SPOTLIGHT

DEC 2023

RAN
Practitioners

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EDITORIAL

In 2023, the violent extremist threat has continued to evolve. This year has seen a number of major socio- and geo-political events which have had a polarising impact upon communities right across the EU, such as the cost of living crisis, the ongoing Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and the recent conflict between Israel and Hamas. These events have enabled violent extremists to find new ways to remain relevant and appeal to their audiences, while the introduction and adoption of new digital technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), have given new opportunities for violent extremists to reach, engage, radicalise and recruit vulnerable individuals online.

In the face of these challenges, RAN Practitioners has continued to connect frontline practitioners, from all corners of the EU, from many different fields of work, to come together to share knowledge, experiences and ideas about how best to prevent and counter violent extremism (P/CVE). Through Working Group meetings, cross-cutting events, study visits, webinars and a series of papers, products and publications, RAN and its network of practitioners have been able to generate new insights which have informed the development of new practices and the delivery of new interventions.

As the year comes to a close, we therefore take a look back at some of the emerging P/CVE challenges that have arisen and some of the key events that have taken place. This edition of the Spotlight publication also provides a summary of some of the key activities that have been delivered, hearing from some of those practitioners who have been involved, including on the European Remembrance Day for Victims and Survivors of Terrorism, the new intake of young professionals into the RAN YOUNG Platform and the RAN Plenary.

As always, we want to hear from you. If you would like to contribute to future editions of Spotlight, or if you have ideas for an article, interview or feature, please get in touch with the RAN Practitioners communications team at team at **ran@radaradvies.nl**

RAN Practitioners Staff

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Global events and P/CVE
Kacper Rekawek

*We spoke with **Kacper Rekawek**, a Senior Research Fellow and Programme Lead (Current and Emerging Threats) at the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), about the current P/CVE threats in 2023 and how the threat picture has changed over the course of the past 12 months or more.*

Are violent extremists increasingly able to capitalise on global events to radicalise and recruit?
Due to the prevalence of different social media platforms and apps – where you can send and distribute video clips, where you can share your thoughts and feelings, almost in a live-feed manner - global conflicts have become 'easier to access'. For violent extremists, conflicts such as the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine and the conflict between Israel and Hamas in Gaza, have strengthened their conviction and their ability to propagate a "them vs. us" narrative, a good vs. evil clash, pitting themselves against the US or the West.

A second version of events is that the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, for instance, is a fictional conflict which has been manufactured by some kind of new world order, which is trying to convince us that there is a war going on and we need to be preoccupied with it, we need to donate and we need to spend money on sustaining the actors involved. Such convictions have provided extremists with ammunition to spread conspiracy narratives say: "Hey, look, this is what is happening and this is what's going on."

What impact has the ongoing Russian war of aggression had on the VRWE landscape in Europe?
There's been a lot of proverbial 'argy-bargy' between extremist, especially on the far right, because there was a bit of a disagreement on where they stand. Vladimir Putin has let down certain people in these circles. Certain people were supporting him and there was a bit of uneasiness around that, especially in the first half of 2022. Now a year and a half later, I think the positions of violent right wing extremists (VRWE) have become more static. The ardent supporters on both sides will stick to their guns. But I think some VRWE still see the war as a peripheral thing. They still see the battles at home, about culture – especially now in relation to LGBTQI+ issues and feminism – as way more important and way more relevant today. Russia-Ukraine is simply background noise, It supports some of their arguments, but because they're not fighting there, that's not key in their view.

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INTERVIEW
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How has the general threat picture changed over the course of the past year or so?

In relation to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, but also in relation to the lasting effects of the COVID pandemic and the wider socio-economic developments of the last two-to-three years, you're looking at a broadening of the extremist landscape and a broadening of the group of people who are essentially anti-systemic and anti-authorities. They might not be violent, they might not all be far right, even though if you quiz them it becomes quite obvious that they share a lot of views with the far right or extreme right.

There is more anger which is now directed to new sets of issues. This, of course has grown out of the protests against COVID measures. Such sentiments and activities have been sustained and have now shifted towards other issues. It can shift one day against Ukrainian refugees, the other day against the support for Ukraine or Ukrainian refugees, then against Israel, and then it can go somewhere else. Basically, there are large numbers of people who are simply extremely angry with whatever happens and how it happens, and they will not rest until there is a type of a reset moment in European society.

There are now many issues, and extremists are divided by issues, even though quite a lot of what they do looks similar and is transnational, but it's a very diffuse threat picture. That's why you have to carefully try to dissect it so that we don't end up developing one-size-fits-all policy responses and that we don't end up labelling it all as extremism, violent extremism, or terrorism. But the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine has become part of our everyday life, even for the extremists, they are not that excited anymore. Many look to some imaginary US versus China clash, others are excited by the Israel-Hamas clash, and it was fascinating to see how they lined up in relation to this one, and how their anti-Semitism, which they often deny, quite often came to the fore.

"In relation to the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine, but also in relation to the lasting effects of the COVID pandemic and the wider socio-economic developments of the last two-to-three years, you're looking at a broadening of the extremist landscape and a broadening of the group of people who are essentially anti-systemic and anti-authorities. They might not be violent, they might not all be far right, even though if you quiz them it becomes quite obvious that they share a lot of views with the far right or extreme right."

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How might the threat picture evolve and what can we do about it?

The fallout from the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine is one element of a larger picture. Surprisingly, people are extremely angry with the current reality, and as a result with governments. If you go around parts of Western Europe, including some of the most affluent bits, the anger and the confusion and the resentment there is sometimes overwhelming. It has built up over many years, as the result of growing instability, of the issues related to housing, jobs, education and health, and from the realisation that life for many will not be as good as the life of their parents or grandparents.

