

Building Dialogue Towards Reintegration Programs

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Content

Introduction	6
Methodology	7
Reactions of North Macedonia's institutions: from repressive measures towards softer ones	10
Institutional irregularities: a critical approach towards violations to the law	12
Reintegration: a new comprehensive step	30
Dialogue Workshop	34
Good practices for reintegration from Europe	38
Conclusion	42
References	46

Introduction

The Project “Building Reintegration and Initiating Dialogue for Greater Engagement” - BRIDGE is implemented by the Association for Civil Activism and Encouraging Social Responsibility HORIZON CIVITAS, and funded by the Government of the United Kingdom. Its purpose is to analyze the basic needs of family members of prisoners charged with criminal offenses for fighting in foreign countries like Syria and Iraq, as well as their involvement (of the families) in drafting adequate policies for programs for reintegration and resocialization.

The Project consists of two baseline activities: The Research Report and the Dialogue Workshop (including findings coming out of this activity) among the families in question and the members of the National Committee for the Prevention of Violent Extremism in the Republic of North Macedonia. The research report aims to depict a general analysis of the current state of stakeholders concerning help devise reintegration programs. The Dialogue Workshop seeks to draft the first steps of the reintegration program taking into consideration the recommendations that come from the families themselves. In this view, the project in general aims to advocate on building communication and dialogue among both interested parties: citizens and public institutions. In this context, the project mentioned above is also the first initiative in North Macedonia by the civil sector in the field of reintegration, solely targeting interviews specifically with the families of convicted individuals and thus enabling a direct dialog among the main parties in the area.

As a conclusion, the outputs from the project, in general, are expected to be considered in forming the public policies for reintegration by the relevant institutions responsible for their implementation. The project enables practical recommendations for the interested parties that need to take care of the citizens and serve them in the activities initiated within the reintegration and resocialization programs.



Methodology

The research project 'Building Dialogue Towards Reintegration Programs' aims to be a summary regarding the initiation of the reintegration programs. Also, the research is dedicated to the evaluation of the basic needs of the families that will be the primary beneficiaries of the programs. Hence, the study gives a comprehensive analysis of the present situation with the involved parties.

This study involves primary and secondary research data. There was a total of 24 family members interviewed directly for the needs of the project, (from 19 different families) of persons trialed with criminal offenses for participating in foreign battlefields in Syria and Iraq. Aside from the families, there were also interviews conducted with the Ombudsman and another attorney that represents six cases in court. Two others refused to be interviewed.

To secure more contextual content regarding the reintegration processes, the practices and policies of the two countries, the Netherlands and Denmark, have been articulated as good practices. Therefore, researchers have conducted a direct interview with the persons responsible for reintegration in the Netherlands. Apart from the interview, this part contains referrals to earlier publications that have data and analyses regarding reintegration programs in general, particularly for the countries as mentioned above. Further on, secondary sources (academic papers, newspaper articles, media news) were also used through different articulations concerning the topics covered in this work.

In the initial phases of this study, the researchers have sent an official request for publicly available information to the Directorate for the Execution of Sanctions, regarding the charged individuals, with the purpose of creating contact with the members of their families as well as their lawyers. However, the Directorate has not produced an answer to this request. Meanwhile, the connection with the family members was obtained through a personal network of the researchers themselves. Naturally, being unable to include all the specific cases limits this work in giving a more accurate picture to the research.

Reactions of North Macedonia's institutions: from repressive measures towards softer ones

With the uprising against the dictatorial regime of Bashar Al-Asad in Syria on March the 15th of 2011, as a continuation of the so-called 'Arab Spring' phenomenon the rebellion of different groups against the regime attracted the attention of the whole world, including North Macedonia as well. Different groups called for participation in the battlefield against the system; some with ideological and political motives, some with nationalist motives and others with ideological ones referring to the Islamic religion. Among the latter were organizations as ISIS and Al-Nusra, that were answered from approximately 150 citizens from North Macedonia¹. This occurrence of participation that reached its peak in the years 2013 – 2015 attracted the attention of the public institutions in charge of the public order security.


