



## **PROPOSED POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE HIGH LEVEL CONFERENCE**

**FROM THE RAN VOICES OF VICTIMS OF TERRORISM WORKING GROUP (DECEMBER 2012)**

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

### **1. Introduction**

The mission of RAN VVT is to make the voices of the victims heard, their positive values understood and their role empowered, thus having a strong instrument to make people aware of the dangers of terrorism and violent radicalisation. Victims become - unwillingly - owners of the message what a terrorist act implies for the life of ordinary citizens. This message should be spread in the most effective way to prevent people becoming attracted or permissive towards radicalised movements or propaganda.

On the one hand, spreading the voices of the victims to the general public or to specific focus groups and, on the other hand protecting the interests and wellbeing of the victims and their organisations is a delicate challenge. It involves ethical, legal, political and academic aspects. By looking for good practices, involvement of academic specialists and the will to be innovative, RAN VVT tries to set a new standard for making the voices of victims heard and instrumental in the field of counter radicalisation.

RAN VVT will promote these standards by collecting, categorizing and disseminating testimonials and other narratives of victims of terrorism that could be useful in, for example, educational programs for young adults. The lessons learned from this process will be shared with organisations or projects that plan to produce new testimonials. Other working groups of RAN can also benefit from these collected narratives. For example, narratives can be part, of programs for prisoners (working group RAN P&P) and working group RAN @ can disseminate narratives on internet and social media.

As victims, we want to clearly understand what happened to us or to our family members. We do not seek for vengeance but for justice and peace. Through our quest for justice and understanding, we believe that the main cause of terrorism is radicalisation, leading to violent extremism. We want to participate to a positive action and make sure that what happened to us will never happen again. That is the reason why we want to participate in the fight against radicalisation.

Victims of Terrorism and their organisations are part of the national and European society and take pride in contributing to tolerance, justice and peace. To achieve this a possibility to speak up is essential. Independency from governments and legal protection are important preconditions. Being independent does not mean unwillingness to cooperate. Where goals are shared, like fighting violent radicalisation, this is even felt as a need.

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

Victims of terrorism are not experts on radicalisation processes and violent extremism even if they suffered (and/or still suffer) the consequences of violent attacks. By fate we know the consequences of violent extremism. It is known that violent extremism is easier to apply when you don't know the victims and you can neglect the consequences of your act when it comes to human tragedy. As victims, we can observe it every time we meet and discuss with radicalised persons.

Many aspects seem to be conducive to the radicalisation process, like, amongst many others, the dehumanisation of potential victims. This process might be countered at an early stage, amongst others, by the narratives of victim, showing the impact and long term consequences on innocent people, who after being affected don't resort to violence themselves, but use democratic and peaceful means to seek justice. This could be our main contribution to prevent from radicalisation leading to violent extremism.

The other contribution could be linked to our fight for justice and recognition. In bringing terrorist to be judged and condemned, we contribute to highlight the horrible consequences of violent extremism. Our contribution in promoting a better implication of the victims in the legal procedures and on an European (or international) status of the victims of terrorism are institutional signs that contribute to a better listening and understanding of the voice of the victims versus the propaganda of the violent radicalism. We should see it as a fight between the voice of the victims (positive, peaceful, legally based, turned on the similitudes) and the propaganda of radicalisation (negative, aggressive, conflict based, turned on the differences).

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

The use of the narratives of victims of terrorism for fighting violent radicalisation has two main aspects. First of all, the victims who contribute shouldn't become victim for a second time as consequence of their testimonial. Safety should be guaranteed in order to avoid revenge. Assistance should be available when it comes to (a revival of) traumatic experiences in the process of making and publication of a testimonial. Furthermore it should be clear for the victims what will be done with their narrative.

The second aspect is the degree in which a narrative of a victim is useful for counter radicalisation and/or deradicalisation. Is a narrative more than a private remembrance for a deceased loved one? Does it express a feeling people can relate to and/or contain a clear message? Is the narrative clear in rejecting violence and revenge and calling for justice in a legal way? Apart from the content which is sent by telling or showing a testimonial, the characteristics of the targeted group are important. Who are the people who watch and listen? Are they vulnerable to radicalisation? How does their day to day life relate to the story told in the narrative? For using narratives successfully, thus a fitting combination of strong testimonials and a public that fits to the narrative content wise and in form, is crucial. The matrix that has been developed by the VVT working group is an effort to make testimonials accessible and to make a good match between narratives and target groups for radicalisation awareness, counter radicalisation and deradicalisation.

Important points to be considered when it comes to the effective use of testimonials are:

- In the narrative of the victims the most powerful words/messages capable to give a strong impact in order to prevent violent radicalism are those who come from victims with a process of resilience in their life after the terror attack sufferance.
- Fitting testimonials of victims of terrorism in a broader educational programme and/or accompany them by further material makes the use stronger. Teachers' manuals, documentation for pupils, narratives of perpetrators (and so on) make the testimonials of victims more

comprehensive.

