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## Jihadism in Portugal: Grasping a Nebulous Reality (ARI)

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**Theme:** Although for the most part inconclusive, signs of possible Jihadist activity in Portugal suggest certain similarities with the risks present throughout Europe.

**Summary:** There are several reasons that justify Portugal's lack of attention towards the Jihadist phenomenon. However, this is not to say that possible Jihadist activity is inexistent. In fact, apart from unclear situations that might conceal a Jihadist intent, there are a number of public cases where known Jihadists have arrived and spent time in Portugal. Still, no evidence of terrorist behaviour was ever discovered. Furthermore, it is not clear what the purpose of their permanence in the country was. Still, it is possible to detect in the few cases that occurred in Portugal some similarities with the Jihadist reality found in Europe.

**Analysis:** France, Germany, The Netherlands, Spain and the UK are some of the European countries that are clearly in Jihadism's sights. In fact, given the efforts made in the EU's political spheres, Jihadism is addressed as a common strategic threat. However, and in spite of historical affinities, geographic proximity and freedom of circulation within the Schengen area, Portugal seems to have escaped the violence perpetrated in the name of Allah. There is no significant news of Jihadist activities in Portugal, nor does the general public perceive it as a threat. But does perception equal reality?

To answer this question, it is important to start by making a brief comment on the reasons accounting for the marginal threat perception, namely political discourse, the media and the national Muslim community. Secondly, it is also relevant to uncover possible signs that might call for alert –in other words, aspects that though not constituting a real threat might indicate or evolve into one–. Finally, the analysis of known cases should allow us to obtain additional information to grasp this poorly-addressed reality.

### *A Comment on Threat Perception*

A proper analysis of the reasons behind the absence of a threat perception regarding Jihadism in Portugal would certainly require a quantitative and qualitative study. However, there are four reasons that would surely emerge as a result of such an analysis: (1) Portugal's attitude towards security and defence issues; (2) media coverage; (3) political discourse; and (4) the specific characteristics of the Portuguese Muslim community.

It could be said that contemporary Portugal –as regards both institutions and civil society– has a relatively passive, even negligent, attitude towards security and defence issues. This somewhat culturally-based stance leads to the adoption of only reactive policies – instead of preventive policies based on prospective analysis– and is prevalent in many aspects of daily life, including the media.

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Contrary to other European countries, information in open sources related to Islamist terrorism in Portugal is practically nonexistent. There are a considerable number of academic articles devoted to Jihadist movements in general and to the importance of Islam in Portuguese culture, but only a very few regarding Jihadism in Portugal itself. The media hardly ever publish any relevant information. Episodes of possible Jihadist activities have been reported in the media, although usually in a sporadic fashion and without being front-page news. Moreover, such cases have hardly ever brought to light any significant information and have never been followed up in any significant way.

A reason that often emerges in political and academic discourse in Portugal to support the idea that the country is immune to Jihadism is the country's low international profile. In other words, given Portugal's lack of leverage in world politics, the impact on the media that every terrorist attack aims for would be smaller than if perpetrated in a leading European country. Although a partly reasonable explanation, there are four considerations that limit its validity:

- (1) While this may be true for a well-structured and internationally-connected Jihadist cell, it is a mistake to think that the same logic applies to self-starter cells (self-reliant and self-recruited groups that have adopted al-Qaeda's rhetoric but act of their accord).<sup>1</sup> According to Europol, the number of these autonomous terrorist cells is on the rise and they are therefore an important concern regarding the Jihadist threat in Europe.<sup>2</sup>
- (2) The combination of Europe's freedom of circulation with the efficiency of the counterterrorist policies implemented in countries such as Spain, France and Germany means that terrorist cells can elect to transfer their activities and, in this respect, Portugal could become increasingly attractive as a target. Mounting security pressure in several European member states could drive committed terrorist cells to search for other countries with less experience in dealing with this sort of threat. Given the enormous freedom of circulation that citizens have within the Schengen area, transferring terrorist activities from one European country to another is not a difficult task.
- (3) Regardless of whether Portugal is –from the Jihadist's point of view– a good target, it is a feasible base for logistic operations –just as Spain was during the 1980s and 90s–
- (4) It ignores the fact that the European experience regarding the attraction of Jihadism generally relies on offering an identity and a sense of belonging to socially and spiritually alienated individuals. Thus, wherever there are socially disenfranchised fringes there is a potential radicalisation and recruitment ground.

