

## CONCLUSION PAPER

*Memorials and commemorations and their role in P/CVE*

*24-25 November 2021, digital meeting*

# Incorporating memorial needs of victims and survivors in P/CVE efforts

## Key outcomes

This paper is based on the insights from the **RAN Victims/Survivors of Terrorism Working Group meeting on 24-25 November 2021**. It presents how practitioners view the different approaches, ways and characteristics of memorialisation and what is the potential of commemorative practices in P/CVE. One of the main aims of the meeting was to analyse the current memorial policies and practices including local, national, and transnational levels. The second was to discuss possible opportunities (or limitations) in using memorials and commemorations more directly to support P/CVE. The outcomes of the meeting are the basis of this conclusion paper, which is designed to inform future RAN activities on the matter.

Memorialisation is still key to public recognition and acknowledgment of the experiences of victims/survivors, yet the process of attributing meanings to remembrance and creating successful memorialisation strategies is not without challenges. The normative ideal is a memorialisation approach that espouses both a private and public dimension of remembrance, reconciling memorial needs of victims/survivors and society as a whole. In order to bridge such an existing gap and put memorialisation in service of prevention and countering of violent extremism (P/CVE), several recommendations have been formulated.

The participants reiterated the following:

- The memorial needs of victims/survivors must be recognised by state and society;
- The voices of the victims/survivors are key to P/CVE efforts;
- Victims/Survivors need to foster and maintain ownership of their own narratives and experiences;
- It's important to reconcile the private and public dimension of remembrance.

The aim of this paper is to share key ideas underpinning the discussion, the focus of the meeting, key outcomes/messages as well as to inform about the challenges and opportunities of using memorialisation in P/CVE.

## Highlights of the discussion

Memorialisation can be an efficient support to P/CVE efforts. Victims/survivors and their organisations are key in raising awareness about the consequences of terror attacks and promoting narratives that counter future cultures of violence.

Successful memorialisation<sup>1</sup> of victims/survivors of terrorism relies in part on careful consideration of various issues associated with the memorialisation process. Some of these challenges include timing – as societal and personal paths to recovery and coping with the consequences of terrorism travel on different timelines. Yet, victims/survivors of terrorism have a variety of needs that shift and evolve over time. Addressing their ‘memorial needs’ is not just desirable but essential. For them, it is beneficial for memorialisation in relation to the enduring trauma.

Participants at the meeting identified several important challenges in relation to the overall process of memorialisation, its efficacy for the victims/survivors and societies at large, and its use in P/CVE efforts. Below is a breakdown of key challenges and needs voiced by the victims/survivors in relation to the use of memorialisation in pursuing P/CVE efforts.

## P/CVE and memorial needs of victims/survivors

### Need to preserve and honour the memory

The symbolic recognition of one’s own personal experiences and sufferings remain central in how victims/survivors understand the memorialisation objectives. Public acknowledgement is fundamental for the victims to feel part of society again. This suggests that preserving and honouring their memory is key to fostering an ‘active remembrance’ and supporting societal awareness about the reality of terrorism and promoting learning about its consequences. In terms of recognition and acknowledgement, the Memorial Centre for Victims of Terrorism<sup>2</sup> in the Basque Country (Spain) is one of the most recent (2021) examples of such efforts. The main mission of the Memorial Centre is to preserve and disseminate the democratic and ethical values embodied by victims/survivors of terrorism. It is also to build the collective memory of the victims/survivors. Another goal is to raise awareness among the entire population for the defence of freedom and human rights and against terrorism. Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 20 000 people visited the Memorial Centre for Victims of Terrorism during the first six months of its opening.

### Need to maintain ownership of experiences

Victims/survivors and their organisations univocally agree that ownership of the memorialisation process should be given to those who have first-hand experience with the consequences of terrorism. In this way, the voices of victims/survivors will be heard. They will be acknowledged, and their needs and wellbeing respected. Ultimately, they will be empowered to better sustain P/CVE efforts. This requires making victims/survivors key interlocutors and not simply recipients of any state-led memorialisation efforts. The experience with the French National Day of Memory suggests its acceptance by the victim/survivor organisations as a day to observe the right of all victims/survivors to honour their memory. There is a desire among victims to be included in the consultative process about commemorative ceremonies and the creation of permanent memorials. By regaining ownership of their personal experiences and telling their own story, the emphasis is placed on the human consequences of such violence. The challenge here is in the ability to de-politicise the inherently political nature of terrorist violence by humanising the victims and emphasising the randomness of such violence. (In)direct victims of terrorism are

<sup>1</sup> Milošević, Ana. 2022. ‘The efficacy of memorialisation after terrorism’, Policy brief. EUROM: Barcelona. pp.1-8. Source: <https://europeanmemories.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/Policy-Brief-web-version.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> For further information: The Memorial Centre for Victims of Terrorism, Source: <http://www.memorialvt.com/en/museum/#>

innocent victims. They are on the receiving end of the terror that perpetrators look to inflict on states and societies. Such randomness of violence does not discriminate between age, sex, religion or race.

