MINDb4ACT

Cluster of Policy Briefs

July 2020

Content

Preface

Shortly after the Paris (2015) and Brussels (2016) terrorists attacks, in a climate of uncertainty and fear for the foreseeable future, the project of MINDb4ACT "Mapping, Identifying and Developing skills and opportunities in operating environments to co-create innovative, ethical and effective Actions to tackle radicalization leading to violent extremism (Grant agreement no. 740543)" was presented to the European Commission. It was a critical moment for Europe, that had to rethink a preventive strategy as well as deal with the insurgence of homegrown terrorism and the foreign fighters flow. There was a clear need to assess the existing preventing and countering practices, evaluate them and propose more innovative programmes. It is within this context that MINDb4ACT was funded and started its research path.

After three year of collaborative research, this 'Cluster of policy briefs' presents a summary of the efforts the consortium undertook to achieve the European expectations. The collection should be taken as a glimpse of the activities, findings, products, and events resulted from the project. This explains the variety of topics included in this document, it aims at showing the complexity of the project, analysing analysing the topic of radicalisation from different angles and reaching diverse audiences (i.e. academics, policymakers, private sector, stakeholders, private sector).

The articles included in this document have been published throughout the project's life span on the MINDb4ACT's website, being key elements of the communication and dissemination strategy of the project. In fact, this document forms part of the Work Package (WP) number 8 on "Dissemination, outreach and exploitation of results". Authors of the Policy Briefs are mainly member of the consortium who advance, based on their experience within the project, recommendations that aim to inspire solutions-oriented action and the future European research agenda.

Policy Brief Nº 1

November 2019

European Union and United States: Common trends and challenges in violent radicalisation leading to terrorism[1]

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Europe is now affected by a polarised climate, which has resulted into phenomena like hate crime and radicalisation. These are consequential effects of social imbalances such as the economic and refugee crisis, the spread of terrorist attacks, the lack of confidence at institutions and political parties, as well as the growing power of right-wing and populist parties, and nationalist ideologies (Akghar, Wells and Blanco, 2019: 12). Similar threats are currently faced by the United States. Specifically, **five common trends of radicalisation** have been identified among the two sides of the Atlantic. However, States still struggle to identify effective prevention and counter policies. By looking at similarities and differences of the two case studies, this policy brief identifies recommendable P/CVE practices.

Common trends of radicalisation

First and foremost, States are facing the issue of **prison radicalisation**. The rise and collapse of Islamic States well as the spread of separatists and right-wing radical movements caused a sharp increase of prisoners convicted of terrorist crimes, prisons into breeding grounds for violence (Europol, 2019: 15-16, 33). This requires States a clear grouping policy for terrorist offenders and a standardised application of risk assessment tools. In the case of Europe, it is not just about 'keeping' measures, but rehabilitation and reintegration policies to ensure, within the next decade, a safe reintegration of around 500 individuals who have been convicted in Europe for terror-related crimes or radicalised in prison and will be released.

Europe: a trendsetter?

Marginalisation and **discrimination** of certain groups of civil society concern another generalised issue. While in the US this mostly refers to second and third generations which lack a sense of community; in Europe factors such as limited education, low employment, and high criminality rates have been causing social exclusion. Such elements are mostly used by hate preachers, a figure diffused in Europe, who prey on deprivation to drive individuals into radicalisation (Ranstorp, 2016: 3). The third trend is related to political factors and **social narratives** used by extremists to radicalise individuals. In both regions, opposite forms of extremism tend to share common narratives like the distrust of political leaders and public institutions as well as a feeling of helplessness or ineptitude about how to find success and fulfilment in modern society (Europol, 2019: 42).

An alarming trend refers to the re-gained importance of **ideology** and the fact that different forms of extremism, especially Jihadism and right-wing extremism, happened to help each other growing (TSC, 2019: 28). Finally, the last trend regards the use of **social media** for terrorist and extremist purposes. Although in Europe social media likely accelerate the process of radicalisation, but do not really initiate it as in the US, the presence of the Internet and social networks transformed radicalisation into a more individualistic phenomenon, highly difficult to detect, and it also helped connecting internationally like-minded individuals – transforming, in most of the cases, extremism into a trans-national threat (TSC, 2019: 40-41)

The identification of five general common trends of radicalisation helps to understand the size of the phenomenon, driving the conclusion that the United States and Europe often experience similar threats, although responding differently, and might collaborate by sharing experiences. To this concern, reflections on the role of Europe in countering violent radicalisation are relevant. Despite commonalities, in fact, Europe shows some distinct, relevant elements that might convert it in an example to follow at least when referring to results on interns' social reintegration and the terror-mental issue nexus (Europol, 2019: 32). Due to the different sentencing times that terror-related inmates are facing in the US and EU, European States will be the first dealing with the release of such individuals. This leads Europe to be pioneer in the application of certain rehabilitation programmes, offering future lessons learnt to the US. The same can be said on the research studies on mental disorders that will be carried out.

Policy Recommendations

All considered, concrete steps to undertake the problem of violent radicalisation have been identified:

- In the case of prison radicalisation, Europe should focus on reintegration and rehabilitation, leaving behind de-radicalisation itself, and maintaining a tailor-made approach. In terms of rehabilitation, restorative justice practices are considered to be highly effective; while concerning reintegration, the engagement with communities and families' interns are crucial.
- The still significant offline component that has European radicalisation as well as the low cyber capabilities terrorist groups suggest to focus on face-to-face interactions and open chats instead of the dark web, which is not the primary source radicalised individuals have access to. In this specific domain, the collaboration with former extremists is key to indicate online spaces and to operate trying to persuade people to no-longer perceive extremist believes.
- Phenomena such as social exclusion show a certain gap between the policy world and the community itself, which could likely be solved by working with grass-root organisations and practitioners, who should be the lead in the prevention process. A good example of grass-root approach is the EFD's Empowerment programme "Liberal Muslims network".
- Due to the relevant role ideology is still playing in radicalisation, it is highly suggestable not to engage with radical groups in new process of policing, because although they are not violent, they tend to justify violence and they are against European values.

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The Soufan Center (2019). *WHITE SUPREMACY EXTREMISM: The Transnational Rise of the Violent White Supremacist Movement*. The Soufan Center (TSC).

[1] This Policy Brief presents information gathered during the Policy Event "Sharing the insights on the US and EU approaches in radicalisation and violent extremism" organised by MINDb4ACT consortium on March 21, 2019, in Brussels.

[2] The author is solely responsible for its content, it does not represent the opinion of the European Commission, who is not resrresponsible for any use that might be made of data appearing therein.

Policy Brief N° 2

April 2020

Language matters! Taking semantics into account in P/CVE[1]

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Thanks, especially, to the European Union constant efforts through its multi-annual funding of applied research (e.g. FP-6.7, H2020), understanding radicalisation leading to violent extremism has made much progress. Research focus displays current efforts on pending issues that are both ambitious and precise: the issue of evaluating P/CVE programmes or recidivism risks, as well as beneficiaries' capacity for a stable and peaceful reintegration into society, would merit further efforts. In other words, the era is no longer one of vast and theoretical research, but one of quick-impact research that is useful and provides solutions for practitioners.

Need for concrete: Language example

On the practitioners' side, the needs always appear important. Without even mentioning the possibility of a broad revival, under certain circumstances, of religiously motivated terrorism (jihadism), the spread – outside the countries it affects today – of right-wing violent extremism is a possibility that should be carefully considered. There is no evidence that terrorist violence cannot also arise from other extremist fringes, be they separatist, politically or religiously motivated. As a precaution, applied P/CVE-oriented research should take these possibilities into account, which needs, for example, a knowledge of these violent extremists' language.