The last of the four reasons explaining the absence of a perception of threat is the origin and structure of the Portuguese Muslim community, which dates from the African decolonisation process of the 1970s. The most significant groups came from Mozambique and Guinea-Bissau, joining a small group of Muslims already in the country since the 1950s, who had come as students. Among Portuguese Muslims there are Sunnis, but also a notable number of Shiite Ismailias who mainly arrived from Mozambique but are – for the most part– originally from the former colonial cities of India (Goa, Damão and Diu), territories lost by Portugal in 1960. It is also worth mentioning that after the creation of Pakistan and India in the 1940s, there was a Muslim exodus from both countries towards Mozambique. Hence, despite religious differences, there are no cultural clashes: these

<sup>1</sup> King's College London (2007), *Recruitment and Mobilisation for the Islamist Militant Movement in Europe*, ICSR.

<sup>2</sup> Europol (2009), *TE-SAT. EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report*, p. 39.

Muslims have been part of a Portuguese 'cultural society' for decades, identify themselves as 'Portuguese Muslims' and started integrating decades ago outside the country's contemporary borders. In addition, this community considers Islam an apolitical and peaceful religion and has been quite active in promoting inter-faith dialogue. Furthermore, most of the members of this traditional community belong to the educated middle and upper classes, and despite their exodus from India to Africa and then to Europe, they have not faced much hardship in resuming their professional activities, building successful careers in the business sector and forging close ties with the Portuguese economic and political elites. This well-established and integrated community, with strong Lusophone roots which are understood as part of their cultural identity, is largely unaffected by the rhetoric of Jihadist recruiters who prey on the socially disenfranchised. However, as discussed in the next section, the changes to the country's Muslim community brought about by the migrant influxes of the last couple of decades could very well undermine the leverage of Portugal's traditional Muslim community and decisively change this religious group's identity.

#### *Matters of Interest for Broad Risk Assessment*

It is widely recognised by experts that the forgery of documents and, to a lesser extent, drug trafficking are two of the main illegal activities used to support and finance Jihadist cells operating in Europe. Such activities have been detected within the new Indo-Pakistani and Maghrebi immigrant communities residing in Portugal. Moreover, there have also been reports of money laundering through small businesses owned and managed by members of these communities. Obviously, this does not allow us to conclude or even infer anything, but it constitutes a fact that should not be disregarded or merely understood as isolated criminal activities. Individuals from the Maghreb comprise the bulk of Jihadists arrested in Europe<sup>3</sup> while, on the other hand, Muslim migrant communities are often used by Jihadist organisations as a means to penetrate western societies. These newly-arrived immigrants can counterweigh, or at least bypass, the traditional Portuguese Muslim community by creating autonomous cultural-religious clusters. In fact, episodes of possible Jihadist activities in Portugal that will be presented later on in this analysis seem to confirm the need to draw the security forces' attention towards this new Islamic diaspora.

