/russie/evenements/evenements-de-l-annee-2023/article/russie-nouvelle-ingerence-numerique-russe-contre-la-france-09-11-23?xtor=RSS-1&debut_sssra=20&page_courante=3#pagination_sssra)

<sup>45</sup> Detsch, A. M., Jack. (2023, October 17). What Putin Stands to Gain From Israel-Hamas War. Retrieved November 2, 2023, from Foreign Policy website: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/10/17/putin-russia-israel-hamas-war-gaza/>

<sup>46</sup> Detsch, A. M., Jack. (2023, October 17). What Putin Stands to Gain From Israel-Hamas War. *ibidem*

<sup>47</sup> Grynspan, E., Ricard, P., Vincent, F., & Vitkine, B. (2023, October 21). Russia uses war in Gaza to weaken support for Ukraine. *Le Monde.fr*. Retrieved from [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/10/21/russia-uses-war-in-gaza-to-weaken-support-for-ukraine\\_6192417\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/10/21/russia-uses-war-in-gaza-to-weaken-support-for-ukraine_6192417_4.html)

<sup>48</sup> Detsch, A. M., Jack. (2023, October 17). What Putin Stands to Gain From Israel-Hamas War. *ibidem*

<sup>49</sup> Detsch, A. M., Jack. (2023, October 17). What Putin Stands to Gain From Israel-Hamas War. *ibidem*

<sup>50</sup> Grynspan, E., Ricard, P., Vincent, F., & Vitkine, B. (2023, October 21). Russia uses war in Gaza to weaken support for Ukraine. *ibidem*

<sup>51</sup> Grynspan, E., Ricard, P., Vincent, F., & Vitkine, B. (2023, October 21). Russia uses war in Gaza to weaken support for Ukraine. *ibidem*

immigrants. Radical Islamists will most likely employ dedicated media campaigns to spread not only anti-Israel but also anti-Western propaganda. Russian media and Russia-affiliated actors have notably manipulated information regarding the aggression of Ukraine and sought to spread anti-Western propaganda.<sup>52</sup> Clearly, the Israel-Hamas War and the public opinion's division provide an invaluable opportunity for Russia to foster instability in Europe, leveraging on existing Islamophobia. A prime example is represented by the Quran burning incidents in Stockholm, which turned out to be funded by a Kremlin-backed media. In fact, the Quran was sent on fire near the Turkish embassy by a far-right politician and anti-Islam provocateur, Rasmus Paludan, who had received money from a former contributor to a Kremlin-backed channel.<sup>53</sup> The latter, Chang Frick, has not denied the provision of money, though declaring that he paid to allow the holding of a process while being unaware of the burning of the holy book.<sup>54</sup> The incident clearly affected the Islamic world. Turkey, in fact, put into question Sweden's NATO membership and has sparked reactions among extremist "lone wolves" around Europe, leading to the already mentioned terrorist attack in Brussels, which cost the lives of 2 Swedish nationals.

The Quran burning was not overlooked by most Muslim countries and leaders, that are increasingly adhering to the anti-Western propaganda and are voicing their dissent about Western powers. A prime example is represented by Türkiye, which had initially approached its Western allies, while it is now growing increasingly distant, probably privileging internal support over its foreign relations with the West. Turkish President Erdogan blamed the Swedish authorities for letting the Quran burning be legitimized as a form of freedom of expression. Besides preventing the bid for Sweden to join NATO, he openly confronted the whole Western world, affirming that Türkiye "*will eventually teach Western monuments of hubris that insulting Muslims' sacred values is not freedom of thought*".<sup>55</sup>

A fierce condemnation of Europe also came at the UNGA in September 2023, when several Muslim leaders voiced their dissent about the Quran burnings happening in Europe, the rise of islamophobia and the partial reactionism by part of the West. In particular, Iranian President Raisi openly condemned the West affirming that "*Islamophobia and cultural apartheid witnessed in Western countries, evident in actions ranging from the desecration of the holy Quran to the ban on the hijab in schools, and numerous other deplorable discriminations are not worthy of human dignity*".<sup>56</sup>