So now we are seeing an increase in the numbers of people who are more anti-authorities in sentiment, many of whom are increasingly extremist in nature, who are saying this world of ours is a sham. They might not constitute a threat at the moment but they raise an interesting point – how do we reintegrate such individuals into societies which promote freedom of speech and freedom of expression? How do you appease them on the one hand, and on the other protect the so-called system which in their view is crooked? This development to some extent mirrors the US, where more and more people are wanting out – out of the system, out of politics, out of the way of life. In light of this and to prepare for the future, we need to re-tell the Western, European story, the 'us' narrative, so that the "I want out" ranks do not grow.

"There are now many issues, and extremists are divided by issues, even though quite a lot of what they do looks similar and is transnational, but it's a very diffuse threat picture. That's why you have to carefully try to dissect it so that we don't end up developing one-size-fits-all policy responses and that we don't end up labelling it all as extremism, violent extremism, or terrorism. But the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine has become part of our everyday life, even for the extremists, they are not that excited anymore."

RAN FILM
RAN Reporters: Green Help-line

FILM
RAN REPORTERS: GREEN HELP-LINE

DEC 2023
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014—015

In the latest episode of our 'RAN Reporters' series – which uncovers some of the most recent, interesting and innovative projects and interventions delivered by members of the RAN Practitioners network – we visit Sofia. Our reporter, Jordy Nijenhuis, meets Angela Antonova, co-lead of the RAN Practitioners Families, Communities & Social Care Working Group, to learn about the Green Help-line which provides mental health support and advice to practitioners working with refugees in Bulgaria. You can watch the film in full on the RAN Practitioners YouTube channel **here**.

RAN PAPER
Toolkit on dealing with conspiracy
narratives

PAPER
**TOOLKIT ON DEALING WITH CONSPIRACY
NARRATIVES**

DEC 2023
2023

In July this year, RAN Practitioners produced a
toolkit which provides practitioners with practical
insights and suggestions on how to potentially
work with a person who believes in conspiracy
narratives. The aims of this toolkit are to explain
what a conspiracy narrative exactly is, what a
conspiracy narrative may offer to someone and
how to help them reconsider their beliefs. You
can read the toolkit in full **here.**

How to deal with conspiracy narratives in your family and with friends?

TOOLKIT

RAN

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ARTICLE
NEW DIGITAL INNOVATIONS: THE CAPACITY GAP

DEC 2023
2023

018—019
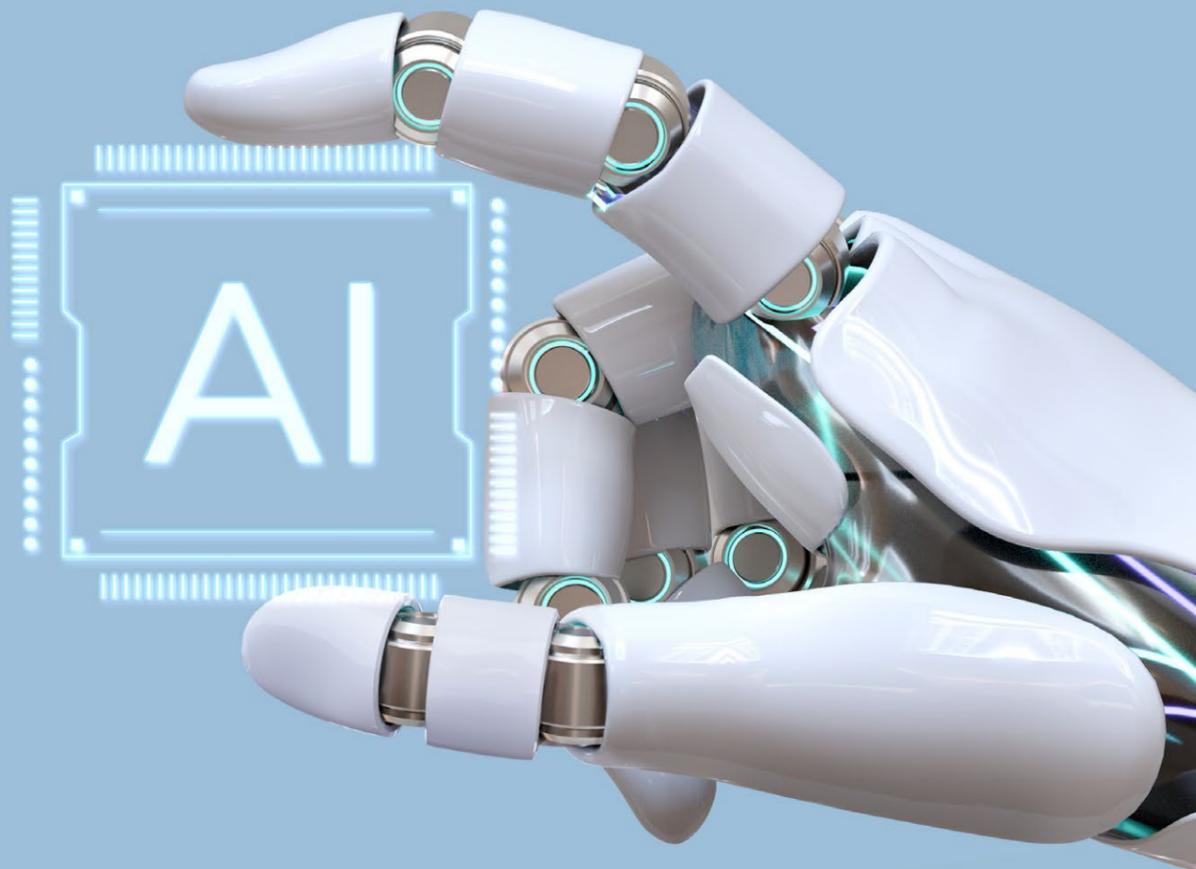
**Jonathan
BENJAMIN**

Innovations in digital technology are changing the way people behave, communicate and engage with one another online (and offline). Artificial intelligence (AI) is the next big transformation, which has seen an explosion of adoption and use in 2023. AI technologies — such as ChatGPT and Dall E — are now giving the power to people to write, narrate, produce and curate their own content.

