EXECUTIVE SUMMARIES

of the project-based collaborations on prevention of radicalisation

LED IN 2019

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General introduction and executive summaries

In its final report of 18 May 2018, the high-level Commission expert group on radicalisation (HLCEG-R) recommended creating a new collaborative format: 'project-based collaborations', led by Member States with the support of the Commission.

The purpose and added value of project-based collaborations was to allow like-minded Member States to collaborate through a series of meetings to produce specific deliverables that helped implement better policy responses.

Following input received from the Member States, the Commission organised in 2019 seven projects with various formats: study visits, workshops or combination of study visits and workshops.

Each group working on a project validated a final report with guidance and recommendations. This document compiles the final reports validated by the Member States.

Far-right extremism in Sweden

The overall **objective** of the study visit was to understand the specific local context of far-right extremism in the area of Borlänge in Sweden, to learn about experiences of other Member States, and to learn from each other about the different approaches and managing the risks posed by far-right extremist groups.

Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Netherlands, Sweden, United Kingdom, European Commission, the Radicalisation Awareness Network, the European Strategic Communications Network and Europol.

The **two-day study visit** brought together Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Netherlands, Sweden, United Kingdom, European Commission, the Radicalisation Awareness Network, European Strategic Communications Network and Europol and local level actors including from local newspaper, university, private sector and local charity, as well as a former far-right extremist and EXIT worker from Borlänge.

The participants **learned** about the challenges posed by the presence of the **Nordic Resistance Movement (NRM)**, which has roots in the region since the 1930s, and has held a seat in the local parliament between 2014-2018. Their presence in the region means that large internationally oriented businesses such as Spendrups brewery and ABB electricity find it difficult to employ and keep staff.

The participants **agreed** that far-right extremism was a threat to democracy, because the *modus operandi* of such groups is to threaten those that speak out against racism and hate. They threaten politicians, government workers, journalists, civil society actors, teachers, students, with the aim of silencing their voices. Although the case of the presence of the Nordic Resistance Movement in Sweden poses specific challenges, Member States can usefully learn from each other's experience in responding to far-right extremist groups. Today there is a notable cooperation between far-right extremist groups in Europe and USA.

One area where the Member States would welcome **cooperation** is in identifying effective tools for law enforcement and public authorities on the **legal boundaries between hate speech and free speech**, and in clarifying the circumstances under which action by far-right extremists is considered illegal and/or constitutes terrorism. Such clarity may also help in taking action against threats of violence that often go unreported.

Another area **is banning of organisations**. When considering whether to ban a group, it is important to have in mind the objective of the ban: whether it is, for example, to stop hate, incitement, or protect public order etc. It is recommended to see whether these objectives can be achieved through disruption of activities rather than by banning the group. Some of the potential results of a ban is that organisations change name, go underground or go abroad.

The **spread of online hate and propaganda** was another issue faced by all Member States, in particular as far-right groups are increasing their organisation and cooperation across Europe and beyond.

At local level, Member States could usefully exchange experiences on how to **develop local action plans** involving communities, local governments, civil society, schools,

students, newspapers and private companies, as well as research. There has been a trend in Sweden and elsewhere in far-right extremist groups moving to certain areas in the countryside to gather as a community. This has resulted in a complex local situation in the county of Dalarna and difficulties in developing prevention work due to threats and fear.

One specific area that requires greater understanding is assessing the **reasons why people join and leave** far-right extremist groups. Testimony from former extremists can help us understand the complexities of this process. Member States could usefully exchange their research findings and experience with exit programmes to this end.

National support to local level

The **overall objective** of the project was to explore structures and processes set up in the participating Member States to support local administrations in a multi-agency collaboration.

The seven participating countries (leading Member States: Sweden, Denmark and the Netherlands; Spain, Italy, Finland and Belgium took part as participating Member States) met four times in 2019, and based on their experience they drafted **10 Recommendations** that could be used both in strategic discussions before setting up prevention measures at national level, and to further develop the ongoing national prevention work.

The utility of having in place a mechanism for coordinating and implementing prevention work, including through a **national prevent structure** has been explored, analysing the different characteristics that such a structure could have, and what could be its impact on local prevention activities.

Clarity on the roles and responsibilities in cooperation at national level benefits the local level, and a clear legal framework, as well as national and local strategies and action plans can serve as guiding documents for all stakeholders. When drafting these key documents, it is therefore important to involve the main national and local stakeholders in the drafting process from the beginning.

A **national map of the hotbeds of radicalisation and violent extremism**, especially if a legal framework and a national strategy/action plan are not in place yet, can be considered as an excellent starting point. The map will provide the knowledge to understand which violent extremist groups are active in a country, and in which municipalities violent extremism is more of concern: this will create a solid base for further action, including prioritisation of relevant support to the municipalities that most need it. Challenges and possible methodologies to conduct such an exercise have been explored, and a reflection on which kind of information should be taken into consideration has been made.

To **develop a multi-agency approach at local level** is crucial to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism, and the national level should support the local level in this process. In some countries, experience shows clearly that it can be extremely useful to build

prevention work on existing multi-agency cooperation mechanisms, either connecting the prevention of violent extremism to crime prevention or to the prevention of a range of social problems. The lack of a legal framework, of clear guidelines on how to collaborate, of a practical inter-agency cooperation for structural or cultural reasons have been identified as possible challenges.

