SPOTLIGHT

2022 THE YEAR IN REVIEW

DEC 2022





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2022 THE YEAR IN REVIEW EDITORIAL In 2022, the violent extremist threat has continued to evolve. This year has seen a number of major socio- and geo-political events which have impacted communities right across the EU, such as: the end of the COVID-19 pandemic, an outbreak of monkeypox, the ongoing war in Ukraine, a number of terrorist attacks, the continued spread of disinformation and conspiracy narratives, the worsening energy crisis, a new inflation crisis and rising interest rates. Such events have, among other things, resulted in socio-economic distress, an increase in polarisation and distrust in authorities. These factors, combined with the evolution in digital technologies, have given new opportunities to violent extremists to reach, engage, radicalise and recruit vulnerable individuals.

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 an update on 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 RAN Plenary, the RAN YOUNG platform, and RAN in the Western Balkans.

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 ran@radaradvies.nl

RAN Practitioners Staff

03

08

10

12

18

24

EDITORIAL

THE YEAR IN REVIEW

FILM Introduction to RAN

INFOGRAPHIC
RAN Practitioners in numbers

ARTICLE

The changing security landscape

ARTICLE

The evolving P/CVE challenges in 2022

SPOTLIGHT **Ukraine**

26

28

36

38

40

42

PAPER

Digital frontrunners: Online P/CVE work

FEATURE

RAN YOUNG —

Disseminating a youth
message

FILM

RAN YOUNG

PAPER

RAN YOUNG: Youth Review Panel

ARTICLE

European Remembrance Day for Victims of Terrorism INFOGRAPHIC

RAN in the Western Balkans

44

46

48

58

60

62

PAPER

Violent Right-Wing Extremism in the Western Balkans FILM

Event Report: RAN Plenary

ARTICLE

RAN Plenary: Setting the agenda for 2023

PROFILES RAN practitioners

FILM

The View — The year ahead

LIBRARY **Discover more**



A short video, published this year, provides information about the nature, scope and scale of RAN Practitioners and its network, including a summary of its purpose and an overview of each of its Working Groups. The video has been shared at RAN Practitioners events throughout 2022. Practitioners are encouraged to share the video with colleagues and others that they work with to give them a better understanding of the network and its work. You can watch the video in full on the RAN YouTube channel heres/be



An infographic provides a snapshot of the work of RAN Practitioners, including the topics it addresses and the activity it delivers. Practitioners are encouraged to share the infographic with colleagues and others that they work with to give them a better understanding of the network. You can access and download the infographic on the RAN website **here.**





RAN Practitioners 2022

Topics and Working Groups

Communications and narratives

The RAN Communication and Narratives Working Group focuses on the delivery of both on- and offline communication that offers alternatives or that counters extremist propaganda and/or challenges extremist ideas.

Youth and education

The RAN Youth and Education Working Group focuses on the need to better equip teachers and youth workers to support them in their role in preventing radicalisation and on strengthening cooperation between the two sectors.

Rehabilitation

The RAN Rehabilitation
Working Group aims to bring
together exit practitioners
under a rehabilitation
roadmap.

Local authorities

The RAN Local authorities Working Group is tasked with bringing together local authorities in charge of coordinating practitioners at the local level and organising their multi-agency work and structures.

Prisons

The RAN Prisons Working Group focuses on supportin those practitioners who have a role in preventing radicalisation. The group exchanges ideas, best practices, contacts and insights to formulate recommendations for

Police and law enforcement

The RAN Police and law enforcement Working Group seeks to identify a more effective police approach that is flexible enough to be shared amongst many police forces in the EU Member States

Victims and survivors of terrorism

he RAN Victims and urvivors of Terrorism /orking Group supports nd empowers victims and urvivors (both those who ave been targets of attacks nd those who have lost relative) in P/CVE and ffers them a platform for vehance

Mental health

The RAN Mental Health
Working Group focuses on
raising awareness within the
health sector and helping
nd establish an effective netwo
of health practitioners acros
acks EU Member States.

Families, communities and social care

The RAN Families,
Communities & Social
Care Working Group aims
to play an important
role in the prevention of
violent extremism. The key
challenges for this sector
are to interpret signs of
radicalisation and help those
individuals who might be at
risk of being radicalised.



Mollie **SALTSKOG**

After over two decades of counter-terrorism and preventing/ countering violent extremism (P/CVE) occupying the West's key security priorities, 2022 has ushered in new priorities and challenges. There is a renewed focus on inter-state conflict and strategic competition as a result of Russia's illegal war in Ukraine and China's assertiveness on the global stage. At the same time, the rising threat of extreme rightwing terrorism in the West makes the terrorism threat more diverse and diffuse.

Following twenty years of focus on counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism, 2022 priorities are now shifting to focus on inter-state conflict and strategic competition with state-actors. In the Biden Administration's National Security Strategy — released on October 12, 2022 — the People's Republic of China is assessed as the country which "harbours the intention and, increasingly, the capacity to reshape the international order in favour of one that tilts the global playing field to its benefit." In the document, terrorism/ violent extremism was mentioned 16 times, whereas China/PRC was mentioned over 50 times. The Russian Federation's further invasion of Ukraine in February has also refocused efforts by the United States and European allies to respond to a war on European soil. NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept singled out Russia and China as posing the biggest threats to Member States. As priorities shift for policy makers, so too will resources. In response to the rise of China, the U.S. has already led alliance-building efforts in the Indo-Pacific with initiatives such as AUKUS and the Quad. As a result of the war in Ukraine, NATO is poised to likely add Sweden and Finland as two new members.

Twenty years of counter-terrorism and P/CVE has, however, showcased that violent extremism does not operate in a vacuum. From the Sahel to Central Asia, geopolitics and structural conditions that fuel support for violent extremism must still be taken into account. Revanchist state-actors utilise non-state actors, including violent extremists, to wage military campaigns. In the case of Russia, the Wagner group — which hosts extreme right-wing individuals and elements in its ranks — has furthered Russia's interests and participated in conflicts in Africa, the Middle East, and Ukraine. State-actors like Russia and China push disinformation and conspiracy theories that seek to sow division and polarisation in democratic societies, feeding extreme narratives that justify violence as a political solution. Collective security threats such as climate change will continue to impact the world and contribute to climate-fueled migration flows. As

competition for scarce resources becomes more pronounced, existing populist and nationalist narratives already utilised by terrorist movements for recruitment and radicalisation purposes may find new audiences. It is therefore important that the investments and commitments to P/CVE made over the past two decades are not simply discarded as new priorities take centerstage. Instead, we must work on integrating counter-terrorism and P/CVE efforts into new security priorities in order to ensure long-term stability.