### Need to be respected

Victims/survivors interact regularly with the places of attacks, and the memorials created in their honour and in memory of the tragedy. Signs of disrespect and tainting of their personal experiences and tragedies is shown with poor maintenance, misuse or even vandalism of public memorials, stealing of memorabilia and lack of inclusion. The latter ranges from the consultation, participation and attendance at commemorative ceremonies to practical issues such as organisational oversight of issues like wheelchair accessibility. Victims feel disrespected when there is a political hesitation or an unwillingness to create a memorial. This is also the case when political support is weak for organising a commemoration, as was the case of the 2017 Westminster attack. In addition, victims are disrespected when extremists hijack their memory and places of suffering. In Argentina, locations where people disappeared, or where they were tortured or killed, have been converted into memorial spaces for the terrorists, not their victims. The way in which memorials are set up in Argentina creates a divide between victims of the regime and victims of terrorism. In Belgium, after a country-wide manhunt for the extremist Jürgen Konings, the site where his body was found has been turned into a venue for supporters of his ideology. In Italy, even decades after the end of fascism, many places of memory are abused by the supporters of neo-fascist and other extreme ideologies. The Piazza Fontana in Milan where a bomb killed 17 and injured 88 people in 1969 is a place where the anti-vaccine movement holds its protests.

### Need to testify, be seen and heard

The roles given to testimonies and their presumed effects can be quite different for those who provide and receive them.<sup>3</sup> The EC has endorsed the belief that testimonies could and should be used to signal positive resilience, prevent further radicalisation and convince people to reject violence. A practical example that highlights such role attributed to testimonies of victims and survivors is the Resilience and Unity project<sup>4</sup> in the UK. The project records stories and testimonies of people affected by acts of terrorism around the world. It maps the stories to create interactive tools for countering extremist narratives. The purpose of the platform is two-fold. Firstly, it acts as a virtual place of digital memorialisation for those affected and those who have lost their lives. At the same time, it amplifies these voices making them a valuable resource for distribution across schools, practitioners and communities. However, it should be noted that participation in a P/CVE activity should not be an additional source of harm for a victim. By extension, it should not be an action resulting in secondary victimisation. If it is considered that victim's participation in P/CVE efforts might have negative consequences, it should not be implemented.<sup>5</sup> This might be particularly the case with providing testimonies in prisons – increasingly concerned with the prevention of radicalisation. Victims, who feel ready, can take part in such activities.

### Need to receive empathy

Building meaningful social connections with others is important for both the physical and psychological well-being of victims/survivors as it fosters mutual understanding. The act of commemoration as an act of coming together is also a way of receiving and practicing empathy. This is the case for the community bound by direct victimhood (victims, survivors, their family members) but also for the local communities from which victims originate or neighbourhoods where the attacks occurred. Experience with the organisation of the European Remembrance Day for Victims of Terrorism (2019) reveals that victims attending the event in Brussels saw EU commemoration predominantly from a social identity perspective. The Remembrance event, as this case proves, is also an

<sup>3</sup> On the role of testimonies see e.g., Milošević, A. & Truc, G. 2021. '(Un)shared memory: European Parliament and EU Remembrance Day for Victims of Terrorism'. *Politique européenne*, 71, 142-169.

<sup>4</sup> For more information see 'The Resilience and Unity project'. Source: <https://www.resilienceinunity.com/>

<sup>5</sup> RAN and Maria Jiménez Ramos. 2019. 'Evaluating the impact of testimonies by victims of terrorism'. April, 10-11. Source: [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/system/files/2019-06/ran\\_rvt\\_maria\\_jimenez\\_prague\\_10-11\\_04\\_2019\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/system/files/2019-06/ran_rvt_maria_jimenez_prague_10-11_04_2019_en.pdf)

opportunity to bond with other victims and exchange ex-post experiences. Inspiring understanding for the experiences of victims/survivors is important in all efforts at preventing and countering future cultures of violence. Receiving an empathic testimony and participating jointly in commemorative rituals can better sustain mutual understanding. To a certain extent, it can also be 'transformative' since it humanises the 'abstract' victim and triggers self-reflection and identification with others' traumatic experiences. Reaching out and being heard by means of sharing personal experience can, in some instances, be beneficial to P/CVE efforts.

### Need to make sense of their experiences: Self-validation

Every personal experience of victims/survivors is different as it is their path to coping with the consequences of trauma. Memorialisation has both the potential of contributing to and setting back one's own personal path to 'recovery'. Many victims feel compelled to share their story. Some do this through writing memoirs or creating art based on their experiences. Others actively engage in public speaking or providing peer support. Books, documentaries and movies can also be a therapeutic outlet for coming to terms with trauma, building resilience and supporting overall P/CVE efforts. Media can potentially play an important role in implementing a positive image of victims/survivors. Their reporting and portrayal of victims is key to the ways victims/survivors are perceived by society and as a support to building a more positive image of oneself. 'Not forgotten' means to be seen, which means the victims are being recognised for their experience and such recognition restores a sense of self.