We know that violent extremism has a language of its own. Practitioners need a Rosetta stone to interact in a safe, even peaceful way, to mitigate violence and to detect risks if they are expressed verbally. This is also true if online prevention is a priority: then it means acting against networks to circumvent their hate speech, to hinder them from recruiting or spreading deadly propaganda.

A semantic tool: Francophone jihadist glossary

We have created, in H2020 Mindb4act, a **semantic tool** that we recommend duplicating, if it does not already exist, even empirically. It can be activated by end-users and retains the possibility of evolution. It can also be a way to improve understanding in the context of life in detention and P/CVE psycho-social interventions intrinsically, through a shared language. Its goal is both to facilitate **interpersonal relations** between jihadists and practitioners for practical/instrumental reasons, and to better understand the way jihadists 'see' or categorise the world, in particular in detention.

We sought, gathered and used complementary items from the following semantic fields:

- The vocabulary of Salafist-jihadist ideology (not Muslim, which is broader and less specific),
- Operational and terrorism vocabulary, with a focus on aggression in detention;
- **Detention vocabulary**;
- The slang used by French-speaking European jihadists (again, from France, Belgium and Switzerland), mostly of North African diaspora origin.

The target users also determined at an early stage the form that our tool should take, including its 'semantic granularity'. The end users were supervisors (all ranks, all roles), non-Arabic speakers, probation officers, psychological-medical personnel, and eventually intelligence officers and analysts. Logically, we used a French transliteration system to allow easy pronunciation for any French-speaking person.

This tool does not reflect the knowledge of one specific inmate — whether in Arabic, theological or operational matters. It is rather

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intended to cover all the profiles' diversity, roughly from the fluent Arabic-speaking facilitator who teaches radical Koranic hermeneutics, to the poorly educated petty criminal and radicalised young offenders.

In its own way, it also reveals the extreme diversity of Arabic uses. Quite often, among people from the Maghreb and young people from this diaspora, Arabic is rather intuitive before being rigorous. It is also primarily oral when its written form is sometimes less mastered.

Our tool consists of **234 items** with brief and rather simple definitions. The Wikipedia format seemed ideal and we have been mostly inspired by its form and definitions, even if it means supplementing them or putting them into context.

Just over half of these terms are in classical Arabic, which no doubt underscores the non-Maghrebin nature of both the Qur'an and current jihadist corpora and languages, including post-ISIS. Moreover, it would be interesting to make a comparison with Algerian jihadist texts produced during the civil war that struck Algeria in the 1990s. The distribution between Maghrebi dialects (mainly Algerian and Algerian sub-dialects), franchised Maghrebi words and slang is more homogeneous. It should be noted that slang often comes either from words of alternative cultural origin (West African Malinke and Wolof languages (toubab = babtou = white people, or gypsy in particular), or from distortion by syllable inversion (dealer = leurdi).

The analysis of the items according to their theme indicates an omnipresence of religious terms (Qur'anic, hadithic), prescriptions and moral standards. The importance of items relating to security, and the vocabulary of aggression or terrorism processes, reflects many of the demands of practitioners in the field.

Much the same applies to the vocabulary about justice and the actors involved in the judicial, police processes. For those dealing with justice, francophone jihadists are both constrained by a judicial time, evident in their language, but also interact with security and justice personnel on a daily basis. Finally, the weight of the vocabulary associated with **narcotics** (despite the religious prohibitions in this area) and the references to bewitchment, possession and **witchcraft** should be emphasised.

Policy Recommendations

In the end, this glossary seems to fill an operational gap. It provides quick and easily usable knowledge elements (low-tech innovation). Moreover, it is necessarily evolving according to the feedback from its users, but also according to the possible emergence of new jihadist networks, if necessary, based on new themes of mobilisation and a specific vocabulary (post-ISIS). It should be stressed in particular that if a jihadist land crystallises one day in a non-Arab speaking area, the question of the collection of new, semantically unusual, words, will arise: The French-speaking jihadist language would then be influenced by it.

Beyond that, such a tool is perfectly conceivable for other forms of violent extremism as soon as the need is felt in the French-speaking world or elsewhere, in a P/CVE approach: Violent right wing extremism (with, for example, elements of semantic analysis on the anti-democratic, anti-parliamentary, or xenophobic corpus), violent left wing extremism (with, for example, a focus on anti-capitalist or anti-Zionist language), etc. The same applies for ethno-separatist forms of violent extremism (Basque, Kurdish, Corsican).

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[1] This Policy Brief presents information gathered during the making of a glossary tool on French-speaking jihadists language, in the frame of H2020 MINDb4ACT.

[2] The author is solely responsible for its content, it does not represent the opinion of the European Commission, who is not resrresponsible for any use that might be made of data appearing therein.

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Policy Brief Nº 3

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Identifying Internet policy recommendations based upon contemporary challenges in countering violent extremism[1]

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Tackling the challenges of the Internet and contemporary media has become a significant area of focus for counter violent extremism practitioners. In particular, the permeation of the Internet into everyday activities alongside the consistent development cycle of 'new media' applications advertised for public use to process and disseminate content are perceived as significant challenges. Parallel to such changes is also the development of legislation and policy frameworks in dealing with extremist content. This policy brief will discuss the contemporary problems for counter violent extremism experts concerning the Internet and new media climate based on the results of the MINDb4ACT Internet and Media Living Labs.

The growth and ubiquity of the Internet

The permeation of the Internet into mainstream culture has enabled new opportunities for radicalisation by providing the capability for vulnerable users to interact with extremist content, groups and one another. The Internet is identified as a large challenge for law enforcement, as it provides a space for extremists to experiment with nuanced methods to improve their effectiveness and similarly increase the difficulty of countering such methods.

A trend identified is extremists use of the Internet to develop new forms of recruitment by replicating the characteristics of mainstream social media 'influencers' to shadow mainstream culture with content that has radical undertones to outreach to large numbers of audience. For example, right-wing content is often heavily intertwined with sarcasm and mainstream cultures such as memes, used to deliberately conceal extremist undertones (Lewis, 2018). This has also increased the difficulty of policing such content due to the difficulties of establishing whether it constitutes as 'freedom of speech' (Roose, 2019).

Adolescent users were identified as being most vulnerable and at risk to these subtle methods adopted by extremists on the Internet. The Internet is at the epicentre of youth culture which has created new opportunities for vulnerable users to become normalised with the engagement and involvement with radical values (White et al., 2015). The impact of extremist influencers is an example of this, as the tactics used make it difficult to determine what content online is 'authentic' and which is underlined with radical narratives. Engaging with such communities to raise awareness and build resilience against radical content disseminated on the Internet presents new challenges for counter extremism experts. Young communities for example are difficult to communicate with and requires nuanced methods which are both engaging and informative to ensure long-term benefits (Jones and Newburn, 2001).

'New media' platforms and application

A challenge identified by the experts was the rise of alternate platforms which have become A challenge identified by the experts was the rise of alternate platforms which have become prominent spaces for recruitment by extremist groups. The rise in mainstream social media platforms taking responsibility in monitoring their sites has seen positive changes in countering violent extremism. Although there remains an unequal balance with law enforcement in the responsibility of countering extremist content online, such platforms have

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increased their monitoring and policies surrounding extremist content (Wall and Williams, 2007).

