

EU policies for preventing violent extremism: a new paradigm for action?

Las políticas de la UE para la prevención del extremismo violento: ¿un nuevo paradigma de acción?

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Abstract: This article presents a supranational perspective on the prevention of violent extremism (PVE) with the aim of ascertaining whether a new paradigm for action can be identified. To this end, it critically analyses EU policies, measures, and strategies that have been established in the context of the threats and challenges posed by radicalisation and violent extremism. It explores how the approach adopted by the EU, originating in its 2005 antiterrorist strategy, has entailed the need to create tools, strategies, programmes, and networks to inspire and encourage member states to produce policies and instruments in order to prevent and combat radicalisation which could lead to violent extremism. Finally, it formulates the hypothesis that adopting this "soft approach" will probably influence, in the long term, strategies and measures that go beyond the security framework.

Key words: European Union, radicalisation, preventing violent extremism (PVE), terrorism

Resumen: Este artículo presenta una perspectiva supranacional de la prevención del extremismo violento (PEV) a fin de averiguar si se puede identificar un nuevo paradigma de acción. Para ello, se hace un análisis crítico de las políticas, las medidas y las estrategias de la UE desarrolladas en el contexto de las amenazas y los retos que plantean la radicalización y el extremismo violento; se examina cómo el enfoque adoptado por la UE, originado en su estrategia antiterrorista de 2005, ha conllevado la necesidad de crear herramientas, estrategias, programas y redes para inspirar y alentar a los estados miembros a elaborar políticas e instrumentos dirigidos a prevenir y combatir la radicalización que puede conducir al extremismo violento; y, finalmente, se formula la hipótesis de que la adopción de dicho «enfoque blando» probablemente determinará una ampliación a largo plazo de las estrategias y las medidas más allá del marco securitario.

Palabras clave: Unión Europea, radicalización, prevención del extremismo violento (PEV), terrorismo

The paper proposes a supranational perspective on the topic of PVE (Preventing Violent Extremism) in an effort to understand if the core of a new paradigm of action can be identified. To achieve this goal, the starting point will be a critical analysis of EU policies, measures and strategies developed in the context of the threats and challenges posed by radicalisation and violent extremism. In fact, it is not possible to analyse EU steps towards a more preventive approach without considering the framework of its counterterrorism efforts. The critical review and analysis of the “state of the art” will be performed by using official documents produced by the EU and the scientific literature on this topic. These secondary sources will be further developed by integrating the empirical outcomes from the TRIVALENT project (Horizon 2020)¹ which constitutes the group of primary sources. This paper will explore how the EU approach to terrorism, radicalisation and violent extremism (which originated in the 2005 EU “Counter-Terrorism Strategy” and then consolidated in the 2015 “European Agenda on Security”) has implied the need to create tools, strategies, programmes and networks in order to inspire and encourage member states to develop policies and instruments on a national or local level aimed at preventing and countering radicalisation which can lead to violent extremism. Within this context, as we will see, the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) has become the main EU actor in building activities at a European level to improve awareness, knowledge and skills in different areas that feed into the preventive dimension: understanding of radicalisation and violent extremism, sharing information across agencies, training professionals to respond to the threat of violent extremism before it becomes manifest and involving young people in the work on PVE. In the concluding notes of this paper it will be assumed that the adoption of such a “soft approach” will probably determine, in the long term, an enhancement of strategies and measures outside of a security driven framework and, consequently, the conditions that could be created for the emergence of a new paradigm of action.