At the same time, the terrorism threat of today is more diverse and diffuse, especially in the West. The rise of extreme rightwing terrorism in the West does not emulate the structures and features commonly associated with the Salafi-jihadi threat. While there are extreme right-wing organisations that exhibit clear command-and-control structures, the contemporary extreme right-wing movement largely features a diffuse and non-formalised network with dense online connections. Livestreaming attacks and publishing manifestos online have become unique facets of how violence is celebrated and furthered in the extreme right-wing movement. Extreme right-wing terrorist attacks also illustrate a prevalence of low-complexity, low-tech, and copy-paste attacks with perpetrators picking and choosing from a variety of ideologies in their path to violence. Manifestos of recent attackers, including the 2019 Christchurch, 2019 El Paso, and 2022 Buffalo attacks, not only highlighted how inspiration is drawn from previous acts of violence, but also featured eco-fascist ideology, which blends traditional left-wing and right-wing ideologies. Moreover, several countries — including the UK, Sweden, and the Netherlands — are sounding the alarm of children and youth becoming radicalised by extreme right-wing ideologies, primarily online. In 2021, 20 children in the UK were arrested, 19 of whom were linked to violent far-right ideologies.

The lack of a centralized ideology or group complicates P/CVE efforts to target the movement. Yet, the apparent trans-nationalisation of the extreme right-wing movement, amalgamated online, will necessitate cooperation between P/CVE practitioners across borders. Sharing best-practices, trends,

and data will be key to discern trendlines across the movement and will help to inform more localised approaches to P/CVE. The phenomenon of ideological convergence and the prevalence of extreme right-wing narratives and conspiracy theories online pose a challenge for P/CVE efforts, especially in preventing radicalisation of children and young people. Including young people as stakeholders in formulating P/CVE policy will be important to minimise rhetoric and programmes that exclusively cast children and young people as the problem and not as part of the solution. Including young voices and perspectives in P/CVE will also build trust in institutions and democracies for future generations.

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"At the same time, the terrorism threat of today is more diverse and diffuse, especially in the West. The rise of extreme rightwing terrorism in the West does not emulate the structures and features commonly associated with the Salafi-jihadi threat. While there are extreme rightwing organisations that exhibit clear command-and-control structures, the contemporary extreme right-wing movement largely features a diffuse and non-formalised network with dense online connections. Livestreaming attacks and publishing manifestos online have become unique facets of how violence is celebrated and furthered in the extreme right-wing movement."

Richard MCNEIL-WILLSON

2022 has brought several challenges and points to reflect on for practitioners and others involved in studying and responding to issues of extremism. What looks likely to be the last set of European Covid-19 lockdowns gradually wound down throughout 2022 and, whilst transmission is clearly still on-going, the political crisis and response has certainly lessened in its severity. As such, we can now assess the landscape of how the restrictions have changed our understanding of extremism with more clarity.

One of the most interesting patterns that has been observed is the emergence of what has been termed 'anti-system extremism'. Anti-system extremism goes beyond a political or social critique of governments or capitalism, and instead relies on a set of conspiracy theories and ideologies that have developed from the pandemic but have since taken on a life of their own.

Such conspiracies have often centred around accusations of a 'Great Reset' in society – the idea that a shadowy elite have engineered a crisis to gain greater control over citizens – and have been used to create alarm around a sometimes eclectic set of debates on migration, left-wing politics, gender and trans rights, and the climate crisis, amongst others. Pandemic conspiracy theories were shown to not just be the preserve of the far right – nor even a tactic even particularly favoured by some far-right groups. They have, however, been founded and perpetuate several Antisemitic, Islamophobic and other racialised tropes, combining with existing distrust towards national governments and authorities to create a motivation for violence that undermines European articulations of democracy. One example includes the December 2022 detaining of 25 members of the Reichsbürger group in Germany¹, a network inspired by an amalgamate of ideologies, to overthrow the democratic German government. Whilst any potential attack was thwarted well ahead of time, the network's targeting of democratic bodies and state infrastructure should raise alarm, especially owing to its resonance with the 2021 assault on the US Capitol.

Such patterns link to broader processes of polarisation² in European societies and warn of the dangers of the creation of parallel societies by majority groups, some of whom attempt to actively withdraw from national laws and democratic practice. This sets up a challenge to practitioners to identify majority communities who seek to fragment societies and communities, and to find methods to challenge the deeply racialized conspiracy theories and ideologies that underpin their activities. Another issue currently faced in understanding and identifying

- 1. Reuters, 'Germany foils far-right plot to install Prince Heinrich XIII in coup' https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/25-suspected-members-german-far-right-group-arrested-raids-prosecutors-office-2022-12-07/
- 2. EUI, 'Polarisation, violent extremism and resilience in Europe today: an analytical framework' https://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/65664
- 3. ICCT, 'The Buffalo Attack An Analysis of the Manifesto' https://icct.nl/publication/the-buffalo-attack-an-analysis-of-the-manifesto/
- 4. ICCT, 'Lessons From the Buffalo Shooting: Responses to Violent White Supremacy' https://icct.nl/ publication/lessons-from-thebuffalo-shooting-responses-toviolent-white-supremacy/

violent extremism is the atomisation of the extreme far right. Recent events have suggested that we no longer operate in a context whereby significant far-right groups, with membership structures or coherent ideologies, are able to gain local influence. More traditional far-right groups seem to be waning in their means and ability to attract members and conduct meaningful activism. What has replaced them are looser networks of individuals, more likely to be united through communities primarily forged online around anti-system sentiment. This means that extreme far-right individuals are far less likely than they were in the past to be linked to urban areas and deprivation, with practitioners reporting increased concern throughout Europe over individuals in more rural communities being drawn towards extreme networks and ideas. It has also led to highly unstable sets of ideologies being at the heart of violence.

The May 2022 Buffalo attack in the US, for instance, occurred alongside a manifesto consisting of a hodgepodge of far-right and mainstream conspiracies, tropes, and anti-migrant and anti-minority language³. Such ideology inconsistency potentially makes it harder to identify far-right language or ban far-right content online⁴, and represent an on-going process of evasion and response by far-right networks online against moderation and proscription.

