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Cult undue influence and the process of radicalization, a question for debate?

Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, the contribution we are proposing comes from the experience of the C.C.M.M. Involved in the care of young people enrolled in a process of radicalization and their families in several regions of the French national territory.

It is inspired by meetings and exchange of information with other actors who are also involved in the prevention of radicalization.

It is therefore above all a testimony of experience. As early as 2011, the CCMM was solicited by families concerned about the behavioral changes of their children because of their sudden and extreme religious beliefs. The rapid progression of the phenomenon and the tragic events led the French public authorities to imagine a system of prevention and follow-up of young people, on which I will comment:

-In 2014 the Ministry of the Interior created a Green Number, a telephone reporting platform available to families and friends (educators, relations, teachers ...) observing worrying and potentially dangerous behaviors in a young person.

For the fluidity of the presentation, I will speak of "radicalized youth", but the notion of youth covers minors and adults, and for the term "radicalized", it would be appropriate to substitute "engaged in a process of radicalization".

Thus, the young people are reported, and after an initial analysis by the telephone platform, each "case" is oriented to be taken over by the prefecture of their department of residence. The prefectures have progressively set up cells for the prevention of radicalization which, in collaboration with the Social Services, Internal Security, Justice and Associations, organize the monitoring of the young people concerned and their families.

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-As of January 2015, the CCMM integrated this system on several parts of the land.

Moreover, a significant number of families, reluctant to report their children to the public authorities, address us directly. They fear stigmatization, but also are most often in denial of the potentially dangerous character of their young people: "My son cannot be capable of such violence." The main part of our mission is to convince them whenever this seems to be the case.

Some figures to date:

13,000 young people have been reported since the creation of the Green N° :

-4500 by the security forces.

-8500 on the telephone platform.

Of which 40° / ° are converts.

35° / ° are women.

25° / ° are under 20 years of age.

Although these figures are weak when compared to the national reference population, they are frightening as regards the collective risks they represent, but also dramatic for the young person whose future is permanently affected. Yet, even before 2010, historian Gilles Kepel, quoted the following statement: "In 2005, Syrian ideologist Abdou Moussab Al-Souri called for global Islamic resistance. Jihadism of the 3rd generation The first target is the West and its "soft belly" Europe, to be fought from within by its own citizens. "From there on," Kepel stated, "underground actions would be carried out, especially in the prison system and through websites."

RADICALIZATION.

What do we consider under this term? We retain the three-point definition given by F. Khosrokhovar * (a sociologist of Iranian origin, a teacher at EHESS):

- A more or less long process, but with rare exceptions, the changes do not occur abruptly,
- adoption of a belief in an extremist ideology,
- legitimizing the use of violence.

We are well placed here to know about the many religious radicalizations, although Islamic extremism may be considered above all as political radicalism. To point out their common points highlights the characteristics which echo cult undue influence:

- they correspond with an exclusive identity search.
- they induce belonging to a protective community of belief.
- the object of belief is dogmatic truth unknown by outsiders.
- It is therefore a "counter" identity, which reinforces social isolation and imposes codified behaviors.
- "followers" feel invested with a mission.

The jihadist project is both religious and political, a globalist and eschatological ideology. It targets young people, men and women, Muslims and converts, many of who still have the vulnerabilities and dreams of youth: the search for the ideal, the exacerbated sensitivity to injustice, the attraction for rebellious models, nevertheless reassuring because binary

Among the profiles of young people we encountered, social affiliation and a wide range of academic levels, we can distinguish common points by age group:

- Over 25, mainly masculine (but there are girls!) Politicized and violent. Followed by Internal Security, we do not know them.
- The few cases of 20-25 year olds are troubling; of the "immature idealists", many young people in failure of social integration, "petty" delinquents and some psychiatric cases not detected before.
- Young people between the ages of 14 and 20, including many young girls, without religious or political preoccupations before having unfortunate encounters. They are the majority of the situations we have followed and on which we highlight phases in the process of radicalization.

- In the majority of cases, the first contacts with "recruiters" take place in the usual places of socialization and for minors, often in schools. These first contacts, which provoke intimate debates among the young people, are then relayed by the social networks enrolling the young person in a new community of belonging.

