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D O C T O R A L   T H E S I S
ON THE THEME: RISKS AND THREATS TO THE SECURITY ENVIRONMENT GENERATED BY EXTREMIST MANIFESTATIONS
- S U M M A R Y -

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Introduction

The choice of extremist phenomenon as a theme of research was determined by its amplitude and implications, which know no borders. Extremism is a complex, multidimensional phenomenon with a wide spectrum of connections and interdependencies.

The actuality of the theme is conferred by the development and magnitude of the manifestation of this phenomenon in the contemporary. Thus, given that extremism is currently one of the greatest challenges to the security environment, its research is imposed **as an objective necessity**. The complexity of the phenomenon requires in its investigation a multidisciplinary, but especially interdisciplinary approach, through political, social sciences, as well as cultural studies.

The documentation on the specialized literature, published both at home and abroad, revealed **a limited treatment of extremism**. Despite their contribution, the few papers, based on punctual, partial or certain perspectives on extremism, *cannot cover the requirements of a comprehensive, systemic study of the phenomenon*. At the same time, due to the difficulties encountered in capturing its identity sphere, *extremism does not yet have an official, universally accepted definition*.

In addition, the events generated in recent years by the manifestations of extremism have foreshadowed changes in the security culture, showing that **it is time to reassess the approaches in the field**, both at the conceptual level and in terms of mechanisms for preventing and combating it.

For these reasons, *the purpose of the research*, established as **a general objective**, aimed at the comprehensive study of the extremist phenomenon, by deepening the causes, forms and typologies, as well as the risks and threats generated by its manifestations, in order to adapt the national legal and institutional framework to the realities of the current security environment.

Following this, we have designed as **specific objectives**:

a. Defining extremism and identifying its characteristics, boundaries and interdependencies in relation to other related concepts;

b. Highlighting the identity traits of the main extremist typologies;

c. Individualization of the elements with a decisive role in the process of generating extremism;

d. Evaluation of the main manifestations and developments of extremism at global and European level;

e. Revealing the impact of extremism on European security, cohesion and unity;

f. Analyzing the peculiarities of the manifestation of extremism in Romania;

g. Investigation of the phenomenon of Islamist radicalization in The Romanian space;

h. Determining the main risks and threats to our country;

i. Designing the main measures to prevent and combat the phenomenon at national level;

j. Identification of the main cooperation formats of States on the line of preventing and combating extremism.

The approach of the issues subject to research determined, according to the specific objectives established, the organization of the work on the following content:

Abbreviations and acronyms used

Small dictionary of specific terms and expressions

Introduction

Currenty and necessity of the theme

Current state of knowledge

Coordinates of scientific research

Originality and contribution of the thesis in the field

The research was deepened by conducting **a case study**, in which *the phenomenon of Islamist radicalization in Romania* was approached. The interest in this subject was not by chance, in the current context raising the question of whether and to what extent the scale and magnitude of the evolution of this phenomenon at global and especially European level can induce similar developments in our country. This option was also justified by the need to identify, at national level, the potential risks and threats posed on this line by the current security environment.

Throughout its stages, **the results of the research have been capitalized in the academic environment**, by publishing in articles and debating within scientific conferences with national and international participation, as well as **at institutional level**, by applying them in the evaluations, synthesises and information carried out in the field of national security, according to the field of activity.

CHAPTER 1

Starting from the need for conceptual substantiation, following the analysis of the constituent elements, we have formulated **a general definition of extremism**, current and comprehensive, able to cover its entire spectrum of manifestations. According to it, *extremism manifests itself in the promotion of unilateral opinions, ideologies or beliefs, which go beyond the normal, moderate, generally accepted limits at a given time by society, on the basis of which individuals, groups or organizations try, through violent actions, including individual and mass criminal acts, to gain power, in order to impose in a fanatical and totalitarian manner their own political program, social, ethnic, religious or economic*.

