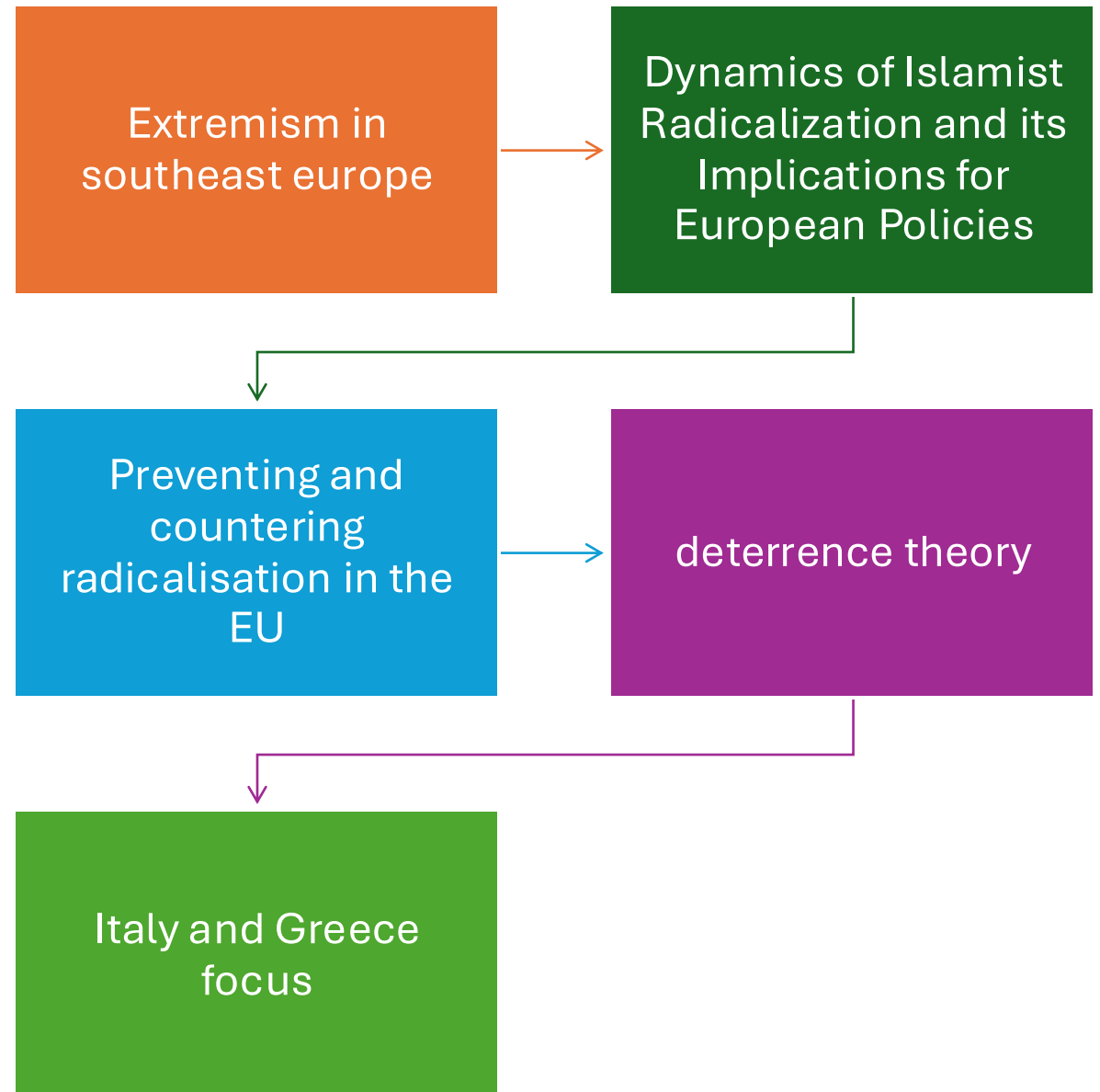# New threats and challenges in the region

Islamist radicalization, Jihadism, Terrorist and illegal trafficking

Introduction

- The issue of radicalization and the threat of Islamic extremism appears in multiple security reports, including NATO's 2022 paper. However, it's important to acknowledge that radicalism and fanaticism are not exclusive to Islam. Extremism can emerge in various religious, political, and ideological contexts.

- The region has experienced different waves of radicalization due to historical conflicts, ethnic tensions, and socio-economic instability.

- Foreign influence and online radicalization contribute to emerging security threats.

- Strengthening counter-radicalization strategies is crucial for regional stability and integration with European security frameworks.