Namely, in the years 2014 – 2016, when North Macedonia was facing a political crisis under ethnic and nationalist tensions, North Macedonia's state institutions undertook a series of repressive measures opposing the participation in ISIS. The government headed by the nationalist party of North Macedonia VMRO-DPMNE did take punitive measures with the excuse of fighting radicalism arresting several persons from religious humanitarian organizations, but not only, actions regarding participation in ISIS or Al-Nusra groups to fight in Syria and Iraq. Therefore, initially, on 5th of September 2014, the Government of that time, updated the Criminal Code article denouncing and persecuting (even criminalizing) direct or indirect involvement in foreign battlefields, inter alia, renaming it by "serving in an enemy army"² in participating in a foreign army, police, paramilitary or parapolice formations.³ Eighteen days later, on September 23, 2014, the US State Department included North Macedonia in the list of countries partners of the Global Coalition to defeat ISIS⁴. These steps were in a way a 'warning for the indictments' that were being undertaken by the judicial organs towards the people that were directly or indirectly involved in the ongoing conflict in Syria.

1 News of NOVA TV, published on 10.Dec.2017, accessed online on <https://novatv.mk/150-gragani-od-make-donija-uchestvuvale-vo-vojnite-vo-sirija-i-vo-irak/>

2 Criminal Code of the Republic of Macedonia, accessed online on: <https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/laws/mk/mk018mk.pdf>

3 Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia published on 05.Sept.2014, accessed online on http://jorm.gov.mk/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/I_Krivicen_zakonik_132_05092014.pdf

4 The Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS: Partners, published on 23.Sept.2014, accessed online on: <https://www.state.gov/s/seci/c72810.htm>



Thus, on August 6, 2015, the authorities of North Macedonia undertook the first police action called “the Cell”⁵. The series of arrests continued with the action known in public as “Cell”⁶. As well as the action “Cell” 3 (August 27, 2016)⁷. In this period there were individual arrests done as well.⁸ After these police actions, on April 27, 2016, the Primary Court Skopje 1, opened the first case to trial the arrested persons.⁹ In a general context, North Macedonia’s way of opposing misdemeanor, as stressed in the study by Analytica Think Tank, was “focused on the executive and judicial competences, with little or no engagement of the community”.¹⁰ In other words, the politicized institutions in North Macedonia were completely focused on repressive measures only, without the measures which are characterized as “soft”. After the change of Government in June 2017, North Macedonia began to give the first clues on changing the way of fighting against the phenomenon of its citizens joining ISIS. Respectively, on August 25, 2017, the Government approved the formation of the National Committee for Prevention of Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism, where the internal organization would be structured in two subcommittees where the first (for the Prevention of Violent Extremism) would focus on softer measures, whereas the second would focus more on cooperation of the security bodies.¹¹

After this, the Government of North Macedonia, on March 6, 2018¹², adopted the National Strategy for the Prevention of Violent Extremism.¹³ This was also a specific step that the new government is focused on a more comprehensive and open approach in cooperation with the interested parties. In this context, the National Committee organized and continues to hold a series of meetings with the interested parties, where among others the interested parties at local level.¹⁴¹⁵

5 Public notice: The operative investigation “CELL”, Ministry of Internal Affairs, published on 06.08.2018, accessed online at <https://mvr.gov.mk/vest/277>

6 Public notice: Four arrested persons during the “Cell” action, published on 09 July 2016, accessed online at: <https://mvr.gov.mk/vest/2275>

7 Public notice: Five detained persons within the action ‘Cell 3’, published on 27 August 2016, accessed online at: <https://mvr.gov.mk/vest/2471>

8 Public notice: A 23-year-old citizen of Skopje arrested, a suspect in ‘Cell’, published on 22 October 2015, accessed online at <https://mvr.gov.mk/vest/638>