The analysis is extended to the concept of violent extremism, enshrined at the level of international organizations, in the idea that it would be more precise and realistic, considering that it covers not only terrorist attacks, but the whole range of violent actions of extremist groups. The UN Secretary-General's report on the Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Extremism, presented to the General Assembly on 5 January 2016, states from the outset that violent extremism is addressed on the basis that it leads to terrorism. The use of the term thus raised the natural question whether the concept of 'violent extremism' would imply, in antithesis, the existence of a 'nonviolent extremism'. The analysis showed that a distinction between the two forms of extremism is improper, because extremism is inherently violent.

The identity characteristics of extremism are determined on the basis of the ideological, organisational and actional peculiarities of extremists, in relation to the chronology of the acts preceding the takeover of power, and after this stage, as regards the order imposed in society.

Since *radicalism*, *fundamentalism* and *fanaticism* are concepts frequently used in the context of the manifestation of extremism, the analysis of the defining

elements and peculiarities of each, the main similarities and differences sought to clarify to the extent that we can speak of a relationship of their interconditioning with the sphere of the extremist phenomenon. Research has shown that the main differentiation of extremism from those concepts is that extremism itself cannot be expressed exclusively by radicalism, fundamentalism or fanaticism, while their manifestation may, by exceeding established limits at some point, become extremist.

Another particularly important issue was **the explanation of the relationship and the inter-conditioning between extremism and terrorism**. Comparative analysis of the defining elements of the two concepts has shown that extremism and terrorism, although different, cannot be separated, they are in a conditional relationship, in which extremist ideology is actually transposed by the terrorist act. Thus, in a relational dynamic, extremism precedes terrorism, while being the main factor that fuels it. It also led to the conclusion that terrorism can be a form of manifestation of violent extremism.

The concept of cumulative extremism was also introduced in the analysis. Established in 2006 by british academic Roger EATWELL, it is described as "*how one form of extremism can fuel and amplify other forms of extremism*". The concept was inspired by tensions in British society, where far-right fascist organisations such as the National Front or the British National Party are engaged in a dangerous dynamic with the Islamist movements al-Muhajiroun or Hizb ut-Tahrir.

CHAPTER 2

The main typologies of extremism are addressed with an emphasis on **political** and **religious extremism**. Within the framework of **political extremism**, **the far-left** is presented, with its forms of manifestation, *communist anarchism* and *Bolshevik communism*. The far left characterizes radical political movements, whose ideals are represented by egalitarianism and social justice and which aim to

achieve their political objectives by violent means, such as bombings and revolutions. Within the political spectrum is also presented **the far right**, which comprises political movements and formations that do not participate in government, with ideologies like ***Fascism*** and ***Nazism***. Characterized by the violent defence of national, ethnic or racial identity, **right-wing extremism** is manifested by ultranationalism, supremacy, racism and xenophobia. It also includes hate crimes, described as "*violence, motivated by prejudice or intolerance towards the national origin of the person, ethnicity, color, religion, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation or disability*".

Although found along the entire political spectrum, **populism** is presented, taking into account the weight of its manifestation, associated with right-wing extremism. Populist ideology promotes the sovereign will of the people, a moral force, against the elite, considered corrupt and enslaved. Beyond political demagoguery and popular radicalisation, it poses a serious threat to the democratic order everywhere and especially to the European one.

In the **approach to religious extremism**, the main episodes of extreme violence and fundamentalism that have characterized the evolution of the great monotheistic religions, namely Judaism, Christianity and Islam, are covered in a comparative analysis.

Religious extremism in Islam is analysed on the basis of the concept of Islam, which targets a politically united Muslim world under the same authority, in which the state and society comply with the rules of Islamic law, as established by the Koran, Sunna and Hadiths. Three sources of Islamist extremism are identified, namely the secession of the Muslim community, which led, after the death of the Prophet Muhammad, to the sectarian differentiation of Muslims (in Sunnis, Shiites and Kharijits), the interpretation of the concept of Jihad in the sense of legitimizing aggression as a war of defense and fundamentalist doctrine, represented by

Wahhabism and Salafism, aimed at returning to the purity of the faith from the beginnings of Islam and the strict application of the Koran.

On these coordinates, **the specific features of the islamist extremist groups**, currently active in the Middle East, Africa and Asia, are highlighted, continuing with the presentation of the main landmarks in the evolution of the **Islamic State** group, which, through the ideology, organization and extent of its evolution, represented a real phenomenon in the sphere of manifestation of violent extremism.