ARTICLE

New digital innovations:
The capacity gap

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2023

ARTICLE
NEW DIGITAL INNOVATIONS: THE CAPACITY GAP

DEC 2023
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Recent years have shown that violent extremists are adept at exploiting the internet, by adopting, adapting and applying the latest in digital technology to radicalise and recruit online. Current events surrounding the conflict in Gaza have demonstrated how digital technologies are being used to spread polarising and radicalising content. Within a frenzied information environment, actors on all sides are weaponising digital technologies and platforms – such as TikTok – to garner support, incite response and recruit people to their cause.

With digital technology continuing to change and evolve apace, with digital platforms multiplying, with violent extremists increasingly adept at exploiting them to target, reach, engage and impact young people online, the online radicalisation and recruitment challenge is not only both real and imminent, but now urgent.

However, first-line practitioners – who are tackling some of these challenges in communities – often lack the knowledge, skills, time, capacity and resources to use digital technologies to reach their audiences online and keep pace with changes in the digital world. Not only are many of them behind the curve in understanding the latest technological innovations, many are also not present on, or using the same digital platforms as young people online.

A critical strategic deficit now exists between violent extremists' and practitioners' understanding of the digital world, their use of digital technologies and their ability to connect with their audiences online. There is therefore an urgent need to narrow the gap. This can be done by inspiring first-line practitioners to get online, grow their capacity and capability to adopt the latest digital technologies, and in doing so help them to integrate the digital world into their work.

While new digital innovations can often seem overwhelming and complex, they can be a force for good. We must therefore embrace the technology and be proactive in using it. Digital

"With digital technology continuing to change and evolve apace, with digital platforms multiplying, with violent extremists increasingly adept at exploiting them to target, reach, engage and impact young people online, the online radicalisation and recruitment challenge is not only both real and imminent, but now urgent."

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ARTICLE
NEW DIGITAL INNOVATIONS: THE CAPACITY GAP

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022—023

"If we are to push back against the tide of polarising content generated and propagated online and minimise the ability of violent extremists to radicalise and recruit, then we need to build a new capacity of properly resourced and equipped civil society digital capacity."

technologies can be used in a number of ways, whether to understand audiences and online conversations, increase awareness of your organisation and/or market your services, reach and engage audiences, or produce, disseminate and promote content.

Increasingly there are a number of free tools that practitioners can use to do much of this. The most notable example is OpenAI's ChatGPT (version 3.5). As a generative AI, large language model (LLM), that uses natural language processing (NLP), ChatGPT can help practitioners to design digital campaigns and write digital content, which can be tailored to any platform or any audience. However, such tools are not always accurate and require subject-matter expertise and audience insight to be of use. Their main utility therefore is idea generation. It is now easier and quicker for practitioners to operate online.

A sustained programme of practical, hands-on training for large numbers of practitioners – especially those who can intervene with at-risk audiences, such as civil society representatives, youth workers and social workers, among others – which demonstrates how to use different digital tools and platforms, is required to take practitioners on a journey from digital beginners to digital experts. To this end, RAN Practitioners delivered four pilot training events on digital skills in October and November 2023, with four more planned in 2024. Alongside the training, support is needed to help practitioners devise digital plans specifically tailored to their organisation and/or work, and apply the lessons learned about how to adopt, adapt and use digital technologies.

If we are to push back against the tide of polarising content generated and propagated online and minimise the ability of violent extremists to radicalise and recruit, then we need to build a new capacity of properly resourced and equipped civil society digital capacity.

Jonathan Benjamin is a Director at REOC Europe, a strategic communications agency based in Brussels which specialises in P/CVE.

RAN FILM
Digital skills training

FILM
DIGITAL SKILLS TRAINING

DEC 2023
2023

In October and November 2023, RAN Practitioners delivered a series of four training events for practitioners on 'digital skills'. The aim of the training was to improve participants' understanding of the most recent digital trends and introduce some digital technologies which could be used in their work. The film provides an overview of the training and the lessons learned, and features the thoughts of both trainers and participants. You can watch the film in full on the RAN Practitioners YouTube channel **here**.

RAN PAPER
Study visit: The Swedish approach to
tackling VRWE

PAPER
**STUDY VISIT: THE SWEDISH APPROACH TO
TACKLING VRWE**

DEC 2023
2023

026—027

During a RAN Practitioners Study Visit on violent right wing extremism (VRWE) to Stockholm, Sweden, in March 2023, practitioners had the chance to gain first-hand insight into the workings of several organisations that are part of Sweden's whole-of-society approach to tackling VRWE and related issues. A paper provides an overview of VRWE in Sweden and a summary of the Swedish approach of the two organisations and their place in the Swedish national approach. You can read the paper in full **here.**

CONCLUSION PAPER
RAN study visit on VRWE
6 & 7 March 2023, Stockholm, Sweden

The Swedish approach to tackling violent right-wing extremism

Key outcomes

Violent right-wing extremism (VRWE) is continuing to grow as a threat in Europe and beyond. A country that has had extensive experience in dealing with various manifestations of VRWE is Sweden. During the **RAN Practitioners Study Visit on VRWE** to Stockholm, Sweden, which took place from 6 to 7 March 2023, 14 practitioners from all over Europe had the chance to gain first-hand insight into the workings of several organisations that are part of Sweden's whole-of-society approach to tackling VRWE and related issues.

