

# Detect to prevent: countering violent extremism strategies in Spain

## Detectar para prevenir: las estrategias de lucha contra el extremismo violento en España

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**Abstract:** This article analyses strategies for preventing and combatting violent extremism in Spain since the Madrid attacks in 2004. Initially concerned with anticipating the terrorist threat by means of police, military, and legal measures, these strategies have gradually incorporated approaches and measures that address the phenomenon of radicalisation. It is argued that the emergence of the concepts of "countering violent extremism" (CVE) and "preventing violent extremism" (PVE) represents a step forward in the approach to terrorism since its target is not terrorism as such but the factors and conditions that can lead to it. In the case of Spain, CVE and PVE policies come together in the present strategy against violent radicalisation.

**Key words:** radicalisation, terrorism, prevention, preventing of violent extremism (PVE), countering violent extremism (CVE), Spain

**Resumen:** Este artículo analiza las estrategias para prevenir y combatir el extremismo violento en España desde los ataques de Madrid en 2004. Inicialmente centradas en la anticipación de la amenaza terrorista a través de medidas policiales, militares y legales, estas estrategias incorporaron gradualmente aproximaciones y medidas que contemplan el fenómeno del proceso de radicalización. Se argumenta que la emergencia de la lucha para combatir el extremismo violento (CVE) y la prevención del extremismo violento (PEV) representa una evolución en la aproximación al terrorismo, puesto que su objeto no es el terrorismo como tal, sino los factores y las condiciones que pueden conducir a este. En el caso de España, las políticas CVE y PEV se mezclan en la actual estrategia contra la radicalización violenta.

**Palabras clave:** radicalización, terrorismo, prevención, prevenir el extremismo violento (PEV), combatir el extremismo violento (CVE), España

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In the last decade, terrorism and violent extremism have become more prevalent in Europe. During this period more than seventy jihadist terrorist attacks have been perpetrated on European soil and more than five thousand European citizens or residents have travelled to Syria and Iraq to join the ranks of terrorist groups like the Islamic State (IS) and Al-Qaeda. In Spain alone, there were 245 police operations resulting in the detention of 437 people between 2010 and 2020 (Ministerio de Interior, 2021).

Until the early 2000s, the struggle against terrorism mainly depended on coercive means to anticipate possible terrorist attacks. After the attacks in Madrid (March 2004), Amsterdam (November 2004), and London (July 2005), several European countries, including Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom incorporated countering violent extremism (CVE) policies into

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their counter-terrorism strategies. Unlike traditional counterterrorism, which is based on coercive military, police, and legal means, countering violent extremism uses non-coercive means for addressing the factors and conditions that could lead to terrorism or violent extremism.

This is a more procedural, indirect approach that seeks to tackle terrorism through psychosocial interventions (Neumann, 2017). However, CVE policies have been subject to several criticisms owing to the conceptual and practical problems that characterise the concept on which they are based. At both theoretical and practical levels, it is difficult to objectively define and identify the phenomena of violent radicalisation and violent extremism.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, several CVE programmes are unable to define what it is that they are attempting to prevent (Harris-Hogan et al., 2016).

The concept of Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE) gradually emerged in response to these criticisms. PVE is inspired in prevention models from the domain of health and emphasises the need to prevent the emergence of radicalisation processes by means of a range of measures (economic, social, and political) designed for different target groups (general population, at-risk groups, and

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1. The concepts of “violent extremism” and “violent radicalisation” tend to be used synonymously, although they are terms with different nuances that will be elaborated throughout the presentation of this text. In the European context, and especially in the case of Spain, the latter term (*radicalización violenta*) is used more frequently. Hence, depending on the context, the expressions “prevention of violent extremism” and “prevention of violent radicalisation” will both be used in this article.

radicalised individuals). Although there have been various attempts to define the concept of PVE, it is difficult, in both theory and practice, to distinguish it from CVE (Stephens et al., 2018). Indeed, some criticisms highlight the fact that PVE, which theoretically aims to prevent the appearance of the terrorist threat, in fact seeks to detect and deal with the threat (van de Weert and Eijkman, 2020), which complicates attempts to distinguish it from CVE.

As will be shown below, the emergence of CVE and PVE policies in the field of counterterrorism represents progress in the approach to terrorism since their object is not terrorism as such but the factors and conditions that can lead to it. In order to illustrate this shift – from an approach based on counterterrorism to one that is focused on the need to combat radicalisation (CVE) and prevent it from occurring (PVE) – I have chosen Spain as a case study. Although the appearance of PVE is presented as a possible response to criticisms levelled at CVE, we shall see that PVE does not necessarily represent an alternative to CVE. In the case of Spain, PVE and CVE come together in the present strategy against violent radicalisation, which leads to some confusion between *preventing* radicalisation and *detecting* the phenomenon.

The aim of this article is to describe and analyse the core elements of the strategies for combatting and preventing violent radicalisation in Spain since the attacks in Madrid in 2004. In doing so it, first, defines the main characteristics of the concepts of CVE and PVE; second, it studies the shift in Spain from a paradigm marked by the struggle against terrorism to another that is focused on combatting radicalisation and violent extremism; third, it examines the present Spanish strategy in combatting radicalisation as envisaged in the Plan Estratégico Nacional de Lucha Contra la Radicalización Violenta ([PEN-LCRV] CITCO, 2015 – National Strategic Plan against Violent Radicalisation); and, fourth and finally, it offers several conclusions.

