



Mapping of primary prevention approaches in Central & Eastern EU Member States

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Radicalisation Awareness Network

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Important definitions used in this paper

Violent extremists (VEs) are individuals who support ideas and/or are involved with groups or movements promoting violent means to enforce an extremist ideology. Violent extremism refers to “the beliefs and actions of people who support or use violence to achieve ideological, religious or political goals.” This can include terrorism and other forms of politically motivated violence ⁽¹⁾.

Violent right-wing extremists (VRWEs) are VEs associated with the extreme right. This category includes, primarily: neo-Nazi movements, anti-Islam and anti-migration movements, identitarian movements, ultranationalist and neofascist movements, far-right sovereign citizen movements, single-issue extremists like incels or anti-vaxxers, and separatist movements ⁽²⁾.

Preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) – proactive, non-coercive actions to counter efforts by violent extremists to radicalise, recruit and mobilise followers to violence and to address specific factors that facilitate and enable violent extremist recruitment and radicalisation to violence ⁽³⁾.

List of abbreviations

CEE – Central and Eastern Europe

COVID-19 – Coronavirus disease 2019; a contagious disease caused by the virus severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (**SARS-CoV-2**)

EU – European Union

LGBTQ+ – This is an initialism that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning and more

MMA – Mixed martial arts

NATO – The North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NGO – Non-governmental organisation

RAN – Radicalisation Awareness Network

VIEs – Violent Islamist extremists

5G – Fifth-generation technology standard for broadband cellular networks

⁽¹⁾ UNODC, *The Doha Declaration: Promoting a culture of lawfulness* (2018).

⁽²⁾ Pauwels, *Contemporary manifestations of violent right-wing extremism in the EU: An overview of P/CVE practices* (2021).

⁽³⁾ Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *A Whole-of-Society Approach to Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization That Lead to Terrorism. A Guidebook for Central Asia* (2020).

Objectives

Along with the increasing imbalance of the world political order, as a result of newly emerging conflicts, both military and commercial, epidemics and pandemics of new viruses, and economic crises, we can observe an intensification of the radicalisation process of their inhabitants in many parts of the world. One of the places in the EU where this process intensifies, especially in the case of violent right-wing extremists (VRWEs), is Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Here, this process is additionally combined with the relentlessly smouldering ethnic conflicts in the region, the fact that it borders on a country with an active armed conflict, the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic and resource crisis, and the actions of external actors. At the same time, these problems differ in many respects from those faced by western European countries. The problems related to VRWEs are much more intense in the CEE, and the problems related to violent left-wing extremism and violent Islamist extremists are much less intense. This is why it is essential to research and discuss local and regional preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) good practices.

The aim of this paper is to take stock of existing approaches and practices developed and used by practitioners active in primary prevention, including social and family workers, teachers, mental health professionals, local authorities and law enforcement in the CEE Member States of the EU (Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Lithuania, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Slovakia), and to present some of examples that may serve as useful inspirations on how to tackle primary prevention of radicalisation in the region. This review includes projects and practices focusing on prevention of violent extremism and radicalisation specifically, but also efforts addressing related phenomena such as hate speech and hate crime, discrimination and xenophobia, polarisation, to the extent they are relevant for P/CVE work and needs of practitioners. Gender dimensions of P/CVE work as well as multi-agency cooperation in the respective practices/fields have also been considered and emphasised where relevant. Based on an exploration of practical work and existing cases, this paper provides an overview of different promising practices, models and/or approaches in each country, as well as areas for future development of primary prevention for practitioners.

Methodology

During the work on this document, a selection of inspiring practices and programmes from among the CEE countries was carried out. To make this selection, the programmes and practices collected in the RAN Collection were reviewed. While this collection features a number of inspiring and best practices from CEE EU Member States, many more exist that have not been earlier systematically reviewed and shared with the wider P/CVE community in the EU. The authors aimed to identify these through desktop research and consultations with key stakeholders. Therefore, 23 interviews were conducted with practitioners from the region, such as: Center for the Study of Democracy (BG), PATRIR (RO), Institute of Social Safety (PL), Political Capital (HU), Debunk EU (LT), Partners for Democratic Change Slovakia (SK), among others, and also with people working (in the context of P/CVE) for government institutions of six countries of the region. In addition, the authors reviewed programmes, good practices and campaigns existing in the CEE (e.g. YouthRightOn and OneBraveThing), outputs from major EU-funded projects covering the CEE region (such as CHAMPIONS, CEE-Prevent-Net, Firstlinepractitioners.com, INDEED, PARTICIPATION), and strategic and policy documents of CEE states.

To present and have a brief review of existing programmes, practices and tools for primary prevention, including mapping the actors involved, the authors divided them in the following main categories of P/CVE work:

- Education activities
- Family support, youth work
- Awareness raising and communication campaigns
- Trainings for practitioners, capacity building

- Community engagement
- Multi-stakeholder cooperation and partnerships (local and national level)

Characteristics of the specificity of the region

The primary element to be taken into account when analysing these practices and approaches from the CEE is, first and foremost, the local specificity. It creates the conditions for action, for at least several reasons, very different from those in which P/CVE in western Europe comes to act. The following points should be noted in the context of these differences:

- **Virtually no (violent) Islamist extremism, a relatively small percentage of Muslims among the larger populations.** Most Muslims in the CEE region are native inhabitants with centuries-old cultural and religious roots in the region, and they are well integrated with other cultural and religious communities, without significant Islamist extremist radicalisation developments⁽⁴⁾. This situation is different from the situation in the western part of Europe, where the problem of (violent) Islamist extremism is much more serious⁽⁵⁾. At the same time, it means that P/CVE patterns of action cannot be transferred one-to-one and programmes in this matter must be developed in close cooperation with CEE partners, both public and third sector, in order to avoid misallocation of funds and attempts to solve non-existent problems in the region. As a result, not only will these programmes be more effective, but also the allocation of funds for P/CVE will be better.
- **The weakness of (violent) left-wing extremism and the low degree of radicalisation of this part of the political scene.** Radicalisation of this ideological shade plays a minor role in the region today. Marxist circles (communists, Trotskyists, Maoists, Stalinists, etc.) are very weak. Anarchists are slightly stronger in the region, with a total of about 20-30 social centres in the above-mentioned countries⁽⁶⁾. They are also active in the labour movement, the environmental movement, the animal liberation movement and martial arts. However, most anarchist activists do not show violent tendencies, and activities of this nature are the domain of specific individuals or groups rather than the local anarchist movement as such. The most noticeable in these groups are the violent tendencies in the matter of combating (violent) right-wing extremists or sabotage actions related to deforestation or industrial animal husbandry⁽⁷⁾. A small number of volunteers from these milieus also fight along the Ukrainian side in the Russian war of aggression against the country⁽⁸⁾. It remains an open question to observe these circles in terms of possible further radicalisation and the influence of external actors towards the EU on the extreme left (such as the secret services of the Russian Federation or the People's Republic of China).
- **Strong nationalist groups.** A very characteristic point in the CEE region is nationalism and its important place in the political discourse of the countries of the region⁽⁹⁾. Parties professing this ideology are important actors of the political scene in a significant number of countries in the region. There, right-wing populist parties achieve good election results⁽¹⁰⁾. As a result, the political discourse in the region has shifted significantly to the far right, compared to the countries of western Europe, and the standards of political discourse, historical perspective, as well as the level of xenophobia, racism and hate speech are significantly different between these regions. It is in this ideology that, first of all, radicalisation takes place in the CEE region, and it is in this segment that activities and resources must be allocated in the first place.

⁽⁴⁾ Górak-Sosnowska (Ed.), *Muslims in Poland and Eastern Europe Widening the European Discourse on Islam* (2011).

⁽⁵⁾ Zhirkov, Verkuyten, Weesie, *Perceptions of world politics and support for terrorism among Muslims: Evidence from Muslim countries and Western Europe* (2014).

⁽⁶⁾ Wennerhag, *Anarchists in Eastern and Western Europe – a Comparative Study* (2012-16).

⁽⁷⁾ Farinelli, Marinone, *Contemporary Violent Left-wing and Anarchist Extremism (VLWAE) in the EU: Analysing Threats and Potential for P/CVE* (2021).

⁽⁸⁾ Rekawek (Ed.), *Western extremists and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022* (2022).

⁽⁹⁾ Liger, Gutheil, *Right-wing extremism in the EU* (2022), pp. 31-33, 44-46, 49-51, 99-100, 131-133, 147-148.

⁽¹⁰⁾ Ágh, *Declining Democracy in East-Central Europe – The Divide in the EU and Emerging Hard Populism* (2019).

- **Gangs of sports hooligans.** An important factor in the region is the presence of sports hooligans gangs, mainly related to football ⁽¹¹⁾. They show a strong violent inclination, and the cult of physical strength, violence and hierarchy make them a valuable place for VRWE to recruit new members. In addition, numerous sociological studies indicate their right-wing, nationalist and xenophobic political orientation ⁽¹²⁾, which further strengthens the importance and strength of VRWE in the region. At the same time, it is worth paying attention to the relationships of sports hooligans groups (primarily related to football and mixed martial arts) not only with VRWE ⁽¹³⁾ but also with organised crime ⁽¹⁴⁾.
- **Short democratic traditions, authoritarian tendencies and illiberal democracies.** The CEE region has a short democratic tradition. In the dominant period of modern history, many countries of the region were ruled by undemocratic monarchies, regimes based on totalitarian political systems (fascism, Bolshevism) and local authoritarian regimes. Similar traditions are still alive in this region today, which translates into the formation of illiberal democracy regimes here ⁽¹⁵⁾.
- **Conspiracy myths and disinformation.** Low expenditure on science and education in the post-Soviet era, increasing political and military instability just outside the EU borders, repeated economic crises, the popularity of social media and the influence of external actors, as well as distrust in state authorities tied to many of these countries' authoritarian pasts, are among the factors contributing to the increasing popularity of conspiracy myths in the region, both related to scientific developments (regarding vaccinations, 5G telephony and COVID-19, etc.) as well as those of political nature (anti-Semitic, homophobic, etc.) ⁽¹⁶⁾.
- **The influence of Russia.** The influence of the special services and Russian diplomacy on the region has been a particularly important factor since the invasion of Ukraine by the armed forces of the Russian Federation. Earlier, from the beginning of the 2000s, it was possible to see support by the Russian Federation of (violent) right-wing extremists and (violent) left-wing extremists, in the spirit of the 'alliance of extremes' ⁽¹⁷⁾. Currently, the countries of the eastern part of the EU are objects of special interest to Russia, which, striving to destabilise the political situation in the region, supports various, often marginal and violent political groups, and niche protest groups ⁽¹⁸⁾. As a result, the societies of this part of the EU are particularly vulnerable to disinformation and the effects of information warfare, such as fake news, conspiracy myths or the strengthening of social polarisation by external actors.
- **The proximity of the war in Ukraine.** The intensification of the conflict in Ukraine, lasting since 2014, and the broad participation of volunteers from outside the countries directly involved in the armed conflict ⁽¹⁹⁾ is another element contributing to the intensification of radicalisation tendencies in the region and the strengthening of local extremist groups ⁽²⁰⁾. Combat training and the ease of acquiring weapons, which accompany a hot armed conflict, make the militarisation of the countries of this region noticeable, as well as the increase in the number of paramilitary groups and preppers, and the tendency to strengthen the demands for easier access to weapons ⁽²¹⁾. The effect of this state of affairs is an increase in the immediate threat from armed extremist groups and the terrorist threat in the region.
- **Low-level of government activities in P/CVE matters.** At the same time, the governments of CEE countries have been implementing P/CVE programmes on a relatively modest scale, often underestimating the problem. This is due to the low presence of the issue of radicalisation in the local scientific discourse, the strong influence of nationalism on the political scenes of these countries, as well as illiberal tendencies in the region. The general perception in CEE states is that there are much more pressing issues to be solved than work on prevention of extremism. Prevention is not done with proper

⁽¹¹⁾ Carr, Parnell, Widdop, Power, Millar (Eds), *Football, Politics and Identity* (2021).