9 Article ‘Cell’, web portal on legal affairs ‘Akademik’, published on 04 May, 2016, accessed online at: <https://www.akademik.mk/sudenje/kjelija/>

10 Selimi K., Stojkovski F., Assessment of Macedonia’s Efforts in Countering Violent Extremism, a view from the civil society, published in November 2016, accessed online at: http://www.analyticamk.org/images/Files/extremism-al-updated-FINAL-web_14c87.pdf

11 16th Session of the Government, published on 25 July, 2018, accessed online at: <https://vlada.mk/sednica/16>

12 , 57th Session of the Government, published on 6 March, 2018, accessed online at: <https://vlada.mk/sednica/57>

13 National Strategy for the Prevention of Violent Extremism, published on 31 May, 2018, accessed online at: https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/dokumenti/sne_nacionalna_strategija_-_albanski.pdf

14 Press Release: Second Donor’s Meeting of the National Committee for the Prevention of Violent Extremism, published on 06.09.2018, online access: <https://vlada.mk/node/15407>

15 Notice, NCPVE organizers of round tables with relevant local stakeholders for the implementation of the National Strategy for the Prevention of Violent Extremism, published on 18.12.2018, online access: <https://vlada.mk/node/16231>

Institutional irregularities: a critical approach towards violations to the law

During the years 2012 – 2016, when the government led by the nationalist party VM-RO-DPMNE was in the peak of a political expansion of power on the public institutions, North Macedonia was characterized by the EU as a “captured state”.¹⁶ This quite harsh diplomatic attribute undoubtedly had to do with the absence of the rule of law, as well as not respecting the division of power between legislative, executive and judicial. In these years, North Macedonia was the scene of a series of court cases commented as politically motivated where institutions were violating legal processes.

Related to this, even in the repressive measures undertaken in the period 2014 – 2016 for participating in ISIS, the media also reported on some institutional irregularities.¹⁷¹⁸¹⁹ Among others, the Ombudsman has also registered two cases where certain people have requested legal assistance related to the indictments by public institutions.²⁰ Having this in mind, the main focus of this part is articulating the concerns and needs of the family members regarding some of the actions that are considered as a legal violation by the public institutions during the indictment processes that ended up with arrests. As a conclusion, based on the analysis of all interviews, these institutional irregularities are categorized into three main topics.

the interviewed family members of the convicted individuals also shared their concerns about the repressive institutional measures, mainly about police operations, judicial processes and the prison conditions. The observations show that those families has a feeling of injustice that, according to them, some violations to the law during those measures resulted to deepened distrust to public institutions.

16 Annual Report on Macedonia 2016, European Commission, published on 9.11.2016, online access: https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/pdf/key_documents/2016/20161109_report_the_former_yugoslav_republic_of_macedonia.pdf

17 17 News: “Cell”; MOI does not tell the name of the prison where the detainees are held, ALSAT-M, published on 10 July, 2016, online access: <https://www.alsat-m.tv/261314/>

18 News: The “Cell” case, the court hearing has been canceled, ALSAT-M, published on 27 April, 2016, online access: <https://www.alsat-m.tv/250282/>

19 News: Police have raided Gazibaba and Tetovo, 4 arrested, TV21, published on 09 July, 2016, online access: <https://tv21.tv/web/policia-bastis-gazi-baben-dhe-tetoven-arrestohen-4-persona/>

20 Interview with Ixhet Memeti, Ombudsman, held on 24 December 2016, Skopje

Reintegration: a new comprehensive step

According to the official data of the MOI of North Macedonia, up until June 2016, there were over 80 citizens of North Macedonia that have returned to their country after participating in battles in Syria and Iraq.²¹ Since many of them did return before September 2014, respectively before the Article for participating in foreign battles outside of the country was amended, the officials had not foreseen any punitive measures. However, there were official statements that the returnees are still under investigation.²² This approach, however, reflects that fact that the returnees are indeed perceived as a potential risk by the security services, for the security and public order, even after their return to their homeland. Globally, persons returning from wars or conflicts are considered as the main disturbers of security, since after their return they are deemed to easily fall prey to the psychological consequences (in psychology known as posttraumatic stress disorders), have experience in the battlefield, have been trained to use weapons, and could (still) have potential links to the violent groups.²³

