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ISLAMIC EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM AS A THREAT TO THE NATIONAL SECURITY OF THE KINGDOM OF BELGIUM

ІСЛАМСЬКИЙ ЕКСТРЕМІЗМ ТА ТЕРОРИЗМ ЯК ЗАГРОЗА НАЦІОНАЛЬНІЙ БЕЗПЕЦІ КОРОЛІВСТВА БЕЛЬГІЇ

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The article analyzes the problem of Islamization of the Kingdom of Belgium, as well as migration, religious extremism and terrorism, which threaten the national security of the country. In modern Belgium, as in many other countries of the European Union, there is an increase in the number of people professing Islam, this trend is already beginning to create a new reality that affects the situation in Belgium in such aspects as social, economic and political life. The current situation has a long history. After the Second World War, the Kingdom of Belgium was restoring its economy. The country lacked workers. In the sixties, workers from the Arab countries of North Africa and Turkey began to come to Belgium. By the seventies, Muslims who came to work in Belgium began to bring their families, thereby increasing the number of Muslims living in the country. This meant the emergence of a new social group that differs from the indigenous population of Belgium in religious, ethnic and cultural terms. The Muslim diaspora began to populate large cities of Belgium. Gradually, mosques, Islamic centers, Muslim schools and Arabic language courses began to be built. In this process, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia played an important role, providing financial and diplomatic assistance. In 1974, the Belgian government recognized Islam as one of the state religions. Since the beginning of the XXI century, Muslim migrants began to pose a problem for Belgium. Migrants were difficult to integrate into Belgian society, and created a Muslim society within a Christian society. Muslim youth, who are poorly integrated, often become victims of the propaganda of Islamic fundamentalism, pushing them towards terrorism. After the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, several hundred native Belgians, as well as Belgian Muslims, went to fight in Syria and Iraq. Many of them returned to Belgium, and pose a danger to national security. Since 2015, terrorist attacks have occurred in major cities of Belgium, behind which stood the Islamic State. At the same time, the Kingdom of Belgium has been involved in the war against terrorism as part of western coalition in North Africa, the Middle East and Afghanistan. As the results have shown, the strategy of multiculturalism does not work. In Belgium, two societies coexist that are completely different and often conflict with each other. The Belgian government now and in the future needs to develop radical mechanisms to solve this problem.

Key words: Belgium, Islam, Islamophobia, terrorism, migration.

У статті аналізується проблема ісламізації Королівства Бельгії, а також міграція, релігійний екстремізм та тероризм, які загрожують національній безпеці країни. У сучасній Бельгії, як і в багатьох інших країнах Європейського Союзу спостерігається зростання чисельності населення, що сповідує іслам, ця тенденція вже починає створювати нову реальність, яка впливає на ситуацію в Бельгії в таких аспектах як соціальне, економічне та політичне життя. Ситуація, що склалася, має довгу історію. Після Другої світової війни, Королівство Бельгія відновлювала свою економіку. Країні не вистачало робітників. У шістдесятих роках в Бельгію стали приїжджати робітники з арабських країн Північної Африки та Туреччини. До сімдесятих років, мусульмани, які приїхали на роботу до Бельгії, стали привозити свої сім'ї, тим самим збільшуючи чисельність мусульман, що проживають у країні. Це означало появу нової соціальної групи, яка відрізняється від корінного населення Бельгії в релігійному, етнічному та культурному плані. Мусульманська діаспора стала заселяти великі міста Бельгії. Так само поступово стали будуватися мечеті, ісламські центри, мусульманські школи та курси арабської мови. У цьому процесі королівство Саудівська Аравія відіграло важливу роль, надаючи фінансову та дипломатичну допомогу. 1974 року Бельгійський уряд визнав Іслам однією з державних релігій. З початком XXI століття мігранти мусульмани почали представляти проблему для Бельгії. Мігранти складно інтегрувалися в бельгійське суспільство і створювали мусульманський соціум усередині християнського соціуму. Мусульманська молодь, яка слабо інтегрована, часто стає жертвою пропаганди ісламського фундаменталізму, що підштовхує до тероризму. Після появи Ісламської Держави Іраку та Леванту кілька сотень корінних бельгійців, а також бельгійців мусульман поїхали воювати до Сирії та Іраку. Багато з них повернулися до Бельгії, і становлять небезпеку для національної безпеки. Починаючи з 2015 року, у великих містах Бельгії стали відбуватися теракти, за якими стояла Ісламська Держава. У той же час Королівство Бельгія брало участь у війні проти тероризму як частина західної коаліції в Північній Африці, Близькому Сході та Афганістані. Як показали результати, стратегія мультикультуризму не працює. У Бельгії співіснують два суспільства, які абсолютно різні, і часто вступають у конфлікт один з одним. Бельгійському уряду зараз і в майбутньому необхідно розробити радикальні механізми вирішення цієї проблеми.