## **From the war on terror to countering violent extremism**

Countering violent extremism is the most significant development of the last decade in the domain of counterterrorism (Romaniuk, 2015). In what follows, the emergence of the concepts of countering violent extremism (CVE policies) and preventing violent extremism (PVE policies) will be contextualised and their main characteristics and limitations will be reviewed to ascertain whether they represent a paradigm shift in counterterrorism.

CVE appeared against a background of the failure of the “war on terror”, a setback that led the George W. Bush administration to replace the controversial term “war on terror” with the expression “countering violent extremism” (Kundnani and Hayes, 2017; Schmid, 2013). Moreover, the terrorist attacks in Madrid, Amsterdam, and London between 2004 and 2005 drew attention to the homegrown nature of jihadist terrorism. The presence of European citizens among the perpetrators of these attacks prompted European governments to try to understand why and how these individuals ended up committing terrorist attacks against their fellow citizens (Sedgwick, 2010). This resulted in the emergence of the concept of “violent radicalisation”, which refers to the adoption of a radical ideology and willingness to support or permit acts of violence (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010: 798).

The concept of CVE is based on the idea that, in addition to counterterrorism endeavours consisting of the use of coercive means (military, police, and intelligence) to anticipate and neutralise the terrorist threat, countering violent extremism draws on a range of non-coercive measures that take into account the factors and conditions that can lead to it (Heydemann, 2014). This new paradigm assumes that it is necessary to combine “hard measures” aimed at neutralising the existing threat (traditional counterterrorism) and “soft measures” that are designed to prevent the appearance of such a threat. From this standpoint, CVE differs from traditional counterterrorism in that it “recognises the social roots of the problem [of terrorism] and promotes non-coercive solutions” (Neumann, 2017: 21). It therefore refers to policies, strategies, and programmes that aim to act on the causes or processes underlying the appearance of violent extremism (Bjørge, 2016).

During the first decade of the 2000s, CVE was gradually incorporated into the counterterrorist strategies of several countries and international organisations. At the European level, the adoption of the European Counter-Terrorism Strategy in 2005 provided the strategic framework for tackling homegrown jihadist terrorism (Argomaniz, 2009). In this context, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, followed by other countries including Germany, Denmark, and Norway, adopted CVE programmes as part of their counterterrorism strategies. In the international sphere, the adoption in 2006 of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy marked a shift towards CVE<sup>2</sup> since it envisages a series of collective measures that “takes into account the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism” and establishes, for the first time, a shared strategic approach to terrorism among the member states (Ucko, 2018).

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2 United Nations General Assembly. A/RES/60/288 (20 September 2006). Online at <https://undocs.org/es/A/RES/60/288> (in English, A/RES/60/288 - E - A/RES/60/288 -Desktop (undocs.org)).

CVE addresses several levels at which the phenomenon can emerge or can be observed. According to Alex P. Schmid (2013: 4), they belong to three main spheres: the micro (individual), the meso (social environment), and the macro (national and international). At the macro level, efforts are concerned with the “root causes” of terrorism, for example inequalities, lack of governance, and human rights violations (Aly, 2013; Bjørge, 2005). At the meso (community) and micro (individual) levels, these endeavours focus on the various factors that can set off a process of violent radicalisation: feelings of relative deprivation, experiences of discrimination or dynamics of exclusion. At these two levels, CVE addresses interventions concerned with the cognitive (*deradicalisation*) and/or behavioural (*disengagement*) dimensions of violent radicalisation (Barrelle, 2015; Horgan, 2009).

Unlike counterterrorism, in which agents from the security sector predominate, CVE tends to involve other actors, for example civil society organisations, educational centres, religious leaders, social educators, prisons, etcetera (Romaniuk, 2015). It is assumed that these actors have the necessary resources and knowledge to design interventions that make it possible to approach the micro and meso levels of violent extremism (Dalgaard-Nielsen and Anja, 2016), since they can detect the process of radicalisation in their areas of work (schools, prisons, etcetera).

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The different levels of violent radicalisation, the multitude of environments where this process takes place, and the diversity of actors involved mean that CVE policies and strategies cover a “potentially unlimited” number of activities (Neumann, 2011: 7). In this regard, lack of consensus over the definitions of phenomena dealt with by CVE (radicalisation, terrorism, and violent extremism) creates a certain conceptual imprecision and even “definitional ambiguity” when determining what it actually is that needs to be prevented (Harris-Hogan et al., 2016: 6). At the theoretical level, the literature referring to CVE often uses this concept “in a way that suggests that it is self-evident and self-explanatory” (Nasser-Eddine et al., 2011: 9). In practice, CVE has become a “catchphrase for a policy spectrum varying from early prevention and safeguarding measures for society, groups, and communities to very targeted measures for violent extremists such as de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes” (Gielen, 2019:5). In other words, CVE covers an extremely diverse theoretical and practical reality that is difficult to delimit.

In the European context, numerous studies have established a correlation between the lack of conceptual clarity of CVE and certain practices that have

negative effects in society in general and/or in certain groups (Heath-Kelly, 2013; Kundnani, 2009; Abbas and Awan, 2015). The reach of CVE into other spheres such as education or public health has been interpreted as a method that normalises pervasive surveillance (Davies, 2016; Heath-Kelly, 2017), while its focus on Muslim communities has contributed to the creation of “suspect communities” (Choudhury and Fenwick, 2011; McDonald and Mir, 2011; Vermeulen, 2014). In other instances, attention has been drawn to certain discriminatory practices like the use of racial and ethnic profiling and also the tendency to conflate counterterrorism policies with those of social cohesion and integration (Ragazzi, 2016; Aly, 2013). These criticisms illustrate the limitations of CVE.

