PROPOSED POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE
HIGH LEVEL CONFERENCE

FROM THE RAN INT/EXT WORKING GROUP *(DECEMBER 2012)*

"The views expressed in this document are purely those of the RAN working group and may not in any circumstances be regarded as stating an official position of the European Commission"

1.   Introduction

The purpose of the Working Group (WG) is to provide a cross-sector platform that brings government and non-government experts together to better understand and address the problem of "foreign fighters" in the context of preventing and countering violent extremism. By identifying and engaging vulnerable people and groups at the community-level (including spiritual leaders and mass organizations) in Europe and in third countries (internal/external), that have the legitimacy, credibility and expertise necessary to marginalize and discredit the narratives associated with violent extremism and generate a positive paradigm, which facilitates social harmony and cohesion within EU members states and abroad. The WG aims to raise awareness, share good practice and to develop policy prescriptive recommendations for the European Union in order to help the EU take action at the internal and external level to reduce the threat of terrorism. The main goal of the RAN INT/EXT working group is reduction of operating space for violent extremist through increasing the operating capacity of countervailing powers. Both measures apply internally within Europe and externally in hotspots identified.

2.   Analysis of radicalisation leading to violent extremism, from the perspective of the WG

The most concrete finding of the WG is that "radicalisation toward violent extremism" is a particularly ill- defined term and while many definitions abound there is rarely consensus on what this term actually entails in reality. Above all radicalisation toward violent extremism is a process of an individual that leads to the conviction that violence is the single effective option to get a political message across.

The RAN INT/EXT practitioner workshops during 2012, combined with an initial study on foreign fighters in the EU[I] underscored the complexity of estimating the magnitude of foreign fighter phenomenon. It became also clear that there are different push/pull reasons why individuals radicalise, decide to depart for conflict zones and engage in violence.

While this process is triggered by different motivational factors in different circumstances it is generally propelled through socialisation, framing of injustice and perceptions of collective exclusion in political or other terms. Narratives and brokers of violence generally play a role and, last but not least, ideology can serve as a structural frame for the radicalising individual. Dehumanization of the opponent is a crucial part of the final step in the process to justification of targeted or random violence.

[I] Hennessy, Orla, *"The Case of Foreign Fighters in Europe ",* ICCT - The Hague (July 2012)

However, it should be borne in mind that there are many individuals who will identify with many or all of these characteristics and yet not turn toward violent extremism. Furthermore there is no one "profile' of an individual who will turn toward violent extremism. While there are certain abstract characteristics which can be identified in those turning toward violence/terrorism such as the above mentioned political/socioeconomic factors, ideological factors, social factors or personal factors we should be extremely wary of profiling individuals or groups. In doing so this may in fact contribute to the process of radicalisation.

Analysing radicalisation leading to violent extremism from the specific perspective of this WG, one should consider as factors of influence on the process of radicalisation inter *alia:* (the perception of) a country's foreign policy; (the perception of) a country's domestic policy toward immigrant communities and minority groups; identification of a diaspora community with other members outside of the country that are (perceived to be) excluded or unjustly treated; (being torn between) multiple identities; shared spaces without borders (e.g. the internet, identification with likeminded individuals across the globe, etc.); the portrayed heroism of those traveling abroad and becoming foreign fighters; returning foreign fighters (both in terms of the danger they pose to society themselves and their role in influencing violent radicalisation among others); and 'imported' conflicts between and among ethno-cultural communities.

With this in mind the WG recognises the dangers of specifically highlighting diaspora groups but feels this is addressed within the below text in terms of support mechanisms and communications recommendations.

3. Best and worst practices, related to the focus of the WG

Several institutions and organisations were identified as positive models of good practices with specific reference to working within either diaspora communities or family/relatives of foreign fighters. Effective methodologies should be replicated in some of these cases across the INT/EXT contexts in partnership with suitable local NGOs and civil society partners. Below is a limited selection of projects which encompass some examples of good practices related specifically to internal/ external factors of radicalisation:

• The RecoRA institute in Birmingham is working to challenge dominant voices within insular diaspora communities by working with groups of 8 (approx.) people to stand up to those who may be calling for or inciting radicalisation. The group model provides security for those individuals and enables them a greater ability to speak up.

