



17/05/2021

CONCLUSION PAPER

RAN event - Digital EU-USA study visit

24-25 March 2021, online

Transatlantic cooperation and exchange of experiences in P/CVE – Digital EU-USA study visit

Key outcomes

The digital EU-USA study visit that took place on 24-25 March 2021 brought together 57 practitioners, policymakers, researchers, and academics with the goal to discuss current challenges and share promising practices addressing racially and ethnically motivated violent extremism (REMVE, term used in the US) and violent right-wing extremism (VRWE, term used in the EU). Acknowledging the importance of transatlantic cooperation, RAN Practitioners together with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office for Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention (OTVTP) discussed common challenges and explored opportunities for further collaboration. Followed by the introductions of representatives from the European Commission's DG HOME, the US Department of State and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the presentations and the group discussions focused on the changing landscape of violent right-wing extremism, and the good practices of regional coordination and multi-agency cooperation.

Some of the highlights and key recommendations of the exchange were the following:

- Violent Right Wing Extremism (VRWE) has recently been identified as the greatest domestic security threat in the US and it poses a growing risk in the EU. In the past decade, VRWE movements have become increasingly connected internationally both online and offline. VRWE actors' ideological and demographic profiles have also become wider and more differentiated, making it more challenging to assess risk. Social media platforms are exploited by VRWE actors to recruit, inspire and spread disinformation. Due to a lack of data on current trends, the real size and nature of the problem is not fully understood.
- Key recommendations to tackle the above-described challenges include investing in research and regular international exchanges; exploring the strategic use of legal and administrative approaches to disrupt VRWE operations; working together with technology companies on content moderation strategies; employing specialised civil society organisations (CSOs) to advise and educate governments and other actors about current trends and designing information and counter-mobilization campaigns.

- Experts on both continents emphasized the importance of a comprehensive, interdisciplinary, multi-agency approach in prevent work. Common elements of this approach include capacity building locally by providing technical, financial and educational assistance; building on existing local structures; building trust and solid partnerships among stakeholders and applying a broader public safety approach.

Highlights of the discussion

The changing landscape of right-wing extremism: common challenges

Violent Right Wing Extremism is recently identified as the greatest threat to domestic security in the US and it poses a growing risk in Europe. The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified this trend with the increase of anti-Semitic and anti-governmental narratives, and with a rise in the activity of VRWE groups. People have also become more isolated, leading to an exacerbation of the influence of online platforms and echo chambers. A common conclusion is that current definitions and approaches to tackle VRWE are not sufficient to address the newly emerging challenges. Some of these challenges include:

(1) Transnational connectivity of VRWE movements

In the past decade VRWE movements have become increasingly connected internationally both online and offline. VRWE-affiliated groups and individuals travel to inspire and mimic one another across borders. VRWE hubs cooperate internationally to organize marches, paramilitary trainings, and access ammunition. The size and the professionalism of these groups are also remarkably greater. In Germany, for instance, VRWE groups build infrastructure and financial power by commercial activities and by organizing music festivals and violent sport events transnationally. Moreover, a shift in the narrative from “nation” to “race” allows previously opposing extremist groups to unite and create alliances beyond borders.

(2) Revisiting definitions

Classic definitions of VRWE and white supremacy need to be revisited in order to describe and map newly emerging threats. Violent right-wing extremist actors’ ideological and demographic profile has become wider and more differentiated. Subjects of radicalisation include lone actors, groups, organisations, and networks, as well as political parties. Examples of insider threats have also been identified in both continents as former and active military or law enforcement personnel became motivated and involved in right-wing extremism. Due to the recent diversification of actors, risk assessment has become more challenging. VRWE movements exploiting online platforms and modern technologies