In response, the concept of PVE has gained prominence (Stephens et al., 2018). Given the increasing spread of zones controlled by terrorist groups like IS, the phenomenon of foreign fighters and the upsurge of homegrown terrorism, the priority is no longer to *combat* violent extremism but to *prevent* it from materialising (United Nations Security Council, 2014). The concern, then, is to prevent people from joining violent extremist groups and to ensure that they do not end up perpetrating terrorist attacks. At the global level, the shift to PVE culminated in 2016 with the adoption of the United Nations Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism. Several countries like Germany, France, and Spain adopted PVE strategies, policies, and programmes. These initiatives take the form of transversal strategies in different spheres, from education to gender equality, as well as international cooperation and other general objectives including social integration, and the battle against the various forms of inequality and discrimination.

Harris-Hogan et al. (2016) established an analytical framework for classifying the actions covered by PVE strategies. Inspired by the public health prevention model, this framework distinguishes between *primary*, *secondary*, and *tertiary prevention*. *Primary* prevention covers the population as a whole and has a twofold aim: raising the population’s awareness of violent extremism and preventing the appearance of conditions that can lead to radicalisation. Activities at this level consist of consciousness-raising and educational campaigns and also collective measures addressing the factors of violent radicalisation. *Secondary* prevention is concerned with at-risk groups, which is to say those showing an interest in or vulnerability to violent extremist ideologies (young people, marginalised neighbourhoods, etcetera). This category includes individual measures (micro level) such as ideological discussions among individuals who show an interest in a radical ideology and specialists in this ideology. It also involves collective actions (meso level) like improving communication channels between at-risk communities and the

authorities in order to establish relations of trust (Vermeulen, 2014). Finally, *tertiary* prevention consists of *micro-interventions* targeting individuals who are identified as radicalised. The aim is to stop or reverse the process of radicalisation in either its cognitive (deradicalisation) or behavioural (disengagement) dimension. For instance, the French government established “deradicalisation centres” in 2016 with the aim of treating radicalised individuals who have been identified by the authorities.

From this perspective, the distinction between CVE and PVE is not evident. Like CVE, PVE seeks to deal with phenomena whose definitions are debatable and debated (Neumann, 2011; Borum, 2011). Lack of consensus over definitions of the key concepts of PVE, for example those of radicalisation and violent extremism, makes it difficult to identify the phenomena it is supposed to be preventing (van de Weert and Eijkman, 2020; Heath-Kelly, 2013). As a result, there is no “coherent, shared discourse” about the meaning of these concepts (Stephens et al., 2018: 2). In fact, CVE and PVE are sometimes used interchangeably and are even brought together in the acronym “P/CVE” (Peter Harling et al., 2018). In practice, CVE usually refers to interventions for *countering* the threat (counter-narratives, detecting radicalised individuals), while PVE refers to proactive interventions aimed at *preventing* the appearance of the threat. In the words of Stephens et al. (2018: 2), PVE refers to “efforts to influence individual and/or environmental factors that are suggested to create the conditions in which violent extremism can flourish, using social or educative, rather than explicitly security-driven measures”. In other words, CVE tackles the *existing threat* while PVE focuses on the *potential threat*, which is to say it aims to prevent the threat from emerging.

Thus understood, PVE does not focus on the perpetration of violent acts but on *potential risk*. Accordingly, several *preventive* strategies like the PREVENT<sup>3</sup> programme or the Dutch approach aim at early detection or, in other words, identifying situations that *could* lead to violent action (van de Weert and Eijkman, 2020). These strategies make use of several tools such as radicalisation indicators and the creation of specific criminal offences like the crime of self-indoctrination, to facilitate detection of situations that may lead to a process of violent radicalisation. It also involves actors who do not

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3. PREVENT is one of the mainstays of the British government’s counterterrorist strategy, CONTEST. Its three main aims are: to respond to the ideological challenges raised by terrorism; to prevent violent radicalisation; and to work with a range of actors and institutions (from educational and religious fields, etcetera) to combat and prevent violent radicalisation.

belong to the security sector (teachers, social workers, health personnel, and so on) in order to collect information about possible radicalisation hotspots and to intervene *preventively* (Heath-Kelly, 2017; van de Weert and Eijkman, 2020). In this regard, it should be asked whether PVE policies—which include methods and tools of early detection—constitute a new truly *preventive field of action* or whether they are a tool that fits into the framework of CVE *repressive* strategies (Ragazzi, 2017). This paper argues that, in the Spanish case, PVE does not constitute a new field of action that is separate from CVE but, rather, that they coexist in the framework of the National Strategic Plan against Violent Radicalisation (PEN-LCRV).

In brief, the introduction of CVE and PVE into the framework of counterterrorist strategies signals a paradigm shift. In combatting terrorism

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and violent extremism, social, educational, and psychological (CVE and PVE) measures complement the traditional military and police responses. Yet it is difficult to give precise definitions of the concepts of CVE and PVE. In practice, the borderlines between CVE and PVE

are blurry. In the Spanish case, although one can see a change in the approach to jihadist terrorism where the focus is on the processes of violent radicalisation, this change is more in line with the logic of CVE than with that of PVE. The following is an analysis of how Spain incorporated the battle against radicalisation into its counterterrorist strategy.