OUTLINE

Extremism in southeast europe → Dynamics of Islamist Radicalization and its Implications for European Policies

Preventing and countering radicalisation in the EU → deterrence theory

Italy and Greece focus

Extremism in southeast europe

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Islam was introduced to the Balkans during the expansion of the Ottoman Empire in the 14th and 15th centuries. It spread through a combination of voluntary and forced conversions, establishing significant Muslim communities in certain regions.

Following the fall of the Ottoman Empire, Islam in the Balkans remained largely moderate, distinct from the fundamentalism seen in other parts of the Muslim world. However, the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s and the economic crises that followed created vulnerabilities. These conditions allowed external actors to introduce more radical interpretations of Islam, challenging the region's traditional religious practices.

Extremism in southeast europe

The Role of Islamic Communities in Different Countries

Bosnia and Herzegovina: Islam as National Identity

Albania: A Traditionally Secular Islam with Radical Infiltrations

Kosovo: A Battleground Between Tradition and Radicalism

North Macedonia: Imported Islamism

Serbia: Between Integration and Radicalization Risks

Bulgaria: Traditional Islam and Foreign Influence Risks

Turkey: A Key Player in the Region

Extremism in southeast europe

Radicalization and Jihadist Recruitment in the region

Foreign Influence – NGOs and foreign governments (particularly from Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Turkey) finance mosques and religious schools, promoting a more conservative form of Islam.

Jihadist Recruitment – Countries like Bosnia, Kosovo, and Albania have seen hundreds of their citizens leave to fight for ISIS.

Online Propaganda and Radical Networks – Extremist preachers use the internet and social media to spread their ideology and recruit followers.

Dynamics of Islamist Radicalization and its Implications for European Policies
Understanding islamist radicalization

Social, Ideologocal and violent radicalization ?

Political repression: The closure of democratic spaces in Arab countries has pushed many Islamist movements toward more extreme positions.

Economic inequalities: Poverty and lack of opportunities fuel resentment against governments and Western powers.

Foreign military interventions: Conflicts such as those in Iraq and Afghanistan have strengthened jihadist narratives.

Failure of political alternatives: The weakness of secular and progressive parties has left Islamists with a monopoly on opposition politics.

Identity and perceived injustice: Many young Muslims radicalize in response to perceived discrimination against Islam.

Dynamics of Islamist Radicalization and its Implications for European Policies
How radicalization manifest?
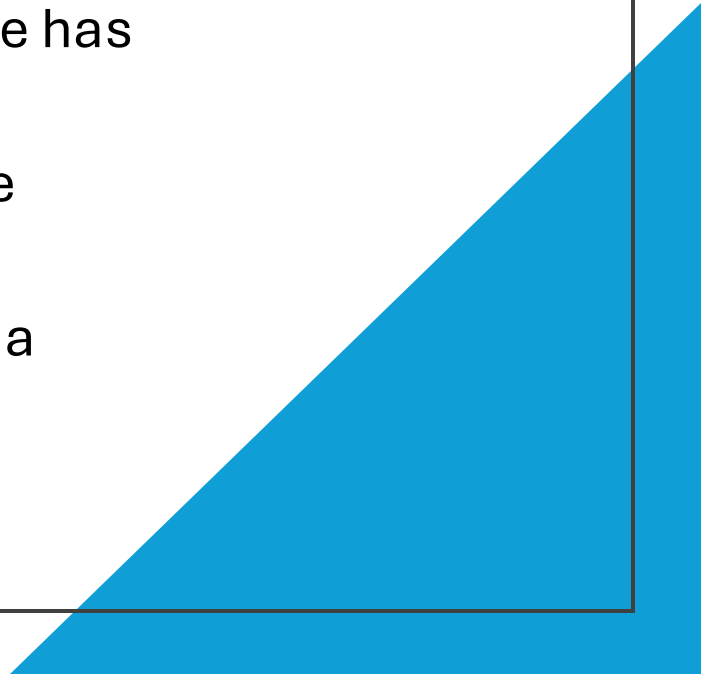
Egypt: The Muslim Brotherhood and Repression

Palestine: Hamas Between Politics and Jihad

Turkey: The (Partial) Success of De-Radicalisation

Dynamics of Islamist Radicalization and its Implications for European Policies
Europe and Political Islam: A Missed Opportunity?

- Excluding moderate Islamist movements → By refusing dialogue with groups like the Muslim Brotherhood or Hamas, Europe has empowered their more radical factions.