- In addition to former point: just dropping a narrative in a group, without any preparation, explanation or programme, will not be effective or can even be contra productive (message rejected).
- Cultural differences are apparent in the way people mourn and react emotionally on extreme harm to themselves or their loved ones. Although the feelings beyond this are clearly universal a testimonial will often come closer to the audience when cultural similarities between them and the victim are larger.

#### **4. Policy recommendations, from the perspective of the WG**

As stated the main goal of RAN VVT is the contribution to fight violent radicalisation. But the group wants to stress that recognition of the rights of victims of terrorism is of major importance for them, in their daily life and for their potential role as a strong player in radicalisation awareness and counter radicalisation.

##### *Victims of terrorism contributing to radicalisation awareness and counter radicalisation*

The flowchart of our policy recommendation has three steps:

1. To take care to the single victims: major goal is to let people regain their independent position in society and teach them to cope with the tragedy that occurred to them. This implies to ensure the single victims all the health and psychologist helps they need, and all the other social support that can answer their needs.
2. To facilitate the victims' organisations: to promote the social cohesion among citizens and victims by facilitating the development of associations of victims of terrorism. As independency of the organisations is of utmost importance, promoting doesn't imply agreeing on all subjects (as sometimes, on some occasions, government and victims organisations will be standing opposite of each other). Mutual respect should however remain.
3. To support their messages: to ensure the associations of victims to access the public communication services (as State broadcasts) and to support their communication projects and activities. More specifically on this point is the need felt for assistance on communication. As small NGO's, mostly without specific professional assistance, organisations of victims of terrorism try to attract media attention. In this level playing field, a lot of organisations are trying to influence public opinion with huge financial and human resources. To keep up in this game, assistance is needed. Another point where the need of support is felt, is the accessibility to bring the narrative of counter radicalisation inside of state funded institutions like schools. Some associations within VVT currently experience rejections on this domain.

#### **5. The role of local actors in preventing violent extremism, from the perspective of the WG**

One of the presumed effective elements of testimonials of victims of terrorism is the fact that people tend to relate to it. Getting away from being strictly factual (number of deceased, description of circumstances and so on) the testimonial adds the human element. By telling the personal story, the victims cause two effects on the people listening. They give a face to the people who were attacked and also how ordinary people cope with a horrible and painful situation. The more victims are seen as 'one of us' the more impact their message will have for the people who receive it. Victims telling their stories in their own community will increase this effect. It should however be noticed that not every

victim does want to share his/her story so close to the daily environment.

Victims have their narrative at disposal for local actors, like schools, community centres, NGOs and local governments. They can also implement the aspect of victims in their narrative on radicalisation. Fixation on the perpetrators without showing the effect of their act can work glamourizing to vulnerable groups. Local actors will be more in tune with the local (political) situation where the radicalisation process may be occurring. This causes opportunities to look very specifically for the right testimonials on the right time in the right situation.

## **6. The role of diasporas in the process of violent radicalisation, from the perspective of the WG**

We know many victims of terrorism coming from the diaspora and overseas communities and preparing dialogue between different victims (from and out of the diaspora and overseas community) with other members of this community is very efficient. This can be seen with the case of the mother (a Muslim, coming from Morocco) of one of the victims of the Toulouse-Montauban attacks going to meet the friends of Merah (the killer).

Testimonies of all types of victims should be used, but especially the ones from victims culturally close to the extremists targeted. We work hand in hand with victims from diasporas and overseas communities and should go on this way to show that on the opposite of the extremists, no distinction or segregation is done, and that our work is inclusive, not exclusive.

## **7. The role of communication on the Internet and elsewhere, from the perspective of the WG**

Internet and social media should be one of the main fields for the competition between narratives of the victims and propaganda of the extremists. Seeding doubt by spreading stories about victims on the internet, for example on discussion sites, social media, blogs etc. can be useful. But, generally speaking, it will be difficult for the victims themselves to be active in this competition and to face the propaganda of violent radicalisation without putting their mental health in danger. Furthermore, it seems an unequal fight as the radicalising movements are often well funded and are putting much effort in their presence on the internet as it is one of the most important places for recruiting. So this kind of activity online must be carried on with the help of professionals and social awareness communication companies.

The internet, in the respect of the working group, also is a medium which can be used as a source of tools to work on radicalisation in the real world. The mapping of testimonials can for example be gathered and stored on the internet. After choosing an appropriate testimonial for an occasion it is shown off line.

Another example of the use of internet is making the general public aware of the risks or consequences of radicalisation. A good example for this approach is executed by the Argentinian victims' organisation CELTYV, who uses Facebook as a mean to mobilize general public for their purpose.