⁽¹²⁾ Benedikter, Wojtaszyn, *Football politics in Central Eastern Europe: a symptom of growing anti-Europeanism and anti-globalization?* (2018).

⁽¹³⁾ Claus, *Ihr Kampf. Wie Europas extreme Rechte für den Umsturz trainiert* (2020).

⁽¹⁴⁾ Superwizjer TVN, "Posłuszeństwo wymusza, używając maczet i tasaków". *Kariera Olgierda L. z Trójmiasta* (2019).

⁽¹⁵⁾ Krastev, *Eastern Europe's Illiberal Revolution: The Long Road to Democratic Decline* (2018).

⁽¹⁶⁾ Astapova, Colăcel, Pintilescu, Scheibner (Eds), *Conspiracy Theories in Eastern Europe. Tropes and Trends* (2021).

⁽¹⁷⁾ Shekhovtsov, *Russia and the Western Far Right. Tango Noir* (2017).

⁽¹⁸⁾ Ibid.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Rękawek (Ed.), *Western extremists and the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022* (2022).

⁽²⁰⁾ Rękawek, *Foreign Fighters in Ukraine. The Brown-Red Cocktail* (2022).

⁽²¹⁾ Kahn, Koper, Muller, *Insight: Weapons industry booms as Eastern Europe arms Ukraine* (2022).

attention and resources also in other fields such as crime, youth delinquency, etc. The effect of this is the limited amount or even absence of visible P/CVE programmes.

- **NGOs replacing governments in P/CVE activities.** As a result of the low level of activity of the regional governments in the matter of P/CVE, the burden of activities in this area was primarily taken over by NGOs. There was a distinctive difference between perspectives of interviewed government officials and functionaries of public institutions (for example: police, counterintelligence, etc.) and NGOs. The first group had a tendency to present extremist problems as almost non-existent in their state or limited to the individual cases, and practitioners and researchers from NGOs had a tendency to show the problem of VRWE as a visible and burning problem.

Additional country-specific context

The specific context of P/CVE work is given by the internal political situation of some of the surveyed countries. For example, some countries have a relatively low ranking regarding the freedom of the press ⁽²²⁾. Simultaneously, high levels of polarisation and illiberal tendencies can be detected in some countries, along with rising nationalism ⁽²³⁾. At the same time, as NATO border countries, in the face of the war in Ukraine, Poland ⁽²⁴⁾, Romania and Slovakia ⁽²⁵⁾ are particularly exposed to the effects of information warfare, disinformation, and the emergence and spread of fake news. In addition, attacks on the LGBTQ+ community are increasing in Poland ⁽²⁶⁾ and Slovakia, and in the latter country there was also a terrorist attack in 2022 with two fatal victims of homophobic violence ⁽²⁷⁾. Croatia is still marked by the legacy of the Balkan War in the 1990s. The conflict left many traces in this region of Europe both in interethnic relations as well as in the approach to issues such as nationalism, xenophobia, political violence and extremism ⁽²⁸⁾. In states like Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia, social exclusion still affects a large part of the ethnic minorities living in these countries, i.e. the Roma. They form a big part of the population living on the border or below the poverty line, and a large percentage of prisoners ⁽²⁹⁾. In some interviews, the influence of the clergy (mainly Catholic) and the church-sponsored civil society in various states (predominantly in Croatia and Poland) and polarisation of the society (predominantly in Croatia, Hungary and Poland) has been highlighted. Smaller and less populous countries, such as Lithuania and Slovenia, according to practitioners from these countries, practically do not experience much pressure from extremists and the development of their organisations, and their main problem is rather hate speech and fake news.

P/CVE activities in Central and Eastern Europe – Overview

Education-related activities

In the simplest terms, P/CVE projects and activities in the field of educational activities carried out in the CEE can be divided into those whose main part is carried out online and those carried out in person. It can be clearly seen that the former predominate. One of the reasons for this state of affairs is, of course, the issue of the internet as one of the main spaces for recruitment, radicalisation, disinformation and dissemination of fake news. At the same time, however, the question arises as to why so few projects and activities related to P/CVE are taking place in another important area of fighting the process of radicalisation and the spread of

⁽²²⁾ No author, *Media Freedom: Few Good Stories to Tell* (2020); DAN, *Polska spadła na 66. pozycję w rankingu wolności mediów. Najgorszy wynik w historii* (2022).

⁽²³⁾ Tworzecki, *Poland: A Case of Top-Down Polarization* (2019); Kubas, *Illiberal Democracy in the Comparative Analysis of Hungary and Poland* (2021); Lugosi, *Radical right framing of social policy in Hungary: between nationalism and populism* (2021); and Jaskulowski, Majewski, *Populist in form, nationalist in content? Law and Justice, nationalism and memory politics* (2022).

⁽²⁴⁾ Kozłowski, *Disinformation in Poland on the war in Ukraine* (2022).

⁽²⁵⁾ Cholewa, Grzesiczak, Tomaszewska, *Ukrainian refugees and disinformation: situation in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Romania* (2022).

⁽²⁶⁾ No author, *Annual review of the human rights situation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and intersex people in Europe and Central Asia 2022* (2022).

⁽²⁷⁾ Rose, *The Bratislava Attacks: Insights from the Shooter's Manifesto* (2022).

⁽²⁸⁾ Polic, *Three Decades On, War's Legacy Still Overshadows Croatia* (2021).

⁽²⁹⁾ Čada, *Social Exclusion of the Roma and the Czech Society* (2012).

extremist views, i.e. in educational institutions. This is a question that should be addressed to the public institutions supervising education in the CEE.