Ключові слова: Бельгія, іслам, ісламофобія, тероризм, міграція.

Introduction. The Islamization of the Kingdom of Belgium has been going on for several decades and will continue to develop in the 21st century. The increase in the birth rate among Muslims, migration from Muslim countries to Belgium and their weak integration have already begun to create problems for the security of the Kingdom of Belgium. The conflict between two civilizations, Islamic and Christian, in a small European country has caused the growth of Islamic extremism and terrorism on the one hand and Islamophobia on the part of the indigenous population of Belgium.

The article's main goal. Research on the social, economic and political behavior of Muslims in Belgium and how it affects the country's national security.

Recent literature review. The topic of Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism in Belgium has been studied by scholars such as Mehmet Orhan, Martijn de Koning, Carmen Becker, Ineke Roex, Alastair Hamilton, Samuel Humes, Sarah Teich, Therese De Raedt and etc.

The main research material. The first mass migration of Muslims to Belgium began in the early sixties of the XX century. The reason for the mass migration was the need for cheap labor. This was a typical situation for Western European countries that were experiencing economic growth in the first few decades after the end of World War II. At the beginning, Belgium concluded agreements with Italy in 1946, with Spain in 1956 and with Greece in 1957. In 1964, the Kingdom of Belgium signed an agreement with Turkey and Morocco. After that, thousands of migrants from these two Muslim countries began moving to the European country for work. Many of them found work in coal mines, textile and metal processing industries [1].

Between 1967 and 1974, the economic growth in Western Europe began to slow down and many countries began to introduce laws restricting the migration of workers from Muslim countries. Belgium was no exception. Turks and Moroccans began to move their families and settled in many cities in Belgium, creating a Muslim diaspora [2, C. 681-685].

In 1974, the Belgian government recognized Islam as one of the official religions of the country, which meant granting it a special status, including financial and material assistance. The presence of Muslims became more noticeable in the eighties. Muslims living in Belgium began to make pilgrimages to Mecca, open halal shops, bookstores where they began to sell religious literature, build mosques and open Islamic cultural centers where religious and public figures invited from Islamic countries spoke. Also, Muslim women began to wear the hijab, which was not approved by the native population of Belgium.

The first generation of Muslims who came to work in Belgium formed their own diaspora. Their way of life was not much different from their life in their home countries. They went to prayers in mosques and

spent their free time in classic Arab cafes, where they drank coffee, tea, smoked hookah and cigarettes and discussed various topics. The second generation of Muslim migrants was very different from their parents. They did not go to mosques as often, were more educated, spoke the language of the host country, and led a more liberal way of life [3, C. 18].

The majority of Belgian Muslims live in Brussels. In 2004, 20% of the total number of Muslims in Belgium lived in the capital. Many people of Moroccan origin live in cities such as Antwerp and Liege. People of Turkish origin live in Antwerp, Ghent and Limburg [4].

As already mentioned, Islam is the second most widespread religion in the Kingdom of Belgium. According to data for 2024, the approximate percentage of Belgian residents who profess Islam is from 4% to 7.6%. The Belgian authorities do not have clear data on the number of Muslims living in the Kingdom of Belgium. They themselves admit this fact.

The Muslim population of Belgium is not evenly distributed. It is mainly concentrated in large industrial cities. Of the total number of Muslims in Belgium, 40% live in Brussels. Approximately 250,000 to 400,000 people profess Islam. That is, approximately 5% of the total number of residents of Belgium. It is very difficult to establish the exact number of the population that professes Islam, since a census of residents of Belgium by religious affiliation is prohibited. Nationality cannot be determined by religious affiliation, since most people from the Islamic region have Belgian citizenship, and their children are born citizens of Belgium.

The majority of Muslims living in Belgium are Sunnis. They are the majority. There are also Shiite and Ahmadi Muslims in the country. Recently, the Muslim diaspora has begun to grow rapidly. This is due to the migration of Shiite Muslims from countries such as Lebanon, Iran and Iraq. They mainly live in Brussels and Antwerp.

If we consider the aspect of distribution of Muslims by regions of Belgium, 42.2% live in Flanders. 23.3% live in the Wallonia region. Another 35.5% live in Brussels. In the capital, the Muslim diaspora is located in such areas as Molenbeek and Schaerbeek.