## Relevant practices

1. The [Memorial Centre for Victims of Terrorism](#) (Centro Memorial de las Víctimas del Terrorismo) in Vitoria-Gasteiz (**Spain**) consists of a museum to commemorate Spain's victims/survivors of terrorism and an archive with an educational purpose. The centre is built on four pillars: truth, memory, dignity and justice, aiming to pay tribute to those who have been affected by terror attacks and to educate the public on the consequences of extremism.
2. The [Resilience in Unity Project](#) (**United Kingdom**) gathers testimonials of victims/survivors of terror attacks from all over the world, mapping them to create an interactive tool, countering extremist narratives. It aims to commemorate victims/survivors of terrorism while at the same time providing resources for educational purposes, playing a pivotal role in P/CVE efforts.

## Recommendations

*Telling an authentic story, sharing an authentic experience.* All year round, victims and survivors – ready to speak and willing to share their stories – can be major advocates of P/CVE efforts. The victims/survivors organisations are an important vessel to deliver and amplify their voices. These organisations and their representatives are in a 'gate-keeper' position to discuss the possibility of delivering such testimony in emphatic, direct contact with the victims – based on their personal situation. However, not all victims/survivors are members of victim/survivor associations, and not all the victims/survivors wish to share their personal experiences in a public manner. Keeping ownership of one's own process of dealing with the consequences of violence should be maintained, at all times, also respecting the right of the victims/survivors to maintain anonymity and silence.

*Pursuing an active remembrance.* Memory of violence is not only memory of one's own personal suffering, but a reminder of the obligation and responsibility that democratic societies have towards past and future victims. Schools, prisons, and the online world are three arenas where P/CVE programmes use testimonies. It is possible that anyone

in any of these settings may become a focus of radicalisation. As such, prevention is key. Preventing future cultures of violence by stimulating discussion and promoting democratic values reflects also in memorialisation. Fostering citizens' participation in memorialisation initiatives, e.g. in commemorations, should be made a key priority of any P/CVE strategy that seeks to raise importance on the consequences that violent extremism, including terrorism, have on societies. An active remembrance, the one that can have a transformative effect, should avoid competition among different political memory frames and create synergies between various memorial initiatives that are organized all year around, and not just around anniversaries.

*Reaching out to citizens, engaging with the narratives.* While the stories of attacks that happened long ago are hard to make relevant in the present, the message that comes across different cases across time is the one of futility of violence. A successful memorialisation strategy that responds to the needs of the victims and seeks to transform the negative lessons of the past into prevention does not rely only on commemorations, monuments and memorial plaques. It is important to reach ordinary citizens and engage them in discussions about the meanings that terrorist violence has for the state, as well as society as a whole and for themselves. Museums that endorse multi-perspectivity delineating themselves from master narratives and antagonistic representations of violence can support these efforts and be an important promotor of P/CVE efforts. By asking 'How could this have happened? What would I have done under these circumstances? What can I do to prevent this from happening again?', a meaningful link between an ordinary citizen and a violent incident can be forged. In Munich, more than 40 years after the attack, an information point was built. It was proof that memory can be invoked for the sake of knowledge transmission.

*Sites of terror and memory, but also sites of learning.* The sites of an attack have an important role in the overall process of memorialisation and attending of victims/survivors needs. Across cases, these sites are not given sufficient attention. At Rambla, in Barcelona, even for the intended visitor it is hard to locate a monument made in memory of the 2017 attacks. When such places and events that happened there are not marked with a monument, or are hard to reach, this alienates the victims. For instance, at the Zaventem airport, in Belgium only a small square shaped plaque gives testimony of the 2016 attacks. Victims, whose names are not listed on the plaque, were not even consulted in the process. A monument is made in the proximity of the airport, but it is hard to reach especially for victims/survivors with limited mobility. Engaging with terrorist attacks sites through memorialisation provides an opportunity to develop counternarratives that disrupt the emergence of terrorism's supportive moral contexts and prevent exposure to these settings. Beyond annual commemorations, public performances that contest the imagery of violence continue to be practiced all year around. Engaging with such initiatives and supporting community-based and citizen-driven memorial responses, is a way of effectively practicing counterterrorism at the site of violence. In this way, the community itself acts as a promotor of the counterterrorism effort.

## Further reading

Milošević, Ana. 2022. '[The efficacy of memorialisation after terrorism](#)' Policy brief. EUROM. pp.1-8.

Milošević, Ana and Truc, Gerome. 2021. '(Un)shared memory: European Parliament and EU Remembrance Day for Victims of Terrorism'. *Politique européenne*, 71, pp. 142-169.

RAN and Maria Jiménez Ramos. 2019. '[Evaluating the impact of testimonies by victims of terrorism](#)'. April, 10-11.

RAN VoT, Luca Guglielminetti and Miriam Attias. 2021. [Memorials for victims of terrorism and their possible value for P/CVE – Different approaches within the EU](#). Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.