However, policymakers in North Macedonia have in some cases expressed the political will to undertake measures not only with regards to the security access but also with inclusiveness, recommending initiation of re-socialization programs for the returnees.²⁴ This expressed will was later transformed into a proactive will, where reintegration was drafted into the National Strategy for the Prevention of Violent Extremism. In this strategy, the Government of North Macedonia has foreseen the implementation of the strategic goal for reintegration through resocialization and rehabilitation.²⁵ This undoubtedly implies a positive signal for the formation of the communication channels between public institutions and returnees as well as their relatives.


21 Webpage of the Presidency of the Republic of North Macedonia, 'Speech from the President Ivanov', published on 22.06.2019, online access: <http://www.president.gov.mk/mk/2011-06-17-09-55-07/2011-07-19-10-40-39/3849.html>

22 News: Spasovski: The returnees from Syria are under surveillance in Macedonia, published on 25.03.2016, online access on <http://www.albeu.com/maqedoni/spasovski-te-kthyerit-nga-siria-jane-nen-vezhgim-ne-maqedoni-/238394/>

23 Schuurman B. & van der Heide L., Foreign Fighter Returnees Reintegration Challenge, Radicalisation Awareness Network, published in November 2016, online access on: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/issue_paper_foreign_fighter_returnees_reintegration_challenge_112016_en.pdf

24 News: Spasovski: The returnees from the battlefields of Afghanistan, Syria or Iraq to resocialize, published on 19.10.2016, online access on: <https://portalb.mk/328112-spasovski-te-risocializohen-qytetaret-e-kthyer-nga-fushebetajat-nga-afganistani-siria-apo-iraku/>

25 National Strategy for the Prevention of Violent Extremism, published on 31.05.2018, online access: https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/dokumenti/sne_nacionalna_strategija_-_albanski.pdf



Also, research conducted by Analytica Think Tank has emphasized that most of the citizens of North Macedonia would have supported the reintegration of individuals returning from foreign conflicts into society.²⁶ Such reflections by the public opinion are very important for further work in the field of reintegration, since the community, as the recipient of the re-socialization process, is one of the key actors that need to be prepared for reintegration programs and to cooperate more in these processes.²⁷

Besides the community, the families of the returnees are among the most important parties in the reintegration process as they have a strong emotional tie with the returnee. When engaged, families are considered to have the most positive potential in the path for the reintegration of the returnees.²⁸ But, first of all, relevant actors involved in planning the reintegration need to have an analysis of the concerns and status of the families to address solutions more effectively within the reintegration programs.²⁹

26 Shabani S. & Kadri A., Working Towards Sustainable Communities, Analitika Think Tank, published in February 2018, online access: http://www.analyticamk.org/images/2018/CVE-AL-WEB_5ed96.pdf

27 The Malta Principles for Reintegration of Foreign Fighters Returned Terrorists, Hedayah & International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law, online access: <http://www.hedayahcenter.org/Admin/Content/File-26102016223519.pdf>

28 Molenkamp M., The Role of the Family and Social Network in the Rehabilitation of (Violent) Extremist Offenders and Terrorists, published on 7.03.2018, Utrecht, online access: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/home-affairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-p-and-p/docs/ran_pp_role_family_social_networks_rehabilitation_extremist_terrorist_offenders_06-07_03_2018_en.pdf

29 Responses to returnees: Foreign Terrorist Fighters and their Families, Manual of the Radicalisation Awareness Network, published in July 2017, online access: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/ran_br_a4_m10_en.pdf



Dialogue Workshop

On 22.02.2019, within the Project, “Horizon Civitas” organized a dialogue workshop for family members of persons convicted for crime related to fighting in foreign battlefields, respectively in Syria and Iraq and the public institutions, i.e. committee members from the office of the National Coordinator for PVE and CT with the purpose of identifying priorities for the initiation of reintegration and resocialization programs. The Workshop also aimed to create a space for the members of the families to be able to express the problems that they have encountered and still do face as a result of the entire process which is related to their convicted family member.