1. TRIVALENT (Terrorism pReventIon Via rAdicalisation countEr-NarraTive). For more information, see: <https://trivalent-project.eu/>

Background to the PVE

The year 2001 was a watershed in the history of European anti-terrorism policy: terrorism and violent radicalisation became major concerns of the EU and its member states. After this dramatic event, EU member states realised that they all faced one collective terrorist threat. This was a crucial moment that prepared the ground for the development of a common EU counter-terrorism policy. The subsequent institutionalisation of this cooperation (especially through the establishment of the European Arrest Warrant, the Counter Terrorism Coordinator and the European Counter Terrorism Centre within Europol) has contributed to a «routinization» (Kaunert, Leonard, 2019; Sperling, Webber, 2019) of counter-terrorism practices in the European Union. In an extraordinary meeting ten days after the 11 September 2001 attacks on the WTC (World

Trade Centre) and the Pentagon, the EC (European Council) declared the fight against terrorism to be an EU priority objective². In particular, two gatherings, an extraordinary European Council meeting in Brussels and a second informal Council meeting in Ghent on 19 October, 2001, marked the beginning of a long list of meetings and the start of the so-called

“Anti-terrorism Roadmap”; a plan of concrete counter-terrorism actions for the EU. The EU’s counter-terrorism agenda has been «to a large extent “crisis-driven”» (Backman, Rhinard, 2018; Davis Cross, 2017) and was heavily influenced by several major shocking events: 9/11; the Madrid and London bombings; the rise of ISIS (Islamic State in Iraq and Syria); the terrorist attacks in France of 2015 and 2016; attacks in Brussels and Berlin in 2016; an attack in Strasburg in December 2018. Even though the perception of a terrorist threat has become ever more shared within the EU post-9/11, a more coherent EU counter-terrorism policy only took shape between 2004 and 2005. The Madrid and London bombings, in fact, prompted the EU to develop initiatives to better understand the root causes of terrorism and this led to an important transformation in the perception of the

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2. Council of the European Council, *Conclusions and Plan of Action of the extraordinary Europe - A Council Meeting on 21 September 2001*, (2001), (online), <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/20972/140en.pdf>

terrorist threat in Europe: from an almost exclusive focus on al-Qaeda, prevalent immediately after the 9/11 attacks, to home-grown terrorism as a result of «intra-EU radicalisation processes and terrorist recruitment» (Bures, 2011). The amendment of the Framework Decision 2002/475/JHA³ in 2008 added several more activities to the list of those already criminalised and shifted the focus on criminalising preparatory acts and incitement to terrorism. Moreover, it stressed the importance of reconsidering the potentialities of a preventive action. The adoption of the EU Internal Security Strategy in Action in 2010 and the creation, in 2011, of the EU RAN⁴ outlined the importance of creating a network connecting first-line experts from various EU member states.

The following years and the events that marked them (the Syrian civil war, the rise of ISIS and a series of new terrorist attacks) forced the European Union to reconsider its counter-terrorism policies due to another change in the terrorist threat perception and the emergence of new challenges. The first of these challenges was the management of the phenomenon of so-called foreign fighters (Bures, 2020). The civil war in Syria and the rise of ISIS attracted a large number of individuals travelling from all over the world, including Europe, to take part in this conflict. The new threat represented by foreign fighters dramatically materialised in a series of terrorist attacks in the EU between 2015 and 2017, prompting all member states to think about new measures in the fight against terrorism. In particular, the attack on the offices of the French satirical weekly newspaper, Charlie Hebdo, on 7 January, 2015, led the EU JHA (Justice and Home Affairs Council) to publish the Riga Statement⁵, which identified terrorism, radicalisation, recruitment and terrorist financing to be among the main threats to EU internal security. In order to respond to the changes of a terrorist threat, the Commission in December 2015 (COM 2015) proposed the adoption of a new directive on combating terrorism, which was designed to strengthen framework decisions and add new criminal offences that would address the foreign fighter phenomenon.

Another Paris attack, the massacre at the Bataclan Theatre on 13 November, 2015, was the deadliest in the EU since the 2004 Madrid attack. Then, on 22 March, 2016, suicide bombings took place at Brussels Airport and Maalbeek metro station in the EU quarter of Brussels. In response to the November 2015 and March 2016 attacks, the European External Action Service (EEAS) proposed

3. Council of the European Union, *Council Framework Decision of 13 June, 2002 on combating terrorism*, (2002), (online), <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:32002F0475>

4. See: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network_en

5. Council of the European Union, European Justice and Home Affairs Ministers, *Riga Joint Statement*, (2015), (online).

new policies the purpose of which were clearly focused on strengthening European boundaries with external relations, despite the rising wave of extreme nationalist sentiment within some member states.