New patterns are also emerging in intergenerational links to violence. Whilst practitioners have traditionally tended to focus on young people as uniquely vulnerable to extremism – perhaps due to young people having limited access to societal support structures or the more fluid nature of identity construction during young adulthood – it is older individuals who are increasingly providing concern around their links to extreme violence.

In the wake of an attack this year on a migration centre, UK Independent Counterterror Reviewer Jonathan Hall KC highlighted how 'the most recent completed Extreme Right Wing Terrorist attacks [are] all being carried out by older men' – with examples in the UK including the 2016 killing of Jo Cox MP, the 2017 Finsbury Park murder of Makram Ali, and recent attacks in Exeter and Surrey⁵. Greater attention should perhaps be paid by practitioners on how to think of radicalisation as occurring amongst older populations.

Finally, we need to guard against language and policy used by extremists being mainstreamed and legitimised by governments and political actors. Research suggests that far-right groups are attempting to make their language more covert and palatable on mainstream social media platforms, using wellness⁶, environmental⁷ and beauty⁸ trends to spread extreme and often White Supremacist narratives⁹.

Meanwhile, national governments and political parties should be wary of using language around conspiracy theories, migration, and minorities – all which risk legitimising far-right mobilisation. The underplaying of the threat from the far right by governments can legitimise extreme narratives and create complications for those local communities who seek to calm polarisation and extremism.

Practitioners must also be aware of the limits of counterextremism and call out those who cast legitimate criticism of national governments or rightful alarm over the climate crisis in the language of extremism. Greater work between practitioners and international policymakers, academic institutions and local communities can act to temper the misuse of security language to target legitimate political opponents.

Ultimately, the practice of responding to extremism has become no less complicated in 2022. Practitioners must embrace a critical reflection of their role and build interaction and discussion across Europe. Rather than seeing community criticism of counterterrorism as a threat or as tacit support of terrorism, critical debate should be embraced by practitioners as an opportunity for rebuilding the trust that has so often been lost between local communities and national authorities. The development of new trends of anti-system extremism,

- 5. The Guardian, 'Most UK far-right attacks now by older men, says terrorism reviewer' https://www.theguardian. com/politics/2022/nov/07/uk-terrorism-reviewer-says-most-far-right-attacks-now-by-oldermen
- 6. European Journal of Cultural Studies, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/
- 7. C-REX, 'What is the relationship between the far right and environmentalism?' https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english/groups/compendium/what-is-the-relationship-between-the-far-right-and-environmentalism.html
- 8. Cogitatio, 'What "Real" Women Want: Alt-Right Femininity Vlogs as an Anti-Feminist Populist Aesthetic' https://www.cogitatiopress.com/mediaandcommunication/article/view/5726
- 9. ICCT, "We Are Worth Fighting for": Women in Far-Right Extremism' https:// icct.nl/publication/womenfar-right-extremism/

Richard McNeil-Willson is a member of the team that delivers the Building Resilience against Violent Extremism and Polarisation (BRaVE) project and is a Research Fellow at the Global Governance Programme, the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies, European University Institute. mixed ideologies and the atomisation of much of the extreme far right, means it is more important than ever to respond to extremism in ways that enshrine human and civil rights at their heart. By diversifying responses to extremism that give trust to those local communities and grassroots movements on the frontline of extremism and polarisation, practitioners can keep up with the new and diverse threats European society faces.

"Ultimately, the practice of responding to extremism has become no less complicated in 2022. Practitioners can keep up with these trends by embracing a critical reflection of their role, as well as by building interaction with European research exploring these trends and debates. The development of new trends of anti-system extremism, mixed ideologies and the atomisation of much of the extreme far right."

SPOTLIGHT UKRAINE

DEC 2022
THE YEAR IN REVIEW

Given events that were unfolding in Ukraine, a Spotlight publication took a look at the potential consequences of the war for preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) across Europe. The publication, which was published in June 2022, includes content on community sentiments towards the war, emerging narratives around migration and refugees, evolving disinformation narratives and the foreign volunteer challenge. You can read the Spotlight in full **here.**





A paper, published by RAN Practitioners in August 2022, entitled 'Digital frontrunners: Key challenges and recommendations for online P/CVE work', takes a look at the challenges posed by online radicalisation and the type of P/CVE work that is being done online. The paper explores the opportunities that working online presents and the needs of practitioners in this space. You can read the paper in full **here.**



Webpage: ec.europa.eu/ran









05/08/2022

CONCLUSION PAPER

RAN C&N: Digital Frontrunners in P/CVE 16-17 June 2022, Riga, Latvia

Digital frontrunners: Key challenges and recommendations for online P/CVE work

Key outcomes

Working online has become increasingly important across almost all fields of work, especially since the outbreak of the COVID pandemic in 2020 when working from home became mandatory for many people. This is also true for work in preventing and countering of violent extremism (P/CVE), since radicalisation processes are increasingly taking place online. Types of P/CVE work that is being done online are, for example: early prevention, trend monitoring, individual interventions, and alternative or counter-messaging.

In the past year, multiple RAN Practitioners Working Groups have discussed online P/CVE work in their respective areas (e.g. RAN Local, RAN Families, Communities & Social Care, RAN Youth and Education, and RAN Rehabilitation). To converge the insights from those meetings and identify remaining challenges and the needs for practitioners in order to take the next step in their online work, the RAN Communications and Narratives (C&N) Working Group held a meeting on 'Digital Frontrunners in P/CVE' on 16 and 17 June 2022 in Riga, Latvia. The participants presented their own online P/CVE practice or project as a "digital frontrunner", and discussed in smaller groups what their current challenges, top tips and future needs are.

The key outcomes of the meeting are:

- There is a need to enhance collaboration and sustainable networking amongst online P/CVE workers, also foreseeing a possible role for the EU (platform, knowledge dissemination, funding, etc.).
- Important issues of privacy of P/CVE practitioners themselves as well as the target groups were raised.
- · There is a need to better address mental health concerns of practitioners who are exposed to harmful content online on a day-to-day basis.
- · Authorities and funders need to acknowledge the importance of online work P/CVE work and the practitioners doing this work, in order to pave the way for further development of online practices.
- · The digital frontrunners are facing data access issues: on the one hand this is about dealing with information overload and information silos, and on the other hand barriers between practitioners and target groups (age/generational, technological) are making it difficult to keep up with trends and

The remainder of this paper is structured slightly different than in other RAN Practitioners conclusion papers. The highlights and recommendations are combined. Each sub-heading consists of a major "need" in online P/CVE work that was identified by the participants. For each need, an explanation is given as to which challenges the need addresses, which top tips (or recommendations) already exist, and what ideas there are for the next steps in order to further address this need.