The meeting's participants represented a diverse group of expert practitioners, including local practitioners, with a background in — among other areas — social work, alternative narrative campaigning, exit work and prison services. Participants learned about Sweden's history of VRWE and how international and geopolitical developments influence what the VRWE landscape looks like in Sweden. On Day I they visited two organisations on site: the Swedish government organisation **Center for Preventing Violent Extremism** (*Center mot våldsbejakande extremism* (CVE)) and the youth centre Fryshuset where the **Exit Sweden** programme is located. On Day II of the meeting, Sweden's history of VRWE was further discussed, as well as the manifestations of VRWE in different EU Member States and to what extent lessons learned can be taken back to the participants' own context.

Following are some **key points** that were discussed.

- National governmental institutions can be of great support for local authorities in sharing expertise and concrete support when dealing with (potential) radicalisation. Local authorities benefit from using national (support) structures instead of having to completely set up their own approach.
- Successful exit work is primarily based on building a trusting relationship and being a credible messenger for the client. Only then is it possible to nudge an individual away from an extremist environment. Bringing clients out of their comfort zone usually takes time and resources, but it is an essential approach to create change.
- Both in Sweden and other European countries the diversification of the VRWE landscape poses big challenges. Whereas 10 years ago VRWE movements were easily recognisable, right-wing extremists nowadays create their own 'salad bar' ideology and/or radicalise mostly online, out of sight of institutions. This makes tackling the issue more and more complicated. Building a strong civil society that can counter the normalisation of right-wing narratives in the public domain is an essential way to counter these developments.
- Media have a responsibility to assess whether their productions showing the workings of extremist groups can negatively influence vulnerable individuals and to adjust their work accordingly.
- Privacy and information sharing when dealing with cases are challenging for many stakeholders across Europe. Developing effective systems for practitioners' work is crucial for advancing the prevention of and responses to involvement in violent extremism. The practice of, for example, Info-houses was discussed as an example of bringing relevant stakeholders together for joint responses and approaches.

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European
Commission

RAN FILM
RAN Reporters: Web Constables

FILM
RAN REPORTERS: WEB CONSTABLES

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In July 2023 we travelled to Tallinn, Estonia, to meet with Maarja Punak to learn about the Web Constables project. In this episode of our RAN Reporters series, we learn about the role of police officers ('web constables') who carry out police work online in order to respond to a myriad of sensitive issues, including cyber bullying, extremism and hate speech. You can watch the film in full on the RAN Practitioners YouTube channel **here**.

030—031

FEATURE

Kelsey
BJORNSGAARD

FEATURE

RAN YOUNG: Young people in P/CVE

Over the last few years, I have had the opportunity to work closely with the members of RAN YOUNG: who now amount to over 50 remarkable young P/CVE practitioners — both past and present — who are active across the EU in a multitude of capacities. Researchers, policy makers and programme managers, they are working with CSOs, their local and national governments, and the European Union to address drivers of hate, polarisation and extremism in their own communities and across the continent.

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FEATURE
RAN YOUNG: YOUNG PEOPLE IN P/CVE

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032—033

"**RAN YOUNG is a dedicated space for Europe's young P/CVE professionals to both hone and contribute their expertise. Created in recognition of the important role that young people play in this field, RAN Practitioners has built on its successful networked approach to incorporate young professionals in a way that serves the young people themselves — through training, networking, experience, and exposure — as well as the wider network of P/CVE practitioners.**"

RAN YOUNG is a dedicated space for Europe's young P/CVE professionals to both hone and contribute their expertise. Created in recognition of the important role that young people play in this field, RAN Practitioners has built on its successful networked approach to incorporate young professionals in a way that serves the young people themselves — through training, networking, experience, and exposure — as well as the wider network of P/CVE practitioners and policy makers by giving voice to critical perceptions, experience and insights. In working with young people as professionals, RAN Practitioners is prioritising the more neglected parts of youth engagement: support and inclusion.

A new cohort
This year saw the intake of a new generation of young professionals into the RAN YOUNG network. This new cohort of over 20 young people working in P/CVE will be members of the RAN YOUNG Platform for the next few years. Following their induction, the new members of the network met three times across the year, both in person and online, to discuss issues relevant to them. Outside these dedicated meetings, RAN Practitioners also provided opportunities for RAN YOUNG members to participate in other RAN Practitioners activities, such as the RAN Practitioners Plenary event in Octoberm to ensure their voices could be heard across the network.

Peer review
On 3 and 4 May 2023, a kick-off meeting was organised in Budapest, Hungary, bringing together this new cohort of young professionals for the first time. The meeting brought together 26 young people from 14 EU Member States.

Recognising the value of so many perspectives and experiences in one room, this first meeting was devoted to creating a conducive environment for peer-to-peer learning and building new relationships. The focus of the meeting was to review three current projects which new members of RAN YOUNG are supporting to deliver:

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FEATURE
RAN YOUNG: YOUNG PEOPLE IN P/CVE

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• Smart Hubs: As part of the European Commission's INDEED programme, PATRIR is creating Smart Hubs – spaces for P CVE practitioners to come together and share knowledge, discuss gaps and learn about emerging challenges. Smart Hubs are systematic, long-term responses to community level prevention, supporting a whole-of-society approach that comes from within the community it serves.