## **Spain after the attacks of 11 March 2004: from counterterrorism to CVE policies**

In Spain, the earliest activities of individuals or groups affiliated with jihadist Salafism date back to the 1980s, and the existence of jihadist networks goes back to the 1990s (Jordán and Horsburgh, 2005). The authorities did not have a strategy for dealing with this type of terrorism until the early 2000s. Instead, the response consisted of police operations to arrest and prosecute the members of these networks. Between 1995 and 2004, a series of police operations led to the arrests of at least ninety-nine people belonging to the Grupo Islámico Armado (GIA – Armed Islamic Group) or the Grupo Salafista

para la Predicación y el Combate (GSPC – Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat) (Jordán and Horsburgh, 2005: 173). The attacks of 11 March 2004 (11-M) in Madrid marked a before and after in this domain. As shown below, these attacks gave rise to a series of unprecedented measures and reforms in the domain of security. Nevertheless, the phenomenon of violent radicalisation was not confronted until the beginning of the following decade, in 2012, with the adoption of the Estrategia Integral Contra el Terrorismo Internacional y la Radicalización (EICTIR – Comprehensive Strategy against International Terrorism and Radicalisation).

## **The Spanish response to jihadist terrorism after 11-M**

Until the attacks of 11 September 2001 in the United States, almost all counterterrorism efforts in Spain were devoted to the struggle against the armed Basque nationalist and separatist organisation ETA. After the attacks of 11 September, besides dismantling Spanish-based networks affiliated with Al-Qaeda, the authorities increased the human and financial resources of the Fuerzas y Cuerpos de Seguridad del Estado (FCSE – Spanish Security Forces) to improve their intelligence capabilities in the face of the jihadist threat (Jordán and Horsburgh, 2006: 214). However, the struggle against jihadist terrorism did not become a priority for internal security until 11-M (Alonso and Reinares, 2008). These attacks, with a toll of 192 deaths and more than 1,850 injuries have given rise to a broad series of measures for improving the coordination and counterterrorism capabilities of the security forces (FCSE).

In the months following 11-M, the Ministry of the Interior launched a series of counterterrorist initiatives with four aims: to strengthen intelligence capabilities; to improve the capacity to prevent and respond to the consequences of terrorist attacks; to block funding of terrorist activities; and to protect public transport (Gobierno de España, 2011: 49). In keeping with the first objective, more than a thousand National Police and Guardia Civil (Civil Guard) officers were recruited between 2004 and 2008 and the number of agents and departments working in the area of jihadist terrorism also increased (Reinares, 2009). In addition, the capabilities of the National Intelligence Centre (CNI) were also bolstered with additional human and financial resources (Jordán and Horsburgh, 2006). As for coordination, the Centro Nacional de Coordinación Antiterrorista (CNCA – National Counterterrorism Coordination Centre) was created in 2004 with the aim of advising the government on this issue and to strengthen coordination

between the National Police and the Guardia Civil. In the area of protection, a multitude of operative plans were also adopted to prepare the response of security personnel in case of a terrorist attack. For example, the Terrorism Prevention and Protection Plan (2005) enables mobilisation of police and military officers to carry out certain tasks in the fight against terrorism (airspace surveillance, protection of infrastructure, etcetera). Finally, Spanish legislation was amended to toughen sentences for terrorists, to crack down on illegal use of explosives, and to facilitate monitoring of electronic and telephone communications (Alonso and Reinares, 2008).

11-M therefore led the Spanish authorities to employ a series of police, penal, and intelligence measures in order to address the threat of jihadist terrorism and prevent the perpetration of further attacks in the country. The response was mainly concerned with combatting the threat and, in contrast with other European countries that suffered jihadist terrorist attacks in the same period (the Netherlands, United Kingdom), no measures were taken to address the conditions favouring the appearance of jihadist terrorism (Jordán, 2009). In other words, the response following 11-M was based on the counterterrorism paradigm. The adoption of EICTIR (Comprehensive Strategy against International Terrorism and Radicalisation) was a watershed since it incorporated the struggle against violent radicalisation into the Spanish counter-terrorism strategy.

## **From the counterterrorist struggle to the battle against violent radicalisation: the Comprehensive Strategy against International Terrorism and Radicalisation (EICTIR)**

Adopted in 2010 and ratified on 2 March 2012, the EICTIR establishes the struggle against violent radicalisation as a pillar of the fight against terrorism. It is presented as a continuation of the country's counterterrorist efforts since 11-M (Ministerio del Interior, 2010: 1). This occurred in a European context marked by the incorporation of CVE programmes into EU counterterrorist strategies as well as those of certain member states, and with a background of intensified jihadist activity in Spain. On the European level, the adoption of the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy in 2005 established a strategic framework for tackling homegrown terrorism and violent radicalisation. Structured into four pillars—*prevent*, *protect*, *pursue*, and *respond*—the strategy devotes its first pillar, *prevent*, to violent radicalisation and its aim to “prevent people from turning to terrorism by tackling the factors or root causes which can lead to

radicalisation and recruitment, in Europe and internationally”.<sup>4</sup> Hence, several member states included a CVE pillar in their counterterrorism strategies. In Spain, the threat has a significant endogenous component. According to García-Calvo and Reinares (2013: 2), between 1996 and 2012, seven out of every ten individuals killed or convicted for jihadist terrorism had been partially or totally radicalised in Spain.