RAN PAPER

DEC 2022 THE YEAR IN REVIEW



CONCLUSION PAPER RAN C&N: Digital Frontrunners in P/CVE

During the meeting, the participants identified one important top tip, or recommendation, to tackle some of the above challenges:

· Cooperate, not only with your direct colleagues but also with other organisations. Given the fact that there is a general lack of capacity, an information overload and organisations working in information silos, it is beneficial for all parties to share information regarding trend monitoring and relevant research between organisations and individual practitioners. Do not reinvent the wheel by doing the same work as a similar organisation and come to the same conclusions, but also do not be afraid to cooperate and share information with each other.

Moreover, several ideas to take the next steps in addressing this need were suggested by the participants:

- Regarding data access, it was suggested that platforms could provide open APIs (application programming interfaces) to researchers and practitioners so they can consistently access and use data from these platforms. Not only the big platforms but also fringe platforms need to think about how they can provide access to practitioners and researchers in order to prevent and counter radicalisation (within legal and ethical boundaries, of course).
- · Also, policy and funding could play a role in overcoming these challenges, for instance by promoting collaboration and demanding data access.



2) The need to maximise opportunities for collaboration

The second major need identified is the need to maximise opportunities for collaboration and cooperation, both for practitioners and organisations doing online P/CVE work, on local, regional and (inter)national levels. There are several challenges that can be tackled by capitalising on opportunities for collaboration:

- As also explained in the previous section, the challenges relate to monitoring trends and developments, mainly concerning lack of capacity, information overload and information silos. By working together, you can divide certain tasks and increase overall capacity
- Time drain on bureaucracy and administration takes away valuable hours that could be used to invest in cooperation and collaboration with partners. An example of this is the time spent on funding procedures. Moreover, funding procedures normally do not promote cooperation between different organisations (also see the next section on funding).

Several tips and recommendations were suggested by participants in order to address this need for more

- Identify the partners that can strengthen you and work across disciplines (if not within your own organisation, then by collaborating with partners).
 - o Also consider potential cooperation with tech and social media companies
- Use your network and do not hesitate to reach out and ask for help.

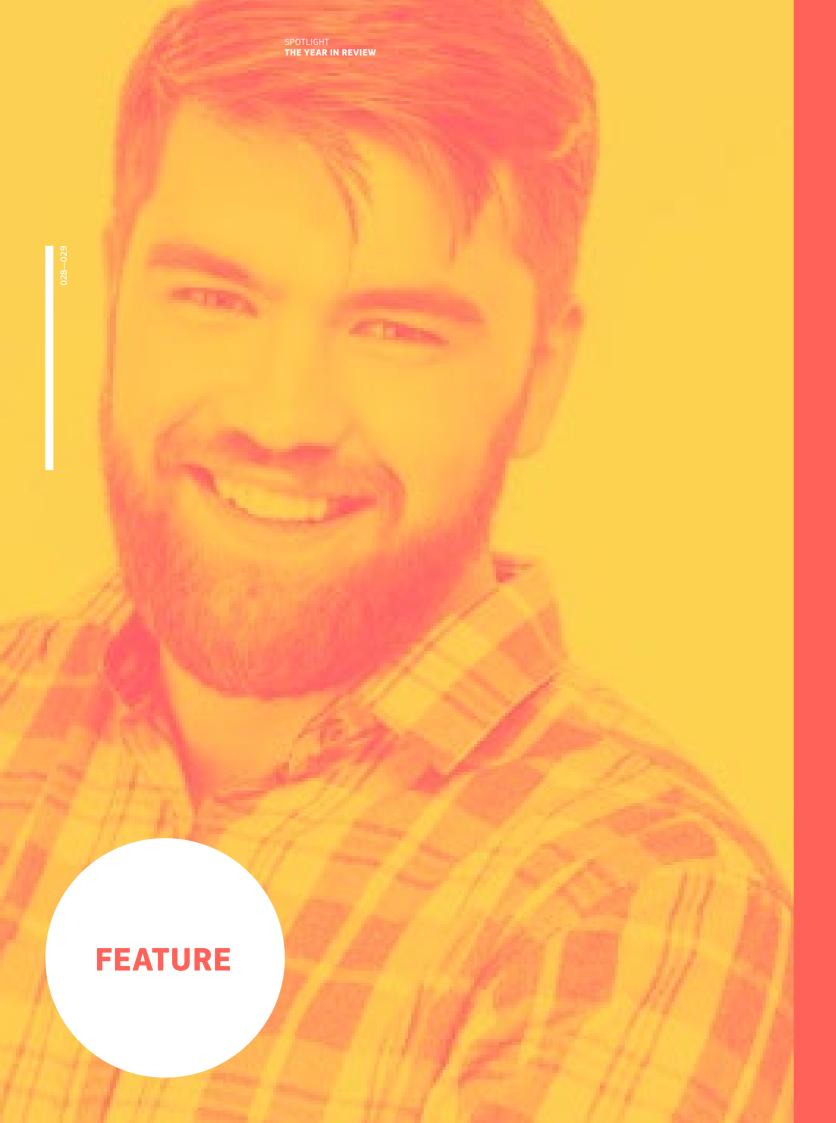
Product of the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN Practitioners)

- In early prevention, consider actions to co-create with your target audience (i.e., youths). Involve them in developing your online practice in order to reflect their needs (e.g. using their experience and preferences in social media use to create media literacy training) (1)
- . Do not be afraid to share information with partner organisations you cooperate or collaborate with (bearing in mind GDPR rules of course).
- Take the initiative to establish more structural collaborations and sustainable networking between your organisation and others.

⁽¹⁾ This is less relevant for countering violent extremism, that is, in a phase where individuals are already radicalised. It would not make sense to attempt co-creation then. Formers could be an alternative to involve.







Kelsey **BJORNSGAARD**

RAN YOUNG Disseminating a youth message

Over the last few years, I have had the opportunity to work closely with the members of RAN YOUNG: over 30 remarkable young P/CVE practitioners who are active across the EU in a multitude of capacities.

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 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 is prioritising the more neglected parts of youth engagement: support and inclusion. This year, RAN YOUNG convened three meetings, creating a productive space for its members to build and exchange good practice while exploring means of magnifying their impact in their own work and through the network. Outside these dedicated meetings, RAN also expanded opportunities for integrating these young practitioners into other RAN activities to ensure their voices could be heard across the network.