• CONNEKT: 'Contexts of Extremism in MENA and Balkan Societies' is a Horizon 2020 project that is exploring the drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism among people to improve prevention. CONNEKT is closing the gap between research, policy and programming at the state, community and individual levels to address the threat of extremism in a combined way.

• M11 Association for the Victims of Terrorism: A survivor led initiative to support victims of the 2004 train bombing in Madrid. The programme organises debates and talks and runs a series of social media campaigns to raise awareness about terrorism and the high toll it takes on survivors and their families. It pays special attention to young people, using storytelling to teach them about terrorism and extremism through personal experiences.

During this meeting, participants had the opportunity to conduct a SWOT analysis and offer some recommendations about how to include a youth perspective into these projects, including how to reach young audiences, how to engage them with compelling, appropriate and relevant content, and how to involve young people in the design and delivery of these activities.

Practitioner exchange
The RAN YOUNG Platform held two further meetings, which took place in September and October online. In the first of these two meetings, participants had the opportunity to discuss both P/CVE issues relevant to them, providing observations from their countries and experiences, and timely P/CVE issues, offering a youth perspective on the nature of the challenge(s) and how

to deal with them. During the second of these meetings, RAN YOUNG members had the opportunity to meet with practitioners from a number of RAN Practitioners Working Groups to explore and discuss latest developments in P/CVE. They also had the chance to learn from practitioners about how to design and deliver different projects and practices.

This year we met with some of the young people who have joined the RAN YOUNG Platform in 2023. Through a series of interviews and diary vlogs, this short film follows them as they take their first steps on their RAN YOUNG journeys. The film discovers about the work that they are doing and the issues that are important to them, why they joined the Platform and what they hope to get out of it. You can watch the film on the RAN Practitioners YouTube channel **here**.

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ARTICLE
RAN PRACTITIONERS PLENARY: SETTING THE
AGENDA FOR 2024

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038–039
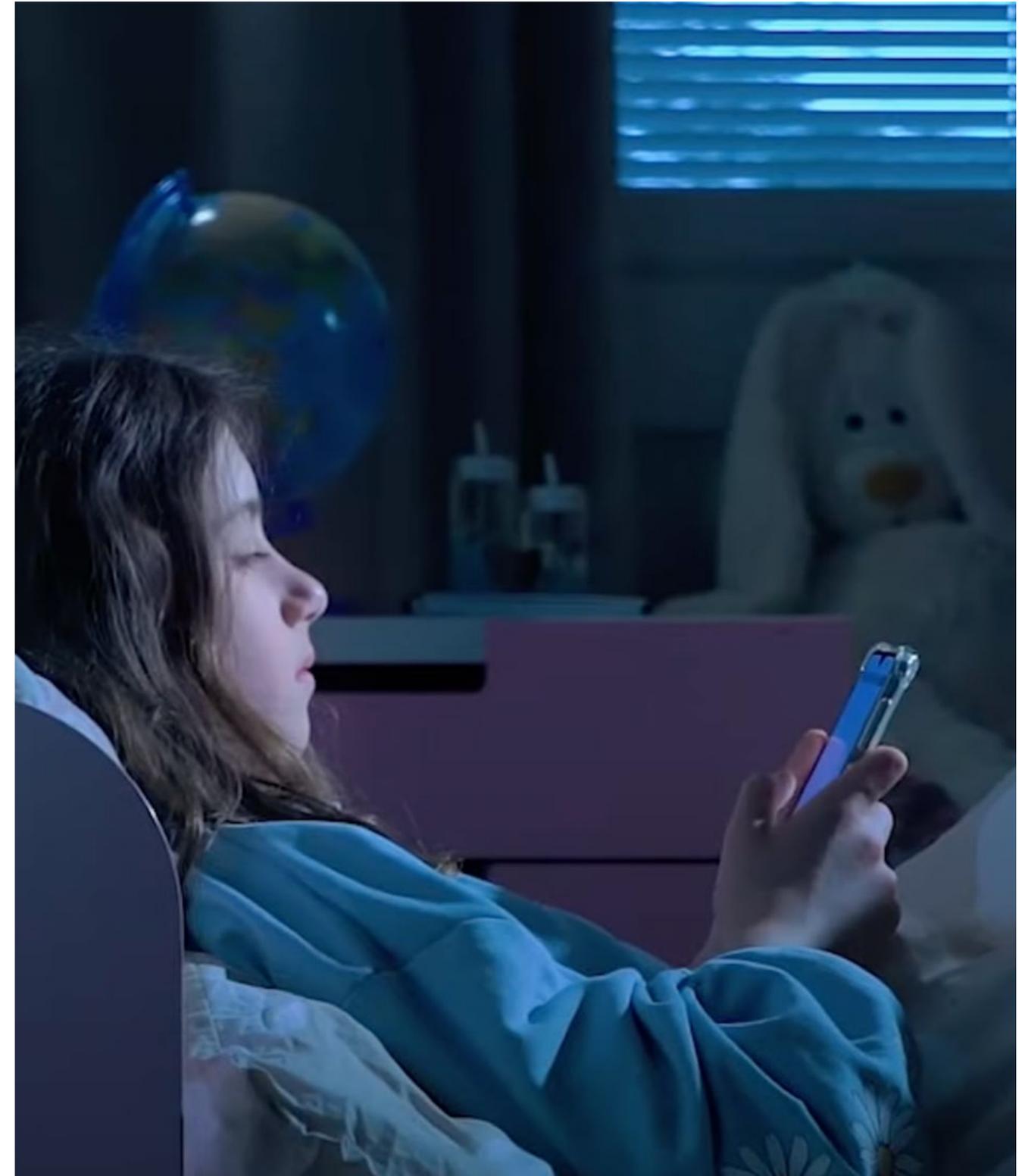
ARTICLE

RAN Practitioners Plenary: Setting the agenda for 2024

RAN
Practitioners
Staff

The RAN Practitioners Plenary, which gathers once a year, brought together practitioners actively engaged in the network in order to take stock of past achievements as well as discuss priorities for the year ahead. The RAN Practitioners Plenary 2023, 'Practitioners' voices and perspectives: achievements and challenges', which took place in Brussels in October, offered an opportunity to: address new topical angles in P/CVE; meet beyond the normal composition of the RAN Practitioners Working Groups; assess cross-cutting issues; and discuss the mental health of practitioners.