In the last decade, there has been a trend towards increased religiosity among young Muslims in Belgium. This is expressed in visiting mosques to pray, visiting Islamic cultural centers, studying the Koran and Arabic. Among Arab and Turkish youth in Belgium, there is a growing Islamic self-identification, as a sense of belonging to the Islamic world. This indicates their low integration into Belgian and Western society. As recent studies show, Islam for Belgian Muslims is not just a religion, but also a cultural and social identification [5].

Muslims in Belgium take an active part in the political life of the country. This is a natural social process associated with the gradual increase in the number of

Muslims in the Kingdom of Belgium, who are beginning to influence political processes within the state.

The beginning of the political activity of Muslims in Belgium can be considered the sixties. At that time, Muslim students, with the support of the Embassy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, created a commission to obtain premises for Muslim meetings. As a result, in 1963, the Islamic and Cultural Center of Belgium was created. The first task of this organization was to obtain permission from the government of Belgium to create an Islamic pavilion in the Sankantener Park in Brussels on the basis of the Eastern Pavilion. In 1967, during the official visit of the King of Saudi Arabia Faisal ibn Abdulaziz al-Saud, the King of Belgium agreed to the transfer of the building in the park for the needs of the Islamic Cultural Center of Belgium during the official meeting. After a long reconstruction, in 1978 the Eastern Pavilion was rebuilt into a mosque. The main task that the leadership of Saudi Arabia saw, was to promote its interests in Belgium and the propaganda of the ideology of Wahhabism. Today, at the Cathedral Mosque in Brussels there is a school, Arabic language courses and an Islamic research center [6, c. 134-137].

The growing number of Muslims in Belgium led to Muslim riots and clashes with the country's security forces in the early nineties. The clash occurred on the evening of May 10 due to a dispute between the Brussels police and a 17-year-old teenager over the license plate on his motorcycle. The dispute turned into a fight and a clash with the police. Arab youth took part in the riots in the Molenbeek-Saint-Jean and Schaerbeek districts, using cobblestones and Molotov cocktails. A few days later, several cars were burned in two districts of Brussels. The Muslim riot in Brussels in 1991 was caused by the large number of Muslims in the capital of Belgium, their young age and lack of integration into Belgian society [7].

In 1999, the first Islamic party, NOOR, was founded. The party appealed to Islamic values and appealed to the conservative Muslim diaspora. The party offered a political and social alternative. Controversial issues included forced marriage and the death penalty, the fight against smoking, alcohol and drug use. This led to a negative reaction among Belgian society towards Islamic political forces.

Parties such as the Young Muslim Party, the Party for Citizenship and Prosperity and others also gradually emerged. The bulk of candidates in these parties' elections were young Muslims with low levels of education who were born in poor areas of Belgian cities. These parties are considered marginal in Belgian society [8, c. 15-16].

In 2012, a new political party called «Islam» was founded in Belgium. The party is based on the ideology of Islamism, the goal of which is to build an Islamic state and society on the territory of modern Belgium. In the municipal elections in Brussels, the party man-

aged to win two seats, which were lost in the elections in 2018. The main political demands of the «Islam» party are halal food in canteens and restaurants, recognition of Islamic holidays, gender segregation, the wearing of the hijab by Muslim women, especially girls in schools, and adherence to Islamic ethics [9].

As we can see, Islamic political parties in Belgium are not very popular. Their strategy is to make a name for themselves and promote their interests in areas with a high Muslim population. Muslim political activity is a long-term project that is designed for several generations in the future, when the demographic component of Belgium will gradually change and the Muslim population will begin to grow due to high birth rates.

As a NATO member, the Belgian Armed Forces have taken part in many armed conflicts in the Muslim region. Belgium has long been involved in the war against terrorism. Since the autumn of 2001, when NATO forces began their invasion of Afghanistan, Belgium has provided humanitarian aid by providing 90 tons of food, as well as liaison officers, analysts and communications specialists for US military operations [10].

In 2005, Belgium deployed six of its F-16 fighters to Afghanistan. The Belgian fighters carried out joint combat sorties with the Dutch Air Force [11].

In 2014, the Belgian F-16 mission ended. The last combat sortie was carried out on September 28 [12].

The Belgian military contingent left Afghanistan on 25 May 2021, as part of the general evacuation of NATO forces [13].

In March 2011, the Belgian Air Force took part in Operation Odyssey Dawn, the mission of which was to ensure a no-fly zone over Libya and inflict a strategic defeat on the forces of Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. The operation involved 6 F-16 fighters, which carried out 448 missions [14].

Since 2014, Belgium has been participating as a member of the coalition against the armed groups of the Islamic State. Belgian F-16 fighters have taken part in combat operations in Syria and Iraq [15].