In March, RAN YOUNG convened an online Youth Review Panel, where its young participants worked together to perform a SWOT review of three projects from RAN's <u>Collection</u> <u>of Inspiring Practices</u>. Representatives from <u>Concordia</u> <u>Bloggers</u>, <u>DECOUNT: The Game</u>, and <u>Dare to be Grey</u>



presented their youth-facing projects and discussed them with participating members. These kinds of forum are important for both youth and project leads. For young people, it gives them a chance to learn about successful practices in detail, seeing different methods and getting an in-depth understanding of strategic approaches in different contexts across Europe. For the project leads, this interaction gave them a chance to get direct feedback from young people who brought their own unique insights and advice for how they could build on their success and amplify their impact with more European youth. This kind of inclusive approach to project development is critical for effective and sustainable youth engagement in all forms.

While the year's first meeting focused on expanding RAN YOUNG members' experience with established practices, the second meeting shifted attention to capacity building, presenting participants with a tailored training opportunity. In May, RAN YOUNG came together in Athens for the first offline meeting since 2020. Taking the theme of Youth Empowerment and Engagement, this meeting offered participants a comprehensive introduction to planning and managing social change projects for the prevention of violent extremism. RAN YOUNG members from around the EU worked together to plan strategic projects to address discrimination, political polarisation, online hate speech, disinformation, and conspiracy narratives. Working in thematic groups, they analysed how their given challenge manifested in their own context, selected and defined a target audience, set a strategy, brainstormed outputs and finally created a theory of change. The process and skills at the core of this meeting are critical for P/CVE across sectors and therefore a necessary part of capacity building for any practitioner. And just like any practitioner, young people come with varying levels of experience and different ideas about what their involvement will entail. As they are given space to play a larger role in defining the P/CVE agenda, young people will require specialised training and support that is just as dynamic as they are.

Finally, in September RAN YOUNG presented its members with an opportunity to help define the programme's message

10-11 Sept 2019, RAN YOUNG Academy Session 3



FEATURE
RAN YOUNG — DISSEMINATING A YOUTH MESSAGE



"Taking the theme of Youth **Empowerment and Engagement,** this meeting offered participants a comprehensive introduction to planning and managing social change projects for the prevention of violent extremism. RAN YOUNG members from around the EU worked together to plan strategic projects to address discrimination, political polarisation, online hate speech, disinformation, and conspiracy narratives. Working in thematic groups, they analysed how their given challenge manifested in their own context, selected and defined a target audience, set a strategy, brainstormed outputs and finally created a theory of change."

and lend their voice to shaping the future of the programme. Gathering in Prague for the final meeting of the year, RAN YOUNG participants planned and filmed a message video that would form the core of RAN Practitioners' recruitment drive for RAN YOUNG 2023. Participants reflected on their time in RAN YOUNG, articulating what the experience had meant for them and penning messages for future young P/CVE professionals and RAN's wider practitioner and policy networks about the importance of youth engagement.

This year's meetings highlighted the importance of encouraging young people's full participation in P/CVE and showcased the dynamic approach to youth empowerment that it will continue to pursue in years to come. So, if you are a policy maker or practitioner, take inspiration from this example and seek out ways for young people to meaningfully participate and contribute. If you work with exceptional young people just getting started in their P/CVE careers, pass along this message so they can help shape the next cohort of RAN YOUNG. And of course, if you are yourself that young person who wants to help prevent and counter extremism in Europe, consider applying and leave your own mark on P/CVE in Europe.

Kelsey Bjornsgaard is the Head of Capacity Building and Campaigns at the Institute of Strategic Dialogue (ISD) and has supported the RAN YOUNG platform throughout 2022.

For the first time in two years, members of the RAN YOUNG Platform had an opportunity to meet in person, to discuss the role of young people in P/CVE. We travelled to Athens to participate in this RAN YOUNG event and meet with some of its participants. In the margins of the meeting we brought some young people together to discuss issue and topics relevant to them, including the challenge posed by digital technology, the proliferation of disinformation, and why being part of RAN YOUNG is so beneficial to them. You can watch the film in full on the RAN YouTube channel <a href="https://example.com/hemes-representation-need-to-people-together-be-representa



A paper, published by RAN Practitioners in May 2022, presents the findings from an online workshop where 16 young people reviewed three projects from RAN's Collection of Inspiring Practices. Providing a young person's perspective, they identified each practice's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The paper summarises the key recommendations and takeaways. You can read the paper in full **here.**



Webpage: ec.europa.eu/ran









14/04/2022

CONCLUSION PAPER

Youth Review Panel 22-23 March 2022, Online

RAN Young: Youth Review Panel

Kev outcomes

On 22-23 March 2022, the RAN Young Platform (RAN YOUNG) organised its third RAN YOUNG Review Panel. Through an online workshop, 16 young people reviewed three projects from RAN's Collection of Inspiring Practices. RAN Young's participating members were split into small groups of reviewers and assigned to a practice. Over two days, they participated in four sessions: first, practitioners presented their practice to a group of reviewers, explaining the project's goals, strategy, outputs, and outcomes. Second, the reviewers interviewed the practitioner to make sure they understood the practice clearly. Third, the practitioners left for the day while the reviewers performed a SWOT analysis to identify each practice's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Finally, the reviewers presented their findings and recommendations to the whole group, including all three practitioners and the other review groups to create an opportunity for wider discussion. The main takeaways are summarised below:

- Get creative. The three practices demonstrated that creative content, like games or videos, can make complex topics more approachable. They offer the chance to immerse viewers into information through narratives and can help retain their interest by combining learning with entertainment.
- Update your platforms. Social media continues to be an effective way to reach young people; however, practitioners should keep up with changing trends. As the reviewers warned, young people are leaving Facebook in favour of Instagram, YouTube, Discord, Telegram and TikTok. Social media campaigners will have to learn to navigate new platforms to retain their audience.
- Encourage critical thinking. All three practices developed content that incorporated critical thinking to their audience's experience. In addition to presenting viewers with new information, they immersed viewers in the topic through experiential learning.
- Balance online with offline. Online platforms are a great way to reach a large number of people but, as the reviewers noted, they offer limited opportunities to engage with an audience. Incorporating online content into offline activities like workshops or school-based meetings can enhance a practice's impact.
- Youth practices must be dynamic. Youthful language and references help engage young audiences, but they need to be updated frequently to avoid becoming outdated. The participants observed places in all three practices where outdated graphics, (youth) language or references could hurt its appeal
- · Capitalise on existing models for expansion. The reviewers noted that all three practices had many opportunities to expand their work by employing their existing content and models in new ways. This could mean adapting an existing model for a new context or finding additional applications for content.