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ARTICLE
NEW PRACTITIONERS PLENARY SETS RAN THE GAP
AGENDA FOR 2024

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Emerging topics

The Plenary explored the current trends and topics of concern to RAN practitioners. These discussions were informed by a survey of network members conducted prior to the event, which found that the following topics were of most concern: current drivers for radicalisation; mainstreaming of violent right wing extremism; new digital technologies and online radicalisation; the mental health of practitioners and mental health aspects of P/CVE; and the impact of global events, such as Israel-Gaza, and geopolitical factors in P/CVE.

In break-out groups, participants at the event also had the opportunity to sit within their Working Group (and contribute to others) to set the agenda for each Working Group for the year ahead. Each Working Group produced a shortlist of relevant topics which will be explored through Working Group meetings and other activities in 2024. The final selection will be made in the coming weeks and the planned events will be published on the Calendar on the RAN Practitioners website in due course.

Message from the Commission

In his welcoming words, Olivier Onidi, Deputy Director-General, Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, European Commission, commended how RAN proved its fast reactivity and flexibility in shifting the focus on the P/CVE-related effects of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine over the course of the past year. With a view to the developments in Israel and Gaza at the time of the meeting, Mr Onidi expressed his shock and called on practitioners to remain flexible in their responses to the fallout of this situation.

Expressing the European Commission's gratitude for practitioners' continued dedication to informing the EU agenda, including the strategic orientations currently being drafted with the Member States, Mr Onidi highlighted some of the main topics to be addressed by the future EU Knowledge Hub in continuation of the RAN. These include the increased variety of extremist ideologies, the need to address mental health aspects, the imminent release of large numbers of (violent) extremist and terrorist offenders

"The Plenary explored the current trends and topics of concern to RAN practitioners. These discussions were informed by a survey of network members conducted prior to the event, which found that the following topics were of most concern: current drivers for radicalisation; mainstreaming of violent right wing extremism; new digital technologies and online radicalisation; the mental health of practitioners and mental health aspects of P/CVE; and the impact of global events, such as Israel-Gaza, and geopolitical factors in P/CVE."

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ARTICLE
**RAN PRACTITIONERS PLENARY: SETTING THE
AGENDA FOR 2024**

DEC 2023
2023

042—043

"In his welcoming words, Olivier Onidi, Deputy Director-General, Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs, European Commission, commended how RAN proved its fast reactivity and flexibility in shifting the focus on the P/CVE-related effects of the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine over the course of the past year. With a view to the developments in Israel and Gaza at the time of the meeting, Mr Onidi expressed his shock and called on practitioners to remain flexible in their responses to the fallout of this situation."

(VETOs) from prisons and the question of whether P/CVE prison programmes have in fact proven successful, acknowledging the importance of gender responsivity, and the continued need to consider the perspective of victims and survivors in P/CVE.

Finally, Mr Onidi stressed the importance of involving the new generation of practitioners by way of establishing RAN YOUNG, thanked the network for its efforts, and offered the prospect that meetings such as the Plenary and the involvement of practitioners therein will continue in the EU Knowledge Hub.

