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EX POST PAPER

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RAN High-Level Conference

Each year, the RAN High-Level Conference on radicalisation (RAN HLC) evolves around the unique opportunity of bringing together the European Commission, high-ranking officials of the EU Member States and RAN first-line practitioners from all its Working Groups. This year's HLC, which took place on 4 November, centred on the viewing of **Le Jeune Ahmed**, a movie by Belgian film directors **Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne**, about the radicalisation process of a young boy. The film premiered in Cannes, May 2019. At the HLC, first-line practitioners and high-ranking policymakers used the story in this film as the basis for their discussion about the question of whether things could have gone differently, and if so, what it would require in terms of policy and practice. The HLC focused on four themes identified in the film: family and community, ideology, education, and disengagement and deradicalisation.

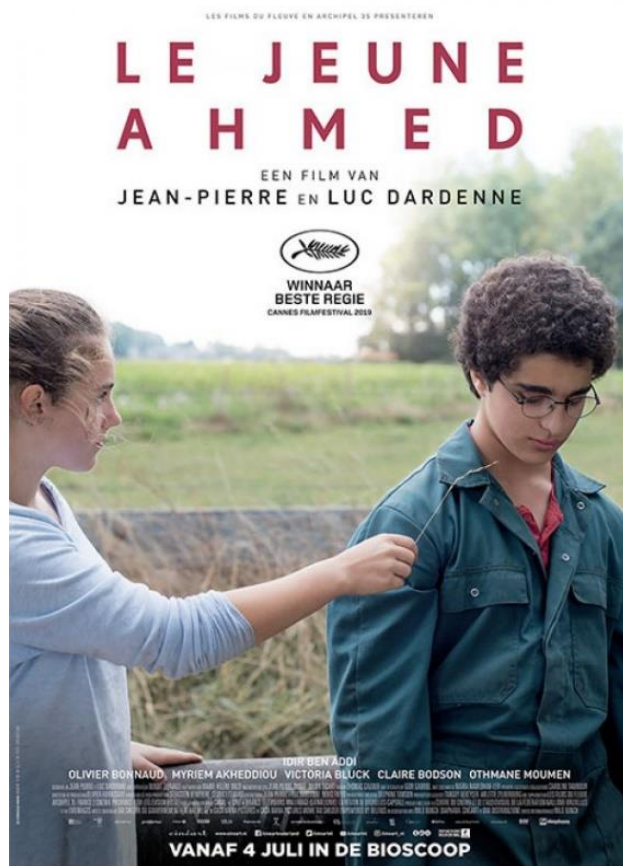
This ex post paper covers the main outcomes of the discussion. In addition, four practitioners of the RAN network share their unique insights in this paper: a municipal case manager, a prison staff member, a school director and a staff member of a Support Centre for Extremism. They were asked to describe the first case or practice that came to mind, and to describe how they handled this case. Their stories, like the movie, provide us not only with an inside look into their daily working practice, but also with food for thought.

Le Jeune Ahmed

The film tells the story of a Belgian teenager, Ahmed, who starts to embrace an extremist interpretation of the Koran. Ahmed is a 13-year-old Muslim boy coming from a Belgian city. His dad is no longer around. Lacking a father figure, and inspired by a cousin who has gone off to be a jihadi fighter, Ahmed becomes radicalised by a local extremist imam.

Ahmed develops radical ideas: He does not want to shake hands with his teacher who is 'dating a Jew' and he lectures his family about drinking alcohol and their revealing clothes. When Ahmed attempts to kill his teacher Inès, he is sent to a juvenile detention centre. Many characters in the movie aim to put a stop to these ideas; Inès, his mother, his caseworker, the judge, the psychologist at the detention centre, his lawyer, the owners of the farm where he is placed, and their daughter Louise. After many attempts, the people around him seem convinced he has changed and plan a reuniting encounter with his teacher Inès; however, Ahmed's plot to kill his teacher is still on his mind.

The film is an impressive exploration of the complexities of an individual's radicalisation process. The Dardenne brothers have depicted the difficulties practitioners encounter when working with radicalised persons. The film shows the various efforts to deradicalize and rehabilitate young Ahmed which fail to change Ahmed's beliefs.



Could things have gone differently?