A further factor to take into account is the presence of Tabligh Jamaat (TJ), an international proselytising movement that is often described as being apolitical and peaceful, although there is no consensus on this. Founded in 1927 in India by Maulana Mohammad Ilyas, it was deeply influenced by Deobandism<sup>4</sup> and was a direct response to Hindu proselytising. The TJ is one of the world's most important Islamic movements and its annual international event in Raiwind, Pakistan, is the largest Muslim meeting worldwide after the *hajj* (pilgrimage) to Mecca, gathering over a million people. While strictly focused on propagating the Islamic faith, the TJ preaches an 'integrist' and strict version of Sunni Islam, similar to the Salafist forms adopted by the Jihadist movements. Though not violent in its actions and self-excluded from political participation in the West, the TJ prescribes a political version of Islam that perpetuates 'otherness', thus possibly jeopardising integration and, consequently, social harmony. The movement's rapid

<sup>3</sup> Edwin Bakker (2009), 'Jihadi Terrorists in Europe and Global Salafi Jihadists', in Rik Coolhaet (Ed.), *Jihadi Terrorism and the Radicalization Challenge in Europe*, Ashgate, Hampshire, 2008, p. 75-79; Europol (2009), *op. cit.*, p. 18.

<sup>4</sup> An Islamic movement started in 1866 at the *Dar al-Uloom* Deoband *madrassa*, north of Delhi, in India. Among other features, Deobandis were initially driven by resisting British rule and what they perceived to be the threat of the assimilation of Islam by the West.

penetration in non-Muslim countries began in the 1970s as a result of the joint efforts and cooperation between Saudi Arabia's Wahhabis and South Asia's Deobandis.<sup>5</sup> Nowadays, TJ members travel around the world as missionaries spreading the word of Islam with the purpose of establishing networks among Muslim communities in different countries and converting non-Muslims. It has successfully fulfilled its goals throughout Europe and the US, often functioning in parallel to Wahhabi organisations.<sup>6</sup>

However, despite its size and world-wide presence, the TJ is largely unknown as its activists shun both media and government attention.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, the movement has no known organisational structure, nor does it advertise its activities and financial records.

This Islamic movement is often accused of being a precursor to terrorist organisations in India, Pakistan, Algeria and even Morocco, as well as using its activists' frequent travelling for religious purposes to facilitate logistical and financial support for Jihadist organisations. Furthermore, many known terrorists and Jihadist recruiters have at some point in their lives belonged to the TJ, suggesting that it is often a preparatory step before entering a Jihadist organisation. However, since no indisputable links have ever been established, the connection with both Jihadist groups and terrorists could be construed as the work of individual members and not of the TJ as a whole. What seems likely is that Jihadists take advantage of TJ mobility and meetings to exchange information and carry out support activities for terrorist cells.

The TJ has been in Portugal since around 1979, although only in an organised and active way since the beginning of the 1980s. The movement holds its annual meeting, the *Ijtimah*, since 1987, an event attended during the past few years mainly by Portuguese Muslims although delegations from Spain, Morocco, Algeria, Pakistan, the UK and many other countries have at times been present. The *Ijtimah* aims to reflect the movement's international dimension and dynamism as well as facilitating contacts between Tabligh members from different countries. The TJ is currently using Portugal as a platform for spreading its pan-Islamic message to Africa (especially to Portuguese-speaking countries like Mozambique) and Latin America (particularly Brazil).<sup>8</sup> Within Portugal, the group relies on mosques and religious sites on the outskirts of Lisbon (eg, in Palmela, Laranjeiro and Odivelas) and on their corresponding *madrassas*.

Though fairly discrete and committed to projecting an apolitical image, the Portuguese TJ branch has not escaped controversy, at least on one occasion. In January 2008 a terrorist cell composed of 12 men (11 Pakistanis and an Indian) was dismantled in Barcelona before carrying out an attack on the city's subway system. One of its members admitted to the existence of plans for attacks Germany, the UK, France and Portugal. After the Spanish authorities issued a terrorist alert for these three countries, the Portuguese security agencies started searching for two Pakistani nationals, allegedly members of the Barcelona cell that would have entered Portugal through the TJ's *Jamaats* (proselytising groups) on their way to an *Ijtimah*. However, neither the Pakistanis' entry or presence was ever confirmed, nor was there any solid evidence pointing to a possible attack in

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5 Alex Alexiev (2005), 'Tablighi Jamaat: Jihad's Stealthy Legions', *Middle East Quarterly*, vol. XII, nr 1, Winter, p. 4.