As a response to the increased censorship on mainstream social media platforms, extremist groups have been forced to transition from the surface web to more encrypted and secure platforms such as Discord and Telegram, which are often associated with such extremist activities due to their enabling effect in amplifying extremist values (Guo, 2020). This challenge was identified by the experts as limiting to tackling radicalisation online efficiently. Right-wing extremist channels dedicated to disseminating extremist content, for example, have become prominent on applications such as Telegram, Stormfront and Endchan. These less-mainstream applications can be more easily exploited by extremist groups to draw in vulnerable users through the radicalisation process. This can include the creation and dissemination of fake news and misinformation with the aim to resurface debates over factual topics and further exacerbate social tensions in communities (Guo, 2020).

Policy Recommendations

The challenges identified on the Internet and new media platforms and applications presented by counter extremism experts reinforces the need that policies must reflect the transition of extremist groups to online resources, with several suggestions:

- To raise awareness of fake news and misinformation spread online amongst younger communities, schools can use their established authority and credibility to promote alternative narratives and encourage best practices. This can include engaging with students that are deemed most vulnerable or at risk through anticipatory interventions.

- Neighbourhood policing strategies should be transitioned online to maintain a positive engagement with the public by understanding the perceived public attitudes and cultural trends surrounding violent extremism online, particularly with vulnerable communities which are most at risk.

- To better manage the policing of extremist content on new media platforms and applications the current cooperation between law enforcement and social media platforms must be improved. Having a larger emphasis on identifying emerging trends, concerning behaviours and the impact of extremist groups online will provide a more effective set of precursors to understanding horizon threats.

- As a long-term goal law enforcement needs to move towards a coherent set of generic extremist awareness materials which will be used nationwide, to resolve current disparities in the current counter violent extremist measures adopted in a single country.

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[1] This Policy Brief is an extract of the scientific article edited by Raven, A. and Wells, D. (2020) *A Review of Critical Challenges Towards Countering Violent Extremism in the UK*, funded by MINDb4ACT Project.

[2] The author is solely responsible for its content, it does not represent the opinion of the European Commission, who is not responsible for any use that might be made of data appearing therein.

Policy Brief Nº 4

May 2020

Prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism through the prism of education[1]

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In 2019, VUB within the framework of the Horizon 2020 Mindb4ACT Project developed an evidence-based pilot project in order to understand the gaps pertaining to radicalisation in the Belgium education system. The information gathered from the pilot project served as a starting point for the identification and **analysis of gaps**, providing a foundation for the development of tools to address issues faced by Belgium and EU educators, alike. Using the outcomes of the pilot project, this policy brief aims to: 1) outline the **main challenges** that educators are faced with in the classroom; and 2) provide policy recommendations supporting **educators**, seeking to confront issues present within their classrooms.

Lessons learnt from Belgian educators

Education remains a priority for achieving sustainable success in tackling radicalization and violent extremism. Even though the impact of education is measurable only in the long term, it nonetheless plays a crucial role in an individuals' immediate socialisation and adaptation processes (Rappaport and Seidman 2000). This is prevalent if the goal is to invest in a "holistic response to violent extremism and radicalisation, which looks at prevention from the earliest possible stages of education" (Council of Europe 2018). The pilot project brought together Belgian experts in education and other professionals from fields at the **intersection with education**. They shared their experiences on preventing radicalisation, identified pivotal needs alongside the most visible gaps, and formulated practical solutions. Data was collected through focus groups and a guided discussion.

The analysis demonstrated educators' scarce understanding of radicalisation as a phenomenon, rudimentary familiarity with the variety of local actors involved and a lack of classroom-tailored tools and methodologies. **Educators, expressed concerns** about grasping the difference between radicalisation, extremism and terrorism, reinforcing that, despite having entered a variety of *milieus*, the concept of 'radicalization' still remains vague (CONRAD 2019). While terrorism is clearly defined in the Belgian Penal Code (art. 137), the absence of a legal definition for "radicalisation" in the Belgian national legislation allows for a broad space for manoeuvring, in terms of interpretation and application. As a result, 'radicalization' has surged to some sort of *default* explanation in relation to terrorist phenomena (CONRAD 2019). Radicalisation as a peaceful process and a form of expression of "out of the box" thinking is uncommon and is seemingly associated with a predisposition to violence versus a non-violent process (Schmid 2013). Consequently, the most common questions by teachers were on violence and "peaceful" radicalisation, detection and signs of radicalisation, and the nexus between behavioural deviations and predisposition to violence in students.

The discussions revealed that educators were **uninformed of specific tools** meant to support their daily work, and if they were informed, rigid schedules did not leave them enough time to explore such tools. Educators also pointed out that the plethora of information available online tended to overwhelm them. As such, they were unable to find answers to situational questions and were unable to adapt this knowledge to the context of the subjects they taught.

Issues with limited knowledge of Belgian national approaches towards

counter-radicalisation and the actors involved were prevalent, with accessibility to and systematic exchanges with Belgian authorities barely existing. Regular forums or meeting platforms between the two professional categories where teachers could discuss their concerns were absent. Communication only occurred reactively in case of critical events at schools. Nonetheless, educators expressed their desire to better understand which actors engaged with schools and young people and make such exchanges mandatory, as it could improve the chances of successful early stage interventions.

Source, functionality, and applicability of pedagogical tools both for in-classroom use and for self-training, posed a big question mark for teachers. The lack of awareness and specificity of certain tools may lead to situations where improvisation or neglection are the only options available to teachers. The scarcity of resources, lack of precise information, absence of adequate training and support, all constrain teachers to 'self-made,' and one-off solutions of questionable utility.

Policy Recommendations

Educator oriented:

- Alignment of educational tools and competences with the latest trends and needs from the field should be among the main priorities. This requires the increase of knowledge and exchanges with highly specialized professionals.

- Revolving around pathways to radicalisation and potential violence, educators must work towards (i) increasing the sense of belonging in schools – by prompting pupils to reflect on shared norms, values, objectives; (ii) understanding of group dynamics, e.g. approaching prevention through humanistic approaches; and (iii) strengthening social media literacy and critical thinking on the use of technology and its double-edged consequences.

Policymakers and National Authorities oriented:

- Specific contextual needs should be systematically collected from educators to provide clear and better targeted policies and measures.

- Flexible up-to-date tools, platforms and solutions are required. Formal education must adapt to societal challenges to keep up with the ever-growing pace of new developments. To this end, regular exchanges between teachers and policymakers are crucial and should even become mandatory.

- The roles of educators in the national preventive approach including within the chain of prevention security actors should be clarified. This will allow for a clear understanding of the mandate of various education professionals and, at the same time, adjust public expectations

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[1] This Policy Brief is an extract of the scientific article written by van der Vet, I. (2020) *The role of teachers in prevention of violent extremism and radicalisation in schools: the Belgian experience*, funded by MINDb4ACT Project.

[2] The authors are solely responsible for its content, it does not represent the opinion of the European Commission, who is not responsible for any use that might be made of data appearing therein.

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Policy Brief Nº 5

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Countering radicalisation by curtailing freedom of expression. A human rights critique of the European strategy[1]

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The relative success of the tactics used by the Islamic State and other terrorist groups to gain support and attract new members has prompted world leaders to advance a global framework aimed at tackling processes of radicalisation leading to violent extremism (RVE). A key objective is to develop effective strategies to interfere in and disrupt these processes including through counter-terrorism narratives (UNCC 2020). This development has reverberated in Europe where regional legal instruments have been crafted to tackle the challenge posed by the dramatic increase in Jihadist mobilization since 2012 and onwards. In line with the Additional Protocol to the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism (2015) and the EU Directive on combating terrorism (2017), states are required to criminalise different forms of engagements in RVE, such as public provocation, including indirect provocation (glorification), recruitment and training for terrorism purposes. While the overarching idea is to criminalise activities of radicalisers, some attention is also given to those have become radicalised. For example, States must ban acts of receiving training and travelling abroad for terrorist purposes or providing support to terrorist groups.