DEC 2022 THE YEAR IN REVIEW



CONCLUSION PAPER RAN YOUNG Review Panel 2022

The Practices

The Review Panel included three projects from RAN's Collection of Inspiring Practices.

 Concordia Bloggers: I Survived Terrorism
 A video game series based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights; the game presents a series
 of scenarios related to different human rights articles that a player must navigate using critical thinking. The final chapter, called 'I Survived Terrorism' that challenges the normalisation of radical violence in the Basque Country, is based on the testimony of a young boy, Iker, who survived a

2. **DECOUNT: The Game**

A video game designed to promote democracy and fight extremism through interactive counter narratives that recreate the radicalisation processes of four protagonists. Developed through a collaboration between the Austrian Institute for International Affairs, Bloodirony Games, and SUBOTRON, the game has been used in schools and workshops in Austria.

3. Dare to be Grey: Project Grey

Dare to be Grey challenges polarisation by empowering the moderate middle ground and breaking down the 'black-and-white' dichotomy in favour of more nuanced 'grey' thinking. Project Grey used social media to unite online activists, data analysts and social workers in strengthening a 'grey narrative' through online content and a handbook on polarisation.

Highlights of the discussion

Product of the Radicalisation Awareness Network

The RAN YOUNG Review Panel created space for youth and practitioners to exchange ideas and perspectives about the specific practices and P/CVE programming more broadly. One result of these discussions was the identification of several **good practices** for youth-oriented P/CVE projects.

- All three of the practices utilised creative, youth-oriented content. Project Grey utilises a variety of digital content, while Concordia Bloggers and DECOUNT both created immersive video games. Creative content can make challenging and taboo topics more approachable, especially for younger audiences, and the reviewers noted that visual content that was clear, concise, and easily sharable was more effective on digital platforms. Video games especially are a good medium for getting young people interested in these issues. They not only made learning more fun, but their interactive nature also invites players to become immersed with the topics and allows them to make decisions that employ and reinforce critical thinking.
- The game projects made good use of narratives, demonstrating the power of storytelling in learning. The reviewers praised the projects' translation of real-life experiences and research into compelling narratives that allowed players to become invested in the lives of real people via fictional avatars.
- The reviewers praised Dare to Grey's agility and versatility in responding to current events. The project's use of social media and short, digital content meant it could continuously apply its 'grey' advocacy to a wider variety of topics and current events. They felt this kept the project relevant and enhanced understanding by showing followers how the approach could be applied in varied contexts.
- All three projects incorporated critical thinking. The reviewers praised the fact that, in addition to presenting information to enhance knowledge, the practices pushed viewers to consider difficult questions and engage with the material - either through play or discussion - to reach their own conclusions.
- The reviewers noted the practices' ability to include of a variety of themes related to P/CVE, while remaining targeted. For example, DECOUNT's game spoke to different forms of extremism, but presented everything within the context of Austria to offer a holistic yet relevant look at extremism across the spectrum. Concordia Bloggers took a focused look at terrorism in the Basque Country specifically, but incorporated





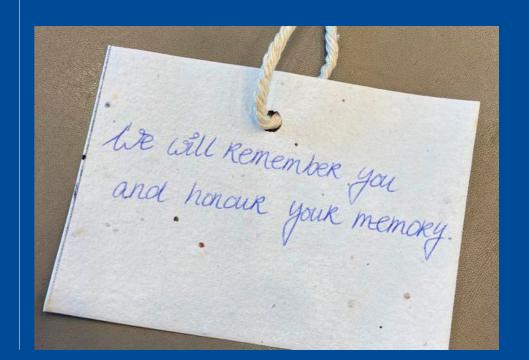


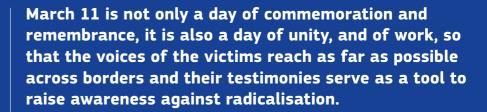
ARTICLE EUROPEAN REMEMBRANCE DAY FOR **VICTIMS OF TERRORISM**

Ana RODRIGUEZ **CORDERO** and **Philippe VANSTEENKISTE**

On March 11, 2004, the largest terrorist attack in the history of Europe took place in Madrid (Spain). The deaths and injuries of that fateful day on the city's railway network marked a before and after in the fight against extremism and radicalisation. Since then, that date has been marked on the European calendar to commemorate all the victims and survivors of terrorism who, unfortunately, year after year, are growing in number.







The event has been held mostly in Brussels, except on two occasions when it was moved to Paris (2020) and Madrid (2021). It is attended by representatives of European governments, the European Commission, experts, and associations of victims and survivors of terrorism, to show their respect and their deep rejection of terrorist violence, together.

The day is always special. We remember those who are no longer here, we listen to the testimony of those who are still with us and make us stronger, of those who helped deliver interventions, of those who continue to do so, and of those who fight so that it does not happen again. And all this is accompanied by music, which is never lacking in our Remembrance Days, and by our wonderful tree ceremony, where the messages of love, respect and solidarity multiply every year.

It is a day to remember, to listen to the voices of the victims and those accompanying them, and to join forces between governments and practitioners. It is also a day to get to know each other and strengthen ties and make us stronger.

But without a doubt, the great importance of this Day is its ability to reach every place. The voices of the victims are an indispensable tool in the fight against radicalisation. Being able to listen to them is one more step towards ending the violence.

Not only a commemoration

Ensuring that victims and survivors of terrorism throughout Europe are remembered is an essential initiative of RAN Practitioners and the Victims and Survivors of Terrorism (VSoT) Working Group. It is a sad truth that most Member States have citizens who have been affected by terrorist attacks, one way or another.



The objective of the Remembrance Day therefore is to remind the wider population of the impact of such events so that we might work together to prevent future attacks.

The European Remembrance Day is the opportunity for Member States to reach out to victims to express empathy and dignity. But the Day has in fact a much deeper significance and role within our EU society. Remembrance is a unique moment of the year where the victims, who live daily with the consequences of their experience of terrorism and who work daily on their resilience, have a moment to reflect.