The dramatic episodes mentioned above and those which occurred subsequently (the attack in Nice in July 2016 and the attack on the Christmas Market in Berlin in December 2016) seemed to demonstrate a further transformation in the threat to EU citizens: the emergence of the phenomenon of the lone wolf and the «weaponisation of ordinary life» (DG IPOL, 2017: 36).

The EU and the preventing policy: a critical review⁶

Counter-terrorism strategy remains part of a broader «EU security architecture» (EPRS, 2018), but policy making in this area has also been influenced by other general strategies. Some components of the European Union's «multifaceted fight against terrorism» (Argomaniz, Bures, Kaunert, 2015: 192) include the exchange of information between police and intelligence agencies; the development of external action; the managing of complex threats and natural disasters; the control of European borders; the fight against terrorist recruitment and financing; and the production of counter-terrorism legislation.

Since one of the four pillars of the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy is prevention, the prevention of radicalisation is considered an important aspect of the general approach of the EU to combat terrorism and counter radicalisation and violent extremism. Several strategies and programmes have been developed, which include «a special EU Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism, a Media Communication Strategy, a Check-the-Web project, and an EU-wide Empowering Civil Society-programme» (DG IPOL, 2017: 63). However, in terms of mandates, prevention of radicalisation is considered «an area that falls under the sovereign authority of member states» (ibid.). At EU level various tools, strategies, programmes, networks, and platforms were created

6. This section draws, in part, from the content of a previous publication by the author: «The European Union And The Preventing Radicalization And Terrorism Policy» in Maniscalco Maria Luisa, Rosato Valeria, *Preventing Radicalization and Terrorism in Europe*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2019, PP. 2-24

to inspire and encourage member states to develop policies and instruments at local and national levels. The RAN can be considered «the main actor in place to give follow-up to the objectives of the EU and functions as a network to exchange experiences, collect good practices and offer training to first-line responders» (ibid.: 64).

An important area within the dimension of preventive measures is that which concerns measures and tools for data collection, database access and information exchange. The EU has created several structures with the aim of allowing data collection, operational cooperation and information exchange concerning intelligence, law enforcement and justice. A Council Decision of 2002 introduced an important agency to the field of operational cooperation and law enforcement: the European Union's Eurojust (Judicial Cooperation Unit), which

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aims to stimulate and improve the coordination of judicial investigations and prosecutions of cases with links to two or more member states. In 2004, Council Decision 2004/512/EC28 established the VIS (Visa Information System) to allow the processing of data concerning third-country nationals applying for short-

stay visits or travelling through Schengen member states. VIS involves the exchange of visa data between the member states in order to conduct a common visa policy. Framework Decision 2006/960/JHA (also known as the "Swedish Decision" because of the initiative adopted by Sweden) established the rules for member states' law enforcement authorities to simplify the exchange of information more effectively in order to detect, prevent and investigate criminal offences and conduct criminal intelligence operations.

In 2009⁷, the Europol (European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation) was created to help member states deal with a specific set of criminal offences, including terrorism. Europol collects, stores, processes, analyses, and exchanges information as well as facilitating operational cooperation via JITs (Joint Investigation Teams). Moreover, the Agency provides law enforcement expertise to