Punishing those who radicalise

The measures taken by states to implement these requirements place the right to freedom of expression under immense pressure. As held by the European Court of Human Rights, this right enables people to express their opinions and beliefs, even if offensive, shocking or disturbing (Handyside v. United Kingdom; Erbakan v. Turkey). To be certain, the right can be abused, such as when it is exploited by xenophobic, racist and antisemitism groups to spread, incite or promote hatred and violence, based on intolerance. Such speech is unprotected and must be prohibited by law (Council Framework decision on combating racism and xenophobia, 2008). The same applies to the incitement of terrorism offences. However, not all speech creates a concrete danger that a terrorist offence will take place. This is an essential element to count as a preparatory act. While acknowledging the political risks involved with a policy of non-interference and the right of states to restrict free expression in order to prevent disorder and crime, some speech remains protected (UNSR 2020). For example, defending Sharia law without calling for violence as a means of implementing it in society is protected speech (Gündüz v. Turkey).

Punishing those at risk of becoming radicalised

Another key problem with the strategy is its shift of focus onto the conduct of those who become radicalised. However, while European legal instruments are limited to the crimes of receiving training or travelling abroad for terrorist purposes, some states have gone further in this regard by punishing people who merely put themselves at risk of becoming radicalised. This is the case with the French and Spanish ban on regular access to terrorism content online. This amounts to an unacceptable limitation on the right to free expression, which entail the freedom to receive information and ideas. Moreover, a general ban disregards that people who access such content may do so without any intent to commit a terrorist offence (French Constitutional Council decisions 2016-611 and 2017-682). More generally, criminalizing conduct of people who put themselves at risk of becoming radicalised ignore the complexities of RVE. These processes consist of several stages from moral outrage to mobilisation by terrorist groups (Sageman 2010: 71-88). However, this is not a linear or deterministic process. It is next to impossible

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to predict if a radicalized person will commit violent acts (Patel 2011:2).

Policy Recommendations

Having identified some key problems with the European strategy, a few policy recommendations are at hand.

National legislatures

- When implementing relevant European legal instruments, the legislative intention behind these instruments as clarified in the Explanatory Report to the Additional Protocol and in the recitals of the EU Directive should be taken into account. While states are given some discretion when implementing obligations derived from European legal instruments, the mentioned texts provide valuable insight for limiting the negative effects of criminal law on freedom of expression. According to these texts, criminal intent is required. Notably, the crime of receiving training must be done for the purpose of contributing to a terrorism offence and should not extend to regular access to terrorism content available online. Finally, speech endorsing terrorism must have created a concrete danger that a terrorist offence will take place.
- A distinction must be made between people who have become radicalised and have perpetrated a preparatory act to commit a terrorist offence, on the one hand, and people who have put themselves at risk of becoming radicalised, on the other. A more effective strategy to tackle the latter challenge is through the development of counter-terrorism narrative which is also in line with freedom of expression.

National courts

- The general wording of the crimes in focus increase the risk of judicial overreach in criminal proceedings concerning radicalization cases. It is of critical importance to prevent such overreach by insisting on the application of the standard requirements for a criminal offence in these cases and to uphold respect for freedom of expression.

European institutions

- The Council of Europe has assumed a leading role in the construction of the European RVE strategy. Logically, it should have a special responsibility to ensure that states respect their human rights obligations when implementing that strategy. There is a need for close monitoring and supervision of the implementation of its Additional Protocol.
- The impact of the EU directive on combatting terrorism on human rights must be assessed. This will be done by the European Commission in a forthcoming report to be submitted to the European Parliament and to the Council by 8 September 2021 (Article 29). This report should extend to a critical assessment of the crimes of apologia, recruitment and training from the standpoint of the right to freedom of expression.

Consulted & Recommended Sources

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Policy Brief Nº 6

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The Potential of Technologies in the Fight Against Radicalism[1]

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We hear a lot about violent extremists mobilising technology for their own nefarious purposes but not nearly enough about how society is using that technology against these criminals. In order to gain insights from leading experts on the potential for technology to support counter violent extremist strategy (CVE), the MINDb4ACT project held its first Virtual Roundtable on 27 May 2020, bringing together policymakers, end-users, law-enforcement, and CVE technology developers. This policy brief will showcase the results of their discussions and provide a set of policy recommendations that encourage the development of more effective and adaptable CVE technologies in future.

What are CVE technologies?

As part of the MINDb4ACT project research, a deep dive into the CVE technology landscape was undertaken, mapping tools available to end-users fighting radicalisation. These tools were aggregated into a database, which will be digitalised and included on the MINDb4ACT information-sharing platform. These CVE technologies range from opensource data mining, public sentiment analysis, and deep web monitoring to more complex AI-enabled data dissemination platforms.

While integration and compliance challenges remain for many CVE technologies, there are also opportunities, including an emerging trend towards innovative social initiatives. The results of a MINDb4ACT pilot study, which mobilised virtual reality (VR) technology to create educational scenarios for identifying radicalisation and misinformation online showed that demand for such technologies has been growing to provide more engaging and practical training methods. Future trends in countering radicalisation include using VR technologies to raise awareness amongst hard to reach communities about how radicalisers are using social media influencer culture, and mainstream politics to spread disinformation, extremist views and violent tactics.

How are policymakers already supporting CVE technology?

The European Commission highlighted the importance of platforms for multi-stakeholder engagement for tackling CVE, including the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) and EU Internet Forum. Funding for CVE initiatives continues through the H2020 programme, and legislative initiatives are emerging on the prevention and dissemination of terrorist content online. However, to ensure the right CVE technologies solutions are developed, there need to be incentives for their deployment, and clear boundaries on how they are deployed. More work needs to be done on a common definition of violent extremism across, and within, EU Member States, and boundaries for implementing CVE measures.

What do CVE technology end-users need?

The representative of the European Network of Law Enforcement Technology Services (ENLETS) highlighted that while technology remains a vital CVE tool, it cannot operate in a vacuum. Law enforcement needs a continuous platform of knowledge sharing and exchange at EU level, between end-users, private industry, and policymakers, to reflect the continuous evolution of threats, CVE technologies and EU policies. Only through a joint EU effort can we ensure that the right CVE technology is in the hands of the right people, who have been trained in the right way to employ it in line with European legislation.

Approaches to CVE in prisons were examined in the MINDb4ACT pilot study with the Italian Ministry of Justice. Used in the prevention and investigation of radicalisation, prisons are increasingly mobilising technologies including

artificial intelligence (AI), data integration, data mining and VR. Yet, their use is mandated by two seemingly conflicting legislative frameworks: the GDPR and the Police Directive. Without addressing these inconsistencies on mass data gathering, there's a risk these preventive and investigate technologies become push factors for further radicalisation.

How is CVE technology evolving?

From the perspective of the private sector, the use of AI for predictive analysis of radicalisation is vital to understanding how radicalisation strategies evolve. However, CVE efforts could be enhanced by a common EU understanding of radicalisation. In terms of future trends, there is an increasing need for tools to support the preventive aspects of radicalisation, identify early extremist behaviours and address education and values by mobilising social innovation technologies. The internet is a rich source of pre-criminal radicalisation activity, which can be accessed and analysed without compromising GDPR laws, and thereby define appropriate intervention in line with the potential risk. Going forward, small but effective actions by large online platforms to create barriers to CVE content are critical, as are knowledge-sharing efforts between technology developers, policymakers, and end-users.

What priorities going forward?

The views of participants in the Roundtable discussions demonstrated where the greatest challenges and priorities lie for CVE policy going forward. The practical application of CVE technology has two major obstacles: end-user skills and resources to implement the technology; and, the development of technology (R&D) in line with sectoral needs. The solution according to most participants was for policymakers to enable platforms for exchange of CVE expertise and solutions.

