



RAN ISSUE PAPER

Tackling the challenges to prevention policies in an increasingly polarised society

Introduction

The refugee crisis poses a number of challenges for the EU. One, in particular, is in relation to its impact on violent extremism. The RAN community of practitioners has looked into this issue and its effects on radicalisation towards violent extremism and terrorism. This conference paper builds on lessons learnt from RAN activities undertaken in the last 12 months.

"These people who have arrived at our shores are precisely fleeing the same terror that has struck us, right here in the heart of Europe.

To antagonise those seeking protection would be giving in to the hatred and division that terrorists seek to sow."

Commissioner Avramopoulos,
Brussels, 23 March 2016

The numbers, routes and profiles of the refugees and migrants have changed over time and they will continue to evolve based on crises within the countries of origin, and the political response taken by third countries and Member States. Both right wing violent extremist groups and Daesh have sought to exploit the refugee crisis to promote their own poisonous narratives and there has been particular concern that Daesh will use the migrant flows to smuggle in terrorists.



This issue paper was prepared by Steven Lenos of the RAN CoE. The views expressed in this document are those of the author alone and do not necessarily reflect those of the RAN CoE, the European Commission or any other institution.

When groups of newcomers are arriving, or are being relocated or redistributed, the response from the recipient communities can be mixed, from offers of support and warm welcome, to demonstrations, clashes, hate speech and hate crimes and even violent extremism. In many countries (for instance in France¹, United Kingdom², Germany³) there has been a worrying rise in attacks on refugee facilities, refugees and mosques, as well as hate crimes targeting ethnic minorities. The German North-Rhine Westphalian intelligence agency states that "The inhuman campaigns against refugees by the far-right have contributed to a brutalization of the political climate" ⁴Even if the number of refugee arrivals drop further, their 'distribution' within Europe might continue to lead to resistance and even polarisation. Efforts to deport those deemed as illegal migrants, might also lead to resistance and violent protests.

In the last year, we have also seen how in the aftermath of terrorist attacks, there is a 'backlash' against those wrongly perceived to be responsible. Furthermore, there have been violent and sexual attacks (such as the New Years Eve attacks in Cologne, Germany last year) which can stir up bad feeling against those who have recently entered the EU. Furthermore, myths and fears can deepen the polarisation and feed radicalisation and extremism.

¹<http://www.la-croix.com/France/Bernard-Cazeneuve-Dans-la-Republique-la-notion-cardinale-est-le-respect-2016-01-19-1200732386>

²<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/brexit-hate-crime-racism-stats-spike-police-england-wales-eu-referendum-a7126706.html>

³<http://www.dw.com/en/good-living-report-highlights-hate-crime-in-germany/a-36148105>

⁴ <http://www.dw.com/en/german-intel-more-turbo-radicalized-neo-nazis-emerging/a-19379532>



Polarisation? Radicalisation?

If we talk about polarisation, we mean **polarisation** being the process where groups in society become adversaries. When there is a sharp psychological division between “us and them”. Alienation and hostilities are growing, resulting in a political climate where prejudices, hate speech and even hate crime flourish. This is not radicalisation – at least not yet.

Radicalisation is the process where individuals or factions of these polarised groups grow further towards the acceptance and use of violent extremism and ultimately terrorism. So polarisation leads to something other than radicalisation. You can have a polarised society without radicalisation and people and groups can radicalise in a society that is not polarised.

Five challenging dynamics

It is against this background that the RAN looked into the effects of the refugee and migrant crisis for those working to prevent radicalisation leading to violent extremism and terrorism. It was researched and developed into a draft Policy Paper. In April 2016 RAN organised a Thematic Event on the topic, and four Member State support workshops have been held on the matter.

This led to the identification of five effects that can occur. Five effects with their own dynamics, which need to be understood and covered. The overarching challenge is the cumulative and reciprocal dynamics between the four effects. On these effects awareness should be raised, the dynamics should be assessed and tackled in policies preventing radicalisation towards violent extremism.

1. Polarisation and radicalisation
2. Right wing extremism
3. Extremist ‘jihadism’
4. Left wing extremism

5. Reciprocal radicalisation

Challenging dynamic1: Polarisation and radicalisation

No one will doubt the existence of polarisation, or the unhealthy nature. But why does it matter to those working to prevent radicalisation? Polarisation does not necessarily lead to radicalisation and radicalisation does not have to result in growing polarisation. The answer lays in the concepts of factors that make people vulnerable to extremist propaganda and recruitment. RAN wrote about a kaleidoscope of factors⁵. Being affected by a process of polarisation amplifies many of the psychological and social factors that make people vulnerable. A heavily divided community with hostilities between groups and a strong “us and them” thinking is the ideal breeding ground for recruiters and radicalisers for extremist ideologies, exploiting feelings of fear, distrust and rejection of “them”.