At the HLC, *Le Jeune Ahmed* was deployed as a case study. After the screening of the movie, both film directors were interviewed. They introduced the movie, explaining their artistic and narrative choices as well as the research they had undertaken preceding the shooting of the film (see box below). Then the conference participants used the storyline in order to elaborate on how they would have acted had they come across Ahmed in their daily practice.

Could things have gone differently? First-line practitioners, policymakers and high-level representatives approached this question from four angles: family and community, ideology, education, and disengagement and deradicalisation. Below are the main outcomes of the discussion.

Reflection on the film – the directors' view

Quotes from the interview with Jean-Pierre & Luc Dardenne

"With this movie we wanted to focus on the question whether it is possible to deradicalise someone. The movie starts quite late in the process, we don't know exactly what the reason is for Ahmed radicalising. We did not want to provide the reason for his radicalisation process, as there can be many reasons why someone gets extremist ideas."

"For Ahmed, there is no redemption, apart from the fact that Ahmed asks for forgiveness. We wanted to show how radicalised individuals – no matter what their ideology is – think they are doing the right thing, even when this includes violence. It is very hard to convince someone that he or she is not doing the right thing. First-line practitioners know how much time is needed for someone to change ideas. This is what we wanted to show with the film. However difficult it may be, you have to keep believing that some way or another dialogue is possible."

"The idea that we had was to look at the depth of radicalisation. It has you in its grip and takes a long time to counter. It is complex, and that is what we wanted to get across. Although the film might feel quite pessimistic for viewers, we feel that it is realistic and that there were small signs of change in Ahmed's behaviour. Radicalisation is not a process of ideas only: It has an emotional load as well, and we hoped to bring this across with the movie.'

"We wanted to have a realistic ending. A fanatic might look forward to death, as it means life is ended in the right way. Ahmed is only a child and the idea that his life might be ending frightens him so much, that it makes him empathise with his victim. What we tried to do in this film is bringing Ahmed back to childhood. He is a child, calling for his mother, not for the imam, and asking for forgiveness."

Family and community

Ahmed's father, mysteriously, is nowhere in sight. Ahmed's mother has seemingly tried to give her kids access to Islamic culture, even though she isn't a practicing Muslim herself. Indeed, the fact that she occasionally drinks alcohol enrages her son, whose new fervent devotion to Koranic scripture and customs is apparently acquired very recently. "Only a month ago, you were playing with your PlayStation, and now all the posters are gone from your walls," she complains... ⁽¹⁾

Reflections on the movie by the group that addressed the theme **Family and community** include the following.

- When trying to stop and reverse a process of radicalisation, it is paramount for the success of the intervention to strengthen and **empower the bonds with the family and friends** – provided these are family members and friends who have the same goal of stopping this process and are not involved in the extremist group themselves. An individual's close social network is crucial in prevention, intervention and reintegration. Family members are often the first to detect signs of radicalisation, and the last to break the bonds with the individual. Family and close friends might subconsciously be aware of the underlying reasons their relative radicalised – this knowledge can come to the fore when talking to aid workers and is crucial to creating a well-founded intervention.
- The movie shows various factors that possibly contribute to the radicalisation process of Ahmed. The directors clearly highlight one of these factors: **Ahmed does not have a proper role model**. Due to the absence of his father, Ahmed starts to look up to the imam and was influenced by his extremist worldview. The imam provides Ahmed with a sense of belonging and being recognised and loved – something the film shows that he misses at home.
- A radicalisation process can be difficult for families to handle and might lead to tension at home. In the movie, Ahmed's process starts with behavioural change, such as dressing appropriately and reading the Koran. It does not make his mother happy, but her attempts to talk to her son fail due to his unwillingness to have such a conversation. The situation soon evolves into him telling his mother and sister how to dress or behave, and arguing with them about faith. In situations like these, parents often become very authoritative towards their children – forbidding them to be involved with their extremist friends and trying to convince them their beliefs are incorrect. This can work counterproductively. It is recommended to start an **open, non-judgemental dialogue**: Ask sincere questions, show interest in the beliefs of one's child and take their thoughts and behaviour seriously. Parents also need to know who to approach for proper advice and guidance at an early stage.
- The interventions in the movie clearly lack central coordination. In this case, a partnership should have been created between the school, Ahmed's family and others, such as the social worker. **Without a multi-agency framework, it is nearly impossible to achieve successful interventions**. To allow for these relationships, a policy is required that enables the building of strategic engagement between different actors. This policy needs to be created during peacetime – the structures need to be in place before a crisis pops up. Moreover, local communities would benefit from working together more, as well.
- When it comes to involving the community, peers could play a big role in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). After all, the issue is all about **strengthening the right bonds**, and other young people can provide an alternative network for the radicalised individual, for example through sports.