CHAPTER 3

In deepening the process of extremism generation, several definitions proposed in the political and academic environment are covered, capable of providing a more complete picture of it. Of these, it is retained as a benchmark, but without being official, the definition of radicalisation formulated at European Commission level.

Radicalization that leads to violent extremism can take various forms, depending on context and time period and can be associated with different causes or ideologies. They are mainly represented by left-wing extremism, right-wing extremism, political-religious extremism and thematic extremism.

The study revealed that radicalization factors comprise a very wide range of origins, triggers and conditions. In the context of the comparative analysis of several factors, the most comprehensive and applied classification is shown to be that of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), which, in addition to *push factors* and *pull factors*, also identified a set of general factors, called *enabling environment factors*. At the same time, the factors that push towards extremism, push factors, are systematized into three subgroups, represented by

socio-economic, political and cultural factors. They are analysed at both social and individual levels.

Investigating several elements that may play a decisive role in the psychological dimension of the radicalisation process leads to the conclusion that **injustice and discrimination against minority groups are the main motivating factors**. Experts believe that a combination of different factors can be converged in a variety of ways in making an individual sensitive to radical ideology. In response to this problem, a number of academic models have been developed to try to create a step-by-step outline of radicalization and identify possible factors influencing these people. The study presented four models, namely the 'Path to Suicide Extremism', proposed by Paul GILL, of the University College of Dublin, Ireland, the 'Four-Stage Process', belonging to the forensic psychiatrist and counter-terrorism consultant, Marc SAGEMAN, 'The Scale to Terrorism', authored by Professor Fathali M. MOGHADDAM and 'The 12 Mechanisms of Radicalisation', designed by researchers Clark McCAULEY and Sophia MOSKALENKO.

CHAPTER 4

The manifestation of global extremism included a series of violence by Islamist actors, the most significant of which were the tripling, between 2018 and 2019, of the attacks in Mozambique, the coordinated suicide bombings committed by IS affiliates in Sri Lanka on Easter Sunday in 2019, the attack on the Indonesian Minister of Security, Wiranto, in October of the same year, as well as the aggression launched in the first part of 2020 by remnants of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, which rank as the most sophisticated and lethal to date. The March 2019 attack, in which 50 Muslims were to be killed at two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, this time marked the shift of right-wing extremists to "defense" against the threat posed by Islam.

However, statistics show that more right-wing extremists are involved in the attacks so far than radical Islamists, most of which have been carried out in Europe.

The main threats are the maintenance of a global presence of the Islamic State, which, despite its territorial defeat, declared wilayats (provinces, governorates) in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Nigeria, Afghanistan and the North Caucasus, announcing their presence in the first half of 2019, including in Turkey, Pakistan and India.

The difficulty of integrating migrants from MENA, whose influx peaked in 2015, remains another problem in Western European countries, with a high potential for generating violent extremism. The massive presence of Muslim immigrants would be reflected in a lot of antisocial acts and violations of the law, such as sexual assaults, rapes, thefts and robberies. Moreover, the humanitarian and security challenges have reached unprecedented levels after the territorial defeat of the Islamic State, and it is necessary for European officials to take a decision on the repatriation of former fighters of this organization.

The violence recorded in Europe as an expression of Islamist violent extremism culminated in the 2015 massacres in Paris, followed in 2016 by those in Brussels, Nice and Berlin, and in 2017 by those in Stockholm, Manchester, London and Barcelona, which were only the most important in terms of victims and impact. Among the perpetrators of these attacks, claimed by the Islamic State, were, in addition to Muslim immigrants, "*homegrown terrorists*", European citizens of Arab or North African origin, with the nationality of the countries in which they acted.

Recent developments in Western Europe increasingly point to a **violent intersection of radical Islam with far-right movements**. Street protest movements such as the *English Defence League*, *Les Identitaires* in France and *PEGIDA* in Germany *spread their anti-Muslim propaganda* both online and through street demonstrations and actions. The activism and series of violence committed by far-right organisations and actors culminated in the incident on 19 June 2017, when

a man drove a van into the crowd gathered in the Mosque area of Finsbury Park in London.