6 Zeyno Baran (2005), 'Radical Islamist in Central Asia', *Current Trends in Islamist Ideology*, vol. 2, p. 51.

7 Alex Alexiev (2005), *op. cit.*, p. 3.

8 Member of the Portuguese Intelligence Community nr 1, interviewed by the author, 26/III/2010.

Portugal.<sup>9</sup> Nonetheless, three of the men detained in Barcelona had attended the *Ijtimah* in the past, between 2004 and 2007.<sup>10</sup>

There was at least another high-profile participant at a Portuguese *Ijtimah*. Abdelaziz Benyaich, a Moroccan national accused by his country's authorities of being involved in the Casablanca attacks of May 2003, was in Portugal for an *Ijtimah* when the bombs exploded.<sup>11</sup> In 2005 Abdelaziz was convicted of belonging to al-Qaeda's Spanish cell and was sentenced to eight years in prison.<sup>12</sup> Salahedin Benyaich, alias Abu Muhgen, Abdelaziz's brother, was convicted for the Casablanca attacks and is currently serving time in prison in Morocco, and was a mujahedeen in Bosnia, Chechnya and possibly other countries. Furthermore, Salahedin was close to Allekema Lamari, one of the terrorists responsible for the 11 March 2004 terrorist attacks in Atocha Station, Madrid, who committed suicide when surrounded by the police in Leganés, in the suburbs of the Spanish capital.

#### *Known Cases of Possible Jihadist Activities in Portugal*

Particularly since 2001, the Portuguese media has echoed some cases of possible Islamist terrorist activities in Portugal. The cases presented below were all reported in the national media, although here we present new data, analysis and conclusions.

##### *(a) Operation Alfarroba*

In March 2003 a police operation carried out in Lisbon and Quarteira (in southern Portugal) led to the arrest of 13 Algerians suspected of being involved in the forgery of documents. The identity of these men was never very clear, nor what their intentions were –a lack of information that would become habitual in future cases of possible Jihadist activities in Portugal–. Nonetheless, a name emerged from these arrests: Sofiane Laïb, a 25 year old Algerian national who was in Germany at the time of the arrests in Portugal.

With a record of petty crime –namely small-scale theft and the forgery of documents–, Laïb was party to a money transfer carried out by one of the 13 Algerians arrested. It has been reported that between 1998 and 2000 Laïb shared an apartment in Hamburg with Mohamed Atta, the leader of the cell responsible for the 11 September 2001 attacks in the US.<sup>13</sup> Whatever the case, it has been confirmed that the young Algerian knew Atta and frequented the same religious and social circles in Hamburg.<sup>14</sup> A few months after the arrest of the 13 Algerians in Portugal, Sofiane Laïb was arrested in downtown Lisbon in possession of forged documents, the sole crime for which he was convicted. After serving a short time in prison, Laïb was expelled to Algiers in April 2006 by the Portuguese authorities. One of his known associates was a Tunisian national called Ben Yamin Issak, alias Ben Youssef Boudhina, himself close to Atta in German Islamist circles.

In September 2002 Ben Yamin Issak tried to board an airplane in Lisbon headed for London. He carried a false French passport which was detected by a steward at the boarding gate. The extremely poor quality of the documentation suggests that he was

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9 Member of the Portuguese Intelligence Community nr 2, interviewed by the author, 9/IV/2010.

10 Member of the Portuguese Intelligence Community nr 3, interviewed by the author, 16/IV/2010.

11 Members of the Portuguese Intelligence Community nrs 1 & 3.

12 Amanda Figueras (2005), 'La audiencia nacional condena a 27 años de prisión al líder de la red terrorista de Al Qaeda en España', *El Mundo*, 27/IX/2005.