So, a preventative CVE approach aiming at preventing radicalisation needs to address the vulnerabilities which feed the breeding ground for radicalisation.

But how does one mitigate polarisation? What is under the bonnet of the polarisation process? In several meetings RAN practitioners referred to a conceptual framework for polarisation developed by Bart Brandsma for the Dutch police⁶. It was first presented at a RAN POL meeting⁷.

⁵http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/issue_paper_root-causes_jan2016_en.pdf

⁶ Police and Polarisation, An initial guide. Bart Brandsma, Pharresia 2016

⁷ http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about

Brandsma's claims polarisation is built upon *two rules* and *five roles*:

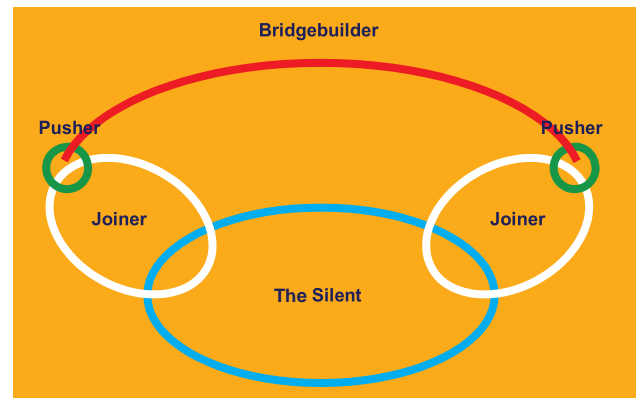
Two rules

1. *Polarisation is a thought construct, 'us-and-them' thinking, based on identities and groups;*
2. *Polarisation needs fuel; it thrives on talking about identities in combination with judgment. If there is no communication, no energy put into the polarisation, it will die out.*

The five roles

1. The *Pushers*, trying to create polarisation, the instigators acting from the poles;
2. The *Joiners*, who have chosen sides, and moved towards the pushers, this is polarisation taking place;
3. The *Silent in the middle*, the nuanced. Those not taking part in polarisation. They could be neutral, scared and/or indifferent. They are targeted by the pushers;
4. The *Bridge builder*, trying to bring peace and moderation by reaching out to both opposing poles. By doing so underlining the existence of the two poles adding fuel by;
5. The *Scapegoats*, which are being blamed or attacked, these could be the non polarised 'in the middle' or the bridge-builders.

The extremists and terrorists deliberately try to polarise. Daesh even explains in the editorial of its online magazine Dabiq that they "want to



destroy the grey zone". Daesh has produced dozens of videos capitalising on the refugee crises. They enforce four themes: 1. The West does not care about refugees. 2. Any refugee fleeing from the 'caliphate' to a non-Muslim country is a sinner 3. Because of their sin, any Muslim who dies on the road to the West will be punished by God 4. Any sinner will become a target of Daesh.

Central themes used by the right wing extremist pushers in their narratives focus on cultural-religious anxiety, threat to physical safety (especially for women), economic insecurity and scarcity of housing and public services. Tackling polarisation is not always an important element in CVE plans. Sometimes a CVE plan comes to life as an element of a Counter Terrorism (CT) Strategy. 'Old school' CT is about threats to national security. Radicalisation is in this perspective seen in combination with mobilisation and recruitment for terrorist groups. As a result there is a risk that radicalisation, as seen through a CT lens, might underestimate the processes in society which have an effect on vulnerability, (lack of) resilience and start to form the breeding ground.

Challenging dynamic 2: Right wing extremism

There is a myriad of groups and initiatives on the right wing side of the political spectrum, ranging from resurrected right wing extremists, to new militant vigilante groups and concerned citizens



outing their concerns in angry, xenophobic words.

The Independent wrote “Refugee crisis sparks record year for political violence in Germany as right and left wing clash”. In the article the interior minister, Thomas de Maiziere, presented spiked figures on political violence and warned that violence by right and left-wing violent extremists was “increasing at an unprecedented rate”⁸. RISU warned in a recent CLAD-report⁹ of lone wolf attackers who might turn to violence in an atmosphere of perceived justification.

In discussing this dynamic, the RAN practitioners were keen to stress the distinction between extremists prone to violence and concerned citizens who have grievances and fears and sometimes show this in a brutal and angry manner. An inclusive CVE approach, strategic communication approach and social policies should be able to deal with 'angry citizens'. Labelling concerned citizens as extremists can feed the sense of polarisation. The state should put effort in challenging myths and offering security and safety, as well as addressing real grievances.

The CVE approach for dealing with the prevention of right wing extremism must take account of the different approaches and their organisation, and must range from early prevention work with vulnerable groups, to pursue and deradicalisation and disengagement for those deemed as violent extremists.