⁽¹⁾ All quotes about the movie from: <https://www.hollywoodreporter.com/review/young-ahmed-review-1212193>

A STORY FROM DAILY PRACTICE: FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

Elke Wouters, case manager at the Municipality of Antwerp (Belgium)

There is a Zulu phrase, *Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, which means, "A person is a person through other persons". As case managers at the Antwerp municipality, our primary focus is on the individual. But in actual practice, there is no such thing. The individual is always connected with his or her family, context and society. If we want to make real progress, we have to involve the social context of the individual.

Bashir was one of our first cases. He was 15 when he fled Afghanistan because of the war. He arrived in Belgium as an unaccompanied refugee minor. The local police were concerned about Bashir, because after he was arrested for committing a petty crime he started threatening them by saying "he had friends in the Taliban" and as a retaliation "he would bomb Antwerp Central Station".

As a social worker, I worked with refugees for several years. Because of this experience, I gained cultural knowledge about Bashir's home country, Afghanistan. This knowledge enabled me to build a close relationship of trust with him. Every week I visited Bashir at home. Bashir started sharing about his traumatic experiences. I noticed that he was talking a lot about his family. In contrast, his network and social contacts in Antwerp, where he lived, seemed almost non-existent. He had very few friends close by or people he could rely on or confide in.

I decided to involve his family in our conversations. The big problem was that Bashir's family was in Afghanistan. I had to figure out a way to engage them while they were living on the other side of the world.

At first, I involved them in a more figurative way. In every conversation, I would ask Bashir about his family. I also asked him what his father or mother would say to him in this or that situation. This way his parents became a part of our conversations. Bashir opened up when he could talk about them. I started to understand how disconnected and alone he felt. He needed the influence of his parents. Together we looked for ways to involve his parents for real. We decided to set up a video chat. With the help of a translator, I asked Bashir's parents about their wishes for Bashir. Afterwards, we implemented the desires of his parents in Bashir's plan of action. Because his parents gave their blessing, Bashir was strongly motivated to reach the goals in the plan.

What we learned in this case is that the social context, and more specifically the lack or strength of the social network of people in the process of radicalisation, is often forgotten by professionals in the field. It takes an extra effort to involve more people, but it's a crucial step to make long-lasting changes in people's behaviour.

Ideology

The imam, who looks only a little older than Ahmed himself, celebrates martyrs who have shed blood and sacrificed their own lives for holy jihad. Ahmed even has a cousin abroad who has carried out this kind of sacrifice and now has a website devoted to his memory.

Reflections on the film in the group that addressed the theme **Ideology** include the following.