Erdogan's anti-Western rhetoric has grown enormously since the breakout of the war, witnessing a shift away from Türkiye's previous attempts to occupy the role of mediator and approaching the Western allies. The clearest evidence is provided by the speech held by the Turkish President at the pro-Palestinian rally in Istanbul on October 25, 2023. On this occasion, Erdogan not only declared Israel as a war criminal to the world, but even grew distant from the West in affirming that Hamas does not represent a terrorist organization, but rather a liberation movement, abandoning the initial

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<sup>52</sup> Council of the EU. (2023, July 23). Information manipulation in Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine: EU lists seven individuals and five entities. Retrieved November 2, 2023, from consilium.europa.eu website: <https://www.mybib.com/#/projects/w0QqLO/citations/new/webpage>

<sup>53</sup> Rankin, J. (2023, January 27). Burning of Qur'an in Stockholm funded by journalist with Kremlin ties. Retrieved from the Guardian website: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/27/burning-of-quran-in-stockholm-funded-by-journalist-with-kremlin-ties-sweden-nato-russia>

<sup>54</sup> Rankin, J. (2023, January 27). Burning of Qur'an in Stockholm funded by journalist with Kremlin ties. Retrieved from the Guardian website: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jan/27/burning-of-quran-in-stockholm-funded-by-journalist-with-kremlin-ties-sweden-nato-russia>

<sup>55</sup> AP. (2023, June 29). Turkey's president condemns Quran burning in Sweden, signals it'll obstruct NATO membership. Retrieved from AP News website: <https://apnews.com/article/turkey-sweden-nato-erdogan-quran-c69a3258e3bd60995561b5fbc87b8d12>

<sup>56</sup> Alarabiya News. (2023, September 20). Muslim leaders criticize the West at the UN General Assembly over Quran burnings. Retrieved November 3, 2023, from english.arabiya.net website: <https://ara.tv/bcsyk>

balanced stances regarding the Israel-Hamas war.<sup>57</sup> In the same speech, his anti-Western rhetoric became increasingly clear, as he referred to the Western powers as “*the main culprits of the massacre in Gaza*”<sup>58</sup> and reproached the West for not having called for a ceasefire, stating that “*Israel cannot take a step without the West*”.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, he called Israel the invader, affirming that while the West owes to Israel, Turkiye does not, and will side with the oppressed. He voiced the anti-Western rhetoric of double standards between the war on Ukraine and the Israel-Hamas war, accusing the West of hypocritically mourning civilians’ deaths in Ukraine, but remaining silent about those killed in Gaza.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this analysis sheds light on the potential influence of the Israel-Hamas conflict on migration and expulsion policies, illustrating this with past instances of legal and policy changes following terrorist attacks. Moreover, it highlights the possibility that the Israel-Hamas war will represent a huge target for disinformation and misinformation, and risks being exploited as a tool to leverage existing Islamophobia, anti-semitism and anti-Western feelings to reach geopolitical goals unrelated to the War. In fact, while European security agencies are increasing preventive measures in the face of an increase in terrorist threats, it is crucial not to overlook the risks that this conflict entangles for the polarization of our societies. As the war goes on, propaganda may mount a spiral of anti-Western sentiments among the Muslim world and Arab communities in Europe and may exacerbate Islamophobia. External influencers, such as the Russian Federation, may find political leverage through destabilising tactics on European soil.

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<sup>57</sup> Bourcier, N. (2023, October 30). Turkish President Erdogan champions the Palestinian cause, fiercely attacks Israel. Le Monde.fr. Retrieved from [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/10/30/turkish-president-erdogan-champions-the-palestinian-cause-fiercely-attacks-israel\\_6213559\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/10/30/turkish-president-erdogan-champions-the-palestinian-cause-fiercely-attacks-israel_6213559_4.html)

<sup>58</sup> Bourcier, N. (2023, October 30). Turkish President Erdogan champions the Palestinian cause. *ibidem*

<sup>59</sup> Bourcier, N. (2023, October 30). Turkish President Erdogan champions the Palestinian cause. *ibidem*