

206
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TEN KEY PRINCIPLES FOR A LOCAL POLICY TO PREVENT VIOLENT EXTREMISM*

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155,000. That is the estimated worldwide number of victims of terrorist attacks in the 21st century (Institute for Peace and Economics, 2017: 15). Just 4% of these victims are in Western countries and yet terrorism is among European citizens' main concerns. The chances of dying in an attack are practically negligible, but the fear of terrorism is growing. The attacks in Madrid (2004), London (2005), Oslo (2011), Paris (2015), Brussels (2016), Nice (2016), Berlin (2016), Manchester (2017) and Barcelona (2017), among others, have only increased this sense of fear and insecurity.

Faced with these attacks, two responses have been given.

The first and most immediate is political. In his essential book on the issue *Terrorism: how to respond* (2010), Richard English states that the threat terrorism poses to democracy is not the risk of death and destruction, which is always limited by comparison to a war, but the danger of provoking regrettable and counterproductive responses from states. In many European countries, the experience of a terrorist attack has led to the declaration or verbal formalisation of war: war against an external enemy – recall the military operation in Raqqa that followed the November 2015 Paris attack; but also war against the *enemy within*, for example, declaring a state of emergency and deploying the army in the streets of major cities.

The second and medium-term response to a terrorist attack tends to take the form of public policies. As a report by Kundnani and Hayes (2018) indicates, of the counterterrorist policies developed over the past decade, those to combat and prevent violent extremism have been among the most fully developed.

What began as a merely rhetorical commitment by certain international agencies and governments has become a set of policies and programmes that have been developing around the world and apply the same terms: terrorism, radicalisation, violent extremism. They may differ substantially, but these policies all

combine measures that clearly focus on security with others that aim to prevent violent extremism.

The approval of the United Nations Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (2015) has consolidated the transition from conventional antiterrorist policies to policies that also include prevention of violent extremism (PVE). Although the plan recognises the need to act both from a global perspective and at national and local levels, it is international organisations and states that have ended up developing PVE policies with budgets that have grown substantially. For example, the EU's Internal Security Fund

1. Agreeing definitions and establishing goals is essential
2. It is necessary to shift from "at-risk groups" to "risk factors"
3. Prevention is not detection
4. Not a problem of integration but of differentiated inclusion
5. Young people must be targeted by PVE policies
6. The key lies in the associational fabric
7. The shift must be made from counternarratives to constructing an alternatives
8. The international political dimension must not be forgotten
9. A local PVE policy above all needs coordination
10. There is no policy without periodic evaluations

has committed to investing €1bn between 2014 and 2020 (EPLO, 2016); €95 million has been agreed between 2017 and 2020 by the United Nations for programmes developing preventive solutions (UNDP, 2017); and the United Kingdom spends £45 million a year (BBC, 2017).

The relationship, and often confusion, between conventional antiterrorist policies – clearly a state competence – and measures to prevent violent extremism explains cities' reluctance when developing programmes in this field. Though it explains it, it does not justify it. If we understand PVE policies as interventions made in the preventive phase with the primary objective of addressing the causes that facilitate the rise of violent extremism or strengthen the factors that hinder its emergence, cities cannot be anything but fundamental players (Muro, 2017). Violent extremism may be a global phenomenon but it is expressed at local level. Violent extremism is also nourished by problems related to the coexistence of very diverse social groups. Because local councils are the closest institutions to citizens and, as a result, those that best know a city's streets and neighbourhoods. And because the professionals that are most directly involved (from social work, health, education, leisure and culture), and those who receive the most public support, work in the local sphere. But what should a local PVE policy look like? What do we know about violent extremism and the PVE policies implemented to date that can help us rethink prevention from the local level? These guidelines gather what we believe should be the ten key principles which govern all local PVE policy.