Regardless, educational activities regarding P/CVE in the CEE region are predominantly found online. They are most often focused on building resistance among young people and other beneficiaries of resistance to extremist, radicalising messages, hate speech, and strengthening critical thinking in groups of beneficiaries, as well as digital literacy trainings for teachers and young people in schools, for parents. Examples are the Bulgarian Safer Internet Centre project, which addresses all types of online harms, especially concerning children and young people and also runs an online hotline ⁽³⁰⁾, and Media Literacy Coalition Bulgaria, which conducted numerous trainings and outreach activities for different target groups ⁽³¹⁾.

Young people today live in difficult economic and financial conditions, struggle to find employment, and when they do get a job, the working conditions are often poor. The impossibility of independence from parents is a growing problem, and sometimes parents themselves believe that young people are not mature enough to have their own opinion, so young people turn to the internet and discover new dimensions and knowledge. With the advent of the internet, online radicalisation has increased as young people rely on online sources for research and self-education while much of the content is increasingly biased and as algorithms keep feeding borderline or extremist content. All these are just some of the factors that can trigger an identity crisis among young people, which in turn can be a trigger for radicalisation. In order to reach young people, especially online, it seems important to use the experience of several CEE programmes that take into account the specificity of the language and everyday experiences of children and teenagers.

There were several such programmes in the CEE, which combined the most important elements of good youth work practices. An example of such a programme was conducted by the Bulgarian Center for the Study of Democracy called YouthRightOn, created to build resilience against far-right messages online. Social media (Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, Vbox) were used in the project, and in the construction of the online survey and focus groups (among the group that was to become the beneficiary of the programme), and thanks to this it was possible to include the knowledge and perspective of the students themselves in building the programme. As a result, an analysis of the most popular radicalising extremist narratives in social media was conducted and attempts were made to counter them with alternative narratives. Similar research was carried out in the Croatian project 'With Education against Radicalization' run by the Faculty of Political Science during 2022 ⁽³²⁾.

In such an activity targeted to young people, it was also interesting to use ways to reach young people, using means and methods known to them and creating their everyday world, i.e. engagement of the influencers, through videos, comics and games. As a result of the Bulgarian YouthRightOn project, pilot lessons were also introduced in 70 schools, and the reinforcement of online activities with those in real daily life is especially important for the effectiveness of such programmes, as online activities themselves tend to 'disappear' in the mass of information that flows over the internet every day, giving a chance for knowledge to take root in students and directing their attention to its sources. Unfortunately, despite the interesting approach, the programme itself is not continued and its website has expired.

In the context of regions with heavy ethnic tensions, it is extremely important to take some steps to combat this state of affairs and stop the radicalisation process at the earliest possible age. Hence the great importance of schools in this process. An example of a project that is a bridge between the third sector and the government side was the project Intercultural education through the subject 'Cultural and Spiritual Heritage of the Region' (CSHR) ⁽³³⁾ implemented in Croatia at the public Dalj Elementary School (Osnovna škola Dalj). The aim was to improve social relationships in post-conflict societies in Croatia, and to familiarise children in multi-ethnic communities with the culture and customs of 'others'.

The school still provides separate schooling for the Serbian minority, in the Serbian language and Cyrillic script, which was one of the demands for the peaceful reintegration after the war. This means that children from the two ethnic groups (namely, Croats and Serbs, age of students: 11-15, grades 5 to 8) spend most of their time at school separated. Croats and Croatian Serbs had almost no contact between 1991 and 1998.

⁽³⁰⁾ Safer Internet Center Bulgaria website, <https://www.safenet.bg/en>

⁽³¹⁾ Media Literacy Coalition Bulgaria website, <https://gramoten.li/about-us>

⁽³²⁾ With Education against Radicalisation programme website, <https://www.novinarz.online/radikalizacija-mladih.html>

⁽³³⁾ Intercultural education through the subject 'Cultural and Spiritual Heritage of the Region' (CSHR) programme website, <https://www.congress-intercultural.eu/en/initiative/219-intercultural-education-through-the-subject-cultural-and-spiritual-heritage-of-the-region-cshr.html>

Today's teenagers often have relatives or grandparents who fought during the war. Therefore, a strong feeling of mistrust has remained. In light of this, the CSHR launched a new practice, enabling students from different ethnic groups to cooperate in one joint activity. Since the children often deal with nationalism at home, it was important to make them reconsider their view of the 'others'. In turn, this will help prevent future radicalisation. Topics covered in this project manual range from communication, tradition and customs, local history, stereotypes and prejudices to identity. The results and outcomes of the education process related to the project are primarily promoting tolerance, learning about the culture of other ethnic groups, and preventing violent and extremist behaviour. A set of handbooks has been produced as well as a set of brochures and a DVD titled 'Will you say hi to me on the bus?' has been produced as part of a high school project.

This project and the school subject implemented in its scope are a step in the right direction, but also an example of the difficulties encountered by P/CVE programmes in the CEE region. Here, the elements of the fight against radicalisation had to be incorporated into another subject. At the same time, the active parties on the part of the authorities were regional, not national, authorities. This is a common case in the CEE, where regional and local authorities are more positive about P/CVE projects than central authorities are.

Family support and youth work

A surprising effect of the review of good practices and programmes operating in recent years in the field of P/CVE in the CEE was the small presence in the examined set of activities that can be directly classified as family support, youth work connected with P/CVE. Yes, there were many activities in the region that could be called youth work, but those specifically related to P/CVE were missing, on all prevention levels. While this paper is focused on primary prevention approaches, it is striking that not even common tertiary prevention approaches that can be found in many countries today, such as EXIT programmes, could be identified in most countries. A typical EXIT programme is being implemented in practice only in Slovakia (under the name *Mládež Ulice*). Similar activities are undertaken by the CODEX foundation in Poland. This aspect should be strengthened in the region in order to support the deradicalisation processes of extremists, which usually also strengthens secondary and primary prevention approaches, through related measures (e.g. family or institutional counselling), carried out by experienced P/CVE professionals.