In this regard, the EICTIR aims to “provide a specific, comprehensive response to neutralise the threat represented by international terrorism and to reduce the vulnerability of society to these attacks by combatting the processes of radicalisation that can lead to it or sustain it” (Ministerio del Interior, 2012:5). This focus is justified by three types of threat: 1) the “expansion of Salafism”<sup>5</sup> and of “Islamist movements” in Spanish territory; 2) the “possible radicalisation” of second-generation immigrants; and 3) the return of “jihadists” from conflict zones (Ministerio del Interior, 2012: 3).

Given these threats, the Spanish strategy focuses on the ideological dimension of the radicalisation process, employing CVE measures that target Muslim communities in Spain and second-generation immigrants. It prioritises the struggle against the “expansion of radical Islam”, defined as an ideology based on a strict, extremist, and sectarian interpretation of an Islam that justifies violence as a means to attaining ideological goals. According to the EICTIR, radical Islam constitutes “the ideological and social base of jihadist Salafism” by placing Islamic law before common law, causing the non-integration of Muslim communities, social rupture, polarisation, segregation between Muslims and non-Muslims: in short, by encouraging confrontation (ibid.: 4-5). Hence, the EICTIR assumes that there is a continuum between the adoption of a radical vision of Islam and radicalisation into jihadist Salafism. Although debatable and disputed (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2017), this idea that adopting a hard-line view of Islam leads to radicalisation into jihadist

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4. Council of the European Union. Doc. 14469/4/05 REV 4 (30 November 2005), p. 3. Online at <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST%2014469%202005%20REV%204/ES/pdf> (in English, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST%2014469%202005%20REV%204/EN/pdf>).

5. Salafism is a literalist (or fundamentalist) religious current that preaches a return to the Islam of the first generations of Muslims (*al salaf al salih*). It should be distinguished from jihadist Salafism, which emerged in Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion of 1979, and on the basis of which groups like Al-Qaeda, Islamic State, and Boko Haram assert their claims. The EICTIR briefing note does not define what it means by “Salafism” but the use of the term “jihadist Salafism” in the text seems to establish a distinction between the religious current and the political-religious ideology.

Salafism justifies the implementation of measures focused on the ideological dimension of violent radicalisation. Its aims are to “strengthen relations with Islam”, to “act on radical movements”, and to “beat [terrorists] in the battle of ideas” in order to confront jihadist Salafism ideology (Ministerio del Interior, 2012: 6-7). Although these measures lack specificity, they explicitly target Muslim communities and second-generation immigrants in Spain.

At the operational level, the strategy is inspired by the European four-pillar structure of 2005. The *prevent* pillar addresses, in three areas, the *causes* leading to the process of radicalisation: the *internal* (domestic), *external* (outside cooperation), and the *Internet* (cyberspace) spheres. The priorities are institutional coordination and cooperation, adoption of new legislative measures, as well as other procedures aiming to develop relations with Muslim

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communities in Spain. In terms of implementation, its logic is multi-departmental and multilevel. Through the Centro Nacional de Coordinación Antiterrorista (CNCA – National Counter-Terrorism Coordination Centre), which is responsible for EICTIR,

the Ministry of the Interior is in charge of the design, coordination, and implementation of the strategy. Other ministries are involved, among them, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, the Ministry of Equality, and the Ministry of Justice. Moreover, the application of the EICTIR is planned for three levels of administration—central, regional, and local—with particular attention to the level of local action with regard to activities aiming to prevent radicalisation. Finally, the participation of other agents such as universities, the media, and representatives of Muslim communities in Spain is also envisaged.

As can be seen, Spain shifted from a counterterrorism strategy marked by coercive measures after 11-M to a strategy that includes CVE. The EICTIR incorporates the struggle against violent radicalisation into the Spanish counterterrorism strategy. In its *prevent* pillar, it includes measures that are concerned with the ideological dimensions of radicalisation, these targeting Muslim communities and second-generation immigrants. The EICTIR envisages a Master Plan for each of the four pillars. The plan for the *prevent* pillar was developed after 2015 with the adoption of the Strategic Plan against Violent Radicalisation (PEN-LCRV), which will be discussed below.

## Between prevention and detection: the PEN-LCRV

The adoption of the Plan Estratégico Nacional de Lucha Contra la Radicalización Violenta (PEN-LCRV – Strategic Plan against Violent Radicalisation) on 30 January 2015 represents a further step in the struggle against violent radicalisation in Spain. I shall now highlight its main features before analysing, in keeping with the framework proposed by Harris-Hogan et al. (2016), the most significant measures that have been implemented. Although it combines PVE and CVE measures, this strategy gives priority to detecting radicalisation.

Produced by the Centro de Inteligencia contra el Terrorismo y el Crimen Organizado (CITCO – Intelligence Centre against Terrorism and Organised Crime),<sup>6</sup> together with twelve ministries, the PEN-LCRV has the same goals as the EICTIR: neutralising the terrorist threat, protecting society from possible attacks, and addressing the processes of violent radicalisation. Three elements justify its implementation: the “foreign fighters” phenomenon, which is to say citizens or residents of Spain who have travelled outside the country to join jihadist organisations, the use of information and communication technologies for purposes of radicalisation, and the funding of terrorist organisations (Ministerio de la Presidencia, 2015: 4). Unlike the EICTIR, which only devotes one pillar to the struggle against radicalisation, the PEN-LCRV deals with the phenomenon in its entirety: it is presented as an “effective instrument of early detection and neutralisation of outbreaks and hotspots of violent radicalisation, acting on at-risk or vulnerable communities, groups, and individuals” (CITCO, 2015: 5).