- Ideology is strongly involved in the radicalisation process. Extremist ideologies and ideas, from Islamist to far-right extremism, have certain commonalities, such as the idea of purity and denial of diversity, others posing an existential threat, an apocalyptic view, the call to arms and supremacy. Recruiters of different extremist ideologies use these narratives as a tool to attract recruits. As set out by first-line practitioners however, **ideology is not the very first or only reason for which people join an extremist group**, as there are many different pathways leading to violent extremism. Other factors, such as a sense of belonging, are predominant. Moreover, the individual's ideological ideas are often not very well founded (see 'A story from daily practice: ideology').
- Ahmed adheres to a strong Islamist ideology, taught to him by a radical imam. Whereas the film depicts usual Islamic habits, such as praying, it also shows how violent extremist ideas grow in Ahmed's mind: the act of killing his teacher as well as the admiration for his radical imam and for his cousin, who went away for the jihad. The directors deliberately chose not to reveal the exact risk factors that contributed to Ahmed's radicalisation process at the early stages in the film, but the way his imam introduces him to a violent ideology is shown. The imam is very important in the way Ahmed's ideology develops but what stands out is that no meaningful conversations were introduced by people around Ahmed, like his teacher or others: **No one respectfully guided him towards the right direction.** His beliefs seem to have been accepted as part of his identity by his community.
- Involvement of the Muslim community or a second religious leader as an alternative to the extremist imam trusted by Ahmed could have helped in building a **bridge** between Ahmed's extreme interpretation of Islam and a more moderate interpretation of it. **The presence of a convincing alternative narrative is decisive** in order to replace the imam's authority. Ahmed is missing a trustworthy person in his environment with whom he can talk about religion and beliefs, to foster critical thinking and raise questions.
- Besides the presence of an alternative person that could guide Ahmed in the right direction, a presence of protective factors is also crucial in order to create a mechanism or buffer against radicalisation in the first place². For instance, **friendship and a stable and supportive family environment serve as a protective factor.**
- One important lesson from the film is that first-line practitioners such as teachers and exit workers, but also families, need to **know where they can go for specific kinds of support.** Ahmed's family, particularly his mother, should have received support in order to counter her son's ideas. Municipalities or national bodies could provide the right conditions ('information and support infrastructure') for this. Furthermore, training on ideology and tools to help conversations about difficult topics with young or vulnerable people need to be available and easily accessible to families and first-line practitioners.

² RAN Issue Paper (2018). Protective and promotive factors building resilience against violent radicalisation. Retrieved from: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/ran_paper_protective_factors_042018_en.pdf

A STORY FROM DAILY PRACTICE: IDEOLOGY

Carlos Fernández Gómez, General Secretariat of Penitentiary Institutions (Spain)

When I hear the term 'ideology', Mohamed comes to my mind as the perfect example of someone driven by strong ideas and convictions. During 2018, Mohamed served his sentence in the prison where I was working. He was convicted of sexual assault and drug abuse, so his personal background was not related to extremism or radicalism. He was 40 at the time.

Despite the above, Mohamed behaved properly in prison over the first years of his sentence. He used to pray every day, and his relationships with officers and prisoners were good. But over a period of one year, he began to espouse inflexible and deep-rooted ideas, and started talking about these. They included ideas that all Muslims in prison have an obligation to pray, that prison officers are against Islam, and that terrorist attacks are the result of racism and oppression of the Muslim community. Furthermore, he said and thought that, at the end of days, victory over the enemy will be a reality. These thoughts were truly shocking, because he had never been a practicing or fervent Muslim. For me, the questions were: Was this ideology something new in Mohamed? Was it a product of extreme religious feelings?

During my personal sessions with him, in which I focused on self-awareness, I found out that Mohamed's ideas were not the result of long-term religious thinking. It was obvious he had a strong ideology, but his ideas seemed hollow and superficial. From the very beginning of my personal sessions with him, I made clear that the aim of the sessions was not to correct his religious ideas, as these are quite a personal issue and were not the cause of his judicial sentence. Rather, in our talks, one thing was clear: He had a firm conviction that cruelty is an acceptable way to achieve goals, whether sexual, economic or social. In other words, his ideology was *violence*, expressed in different ways and at different moments in his life. And for the time being, this ideology was expressed through indoctrination on topics related to Islam. Mohamed always wanted to move the discussion to a religious one, but that would have been a mistake. The violence was not just present in his criminal past, but was also in his desires. Therefore, maintaining an approach away from Islam and theological questions worked well during the sessions with Mohamed.

Education

There, Imam Youssouf preaches hatred against 'infidels' like Ahmed's math teacher Inès. She once helped Ahmed with his dyslexia years back, but now wants to set up// Arabic lessons, and is dating a Jew.

Reflections on the film in the group that addressed the theme **Education** include the following.

