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Racial and Religious Determinants of Terrorism in Western Europe

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Abstract

The gradual rapprochement between peoples, cultures, beliefs involve numerous conflicts with indigenous peoples on ethnic or religious grounds. These conflicts tend to turn into articulation of radical positions and extremist activities. The aim of this study was to analyze the current state of terrorist acts and identify the determinants of terrorism on racial and religious grounds in Western Europe. The statistical method, comparison, graphic analysis, analysis of the Global Index of Terrorism; The European Union reports on the situation and trends of terrorism, as well as the research on terrorism-related issues for 2011-2021, were used as empirical research methods. It is determined that the UK, France, Germany, Greece, Belgium, Spain, Italy, and Sweden are subject to the highest risk of terrorist acts. It was proved that the determinants of terrorism are localized in relation to key issues related to the state of the economic sphere, social development, as well as the spiritual and cultural sphere. Emphasis is placed on the need to overcome the problems associated with terrorist activities by formulating a policy of national means of resolving ethnic and racial issues and active international cooperation. Further research will identify key determinants of terrorism in Eastern Europe.

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Determinantes raciales y religiosos del terrorismo en Europa occidental

Resumen

El acercamiento gradual entre pueblos, culturas, creencias implica numerosos conflictos con los pueblos indígenas por motivos étnicos o religiosos. Estos conflictos tienden a convertirse en articulaciones de posiciones radicales y actividades extremistas. El objetivo de este estudio fue analizar el estado actual de los actos terroristas e identificar los determinantes del terrorismo por motivos raciales y religiosos en Europa Occidental. Se empleo el método estadístico, comparativo, análisis gráficos, análisis del Índice Global de Terrorismo; Los informes de la Unión Europea sobre la situación y las tendencias del terrorismo, así como la investigación sobre cuestiones relacionadas con el terrorismo para 2011-2021, de modo que se utilizaron como métodos de investigación empíricos. Se determina que el Reino Unido, Francia, Alemania, Grecia, Bélgica, España, Italia y Suecia están sujetos al mayor riesgo de actos terroristas. Se comprobó que los determinantes del terrorismo se localizan en relación con cuestiones clave relacionadas con el estado de la esfera económica, el desarrollo social, así como la esfera espiritual y cultural. Se hace hincapié en la necesidad de superar los problemas asociados con las actividades terroristas mediante la formulación de una política de medios nacionales para resolver los problemas étnicos y raciales y la cooperación internacional activa.

Introduction

Acceleration of the manifestation of factors that demonstrate the diversity of the world, its differentiation, the authenticity of cultural, linguistic, ideological manifestations of local societies is significant. Ideologically constructed manifestations of one's identity give rise to growth in the world of conflicts, misunderstandings, and xenophobia. This often turns into extremist (terrorist) actions by certain members of certain groups of like-minded people and entails tragic consequences. The countries of Western Europe, which experience complex consequences of

multiculturalism, given the increase in the flow of immigrants and refugees in recent decades, have not avoided terrorist acts. So, it should be noted that a significant number of terrorist incidents occur on ethnic and racial grounds. Terrorist activities in this study are considered to be the threat or actual use of violence by individuals or groups of individuals to achieve political, economic, religious or social goals.

According to the Global Terrorism Index (GTI), about 100,000 people died in terrorist attacks between 2014 and 2017 (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2018; 2019; 2020). In 2019, there were almost 8,500 terrorist attacks worldwide, carrying away more than 20,300 people, including 5,460 criminals and 14,840 of their victims. It should be noted that the number of terrorist attacks in Western Europe decreased by 6% from 2018 to 2019 (from 203 to 191 incidents, respectively), continuing the downward trend from 2015. Mass terrorist attacks in 2019 in Western Europe remained relatively infrequent. Of the 191 terrorist attacks, nine were incidents in which four people were injured or killed (University of Maryland, 2019). According to the German intelligence service (Verfassungsschutz), there were about 4,000 politically or religiously motivated crimes in the country in 2017 (BMI, 2018). A representative survey in France found that 16% of the adult population and 27% of young people aged 18 to 24 agree with the ISIS goals (Fischer, 2014).

European nations have faced security challenges in recent decades, the violence and consequences of terrorism have become tragic for many people and communities. The resurgence of ethno-nationalist populist movements across Europe has further strengthened the perception of ethnic and religious minority groups as dangerous (Amnesty International and the Open Society Foundations, 2021). Despite the decline in the total number of attacks and deaths caused, religiously motivated terrorist attacks are on the rise (Løvlien, 2021).