Awareness raising and communication campaigns

The awareness raising and communication campaigns in the CEE go beyond P/CVE projects. Projects combating hate speech and disinformation can be found in the CEE region, not only those concentrating on radicalisation itself. Some organisations also do not label their work as P/CVE and also do not want to be in a sense recognised as P/CVE actors, because for many people radicalisation has a very negative connotation and is very often associated with religious extremism and also as a prerogative of the intelligence and security actors.

Examples of activities focused rather on hate speech or combating disinformation can be found throughout the CEE region. They concern the fight against discrimination or hate speech against the LGBTQ+ community and ethnic and religious minorities, and they try to win more space for these groups in public discourse and build counter-narratives to conspiracy theories or fake news about these groups. Such projects often include plenty of offline events such as stand-up comedy shows, open breakfasts, workshops of virtual reality for elderly people, and exhibitions of contemporary art in public spaces of regional towns and villages.

Very often, such projects are the work of specialised NGOs, such as LGBTQ+ community organisations, for example Bulgarian Bilits and GLAS or Polish Campaign Against Homophobia, Lambda or Trans-Fuzja. They focus on fighting homophobia and hate speech and promoting tolerance, democracy, human rights, etc., often building coalitions with other minority groups in their states. An example of such an alliance are two Bulgarian campaigns against hate speech, organised by LGBTQ+ organisations (Bilits, GLAS), Organization

of Jews in Bulgaria “Shalom”, and the Bulgarian section of the Association of European Journalists ⁽³⁴⁾ – ‘WHAT IS BEHIND THE WORDS OF HATE?’ and ‘Not Just Words’ ⁽³⁵⁾.

The Polish KPH, in turn, organises actions in selected schools, such as Tęczowy Piątek ⁽³⁶⁾ (‘Rainbow Friday’) or anti-discrimination lessons. This first action is to show that a given school is a safe and friendly place for every young person, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity or gender characteristics, by organising lessons at school by the school community on tolerance and problems of the LGBTQ+ community. This may consist of hanging a poster informing about the action and organising workshops or conversations with people who face the problem of aggression and intolerance. Anti-discrimination lessons, similarly to Bulgarian projects, are also created jointly/in collaboration with other minority groups — such as religious and ethnic minorities, organisations of people with disabilities, or migrants — in order to increase students’ sensitivity to the problems of these groups and prevent the emergence or dissemination of hate speech against them.

There are many forms of action in the region aimed at combating hate speech and many possible coalitions or partners that can help practitioners in such activities. These can be already operating in this field, for example, film festivals such as the Czech film festival One World of People in Need ⁽³⁷⁾ or the Polish Millennium Docs Against Gravity ⁽³⁸⁾. Some museums are also good partners in such activities, such as the Polish Polin Museum of the History of Polish Jews, the Czech Jewish Museum in Prague ⁽³⁹⁾ and the Museum of Romani culture in Brno ⁽⁴⁰⁾. In many countries of the region, in larger cities, multicultural centres organised by local authorities or NGOs, or their consortia, are also established (e.g. in Poland – Gdańsk ⁽⁴¹⁾, Wrocław ⁽⁴²⁾, Warsaw; in the Czech Republic – Prague ⁽⁴³⁾; in Slovakia – Bratislava, etc.), where it is easier for practitioners to find allies and partners to implement smaller projects. It is also worth trying to seek help from specialised government agencies or institutions that exist in a given country, such as the Czech Agency for Social Inclusion ⁽⁴⁴⁾. They often have good intentions on their side, but they lack dynamism or good ideas, which, in turn, are not lacking on the part of NGOs.

In countering disinformation, hate speech and fake news and in fostering media literacy and critical thinking, numerous trainings and educational initiatives, campaigns, journalists’ associations, such as the Association of European Journalists, and NGOs specialising in such activities are most often an important ally for practitioners. Such organisations include the Lithuanian Debunk.org ⁽⁴⁵⁾, Civic Resilience Initiative ⁽⁴⁶⁾, Media4Change ⁽⁴⁷⁾ and Res Publica ⁽⁴⁸⁾, the Polish foundation Panoptykon ⁽⁴⁹⁾ and the Demagog association ⁽⁵⁰⁾, and the Czech HateFree Culture project ⁽⁵¹⁾. They often carry out communication campaigns and organise training events and educational programmes.

In the more classical activities of P/CVE in the matter of ‘raising awareness’ on the issue of radicalisation and extremism, it is also worth mentioning the Slovak report ‘Online Extremism in Slovakia: Actors, Topics, Platforms & Strategies’, by the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, the Czech Hrozba Radikalizace (‘The threat of radicalisation’) ⁽⁵²⁾, and the Slovenian project RadCePro. In these cases, researchers scanned the entire country and identified radical groups and also vulnerable groups, trying to understand and describe the recruitment channels and mechanisms that lead people to enter the radicalisation process. There are more similar reports for the CEE, also thanks to the support of such entities as the Radicalisation Awareness

⁽³⁴⁾ КАКВО СТОИ ЗАД ДУМИТЕ НА ОМПАЗА? campaign website, <https://helphate.bg>

⁽³⁵⁾ Not Just Words campaign website, <https://glasfoundation.bg/en>

⁽³⁶⁾ Tęczowy piątek campaign website, <https://teczowypiatek.org.pl>

⁽³⁷⁾ One World of People in Need film festival website, <https://www.jedensvet.cz>

⁽³⁸⁾ Millennium Docs Against Gravity film festival website, <https://mdag.pl/20/pl/warszawa/homepage>

⁽³⁹⁾ Jewish Museum in Prague website, <https://www.jewishmuseum.cz>

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Museum of Romani culture website, <https://www.rommuz.cz/cs>