- Schools and teachers have a day-to-day relationship with their pupils and therefore play **a vital role in P/CVE**. However, the phase that Ahmed is in – already willing to kill his teacher - means we are no longer in a phase where the teacher can play a clear preventive role. The phase before radicalisation actually occurs, when teachers still have much influence, is not visible in the film. However, the film does provide the opportunity to analyse the relationship between Ahmed and his teacher Inès and to discuss the role of a teacher in the radicalisation of young people.
- When a student is already radicalised, a coordinated multi-agency approach is crucial. Whereas Ahmed's cousin has already left to enact the jihad, there is no clear interaction between the school and the family to support and pay attention to Ahmed in the film. A multi-agency approach and a **needs assessment** by teachers, family and social workers could have led to a different path. Instead, the approach of Inès, who wants to help her student, can be described as confrontational, pointing her finger at Ahmed about how his interpretation is the wrong one. A more non-judgemental and non-confrontational approach could have been part of the solution in Ahmed's story and, in general, to fight radicalisation of young people.
- For a teacher, it is key to remain in contact with students. In a school context, it is of vital importance to know how teachers approach controversial issues, how they work with their pupils, and how they teach them to think critically. In some cases, it is important the teacher avoids going too deep into the topic of religion, as this can create distance with their students. **Instead of talking about religion**, teachers can choose to talk about other topics, such as the relationship with other classmates, major grievances like Western foreign policies, political situations, what the student thinks about certain subjects, and other problems deemed relevant by the pupils: "We don't care about Napoleon, tell me what's happening in Syria,³" If there is no **mediated space to discuss** this at school, the students will find another platform.
- Policymakers and educators should jointly demand what role schools must play as a whole, how teachers are educated about awareness and recognition of signs of radicalisation, and how to ensure they have enough time and space to be with the pupils to build a relationship with them. **Teachers would benefit from training on how to respond**, when a situation similar to that of the film occurs in their own classrooms. If Inès had had the training to avoid acting in a confrontational style, the outcome may have been different.

³ A RAN EDU member quoting one of his pupils. RAN High-Level Conference, 4 November 2019, Brussels (BE).

A STORY FROM DAILY PRACTICE: EDUCATION

By a RAN EDU first-line practitioner

When hearing about this theme, the first case coming to my mind is the one of Amin and Mélanie. Both pupils attend a secondary school in an urban area of France. Amin is 14, Mélanie 16. They are at the same level of education (last year of secondary education). Two young persons, one of whom rejected the school ethos and the other dropped out, both deciding to follow extreme ideas and models.

Amin is a good-looking and clever boy, who is good at mathematics and technology. He is the third child of a mixed family: His mother has a French background, his father is Algerian. His parents recently separated. In addition, he is engaged in a football team near his house, and, above all, he loves to play online video games and to read blogs. He spends most of his evenings online.

Mélanie is the only child of a French family, who has school difficulties and no plans for the future. As she did not pass her courses the previous year, she has no real schoolmates. She vaguely planned to attend a vocational school to train in geriatric care. She is not too enthusiastic about the idea, but no alternative has been discussed.

At the end of the first term, Amin started to accuse his male technology teacher of the low-quality response he received on technical questions during his class. After this, he started challenging his female history teacher about the curriculum, which in his opinion gave too little attention to slavery and French colonisation. In a few months' time, his school performance drastically declined. As a consequence, the school team had several conversations with his mother, without real success.

By the time Amin started to challenge the teachers, Mélanie was silently in love with him. The school head became aware of that fact, as she disengaged more from class and school activities. The school team noticed that she started wearing a scarf, a long gown and gloves up to the school door, changing clothes between home and school. Moreover, she had told a female classmate that she was attending an after-school class to help with her learning difficulties and has now acquired a 'new perspective'. At the end of the second term, Mélanie left school. Her parents immediately contacted the police and the special hotline number for radicalised young people.

Meanwhile, Amin agreed to talk with his football coach, who convinced him that he could set up plans for future studies, with the school counsellor. In retrospect, we see that establishing a relationship between Amin and the school counsellor was an essential step in getting him back on track. What helped us here was the fact that Amin already had a good relationship based upon a shared interest in sports with his football coach. Today, he is still very critical about the technology teacher, but he is also able to build a relationship with his mathematics teacher, and to participate in a class project including the history teacher, without any problems.

What we learned from these cases that occurred simultaneously at our school is the following. The attraction to extreme ideas exploits social emotional needs that are closely linked to the development of young people during their school years. In a context of growing tensions and polarisation in society, the attraction to violent extremism in views and behaviours is challenging schools, teachers and educators. For Amin, the cooperation between adults around him helped keep him in school. Teachers think he will build up his critical thinking skills, rebalance his expectations and eventually reject extreme ideas definitely. He learned how to cope with a complex reality and find his place as a citizen in a democratic society. Amin struggled with family separation, lack of trust in the technology teacher, and the large complexity of geopolitics and history as it was represented in the school curriculum. But in the end, he

was able, with the help of the sports coach and his collaboration with teachers, to question the conflicts of his own situation.