(3) VRWE movements exploiting online platforms and modern technologies

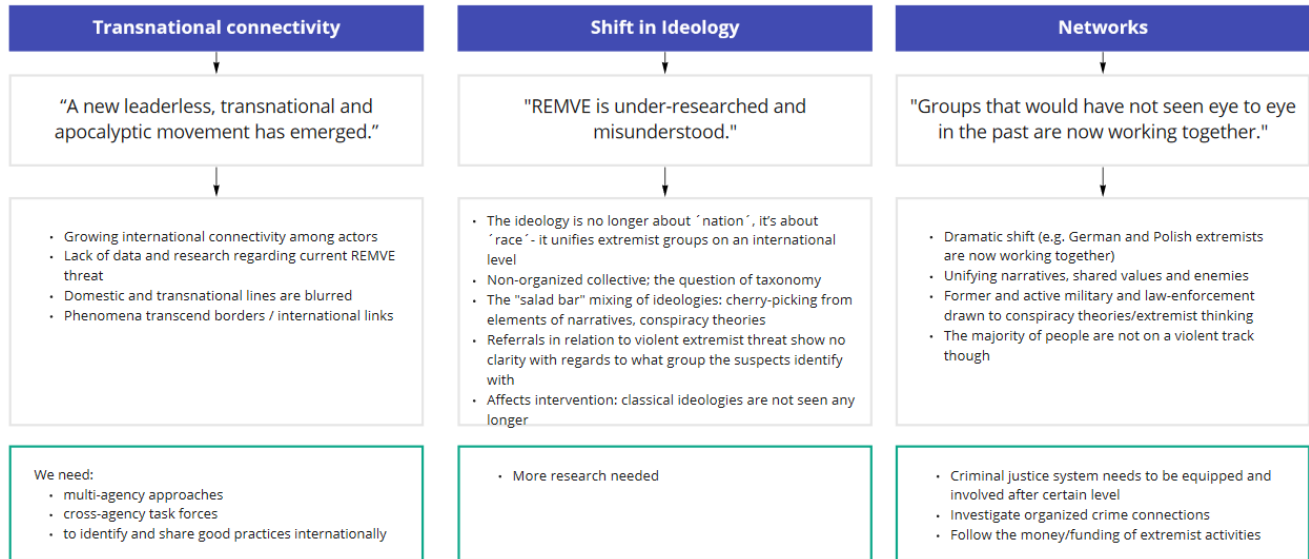
Online activities of VRWE groups are essential to their operations. Social media platforms are used in a wide variety of ways from recruitment to coordination, through spreading propaganda and disinformation aiming to inspire others to justify and commit violence (e.g., by live-streaming attacks). VRWE movements across the world capitalize on the anti-vaccination protests, they form alliances to spread extremist ideologies and to mobilise people against governments to create distrust. Recruiting young people via gaming platforms has also emerged as a new challenge.

(4) Lack of data on current VRWE phenomena

There was a common conclusion that the new VRWE trends are currently under-researched and there is no sufficient data to understand the real size and nature of the problem. Understanding the online and offline milieus is the first step to form effective responses.

Changing landscape in VRWE / REMVE

based on research by the Counter Extremism Project (2020) and The Soufan Group (2019)



Multi-agency approaches in preventing violent extremism

European and U.S. policymakers and practitioners emphasized that a comprehensive, interdisciplinary, multi-agency approach is key in PVE. This entails establishing multi-level operational structures that involve various stakeholders from governmental authorities to local actors (e.g. local governments, schools, police, mental health providers, social workers, CSOs, parents) and providing resources as well as coordination platforms and processes. Although multi-agency cooperation can take a variety of forms, experts on both continents identified key common elements of effectiveness as follows:

- **Empowering communities locally.** Long-lasting, sustainable prevention programmes can only be running by local actors who know the field. Therefore, local capacity needs to be built and strengthened by providing technical, financial, and educational resources. Local actors play a key role in early risk detection as well as in providing tailored interventions.
- **Building on existing local programmes and structures.** Instead of applying a top-down approach, identifying already existing good local practices, and building on them together with the local actors leads to sustainable outcomes. In the US context, for instance, pockets of excellence can be school safety teams, law enforcement crisis intervention teams or mental health teams.
- **Involving local CSOs** to the prevention work, such as houses of worship, refugee settlement organisations, neighbourhood organisations, or other expert organisations that offer, for example, exit programmes.
- **All forms of violent extremism** need to be monitored and addressed.
- **Building trust and solid partnerships** among stakeholders.
- **Applying a broader public safety approach** is favourable. This includes awareness raising and education about violent extremism as well as bullying and hate crime prevention. Stakeholders need to be trained to identify signs of radicalisation and to understand risk and protective factors. They also need to be aware of referral systems and available resources so that they can act upon witnessing risk signs.

In the U.S. context, multi-agency cooperation is implemented through the Local Prevention Framework (LPF) where the above-mentioned principles are applied. Following a broader community engagement model, a whole of society approach is adopted. Its goal is to build solid partnerships and to provide educational assistance to all key societal

stakeholders from parents, schools, mental health providers and social workers to law enforcement and other public authorities. The LPF operates within a public health framework in the following areas: strategic engagement, policy and research, education, and field operations. Inspiring European examples of multi-agency cooperation are, for instance, the Youth Crime Prevention Coordination Model of the city of Oslo and Hesse's regional coordination model for returning terrorist fighters. The latter operates on a state level bringing together all stakeholders, providing resources, communication platforms, coordination, and oversight.

Participants reinforced the need for further transnational collaboration and explored opportunities regarding future cooperation between the US and the EU.

