Youth DE-Radicalization in Tunisia

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NECE Focus Group
Thessaloniki, October 20, 2015
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What’s Radicalization

- The European Commission defines radicalization as: “the phenomenon of people embracing opinions, views and ideas which could lead to acts of terrorism”

- The process of [an individual or a group] adopting an extremist belief system [inspired by philosophical, religious, political or ideological notions], including the willingness to use, support, or facilitate violence [or undemocratic means], as a method to effect [drastic] societal change
Background & context

- January 2011: 1st Arab spring upraising led by Tunisian youth in marginalized areas
- Collapse of one of the most rigid and authoritarian regime = Power vacuum
- General amnesty & presidential pardons = 10000 pardoned
  5000 related to Muslim brotherhood & 2000 salafists
- Return of huge number of Tunisian combatants from Iraq & Afghanistan
- Loss of border control
- Approximately 1,000 of 5,300 Tunisia’s mosques slipped from the government's control. 200 new mosques built without a license also became centers of radicalization.
About 3,500 charities associated with political Islamist groups or Salafist organizations were founded. Two hundred of them were associated with the Salafist group Ansar al-Sharia.

Some of the associations also set up kindergartens and schools to teach radical interpretations of Islam as well as establishing training camps in western Tunisia, on Mount Chaambi, close to the border with Algeria.

During this period, these organizations were able to establish an infrastructure for jihadism in Tunisia.

The government did not intervene until a group of protesters, including Salafists, stormed the US Embassy in September 2012.
Two political assassinations in the winter and summer of 2013 that thrust the country into political crisis.

Huge CSOs reaction pushed the government to designate Ansar al-Sharia a terrorist organization.

The Islamist rolling party Ennahdha left the power and a political dialogue process led by the quartet (Labor Union, Trade Union, HR league and the lowers bar) launched

Consensual non-partisan government led the transition

New constitution, 2 peaceful and successful elections but very low youth participation (less then 20%)

Political stability but security still very vulnerable
The Roots of Youth radicalization in Tunisia

Radicalization of youth is currently increasing due to the various individual, social and political & institutional external and internal push factors:

- Individual push factors
  - Brutal and impulsive behavior
  - Lack of hope
  - Lack of sense of belonging
  - Lack of fulfillment
  - Disappointment and frustration

- Socioeconomic push factor:
  - The socioeconomic situation in Tunisia has worsened since the revolution, which has led to the disenchantment of the lower and middle classes and the youth in particular
The Roots of Youth radicalization in Tunisia

- Politico-institutional
  - The Ex regime tight control of the religious sphere meant that there were few religious actors to step in after the revolution. The fall of the regime created a vacuum that allowed radical groups to preach their ideas and recruit new members among the disenfranchised youth.
  - Ennahdha, a major Islamist religious political party, has focused on constitution building and political struggles and has not struck a healthy balance between politics and religion.
  - Ennahdha has acted pragmatically to consolidate its political standing. But its failure to break with the former political system has further opened up space for social and political contestation.
Youth & Radicalisation

- Youth represent 37% of the population
- Youth led the Tunisian revolution
- High Youth expectations
- 30% Youth unemployment
- High penetration of internet and tech
- 3,000 Tunisians have gone to fight in Syria, Iraq and Libya. The Tunisian Mol says that it has stopped around 12,500 young people trying to leave for foreign battlefields and arrested more than 1,000.

Youth De-radicalization in Tunisia

Government responses:

- The government’s responses to the radicalization threats have so far been militarized. These responses elicit mixed reactions from Tunisian society, who are fearful of extremism but also concerned about the government overstepping and infringing on the space for a vibrant civil life, which hold the risk of aggravating grievances and resentment from communities already vulnerable to extremist appeal.
Youth De-radicalization in Tunisia

Civil Society responses:

- The Civil Society’s efforts on De-radicalization have, so far, focused on the symptoms of the phenomenon and not going deeply in the analysis of the roots and causes of it.
- The Civil Society’s actions are not harmonized and there’s no collaboration between one and other or with government to have clear vision or common strategies in countering radicalization.

Academia responses:

- Very limit number of research and case studies on youth issues & Youth radicalization.
Youth De-radicalization in Tunisia: 2 pilot initiatives

- Empowering Youth Change-makers:
  - Building youth capacities to further engage them in civic actions and public affairs
  - Building constructive relation between Youth and their environment
  - Increasing youth visibility in the society
  - Celebrating Youth success
Youth De-radicalization in Tunisia: 2 pilot initiatives

- On October 17th, 120 young activists in 24 youth-led organizations from the 24 governorates of Tunisia organized the National forum Youth to CVE in collaboration with the ministry of Youth and Sports and the ministry of Social affairs and with the support of SFCG.
  - Prevention
  - Disengagement
  - Enabling state responses
  - Amplifying new narratives

Outcome: Tunisian Youth Action Agenda
Houmty Initiative

- Houmty is a bottom-up approach with community based ownership could be one of the possible solutions for the mitigation of radicalization of youth in Tunisia by targeting each push factors on the various levels, and aiming towards prevention, de-radicalization [disengagement] and reintegration.

- Reduced risk of vulnerable youth joining extremist groups, increased confidence between local community and authorities, architecture to provide sustained support program.

- This Initiative aims to establish a multiagency structure for local authorities (police, municipality, health, education, Youth, employment, culture and social services), Local CSOs and local young activists to assess cases of individuals or groups vulnerable to radicalisation, and develop tailored assistance packages to address that risk.
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Our challenge for Youth inclusion and de-radicalization

- Changing behaviors
- Changing perceptions
- Changing relations
Thank you

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