Thus, the Belgian armed forces took part in other Muslim regions where fighting took place. They were also part of a military coalition of Western countries to ensure security in unstable regions and prevent the spread of Islamic extremism in the countries of the European Union.

Islamic terrorism poses a high threat to the national security of Belgium. This is due to several aspects. The first is the presence of a Muslim diaspora living in large cities in Belgium. These are mainly people from North African countries, as well as from Turkey. After 2015, refugees from Syria began to arrive in Belgium, fleeing the civil war in their country. The second aspect is the low integration of Muslim youth into Belgian society, low level of education, unemployment and poverty. The second aspect is the participation of the Belgian armed forces, as part of the Western coali-

tion, in military operations in Afghanistan, the Middle East, North and Central Africa against armed groups of Islamic fundamentalists. From the point of view of Islamic fundamentalism, Belgium is seen as an enemy Christian state, which is conducting a new crusade in the Islamic world. The third aspect is the geographical location of Belgium, which borders countries such as France and Germany, which are home to a large Muslim diaspora and which themselves are faced with Islamic extremism and terrorism.

In modern history, the Kingdom of Belgium has often faced the threat of Islamic terrorism. In the nineties of the twentieth century, the country was a transit state for terrorist organizations such as the Armed Islamic Group of Algeria and the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group. The Al-Qaeda militants who killed Ahmed Shah Massoud, the head of the Northern Alliance, two days before September 11 were residents of the Brussels district of Molenbeek.

Also, in 2005, Muriel Degauque, a Belgian convert from Catholicism to Islam, committed a terrorist act in Iraq by blowing herself up. This was the first time a Western European woman had blown herself up in a terrorist attack.

After the civil war in Syria and Iraq began, some Belgian citizens went to fight in jihad. After their return, many of them became a danger to Belgium's national security [16, C. 7-8].

In 2016, Belgium was hit by three terrorist attacks attributed to the Islamic State. On March 22, two explosions occurred in Brussels, one at the city's airport and the other at the Molenbeek metro station. Thirty-two people were killed and more than 300 were injured [17].

On August 6, an Islamic State militant attacked two police officers with a machete in the city of Charleroi [18].

On October 5, another terrorist attack with a bladed weapon occurred. Several Belgian police officers were wounded [19].

An important role in the spread of Islamic extremist ideology in Belgium was played by social platforms on the Internet, through which propaganda and recruitment of new militants was conducted, and by the developed public transport system in the country, which allowed for quick movement to the necessary places. According to Belgian researcher Pieter Van Ostaeyen, 450 Belgian citizens, including women, visited Syria and Iraq and gained combat experience there, after which they returned back to Belgium [20].

Islamic terrorism in Belgium is one of the elements of danger for the state and for neighboring countries

in general. The lack of a well-thought-out policy of integration of the Muslim population leads to an increase in adherents of Islamic extremism among the Muslims of the country.

The existence of the Muslim diaspora, migration, the problem of integration, Islamic extremism and terrorism have caused the development of Islamophobia among the indigenous population of Belgium. According to the Interfederal Centre for Equal Opportunities, 90% of people discriminated against in Belgium are Muslims. Since 2015, namely the year of the increase in migration flows of Muslims from the Middle East and North Africa, the percentage of negative attitudes towards Muslims has increased sharply. For example, 43% of Muslims in Belgium have been discriminated against when looking for housing. Also, discrimination against Muslims is manifested in such aspects of life as employment, education, health care, etc [21].

One of the acts of Islamophobia in Belgium was the ban on Muslim women wearing burqas in public places. In 2004, the Belgian city of Maaseik was the first to pass a law banning our burqas [22].

Until 2011, at the regional level, authorities began to prohibit wearing the burqa. On June 1, 2011, the Belgian parliament at the state level banned wearing the hijab and other types of scarves that can partially or completely hide a woman's face and head. After the adoption of this law, conflicts occurred for many years due to non-compliance with the law on wearing the hijab. The cause of the conflicts is the clash of the Belgian law on religious freedom and the protection of the national and cultural identity of Belgium, as a Christian country [23].

Conclusion. The growing Islamization of Belgium already poses a high threat to the state. Firstly, the growth of the Muslim population in the country is increasing due to the high birth rate, compared to the native population of Belgium. Secondly, the Muslim population is poorly integrated into the society of the host country, preferring to adhere to their religious and cultural customs. Thirdly, Muslim cultural customs are very different from Belgian ones, which are based on Christianity or on the secular relationship between religion and the state. Fourthly, the low standard of living of Muslims and their lack of integration into Belgian society leads to an increase in extremism and terrorism, as a social response, especially among young people who profess Islam. Thus, there is a gradual spread of Islamic extremism among Muslim youth, which already threatens the national security of Belgium.

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