RAN FILM
RAN Practitioners Plenary

FILM
RAN PRACTITIONERS PLENARY

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044—045

A short film, which provides an overview of the RAN Practitioners Plenary, explores why the event matters, what the key points of discussion were and what the future holds. To do this, we spoke to a number of participants at the event, including the European Commission, Working group leads and a member of the RAN YOUNG Platform. You can watch the film about the Plenary event on the RAN Practitioners YouTube channel **here**.
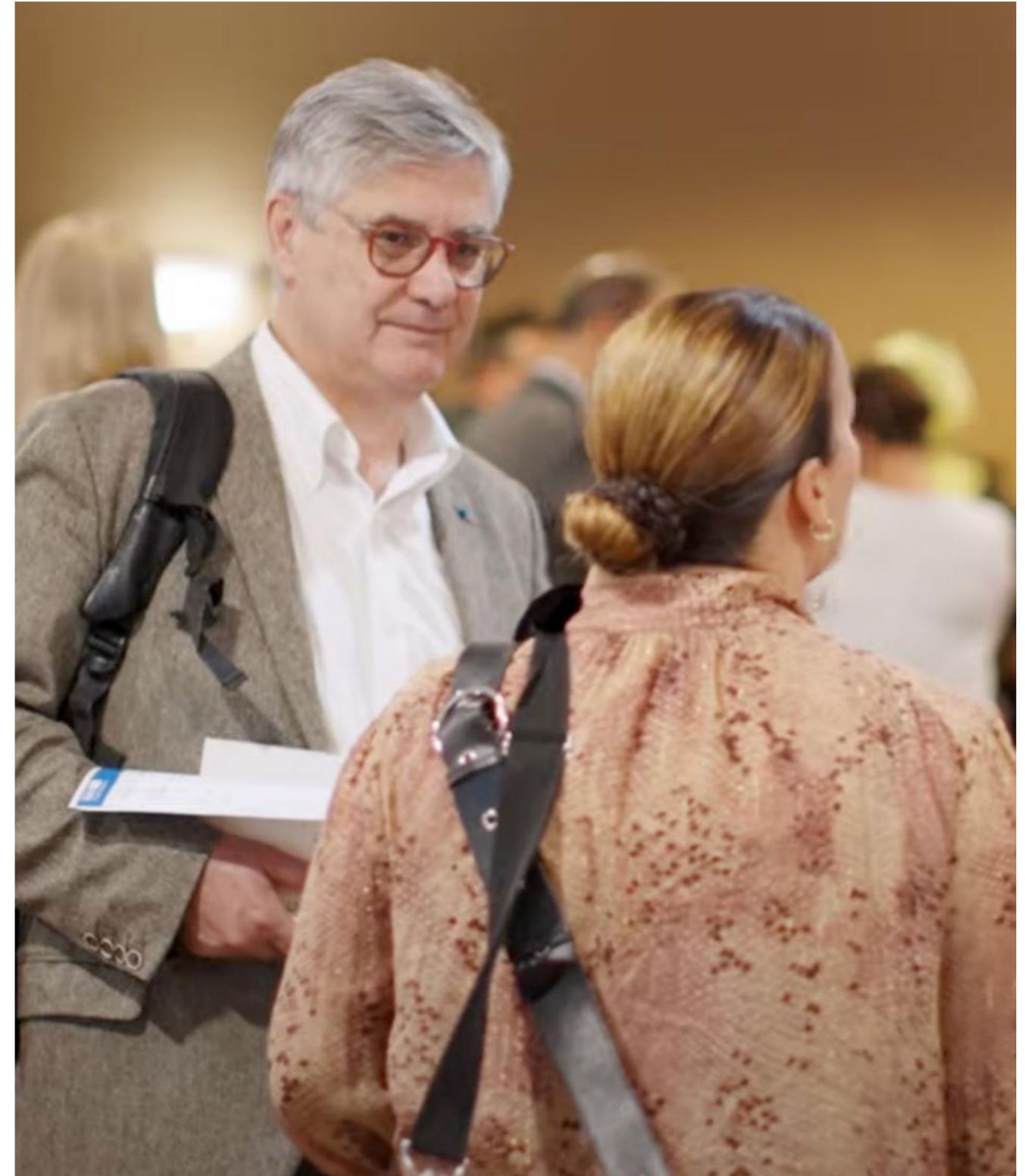
The discussions and outcomes of the RAN Practitioners Plenary have been summarised in a paper published on the RAN Practitioners website. The paper provides an overview of the opening presentation on the mental health of practitioners; a summary of the overarching topics for 2024; and a breakdown of the focus for each Working Group for next year. You can read the paper in full **here.**

15/11/2023
CONCLUSION PAPER
RAN Plenary
13 October 2023, Brussels, Belgium and online

RAN Practitioners Plenary 2023
Practitioners' voices and perspectives: achievements and challenges

Introduction

Annually, the RAN Practitioners Plenary convenes practitioners actively engaged in the network to discuss upcoming topics and challenges relevant to the RAN Working Groups and across the field of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) more broadly. This provides an opportunity to weigh in on the agenda for the year ahead.

This year marks a special occasion, as the RAN will transition into the new *EU Knowledge Hub on the Prevention of Radicalisation* in the second half of 2024, heralding a new phase of P/CVE in the EU and making the 2023 RAN Practitioners Plenary the last of its kind. The achievements made and the continued need to centre practitioners in P/CVE were therefore emphasised by the European Commission's Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG HOME) during the meeting.

Topics and priorities for the first half of 2024 were discussed and substantiated in small groups, including in an online group that was part of this year's Plenary's hybrid set-up, which allowed for streaming of most of the event.

Highlighting practitioners' voices, perspectives and, crucially, their well-being was central to the 2023 Plenary. The continued importance of mental health as a topic in P/CVE was underlined at various moments throughout the meeting.

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European Commission

RAN FILM
The View

FILM
THE VIEW

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048—049

In this year's episode of The View, our panel of experts – which includes Virginie Andre from the International Center for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT), Kelsey Bjornsgaard from the Strong Cities Network and Peter Neumann from the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR) – take a look at what's new, interesting and innovative in the world of P/CVE, including emerging threats that are of concern, such as the impact of the conflict in Gaza on communities in Europe. You can watch the programme in full on the RAN Practitioners YouTube channel **here**.

RAN PROFILES
RAN practitioners

PROFILES
RAN PROFILES

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050–051

RAN
Profiles

Virginie ANDRE

Virginie Andre is as a Senior Research Fellow in Strategic Communications at the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) and a RAN Policy Support and RAN Practitioners expert. Virginie has an expertise in terrorism and countering violent extremism, strategic communications, media and terrorism, and ethno-nationalism and conflict transformation. She has a particular interest in disengagement from violent extremism and youth radicalisation.

In the last fifteen years, Virginie has researched diverse communities in Europe, Northern America, Southeast Asia and Australia. She is regularly consulted as an expert by various institutions and develops and delivers trainings on counter violent extremism to government officials, media practitioners, front line practitioners (including military) and youth. In 2021, she joined the international editorial team of EXIT Germany Journal. She is also the co-founder of the Finnish NGO youth outreach organisation Kare. Virginie holds a PhD degree from Monash University and a degree in art therapy and life coaching.

Kelsey BJORNSGAARD

Kelsey Bjornsgaard is a member of the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD) and the Head of Practice for the Strong Cities Network where she develops training models and resources to enhance locally-led approaches to preventing and countering violent extremism. Kelsey delivers many of the events for the RAN YOUNG Platform.