7. The European Police Office (Europol) started as an intergovernmental body regulated by a Convention concluded between the Member States, which entered into force in 1999. By virtue of a Council Decision adopted in 2009, Europol became an EU agency funded by the EU budget. Link of the Council Decision: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:52013PC0173>

member states and produces threat assessments, strategic and operational analyses, and general situation reports such as the annual and public TE-SAT (Terrorism Situation & Trend Report). In order to strengthen Europol's counter-terrorist efforts, the ECTC (European Counter Terrorism Centre) was created in January 2016. The ECTC focuses on tackling foreign fighters; sharing intelligence and expertise on terrorism financing amongst member states; countering illegal arms trafficking; fostering international cooperation among counter-terrorism authorities; and monitoring and suggesting preventive measures against online terrorist propaganda and extremism. This final and key preventive function is performed by the EU IRU (Internet Referral Unit) which started its activities in July 2015 and whose mission is «to link the virtual face of terrorism to its physical aspect by connecting prevention and investigation capabilities» (Europol, 2019). The EU IRU's role is to identify the disseminators of terrorist propaganda and reduce accessibility to terrorist content online by providing a resilient referral capability for member states. Moreover, this unit provides internet-based investigation support to respond to member states' operational needs. In recent years, there have been some interesting improvements at EU level. In addition to the evolution of Europol's ECTC, the CTG (Counter Terrorism Group) was improved in 2016 with the creation of a common platform for the exchange of information between member states' security services. In general, the foundation of CTG and ECTC within Europol can be seen as concrete testimony of the fact that counter-terrorism cooperation has become increasingly institutionalised in the EU. This institutionalisation, as recently highlighted by Christian Kaunert and Sarah Léonard (2019), has contributed to the «routinisation of EU counterterrorism practices». In order to guarantee control of its external borders and support the management of migration, the EU (always with a preventive perspective) has created tools and established specific measures. In 2003, the Eurodac (European Dactyloscopy), the European Union fingerprint database for identifying asylum seekers and irregular border-crossers, was created, while in October 2013, the EU adopted a regulation establishing the European border surveillance system, Eurosur, an information-exchange framework for generating EU-wide situation awareness and for detecting, preventing and combating illegal immigration and cross-border crime as well as saving migrant lives at the external borders of member states. Another step forward «to ensure and maintain an area of freedom, security and justice» was made in March 2017, when member states produced the Rome Declaration, which invited the EU to take measures (the so-called "Rome Agenda") on migration, terrorism, socio-economic development, security and defence, and the environment (Sperling, Webber, 2019). An important piece of legislation among the acts recently adopted by the European Union legislature is Directive (EU) 2017/541, adopted on the basis of Article 83 (Ex-

Article 31 TEU)⁸ and considered necessary to align the EU legal framework with the changing international legal context, taking into account, in particular, United Nations Security Council Resolution 2178 (2014) and the Additional Protocol to the Council of Europe Convention on Prevention of Terrorism. Interventions, measures and instruments designed and created to combat terrorism and radicalisation can be placed in a sort of “intersection” between preventive and repressive measures. In recent years, awareness of online radicalisation has increased. In 2015, the European Commission launched the EU Internet Forum with the aim of stopping misuse of the internet by international terrorist groups, as well as providing a framework for efficient and voluntary cooperation with the internet industry in order to control terrorist online content. Building on the continuous work within the EU Internet Forum, on 1 March, 2018, the Commission recommended a set of urgent

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operational measures that online platforms and member states should take. The EU IRU works to anticipate and pre-empt terrorist abuse of online platforms: it identifies terrorist content and provides operational support and

analysis to EU member states. Within the fight against online radicalisation, an important issue has become the creation of the online counter-narrative. In order to spread alternative narratives, the European Commission decided to support civil society partners through the Civil Society Empowerment Programme. Under this programme, the Commission finances campaigns that provide alternative narratives to terrorist propaganda and that promote fundamental rights and values. On this last point, in January, 2018, the Commission proposed a Council Recommendation on «promoting common values, inclusive education, and the European dimension of teaching» (COM 2016) aimed at ensuring that young people understand the importance of common values, thus strengthening social cohesion and contributing to fighting the rise of extremism, populism, xenophobia, and the spread of fake news, especially on the web.