⁽⁴¹⁾ Centrum Wsparcia Imigrantów i Imigrantek: CWII website, <https://cwii.pl>

⁽⁴²⁾ Miejsce Otwarte – Centrum Integracji Międzykulturowej Facebook fan page, <https://www.facebook.com/MiejsceOtwarteWroclaw>

⁽⁴³⁾ Multicultural Center Prague website, <https://mkc.cz/en/about>

⁽⁴⁴⁾ Agency for Social Inclusion website, <https://www.socialni-zaclenovani.cz>

⁽⁴⁵⁾ Debunk.org website, <https://www.debunkeu.org>

⁽⁴⁶⁾ Civic Resilience Initiative website, <https://cri.lt/#projects>

⁽⁴⁷⁾ Media4Change website, <https://www.media4change.co>

⁽⁴⁸⁾ Res Publica website <https://en.respublica.lt>

⁽⁴⁹⁾ Panoptykon website, <https://panoptykon.org>

⁽⁵⁰⁾ Demagog website, <https://demagog.org.pl>

⁽⁵¹⁾ HateFree Culture project website, <https://www.hatefree.cz/o-hatefree>

⁽⁵²⁾ Hrozba Radikalizace project website, <https://www.fbmi.cvut.cz/cs/fakulta/pracoviste/kzooo-informace/datekce-radikalizace>

Network (RAN), the Central European Digital Media Observatory (CEDMO) ⁽⁵³⁾, and the Dialogue about Radicalisation and Equality (DARE) ⁽⁵⁴⁾ project.

Trainings for practitioners and capacity building

As a result of the research, it may be concluded that in the CEE region trainings for practitioners in the matter of P/CVE are addressed primarily to teachers of primary and secondary schools, public administration and regional authorities, and police officers. It is for them that most projects and trainings are created in this area, and it is them that the CEE national or regional authorities seem to see as a key point for strengthening P/CVE. This is clearly demonstrated by examples from Croatia, Poland and Romania. They are implemented by various entities, NGOs, government institutions or multi-sector entities.

Such projects include the Croatian projects 'Against Hate' and 'Facts against hate' ⁽⁵⁵⁾ addressed to police officers, containing good practices for identifying and preventing acts of hatred. Their continuation was also addressed to teachers who were also trained in judgments of the European Court of Human Rights in connection to hate crimes and they also received materials on the matter of hate speech and how to approach it. Importantly, these programmes also included a transnational dimension, because as a result of the teams' work, a manual adapted for three countries, Slovenia, Serbia and Croatia, was also created. The Croatian programmes 'Increasing the competencies of state security services, public administration employees and research and development centres and strengthening their cooperation in the field of national security' and 'Strengthening Juvenile Justice Systems in the counter-terrorism context: capacity building and peer-learning among stakeholders' were similarly multidimensional. The first is for the public administration for more effective recognition and opposition to terrorist and asymmetric threats, based on international experiences. The second is for the employees of the juvenile justice system.

Even more broadly, in terms of geographic coverage, as measured by the EU's Internal Security Fund, was the police programme 'Preventing radicalisation of young people on the internet by increasing their awareness of common cognitive biases' (PRECOBIAS) ⁽⁵⁶⁾. Prepared by researchers and practitioners from six countries, it is available in eight languages and has been implemented in several European countries in cooperation with teachers' trade unions and local authorities. The project was aiming to contribute to the long-term prevention of radicalisation of young people by making them immune to extremist content on the internet by strengthening their ability to think critically and use the online media. The focus was on examining cognitive biases, common to all people, that can lead to greater vulnerability to radicalisation online. As part of the project, an online campaign was developed and carried out, the aim of which was to make young people aware of how selected cognitive errors (e.g. the authority effect, confirmation effect, positive retrospective, group effect) can lead to easier succumbing to and accepting extremist content that is more and more widely available online. The campaign targeted young people who, for various reasons, could be exposed to radicalising content on social media and other online platforms. In collaboration with a group of practitioners who work with young people on a daily basis (teachers, psychologists, etc.), guides have also been prepared with tips on how they can use knowledge about cognitive biases in their work to strengthen critical thinking in young people and prevent their radicalisation.

Slightly more modest in scope and objectives were other similar projects aimed at teachers in Poland: 'Training for staff of primary and secondary schools in Poland to enhance security and prevent radicalisation' ⁽⁵⁷⁾, the Czech 'The JSNS Educational Program of People in Need' ⁽⁵⁸⁾, and the Romanian 'Fighting discrimination in the classroom - a guide for teachers'. All of them provided a set of workshops to all school staff (head teacher, other teachers, administrative staff) connecting hate speech topics with radicalisation topics, increasing the level of awareness and the ability to identify, fight and report cases connected to them in schools. Generally, P/CVE work with schools offers a basis for further working with the entire local community (parents, local police, local government officials, social and street workers, etc.) and forming a future multi-agency local collaboration task force.

⁽⁵³⁾ CEDMO network hub, <https://cedmohub.eu/pl>

⁽⁵⁴⁾ DARE project, <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/725349>

⁽⁵⁵⁾ Centar za Mirovne Studije website, <https://www.cms.hr/en>

⁽⁵⁶⁾ PRECOBIAS project website, <https://www.precobias.eu>

⁽⁵⁷⁾ Institute of Social Safety projects website, <https://www.fundacjaibs.pl/projekty-i-wiedza>

⁽⁵⁸⁾ The JSNS Educational Programme of People in Need website, <https://www.jsns.cz/en/home>

Community engagement

The countries of the former Eastern Bloc often have problems with activating local communities in matters other than immediate economic, logistic or ecological problems, which is why the community engagement departments in the P/CVE departments in this region is not widely represented in this study. Two main directions of activities of the entities involved in building a broader community involvement in the fight against extremism and radicalisation can be distinguished. These will primarily include assistance to victims of violence and support for marginalised communities in stopping radicalisation, as well as activities aimed at protesting against the presence of extremists or groups of radicalised people within this community. Two actions can be cited as examples of such activities: the Czech programme 'Monitoring Hate Crime against Roma with Mentors' ⁽⁵⁹⁾ and the Slovak grassroots initiative 'Not in Our Town (NIOT)' ⁽⁶⁰⁾.