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<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/refugee-crisis-sparks-record-year-for-political-violence-in-germany-as-right-and-left-wing-clash-a7044521.html>

⁹ <https://rusi.org/publication/occasional-papers/lone-actor-terrorism-final-report>

Challenging dynamic 3: Extremist ‘jihadism’

There are three dimensions worth highlighting with regards to polarisation and extremist ‘jihadism’.

Firstly, terrorist groups such as Daesh will continue to instil fear within Europe in alleging that their supporters are hiding amongst the refugees. Daesh claims it has put thousands of terrorists inside the refugee stream. At the RAN Thematic Event it turned out that there were no indications of such numbers, but undoubtedly there were terrorists, radicalisers and people in the radicalisation process identified in the refugee facilities and communities. An analysis of the perpetrators of recent attacks in the Wall Street Journal concluded ‘(there is a) body of evidence that the terrorist group used last year’s migrant influx to send fighters to Europe.’¹⁰ It is not unlikely that losing ground in the so-called Caliphate could result in more terrorist fighters entering Europe disguised as refugees, hence the importance of ensuring adequate checks at the external border and investments in awareness and detection for those working with refugees.

The second dimension is the risk of vulnerable refugees being targeted by radicalisers. For instance, Hans Georg Maassen, head of Germany’s Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (BfV) mentioned 340 attempts to approach and recruit newcomers in refugee centres and local mosques. “*We are concerned*

¹⁰ Germany charges Syrian immigrant with supporting Isis, 27 October 2016, http://www.wsj.com/articles/germany-charges-syrian-immigrant-with-supporting-isis-1477566821?cx_navSource=cx_picks&cx_tag=collabctx&cx_artPos=1#cxrecs_s



that Salafists and other Islamists do recruit in asylum seeker camps," he said¹¹.

But let there be no mistake, the vast majority of refugees are fleeing countries where violent extremism and sectarianism are rife. But in refugee communities there are vulnerable people, vulnerable because they are traumatised, cut off from basic needs and protective structures, feeling marginalised and unwelcome. In some cases, they have even been attacked or suffered verbal abuse once they have reached

"I was furious with him, I couldn't accept something like this – especially here in Germany, the country that opened its doors to us."

One of the three Syrians turning in Jaber al-Bakr, the refugee suspected of terrorism, who was on the run in Germany

their intended destination. As mentioned in the RAN DNA, communities and families can be considered valuable partners in countering extremism and building resilience. As we have learned with other communities at risk, we need to develop a relationship of trust to help protect and safeguard vulnerable individuals.

The third dimension is the fact that attacks on refugee facilities and mosques, and a rise in Islamophobia, are being exploited in the extremist 'jihadist' recruitment propaganda. It is portrayed as an illustration that 'the West doesn't want Muslims' and is not protecting them against violence. Individuals who feel threatened and under attack, and who do not feel protected by their government may also become vulnerable to radicalisation.

¹¹ ISIS & Islamist groups in Germany recruit refugees, infiltrate mosques – intel chief, RT 15 August 2016 <https://www.rt.com/news/356011-isis-germany-recruit-refugees/>

Challenging dynamic 4: Left wing extremism

Left wing extremism is not new for most European countries. Even before the refugee and migrant crisis spiked, some countries were challenged with autonomous and extreme left organisations. Defending 'citizens without papers' and claiming that 'no human being is illegal', and 'the State is oppressive', some organised violent clashes, organised intimidating naming and shaming campaigns against those working in, or responsible for the detention and repatriation of illegal migrants. For instance in the Netherlands, a detention facility was firebombed in 2009¹² and the architects suffered from intimidation by extremists. During the recent crisis, Italian demonstrators clashed with Austrian police at the Brenner Pass over the tightening of Austrian migration policy¹³. There are indications that foreign European activists play an inciting role in several places where refugees and migrants are being kept or detained. Several RAN participants have reported how in and around refugee and migrant facilities, there are left wing activists who are fuelling the polarisation between the refugees and the local authorities.¹⁴

The extreme left is in many places reorganising and becoming more active in response to the surge in activities of right wing extremist groups.

¹² <https://www.indymedia.nl/nl/2010/06/68319.shtml>

¹³ Italian demonstrators clashed with Austrian police at the Brenner pass, Euronews, 24 April 2016, <http://www.euronews.com/2016/04/24/italian-protesters-clash-with-austrian-police-at-brenner-pass>

¹⁴ <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/2077479/leading-member-of-activist-group-accused-of-starting-fires-in-calais-jungle-is-a-british-academic/>



As seen in for instance Greece¹⁵, Sweden¹⁶ and Finland this can result in violent incidents and clashes. There is a hard core of the so-called antifascist movement, but at large demonstrations they are marching together with concerned citizens.