-The objective is to adhere to the practice of Islam, and gradually to an Islam more and more fundamentalist. The demand by young people for their new belonging, their desire for conversion or for "reconversion", the breaks in their vision of relationships between men and women, and the cessation of their leisure activities, worries their family and friends who seek help... It took between 6 months and 1 year since the beginning of the recruitment, because the moment when the commitment is initialized remains invisible to those around the youth.

-Conflicts with family members multiply, external pressure from recruiters and the community is reinforced and becomes demanding and harassing. Emotional distancing from the family is accentuated; It is at this moment that the risks of behavioral shift are the most abrupt, in the form of "unpredictable" or "duplicate" and legitimizing a totalitarian and violent political model.

This distancing may go as far as complete rupture, often preceded by a "pseudo" return to normal by concealment. The risks of acts of violence, whatever their form, are then major.

Without insisting on changes, signs, and indicators of rupture, we easily recognize the progression and mechanisms at work in mental manipulation:

- The progressive and pregnant tightening of the mesh around the young undertaken by physical or virtual "trained" recruiters, and charismatic speakers.
- The delays that elapse so that the passage from the early to final adhesion takes place without suspicion. Then the pace accelerates and the demand strengthens.
- The valuation of the new group of belonging ("the brothers, sisters"), the change of name, even identity, and the isolation of the usual referents.
- The new corpus of binary beliefs, against the rest of the world, but reassuring.
- The conspiracy theory and the untruths.
- Intellectual and quasi-physical harassment through websites.
- The assimilation of any critical attitude to a betrayal.

HOW TO UNDERSTAND?

Doubtless, by remembering that the jihadist project was conceived, organized and served by significant means (especially in communication) to constitute in our territory an "army of internal enemies".

There are also many factors to consider:

- Reflecting on the evolution of the global context and the end of ideologies.
- The gradual advent of what a French newspaper describes as the era of "post-truth" or that the President of the United States names the "alternative facts"; All reinforced by social networks where any affirmation is taken to its face value and where anything goes.
- Of course in France one cannot ignore our recent history, our relations with our ex-colonies and the feeling of injustice that prevails among many young people of immigrant origin.
- In addition to all these elements of context, it should be emphasized again that the target of the jihadists are young people in search, for whom Jihad can appear as an "idealized offer".
- Finally, for many of these young people, the family environment and its own dysfunctions may constitute an additional risk factor.

And yet none of this is systematic or mechanical. There is the part of chance, the wrong encounter at the wrong time.

Psychiatrist Serge Hefez cautiously submits a hypothesis that I quote:

"Adolescence is a questing process, the transition from being a member of the family to being a social subject, able to find in itself its own freedom. This separation of the family can be done in a progressive way or violently because otherwise impossible. Some dysfunctional families are like cults in fencing with the environment, which prevents the harmonious development of what the teenager looks for and what he finds. The only way in which the adolescent finds himself is paradoxically by falling under another stronger hold. "

According to S. Hefez, there is a prevalence of this phenomenon among radicalized young families.

HOW TO REACT?

The activities carried out by the CCMM vary according to the French Departments: local sociology, organization of the monitoring cells and the degree of implantation of the jihadist networks in the Department.

- First and foremost, support and advice to families, faced with contradictory injunctions: to remain the guarantors of authority and security in the family space, not break with the youth who opposes it and becomes gradually insensible to reasonable argument.

-With young people, and after finding a way that allows access, the difficulty lies in the fact that the propositions of the jihadists are totalizing and symbolically "reparative of the dysfunctions of the world". After assessing their degree of involvement in the process of radicalization, it is a matter of identifying the causes and motivations of the changeover. According to the established diagnosis the "counter-offer" may be:

- Social monitoring in collaboration with the competent services, support for the youth in the resumption of a school or apprenticeship program with a view to professional integration ...

- Therapeutic type follow-up, particularly family therapies.

The process of radicalization is often the expression or exacerbation of an important or minor family dysfunction in young people, although it cannot be reduced to that.

The results observed today call for caution.

In a process of recruitment which may extend for one or two years, therapeutic follow-up interrupts the progression which could lead to violence; But the radical group is never far away.

Whatever the context, it is often necessary to raise social awareness of the particularities of the process of radicalization and its rapid changes, but also to exchange, capitalize and refine our understanding.

The recent phenomenon of radicalization among young people does not allow us to refer to research, scientific studies or statistics at this stage.

Reactivity with young people is imperative.

Caution in diagnosis is required.

The exchanges of experience as proposed in this colloquium by FECRIS are a welcome initiative.