• Sisters Against Violent Extremism (a Women without Borders initiative) connects women, whether mothers, wives or sisters of those who have turned to violent extremism, to empower these women and to challenge narratives of violent extremism.

• The Unity Initiative in London uses respected Islamic scholars to de-construct violent extremist Jihadi narratives. The organisation reduces incendiary language to its original roots using skilled linguists. The Unity Initiative has mechanism to monitor and measure its success rate when attempting de-radicalisation or rehabilitation programmes, this is a good practices that should be widespread.

• Arbeitsstelle Islamismus und Ultranationalismus (ASTIU) (Center for Islam and ultra-nationalism) in Germany works with families and relatives of those who turn to violent extremism. They are one of the only organisations in Germany working in this field to help prevent and counsel those vulnerable members of communities who may be susceptible toward violent extremism.

- Khudi is a counter-extremism social movement working to promote a democractic culture in Pakistan. Its work involves promoting respect for differences in society and fostering critical thinking skills and debates about pluralism, progress and democratic values.

- Kenya Muslim Youth Alliance (KMYA) incorporates 153 youth-led community-based organisations in Kenya where it works on capacity-building programs for youth leadership and counter- radicalisation initiatives.

Some examples of lessons learned that were raised during the WG meetings:

- It is important to deal with cultural sensitivities when dealing with insular communities and show understanding of their background and (perceived) grievances.
- Solutions must implicitly recognise multiple identities where they exist.
- Intervention and de-radicalisation efforts are generally more effective when an emotional connection is established first by someone with authority based on influence, prior to tackling ideological or religious arguments.
- Politicians need to be careful not to hijack terms that should be open to debate.
- Practice what you preach: foreign and domestic policies should be in line with each other and in line with public statements by governments and its politicians. Discrepancies must be explained clearly and convincingly, to prevent (the perception of) double standards.
- Politicians/governments make mistakes about who delivers the narratives and when, and can lack sensitivity which can be counterproductive to efforts on the ground - this should be borne in mind
- Community police officers, municipal practitioners, social/youth workers and other local actors need to be attuned to the problem of radicalisation leading to violent extremism and have clear procedures to report suspected cases.
- Avoid collectively labelling communities but rather speak of communities - a complex ecology - that experience different levels of dislocation and insularity and which requires differentiated targeted approaches and engagement. This is important both in public statements and in policy design.
- Avoid using just *any* former but rather differentiate their skill sets, approach and reach within local communities.
- Always operate under the do not harm principle.

4.   Policy recommendations, from the perspective of the WG

The WG noted a stark difference in policy recommendations that would be conducted on both the micro and macro levels. From the EU level or national government (macro) level, strategies to prevent and counter radicalisation leading toward violent extremism involve big symbolic gestures, using comprehensive coordinated media strategies, public relations, role models, language and branding. At the ground (micro) level i.e. local practitioners require context-specific tailor-made programmes using credible, knowledgeable, well trained actors and messengers, with (often invisible) support from the macro level. All policies should be mutually reinforcing and coordinated with each other. What follows below is a list of policy recommendations and practical suggestions, separated per topic. The list is non- exhaustive and not every recommendation is applicable to every context: it should be read as to provide inspiration for tailor-made and context specific policy solutions.

4 a. The role of local actors/civil society in preventing violent extremism. from the perspective of the WG

- **De-construct violent extremist narratives using linguistics and knowledgeable scholars in de- and counter-radicalisation**
Using the example of the abovementioned Unity Initiative, knowledgeable local actors can reconstruct identity and provide a more humanistic point of view to counter the individual or group mentality of the radicalised extremist. It is important to change uniform perceptions and re-contextualise extremists' experience. A useful tool is de-constructing the multiple languages and narratives to their original roots. Another is to emphasise the humanistic element of faith and highlight humanity as a whole, not the individual.

- **Identify and engage INT/EXT de-and counter-radicalisation actors and facilitate exchange and unified platforms of religious authority figures**
Identify and engage INT/EXT actors (including spiritual leaders and mass organisations such as the Nahdlatul Ulama) that have the legitimacy, credibility and expertise necessary to: a) marginalise and discredit the narratives associated with violent extremism; and b) generate a positive paradigm, which facilitates social harmony and cohesion within EU Member States and abroad. This could be utilised by e.g. uniting Nahdlatul Ulama (on macro level) with Unity Initiative (micro leve with LibForAll foundation guidance.