Policy Recommendations

- Define a common European understanding of radicalisation and violent extremism to enable coordination of national CVE strategies and mobilise predictive technologies.
- Establish an innovative and proactive multidisciplinary CVE platform for knowledge exchange to ensure a coordinated and evolving approach along the CVE stakeholder supply chain – from technology R&D, to policy development to LEA and end-user implementation to wider socially-focused networks in education and communications.
- Encounrage CVE innovation based on a clear understanding of the gaps and opportunities in EU CVE, and incentivise technologies with indicators based on rish rather than stereotypical identifiers.
- Provide a framework for deploying CVE technologies to ensure clear boundaries for implementation, particularly in the context of GDPR and the Police Directive.
- Ensure CVE technologies co-exist with ethical mechanisms allowing people to get help in the early stages of radicalisation.
- Consider the symbiotic relationship between disinformation and radicalisation in the development of CVE policies.

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Policy Brief N° 7

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At the forefront of prevention work: How schools in Europe can contribute to effective radicalisation prevention[1]

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An overwhelming majority of Islamists living in Europe start to radicalise between their mid-teens and mid-thirties. Many still go to school or just have left school when they turn towards radical ideologies. Jihadi travellers who ventured to war zones in the Middle East from Germany are a telling example: A 2016 analysis security agencies performed on biographies of 784 of a total of 1.050 Germans who had reinforced the ranks of Islamist groups in Syria and Iraq showed 486 individuals were aged between 18 and 25 years and 56 under 18 years at the time of their first departure. Moreover, 69 individuals were still minors when starting to radicalise and 72 were attending school until just right before they departed (BKA, BfV, and HKE, 2016). Socio-demographic figures of Jihadi travellers from other EU member states will, most likely, look similar to those from Germany. It is, thus, reasonable to say European schools are a core area to prevent critical radicalisation of young people. In the following sections, we are going to present three lessons learnt from research on Islamist radicalisation prevention work in schools. Although these insights are mainly extracted from the German context and European schools systems are highly different we consider they can be adapted to the specific realities and necessities of other member states.

Strengthening prevention architecture

Retrospective research into biographies of radicalised school shooters and Islamist terrorist attackers confirmed a variety of people in their social environment —i.e. peers and parents, but also school personnel— to a certain extent had noticed signs of radicalisation or psychosocial crises the individuals were trapped in *before* they turned into perpetrators of violent acts (Böckler et al., 2018). However, those fragments of information in none of the cases were pieced together into one picture, so their real escalation level was never understood completely. In schools, important pieces of knowledge very often get lost over their complex organisational structures and demanding working routines, or reach recipients incompletely — phenomena well known as information loss or fragmentation (Fox and Harding, 2005). As a result, critical psychosocial developments in students' lives are identified too late or remain completely out of teachers' sight. For that reason, it is vital, also from a health promotion perspective, to integrate standardised structures for case-specific prevention work into schools' internal operational architectures.

Strengthening external networks

Although teachers' primary task is knowledge transfer, as a matter of fact they have to engage also in social work as they are frequently confronted with a great variety of societal challenges, including radicalisation. As our own research has been able to confirm school personnel very often lack in-depth knowledge about signs and behaviours that might indicate radicalisation or psychosocial crises in adolescents. This is a worrying gap as they are at the forefront to support adolescents in critical phases of their development. Despite these shortcomings, it is also clear that effective management of radicalisation cases cannot be guaranteed by schools alone as it simply exceeds their capacities. Involving external specialists such as counselling centres for radicalisation, psychologists, or

religious communities is vital to increase the effectiveness of prevention interventions.

Strengthening prevention effectiveness through evaluation

In recent years, projects to prevent Islamist radicalisation hit the ceiling. In Germany, for example, the *Demokratie Leben*-programme — by far the biggest state programme to fund prevention interventions— operates with an annual budget of more than 100 million euros and has financed several hundred projects. In sharp contrast to the resources available today for radicalisation prevention work, approaches that have proven through robust scientific evaluation studies they are, in fact, effective remain relatively scarce (Kober, 2017). With regard to Germany, again, renowned data bases such as *Wespe* or *Grüne Liste Prävention* still register a relatively small number of radicalisation prevention measures whose effectiveness has been underpinned by scientific scrutiny.

Policy Recommendations

For prevention work in schools to become more effective policy makers in the EU should consider promoting the following measures:

- To find out about critical developments in students and initiate measures to support them as early as possible it is strongly advised educational institutions are furnished with a comprehensive prevention architecture. Such structures should not be implemented through a merely security lens to detect students who might become a risk for safety in schools, but rather adopt a public health perspective, as schools could contribute considerably to identify vulnerable students and support them in their psychosocial development. However, it is imperative to avoid creating double and triple structures. The NETWASS and NETWAVE programmes developed by FUB are a good practices example for such a prevention structure.
- In order to increase school personnel's capacities to support prevention work specific training on psychosocial crises in adolescence and radicalisation should be incorporated as a compulsory standard into the education curricula for teachers.
- It is highly important that radicalisation prevention interventions developed for educational institutions undergo scientific scrutiny in order to guarantee cases are dealt with effectively. Effectiveness evaluations should be a standard practice whenever launching new or extending already existing programmes.
- At the same time, educational institutions should be actively supported to build and nurse support networks with external prevention and radicalisation specialists.

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[2] The authors are solely responsible for its content, it does not represent the opinion of the European Commission, who is not responsible for any use that might be made of data appearing therein.

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Policy Brief Nº 8

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Gender in P/CVE approaches: pathways from theory to practice[1]

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Violent extremist ideologies continue to challenge social cohesion and democratic values, and terrorist action is used to destabilise societies. The degree to which the global COVID-19 pandemic will fuel extremist ideologies has yet to be fully examined. Domestic and gender-based violence have been exacerbated by the lockdowns, leaving women and children locked in their homes with their abusers and without access to support services (United Nations, 2020). These spikes in violence are a grave threat not only for women, but for the security of our societies.

Extremist groups have historically undermined gender equality and human rights and continue to exploit rigid concepts of gender and adapt narratives to context-specific grievances of men and women. The last 30 years have seen major efforts in forming expertise on women and gender in war and violent conflict. With the landmark 1325 Resolution of the Security Council of Women, Peace and Security in 2000 this agenda has seen global recognition. Nevertheless, the role of women as agents of peace and gender as a cross-cutting attribute is still neglected in P/CVE and has only recently gained interest.

If P/CVE policies are to be practised sensibly and sustainably, approaches to increase gender equality need to be emphasised, in line with the notion that societies with higher gender equality are more resilient to violent extremism (General Assembly United Nations, 2015).

Key debates about gender in P/CVE

Three main foci of interest in gender and P/CVE have been dominant in recent years:

1) **Gendered pathways to radicalisation and the role of men and women in extremist groups.** Violent extremist groups exploit context-specific gender grievances to recruit both male and female members. An understanding of these mechanism is crucial for the impact of P/CVE programming (Brown et al, 2019: 20f).

2) **Toxic masculinities and the role of power relations.** Questions on gender have focused on women's victimhood and their role in violent extremist groups. Masculinities within such groups have been frequently referred to as toxic masculinities (Pearson, 2019: p.1256). Recent discussion warns that the notion of toxic masculinity as a singular set of problematic ideas, may lead to the ignorance of power relations and could prevent from understanding the complexities of masculinities in the light of local context and situation (Pearson, 2019:1270).