It is tragic to see how different reality has been for Mélanie, who is now out of formal education, facing identity struggles and traumatic issues. It is sad to notice that both family and school could not provide sufficient care and awareness on time that would have functioned as a counterbalance while she was growing up. Mélanie did not succeed in finding a way to resolve her internal struggle, her feelings of insecurity about her lack of perspective. She missed a sense of belonging and this fact remained unnoticed for too long. By the time the school team understood what was going on with her, it was too late to establish a relationship with her; people who could have been mobilised to support her could not be found either in the school nor in her direct social environment. Eventually, unfortunately, she had to be reported to the authorities.

Disengagement and deradicalisation

... we jump ahead to find Ahmed in a juvenile detention facility where social workers, psychologists and judges all discuss how to do the best thing for him.

Reflections on the film in the group that addressed the theme **Disengagement and deradicalisation** include the following:

- There are many ways in and out of a radicalisation process. In *Le Jeune Ahmed*, Jean-Pierre and Luc Dardenne show us a lost adolescent boy. Ahmed is clearly in need of someone who nurtures him, who provides a structure and who makes him feel safe. In his case, the imam is the only one who fulfils this role for him. If Ahmed's needs had been more properly assessed, the radicalisation process could have been halted at an earlier stage. This needs assessment can be difficult in a case such as Ahmed's: **A lot of minors find it hard to express their feelings, as these are usually highly ambivalent.** There's often a gap between their words and their body language. The end of the movie aptly shows this internal struggle of Ahmed's.
- When it comes to successful interventions, **tailor-made and evidence-based programmes** are key. At the beginning of an intervention, it is crucial to define what the preferred outcome should be. This can differ per person, and deradicalisation is not always successful – disengaging from using violence and from the extremist group might be all that can be achieved.
- Looking for **protective factors** is important. Interaction with people outside the extremist group, such as the girl Ahmed befriends, is a good start of constructing an alternative network. Also, it is important to build upon alternative activities that someone is interested in, to add purpose in life. Having said that, having an exit programme end with either a job or an education is optimal, to ensure radicalised people have a clear purpose in life and feel part of society again after the programme. Each Member State differs in whether radicalised people are actually aided in finding a job or enrolling in education.
- The turning point in the film was when Ahmed confronted his teacher about her Jewish boyfriend (who is not visible in the film). It was clear that Ahmed was already quite far in the radicalisation process at this point. This is a situation a lot of the practitioners recognise; they all know colleagues who have been called into schools at similar stages. **It is important to give Ahmed the feeling that the social worker takes his religious beliefs seriously,** since he wanted to discuss the Koran extensively. But in the film, the interventions provided to Ahmed lack this sensitivity. He has a specific interpretation of the Koran in mind; this idea of taking the Koran literally can be very attractive for the clear structure it provides in a complicated reality and for the definite sense of purpose. To counter this strict view of reality and deradicalise Ahmed, **it could have beneficial to provide him with another, similarly straightforward but less violent worldview. Unfortunately this is not that simple.** Besides a different ideological view, another imam would have also been able to fulfil the role of a father figure for Ahmed, something he clearly misses.
- As dealing with radicalised individuals calls for specialised and experienced staff, the question arises whether **to organise deradicalisation efforts nationally or locally.** The best is to combine both approaches; for the development of methodology and expertise it is recommendable to work from a central level. The execution of the programmes, however, should be done by local teams that are geographically close to the radicalised person and know the environment, but who can also fall back on the methodology and expertise developed by the central team. The latter can also keep a helicopter view, which prevents radicalised people and their families from falling off the radar if they move to a different region.

A STORY FROM DAILY PRACTICE: DISENGAGEMENT AND DERADICALISATION

By a first-line practitioner from the Dutch National Support Centre for Extremism (The Netherlands)

When we received the request to write a contribution on deradicalisation on one of many cases our centre has worked on, we decided to take the case of Peter (anonymised) as a prime example of our holistic approach to deradicalisation. Illustrated here is the importance of working with both the family and the radicalised person themselves, as well as the need for a holistic approach — covering ideological, psychological and social aspects.