- **Establishment of local or regional support networks for indirect support of women and families of prospective and departed 'foreign fighters'**
The German ASTIU's work and methodologies for local communities should be evaluated, prioritised and made available for local communities as it focus solely on the role of supporting family members who are better equipped at influencing other family members who are considering leaving for a conflict zone. This low-cost intervention program never engages with individuals who have crossed the threshold towards violence - it only supports those closest to them.

4 b. The role of diasporas in the process of violent radicalisation. from the perspective of the WG

- **Develop educational material and two-way youth exchanges to tackle perception of idealised homeland and perception of conflicts for diaspora youth**
At the micro level use local actors in the community to instigate contextualised programmes aimed at diaspora communities looking specifically at conflicts in their home countries, particularly for instance with reference to the Arab Spring or the Syrian civil war. Some diaspora youths have a significantly distorted perception of their parent's country of origin and the nature of associated conflicts, their causes, dynamics and human costs. Disconnect between realities and what they perceive may complicate double alienation of diaspora youths and feed into binary choices.

- **Provide psychological counselling to traumatised families and youths**
Many traumatised family members and specifically youths have experienced intense violence and are in state of shock and severe dislocation from what they experienced in conflict zones. Use local actors at the micro level to provide timely and sufficient psychological support. This should be extended immediately on their arrival and done by assessing individual needs. Youths are particularly vulnerable and traumatised, which can help both radicalisation and recruitment into violent extremism. At the macro level, media campaigns can be utilised to advertise such services and outlets.

- **Enhance parenting skills of diaspora youths and communication skills between parents and the second generation**

  This can be done by expanding programmes such as the SAVE model (mentioned above), using, for instance, females within the diaspora community to communicate this message. Take women of strong agency to promote connections/ positive stories and engage them in reconciliation. Promote women groups cross border connections: within the EU, and also without from Somalia, Pakistan/ Yemen where possible. Women have an easy and strong agency to promote commonality as mothers and sisters. The Pakistan Women's Coalition Against Extremism and Somalia's Women Against Extremism are good examples of NGOs for further engagement on this issue.

- **Foster youth entrepreneurship and exchanges with diaspora communities**

  Successful pathways exist for connecting and fostering social enterprise and connecting diaspora exchange on the role of mentoring. The YES (Youth Engagement network) network in Pakistan is a useful model on social entrepreneurship in educational establishments. In the UK, the Prince's Trust conducts funding for projects that foster positive, voluntary activism. Similarly, youth exchanges between **the** Somali Minneapolis community and those in EU would provide inspiration for social entrepreneurship.

- **Engage dialogue and cooperation between Somali clan elders. religious authorities and police**

4c. The role of communications/the Internet and elsewhere. from the perspective of the WG

Research and practical experience shows that language and communication efforts are critical in fostering trust and in shaping relationships and partnerships. It requires great sensitivity and measured judgement as insensitive, divisive or politicised language can be counterproductive, actually serving to create an atmosphere of polarisation, tension, and extremism in society. Avoiding framing diaspora communities as problems or assigning blame is essential. Similarly, relationships built on trust and partnership cannot be created over night but rather are built on sustained, step-by-step dialogues over non-security related issues that matter to the community on a day-to-day basis. It is crucial to be seen to be, and actually be, interested and supportive.

- **Undertake deliberate EU and government led strategies making intolerance unacceptable immediately**

  Discrimination against Islamists or diaspora communities should be addressed and deliberately targeted like homophobia and like racism have been over the last three decades. It is crucial to challenge the public narratives/ discredit them and re-brand positive activism. For example, the Arab Spring is a positive example of young Muslim youth peacefully revolting. Promote this, change the "violent Muslim narrative" and do not miss the moment which is evaporating. High profile activities to turn discrimination into totally unacceptable, using the media as one part also using symbols, role models, women, public relations.