The Remembrance Day starts a day early for the victims and survivors of terrorism who participate in it.. The Victims and Survivors of Terrorism (VSoT) Working Group provides victims across the EU with the opportunity to connect, whether online or in person. In fact, RAN offers a "secured and closed moment for them to connect" the day before the actual event. This connection has a tremendous positive impact: it is the moment of the year where they can finally meet others with similar experiences and share their commonalities and differences. Victims are able to easily build connections with one another . They "feel" each other, they "read the eyes of the fellow victim", they connect through an "unspoken but guaranteed brotherhood". Meeting their "family" once a year empowers them. It is a key moment of a "peer to peer" experience, solidarity and of mutual support.

This is one of the most valuable moments the European Remembrance Day provides for victims and survivors. It is not only an important, and essential, day of remembrance, but it is a unique day that empowers them, allowing them to feel part of our European society, that they are respected, recognised and treated with dignity within Europe.

The European Remembrance Day brings much more than a commemoration. It brings direct support to the victims and survivors themselves. This is what makes it so special and unique.

Ana Rodriguez Cordero and Philippe Vansteenkiste are the co-lead for the RAN Working Group on Victims and Survivors of Terrorism (VSoT).



The RAN in the Western Balkans project has now been up and running for a number of months, connecting practitioners from across the region to exchange knowledge, good practices and ideas on a number of key P/CVE issues relevant to them, namely the management of returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) and their families, and the rise of violent right-wing extremism. An infographic provides a snapshot of the project. You can access and download the infographic on the RAN website **here.**

RAN in the Western Balkans.

The Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) is a network of frontline practitioners who work daily with both those vulnerable to radicalisation and those who have already been radicalised. As civil society representatives, social workers, youth workers, teachers, healthcare professionals, local authority representatives, police officers and prison officers, they are engaged in both preventing and countering violent extremism in all its forms and rehabilitating and reintegrating violent extremists.

About

RAN in the Western Balkans aims to support the prevention of radicalisation in the region and enhance synergies between EU and Western Balkans professionals. The project aims to map practitioners working in the Western Balkans, establish a pool of experts and organise meetings, workshops, webinars, trainings and study visits around relevant P/CVE themes so that professionals can exchange ideas and share good practices.

Radicalisation Awareness Network
RAN ::
Practitioners

Challeng

Western Balkans countries face a number of challenges from violent extremism, including the deradicalisation and reintegration of returnee Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs) and their families and the resurgence of violent right wing extremism (VRWE).



500+ individuals travelled to Syria and Iraq



350+ individuals have returned



50+ terrorism related arrests in 2020/2021

Main Topics

Foreign Terrorist Fighters and their family members (FTFs) Violent Right-Wing Extremism (VRWE)

RAN in the Western Balkans in numbers:

Events



5 topical meetings



2 national workshops



2 webinars



2 trainings



3 study visits in the EU (Berlin, Stockholm and Paris)



2 study visits in the Western Balkans



1 'cross-cutting event'

Participants



300+ participants

Resources



1 comprehensive overview



4 consolidated overviews



4 ad hoc papers

Albania Bosnia and Herzegovina Montenegro Kosovo North Macedonia Serbia

Get involved

To find out more about RAN in the Western Balkans, and how to participate in the activities and access the papers listed above, visit the RAN website here or email us at ran@radareurope.nl

RAN PAPER Violent Right Wing Extremism in the Western Balkans

A paper, published by RAN Practitioners in July 2022, entitled 'Violent Right-Wing Extremism in the Western Balkans', provides insights for practitioners about the nature and scale of the growing threat. The paper focuses on both not-yet-violent and violent extremist movements and activities. You can read the paper in full **here.**



Violent Right-Wing Extremism in the Western Balkans:

An overview of country-specific challenges for P/CVE

Practitioners

Authored by Mirza Buljubašić, RAN in the Western Balkans Expert Pool Member

RAN PAPER

DEC 2022 THE YEAR IN REVIEW

VIOLENT RIGHT WING EXTREMISM IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

Introduction and context

In recent years there has been an increasing concern about the potential for violent right-wing extremism (VRWE) in the Western Balkans: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH), Kosovo*1, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia. The region has been historically perceived as politically volatile with a history of violence that stems from right-wing (political) ideologies and actions.² Experts and officials from the Western Balkans raise concerns about the spread of right-wing extremism (RWE) in the context of political conflict. Thus, this paper focuses on both not-yet-violent and violent extremist movements and activities in the Western Balkans.3

Experts and practitioners have used various terms to frame VRWE. There is, however, lack of a universal definition. In 2021 a group of Member States of the European Union (EU) participating in a Project Based Collaboration⁴ on Violent Right-Wing Extremism (Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Sweden) decided to adopt the following non-legally binding working definition:

"Violent right-wing extremism are acts of individuals or groups who use, incite, threaten with, legitimise or support violence and hatred to further their political or ideological goals, motivated by ideologies based on the rejection of democratic order and values as well as of fundamental rights, and centred on exclusionary nationalism, racism, xenophobia and/or related intolerance."

In this paper, RWE is defined as an ideology that "encompasses authoritarianism, anti-democracy and exclusionary and/or holistic nationalism".5 Accompanying characteristics of the concept are xenophobia, racism and populism.⁶ Its violent manifestation (VRWE) is a form of political violence that has fluid boundaries between hate crime, terrorism⁷ and atrocity (e.g., genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, ethnic cleansing).8 An inseparable feature of VRWE in the Western Balkans is ethno nationalism. This concept is based on a large-group identity that forms around common points - such as the myth of common descent, language and religion - and has ideological roots in nativism, racism, chauvinism, traditionalism, xenophobia, homophobia and supremacism.9

The Western Balkans have numerous risk factors that can be related to RWE, such as unresolved identityrelated issues, conflicting historical and governance issues, in some cases difficult transition to a fully accomplished democracy, frozen conflict and administrative dysfunctionality. Yet, knowledge about RWE in the Western Balkans has been scattered and unorganised. This paper aims to integrate and systematise knowledge on RWE in the Western Balkans; it frames the most important challenges for preventing and countering this form of violent extremism.

After a brief introduction, RWE and tendencies towards VRWE in the Western Balkans will be elaborated. The most important RWE actors and factors – from Albania, BiH, Kosovo*, Montenegro, North Macedonia

¹ This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence

² Azinović, Understanding violent extremism in the Western Balkans, 3; Bećirević, Halilović and Azinović, Radicalisation and violent extremism in the Western Balkans. 6.

³ Azinović, Understanding violent extremism in the Western Balkans, 3 and 14; Schmid, Violent and Non-Violent Extremism: Two Sides of the Same Coin?, 14.