13 José Vegar (2007), 'O encaixe das rodas dentadas. A investigação do terrorismo Jihadista em Portugal', *Sociologia, Problemas e Práticas*, nr 54, p. 177.

14 Members of the Portuguese Intelligence Community nrs 2 & 3.



eager to get to the UK. Although detected, Ben Yamin Issak was able to leave the airport and later use false Portuguese ID to catch several buses until he arrived in London. Sofiane Laïb was waiting in a car outside the airport in case something went wrong –as it did– and helped Issak evade capture. When he arrived in the UK, he stayed at Kamel Bourgass’s house in Wood Green, north London. Bourgass is an Algerian national who trained in Afghanistan and is suspected of having fought for the Algerian GIA (*Groupe Islamique Armée* –Islamic Armed Group–). While in the UK, Ben Yamin Issak and Bourgass attended the Finsbury Park mosque, then run by the notorious Imam Abu Hamza al-Masri. In January 2003 they managed to anticipate a police raid which found Jihadist propaganda, Issak’s false Portuguese ID and castor-oil beans (typically used to produce ricin toxin) in Bourgass’s house, thus foiling the well-known ‘London Ricin Plot’. Issak’s false ID had been stolen by Sofiane Laïb from an African staying at a hostel in Lisbon which is associated with illegal immigration and prostitution. Kamel Bourgass was captured a few days later in Manchester after stabbing five police officers with a knife, one of whom died. He is currently serving a life sentence and his arrest triggered a raid by the British authorities on the Finsbury Park mosque, where false documentation used to support Jihadist activities was found. On 12 July 2003 Ben Yamin Issak was arrested in Liverpool trying to board an airplane heading for Barcelona.

*(b) The Alleged Euro Cup Plot and the Hofstad Group link*

In June 2004, just before the beginning of the Euro Cup –held in Portugal that year–, the Portuguese media reported that 11 men of Maghrebi origin had been deported to the Netherlands. Despite the fact that the arrest involved more than 20 individuals, only three were considered to be of interest,<sup>15</sup> among them Nouredine el-Fathmi and Mohammed el-Morabit, both Moroccan nationals. Nouredine el-Fathmi had lived in Amsterdam with Mohamed Bouyeri who, in November of that same year, had assassinated the film director Theo van Gogh.

At the time of the arrest in 2004 there was an established link between el-Fathmi and el-Morabit, who were arrested in a hostel in Oporto, and the Hofstad Group –a well known Jihadist organisation in the Netherlands–.

Among other material, the Dutch authorities had previously seized a declaration by Nouredine al-Fathmi in which he declared his intention of dying in the name of Allah. However, no evidence sufficient to ensure a conviction for terrorist activities was ever found in Portugal, and therefore he and the others were deported to the Netherlands where they were interrogated by the Dutch authorities and then released due to lack of evidence.

There was some speculation about a possible attack on the foreign dignitaries attending the Euro Cup, also aimed at the then Portuguese Prime Minister, José Manuel Durão Barroso. Although it was a plausible, no actual evidence of a planned terrorist attack was ever discovered.<sup>16</sup>

Given the intelligence gathered by the Dutch authorities, and the surveillance and efforts of the *Direcção Central de Combate ao Banditismo* of the *Polícia Judiciária* (at present the *Unidade Nacional de Combate ao Terrorismo*, or Counter Terrorism Unit of the Judicial

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15 Members of the Portuguese Intelligence Community nrs 1 & 3.

16 Members of the Portuguese Intelligence Community nrs 2 & 3.

Police), the arrest of these three men seems to have been a relatively over-hasty and ill-considered decision.