Analysis of data on terrorist acts shows that nationalist ideology is a more common feature than religious ideology in modern terrorism. Religious terrorist groups cause more deaths than other types of terrorist acts. Groups classified as exclusively Islamist have caused more deaths than all other nationalist groups. Modern religious terrorism threatens more people (Romano and Phelps, 2019). Some scholars identify Islamic ideology as the direct cause of the radicalization of Muslims, leading to extremist actions and terrorist attacks. Another view is that Islamist groups formulate the demands and agenda of radicalized people (Egger and Magni-Berton, 2021). In Western Europe, immigration has some connection to the level of terrorism in the country, which determines dissatisfaction with the existence of migrants and changes in social order but is not related to economic competition between the local population and immigrants (McAlexander, 2020).

Radicalization and extremism can be described as the result of a number of (social, individual) determinants (Lerner, 2018) that influence the development of extremist behaviour. Researchers (Kis-Katos *et al.*, 2014) argue that terrorist acts have different determinants, based on the problems of individual radical groups, different opportunities to reach compromises, and their own organizational constraints. The ideological foundations of a terrorist group can be motivated by various determinants based on their own ideology. For example, ethnic discrimination may be relevant to the manifestation of nationalist-separatist terrorism (Brockhoff *et al.,* 2016). But the determinants of ethnic and religious terrorism have both differences and common features (Kis-Katos *et al.,* 2014).

The problem of growing inequality due to austerity policies has led to a decline in social mobility, which has affected both the local population and national minorities, in particular in urban post-industrial settlements. This has exacerbated identity, citizenship and affiliation (especially in parts of Western Europe where industrial cities have faced a decline). Some changes in the local economy have led to a crisis, where the traditional practice of patriarchy has been threatened by the liberalization of labour markets, complicated by issues of identity uncertainty (perceptions of citizenship, belonging to religious and ethnic groups). The impact of these structural and cultural changes has led to the desire of far-right groups to avoid the risks of policy expansion based on diversity and multiculturalism (Abbas, 2020).

Given the conquest of right-wing populism and ethnic nationalism in Western European society, the problem of a general right-wing movement with the speeches of political leaders who support a broader transnational discourse is growing (Froio and Ganesh, 2018). This applies not only to developed Western democracies such as the United Kingdom, Germany and the Netherlands, but also to other liberal states such as Poland, Hungary and Slovakia (Halikiopoulou, 2017). There is a need to assess the dynamics of radicalization as embedded in social processes at the structural level, where concerns about identity, belonging and self-realization are fundamental (Abbas, 2020).

Ethnic identity refers to the feeling of affiliation with an ethnic group and the part of thinking, perception, feelings and behaviour that is due to belonging to an ethnic group. Religious identity is a specific type of identity. This is the feeling of group religious membership and the importance of such participation in the group, as it relates to personal philosophy (Ngari and Reva, 2017). If religion is understood as an ideology, many world ideologies tend to show a high level of intolerance, which leads to violence (Tarlow, 2017).

Actions that are deeply biased in terms of ethnic affiliation, religion, and similar factors arise a sense of discrimination in communities, creating

an impression of intentional state pressure on communities through the religion or ethnic affiliation of members. This discrepancy in the relationship between states and ethnic or religious groups raises serious concerns about discrimination and equal treatment of the law (Ngari and Reva, 2017).

At the broadest level, political, religious and other extremism is defined as a significant deviation in attitude and behaviour from basic legal and political norms and values within the social system (society or state), which seek to abolish and replace them (Beelmann *et al.*, 2017). For example, terrorist activities based on religious and ethnic factors may arise from incomplete modernization in the social, political, and cultural spheres due to the clash of the modern and the traditional (Pain, 2007). The rise of right-wing nationalism can be seen as a response to growing European integration, which expresses transitional and modernization difficulties (Straume, 2012).

The model of radicalization begins with the definition of terrorist acts in several ways: a significant deviation in attitude and actions from specific fundamental, political, legal and humanitarian norms and values. The main issue is the values and goals that underlie views and actions, not the violence used to achieve them. But judgments about radicalization and extremism do not necessarily have to be based on clearly defined attitudes and actions. Interconnected but different processes of social development are central to radicalization and extremism: problems of identity, prejudice, political or religious ideologies, and antisocial attitudes and behaviours. These processes are caused by real social or individual conflicts and are marked by constant intergroup processes (Beelmann, 2020).