Challenging dynamic 5: Reciprocal radicalisation (1+1+1+1>4)

The fifth challenge is the culmination of the above described four dynamics. The extremist recruiters feed off each other with their propaganda, by pointing to the “them” being an imminent threat. A good illustration is the birth and rise of the English Defence League in response to the Muslims against Crusaders with their provocative ‘poppy burning’, as described by Demos¹⁷. In their online and offline manifestations both opposing movements legitimise their existence and actions by referring to the other, culminating in preparation for deadly acts of violence which were disturbed just in time. Reciprocal radicalisation could lead to a reactive “tit for tat” or even co-evolution of organisations and ideological groups

The dynamics of reciprocal or cumulative radicalisation are far more complex than interaction between the two or three major forms of extremism. All of these actors also react to the government interventions - or the absence of them. Brandsma illustrated that in the

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Murder_of_Pavlos_Fyssas

¹⁶ <https://www.thelocal.se/20160403/soldiers-of-odin-in-gothenburg-brawl>

¹⁷ <https://www.demos.co.uk/files/Demos%20-%20Cumulative%20Radicalisation%20-%2005%20Nov%202013.pdf>

dynamics of polarisation the activities of an actor attempting to build bridges between opposing actors in fact restates the existence of the two polarising poles. State interventions targeting specific groups in society can result in counter reactions from these communities and groups. The policy decisions on CVE, refugees, immigration and integration all potentially influence groups that might start to radicalise, or extremist groups who will spin it for their goals. This is where conflict sensitivity should make governments aware of unwanted effects of their policy, actions or communication. Policy developed in silos, without coordination, might work against each other.

Topics for further consideration

The main consideration is to develop a holistic CVE approach, including all potential forms of radicalisation and polarisation.

The approach could include the following elements, which are suggested as considerations for further thought:

1. Inclusiveness, while addressing different forms of reciprocal radicalisation

Defend fundamental values and rights against all forms of extremism. In the policy agenda and framing of threats, pay attention to potential blind spots and make sure the concerns and grievances of all vulnerable communities and groups are covered. This also applies to the hosting communities.

Deter and pursue, and at the same time work with prevention strategies, being the only sustainable solution. Make sure that police is visible and active around refugee centres, I) strong on radicalisation and

recruitment, II) protecting refugees from hate crime attacks and giving priority to investigating attacks and incidents and III) deal with all illegal and criminal acts to keep the peace at local level. Make sure everyone feels safe, both members of the hosting communities and refugees. If they do not feel protected, communities can feel threatened which in turn can potentially make them vulnerable to radicalisation.

2. Tackle polarisation as part of CVE and inclusiveness, direct interventions to in the "people in the middle"

Understand the dynamics of polarisation on a local and national level and try not to feed the "us and them" game favoured by extremists and pushers of polarisation. Invest in the non polarised middle and what people have in common.

3. Invest in training and awareness and resilience

Invest in practitioners working in first reception, detention or refugee facilities.

Make first line practitioners, NGO volunteers aware of the potential risks of radicalisation, recruitment and polarisation.

Train them on I) signs of radicalisation and where to report them. But just as important are II) signs of concern and the factors that make people vulnerable to recruitment and radicalisation. Professional attitudes and actions can make a difference, making people at risk resilient or helping them to see practitioners as trustworthy and sharing their

concerns about safeguarding vulnerable individuals and groups.

4. Invest in strategic communication and media relations and knowledge

It is not only Daesh that is skilled in using social media to influence their members, sympathisers and empathisers; the counter-jihad movement and actually all extremist groups can be equally effective. Framing, hoaxes, myths, conspiracies and propaganda are spread and shared at an astonishing speed. Strategic communication, with understanding of audiences and attitudes, is crucial. Communication should not only be about facts and figures, because feelings of fear, threat and injustice are perhaps even more important.

The ICT industry could help NGOs and communities to use social media to empower themselves.

Governments should pro-actively feed the media landscape with facts and figures defusing myths and propaganda. Members of the press must be informed on facts and developments in society. Media organisations could be challenged and supported to develop a code of conduct for journalists reporting on the sensitive topics of refugees and radicalisation.

5. National coordination and local empowerment

There is no silver bullet or one unique solution. As the Thematic Event, the Policy Paper and the Member State workshops showed, many interventions are needed – by national governments, local



governments, NGOs, schools, volunteers and others. This needs national coordination, as well as sensible empowerment and guidance for local governments and the local actors working together. Coordination and expertise on national level can support local governments to assess the local situation and find multi-agency responses.



Relevant RAN publications

- The Root Causes of Violent Extremism (issue paper, January 2016)
- The refugee and migrant crisis (Ex Post paper for the Thematic Event, 8 May 2016)
- Successful and effective engaging with communities, Ex post paper RAN POL , Oslo (NO) 06-07 April 2016)

All of these can be found on the RAN Website:

<http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/ran>