Twenty-seven family members participated in this Workshop from 19 cases and only four members of the NCPVE. The Workshop consisted of two activities: presentations on the importance of parenting by two local trainers and work in small groups where family members together with the members of NCPVE divided into four smaller groups discussed on the problems that can be resolved and defined priorities for the initiation of reintegration and resocialization. In the end, the work of each group was presented and summarized in a letter of priorities, that was handed to the stakeholders (NCPVE and international organizations that work in this field) with the purpose of undertaking steps for its implementation.

Based on the discussions, it was observed that the problems which the families of the convicted people face are relatively connected to the basic needs that the public institutions are obliged to fulfill within their regular scope of work. Consequently, the relatively low expectations from the public institutions have to ease prioritizing with the governing authorities and undertaking steps to realizing them. Also, it was observed that problems and needs expressed within each smaller working group were similar by nature. According to this, the priorities defined in the working groups were categorized into four sub-topics, as follow: health, legal, social and economic.

Other than this, there were discussions on having a multidisciplinary unit of appropriate institutions that would work only on the topic of reintegration and resocialization. Expressing such a need that comes from the families themselves above all reflects the trust they have in the public institutions. Another essential request that they pointed out was regarding media stigmatization, done from unprofessional reporting in the media, related to their cases.


LETTER OF PRIORITIES

Health Support

- The need for health treatment and rehabilitation from the psychological trauma caused to the family members, in particular from the repressive measure of the police.
- Securing the necessary medications for the prisoners that are in a severe health condition. So far, acquiring the prescriptions was done mainly privately from the families themselves.
- To enable specialized health treatments for the prisoners in the appropriate health centers outside prison.
- For some of the families with a critical health condition, to create the possibility for free service or lower participation fees to overcome the problematic situations.

Legal Support

- Removing legal problems that individuals that have served their sentence and their families illegally face, when crossing the borders of the Republic of North Macedonia.
- Respecting the right for parole during the weekends for the prisoners that have this right, and avoiding it with the subjective pretext of the security service.
- Securing financial means to cover the legal costs that have been created during the court processes and have not been covered due to the inability to do so.
- The possibility to secure free legal aid for the latest extradited persons (August 2018) for which the judicial procedure has just begun.
- In the event of the death of a close member (the extended family and friends) of persons still serving the prison sentence, to enable the legal framework that allows them to attend funeral rites.
- Provision of quality food for prisoners by the Directorate for Execution of Sanctions, as well as the possibility of transferring food delivered by family members, professionally and without misuse by the prison staff.

- 
- Provision for compensating for material damage caused during the repressive police measures, according to the expert's assessment of the damage in each of the cases.

Social Support

- Enabling legal and financial support (securing a monthly scholarship) for continuing the education of convicted individuals as well as some other members of their families.
- Enabling social and health services for the rehabilitation of persons with disabilities from the families of imprisoned individuals.
- To reactivate the social assistance for some cases that were discontinued for technical reasons.
- Institutional support to enable employment of individuals after the serving of the sentence, through collaboration with the private sector or organizing vocational training for qualifying in a particular field. This could go through Agency for Employment of North Macedonia.

Economic Support

- Financial support for the opening of small businesses for individuals that have served their sentence and who have ideas and aspirations for a business venture.