This case came to the Dutch National Support Centre for Extremism (Dutch abbreviation: LSE) by a call from Mary. She was anxious about her 15-year-old son Peter and had difficulty dealing with him. Peter had converted to Islam a year earlier, and the atmosphere at home had turned grim and stressful. The information gathered during the phone call and later in personal meetings revealed a worrying situation: Peter had turned violent against his mother and his sister, as they did not conform to his desired lifestyle regarding appearance and prohibition of alcohol. Peter had quit his side job and stopped socialising with his old friends. Unidentified men visited the house, and Peter was fixated on his laptop during night hours. He had conversations in English with people abroad. These people, who were seemingly involved with Daesh, made him feel special by spending a lot of time on him. The involved LSE family caseworker, an experienced family therapist, convinced the mother of the necessity of an immediate intervention. The mother contacted the police and asked for their help to get her son transferred to a juvenile facility after a crisis situation involving domestic violence from Peter towards his mother.

Importance of a perfect match

At this point, a caseworker from the LSE was introduced to Peter for personal counselling, in close coordination with the security officer of the municipality where Peter lives. The LSE works on a voluntary basis, with both family members and the radicalising/radicalised person. The positioning and introduction of the caseworker towards the client, and the way the caseworker responds to the client's needs and expectations, are vital in the effectiveness of the counselling process in relation to (de)radicalisation. Peter was especially interested in anti-social opinions and extremist ideology and desired to talk about this with other people within the juvenile facility. This afforded an opening for establishing contact. The best match, in this case, was an LSE caseworker who is specialised in Islamic counselling for radicalised individuals. Being a convert, Peter lacked an Islamic upbringing and therefore also lacked basic knowledge of Islam. The caseworker visited Peter on a weekly basis within the juvenile facility and was seen by the client as a trustworthy and reliable authority on matters of religion, identity and society. Through this counselling relationship the caseworker could challenge several of Peter's extreme beliefs by reflecting on the validity and limitations of his knowledge.

Key elements in the deradicalisation process of Peter

Within the juvenile facility, Peter was also psychologically assessed, and it was determined that he had a low IQ and aggression issues. Peter gave permission to the caseworker to look into the results of the psychological assessment, which helped the caseworker to get a better understanding of Peter's vulnerability to radicalisation, as well as to adjust the interventions to Peter's (in)abilities and needs even more. Given his low IQ, the focus in the counselling sessions shifted from ideological conversations to building resilience and an alternative network. For Peter to become more resilient, goals were set aiming at gaining more self-confidence by pro-social daily activities and by stabilising the relationships with his mother and sibling, and even with his predominantly absent father. Peter

felt betrayed by his mother and refused to see her. The LSE family caseworker focused on slowly restoring contact, as family relationship is an important protective factor for radicalised individuals and a requirement for Peter to be allowed to leave the facility and go back home. The absence of his father in Peter's life was an important destabilising factor, and restoring this relationship contributed to the client's self-confidence and emotional self-regulation. Parallel to this, he received anti-aggression therapy in the juvenile facility.

When Peter was found to be more stable regarding emotional and aggression regulation, and having re-established the relationships with his mother and sibling, he was released from the juvenile facility. The LSE caseworker continued counselling Peter and focused in this second phase on positive identity formation aligned to his adolescence, cognitive abilities and conversion. This was done by coaching Peter within the limits of his cognitive abilities, pro-social understandings and interpretations of religion and society.

As Peter became less and less influenced by his extremist contacts, reconnected to several old friends, and was able to have a more autonomous and pro-social understanding on topics regarding religion and society, the goals of the LSE casework were achieved. In consultation with the security officer of Peter's municipality, the counselling process was completed. Peter's personality and low IQ will remain elements of vulnerability. For this reason, Peter was referred to a local healthcare provider to support him with challenges that may occur later in his life, because of his personality, low IQ and unstable family situation.