Racism can be characterized by the promotion of natural and hereditary differences between races, with the main belief emphasizing the superiority of one race over another, which is reduced to a certain incompatibility of habits and cultures. Non-natives are perceived as a threat to host communities, based on xenophobia, which is defined as fear, hatred or hostility towards "foreigners" (Mudde, 1995).

The debate on security in Europe borders on ideology-driven discussions on migration, social change and terrorism. Relative security in Europe may explain the rise of xenophobic politics by Western political actors, who believe that globalization is causing irreversible changes in the very nature of European society (Richards, 2017). Extreme political parties often propose to redistribute resources outside certain subgroups of society, such as ethnic minorities or citizens living in certain regions (Brückner and Grüner, 2020).

Conceptually, extremism gets its essence through association with other ideas — totalitarianism and terrorism, referring to the opposition of such concepts as democracy, openness, liberalism, tolerance and moderation

(El-Ojeili and Taylor, 2020). Based on the features most often mentioned in the existing definitions of extremism, it can be noted that authoritarianism, anti-democracy and nationalism determine the properties of extremism. In contrast, xenophobia and racism are concomitant characteristics of the concept. Right-wing extremism is an ideology that embraces anti-democracy and nationalism (Carter, 2018).

Given the undeniable importance of the problem, the aim of this study is to identify the racial and religious determinants of terrorism in Western Europe. The main objectives of the study are: obtain information on terrorist acts on racial and religious grounds based on a sample and analysis of the Global Database on Terrorism on the number of terrorist acts in Western Europe; determine the level of terrorist threat based on the analysis of data from the Global Terrorism Index to identify the risk of terrorist acts in Western Europe; identify the key determinants of the emergence of terrorist acts in Western Europe on the basis of modern research; propose approaches that can deter the development of terrorism on racial and religious grounds.

1. Methods

Information and analytical sources, which contain processed data on terrorist activities, as well as studies that are indexed in the Scopus scientometric database were used as an empirical basis. The materials for the study were the Global Database on Terrorism (University of Maryland, 2021); the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) study (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2020); European Union reports on the situation and trends of terrorism (Europol, 2021), and scientific articles examining terrorism-related issues for 2011-2021.

The use of the Global Terrorism Database (GTD) is related to the fact that it includes information on domestic and international terrorist acts around the world from 1970 to 2019, and includes more than 200,000 cases. The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) provides access the GTD database online for better understanding, detailed research information and prevention of terrorist acts (University of Maryland, 2021). The use of the Global Terrorism Index (GTI) (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2020) helped to determine the level of terrorist activity in Western Europe and to determine which countries and to what extent face a terrorist threat. The European Union's Terrorism Situation and Trends Report (Europol, 2021) provided information on terrorist attacks and terrorism-related arrests in the European Union (EU) in 2020, submitted to Europol by EU Member States. Search and analysis of scientific articles allowed us to identify the main determinants of terrorism in Western Europe.

According to the categories of variables (University of Maryland, 2018) contained in the Global Terrorism Database (GTD), the selection of the necessary information on terrorism on racial and religious grounds involves the following steps. The first limitation was the separation of Western European countries according to a sample based on the regional classifier — Western Europe. The next step was to select from the total number of terrorist incidents those that concerned only racial and religious incidents. According to the classifier (University of Maryland, 2018), incidents related to racial and religious factors are identified by the codes: 69 — Religion Identified, 71 — Race/Ethnicity Identified, 85 — Religious Figure, 86 — Place of Worship, 87 — Affiliated Institution. The last approach is separation of the information on terrorist acts on racial and religious grounds for 2000-2019. A comparative analysis was conducted based on the obtained data.

A study of the Global Terrorism Index for 2017-2020 and the use of a graphical method of analysis allowed identifying Western European countries with the highest risk of terrorist acts and changes in their level. At the final stage, the methodology included the identification of the main determinants of terrorism in Western Europe on the basis of research on terrorism issues for 2011-2021. The result of generalization was to determine the directions of localization of issues that give rise to the determinants of racial and religious terrorism.

The research procedure included the following stages: determining the countries in which the terrorist acts on racial and religious grounds were reported; analysis of the level of terrorist threat; identification of key determinants of terrorism on racial and religious grounds in Western Europe.

2. Results

The number of terrorist acts on racial and religious grounds in Western Europe in 2000-2019 was determined based on the results of sampling information from the Global Terrorism Database, which is presented in Table 1.