Nouredine el-Fathmi was again arrested in 2005, this time in Amsterdam on his way to Lelylaan Station while in the possession of firearms and ammunition. In January 2006 the Dutch public prosecutor claimed to have ample evidence that the Hofstad Group was indeed a Jihadist organisation, directed by a six-man council to which Mohamed Bouyeri and el-Fathmi belonged. In March 2006 el-Fathmi and Mohammed el-Morabit were sentenced by a Rotterdam court to five and two years imprisonment respectively. Bouyeri was also convicted at the trial for being the ringleader, although he was already serving a life sentence for the assassination of Theo van Gogh. Nouredine el-Fathmi was also implicated in what the Dutch intelligence called the 'Piranha Network', a group plotting to assassinate senior Dutch politicians and bomb a government building.

*(c) Serguei Malischev and Spain's Audiencia Nacional*

It has been reported<sup>17</sup> that in October 2004 the Spanish authorities warned Portugal of a terrorist cell trying to acquire explosives in Bragança, in northern Portugal, with the aim of perpetrating an attack against Madrid's *Audiencia Nacional*. However, there are members of the Portuguese intelligence community who claim there was no such tip-off.<sup>18</sup>

In May 2005 Portugal deported Serguei Malischev, a man suspected of being involved in this plot as well as having strong connections to Jihadist groups. Malischev, a Belarus national, remained under arrest in Portugal for two months due to immigration irregularities before being deported to Belgium, the country that had issued his Schengen visa. During his time in Portugal, as in many other cases, no evidence of terrorist activity was discovered. Still, Malischev had an apparently real interest in entering the country since he tried to do so twice: the first attempt failed, while the second was successful.<sup>19</sup>

Serguei Malischev surfaced later in Palma de Mallorca, Spain, where he was accused in December 2005 of belonging to a Jihadist cell led by an Iraqi called Abu Sufian, who – according to police sources quoted in the Spanish media<sup>20</sup> had direct contact with Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, then leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq. According to Fernando Andreu, the Spanish judge who presided over the trials of Malischev, Sufian and others, this terrorist cell endorsed proselytising activities and recruited individuals to be later sent to fight in Iraq, Chechnya and other countries in Asia.

Malischev was a chemical-weapons expert with a background in Pakistan and Azerbaijan. He also went by the names of Andrey Misiura and Amin al Anari and died in prison in 2009.

*(d) The Four Cape-Verdean Dutch*

In February 2006 the Netherlands issued an alert for four Dutch citizens of ethnic Cape-Verdean descent. The group had been involved in a shootout in a Rotterdam pub causing five deaths, after which they fled to Portugal.

17 Maria do Céu Pinto (2007), 'Portugal. Plataforma logística do terrorismo Islâmico', *Cidadania e Defesa*, nr 25, May/June, p. 17; José Vegar (2007), op. cit., p. 178-179.

18 Members of the Portuguese Intelligence Community nrs 1, 2 & 3.

19 Member of the Portuguese Intelligence Community nr 3.

20 'La policía detiene a quince personas por reclutar y adoctrinar terroristas para Irak', *El Mundo*, 19/XII/2005.

It was said that at least one of them was an Islamist terrorist related to the Hofstad Group, and that the gang's leader had been trained in the Yemen. However, there is no solid evidence that either the alleged leader, Fernando Jorge Pires, had been trained in the Yemen or that there was any significant link with the Hofstad Group. The shootout in Rotterdam was related to a diamond-trafficking deal that had gone wrong, and the alleged Hofstad link was no more than contact with a Turkish group that, in turn, had some ties with the Dutch terrorist cell.<sup>21</sup> Fernando Jorge Pires was arrested on Christmas Eve trying to board a plane in Lisbon, while two other members were arrested two months later near Amadora, on the outskirts of Lisbon. The fourth man, José Barbosa, was able to escape to Cape Verde.