An analysis of the current state of the EU’s counter-radicalisation strategy reveals new trends also found in contemporary international security. Among these identified trends of particular importance are the predominance of

8 European Union, *Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union* – part three: Union policies and internal actions – Title V: Area of Freedom, Security and Justice – Chapter 4: Judicial cooperation in criminal matters – Article 83 (ex-Article 31 TEU), 26.10.2012, Official Journal of the European Union, (2012), (online), [Accessed 24.03.2021].

preventive strategies, the «crime-terror nexus» (Oliveira Martins, Ziegler, 2017: 7) and the «overrepresentation of Islamist-inspired terrorism in EU policy documents and strategies» (Oliveira Martins, Ziegler, 2017: 7) while other forms of terrorism are mostly absent. The reconstruction of the state of European Union policies on counter terrorism and prevention of radicalisation, above all taking into account their coherence and effectiveness, has identified the presence of some limits and gaps. The first gap identified is the lack of evidence for programmes addressing radicalisation. Radicalisation research has received a lot of attention and funding and many of these funds have been guaranteed by EU programmes. Nevertheless, despite its exponential growth in recent years, we still know very little about the actual causes, processes and mechanisms of radicalisation. Another critical aspect regarding EU counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation policies is the lack of operational cooperation between LEAs (Law Enforcement Agencies), which is also linked to some gaps in the use of information systems at both national and EU agency levels. Another relevant gap is in the effective fight against terrorism. The implementation and enforcement of EU tools and measures in the fight against terrorism have not yet been fully evaluated, especially as regards their coherence and compliance with fundamental rights. The European Commission has conducted a comprehensive assessment of EU security policy and this effort could be seen as a positive first step. However, the invalidation by the Court of Justice of several EU legal instruments in this field suggests that EU institutions have failed many times to take fundamental rights into account in the process of counter-terrorism law and policy-making. The issue of the coherence and compliance of EU counter-terrorism policies with fundamental rights is closely related to some implications deriving from the growing counter-terrorist power given to Europol and highlighted by recent research and studies. As a result of Europol becoming «highly bureaucratized» (Jansson, 2018: 442), the Police are now technical actors in the fight against terrorism and this has «depoliticised» (Jansson, 2018) counterterrorist efforts. The depoliticisation of terrorism has turned out to be a strategy to “normalise” counter-terrorist procedures and facilitate cooperation as it removes the need to analyse the motivations behind terrorist acts and transform anti-terrorist cooperation into a «technical matter» (Jansson, 2018: 442).

An important final consideration, deriving from a recent comprehensive assessment of EU Security Policy by the European Commission, is the need for «a more long-term, societal approach in counter-radicalisation policies» (DARE, Horizon 2020: 3). Current security, counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation policies, do not take sufficient account of long-term and socio-economic factors at a national and European level. In reality,

however, the response to radicalisation should be global, which would mean that a fundamental step towards effective counter radicalisation is supported by regional, national and international cooperation. This cooperation is relatively well developed in the sphere of counter-terrorism (e.g. intelligence sharing) but less so when it comes to the prevention of radicalisation (DARE, EU Horizon 2020). As will be seen, the importance of a preventive approach (at European Union level) towards radicalisation and violent extremism is an issue that has strongly emerged just recently and owes much to a series of initiatives launched by the RAN.

PVE policies at European Union level: some reflections on future developments

Prevention is defined as efforts to influence individual and/or environmental factors that are suggested to create conditions in which violent extremism can flourish, using social or educative, rather than explicit, security driven measures. Specifically, when we talk about PVE, we refer to «the “soft” or “preventive” strategies, policies and programs that identify and challenge the ‘push’ and ‘pull’ factors of radicalization and recruitment» (Zeiger, 2016: 2). These soft-power approaches aim at intervention before violence occurs (Stephens, Sieckelink, Boutellier, 2019); they try to address the root causes and drivers of violent extremism. Since 2013 (especially with the emergence of issues such as the foreign fighters of ISIS and related groups) PVE initiatives have become more visible as key processes enacted both in statutory and non-statutory forums as counterterrorism measures.