Restrictions of Western European countries on the basis of the reginal classifier — Western Europe — identified 18 countries of Western Europe, which recorded terrorist acts on racial and religious grounds in 2000-2019 (Table 1).

Table 1. Number of terrorist acts on racial and religious grounds in Western Europe in 2000-2019.

Country	Number of terrorist acts	Target/Victim Subtype				
		69 – Religion Identified	71 – Race/ Ethnicity Identified	85 – Religious Figure	86 – Place of Worship	87 – Affiliated Institution
Austria	3	1	1		1	
Belgium	6	1		1	4	
Cyprus	2				2	
Denmark	2				2	
Finland	3				3	
France	48	6	3	5	34	
Germany	32	1	6		24	1
Greece	11	3	2		6	
Iceland	1				1	
Ireland	1				1	
Italy	17		3		13	1
Malta	1				1	
Netherlands	8				8	
Norway	3		1		2	
Spain	9		2	1	6	
Sweden	12	1			10	1
Switzerland	1	1				
United Kingdom	146	49	15	2	72	8

Source: compiled based on (University of Maryland, 2021)

Accordingly, the comparison of terrorist acts on racial and religious grounds (8.48%) with the total number of terrorist acts for other reasons (91.52%) in Western Europe in 2000-2019 is presented in Figure 1.
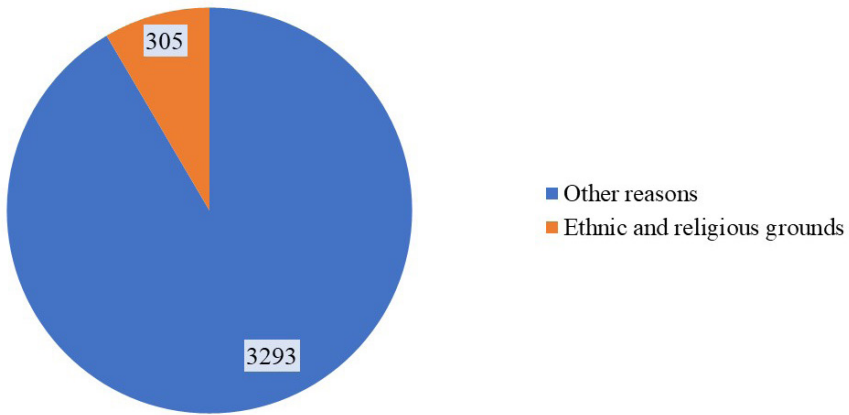
Figure 1. The number of terrorist acts on racial and religious grounds in the total number of terrorist acts in Western Europe in 2000-2019

A study of the Global Terrorism Index in EU member states for 2017-2020 showed that the highest risk of terrorist acts was found in the UK, France, Germany, Greece, Belgium, Spain, Italy and Sweden (Figure 2). This information confirms the preliminary data on the number of terrorist acts on racial and religious grounds in Western Europe in 2000-2019 (Table 1). It should be noted based on the data obtained, that the situation in the studied countries of Western Europe regarding terrorist acts on racial and religious grounds correlates with the results that reflect the situation regarding the general trends of the risk of terrorist threats.

It can be noted from the data obtained during the study, that the issue of terrorist acts has become more acute in the EU countries due to the influence of ISIS. ISIS terrorists attacked individual targets and public places, attracting recruiters from European countries. Most of the incidents in Western Europe were based on the use of various means to injure or kill people. For example, the deadly attempted attack on a synagogue in Germany in October 2019 demonstrated the serious danger of terrorism on racial and religious grounds. The majority of terrorism-related arrests in France have been made against individuals and groups suspected of involvement in ISIS. The German government has identified Islamist terrorists and terrorism on racial or religious grounds as the greatest threat to national security. The United Kingdom continues to stabilize the situation in Iraq and northeastern Syria, which has the potential to combat counter-terrorism and ISIS activities, and remains a top priority.

