

Key points and recommendations

- Develop a better understanding of the (trans-) national VRWE threat pictures and their different sub-milieus in the EU.
- Identify good and not so good practices from 20 years of experience of P/CVE/CT measures focused on Islamist extremism/terrorism, while having the challenges of transferability in mind.
- Investigate organised crime connections of VRWE and explore the strategic use of the “administrative approach” (e.g. rigorously investigating/penalising tax/building/fire code violations).
- Follow the money! Investigate VRWE actors like you would follow the financial activities and networks of (violent) Islamist extremists.
- If a VRWE group can be banned under national law or on the EU level, a legal ban can open up new tools to explore and disrupt networks. A lesson learned from allowing supporters of the “Islamic State” in the EU to continuously recruit and fundraise indicates that not using this tool actively can backfire.

Introduction on the topic

This webinar addressed the emergence of a new transnational (cross-border) violent right-wing extremism (VRWE) movement and its implications for P/CVE practitioners on a local level. After discussing the latest relevant research on the transnational dimension of VRWE, the meeting focussed on lessons learned and good practices on how relevant activities of right-wing extremists can be identified, understood, prevented or countered for local P/CVE practitioners. The target audience were public administration officials (including from tax offices, building authorities and youth welfare offices), police and law enforcement officials and practitioners who were interested in exchanging on the following issues:

- Commercial events (e.g. concerts, festivals, mixed-martial arts) hosted by VRWE;
- Commercial activities (e.g. mail-order business/merchandise) by VRWE;
- Multi-agency cooperation on how to effectively deal with VRWE events or marches;

Overview of webinar

Contributions were made by Maximilian Kreter (Hannah-Arendt-Institute Dresden, Germany), Josefin Bergström (The Swedish Center for Preventing Violent Extremism, Sweden), Hana Šebová (Extremist Screening Centre, National Counter Terrorism Unit, Czech Republic) and Alexander Ritzmann (RAN/Counter Extremism Project (CEP)). The presentations were followed by a lively Q&A session and reflections by the panel. The meeting was held under the Chatham House Rule.

Key topics

Study: A new violent right-wing extremist movement has emerged

A [recent study](#) by the Counter Extremism Project (CEP) highlights that from around 2014, a leaderless, transnational, and apocalyptic and violence right-wing extremist (VRWE) movement has emerged, staging itself as a victim of left-wing political domination, migration and refugee movements, and a global Jewish conspiracy. National right-wing extremist scenes are linked by narratives that conjure up the downfall of the entire "white race", and not just the respective national "people". The "[Great Replacement](#)", an imagined conspiracy where Jews, Muslims, feminists and other white "traitors" aim at transforming the "white race" into a "brown race", is understood as an apocalyptic "white genocide". The [myth](#) claims that the "white race" can only be saved if believers go into battle together.

The new movement is not hierarchically structured. Its followers, however, feel closely united by common values and imagined enemies, and thus have formed a kind of unorganised collective, which also offers a new home for example to be they [so-called lone perpetrators](#), comradeships, "angry citizens", hooligans, or entire RWE parties. The supposedly apocalyptic dimension of the threat allows the supporters of this collective to feel like heroes in the often wished-for civil war.

Building structures through commercial success

Transnational VRWE martial arts events with hundreds of visitors and dozens of fighters serve not only as sporting events or as training grounds for the physical confrontation with political opponents, but also to recruit previously apolitical fighters. Estimates in Germany alone put the turnover at around 40,000 euros for the large martial arts events, while "White power" music festivals probably bring in several hundred thousand euros. Parts of the right-wing extremist music and martial arts scenes are transnationally conceived and integrated into a [corporate network of music producers, fan-article distributors, clothing brands and fitness products](#) with partners in Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, France, Great Britain, Italy, Portugal, Ukraine and Russia, among others.

Go East!

Many European or United States' right-wing extremists look fondly to Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries and see them as the future saviours of the west. Since 2014 the Russian-Ukrainian conflict has created the [opportunity to gain combat experience](#) on both sides and to receive paramilitary training. Also, some CEE countries seem to allow for more opportunities for VRWE and their endeavours which is why some leading VRWE activists advocate for the relocation of fellow comrades there. In some countries, narratives formerly considered extremist became part of the mainstream and members of banned VRWE groups have become elected officials on a local level.

Misunderstanding RWE terrorism

The national and transnational dimensions of right-wing extremism might require a new and adjusted understanding. Terrorism as a strategy combines violence with propaganda, where violence serves the purpose of building a stage upon which terrorists can display their demands. While some RWE attacks have come with detailed propaganda manifestos, more often right-wing extremist violence is without demand or explanation. It thus constitutes an anomaly particularly compared to left-wing or Islamist terrorism. Terror, however, is being spread to VRWE victims anyway, just in a different way – namely, through false suspicions, rumours and the fear of not being safe. As a result, national statistics on VRWE and terrorism will likely not show the real threat picture.

Overview of available P/CVE approaches:

- **Legalistic Approach:** Criminal law, prosecution of specific offences, limited to the actual offence banning VRWE groups
- **Community (Multi-Agency) Approach:** Municipalities (including police) and Civil Society organizations work together based on a shared understanding of the local phenomenon(s)
- **Civil Society Approach:** Information campaigns, (counter-)mobilization, training and educating other involved actors
- **Administrative Approach (originally developed to fight organized crime):** Cross-agency/coordinated government interventions to disrupt VRWE actors, including their “legal” activities by proactively investigating e.g. for possible tax, fire or building code violations

The above described approaches can be combined according to local needs and might have short or long time effects as well as unintended consequences. For example, limiting the operational space for legal RWE activities can lead to a general limitation of activities also for pro-democratic organisations.

Shared good practices

- To protect citizens against backlash from VRWE actors, local prevention coordinators or CSOs could handle/bundle legal claims of plaintiffs so the personal information of the citizens does not get shared during court proceedings
- Specialised CSOs should educate and advise other CSOs, citizens and government officials about recent trends and local VRWE actors and activities.
- Organised crime connections of VRWE actors should be investigated and the applicability of the “administrative approach” should be explored locally.

Follow-up topics for future RAN activities

The RAN should initiate and facilitate a series of expert meetings that investigate the question if the nature of the VRWE treat is understood properly since its modus operandi seem to significantly differ from e.g. violent Islamist extremism/terrorism. As a result, the RAN could communicate its findings and advise Member States on how to potentially adjust national definitions and statistics.

Secondly, the RAN could explore the applicability of the “administrative approach” as a strategic tool in P/CVE, particularly regarding the legal and illegal activities of key VRWE actors and groups.