- **Establish definitions and reclaim extremist appropriated terminology**

  Language matters greatly in achieving community buy-in to any initiatives. Crucial at the macro level is to avoid contentious labels. It is essential to avoid the trap of framing the issue as a religious conflict or as purely a religious issue. It is important to educate governments and civil society about terms and reclaim true meaning. For example, in terms of counter-narratives, "jihadism" is itself the original counter- narrative to the more mainstream interpretation of Islam. The term "formers" is also problematic: a former, has in fact returned to the norm. But what norm, whose norm? "Radical" itself is relative, usually relative to mainstream opinion, the rule of law or government. It is not in and of itself a negative term.

- **Creation of EU RAN Kite Mark**

  The EU ought to consider creating a counter-terrorism 'kite mark' that identifies and recognises those NGOs whose work is of particular interest and success in the delivery of national governments' strategies on the local level. This kite mark is achieved by building a list of organisations whose efforts are particularly noteworthy or represent a 'best in class' capability - not to fully support them politically as EU, but to praise their on-going efforts and promising future. Civil society groups, intervention providers and organisations recognised by RAN would be able to carry the EU kite mark as a matter of pride. The mark, represented by the efforts of the RAN network, will then be able to organise any number of sharing initiatives i.e. conferences which national governments will participate in. This exercise could serve as the basis of the networks efforts to deliver a mutually reinforcing platform for governments to engage with NGOs to share information and best practice and to build a sustained dialogue about challenges and solutions.

- **Public Advocacy**

  Create an EU wide Public Advocacy capability which delivers daily news content for broadcast, print and online channels which vividly shows the 'reconciled reality' of life in diaspora communities and community perspectives abroad. The concept is based on the simple idea that communities are already engaged in thousands of events every day which are not communicated to our target audiences and which reflect a more 'reconciled' existence with the 'West'. At the core of this strategy is to confront extremists' assertion that the 'West is at war with Islam' by aggressively framing our reality, and showing how communities are addressing the psychological needs of belonging, status and meaning. It recognises that existing structures (e.g. NGOs) poses neither the capacity nor the quality to bring this reality to life.

- **Media Production**

  Work with media agencies which proactively make film and TV material for broadcast channels which reach target audiences. This TV and film initiative could identify stories which challenge the extremist version of the world and how in 'hard to reach' countries material is abundantly available. This material could focus on for instance the al Qaeda story and how it is failing to deliver on its promises to the Muslim world. Many governments are unable to commission production of programming. The EU could offer these capabilities and resources to help make this possible. Channels which reach our most vulnerable audiences do not have the resources to commission the more expensive elements of the production required for this type of programming.

- **On-line Channel**

  Create an innovative online platform designed to provide pathways away from extremism for at-risk individuals. Using a combination of social media engagement strategies like crowd sourcing and peer-to- peer outreach efforts, this proven methodology provides the strategic long term means to help person reinforcing ideologue exclusion encouraged by radical propagandists and recruiters.

- **Communicate to the public/communities/vulnerable groups about the realities of war within EU and in key transit countries (Pakistan. Kenya. Turkey. etc.)**

- **Develop national public forums debating foreign policy and provide a public outlet for grievances**

- **Highlight the experience of exploited and disillusioned foreign fighters returning home**

  Several successful news stories surrounding the harsh conditions on the frontline of conflict zones and rudimentary experience and difficult life in training camps (especially for families) can act as effective deterrent for travelling in the first instance. For example, the Human Rights Watch report on al-Shabaab's extensive use of forced recruitment of children should be more extensively used to reveal human rights abuses by terrorist groups.

- **Utilising the voices of Former Fighters to de-construct narratives**

  The WG identified former fighters as particularly credible messengers to both help prevent others/ vulnerable youth from becoming radicalised and to help in the de-radicalisation and rehabilitation on return. Using practitioners at the micro level to identify suitable and able formers the EU should collect these voices and work with them. Against Violent Extremism (AVE) is an organisation that utilises 85 formers to provide differing types of engagement when it comes to combating violent extremism including education initiatives and front line interventions. Such a model could be expanded in various member states and network and education exchanges could be organised as part of a macro communications initiative and also on the ground in micro settings.