Like the EICTIR, the PEN-LCRV designates three spheres of operation: the “internal sphere” (domestic), the “external sphere” (outside cooperation), and the “cyberspace sphere” (Internet). The internal and cyberspace spheres are concerned with activities for detecting radicalisation: in the internal sphere, to detect “any social or political phenomena that could lead to violence or

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6. The CITCO was created on 15 October 2004 with the merger of the Centro Nacional de Coordinación Antiterrorista (National Centre for Counterterrorism Coordination) and the Centro de Inteligencia contra el Crimen Organizado (Intelligence Centre against Organised Crime) with the aim of constituting a single body. Answering to the Ministry of the Interior, its mission is to coordinate efforts in the fight against jihadist terrorism and organised crime. One of its aims is “to propose national strategies against organised crime, terrorism, and violent radicalism” (Boletín Oficial del Estado, 2014: 83378). The PEN-LCRV was adopted less than four months after the creation of this institution, which suggests that the struggle against violent radicalisation was a priority.

terrorism”, while, in the area of cyberspace, the aim is to counter the spread of violent extremist propaganda in order to hinder the emergence of such processes (ibid.: 7). This is a matter of *detect to prevent*: detecting situations that *might* lead to processes of radicalisation in order to prevent their *potential* appearance.

At the operational level, the PEN-LCRV establishes three areas that are concerned with the process of radicalisation: the *area of prevention* (before the process of radicalisation), the *area of monitoring* (during the process), and the *area of action* (after the process). The aim of the *area of prevention* is to “build trust and social legitimisation” and “prevent the spread of violent radical ideologies” (ibid.: 8). This covers *primary prevention* which is concerned with the population as a whole and therefore acts on the factors that can fuel the radicalisation process. These are collective measures (macro level)

**Unlike the Comprehensive Strategy against International Terrorism and Radicalisation (EICTIR), which explicitly refers to Muslim populations and second generations in Spain, the National Strategic Plan against Violent Radicalisation (PEN-LCRV) does not specify which groups it considers to be vulnerable to radicalisation.**

to ensure “integration and social coexistence” and to encourage “political-ideological plurality and democratic diversity” (p. 11). Three kinds of action are suggested for the goal of social integration: 1) measures that *recognise diversity* or, in other words, actions that foster acknowledgement of the different identities, cultures, and traditions

that comprise the population; 2) measures that *build trust*, for example creating mechanisms for communication between citizens and the authorities in order to channel complaints and the requirements of specific groups; and 3) measures of *commitment*, which encourage citizen participation in the institutions. Furthermore, democratic pluralism and diversity are envisaged as antidotes to violent extremist ideologies.

The plan offers few details about the measures to be implemented, although it does establish three lines of work: 1) strengthening communication between the local and central administrations and adopting legislation to act against processes of radicalisation (*administrative cooperation and legislative adaptation block*); 2) training the relevant actors (for example civil servants) in prevention and treatment of radicalisation and fostering awareness-raising and educational campaigns (*education, training, and awareness-raising block*), and 3) adopting a policy of coherent communication at the administration level (*information and communication block*).

The *area of monitoring* focuses on *secondary prevention*, which is to say it is concerned with people at risk of radicalisation or who show signs of it. It aims to detect, observe, and deal with processes of radicalisation “in the early

stages of their evolution” (p. 8). To this end, it provides for a series of individual and/or collective interventions aimed at “vulnerable groups and those at risk of violent radicalisation”. By contrast with the *area of prevention*, which includes preventive measures on the national scale, this area is primarily implemented at the local level (municipality) with measures of a “social nature” that address the processes of radicalisation at the individual level (micro level) and within groups that are “at risk” (meso level) (p. 8). In this regard, the role of actors from the local security sector is crucial since they are responsible for detecting and assessing possible cases of radicalisation and for producing all measures in this area, even when they are of the social type.

The *area of action* deals with radicalised individuals and groups and therefore comes under the heading of *tertiary prevention*. This area includes police or juridical interventions in situations where measures envisaged in the *prevention* and *monitoring* areas have not been effective. Coming under the responsibility of the Spanish Security Forces (FCSE), this area is devoted to monitoring, investigation and, where appropriate, prosecution of the cases that are detected. All the measures envisaged here are individual. For example, “deradicalisation systems” are mentioned but no details are given about them (p. 10).

The PEN-LCRV adopts a multistakeholder, multilevel approach which mainly involves government actors. Three distinct kinds of actors are involved: the *General State Administration*, *vulnerable collectives*, and *those at risk of violent radicalisation*, and *civil society* as a whole. Nevertheless, since it is responsible for producing and supervising the measures envisaged in the Plan, the administration is the chief actor. The *Grupo Nacional de Lucha Contra la Radicalización Violenta* (GN-LCRV – National Group for the Fight against Violent Radicalisation) and the *Grupos Locales de Lucha Contra la Radicalización Violenta* (GL-LCRV – Local Groups for the Fight against Violent Radicalisation) have been established in order to perform these roles at all levels. The former is a structure consisting of several ministries, the National Intelligence Centre (CNI) and a number of private entities, including the Federación Española de Municipios y Provincias (FEMP – Spanish Federation of Municipalities and Provinces). Its mission is to coordinate implementation of the Plan at the national level. Meanwhile, the GL-LCRV, are multi-sectoral and, created at the municipal level, cover the areas of *monitoring* and *action*. They include a range of actors that are in contact with the local communities, among them the local and/or regional police, educational centres, social entities, and public health centres.