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1. Agreeing definitions and establishing goals is essential

Definitions and goals are – for any public policy – not purely rhetorical or merely the preliminary sections of a list of measures with an allocated budget. If violent extremism is defined as a security problem, the response is likely to take the form of vigilance and monitoring. If we place the emphasis on radicalisation processes and the “at-risk individuals”, a PVE policy's objective will be to detect those individuals and intervene before or at the start of the process. If we focus above all on causes and understand radicalisation processes from a more social than individual perspective, a PVE policy will necessarily include strengthening the effectiveness of social policies that fight discrimination and exclusion and foster inclusive societies. Hence, different definitions lead to different policies. We start from the basis that a PVE policy should take into account each one of these dimensions and, therefore, each of these levels of intervention, a local PVE policy should aim more towards prevention than detection, concern itself more with social causes than individual backgrounds. Tackling causes in order to prevent radicalisation processes means not only combating *risk factors* such as discrimination, racism, social

exclusion and hate speech, it means strengthening factors that inhibit its emergence (*promotion factors*), such as constructing an inclusive *we*, reinforcing the city's associative fabric and promoting links between citizens (Sieckelinck and Gielen, 2018: 4).

2. It is necessary to shift from “at-risk groups” to “risk factors”

As the act of violence is considered decisive when analysing the path of an individual towards violent extremism, the radicalisation process tends to be reconstructed *a posteriori*: for each individual we analyse their biographical background to determine what led them to the act of violence. From there a recurring series of factors are identified (migrant origin, prior experience of delinquency and/or prison, marginalisation, etc.), which we tend to turn into causes. This is where the retrospective illusion operates (Guibet Lafaye, 2017: 12): we define aspects that are at best correlations as causes. This focus can lead us to mistakenly map at-risk populations and areas based on macro indicators and statistics (unemployment rate, presence of immigrants, marginal neighbourhoods, number of mosques, etc.). In the case of violent extremism of the Salafi-jihadist kind, these correlations point to two factors in particular: Islam, as all Salafi-jihadists consider themselves Muslims, and origin, as most attacks claimed by jihadist organisations in Europe in recent years have been committed by people with Maghrebi roots. The question is whether these factors alone explain the radicalisation processes or whether they are decisive factors that help explain certain personal trajectories (discrimination, marginalisation, social exclusion, etc.). If we accept the latter, the question becomes why, with the same religious and/or ethnic characteristics, do only a minority of individuals radicalise? In terms of local PVE policies, this leads us to two conclusions: first, a PVE policy must avoid the stigmatisation involved in turning certain correlations into causes, and certain causes into indicators used to identify at-risk groups; and second, a PVE policy must impact the factors that explain the radicalisation of some but not of others, tackling trigger factors and promoting others that may inhibit them.

3. Prevention is not detection

The prevention and detection of violent extremism policies are not the same, though they are interrelated and necessarily require mutual collaboration. In contrast to detection, prevention aims to fight the causes and work on the environments that facilitate the emergence of violent extremism: it does not target violent extremism itself. As the criticisms of the United Kingdom's PREVENT programme make clear (Kundnani and Hayes, 2018), when detection is part of prevention the risk is of turning the agents of prevention into surveillance agents and thereby fomenting a generalised climate of suspicion that provokes distrust and, as a result, puts prevention itself at risk. As policies with different goals, pre-

vention and detection must be in the hands of different administrations or fields of administration. A prevention policy in the hands of the security forces would inevitably mean the perversion of its nature, making prevention an instrument of detection. That said, the relationship and coordination between prevention and detection is fundamental: without the collaboration of the security forces it is not possible to chart processes of violent radicalisation or, therefore, to design prevention policies; without the collaboration of the social services or professionals in contact with radicalised people, the detection policy is a mere fiction. It is therefore necessary to conceive multilevel, multi-actor coordination structures that respect the nature and autonomy of each field, as well as the different administrations involved.

4. Not a problem of integration but of differentiated inclusion

The media often emphasise the terrorists' foreign origin or, by contrast, present the strangeness of their level of integration. In France, for example, attacks have tended to be portrayed as direct assaults from within by those who reject the republic's foundational values (Kepel, 2017). In Catalonia, after the Barcelona's attacks in August 2017, it has been recalled once and again with great surprise that the terrorists were perfectly integrated (Bourekba, 2017). In the case of jihadist extremism, violent radicalisation is not the expression of a traditional Muslim culture but the consequence of the deculturalisation of Islam (Roy, 2016). Without fully forming part of their parents' cultural world, so-called *second generations* are also not wholly accepted as full members of the societies where they've grown up.