  Formers of differing types can play a role at various levels when it comes to combating violent extremism: *1) Educating youth* about the nature of violent extremist groups and building resilience. Formers are uniquely suited to this role as they are credible messengers; 2) Front *line interventions* with those considered to be at risk of joining extremist groups or those who are already in such groups. As above, formers are uniquely suited to this role as they are credible messengers; 3) *Training law enforcement* and community workers to ensure they are more effective in their work. Important to note that this does not mean acting as an informant. Formers are uniquely suited to this role as they are experts in the operation of their respective groups; 4) Advising policy *makers* on probably efficacy of policies designed to counter violent extremism.

A survey of 85 AVE formers suggests several pathways for increased and more effective engagement of formers:

- Demonstrate a willingness to engage with formers at all levels by relaxing some of the more stringent rules on working with individuals with criminal records.
- Create educational and treatment opportunities for formers and assist them in finding jobs
- Proactively recruit formers early in the "stage of change" process. This will allow for closer supervision of former over a longer period of time to help gauge sincerity and commitment to change but may also provide incentive to stay the course for the former.
- Formalize a "formers" group/organization that can help track formers and progress, recruitment, screen, etc
- Create a waiting list for formers who can apply for pardons, amnesty, etc.. .who with certain references, completed deeds and works, predetermined waiting period and support can be considered for reconciliation process quickly (expedited)
- Pair formers who have been screened and assessed properly with high level officials (mentors) on task force(s) when creating prevention and intervention programs
- Consider funding private organizations to provide training to groups and NGOs led by formers.
- AVE recommends further EU study of the Los Angeles Violence Intervention Training Academy (LAVITA) as an example of a formalised, successful programme which screens, trains and utilises formers.

4d. The role of education/training from the perspective of the WG

- **De-constructing the narratives for youth using two-way school exchanges from EU abroad and for those abroad to diaspora communities in EU.**

- **Provide risk assessment and education about extremism and vulnerability to foreign students**

- **Trainings for state institutions**
  Using practitioners (including formers/women's groups/religious scholars/psychologists and academics) provide trainings for sectors of the member state e.g. politicians, police officers/prison

wardens/ teachers etc. and up to date materials on radicalisation leading toward violent extremism. Providing continually updated material on the root causes of violent extremism to help understanding of those who may be in a position to prevent the phenomenon or rehabilitate those returning from abroad (or equally from prison).

- **Trainings for consulates abroad**
  It should be borne in mind that European Foreign Fighters will be active in external countries. Embassies and consulates should be educated about the phenomenon in order to be able to respond appropriately should the situation arise.

4e. The role of the uprisings in MENA, Syria, and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, from the perspective of the WG

The working group identified the MENA region and particularly the on-going civil war in Syria as especially relevant to its work. The region was deemed the biggest risk and in future will provide large numbers of well trained, psychologically vulnerable people returning to the EU from conflict. The situation was likened to Afghanistan in the 1980s and practitioners underscored the importance of learning lessons from this period. Individuals undertaking such trips may not necessarily start out as violent extremists but there is a distinct likelihood that a person may become radicalised towards violent extremism while undertaking such a trip. The fluid nature of the uprisings also means that should someone join a unit of the rebel opposition in Syria for instance, the following week that unit may be taken over by a branch of al Qaeda or similar organisation - as those listed terror organisations operating in Syria are proving to be the best armed and best trained. This situation dramatically increases the likelihood that someone starting out with potentially radical views but not necessarily a violent ideology may be indoctrinated and as such radicalised toward violent extremism.

With particular reference to this situation the EU should immediately consider:
- Facilitate an EU-meeting to establish a baseline assessment of the problem of foreign fighters in this region with a view to discuss policy options and the potential role of civil society, new initiatives and contingencies to mitigate the flow and return of foreign fighters.
- An outlet should be created to provide up to date information on the situation in Syria/ Libya and to provide opportunities to help from the home country. Such as, for instance, contributing money to aid workers on the ground or to provide assistance to the many displaced refugees. Such an outlet could be funded by the EU but undertaken and managed at the micro level by a knowledgeable experienced practitioner or aid organisation.
- Establishment of mechanisms to provide psychological counselling and other forms of support to those members from the affected diaspora communities and/or those returning should be implemented immediately. Again, this could be funded by the EU and undertaken by local practitioners per member state.