- Backing repressive regimes → Supporting dictatorships like Mubarak's in Egypt increased anti-Western resentment.

- Lack of a coherent strategy → The EU has failed to develop a clear and consistent approach to political Islam.

Preventing and countering radicalisation in the EU
Key strategies for preventing radicalization

- Preventing Radicalisation in Prisons & Rehabilitation Program.

- Countering Terrorist Propaganda & Extremist Narratives

- Local-Level Approaches & Community Engagement

- Enhancing Knowledge Sharing & Data Exchange Among EU States

- Monitoring Extremist Ideologies & Reducing Social Polarisation

- Protecting & Rehabilitating Radicalised Minors

- Education & Social Inclusion Strateg

- Strengthening International Cooperation

Preventing and countering radicalisation in the EU
Counterattack

- EU member states have adopted a three-tier approach to counter terrorism: Prevention → tackling radicalisation and extremist propaganda. Repression → strengthening security measures and enforcing stricter laws. External action → cooperating with third countries to address threats at their source.

- Key Measures:

 Passenger Name Record (PNR): collecting passenger data to track suspected terrorists.

 Creation of a European Border and Coast Guard to reinforce external EU border controls.

Establishment of the European Counter-Terrorism Centre (ECTC) within Europol.

 Enhancement of the Schengen Information System (SIS) to monitor foreign fighters.

 Use of the Eurodac database to identify migrants and potential terrorists through fingerprint data.

Deterrence theory

- After a targeted killing, the total number of terrorist attacks tends to increase.

- However, the quality and effectiveness of these attacks decrease – terrorist groups resort to less sophisticated and more disorganized operations.

- There is a shift in targets: instead of attacking Western troops, terrorist groups focus on easier targets, such as Afghan civilians.
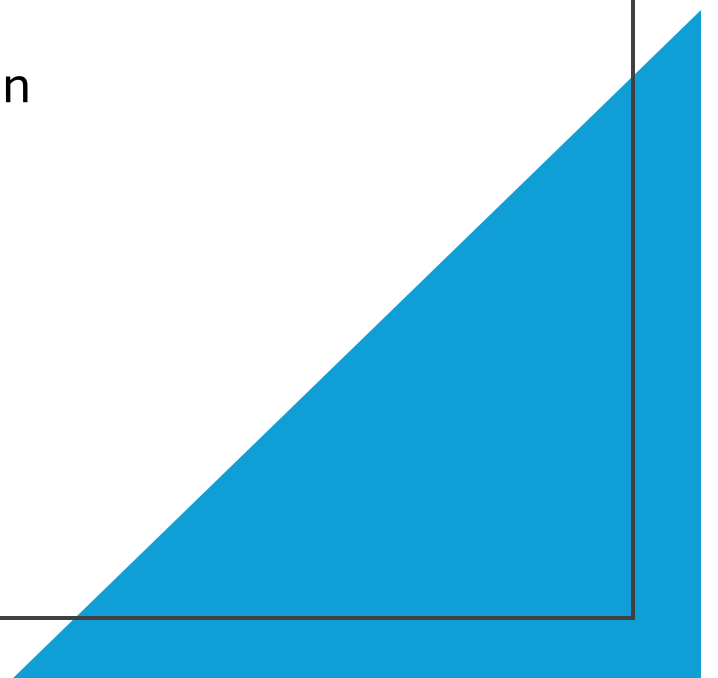
Italy and Greece focus
Greece Case

Greece has so far avoided major terrorist attacks, but both international and domestic conditions are shifting.

Security policies must balance human rights with the need to protect the country from potential threats.

Economic hardship and a progressive political climate make it difficult to implement stricter security measures, but prevention is crucial to avoid disastrous outcomes.

Italy and Greece focus
Italy's paradox

- Italy has been relatively less affected by jihadist terrorist attacks compared to other European countries like France, the UK, and Germany. Several theories attempt to explain this situation, often interconnected.

- Terrorist Organization Strategy

- Effectiveness of Law Enforcement and Intelligence

- Presence of Organized Crime

- Italy's geopolitical role

CONCLUSIONS

- Radicalism and terrorism represent a growing challenge for Southeast Europe.

- Security must be addressed with an integrated approach that combines hard power and soft power.

- Greece and the Balkans need to enhance regional cooperation and prevention strategies to mitigate the risk of terrorist attacks.

- The stability of the region will depend on the ability of the EU and individual states to balance security, integration, and respect for human rights.

- Radicalization has multiple causes, including social, political, and economic factors, which must be carefully analyzed to develop effective countermeasures.