3) **The role of women in P/CVE.** The positive effects of women participating in security and processes remain unquestioned. Women at all levels are seen as uniquely placed to challenge extremist narratives. As decision makers, community leaders, professionals but also within families where they are best positioned to detect early warning signs of radicalisation (Schlaffer et al, 2019). At the same time women are often the first targets of violent extremists and therefore the first to notice negative trends in their surroundings (OSCE, 2019: 51), as in cases of domestic violence that has the potential to develop into violent extremism, if undetected and unreported (Anderlini, 2018: 34). Women in the police forces tend to have a more specific focus on human rights violations and can de-escalate tension more efficiently. This in turn allows them to establish trust within communities (Fink et al, 2016: p.45). Finally, women-led organisations are key actors in P/CVE. They are locally rooted and trusted in their communities. They are able to recognise

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and respond to changes within the local context quickly (Anderlini, 2018: 31).

Policy Recommendations

The following aspects are recommended to be taken into account when developing and implementing P/CVE policies:

- Gender, as a cross-cutting perspective within P/CVE efforts, should be an integral part in whole-of-community approaches. Gender identities and gender relations are sensitive issues. Tackling harmful gender norms requires safe spaces and trust, which can best be created by civil society.
- Policies should support the empowerment and equality of women both in the public and the private spheres. Women can only exert their power in P/CVE when their voices are heard. One grassroots project targeting the empowerment of women is the MotherSchools Parenting for Peace Model.
- Policymakers and donors need to take into account that gender norms are manipulated and exploited by violent extremists and that they have developed over space and time. Deconstructing existing norms implies that a project lifecycle may not suffice to achieve sustainable impact.
- Gender in P/CVE programming needs to consider the perspectives of women, men, girls and boys alike as well as underlying dynamics, relations and hierarchies between them. These considerations should as well include other social attributes such as age, class, religion and ethnicity.
- Programmes should include both women and men as agents of change to support alliances and foster partnerships between men and women in promoting transformative masculinities and femininities.

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Policy Brief Nº 9

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From Europe to Maghreb and back: A new cooperation approach in P/CVE[1]

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The aftermath of 9/11 prompted the European Union (EU) to rethink its counter-terrorism strategy, setting among its priorities preventing radicalisation and strengthening the cooperation with its near periphery in North of Africa, particularly the Maghreb countries. This approach reflected the European concerns regarding al-Qaeda's (AQ) increasing societal and political influence, North African connections of terrorists who have carried out attacks within Europe, and more recently the establishment as well as development of the Islamic State (IS), the foreign fighters flow and the returnees phenomenon. The signature of the Valencia Action Plan in April 2002 aimed at covering such European concerns, and definitely achieved certain goals: It managed to reinforce local security capabilities in Maghreb, it increased the exchange of information among EU and Maghrebi intelligence services, and successful carried out joint actions to fight terrorism. Among others, a recent case of international cooperation is the counter-terrorism operation carried out last 19th of March 2020, when a terrorist cell, whose head was from Tunisian, was dismantled.

While in terms of operational support the cooperation is fluent, actions towards prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism need to be improved.

Common P/CVE trends in EU and Maghreb

EU and Maghreb share common issues and trends regarding jihadist extremism. Firstly, in both regions radicalised individuals are moved by the same **jihadist ideology** and terrorist groups, mainly AQ and IS. In addition, they both have been suffered the flow of **foreign fighters** who have gone to fight with IS in Syria and Iraq. By the end of 2017, 5,778 fighters had travelled from Western Europe while 5,356 from the Maghreb (Barrett, 2017: 11). Now that the caliphate has been military defeated, they are both dealing with **returnees** (women and children included), debating on whether to repatriate them, to allow them to return and eventually prosecute them or leave them in **refugee camps**. The latter, together with prisons, is proving to be a real breeding ground for radicalisation. A clear example is the case of Al-Hawl refugee camp, where the most radical women have overtaken a part of the site and rule the space with the hardest rule of Sharia law existing (Vale, 2019: 6-7). As for **prisons**, although considered a marginal phenomenon in terms of numbers, the presence of detained terrorists, penitentiary bad conditions and the increasing **crime-terror nexus** still present a threat to society. Even more now that IS included a discourse of solidarity for the "brothers in jail" and invoked to carry out attacks against prison officers. By now, advances have been made to develop risk-assessment tools to detect at-risk individuals or radicalised inmates. However, little attention has given to prisoners' treatment and **disengagement programmes**. In most cases, such actions are still at a preliminary stage or lack evaluation and, sometimes, do not even exist as it is the case in Egypt or Libya (Renard, 2020).

Towards a new cooperation method

Despite the similar threats and terrorist interlinkages between EU and North Africa, radicalisation drivers, vulnerable areas and communities, as well as the cultural-historical backgrounds, highly differ from one region to another, and therefore need different interventions and approaches. In order to deploy cooperation in prevention and deradicalisation, **the approach should change** shifting from an exchange of good practices to a real intention to understand one another and learn how each State deal with such threats. This comparative, less invasive analysis would allow States to create longer-term mechanism of resilience, target more specific issues and finally better understand the nuances of jihadism in their own local contexts.
An outstanding sample of this proposed approach is the five-year effort on "Countering violent extremism in regions of Maghreb and Sahel" launched by the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research

Institute (UNICRI) in collaboration with the European Union, thanks to which 31 pilot projects have been carried out.

In the preliminary findings of the project, the difference in approach between local and international organisations is already notable and it makes it easy to extract key ideas for future successful interventions. The very first lesson learnt regards the need of having an in-depth knowledge of existing conflict dynamics and cultural preferences in order to avoid any clash with the logic of communities' values and practices. More specifically, actors should not only know the communities and context where to implement a project but should have their trust. This thorough understanding is key also to define which vulnerabilities constitute a risk for radicalisation or for joining violent extremist groups, and how to address them. In fact, stipulating preferred type of issues that need to be tackled risks to undermine the success of the intervention. Even more interesting is the **centrality of religion** in North African projects. In Maghreb it should be adopted an approach that recognizes the importance of religion and demonstrates deep respect for the culture embedded within an Islamic worldview by incorporating Islamic values and teachings into their counter-radicalisation efforts. It would be worth it to evaluate how much this approach could work in Europe and which might be the actors to involve. On the other hand, it was showed how certain tasks are better undertaken by Western countries. Specifically, Europe has a broader knowledge of project management and, therefore, the participation of international organisations in these P/CVE interventions could ensure the implementation and coordination of administrative tasks. Also, UNICRI's results show how certain topics are not assessed by local communities, while they could be discussed through diplomacy and international dialogues (i.e. institutional and security forces accountability and equal access to justice).

Policy Recommendations

In line with the reflections made above, a few actions are recommended:

- The cooperation approach has been too related to security, while it is now time to shift to prevention and deradicalisation – always preferring a "bottom-up approach".
- The security strategy should be re-designed in a post-Caliphate era. There is a high risk that the next generation of jihadists will use the image of the past Caliphate in its discourse, recruiting people with a political and ideological message such as "make the Caliphate (great) again". Both North Africa and Europe should reinforce their counter-narratives capabilities and collaboration with media, in order to avoid polarised discourses and ensuring a standardised quality of news regarding terrorism.
- Society should be more involved in prevention and, especially, disengagement. Particularly, it has been demonstrated how effective the presence of families, victims and former extremists can be for radicalised individuals. They are perceived as credible voices and may help creating a 'safe space' for the radicalised individual to speak out, as well as finding a sense of peace or community outside the terrorist group. In the case of Europe, it might also be interesting to work on "religious leaders", learning from the Maghreb.

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[1] This Policy Brief presents information gathered during the Policy Event "Sharing the insights on the Maghreb and EU approaches in radicalisation and violent extremism", organised by MINDb4ACT consortium on November 28, 2019 in Brussels.