The role of the RAN in enhancing EU PVE approach

The Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) can be considered the main actor able to provide follow-up to the objectives of the EU and to function as a network to exchange experiences, collect good practices and offer training to first-line responders. It is by virtue of this role that RAN makes an essential contribution through its initiatives to outline a preventive approach to radicalisation and violent extremism at EU level. Its mission is «to connect frontline practitioners from across Europe with one another, and with academics and policymakers, to exchange knowledge, first-hand experiences and approaches to preventing and

countering violent extremism in all its forms»⁹. The RAN Centre of Excellence acts as an EU knowledge hub, consolidating expertise and fostering the dissemination and exchange of experiences and cooperation on anti-radicalisation. Several of its working groups¹⁰ have realised initiatives and activities which have made it possible so far to collect experiences and elaborate recommendations and guidelines (contained in a series of working papers) for those who are at the forefront of preventing radicalisation and violent extremism. A significant example of this kind of contribution by the RAN are two different working papers from 2018 in which the RAN H&SC (RAN Health and Social Care) explores the role of MAW (Multi-Agency Working) in the prevention of, and response to, violent radicalisation. The task for the multi-agency service is to identify and address those risk factors associated with the specific phase being targeted in their intervention. Redirection and Prevention actions (respectively, to work with individuals who are currently believed to be going through the process of violent radicalisation and to implement a public health or community-based resilience-building initiatives) could be examples of the multi-agency work being conducted in preventing violent extremism. RAN H&SC stresses the importance of building awareness, knowledge and skills in the area of information-sharing within and across agencies as well as improving the understanding of violent radicalisation leading to terrorism through knowledge transfer between member states, and training and awareness-building activities at national and EU level (RAN H&SC, 2018). In the second Paper, RAN H&SC illustrates another important facet of contemporary approaches to managing violent extremism: the need to improve preventive action. It is not enough to simply respond to the threat of violent extremism once it shows itself; it is essential to act on the roots of violence before its appearance, or at least to intervene as soon as possible in the process of violent radicalisation. This implies both the ability to identify individuals potentially at risk of violent extremism and to support them within a «needs-based model» (RAN H&SC, 2018) in order to redirect their lives towards non-violence. An initiative born to move in this direction was the idea of setting up the RYEA (Ran Young Empowerment Academy) which originated in 2018 during a Ran Young meeting held in Nice. The purpose of RYEA is to empower young people wishing to play an active role in the prevention of radicalisation. In the RYEA sessions, young people «work on enhancing their

9. https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network_en

10. Communication and Narratives Working Group (RAN C&N); Youth and Education Working Group (RAN Y&E); Local authorities Working Group (RAN LOCAL); Police and law enforcement Working Group (RAN POL); RAN Mental Health and Social Care (RAN H&SC); Families, communities & social care working group (RAN FC&S).

personal development, expand their knowledge on P/CVE (Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism), and develop the skills and competencies needed to become a youth influencer and/or set up their own locally sustainable P/CVE initiative» (RAN YOUNG, 2019: 2).

In January 2020, the RAN (based on the experiences collected and research) elaborated an issue paper with the objective of supporting practitioners and policymakers in adjusting existing strategies for PVE to the challenges related to refugees, asylum seekers and migration issues, but also to the more and more visible far-right extremist attitudes and narratives (RAN 2020). According to members of the RAN community, there are four main approaches to follow: a) the approach focused on fostering social cohesion aims to improve access for refugees and asylum seekers to basic services in the areas of housing, employment, education, health and social life; b) the approach focusing on education and youth work to empower youngsters and young adults and to enhance their participation and access to civic, social and political rights; c) the approach focused on training and supporting practitioners especially for PVE interventions with refugees; d) and the approach focused on enhancing competencies and skills to address the mental health issues of refugees.