Summarising, the key elements in this successful case can be attributed to a multidisciplinary and holistic healthcare approach to disengagement and deradicalisation, which ensures an effective form of pro-social reintegration of radicalised individuals while it also safeguards the individual's human rights. One of the lessons learned was the importance of having clients undertake a psychological assessment early on in the counselling process, in order to adjust the counselling to the (in)abilities and needs of the client in the best way possible and thereby increase the effectiveness of the holistic approach to deradicalisation.

Conclusion

Statements expressed at the High-Level Conference closing are summarised below.

The RAN unites the power of first-line practitioners, who are supporting individuals already radicalised or on the way to becoming radicalised to reclaim their place in society. Through RAN, this trust has improved and there is a belief that first-line practitioners and policymakers can work together to make this change happen. The RAN High-Level Conference of 2019 has contributed once again to their collaboration to improve the collective capacity of all involved parties to tackle radicalisation more effectively, and to improve the ways in which they can be helpful.

First-line practitioners expressed a strong call for the greatest attention to be directed at the **families and communities**, as there is no substitution for their multi-level contributions. They in turn need support structures and need to know where to go with their questions. Some cases call for an expert on **ideology** to explain ideologies in a non-confrontational way, while others call for many first-line practitioners to work together in order to **deradicalise** an individual – and to provide him or her with new prospects in life. In addition, there should be a strong focus on the **educational system**, although that too can start manifesting weaknesses if it is expected to do too much. Therefore, educators themselves are the ones who can set out what can or should be expected from educational and support services, and what kind of training they need in order to reach their objectives.

Looking back at the discussions that took place during the RAN High-Level Conference, it is clear that the field of P/CVE in Europe has matured a lot in the last few years. After having watched *Le Jeune Ahmed* and the interventions that were used in that movie, many of the attending practitioners expressed the feeling that they could have acted at an earlier stage. Although tackling violent extremism takes time, the myriad of approaches that were discussed at the RAN HLC show that Europe's P/CVE practitioners are professionalizing.

Recommendations for further reading

Education

- [RAN ISSUE PAPER 'The role of education in preventing radicalisation', December 2016](#)
- [RAN POLICY PAPER 'Transforming schools into labs for democracy', October 2018](#)
- [RAN EDU 'Making a difference: the dissemination and implementation of RAN EDU lessons for PVE-E', Dublin, February 2019](#)
- [RAN Policy & Practice Event, 'Building resilience among young children raised in extremist environments – specifically child returnees', Warsaw, 4 July 2018](#)
- [RAN EDU 'Education and radicalisation prevention: Different ways governments can support schools and teachers in preventing/countering violent extremism', 6 May 2019](#)

Deradicalisation and disengagement

- [RAN P&P and RAN EXIT 'Building Bridges', Prague, 5-6 June 2019](#)
- [RAN EXIT 'Practical guidelines – Management of exit programmes', Frankfurt, 17-18 January 2019](#)
- [RAN Policy & Practice Event, 'The challenge of resocialisation: Dealing with radicalised individuals during and after imprisonment', Vienna, 6 November 2018](#)
- [RAN EXIT Academy 'Communicating with radicalised individuals in an exit setting', Rotterdam, 25-26 April 2018](#)

Family and community

- [RAN P&P and RAN YF&C 'Radicalised and terrorist offenders released from prison: Community and family acceptance', Prague, 6-7 June 2019](#)
- [RAN YF&C Academy 'Children growing up in extremist families', Rome, 24-25 April 2019](#)
- [RAN YF&C 'The role of gender in extremism and P/CVE', Manchester, 29-30 November 2018](#)
- [RAN LOCAL and RAN YF&C 'Engaging with communities – Collaboration between local authorities and communities in PVE', Prague, 22-23 February 2018](#)

Ideology

- [RAN POL and RAN C&N, 'RAN Policy & Practice Workshop – Narratives and Strategies of Far-Right and Islamist Extremists', Amsterdam, 4 July 2019](#)
- [RAN H&SC 'Grooming for terror – Manipulation and control', Bucharest, 25 April 2019](#)
- [RAN POL and RAN C&N 'Current and future narratives and strategies of far-right and Islamist extremism', Stockholm, 4-5 April 2019](#)
- [RAN H&SC 'Understanding the mental health disorders pathway leading to violent extremism', Turin, 13 March 2019](#)