[2] The author is solely responsible for its content, it does not represent the opinion of the European Commission, who is not responsible for any use that might be made of data appearing therein.

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Policy Brief Nº 10

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Current radicalisation trends in Central and Eastern Europe[1]

Marzena Kordaczuk-Was[2] | Expert on Radicalisation Prevention, Polish Platform for Homeland Security

Identifying trends in radicalisation, which should be the starting point and the basis for the proper design of new as well as reorientation of already undertaken actions in preventing radicalisation. Without current knowledge and a proper understanding of the current trends in the development of the threat of radicalisation, its most common forms appearing at the national or regional level and in individual local environments, the risk factors reinforcing this threat, it is impossible to plan, design and implement effective preventive measures (Kordaczuk-Wąs, 2018: 61-66).

The term 'radicalisation' is most often associated with radical behavior leading to acts of extremism and terrorism. Meanwhile, radicalism is not only about Islamic fundamentalism, but also regards problems that can be particularly notices in Central and Eastern Europe, such as hate speech, xenophobia or nationalism. It is, therefore, crucial to be able to react at an early stage of symptoms of an individual's radicalisation. This, in turn, entails the need to properly identify the problem and understand the mechanism of a specific form of radicalisation. The creation of a comprehensive and complete picture of the current situation prevailing in Central and Eastern Europe has been possible, by an invitation to a joint discussion representatives of: 1) the strategic European body (European Commission) responsible for shaping policies in the area of preventing radicalisation; 2) key networks gathering policymakers and practitioners translating European policy language into national practical solutions (RAN and EFUS), as well as 3) non-governmental organization supporting the adaptation of practical activities undertaken to prevent radicalisation to the reality of Central and Eastern Europe (Institute of Social Safety, Poland).

Key debates on current trends on radicalisation

Dividing the discussion conducted as part of the above-mentioned expert panel into two main areas allows for the identification of key observations regarding the trends in radicalisation currently occurring in Central and Eastern Europe, and at the same time for the formulation of recommendations for creating further policy in preventing and combating radicalisation.

Starting from today's most commonly observed forms of radicalisation, including changes in trends and perceptions of this threat in Europe, few interesting elements comes out. First of all, there a need to recognize the proper weight (significance) of the problem and strive to achieve a common understanding of the definition of radicalisation, with particular emphasis on far-right extremism. The most common risk factors and feeding ground for radicalisation of individuals' attitudes are listed: hate crimes, fake news, conspiracy theories related to the pandemic situation as well as 5G technology. It is also emphasized the need to pay more attention to the problem of individual radicalisation and the particular risk group created by lone actors.

An important observation concerns the inspiration of radicals by politicians. Therefore, properly identifying and understanding the mechanisms leading to radicalisation means depoliticizing and building a systemic approach to preventing and combating radicalisation.

In addition, there are currently general anti-democratic trends and sentiments in many countries in Europe and the world.

Practitioners note that trends in Europe are coming from the East, therefore special attention should be paid to the need to intensify activities in Central and Eastern Europe in the area of preventing and combating radicalisation. The aforementioned anti-democratic sentiments are conducive to the development of both far right and left-wing extremism.

Furthermore, it was discussed the importance of reaching an effective approach to a systemic prevention of radicalisation. Building a systemic approach requires establishing bridges between policy makers, researchers

and practitioners so that it is possible to use each other's competences. The voices of practitioners regarding the need to improve practical operation in local environments are particularly important. However, the potential of researchers should not be ignored, but the language of science should be translated into the language of policies and strategic documents and then into practice. The private sector should also be included in this overall picture.

Additionally, it is very important to build a system based on an individual-oriented approach, paying attention to the individual causes of radicalisation. It means placing at the center of the undertaken actions a diagnosis setting the directions for building individual aid plans based on the real radicalisation causes (roots, pathways into), and at the same time enabling the involvement and use of specific competences of individual entities operating in the local community.

Finally, harnessing the potential of evidence-based programmes, practices and policies is also of key importance in this area. This means the use of actions proven by reliable scientific research confirming their effectiveness and impact. In addition, attention should be paid to the preparation and implementation of comprehensive and tailored prevention programmes.

Policy Recommendations

It should be emphasized that all the areas discussed and described above already contain important conclusions, which should be reflected in the policies and strategies that build the ground for the design and implementation of actions in the area of preventing and combating radicalisation. Additionally, during the discussion, it was possible to indicate specific direct recommendations for policymakers supporting practitioners in their actions are collected below:

- It is necessary to ensure that the police (and other LEA) operating in various EU Member States can collect comparable statistical data on extreme-right extremism. This will facilitate taking consistent actions both at the strategic and executive levels.
- It is strongly recommended to 'start action from people', that means looking at the problem from the so-called 'street level'. Additionally, the 'prevention is the key' slogan is still valid. In order to effectively prevent radicalisation, actions should be initiated in the non-violent phase.
- The issue of local management and strategies to bring local, regional, national and European authorities together is also extremely important. It is recommended to strengthen local democracy and civic involvement in social life. Moreover, it is crucial to ensure the social inclusion and care for the well-being of the population. This can in turn be achieved through building the professional culture, active collaboration, innovation and the use of the new technologies.

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[1] This Policy Brief presents information gathered during the virtual Policy Event "Sharing the insights on Central and Eastern Europe approaches in radicalisation and violent extremism", organised by the MINDb4ACT, BRaVe and CHAMPIONs consortia on July 2, 2020.

[2] The author is solely responsible for its content, it does not represent the opinion of the European Commission, who is not responsible for any use that might be made of data appearing therein.

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Policy Brief Nº 11

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Improving collaboration and multi-stakeholder approaches towards addressing P/CVE in Central and Eastern Europe[1]

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Political polarisation and right-wing radicalisation can best be illustrated as falling on a broad spectrum of 'group-focused enmity' (Küpper & Zick, 2014), ranging from attitudes and everyday actions within the population — felt through laws and regulations in institutions — to electoral successes of parties of the extreme right, the actions of extremist groups, and incidences of hate crimes. In recent years there has been a rise in popularity of extreme right parties, accompanied by more tangible everyday racism among the population in many European countries, both on the street and online. Hate has been particularly focused on the topics of migration and refugees but has also been directed against those who advocate for equality of LGBTQIA+ individuals and women, and in many instances framed by anti-Semitic or other similar conspiracy myths (Jaecker, 2004).

In response to the rising tide, numerous initiatives have been launched in the field of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). Coming from the municipal, national, and European levels and launched by non-profit institutes, government agencies, intergovernmental and supranational agencies, and even private corporations — there is no shortage to the responses that attempt to curb the rise in polarisation and radicalisation through diverse means and frameworks. From addressing prejudice and discrimination through sport; to activities integrating third country nationals into the local communities; to work with youth susceptible to online radicalization, there is currently a breadth and depth of P/CVE activities never before seen.

A major challenge, however, lies in the fact that these initiatives are often 'silo-ed': only accessible to those directly involved and the respective funding agencies, without the possibility to share best practices or challenges with other similar initiatives. Furthermore, there is a lack of collaboration opportunities — and often a deep lack of trust — between public institutions and non-profit organisations, further limiting knowledge-sharing and cooperation even within the same cities or networks.

Key challenges

The result of the research conducted within the CHAMPIONs project showed that the vast majority of first line practitioners in Hungary, Poland, Germany, and Romania believe that collaboration among practitioners and other stakeholders at the local level would be helpful in preventing and reacting to political polarisation and right-wing radicalisation in a community (CHAMPIONs, 2020).