According to the latest data from the European Police Office (Europol), religious terrorism in the EU Member States remains the greatest terrorist threat. There were three terrorist attacks in the UK in 2020, and Switzerland was attacked by two jihadists. So, there were 15 completed jihadist attacks in Europe (EU, Switzerland and the UK) in 2020, which was twice as many as in 2019 in the EU (including the UK). In 2020, France and Spain reported 14 terrorist attacks by ethno-nationalists and separatists targeting infrastructure (Europol, 2021).
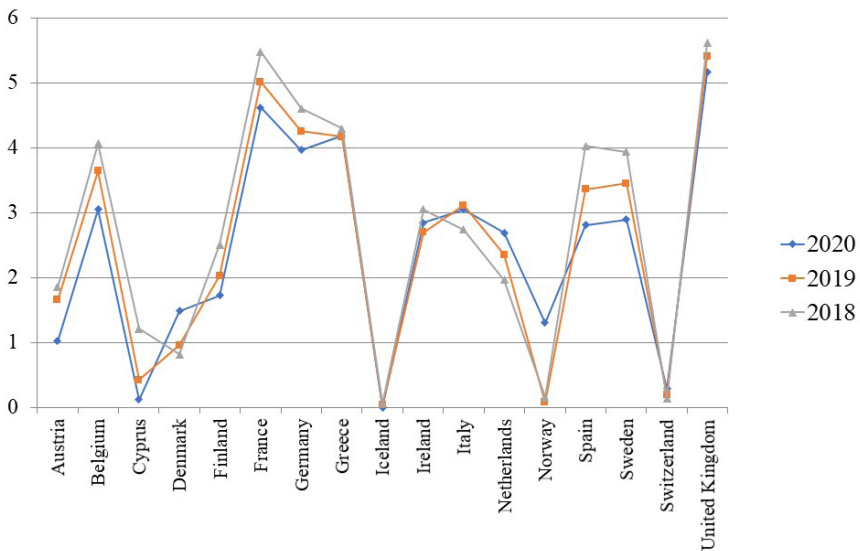

Figure 2. Global Terrorism Index in EU Member States for 2017-2020 (Institute for Economics and Peace, 2020; Institute for Economics and Peace, 2019; Institute for Economics and Peace, 2018)

The next result, which was obtained according to the methodological approach, is the identification of the main determinants of terrorism in Western Europe. The main determinants of terrorism are identified based on the study of terrorism-related issues for 2011-2021 (Table 2).

Table 2. Key determinants of terrorism

Determinants of terrorism	Source
Uneven economic development, difficult economic conditions, declining economic growth	(Shahbaz, 2013; Meierrieks, 2014; Poveda, 2012; Hou, 2021)
Income inequality	(Shahbaz, 2013; Sanso-Navarro *et al.*, 2021)
Lack of education, education coverage level	(Shahbaz, 2013; Nurunnabi and Sghaier, 2018)
Unemployment, employment rate, labour market conditions	(Shahbaz, 2013; Okafor and Piesse, 2018; Ismail and Amjad, 2014; Okafor and Piesse, 2018; Nurunnabi and Sghaier, 2018; Sanso-Navarro and Vera-Cabello, 2020; Sanso-Navarro *et al.*, 2021)
Significant number of people with low living standards (low GDP per capita)	(Shahbaz, 2013; Ismail and Amjad, 2014; Poveda, 2012; Tahir *et al.*, 2019; Tahir, 2020)
Increasing population density	(Freytag *et al.*, 2011; Hou, 2021)
Lack of effective and strong political control, political instability, civil wars, number of refugees	(Okafor and Piesse, 2018; Tahir *et al.*, 2019; Coggins, 2015; Nurunnabi and Sghaier, 2018; Tahir, 2020; Hou, 2021)
Ethnic, linguistic diversity of society	(Gassebner and Luechinger, 2011)
Religious diversity of society, religious fanaticism	(Gassebner and Luechinger, 2011; Halkos *et al.*, 2017)
Rising inflation	(Ismail and Amjad, 2014)
Accumulation of human capital	(Okafor and Piesse, 2018)
The importance of the business sector	(Sanso-Navarro *et al.,* 2021)

According to the identified determinants of terrorism, we can say that they are localized in terms of the key issues of the economic sphere (low level of economic development, poverty, unemployment, inflation, etc.), social development (education, human capital), as well as spiritual and cultural sphere (ethnicity, language, religion). It should be noted based on the aim of our study, that the areas of localization of issues that give rise to the determinants of terrorism on racial and religious grounds, in addition to the directly mentioned problems, are additional problems in the economic and social spheres. This reinforces the causes and consequences of extremist actions on ethnic and religious grounds.

It should be noted that, despite some reduction in terrorist acts in Western Europe, terrorism on racial or ethnic grounds (of jihadist terrorism

and terrorists coming from conflict zones) is of particular concern. These activities pose significant threats, given the support of an extensive network of EU citizens who are radicalized and may be complicit in terrorist acts on racial and ethnic grounds.