In addition to the identification of such PVE approaches, always according to RAN experts, policies should significantly increase efforts to tackle polarisation of public opinion and challenge extremist “us-and-them” narratives. Instead, practitioners should build on interdisciplinary and multi-agency networks and cooperation to exchange knowledge and experiences in order to develop strategies to improve social cohesion and prevent polarisation. Another RAN working paper (2020) explores whether the mechanisms and measures used in crime prevention work in PVE; outlining the close relationship between general crime prevention and PVE, and exploring the extent to which general principles, mechanisms and methods of crime prevention could apply to preventing violent extremism and terrorism.

Finally, the EU Area of Justice and Fundamental Rights has recently created a “Legislative Train Schedule”¹¹ using the metaphor of the train to graphically summarise and briefly explain the needs that have emerged in the context of the European Union with respect to different areas of intervention and the legislative initiatives undertaken to meet these needs. The prevention of radicalisation is counted among the areas of intervention as “in a state of progress” and the fundamental role played by the RAN is recognised as well as the importance

11. See: <https://www.europarl.europa.eu/legislative-train/theme-area-of-justice-and-fundamental-rights/file-preventing-radicalisation>

of a comprehensive strategy to tackle extremism in which multi-agency work, information sharing, communication and dialogue are again considered powerful and indispensable tools in PVE together with the need to strengthen intercultural dialogue through educational systems.

Preventive measures in the field of radicalisation and terrorism: some empirical outcomes from the Trivalent project

Preventing violent extremism has become a concern for policy makers at all levels, from municipal governments to international organisations. As we have seen, a common feature of policy at all levels is the call for collaboration between different sectors, professionals, organisations and communities. This issue has also emerged from the interviews and questionnaires carried out within the Trivalent project¹². Specifically, this part of the research has been based on two surveys involving European civil experts and LEA members in order to gather experiences, needs and views of field actors on the radicalisation process¹³.

The results of the scientific literature review carried out before the implementation of the survey made it possible to identify four macro-analytical dimensions¹⁴ which constituted the starting point of our survey of expert people. One of these analytical dimensions, called “future trends”, made it possible to investigate, together with

12 *Terrorism pReventIon Via rAdicalisation countEr-NarraTive*. It was an EU funded project aimed to gain a better understanding of root causes of the phenomenon of violent radicalisation in Europe in order to develop appropriate countermeasures, ranging from early detection methodologies to techniques of counter-narrative.

13 Methodological notes: we implemented qualitative interviews with European civil experts (21 civil experts: 8 from Italy, 8 from France, 3 from Belgium and 2 from the UK) and a two-step Delphi survey on LEAs involved in the project (11 LEA partners from different member countries – Belgium, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Spain - including one EU candidate country: Albania). In qualitative interviews the interviewees were given space to expand their answers and accounts of their experiences and feelings. This technique ensures a more open discussion about the research subjects and to gather unexpected information and considerations. The Delphi method objective, instead, is to bring to the surface most possible scenarios of a specific topic based on specialists' knowledge. The Delphi method includes a general three step structure: a first round based on a questionnaire with open-ended and close-ended questions, to be complete by interviewees. A second step based on a new questionnaire that summarises the findings of the first step, inviting interviewees to discuss them. A third final round of discussion to be realised through a focus group or new questionnaire.