The aim of the project for monitoring hate crimes against the Roma with the help of mentors has been monitoring and supporting based on the ability of Roma mentors to approach the Roma victims of hate-motivated incidents. The aim of the project has been to gain their trust and efficiently link them with relevant professionals, who provide expert services (legal support, psychological support, etc.) in order to prevent reciprocal radicalisation and reciprocal hate crime as a reaction to the attack. The mentors' ethnic and cultural proximity with the clients eases trust building and facilitates the approach. Depending on the type of case, they may be linked to the partner organisation (In IUSTITIA) that provides legal support to victims of hate crimes. The regional coordinator also communicates with other members of the local community in order to prevent situations leading to hate-motivated incidents.

The NIOT grassroots movement in the Slovak city of Banská Bystrica is an example of the other trend in building community engagement. The election of an extremist, who was later convicted for his use of neo-Nazi symbolism ⁽⁶¹⁾, as the head of the regional authority caused strong resistance from members of the local community. They organised themselves through grassroots movements to protest against the progress of radicalisation in their region and began to build a network of cooperation based on positive values such as tolerance, friendship, respect and love, and not as a political battle against the new extremist regional governor. It was an attempt to show that civil participation can contribute to breaking civic apathy and to motivate the wider local/regional community to engage in resistance activities against fascism, racism, anti-Semitism, xenophobia and any kind of intolerance. Of all the activities undertaken, at least two long-term activities might be mentioned: Schools for Democracy, and Human Forum. Schools for Democracy is a programme initiated by the NIOT. Fifteen schools (primary and secondary) in the region of Banská Bystrica are now involved in the programme. The programme includes critical thinking workshops, a pilot project on values (measuring values before and after educational activities), and 'living libraries'. In this context, living libraries proved to be the most successful form of informal education when a NIOT volunteer from a marginalised group (a Jew, a Roma, a LGBTQ+ representative, a former neo-Nazi, etc.) visits a class and tells the students his/her own life story ⁽⁶²⁾.

Multi-stakeholder cooperation and partnerships (local and national)

Multi-stakeholder cooperations are the most difficult part of P/CVE activities; however, they also have the strongest social impact. Most often, such projects combine the cooperation of NGOs, government or local government institutions, and practitioners, building various approaches, good practices and programmes in the field of P/CVE, trying to reach the causes of radicalisation and remedy its symptoms as broadly as possible through multi-directional and multi-sector cooperation. The collaborative model also helps practitioners build resilience to polarisation and radicalisation in the local environment and protect the most vulnerable groups of people from these phenomena.

⁽⁵⁹⁾ Monitoring Hate Crime against Roma with Mentors project website, <https://www.congress-intercultural.eu/en/initiative/136-romanlar%C4%B1-hedef-alan-nefret-suclar%C4%B1n%C4%B1-rehberler-ile-gozleme----prag----cek-cumhuriyeti.html>

⁽⁶⁰⁾ Bitušíková, Chorvát, *Not in our town – NIOT Slovakia* (2018).

⁽⁶¹⁾ See for example: The Slovak Spectator, 'Kotleba accused of extremism, faces losing mandate', 31/07/2017, <https://spectator.sme.sk/c/20615664/kotleba-accused-of-extremism-faces-losing-mandate.html>; Euronews, 'Slovakian far-right leader loses mandate as MP over neo-Nazi symbols, court decides', <https://www.euronews.com/2022/04/05/slovakian-far-right-leader-loses-mandate-as-mp-over-neo-nazi-symbols-court-decides>, 05/04/2022.

⁽⁶²⁾ Ibid.

An example of such activity is the Polish 'CHAMPIONS' project. The main goal of the project was to create and support the functioning of the first local operational group in Poland for the prevention and counteracting of radicalisation (in Dąbrowa Górnicza city) and to support its work, among others through a series of trainings and meetings and the possibility of using an online platform facilitating cooperation between practitioners and experts in the field of preventing and counteracting radicalisation. As part of the project, a series of trainings for the above-mentioned local operational group, including introducing training in the field of preventing and counteracting radicalisation for people from different entities within the city structure (education, social communication, transport, etc.), social workers; and a series of trainings and workshops intertwined with them, aimed at transferring knowledge and strengthening skills in the field of cross-sector cooperation at the local level, and then jointly working out effective local solutions.

A slightly different approach was proposed by the creators of the 'MONITOR Countering Radicalisation in Central and Southeast Europe through a Radicalisation Monitoring Tool' project developed by the Bulgarian Center for the Study of Democracy. The framework of the project aimed at developing two monitoring instruments for institutions in Bulgaria, Czech Republic and Greece that have very limited experience in understanding and countering radicalisation, and therefore work was focused on providing tools that would allow the institutions to conduct risk assessment, increase basic awareness and identify priority areas for intervention — basically laying the basis for setting up prevention and multi-agency cooperation. The Framework of Radicalization Risk Indicators has provided a review of the existing approaches and tools that identify, monitor and assess radicalisation in Europe and beyond. It then has offered a conceptual framework of radicalisation risk and vulnerability indicators and a guide to their interpretation. This has formed a basis for developing early warning mechanisms for frontline practitioners in countries lacking specific prevention and counter-radicalisation policies. The guide has been intended for national- and EU-level policymakers, as well as practitioners directly involved in the prevention of radicalisation in the CEE and beyond. An important element of the programme was a smooth cooperation with the government. Based on the framework of indicators, a risk assessment questionnaire was developed for internal use by the Bulgarian Ministry of the Interior, intended for police officers.