3. Discussion

The results of this study have certain features related to the approaches used to identify racial and religious determinants of terrorism. The proposed methodological approaches used in the study were based on information from the Global Terrorism Database. This database contains data on terrorist incidents from 1970 to 2019. The use of data sampling since 2000 has somewhat narrowed the array of information. But given that the period of the last two decades shows a significant increase in the number of terrorist acts and their objective record in the database, we consider this time period sufficient to draw our own conclusions.

The use of the regional classifier — Western Europe — has limited the number to 18 Western European countries (Austria, Belgium, Cyprus, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom), which reduced the representativeness of the analysis. At the same time, the use of these European countries has been sufficient to demonstrate the share of terrorist acts on ethnic and religious grounds in the total array of terrorist incidents for other reasons. Besides, the restriction of the sample from the Global Terrorism Database only by the codes: 69 — Religion Identified, 71 — Race / Ethnicity Identified, 85 — Religious Figure, 86 — Place of Worship, 87 — Affiliated Institution shows only a fixed number of consequences of terrorist acts on ethnic and religious grounds. But other target subtypes identified by the Global Terrorism Database may include incidents on ethnic and religious grounds. So, the number of terrorist incidents committed on ethnic and religious grounds may actually be higher. Unfortunately, the Global Terrorism Database does not contain data on the motives for committing terrorist acts.

As we can see from the analysis of research on terrorism on racial and religious grounds, the threats posed to certain religious groups are an important factor in intensifying the radicalization of the belief system, which may have involved nonviolent action. These findings were confirmed by a Dutch study on the impact of collective identity and identity factors on attitudes towards violence in defence of religion or ethnicity (Van Bergen *et al.*, 2015). The results of the study demonstrate the role of religious beliefs and their impact on the willingness to justify terrorism, which is closely linked to the strengthening of religious practices around the world (Egger and Magni-Berton, 2021).

The findings support evidence that belonging to a lower-middle-income minority group is significantly more likely to support a more radical view of terrorism tactics (Løvlien, 2021). The key determinants of terrorist activity, which are identified in this study, expand the previous results, considering a combination of factors of social development, economic and spiritual and cultural spheres as reasons.

The close link between extremist acts and violence, terrorist acts and the deaths of civilians urges the importance of such topics as security, deterrence, preventive actions, and the protection of democratic heritage; implementation of policies aimed at combating the ideas of xenophobia and intolerance, deradicalization; relevance of diagnosis of economic, social, spiritual and psychological factors.

Modern experience in the fight against terrorism in the world proves that the formation of policies which increase pressure on communities differing in their ideology, culture and religion; identifying them as dangerous and suspicious, distinguishing local communities under national paternalism, can create complications and controversy. Strengthening authoritarian measures can increase the long-term risks of lack of trust between certain communities in the country, complicate the issue of refugee adaptation, which will affect the ability to maintain social achievements based on democratic principles and freedoms.

Countering terrorism involves the development of multi-sectoral policies and measures on the possibilities of intervention, which can be the basis for fighting terrorism. These approaches should use proactive countermeasures, as well as operational security issues, police and intelligence. The fight against terrorism must build the resilience of the community and the ability to protect and counter those problematic features that potentially affect threats to national security. Besides, the effective response of the state to extremist acts and terrorist acts of a religious and ethnic nature should include a number of coordinated actions both within the country and internationally, including security, national minority, religious and immigration policies. The key approaches remain to ensure the development of cultural heritage by states and the provision of opportunities for spiritual and religious activities of national minorities in the territories of indigenous communities of Western Europe.

Conclusion

The study of the determinants of terrorism on racial and religious grounds in Western Europe is a critical issue, given the possible tragic consequences of extremist activities. The atmosphere of intolerance of ethnic and religious differences is quite common, including the current

situation in countries with developed democratic values. The available data set analysed in the study allowed us to partially distinguish terrorist acts on ethnic and racial grounds from the total number of terrorist acts in Western Europe in 2000-2019. The analysis demonstrates a high risk of terrorist acts (including ethnic and religious ones) in the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Greece, Belgium, Spain, Italy and Sweden. It is determined that the determinants of terrorism are caused by the problems of the economic sphere, social development, as well as spiritual and cultural sphere. Overcoming the challenges of terrorism must be based on policies that shape both domestic means of resolving ethnic and racial issues and active international action. The obtained results were based on the available data of countries that have come a long way in the development of democratic values and human freedoms. It will be useful to identify the key determinants of terrorism in Eastern Europe in further research.

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