Good practices for reintegration from Europe

With the return of a large number of participants from Syria and Iraq to their hometowns, many countries around the world have alarmed the need to deploy reintegration and re-socialization programs, even from the stage of serving a prison sentence (after returning to their homeland). In this regard, some international organizations have prioritized the agenda of addressing effective solutions to the return phenomenon.³⁰ Also, EU member states have organized a series of meetings mainly through the Radicalization Awareness Network, from which they came to conclusions about joint actions to deal with returnees.³¹

Related to this, in the latest annual report for North Macedonia (2018 Report), the EU also stressed that *'It is necessary to invest in de-radicalisation measures and re-socialisation measures in the society and prisons.'*³² In this regard, it is important for North Macedonia to advance co-operation with regional and EU countries in the area of reintegration as well. For this, the competent bodies, respectively the National Committee for the Prevention of Violent Extremism, can prepare a more detailed analysis on good practices by states that have achieved concrete results in reintegration.

Thus, this part of the report focuses on examining some good practices in the reintegration area from two European countries: the Netherlands and Denmark. Reviews and evaluations in this section are based on direct interviews with the official authorities responsible for reintegration programs as well as on secondary resources that deeply analyze the programs in the states as mentioned above.

Netherlands

In many studies on the subject of reintegration, the Netherlands has been highlighted as one of the most efficient and successful states in Europe in terms of the measures undertaken for people returned from conflicts in Syria and Iraq. In fact, the Dutch experience with deradicalization programs dates back much earlier to the phenomenon of participation in these battlefields and the phenomenon of the returnees. It is worth pointing out that one of the other success

30 Rome Memorandum on Good Practices for Rehabilitation and Reintegration of Violent Extremist Attacks, Global Forum on Countering Terrorism, published in 2017, online access at: <https://www.thegctf.org/Portals/1/Documents/Framework%20Documents/A/GCTF-Rome-Understanding-ENG.pdf>

31 Responding to Returnees: Foreign Terrorist Fighters and their Families, published in July 2017, online access at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/ran_br_a4_m10_en.pdf

32 2018 Annual Report on Macedonia, European Commission, published on 17.04.2018, online access at: <https://ec.europa.eu/neighbourhood-enlargement/sites/near/files/20180417-the-former-yugoslav-republic-of-macedonia-report.pdf>



factors is investing in policymaking analysis in the area of reintegration. The Netherlands' programs are based on multidimensional analysis, including expert and local civic organizations assessments.³³ Next, policy-making working groups are formed based on conclusions from the analysis, which also includes many stakeholders at the local and republican level.

Since 2012, programs aimed at the reintegration of returnees from Syria and Iraq are conducted as a joint project of the National Security and Counter-terrorism Coordinator and the Dutch Probation Service. The program is implemented during and after serving the prison sentence of the person who has returned. Under the terms of this cooperation, five people have been designated by the Dutch Probation Service to deal directly with persons who have completed the serving of their prison sentence. The five officers have met each month at The Hague and were led by a sixth officer and a regional leader who monitors initiatives and reports at the highest level of regional management. Also, a public servant in the Department of Correction Service attends meetings where the developments regarding the program and further steps are discussed.³⁴

In addition to state-level institutional cooperation, the Netherlands is also highly focused on co-operation with the local level. Thus, one of the most important actors for the Netherlands in this regard is cooperation with civil society. Partnership with civil society focuses more on reintegration initiatives and engagement with members of the families of individuals involved in the phenomenon of fighting in Syria and Iraq. At the initiative of many relevant stakeholders, the Family Support Association was established in the Netherlands. The association consists of earlier activists in similar phenomena, religious authorities, activists with experience in the field of sociology, psychology, community, etc., and has financial support from public institutions as well as health services. The activities of the association mainly focus on health support, such as psychological counseling with family members. Among others, the association also organizes religious instruction activities as well as family visits.

Within the framework for local cooperation, another important body is the local government. Some municipalities in the Netherlands have formed local support units, where they deal especially with specific reintegration programs. The unit meets for regular meetings and consists of social workers, municipal officials, police units and other security officials. In these meetings, the unit consults the families' needs, and each case is dealt with separately.