Kelsey works closely with youth, civil society and national and local government actors to identify good practice, build critical capacities and drive cross-sectoral coordination to promote community-based solutions on a global scale. Kelsey leads the delivery of Strong Cities' youth pillar, Young Cities, and is driving work on National Local Cooperation. Kelsey holds a Master's in International Conflict Studies from King's College London and a Bachelor's in European Studies from the University of Oklahoma.
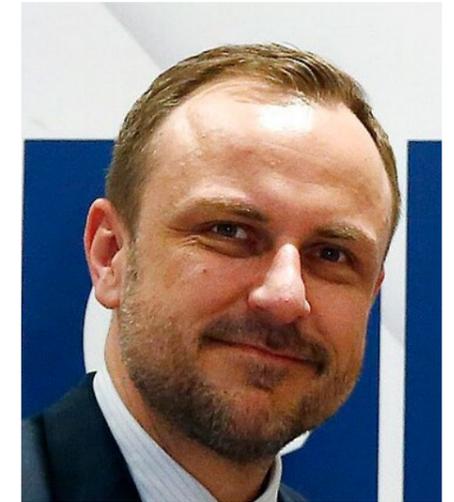
Peter Neumann

Dr Peter Neumann is Professor of Security Studies at the Department of War Studies, at King's College London and founded the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR), which he directed between 2008 and 2018. In 2017, he also served as the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe's (OSCE) Special Representative on Countering Violent Extremism. Peter is a RAN Policy Support expert.

Peter has authored or co-authored seven books, most recently Bluster: Donald Trump's War on Terror (Hurst and Oxford University Press, 2020). Previous books include Radicalized: New Jihadists and the Threat to the West (IB Tauris, 2016), Old and New Terrorism (Polity Press, 2009), The Strategy of Terrorism (with MLR Smith) (Routledge, 2008), and Britain's Long War: British Strategy in the Northern Ireland Conflict, 1969-98 (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003).

Interview:
The impact of the Israel-Hamas war
Magnus Ranstorp

We spoke with Magnus Ranstorp, Strategic Adviser at the Centre for Societal Security at the Swedish Defense University, Vice Chair of Nordic Safe Cities and Special Adviser to the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) Practitioners, about the impact of the conflict in Gaza on communities in

What makes the current conflict stand out from previous conflicts?

What happened on the 7th of October was no real surprise. It's been simmering for a long time. Yes, there have been wars, small wars, but it has been simmering and it has been coming to a boiling point... But the scale, scope and complexity of the operation – in which Hamas demolished Israel's communication systems through the use of drones dropping improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and thousands of militants streaming into an area that stretched all around Gaza, killing 1400 individuals and kidnapping 140 civilians – is something that we have not seen before.

Why is the conflict stirring such emotion among people in Europe?

It is difficult for the public not to be emotionally caught up in the conflict. But there are several things that they have to keep in mind. The first is that Israel has a right to defend itself against terrorism and the ongoing indiscriminate rocket fire, several thousands of rockets. The second issue is that you have to protect civilians, and civilian infrastructure must not be targeted. However, the difficulty is that Hamas is placing rocket systems within highly condensed civilian areas... You also must have humanitarian assistance. It's a terrible humanitarian situation. At the same time, that provision of humanitarian assistance may be used by Hamas, too. But humanitarian access is absolutely essential. Most of the people living there are hostage to this situation. And most of the civilian casualties are children.

How is the conflict impacting European countries and communities?

We are seeing the impact of the conflict boomeranging back into Europe. We are seeing mass protests, the scale of which we have never seen. First of all, anti-Semitism is skyrocketing. It's also becoming normalised. The threats against the Jewish Synagogues and Jewish communities have never really been higher. Secondly, we are seeing large numbers of people are turning out for the pro-Palestinian protests. In terms of what they are chanting, some of it is problematic. And it's leading

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to huge polarisation in society, all across Europe. How do you handle extreme emotion and extreme polarisation, in a conflict where there doesn't seem to be a middle ground? Either you are on one side or the other. And minority groups are in the middle of this.

Why are people taking sides and what are they saying?
It's easy to sympathise with Palestinians of course, because they are suffering. Some 2.3 million people are living in an area 40 kilometres long and just 16 kilometres wide, many of whom have been displaced. The narrative for some around the conflict is one of justice and injustice, a David and Goliath situation – the Palestinian people against the Israeli military that control these territories, while it is of course more complex than that – and young people will not remember the history and will not fully understand the conflict – I think everyone is against the war. Everyone is against conflict. Everyone is against human suffering.

What can we expect to see happen in the coming weeks and months?
This conflict is not going to be resolved in the near future. I fear that there will be much more suffering and much more death and destruction. And the interesting thing is that the regional situation can still get out of control. In the middle of this, you have extremist groups like Hezbollah and others who are stoking the fires by calling for Sharia law... Meanwhile, Western capitals will have to try to deal with the massive polarisation that we're seeing. Protest may get more violent. We might see more attacks against Jewish Synagogues and Jewish schools. We might also see increased Islamophobia, because it's now ramped up into Islamism and Hamas, and attacks against Mosques.

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If you would like to discover more about RAN Practitioners activity you can get in touch with the RAN Practitioners Staff, take a look at the **RAN Collection of Inspiring Practices** Collection or read through some of the latest **RAN papers.** We have included some of these papers in a carefully selected collection of interesting and relevant articles below.

RAN Practitioners (2023)
Involving victims/survivors of terrorism in P/CVE

RAN Practitioners (2023)
Ethical guidelines in P/CVE

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The future and position of local P/CVE strategies and approaches

RAN Practitioners (2023)
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