In effect, the Situational Assessment of Extremist Trends approach was developed as part of the above-mentioned project 'MONITOR'. It is an instrument for the systematic collection and analysis of statistical data, open source data and intelligence information pertaining to extremist actors and activities. It is used by law enforcement and intelligence institutions for the purposes of developing regular situational reports of the spread, nature and trends in extremism and violent radicalism. The tool, based on statistical data (core indicators), captures the core violent and non-violent manifestations of extremism, while the adjustable (qualitative) component (supplementary indicators) allows for an in-depth analysis of all facets relevant to specific phenomena of interest in the national setting. The applicability of the situational assessment methodology was tested in the three central and south-east European countries (Bulgaria, Czechia, Greece). Pilot national studies were conducted in each country, evaluating the data collection and analytical capacity of all relevant national institutions, providing reviews of extremist trends as per available data, and formulating recommendations for improvement of national data collection systems in view of the preparation of regular situation assessment reports of extremist trends.

Similar cooperation between public institutions, experts, practitioners and NGOs was implemented in Romania in the implementation of the projects 'Multi-disciplinary teams in Romanian prison system' and 'Training sessions on the phenomenon of radicalisation, under the aegis of the Strategy for the prevention of radicalisation in the penitentiary environment'. By decision of the General Director of the National Penitentiary Administration in 2015, multidisciplinary teams were set up in most units in the prison system to increase awareness and recognition of and develop a response to potential radicalisation-related threats and events. Teams comprise one officer from the relevant department (or the detention section chief), one psychologist (or social worker if a psychologist is not available), and one officer from the crime and terrorism prevention department. The teams underwent a learning process, with training sessions, online specialised training courses and study materials provided by officers from the National Penitentiary Administration.

The project 'Training sessions on the phenomenon of radicalisation, under the aegis of the Strategy for the prevention of radicalisation in the penitentiary environment' may be considered a continuation of the previous one, but focusing in more detail on the implementation of P/CVE processes, already in selected, specific units of the penitentiary system. Eight penitentiary units have been selected, in order to pilot and establish the degree of sustainability of the form of delivery of the course to the penitentiary staff. The training sessions were organised over 2 months in 2019, the information being transmitted in the form of PowerPoint

presentations and a physical material course providing support for the frontline staff. From 2020, the training course with annual frequency has been delivered to all prison units in Romania.

However, before P/CVE practices are introduced, it is important to integrate changes in the law that include the penalisation of hate speech, discrimination or extremist activities. The Czech 'Právem proti předsudkům' project⁶³ operated in this spirit. With the help of the research using statistical samples of the population, legal analysis and practical findings based on strategic litigation, and in cooperation with the project partner, its creators started preparing a comprehensive legislative proposal to optimise the status and protection of victims of bias-motivated violence (LGBTQ+ persons and people with disabilities). In Slovakia, there is the 'Výbor pre predchádzanie a elimináciu rasizmu, xenofóbie, antisemitizmu' council operating. This is a body created by the government for prevention and elimination of racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism, where a mixture of state actors and civil society meet and cooperate. Currently, the council is working on creating the conceptual framework for countering radicalisation and extremism by 2024.

Summary and conclusions

The common element of all these projects was the fight against disinformation and the influence of external actors. These contribute to the political destabilisation, polarisation and increasing radicalisation, i.e. threats that affect the radicalisation process more broadly, as an element of a process that is larger than just a growing tendency to use political violence. At the same time, the capacity building is not limited to individuals, it also encompasses entities of regional and local police forces with tools to combat the radicalisation process, strengthening the 'immunological' reaction of the organism/state/local government to this process, using the resources of institutions open to cooperate to prevent and counter radicalisation processes.

The overview also shows an interesting tendency in the CEE. Quite often, NGOs are replacing the state as a centre implementing P/CVE strategies. But also, what is noteworthy, they have built a framework for cooperation with public institutions, reaching out with their educational programmes to police and social workers.

⁶³ Právem proti předsudkům project website, <https://www.pravemprotipredsudkum.cz/language/en/about>

Further recommendations on P/CVE in the region

1. There is a need for greater involvement of CEE countries in P/CVE activities and not limiting them only to 'hard' counterintelligence or counterterrorist activities, but a significant extension of 'soft' P/CVE activities in the field of building the activity of local communities in this matter, raising awareness about the problem of radicalisation and a much wider 'building bridges' between NGOs and public institutions.
2. Support the development of more projects dedicated primarily to P/CVE.
3. Increase attempts/support to building local projects related to local communities.
4. Strengthening the component of face-to-face counselling programmes (in tertiary prevention, but also at the intersections of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention) in the region.
5. Expand primary P/CVE activities from their current predominant focus on schools, by developing cooperation also with other public entities such as community centres, libraries, museums, galleries, social welfare centres and sports clubs.
6. Increasing and strengthening work in educational institutions for juvenile detainees.
7. Working to further raise awareness around the need to criminalise and effectively prosecute hate speech in CEE countries that lack such provisions.
8. Increasing support to and strengthening multi-sectoral activities.
9. Strengthening cooperation between central and regional authorities and NGOs.

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Demagog website, <https://demagog.org.pl>

Institute of Social Safety website, <https://www.fundacjaibs.pl>

Media4Change website, <https://www.media4change.co>

Panoptykon website, <https://panoptykon.org>

Res Publica website <https://en.respublica.lt>

FINDING INFORMATION ABOUT THE EU

Online

Information about the European Union in all the official languages of the EU is available on the Europa website at: https://europa.eu/european-union/index_en

EU publications

You can download or order free and priced EU publications from: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publications>. Multiple copies of free publications may be obtained by contacting Europe Direct or your local information centre (see https://europa.eu/european-union/contact_en).

EU law and related documents

For access to legal information from the EU, including all EU law since 1952 in all the official language versions, go to EUR-Lex at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu>

Open data from the EU

The EU Open Data Portal (<http://data.europa.eu/euodp/en>) provides access to datasets from the EU. Data can be downloaded and reused for free, for both commercial and non-commercial purposes.

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