14. A) Radicalisation: definitions; B) Origins and causal factors; C) Gender, radicalisation and terrorism; D) Future trends.

experts, possible future scenarios in the development of radicalisation and terrorism and the question of preventive measures. A first observation to be made is that relating to the overlapping points of view on the prevention of the phenomenon of radicalisation expressed by civil experts and LEA members involved in this survey (Antonelli, 2019: 52). In fact, in relation to preventive measures, our respondents can be divided into two groups. The first group underlines the importance (for the purpose of preventing violent radicalisation) of international relations and the need for an effective peace-building strategy concerning crucial areas, such as the Middle East and North Africa. While, according to the second group, preventive measures should instead be based mainly on a struggle against socio-cultural exclusion. Although the two groups expressed different visions of radicalisation and strategies to prevent or counter it, identifying a common underlying idea was possible: within different societies and at the level of international relations, de-radicalisation and the struggle against terrorism are possible by just firstly promoting the values of an “open society” in a more effective way. In fact, according to our respondents, rights, democracy, peace and tolerance alone can remove the roots of radicalisation and terrorism. Nevertheless, this is not enough: “open society” is only a set of conditions for an effective de-radicalisation process. In order to defeat the risk of a massive radicalisation, particularly in Europe, it is fundamental «to improve re-distribution measures, to promote effective citizenship for immigrants, to socialise all people to respect different cultures» (Antonelli, 2019: 48-49). In other words, it is necessary to shift the focus of attention towards actions, initiatives and strategies that fall within a preventive dimension, thus allowing us to overcome current security, counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation approaches.

Conclusions

In order to analyse the current position of the European Union with respect to the prevention of violent extremism, it was decided to start with a critical review of EU policies, measures, and strategies developed in the context of the threats and challenges posed by terrorism, radicalisation and violent extremism.

Drawing inspiration from official documents of the European Union and the RAN, as well as empirical outcomes produced within the TRIVALENT project (Antonelli, 2019; Maniscalco, Rosato, 2019) analysed in the previous paragraphs, it is possible to identify several issues that outline recommendations for the implementation of future PVE strategies.

Important actions have been taken at EU level in order to improve measures that address the causes of terrorism and to strengthen law enforcement agency

cooperation and information sharing. Civil society is considered an important player in PVE, especially actors such as NGOs, religious communities, former extremists and even victims of terrorism, all of whom can make a valuable contribution to preventing radicalisation by strengthening social cohesion and a feeling of inclusion within the communities and individuals they work with. Policies in support of appropriate educational programmes and projects are fundamental to promoting social inclusion and active adhesion to European values of freedom, tolerance, mutual understanding and non-discrimination because, by doing so, the creation of so-called hotbeds of terrorism would be avoided. Education is, therefore, widely recognised as a key to preventing radicalisation, and the role of educators is very delicate as their main task is to ensure an educational process that promotes the development of skills and abilities and especially the capacity to think critically (Maniscalco, Rosato, 2019).

There are other important indications (placeable within a preventive approach) that can be drawn from the analysis carried out in this paper. First of all, the importance of considering the crime-terror nexus during the design of prevention policies and to pursue a multi-agency approach at local level by strengthening cooperation among local governments and law enforcement agencies as well as NGOs, researchers and social workers operating in the public and private sectors. It is also necessary to reserve an important space in the European Union PVE for communication and the spread of alternative narratives for the purpose of undermining the appeal of terrorist propaganda (Maniscalco, Rosato, 2019). Finally, there is the role of gender and especially women which must not be underestimated in PVE. Regarding this last issue, the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) recently stated in an official document (2020) that women represent “the first line of protection” in the prevention of extremism. PVE approaches aimed at addressing the underlying causes of violence must be gender sensitive and should give priority to the inclusion of key stakeholders, particularly women, in their development and implementation. In other words, PVE can no longer be the responsibility of only security actors. To be effective, a cooperative and inclusive approach to preventing and countering radicalisation and violent extremism must involve civil society actors.

The starting hypothesis according to which the adoption of a “soft approach” will probably determine, in the long term, an enhancement of strategies and measures outside of a security driven framework seems to find confirmation in the most recent measures and initiatives. In the trend to create tools,

In the PVE context, a common feature of policy at all levels is the call for collaboration between different sectors, professionals, organisations and communities.

strategies, programmes, and networks to inspire and encourage EU member states to develop policies and instruments aimed at preventing and countering radicalisation leading to violent extremism we can glimpse the core of a new paradigm of action.

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