Recommendations

Recommendations regarding the common challenges of changing landscapes for policy makers and practitioners:

- Prioritise the in-depth understanding of the current VRWE threat pictures and their different online and offline sub milieus in the EU and the US by encouraging research and regular international exchanges.
- Create a common non-binding working definition of VRWE that grasps the changing landscape with the heterogeneity of actors, groups, ideologies, and operations in order to better describe and map emerging threats.
- Identify good practices and lessons learnt from 20 years of experience of P/CVE and counterterrorism (CT) measures (focused also on Islamist extremism and terrorism) and investigate the transferability of approaches.
- Re-examine and update the international CT framework adapted to the new terrorism landscape.
- Explore the strategic use of legal and administrative approaches to disrupt national and international VRWE operations. This may include banning VRWE groups domestically and investigating funding sources, organised crime connections as well as legal activities (e.g., taxes, fire code violations) of VRWE movements.
- Employ specialised CSOs to educate and advise governments, other CSOs, and citizens regarding current online and offline trends.
- Work together with technology companies with the goal of preventing extremists having access to social media platforms and taking down violence propagating content. Develop guidance for companies about safe online spaces (e.g., creating a list of VRWE symbols and narratives for awareness raising and content moderation).
- Adapt the legislative framework so that terrorist content can be removed quickly with the help of the authorities.
- Employ specialised expertise to design information and counter-mobilization campaigns. The internationally operating NGO Moonshot CVE that analyses audiences consuming extremist content, conspiracy theories and disinformation and designs online counter-information interventions to de-escalate ideologically motivated violence exemplifies a good practice.

Recommendations concerning regional coordination:

- Build trust and solid networks between actors. Discuss expectations and establish a shared understanding of responsibilities among stakeholders.
- Provide a platform (e.g., in form of regular roundtable meetings) to discuss cases. Create efficient processes of information exchange.
- Information sharing between actors: create protocols about sensitive information sharing.
- Sustainability: aim for long-term resources to maintain programs sustainably. Create knowledge sharing and knowledge transfer processes.
- Build competence and confidence among practitioners through trainings and by establishing practitioner networks.

Relevant practices

1. The Regional Prevention Coordinators are part of the DHS Office for Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention (OTVTP). The main aim is to form partnerships between whole-of-society stakeholders and all levels of government, to build local prevention frameworks, through technical, financial, and educational assistance. For more information, see: [Overview of Community Engagement in Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention \(TVTP\)](#).
2. Returnee coordinators in Hesse serve as central interface for security authorities, public bodies, local communities, as well as CSOs. These coordinators are responsible for the multidisciplinary case processing, networking, information gathering and transfer, as well as organising roundtable meetings. For more information, see: [RAN Digital Study visit Returnee coordinators in Germany, visit to Hesse and Berlin, 23-24 June 2020](#).
3. SaLTo is a collaborative model between the City of Oslo and Oslo Police District regarding the prevention of crime among young people aged 12–22 years; its main objectives are coordination of crime prevention, reducing juvenile crime, reducing substance abuse, and preventing hate crime and violent extremism. For more information, see: <https://www.oslo.kommune.no/english/>.

Follow up

Participants agreed on the importance and need of continuing international exchanges. Opportunities of knowledge sharing in the following areas have been identified:

- Building regional/local networks of practitioners
- How to effectively raise awareness / training programs
- Definitions e.g. on violent right wing extremism / racially and ethnically motivated violent extremism
- Share interventions and strategies on dealing with VRWE/REMVE online and offline (e.g. freedom of speech vs incitement)
- Share online and offline exit practices
- How to effectively incorporate mental health issues in P/CVE interventions and strategies

Further reading

Counter Extremism Project (2020). [Violent Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism – Transnational Connectivity, Definitions, Incidents, Structures and Countermeasures](#). Counter Extremist Project.

Department of Homeland Security, [Office for Targeted Violence and Terrorism Prevention](#).

Moonshot CVE Report (2021). From Shitposting to Sedition. Tracking and countering conspiracy theories, disinformation and violence around the 2020 presidential elections, <https://moonshotcve.com/from-shitposting-to-sedition/>.

Pasternack, A., (2021). [One secret weapon against extremism: Google ads promoting mindfulness](#). Fast Company.

The Soufan Center. (2021). [Quantifying the Q Conspiracy: A Data-Driven Approach to Understanding the Threat Posed by Qanon](#).

The Soufan Center (2020). [IntelBrief: The Rising Threat of Right Wing Extremism in the United Kingdom](#).

The Soufan Center. (2019). [White Supremacy Extremism: The Transnational Rise of the Violent White Supremacist Movement](#).

UK Home Office: Prevent duty toolkit for local authorities and partner agencies. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prevent-duty-toolkit-for-local-authorities-and-partner-agencies>, September 2018.