33 Sieckelinck S. & de Winter, M., *Formers and families*, National Coordinator for Security and Counter-terrorism of the Netherlands, published in October 2015, online access at: https://www.nctv.nl/binaries/end-report-formers-and-families_tcm31-30167.pdf

34 Christensen, Wilchen T. & Bjørge, T., *How to manage foreign fighters returnees and other travelers in Syria?*, Oslo University, published in 2017, online accessibility at: <https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english/publications/c-rex-reports/how-to-manage-foreign-fighters-c-rex-research-report.pdf>

In order to enable efficient coordination between the central and local level, a multidisciplinary group of case employees, psychologists, representatives from security agencies, prison services, local government representatives, meets twice a month. The Dutch authorities also run the “Choose for Chances Program”, an eight-week program aimed at personal development (consisted of topics such as civic activism, social responsibility, peacebuilding, etc.). The first approach to families is implemented through the Local Security Coordinator. Families are also approached by the local police staff. They are specifically trained on how to approach families. The multidisciplinary team decides who will approach the family. The Group has internal mechanisms for evaluation of the implemented programs and is currently working on reinforcing this mechanism.

After finishing the detention, Netherlands undertakes an initiative as assistance for the released individuals, to fulfill five primary or essential conditions:

- *Housing* - ensure that the released individual has a place of residence/living.
- *Identity papers* - ensure that the individual continues to be legally represented in the state
- *Financial security* - ensures that the individual has an adequate income in the early post-release period. If not, based on the program's estimates, the person is assisted with appropriate financial assistance.
- *Social networks* - ensure that a person rebuilds his / her dignity in society through organizing or helping organization of social activities at the local level
- *Engagement* - this can be in employment or learning new skills (training, etc.) to start with any professional engagement.

Currently, in the Netherlands, there is a research analysis to introduce an additional component to this approach. This program is led by the Probation Service, in co-operation with local government. The program has financial support from the Government and started in 2012. In the past seven years, the program had 189 clients. Only 10 of them have refused to engage in this program.

The Netherlands also gives great importance to cooperation with religious communities. Local authorities have close cooperation with “masjids” (places of prayer for Muslims). They inform each other about their activities and are invited to various events. Among other things, Masjids inform local officials in advance whenever a foreign religious speaker is invited as a guest.³⁵

³⁵ Interview with Edith Lommerse, Senior Counselor for Coordination Policies in the Committee on National Security and Counterterrorism, on 07.12.2018



Denmark

According to estimates by the Danish authorities, by 2012, a total of 146 citizens from Denmark have left the country to join the battlefields in Syria and Iraq. Also according to estimates, half of them have returned in the following years. With this, the reintegration programs of returnees are a priority for the Danish institutions.

What distinguishes Denmark in the reintegration field is the rather soft approach.³⁶ The Danish re-engagement models are based on comprehensive and collaborative efforts among the many relevant actors. This multidisciplinary approach includes social service providers, the education sector, health care agencies, police, and security services. Local-level implementation also includes schools, youth clubs and local social services. It is worth noting that both before and during implementation, Danish authorities attach great importance to bottom-up and top-down consultations for the most successful implementation of the programs envisaged.

A program highlighted in this regard is the so-called “Back on Track” program support tool that aims at abandoning harmful ideas and reintegrating with the mainstreams of society after release from prison. With this, Danish authorities set up an individual mentor to mentor and accompany prisoners. Subsequently, mentor assessments are then transmitted to the local network of agencies, namely the social services, health care providers and educational institutions, to take appropriate measures such as a progress of the rehabilitation process. By participating in this program, prisoners enjoy the right to be released on probation.