This is where the problem lies. As Jordi Moreras points out (2015: 2), "the children of immigrants no longer act as the children of immigrants". Their expectations are similar to those of other European citizens, but the reality they encounter often fails to correspond. This prompts what the academic literature calls the feeling of "relative deprivation". To fight the differentiated inclusion that produces this feeling, more policies are needed that facilitate social mobility and access to fundamental rights for citizens as a whole. It is therefore essential to create more inclusive identities, far removed from *we/them* dichotomies. At the local level, city identities should be promoted – a local *we* – of which the whole population, in its multiple diversities, can feel part.

5. Young people must be targeted by PVE policies

Jihadist extremists are getting younger and younger: adolescent or post-adolescent (Atran and Hamid, 2016). It is therefore often argued that violent radicalisation is more a generational than religious phenomenon, that the trigger causes and processes are more like US high-school shootings than the dynamics of ISIS (Galdón, 2017). Dawson (2017), however, specifies that three factors distinguish a radicalised individual from "other confused and rebellious youth": 1) the

search for a meaning in life to compensate for real and perceived humiliations; 2) concerns about moral issues; and 3) a strong orientation towards action, adventure and risk. In the French context and in connection with jihadist extremism, Olivier Roy (2015) speaks of a revolt among second-generation young people (and not the first or the third generations) who reject both the cultures of their parents and of the West and who seek to reconstruct themselves according to the rules of Salafi-jihadism. Along the same lines, Alain Bertho (2016) speaks of a "post-historical" generation (without future and without hope) that sees in *jihad*¹ the chance of a final revolution. Variations in nuance and perspective notwithstanding, the generational factor is fundamental to all approaches. So a local PVE policy must address the phenomenon of violent extremism from this angle too. This means doing it based on *primary prevention*, with education and youth policies that encourage diversity, the promotion of democratic values and critical capacity, and the strengthening of the associative fabric between young people; but also based on secondary prevention, developing specific programmes for groups of young people identified as vulnerable, for example with mentoring and peer-to-peer programmes.

6. The key lies in the associational fabric

According to Putnam (1995: 3), the greater the associational density, the higher the level of trust between citizens and the more chance there is of individuals feeling part of the collective or, as he puts it, that the *I* develops as part of

Violent extremism is a global phenomenon that is expressed at local level

the *we*. Based on this premise, promoting the city's associational fabric should be one of the fundamental objectives of any local PVE policy. Not only because of its prevention effects on radicalisation processes, but also to contribute to increasing social cohesion and greater resilience in latent or manifest conflict settings. But more associational fabric does not only mean more associations, it also means stronger relations between them. More social capital does not necessarily mean less discrimination. It concerns, therefore, the building of bridges between citizens of different origins, beliefs and socioeconomic positions, not only within each association or group (bounding social capital), but also, and above all, between associations and groups (bridging social capital) (ibid: 10). In terms of public policies, this means strengthening the associational fabric by supporting the different initiatives and opening the city's spaces up to less visible or more isolated groups, as well as contributing to opening up spaces of dialogue and interrelation between associations and individuals from di-

1. A polysemic term from the first interpretations of the sacred texts until today. Its various meanings are linked to notions of *justice*, *effort* (in a spiritual sense), *struggle* and *equity*. However, the theories and currents we refer to in this study use another meaning of the term: *jihad* as war, a meaning popularised by political discourses and the media since 9/11.

verse social and cultural worlds. Intercultural policies are already moving in this direction – the point is to do it in a way that coordinates with PVE policies.