Far-right populism is unprecedented in Europe, with its entry into the political scene favoured by the onset of the 2009-2010 economic crisis, the refugee crisis in the context of the Middle East conflict and the attacks in Paris and Brussels. Populism is proving to be a real threat to democracy and particularly to the European democratic order. With their speech, more and more European leaders are attacking liberal democracy, promoting nationalist, anti-migration, racist and xenophobic themes. The growing support by European citizens has brought populist parties into government formations, in a worrying percentage. One of the results of these developments was also BREXIT, a decision that was influenced by populism, demagoguery and xenophobic discourse, with no real economic or social basis.

The analysis on Romania has as its starting point the identification of provisions in the field of preventing and combating extremism. Thus, although the phenomenon is not named or defined as such, it is clear in national law that there are the rules that ensure the prevention and combating of right-wing political extremism and the manifestations associated with it. Our country has also aligned itself with international regulatory initiatives on the line of preventing and combating extremism by ratifying international conventions in this area. In Romania, the continuous decline in living standards and the widening of the differences between social classes, as well as the disappointment and distrust of the political class Romanian, have favored the emergence of *right-wing extremism* and *populism*. The most representative in this respect are the Greater Romania Party and the New Right Party. Founded in 1991, the Greater Romania Party positions itself as an anti-system populist party, blaming political elites and state institutions for the weakness of law and order in Romania. It also launches virulent attacks on Hungarians, Jews and Roma, including references to the isolation of the latter in special "colonies". The New Right Party, founded in 2015, demands a strong Romanian nationalist state, the

unconditional union of Romania with Bessarabia, the harsh punishment of "gypsy crimes" and the absolute ban on abortion. At the same time, the nationalist party defines itself as Eurosceptic and an opponent of multiculturalism and NATO. Its political manifesto also includes the fight against Hungarian separatism and homosexuality.

Some analysts observe in the **Romanian Orthodox Church** "extremist tendencies", while noting that it, in its role as a national actor, "constantly affirms its desire to intervene" in the regulation of social life. The Church has been criticized for manifesting its nationalism and intolerance through strong activism against the rights of sexual minorities. Other charges are aimed at "violent actions" against Greek Catholics. In addition, meetings of certain neo-legislative groups in churches and the participation of Orthodox priests in such events are mentioned.

Dobrogea is a secular model of good interethnic coexistence and especially interreligious coexistence, where there is an ancient Sunni Islamic community of Turkish-Tatar ethnicity. The faithful are under the religious authority of the **Mufti of the Muslim Cult in Romania**, which is responsible for Islamic religious practices in Romania.

In recent years, in Romania, as in Western countries, various **non-governmental organizations** have appeared, with imams from countries of the Near East, which promote radical Islamic views and do not respond to any authority. These, such as the *Taiba* and "*Islam Today*" Foundations, are funded by entities from Saudi Arabia, a country known for its very strict and exclusive application of fundamentalist Islam. Since its inception, the two foundations have challenged the authority of the Mufti of the Muslim Cult, even serving representatives of Muslims in Romania. Given that the number of officially recognized imams and unofficially functioning mosques is much higher, representatives of the Muslim Cult, the Democratic Union of Turkish-Muslim Tatars and the Turkish Democratic Union of Romania have called for the regulation of the functioning of Islamic prayer houses,

which must have the opinion of the cult to which they belong and of the state institutions.

In relation to the context, the analysis highlighted **the main risks and threats at national level**. The first of these is islamic radicalization, which, although "does not have the dimensions of a phenomenon", has seen an increase in recent years, especially among the entire residents, originating in areas with a terrorist manifestation, but also romanians converted to Islam.

A second risk is *the presence in Romania of extremist organisations with a terrorist profile*, whose activity poses a serious threat to domestic security. On the territory of our country, their active nuclei belong mainly to *the Muslim Brotherhood*, *Hamas*, *Hezbollah*, *the Armed Islamic Group*, *Hizb ut-Tahrir* and *Al-Gama'a Al-Islamyya*.

Another important risk is *generated in the context of migration*, by crossing Romania by a considerable influx of people coming from spaces with terrorist potential, which constitutes a direct threat to national security.