*(e) The Last Public Case: Samir Boussaha*

In a European joint operation started by the Italian *Carabinieri* in Genoa, an Algerian national called Samir Boussaha was arrested in Oporto in November 2007. Although it was argued in the Portuguese media that he had frequent and firm connections with the group arrested in 2004 in Oporto, it seems that the only link was that both Samir and those related with the Hofstad Group attended the same mosque –the only one in that area of Oporto at the time–.<sup>22</sup>

According to the Italian public attorney, the 35-year-old Samir Boussaha and his brother Mourad were suspected of having been members of the GSPC (*Groupe Salafiste pour la Prédication et le Combat* –Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat–) and of participating in a recruiting network that sent fighters to Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as of collecting funds for Jihadist operations. There was no evidence of Mourad ever having been in Portugal and, with respect to Samir, although he was under surveillance for years, no hard evidence of terrorist activities was unearthed. The lack of proof from Samir's surveillance is not necessarily due to his innocence, but rather a result of his caution.<sup>23</sup> Nonetheless, when Boussaha was arrested by the Judicial Police, the apartment where he lived was also found to contain no evidence. Finally, the barbershop where Samir often worked was also above suspicion and the locals who knew him were surprised since they saw the Algerian as a kind, polite and sociable person. Samir Boussaha was extradited to Italy in mid-November 2007.

**Conclusion:** Apart from suggesting that the authorities should remain on the alert, the cases presented above show that several individuals with disturbing profiles connected with Jihadist activities have entered and spent time in Portugal. However, it has been impossible to establish either their intentions or their activities –ie, the solid evidence needed to guarantee a conviction for terrorism–. The general difficulty in distinguishing between insurgents, terrorists and criminals and of obtaining sound evidence to satisfy a court of law is a reality in Portugal, as it is throughout Europe. But in the process of fitting together the pieces in the jigsaw puzzle of Jihadism in Europe, Portugal is an informational black hole. Many explanations can be offered for such an unsatisfactory state of affairs: the legal framework under which security agencies operate, the shortcoming of the penal code and the lack of preparation and awareness of the country's political decision makers, among others. The complexity and variety of these possible explanations requires separate research and analysis. Nonetheless, and with regard to this paper's topic, what is important is that the succession of inconclusive cases –from an empirical perspective– reflect structural problems which should be addressed as they

21 Members of the Portuguese Intelligence Community nrs 2 & 3.

22 Member of the Portuguese Intelligence Community nr 2.

23 Member of the Portuguese Intelligence Community nr 2.



could ultimately signal to Jihadist organisations the sort of weaknesses that they might decide to exploit for their own benefit.

Despite being nebulous and for the most part inconclusive, these cases of possible Jihadist activity in Portugal do suggest some similarities with the situation elsewhere in Europe.

Considering what time and research has taught us about Jihadism in the EU, Portugal complies with the general picture in the following aspects: most individuals involved in suspected Jihadist activities are originally from the Maghreb, the forgery of documents is often associated with possible cases of Islamist terrorism, the security forces have found it difficult to obtain evidence sufficient to ensure a conviction for the crime of terrorism and individuals suspected of engaging in terrorism or parallel activities are often highly mobile.

However, there is another important characteristic of Jihadism in Europe that seems to be absent from the Portuguese context. As far as is known, there is no sign of internal radicalisation or recruitment or of self-starter cells –even considering the potential perils represented by TJ–. Such a difference with the rest of Europe could have two explanations: (1) the degree of integration and sense of identity of Portugal’s traditional Muslim community; or (2) the simple fact that home-grown terrorism has not yet been detected. However, given the similarities of the phenomenon throughout Europe, nothing should be ruled out for the future.

Finally, taking into consideration, on the one hand, the high degree of mobility of the suspects involved in the inconclusive episodes detected in Portugal and, on the other, the long-established Jihadist activity in Spain, it is puzzling why there has been no spill-over effect. The existence of a settled and well-integrated migrant community certainly plays a role. Nonetheless, given Spain’s strong commitment to countering terrorism as well as the scores of suspects arrested and then convicted by the Spanish authorities, it is curious that there is no obvious transit of Islamist terrorists across the Iberian Peninsula.

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