⁴ The Project Based Collaborations are projects led by EU countries, with the support of the European Commission, to foster exchange and cooperation on priority topics on prevention of radicalisation. Further information can be found here: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/p

⁵ Carter, Right-wing extremism/radicalism: reconstructing the concept, 157.

⁶ Carter, Right-wing extremism/radicalism; reconstructing the concept, 18.

⁷ Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate, Member States Concerned by the Growing and Increasingly Transnational Threat of Extreme Right-Wing Terrorism, 2.

⁸ Buljubašić & Holá, Historical Trauma and Radicalisation: How Can Intergenerational Transmission of Collective Traumas Contribute to (Group) Radicalisation? 3.

⁹ Halilović & Veljan, Exploring ethno-nationalist extremism in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 11; Volkan, Large-group identity, international relations and psychoanalysis, 206-213; but see Malešević & Trošt-Pavasović, Nation-States and Nationalism

The latest episode of our series called 'Event Report' travelled to Brussels in October 2022 to attend the annual RAN Practitioners Plenary event. The programme, which captures the thoughts of a number of participants at the event including RAN Working Group leads and European Commission representatives – tells the story of the event and provides an outlook on the most significant topics RAN practitioners would like to see addressed in 2023. You can watch the programme in full on the RAN YouTube channel **here.**



RAN PRACTITIONERS PLENARY – SETTING THE AGENDA FOR 2023

RAN Practitioners The RAN Practitioners Plenary, which gathers once a year, brought together practitioners actively engaged in the network in order to take stock of achievements to date, as well as discuss priorities for the year ahead. The Plenary, which was held in person for the first time in three years, offered an opportunity to: meet beyond the normal composition of the Working Groups; address new topical angles in P/CVE; and address cross-cutting issues.

#weareRAN



"In her address, the Director-General talked about the challenges being faced today, including "the war in Ukraine, rising levels of inflation and energy prices, and concerns about "job security and financial prospects", leading to people "further isolating themselves, spending more time online" and "losing trust in their governments, in public authorities and even in democracy."



Emerging trends and topics

The first day of the RAN Practitioners Plenary explored the current trends and topics of concern to RAN practitioners. These discussions were informed by a survey of over 300 members of the RAN Practitioners network conducted prior to the event, which found that the following topics were of most concern: the link between mental health, trauma and radicalisation; online radicalisation; anti-establishment, anti-authorities and anti-government extremism; and, violent right-wing extremism, in particular the growing accelerationism movement.

In break-out groups, participants at the event also discussed a number of other emerging challenges, including the thin line between activism (such as climate change protests) and extremism, and disinformation in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine.

Message from the Director-General

In an opening address given by Monique Pariat to participants at the RAN Practitioners Plenary, the Director-General for Migration and Home Affairs, thanked – on behalf of the European Commission – RAN practitioners for their hard work over the past year. She committed to supporting them to tackle the challenges of today and called on practitioners to "reach out to marginalised groups" and "promote European values."

In her address, the Director-General talked about the challenges being faced today, including "the war in Ukraine, rising levels of inflation and energy prices, and concerns about "job security and financial prospects", leading to people "further isolating themselves, spending more time online" and "losing trust in their governments, in public authorities and even in democracy."

The address focused on the challenge posed by online radicalisation: "The Internet provides less filters and safeguards than real life. As a consequence, hate speech and conspiracy narratives are thriving online. This contributes to the further polarisation of society." On this point, the Director-General described the important role of practitioners, who are in "daily

contact with all communities, including the most marginalised and vulnerable groups in our societies."

She said: "This is a daunting task, but the European Commission will support you in this mission every step of the way"... and will do "its utmost to help you in the digital transition." Furthermore, she encouraged participants at the RAN Practitioners Plenary event to share their "challenges and insights" about "the realities of working in the field" in order to help the European Commission "devise better policies" and "devise the most adequate plan to help you carry on your work in the prevention of radicalisation."

A conclusions paper, which will capture the topics discussed and the insights shared at the RAN Practitioners Plenary event, will be made available soon on the RAN website.

PROFILES: RAN PRACTITIONERS





Teun VAN DONGEN

Teun van Dongen is a RAN Policy Support expert. He joined the ICCT in May 2021 as a Senior Research Fellow and Programme Lead, Current and Emerging Threats. In this capacity, he leads the ICCT's efforts to monitor, analyse and research various forms of extremism and terrorism, including the ideologies, structure and modus operandi of the groups and movements involved. Previously, he worked as a policy analyst at The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies (HCSS) and as a Senior Researcher at the Verwey-Jonker Institute. He has also been a lecturer at Leiden University, the Free University and the Inholland University of Applied Sciences. Teun regularly writes for academic journals, newspapers and international affairs magazines and frequently appears in the media to talk about current events in his field of expertise. He gained a PhD degree from Leiden University with a doctoral dissertation on counter terrorism effectiveness.

Chiara DEDEKEN

Chiara Dedeken is a member of the RAN YOUNG platform. She currently supports community-driven Prevention of Violent Extremism (PVE) and Rehabilitation and Reintegration (R&R) projects in the Western Balkans funded by the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF). She holds an Adv. MSc in International Relations and Diplomacy from Leiden University and the Clingendael Institute and a BA in International Affairs from Vesalius College. During her studies she focused her research on the role of women in violent extremism as well as PVE.

The fifth episode of The View takes a look back at the year just gone and a look ahead at the year to come. A panel of three leading experts in P/CVE – including Chiara Dedeken from the RAN YOUNG platform, Teun van Dongen from the International Centre for Counter Terrorism (ICCT), and a representative from the EU Internet Referral Unit (EUIRU – discuss some of the emerging threats of most concern, including online radicalisation and anti-authority/anti-government extremism. You can watch the programme in full on the RAN YouTube channel here.



LIBRARY: DISCOVER MORE

IF you would like to discover more about some of the work of RAN Practitioners and its network in 2022 you can get in touch with the RAN Staff, take a look at the <u>RAN Collection of Inspiring Practices</u> or read through some of the latest <u>RAN papers</u>. We have included some of these papers in a carefully selected collection of interesting and relevant articles below.

RAN Practitioners (2022)

RAN Activities on Rehabilitation

RAN Practitioners (2022)

<u>Lessons Learned from Alternative</u> <u>Narrative Campaigns</u>

RAN Practitioners (2022)

Manifesto for Education 2nd Edition





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