7. The shift must be made from counternarratives to constructing alternatives

In the context of the PVE programmes, significant amounts of money have been allocated to promoting counter-narratives (Kundnani and Hayes, 2018). The starting point – questionable and widely questioned (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2017) – is that ideology plays a fundamental part in violent radicalisation processes and that fighting it is therefore fighting them. While ideologies undoubtedly constitute the cognitive framework that justifies *in fine* the use of violence, excessive emphasis on discourse and counternarratives (as has occurred in the United Kingdom, France and the United States) runs the risk of neglecting factors that fuel vulnerability and the predisposition to radicalisation. What is more, as Scott Atran (2015) made clear in his address to the United Nations Security Council, counter-narratives err when they demystify and discredit terrorist organisations without proposing an alternative. In this sense, a PVE policy should attempt to go further, building a different project that would include citizens as a whole and provide the pull factors that violent extremist organisations guarantee today (feeling of belonging and/

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or community, life project, etc.). This rhetoric can only be effective if it is accompanied by social policies that address risk and promotion factors. Otherwise, the difference between discourse and reality can only worsen the problem.

8. The international political dimension must not be forgotten

Although violent extremism takes shape mainly at local level, it is inseparable from international politics. Its success comes precisely from its capacity to connect domestic problems (discrimination, exclusion, injustice) to international conflicts and dynamics. What is known as “home-grown terrorism” has also been explained as the product of the conjunction of a personal experience of injustice (both at individual and collective levels) and other forms of injustice in conflict settings (for example Palestine, Syria, Iraq or Yemen) (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2017). Although cities do not have competences in terms of international policy, a PVE policy must not neglect this political dimension of radicalisation. This means local actors must: 1) understand the political and global nature of the narratives proposed by violent extremist organisations; 2) analyse the effects of international conflicts on the perceptions/sensibilities of certain local communities, but without forgetting the dis-

inction between political positions and the phenomenon of violent radicalisation; and 3) as far as possible position themselves (in terms of discourse) and act (through their policies of cooperation and alliance with other cities) in support of global justice, which is ultimately at the root of these international conflicts.

9. A local PVE policy above all needs coordination

Some European cities have developed PVE plans. In some cases, such as Amsterdam and Copenhagen, the definition of local policies have accompanied or even preceded national plans. In other cases, cities and other local-level actors have become the enforcement arms for national policies. Great Britain and France are the example of this. There are also cities that have resisted explicitly formulating PVE plans or policies. Their argument is that the problem should not be exaggerated and, in the case of secondary prevention, that the stigmatising effect on the groups identified as most vulnerable should be avoided. Beyond whether cities develop a specific plan, what turns out to be fundamental to a genuine PVE policy are the coordination structures, which must work at three levels: *intramunicipal*, between the different departments, agencies and services within the council; *local*, with the social and civil society organisations that work in the city’s social and cultural fields, and who in some way participate in the prevention measures; and *multilevel*, at national and regional levels, but also between the different areas with competence on the issue (interior, justice, security forces, education, social services, youth) and between the different local administrations (via the municipal federations). These coordination structures are fundamental for agreeing definitions and establishing the aims of what a PVE policy ought to be. But they are also fundamental for establishing synergies between the different programmes and departments, strengthening already existing policies from a PVE perspective, sharing information on the city’s radicalisation processes (always shifting due to their dynamic nature) and evaluating and revising policies in this field.

10. There is no policy without periodic evaluations

Every public policy needs continuous evaluation. Only in this way can the policymaking process cycle be closed, which begins with the definition and implementation of a policy and ends with its evaluation and redefinition. In the field of PVE policies, this evaluation and revision is more necessary than ever. Although these policies have become a priority for many governments (with new programmes and more public finance), systematic analysis of their effects and, therefore, of the validity of their premises, has been made on only a few occasions. It is not, however, a minor task. When clear objectives are not specified it is difficult to assess its impact. Moreover, prevention policies are always difficult to evaluate as the final objective is to prevent, meaning that success is avoiding what might have happened. Said another way, the problem is proving the causal relationship between a poli-

cy and a non-event (Koehler, 2017). It is precisely because of this added difficulty that greater effort is necessary. A PVE policy's objectives and the factors it should prevent must be clearly defined. The emphasis here should be less the point to which the prevention has been achieved but whether intervention has been made on the trigger factors and causes. Greater effort is also needed when involving different actors (public administrations, professionals, social organisations, etc.) in the analysis and revision of PVE policies. The joint work of experts and researchers is fundamental. Without an empirical basis, the risk is run of making policies based on assumptions and malaises that do not always correspond to the problem they seek to address.

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