The Danish model focuses on three guiding principles. The first is involvement rather than exclusion and stigmatization. This implies that Denmark works towards the fact that returnees do not differ from other Danish citizens who can be educated and employed. The second principle is based on quality relations between the private sector and public institutions, where it is working towards providing various opportunities for the released individuals in the private sector as well. Finally, the third principle is based on the scientific discipline called “Psychology of Life,” which is based on the assumption that every individual aspires and deserves a “better life.” With this context and worldview, the Danish institutions take care that the released individual fulfills his life with engagements and daily activities.


36 Hassan Rijal, AS, Deradification of Returned Foreign Fighters: Lessons from Denmark, RSIS - Nanyang Technological University, published on 23.10.2018, online access at: <https://www.rsis.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/CO18175.pdf>

Conclusion

After repressive measures taken against individuals returning from Syria's and Iraq's battlefields, as well as the convicted for their logistical and financial support, North Macedonia's authorities have not taken any steps to initiate comprehensive reintegration and re-socialization programs be it in the period of serving the sentence, or for those who have already served their sentence. However, the inclusion of reintegration and re-socialization of prisoners and their families as a strategic priority in the National Strategy for the Prevention of Violent Extremism shines on to the existence of a political will for a new approach to this phenomenon. However, considering the bureaucratic mentality of the state still in the post-transitional process towards democracy, which primarily considers such phenomena to be under the realm of security with repressive responses, the initiation of reintegration and re-socialization programs can be viewed as a challenging process.

On the other hand, the collapse of the overall situation of the prisoners' families from the entire process, ranging from police actions to constant stigmatization in society and state institutions, which as a consequence has weakened the trust in public institutions, is at the same time a challenge and an opportunity for authorities to initiate reintegration and resocialization programs. The difficulty lies in how much the state mentality is willing to first acknowledge the reality of the damage, and then realize the possible expectations for recompensing of families; while the possibility is that the realization of the relatively small hopes will undoubtedly mean the beginning of building credibility as well as the bridge of communication between the two parties for the initiation of reintegration and re-socialization programs. Therefore, it is considered that the vital step is to initiate the first steps for restoring trust in the institutions. Next, considering the relatively small number of cases, it is believed that the best way for a possible reintegration program is to handle cases separately, where steps would be taken according to specific case dimensions. Having these in mind, the systematization of the reintegration and re-socialization programs should be done in a way that local governments would be the starting point for direct contact and engagement with convicts as well as their family members.

The engagement of civil society, especially at the local level, for advocacy among stakeholders as well as for direct contribution to reintegration and re-socialization programs is vital throughout this process. Civil society can play a significant role as a catalyst for building communication between the parties and the positive development of rein-



tegration and re-socialization. However, considering the finding in this research that some civil society activists who have tried to assist earlier but have failed in this regard, the reality is revealed that civil societies must first be credible and acceptable in the affected communities as well as form a constructive network with them.

It is also worth mentioning that for the initiative of such a process, public institutions in the country need the professional support of international organizations with experience in the field of reintegration and re-socialization. Good practices implemented in some European countries and their exchange with the institutions can help North Macedonia to succeed in this direction. Also, emphasizing international organizations and the importance of North Macedonia's engagement in reintegration and re-socialization shows that such support is there and will be there. However, it is more important that institutions do not consider this engagement only as "compulsory" by international partners, but as an authentic political will to address an area that has never been discussed in history.

In conclusion, it is found that reintegration and re-socialization require a more comprehensive and collaborative approach with all stakeholders. First and foremost, this process requires changes in the approach to convicts and their family members. This implies the perception of them as fellow citizens of North Macedonia that have been influenced by a phenomenon at a certain point in their lives, where all stakeholders should contribute to avoiding the consequences; and not as a permanent threat to public order, with labels that degrade dignity and fuel potential frustrations on prisoners and their families. This would not only help to improve relations and open a new page in the lives of the affected individuals but would also correct the current "codes" of decision-makers in North Macedonia in a more positive direction.

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Building Dialogue Towards Reintegration Programs

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