Indeed, there is general acknowledgement of the benefits of collaboration, including a number of white papers on the benefits of local, regional and multilateral approaches to preventing and countering violent extremism (UNODC, 2018; Haanstra, 2018). However, it is clear that while the theoretical foundations are compelling, putting such collaborative engagements into practice requires high levels of trust and institutional adaptations.

Challenges to collaboration identified by first line practitioners include the lack of time to implement activities due to existing workload; the lack of follow-up, concrete actions, and practical solutions; the lack of agency for the collaboration; and the lack of opportunities and tools for collaboration. Other challenges, such as collaborations being designed only on a short-term basis and the failure to integrate people who could benefit most from such initiatives were also recounted. Issues such as transparency are also key factors as well as excessive bureaucracy and limited funding.

The bottom line remains however that radicalisation as complex social problem can

only be addressed by a team of diverse experts and practitioners working together. All efforts towards supporting collaborative engagements should be put into place.

Policy Recommendations

In this context, the following aspects are recommended to be taken into account when developing and implementing P/CVE policies:

- **Collaborations between institutional actors and other key stakeholders must be formalised and made sustainable**. Ways to ensure this include promoting shared ownership; appointing a team leader embedded in municipal structures; signing Memorandums of Agreement among institutions. Systemic solutions, for instance the creation of national agencies, are preferable.
- Policy makers must be cognisant of the fact that **different approaches and objectives** of multi-agency approaches exist **between Western Europe and Central and Eastern Europe**
- It must be ensured that the teams working on P/CVE have **decision-making powers** and that their roles are embedded in their respective institutional frameworks.
- There should be a **heavy emphasis on trust-building** through dialogue and meeting the needs of the teams and institutions involved; **safe spaces** need to be created where practitioners can learn together with and from each other how best to address P/CVE issues
- **Framing is extremely important** and theoretical language is often unpalatable to first line practitioners who pivot towards action-oriented discussion on specific phenomena and problems
- It is necessary to progress from ad-hoc, project-based multi-stakeholder collaboration and **scale it up to standing, mandated systems** and bring together stakeholders including but not limited to first line practitioners, policy- and decision-makers, and academics in the field of P/CVE.

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Policy Brief N° 12

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Right-wing extremism in Central and Eastern Europe: Context, challenges, research results and best practices[1]

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This policy brief offers an overview of how Far Right violent extremism in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) has developed in recent years, including the specific regional trends, the tactics that have been used and how this fits within global patterns of the Far Right.

CEE offers a specific set of challenges: in a regional context that still grapples with historical legacies of fascism, recent years have seen a surge in right-wing populism and the rise of a small but vocal parliamentary minorities, as well as various irregular groups with links both to the East and the West. Legislation in Eastern European states have looked to tackle Far Right militia, but such groups have still been able to gain substantial regional legitimacy and footholds. As such, more work is needed understanding the rise and threat of the Far Right at local, national and European levels. Whilst COVID-19 and respective responses may have dampened the ascension of the Far Right, new coalitions in response to lockdowns and restrictions, as well as the exacerbation of existing patterns of inequality may spur the Far Right in future.

Regional Far Right trends

Much of the drive behind contemporary Far Right groups in CEE comes from the development of a highly exclusive formation of Social Conservatism. Such values have been weaponised against minority groups, such as Roma communities or Muslims – particularly in the wake of the 2015 so-called 'Refugee Crisis'. In very recent years, we can furthermore observe a shift towards the targeting of non-racialised minority communities, with attacks against LGBTQ+ rights, marriage and parenting (Bustikova, 2019). This is largely framed as a pushback against the accommodation of cultural and political minorities – the advance of minority education, language rights and revisionist readings of WWII which highlight Eastern European engagement in Nazism and the Holocaust. This weaponisation of Social Conservative is relatively recent, with prior waves of Muslim immigration not resulting in such politics, such as that seen in the Bosnian Genocide.

A key tactic utilised by Far Right groups in CEE is that of the public demonstration. Studies of Far Right groups show that, despite a growing online presence by Right-wing Extremists (RWX), demonstrations continue to be utilised. These play an important role both in engaging and cementing the support of existing members, as well as recruiting new members, networking between groups and claiming a space in a public sphere that has often denied them legitimacy (Zeller, 2019; Zeller 2020). Several existing events in CEE have been claimed by the Far Right through marches, including: the Day of Honour (HU); the Lukov March (BG); Independence Day (PL); and the Bleiberg Commemorations (HR and AU). Such marches furthermore provide fertile ground for international cooperation between Far Right networks, with activists from Western and Central Europe, as well as even North America, participating in activism in Eastern Europe.

One significant concern in CEE is the role of state support or sponsorship of Far Right activism. Evident in Far Right demonstrations and the instrumentalising of Far Right discourses by mainstream parties, with many current populist parties evolving from mainstream parties rightwards. As such, the region offers a specific case where the mainstream needs to be watched to understand how fringe RWX will develop. State support of the Far Right is evident internationally, with Far Right Eastern European MEPs engaging positively with governments with similar views, such as Modi in India, Bolsonaro in Brazil, Netanyahu in Israel or Trump in the US. These engagements have often been linked together through anti-Muslim discourse, couched in the language of the long 'War on Terror' and demographic concerns over the 'continued growth' of Muslim minority communities (Leidig, 2019).

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With Eastern Europe becoming in national debates framed as the 'Christian frontier' against 'invading' Muslims, the mainstreaming of the Far Right has been enabled and allowed to grow. Research by the EU Commission project *YouthRightOn: Resilient YOUTH against far-RIGHT messages ONline*, run by *Centre for the Study of Democracy* (CSD), found several Far Right sentiments in Bulgaria had entered mainstream opinion, including: anti-Roma (found to be held by 70% of those surveyed), anti-migrant (63%), anti-Islam (46%) and anti-EU or anti-systemic narratives (30%). This problem has been exacerbated by European counter-extremism approaches which have over-emphasised the threat of so-called 'Islamist' terrorism, neglecting Far Right groups and tacitly supporting a securitisation of Muslim minorities. However, these attitudes were shown by the research as not embedded, with young people in particular quick to respond to alternative information or critical discussion.

Policy Recommendations

- **A common, joined-up European approach to the Far Right:** More coordination in implementing European responses is critical. For instance, Far Right groups have been able to circumvent national banning orders by crossing borders and operating outside of a country's legal jurisdiction. A single policy response or common framework would allow for a consistent, impactful response.
- **Challenging the legitimisation of Far Right politics:** The growth of the Far Right has been, in many instances, legitimised by state governments and other mainstream political actors. The EU should take a stronger stance on member states that encourage the support of the Far Right.
- **Better monitoring is required to understand the scale of the problem:** Under-reporting plagues efforts to understand the Far Right, leading to difficulties assessing the extent of violent extremism and an underplaying of the problem. Better monitoring, through EU research projects, non-governmental organisations and clearer legislation, would be beneficial.
- Measures are required to **restrict the public platform of Far Right organisations**. This can be done through European-wide proscription, the banning of certain symbols or international online responses. Coordination between the EU and researchers and activists may support this, with states currently tending to only act in response to consistent external pressure.
- Responses should **combine online and offline anti-Far Right activities**. Online trainings are crucial in supporting critical thinking, digital literacy and developing the means for combating Far Right narratives. Combining online and offline responses avoids over-emphasising individual factors whilst accounting for the role of the online sphere. Giving youth the space and means to critically explore Far Right narratives, online and offline, furthermore supports wider community resilience-building.
- **More research is needed on the impact of COVID-19** and subsequent lockdowns in Central and Eastern Europe, particularly considering exploring the way this interacts with pre-existing regional inequalities.

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