The *vulnerable groups and those at risk of radicalisation* are at once “cooperating actors” and targets of the plan (CITCTO, 2015: 18). As cooperating parties, they play a twofold role: *creating trust* among at-

risk groups and institutions, and *monitoring and detection* within these communities. Unlike the Comprehensive Strategy against International Terrorism and Radicalisation (EICTIR), which explicitly refers to Muslim populations and second generations in Spain, the National Strategic Plan against Violent Radicalisation (PEN-LCRV) does not specify which groups it considers to be vulnerable to radicalisation. However, the examples used lead one to think that these are the same groups since reference is made to the “identities”, “cultures”, and “traditions” of these groups, with mention of “especially conflictive cultures and religions”, while other official documents related with PEN-LCRV refer exclusively to Muslim communities (Téllez Delgado, 2018: 21). *Civil society* also plays a role as a “cooperating actor” within the framework of the Plan, but no details are given about its function.

In terms of implementation, the activities of the PEN-LCRV—as listed in the editions of the Annual Security Report<sup>7</sup>—are relatively limited. Implementation of the Plan is mainly focused on the areas of *monitoring* and *action*, with measures that are mostly geared to detecting violent radicalisation. First of all, the website *Stop Radicalismos*<sup>8</sup> was launched in 2015, with the aim of encouraging participation of society in the area of detection of radicalisation processes. This is a platform where any person can report to the authorities what is identified as a possible case of “radicalisation or extremist, intransigent, and hate-fuelled conduct for racist, xenophobic, belief-based, or ideological reasons”. The report may be made by telephone, electronically, or through the Alertcops<sup>9</sup> app with CITCO being the key recipient of such reports. According to this centre, in its first year of operation, *Stop Radicalismos* registered 2,550 notifications, of which 935 provided information “of interest”. Although no details are given as to the characteristics or content of this information, it enabled identification of twelve possible foreign combatants affiliated with IS, and the carrying out of some 45 antiterrorist police operations (Caro, 2016). Between 2016 and 2019, more than 7,000 reports were made through this platform, thus making it possible to open more than 150 police inquiries and to detect fourteen cases of foreign terrorist combatants (Ministerio de la Presidencia, 2019: 29).

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7 Published by the Department of National Security, they can be consulted online at: <https://www.dsn.gob.es/es/estrategias-publicaciones/informe-anual-seguridad-nacional>. See, in English, Informe Anual de Seguridad Nacional | DSN.

8. See the official page: <https://stop-radicalismos.ses.mir.es/>.

9. Alertcops is an app designed by the Police and the Guardia Civil for reporting hate crimes and possible cases of radicalisation. See: <https://alertcops.ses.mir.es/mialertcops/>

Although it has enabled the detection of cases of violent radicalisation, the initiative has been criticised for stigmatising Muslim communities in Spain (Fernández De Mosteyrín and Limón López, 2017; Téllez Delgado, 2018). Without a shared definition of the process of violent radicalisation, or reliable indicators to identify this process, employing such a tool can have negative consequences such as stigmatisation of certain groups on the basis of appearance, the use of racial profiling, and even distrust of the authorities (van de Weert and Eijkman, 2020; Heath-Kelly, 2017; Kundnani, 2009; McDonald and Mir, 2011).

Second, establishing the GL-LCRV has been a priority for ensuring implementation of the Plan at the municipal level. According to the PEN-LCRV, the municipal level is crucial because it makes it possible to detect processes of radicalisation, conflicts involving at-risk groups, and also coexistence problems. In this regard, it is assumed that members of the GL-LCRV (civil servants, social workers, teachers, etcetera) can observe certain behavioural changes that point to a process of radicalisation. Hence, these groups are conceived as spaces in which a variety of actors who are in contact with “vulnerable groups” can share their experiences and jointly assess possible emerging cases of radicalisation. In practice, the creation of the GL-LCRV has been limited. At the end of August 2017, they existed in only thirteen municipalities out of Spain’s total of 8,131 (Ortega Dolz, 2017). After the attacks in Barcelona and Cambrils (17 and 18 August 2017), priority was given to establishing these multisectoral groups all around the country (DSN, 2018). However, there are no data concerning their number or geographic distribution. There are some cases, like Ceuta, where the creation of a GL-LCRV was rejected (*El Faro Ceuta*, 2018).

The GL-LCRV have been singled out for criticism by some professional groups (psychologists, teachers in educational centres, social workers, and so on) because this type of structure can encourage dynamics of snitching as well as sowing distrust between some collectives and the authorities (Cano Paños, 2018: 201). Generally speaking, the key role of the security sector in these groups, the status of “cooperating actors” from civil society and of vulnerable groups, and the task of detection assigned to the GL-LCRV can be interpreted as ways of extending counter-terrorism into the social sector (Kundnani and Hayes, 2017; van de Weert and Eijkman, 2019 and 2020).