The possibility of terrorist attacks is also one of the major threats, although our country does not appear to be specifically targeted at present. However, its engagement in the International Coalition against Islamic State may place her among potential targets.

CHAPTER 5

Several international organisations ensure the cooperation of states to prevent and combat violent extremism. **Global cooperation** is ensured through the United Nations (UN) and the Organization for Islamic Cooperation (OIC), while **continental and regional cooperation** is carried out, at the level of the American Continents, through the Organization of American States (OAS), at the african Union (UA) level, at the Middle East level through the League of Arab States (LAS),

and at the level of Asia and the Indian Ocean Basin, through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Indian Ocean River anisassociation (IORA).

Cooperation at EU level is primarily ensured through the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the Centre of Excellence of the Radicalisation Awareness Network. EU cooperation is also taking place with other North American states, the Western Balkans, Africa (Sahel, North Africa and the Horn of Africa), the Middle East and Asia, with cooperation with the US on this line being considered fundamental.

Conclusions and proposals

In essence, according to **the conclusions** of the work:

- on the **political front**, the unprecedented rise of the far right in Western countries, especially the populist one which, through the ultranationalist, anti-immigration and Islamophobic discourse, promotes anti-liberal and anti-union theses, represents a real threat to European democracy, cohesion and security;

- on the **religious front**, extremism manifests itself in the expression of radical, fundamentalist views of Islam. They represent, to a large extent, the manifestation of resistance to the assault of Western modernism, which has fundamentally changed Muslim society;

- the series of attacks claimed or inspired by the Islamic State, committed by immigrants or radicalized citizens, especially in France, Belgium, Germany, Sweden, Great Britain and Spain, have demonstrated the inefficiency of the information and intervention structures of the European states, *a consequence of their failure to adapt to the realities of the security environment*;

- the far-right **in Romania** is not likely to worry, having a low electoral profile, a political success of such parties being unlikely in the near future;

- in our country have appeared in recent years Muslims from the countries of the Middle East who promote, through cultural and religious foundations, a fundamentalist variant of Islam. This situation, in the absence of State control, *may lead to unexpected developments*;

- although at national level the risks remain low in terms of the likelihood of manifestation of Islamist extremism, *special attention should be paid to the phenomenon of radicalisation*, which shows that developments at global and European level are beginning to be felt in our country as well;

- from an actional point of view, the prevention of extremism requires a multisectoral, inter-institutional response and an approach to the whole of society, which is no longer just reactive and tactical, but aligns state institutions and communities in confronting it;

- current developments require reconsideration of the institutional and legal framework, at international level, but especially at European level, in order to calibrate them to the current challenges, steps that can only be achieved through an effective and efficient cooperation of states.

The proposals made mainly concern the:

- unitary approach of the extremist phenomenon at national level, by **defining it** in a higher level normative act, as the basis for the subsequent rules, covering in detail all aspects of its sphere of manifestation;

- amending, in the content of Law nr. 535/2004, of the definition of terrorism, by *including its motivations in the sphere of violent extremism* and the definition of radicalisation, by *formulating it more comprehensively*;

- developing a *Strategy on Preventing and Combating Radicalisation, Violent Extremism and Terrorism*, as well as an *Action Plan* for its Implementation, in a multi-dimensional and integrated concept;

- ensuring state control by approving, by the State Secretariat for Cults, both the establishment of religious associations and foundations (amendment of Government Ordinance no. 26/2000 *on associations and foundations*) and the construction and functioning of places of worship (amendment of Law no. 50/1991 *on the authorization of construction works*);

- strengthening the Mufti's position as leader of the entire Muslim community in Romania, *as the authority responsible for Islamic religious practices in our country*;

- significant tightening of the sanctions provided for in the Penal Code for the promotion of extremist messages of a religious nature;

- initiating an educational program in schools, mass-media and online, with the role of raising awareness of the general public about the phenomenon of radicalization, of the danger generated by it, as well as of identifying its manifestation among the members of the community;

- establishing extremism as a distinct object of study at university level, its scientific deepening being able to provide answers and ensure, in a significant proportion, the diagnostic and prevention component in the field.

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