

Patterns of the Past

Of course, the media stuns today's global audiences by showing the effects of the extremist activity, and immensely much less by spending their precious time to analyse the phenomenon itself, its extent and its causes. The extremism, as shown by the media, is caught in more or less simple and simplifying perception schemes, which makes extremism not only omnipresent, but, what is more, an ever present phenomenon: the same substance in different forms. As it were, such functioning of the media not only excludes the political extremism from the realm of a "normal" political universe, but it also tends to obscure its general features that tie it to the broader ideological systems, with an exception, when the origin of certain kinds of extremism are deemed to originate in an "alien" culture, i.e. some Islamic country. Whatever the case may be, my point, derived from this observation, is a presumption that the extremism more properly defined, makes up part of the world in which there are reasons for a sort of (media) presentations, which conform to the dominant "sense of reality". Only very rarely is the general audiences confronted with the roots and causes of a particular extremist idea and behaviour.¹ Furthermore, since the media tend to reduce the extent of extremism to its most manifest appearances and aspects, such as terrorism, they serve a self-propelled purpose of a curtailing especially the ideological contexts that enable any rise of political extremism. I have no intention here to analyse the functioning of the media, but only to make a note of their importance in creating a public space for the contemporary extremism, as well as means and sometimes objects of extremist activity. As much as the media uncover extremism in their reports, they as well obscure the view on "non-manifest extremism" that could be found within any given cultural and political system.

Although it is possible to argue that each epoch in history has known one or the other form of extremism, we should not succumb to a notion of a preordained evil, which remains only to be an object of proper handling. On the contrary, the forms and the extent of extremism we are confronted with in our times may be defined as historically unique. A broad range of contemporary extremism historically descends from the ultimate

1 In the autumn of 1995, an instructive case appeared in the French media. In a police action against supposedly Algerian extremists, who planted explosive devices in dustbins in urban centres, a young man of the Algerian decent was killed. Soon after the event, some of the boy's own writings were disclosed in the media that showed clearly his anxiety amid the racist environment.