With this arrangement, vulnerable groups are given an ambiguous role. On the one hand they are targets of the prevention and detection measures envisaged in the Plan and, on the other, they are associated with tasks of detection within their own communities. In a nutshell, they are seen as a group that is both *at-risk* and *risky* (Heath-Kelly, 2013). It is precisely this ambiguity between *at-risk* and “*risky*” that justifies the implementation of the measures

of detection in the framework of CVE strategies (Heath-Kelly, 2013). In the case of the PREVENT programme, a correlation between this ambiguity—or lack of distinction between *risk* and *danger*—and the securitisation of Muslim communities has been established (Sedgwick, 2010). Accordingly, they are frequently seen as “suspect communities” (Abbas and Awan, 2015; Breen-Smyth, 2014; Kundnani, 2009; McDonald and Mir, 2011). Hence, there is a risk of the GL-LCRV being used for purposes of “snitching and horizontal control” (Fernández De Mosteyrín and Limón López, 2017: 818).

Third, the adoption of the PEN-LCRV was followed by reform of the Criminal Code with regard to counterterrorism, giving more powers to the FCSE in terms of detection (*monitoring*) and repression (*action*) (Ministerio de la Presidencia, 2015). The aim is not only to approach certain phenomena

**Without a shared definition of the process of violent radicalisation, or reliable indicators to identify this process, employing a tool like the Stop Radicalismos platform can have negative consequences such as stigmatisation of certain groups on the basis of appearance, the use of racial profiling, and even distrust of the authorities.**

associated with jihadist terrorism (foreign combatants and lone agents) but also to deal with the phenomenon of radicalisation. Hence, Organic Law 2/2015, of 30 March, which amends Organic Law 10/1995, of 23 November, of the Criminal Code, introduces harsher penalties for the crime of glorifying or humiliating victims of terrorism in the social networks. It

also criminalises passive indoctrination, especially when this occurs through the Internet.<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the reform of Organic Law 13/2015, of 5 October, amending the Criminal procedure Act, provides the FCSE with certain instruments—including interception of telephone and telematic communications—in order to facilitate detection and arrest of persons suspected of terrorism or violent radicalisation (*ibid.*). These measures have been criticised for their use of sweeping definitions (for example of the concept of “terrorism”) as well as for their repercussions on human rights and freedom of expression (Campderrich Bravo, 2015; Torrús, 2017).

As can be seen, Spain has ended up adopting a strategy that is exclusively centred on the struggle against violent radicalisation. The PEN-LCRV envisages primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention in addition to approaching the

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10. Organic Law 2/2015, of 30 March, which amends Organic Law 10/1995, of 23 November, of the Criminal Code with regard to crimes of terrorism. BOE Number 77, Section I., pp. 27177-27185.

macro, micro, and meso levels of radicalisation. The areas of *monitoring* and *action* are devoted to detection and treatment of processes of radicalisation, while that of *prevention* deals with certain factors that make it possible to prevent the appearance of these processes. The area of *prevention* therefore includes PVE measures, while those of *monitoring* and *action* are more concerned with CVE. In practice, the PEN-LCRV activities are primarily related with the areas of *monitoring* and *action*, and also include activities of detecting radicalisation (CVE). The PVE measures, however, are not well developed. From this standpoint, it could be argued that the Spanish strategy in the struggle against radicalisation gives priority to detection and treatment of radicalisation (CVE) rather than to the struggle against the factors that enable its emergence (PVE).

This focus on *detection* of radicalisation has some potentially negative consequences, including stigmatisation of singled-out groups, the creation of “suspect communities”, and lack of trust between some groups and the authorities. In this regard, critics attribute these effects to certain characteristics of the PEN-LCRV, for example the fact that there is no definition of the process of radicalisation, the key role of actors from the security sector, and the ambiguous role of vulnerable groups.

## Some conclusions

The struggle against jihadist terrorism became a priority for Spain after 11-M. These attacks gave rise to penal, police, and intelligence responses that aimed to anticipate possible terrorist attacks and to neutralise actors linked with Salafist jihadism. In other words, the response that came in the wake of 11-M was essentially based on the paradigm of the fight against terrorism. With the adoption of the Estrategia Integral Contra el Terrorismo Internacional y la Radicalización (EICTIR – Comprehensive Strategy against International Terrorism and Radicalisation) there was a change of paradigm inasmuch as the struggle against radicalisation was incorporated into the fight against terrorism. The *prevention* pillar of this strategy marked the inclusion of CVE into the fight against terrorism. In keeping with this new paradigm, the adoption in 2015 of the Plan Estratégico Nacional de Lucha Contra la Radicalización Violenta (PEN-LCRV – National Strategic Plan against Violent Radicalisation) moved further in this direction. As an instrument exclusively devoted to the struggle against violent radicalisation, the Plan includes CVE measures and contemplates a preventive line of work that aims to prevent the appearance of processes of radicalisation.

In this sense, the Spanish case provides an illustration of the transition from a paradigm marked by counter-terrorism to one that is more focused on combatting the factors and conditions that can lead to terrorism (CVE policies). Nevertheless, although it is possible to observe this shift from counterterrorism to CVE, it cannot be said that Spain has moved from a predominantly CVE framework to one in which PVE prevails. In the case of the PEN-LCRV, the prevalence of CVE measures and the very limited development of PVE measures have been highlighted. This plan mainly focuses on activities of *detecting* radicalisation rather than *prevention*. This has prompted several criticisms since this approach is associated with a series of counterproductive effects, including stigmatisation of some groups and the extension of the fight against terrorism into new domains. Finally, these criticisms are in line with the literature that has analysed the undesirable effects of some CVE programmes in other countries of Europe (for example, PREVENT).

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