Information sharing among stakeholders has been clearly identified as one of the most sensitive issues concerning cooperation in a local multi-agency setting. Without information exchange, it is complicated to put in place local cooperation, and the national authorities should provide guidance to national agencies and local administrations. Also in this case, the lack of a proper legal framework regulating this specific aspect can be a challenge; if a legal framework is in place, it is important that both the national and the local authorities have a shared understanding of the boundaries and the opportunities under the legal framework.

A **regular dialogue between the relevant national authorities, local administrations and practitioners** is crucial to pool experience, knowledge and views. To support the local level in establishing a network of local coordinators/municipalities is important, as sharing experiences can be extremely useful, and can help draw the attention of the national level to the challenges and needs faced by the municipalities. A network of municipalities can be a valuable framework for establishing peer learning among local actors. Supporting the dialogue with associations of municipalities can be a useful way for the national level to achieve a bottom-up approach.

Upgrading the skills of the professionals working at local level is important, including **providing training and developing operational tools and methods**: national authorities should play a key role in this. More than the lack of knowledge and resources, the lack of experience at local level on how to handle cases of violent extremism can be the real challenge.

It can be extremely useful to have one national entity in charge of compiling and sharing research findings and information. National authorities have an important role in **supporting local authorities regarding access to a well-organised and easily usable source of knowledge to prevent violent extremism.** National authorities should identify gaps and local needs in terms of research, prioritising them and producing knowledge to respond to those needs, and should also step up dialogue between policy, practice and research. For local practitioners working on specific prevention measures, it can be valuable to compare their experience with research results, and get support from researchers in trying new methods, evaluating them, and if they show good results, in implementing them.

Civil society organisations (CSOs), including faith communities, play an important role in prevention work. The discussions among participating Member States made clear that **to identify reliable partners among CSOs, the local level needs support from national agencies** in the form of knowledge and guidelines. Dialogue with CSOs should always be encouraged by the national level, keeping in mind that a vetting process is needed before starting any form of cooperation, as there may be organisations that are not considered as reliable partners for cooperation at local and national level.

Finally, **reintegration of returning foreign terrorist fighters and their family members** has been identified as an important area for further developing cooperation between the national and the local level. It is paramount to guarantee continuity between initiatives conducted at national level and initiatives conducted at local level during the different phases of the exit programmes. It's clear that, also in this area, the role that the national level has to play to support the local level is key.

Prisons, rehabilitation and reintegration

The objective of the project on *Radicalisation in prisons, reintegration and rehabilitation* was to offer a platform for exchange between national policymakers on how to manage terrorist and extremist offenders during and after their release, with a view to better addressing the specific challenges this specific group poses, including the need to balance risk monitoring and reintegration efforts. The project had the dual goal to get a better overview of existing initiatives and to identify gaps for further work and formulate possible steps forward.

This work was carried out against the background of a growing number of terrorist and radicalised offenders that are due to end their prison sentences in the coming years and will need effective rehabilitation and reintegration programmes.

Under this *project-based collaboration,* France and Sweden (with the participation of Belgium, Czechia, Germany, Denmark, Spain, Finland and the Netherlands), with Commission support, organised **one expert meeting and two study visits**. The expert meeting took place in Brussels on 13 March 2019. The study visits were organised on 2/3 October and 22/23 October, and involved Sweden organising a visit to Hall Prison and Sollentuna Probation Office, and France organising a visit to the prisons in Vendin-le-Vieil and Annoellin.

Member States agreed that focus should be placed on rehabilitation, reintegration and de-radicalisation programmes in prison and after release with a view to increasing the effectiveness of rehabilitation, reintegration and de-radicalisation programmes in the light of different approaches, as illustrated by France and Sweden.

Member States advocated that evidence-based research should be the basis for programmes, as highlighted at the expert meeting in Brussels and illustrated by the research unit from the Swedish Prison and Probation Service. In this context, specific attention could be paid to risk assessment and management, assessment of individual progress during rehabilitation/reintegration programmes (including self-assessment), information exchange between prison/law enforcement and local government/social sector

and the role of religious counselling (both to provide religious care and to deconstruct the extremist narrative).

Regarding areas that could require further work, Member States raised the issue of training for prison and probation staff, exchanges of lists of prison literature and other content that should be monitored, vetting of Imams, identifying radicalisation in prison (of non-terrorist offenders) and the gender dimension.

Strengthening the knowledge landscape

On 10 May in The Hague and on 9 October in Copenhagen, two expert meetings were organised as part of the project *Strengthening the Knowledge Landscape*, organised under the project-based collaboration initiative.

The goal of the project was to identify and share best practice and to formulate recommendations to strengthen the relationship between knowledge and policymaking in the field of radicalisation, extremism and terrorism. For some years now, Member States have signalled a significant gap between the two. They feel that more knowledge is needed to further develop policies and practices for effectively tackling the constantly evolving challenges of radicalisation, extremism and terrorism.

This gap is also recognised at EU level. The conclusions of the high-level expert group on radicalisation of May 2018 recommend closer engagement with researchers as part of a strengthened EU coordination mechanism on prevention. The call for tenders for technical support to prevent and counter radicalisation from 2020 onwards also explicitly highlighted strengthening the knowledge base as a priority for further work by the Commission and by the Member States.

The Netherlands led this project and Germany, Denmark and France participated. An expert from the UK took part in the meeting in The Hague. A representative from the European Strategic Communication Network took part in the Copenhagen meeting to jointly moderate the meeting with the Commission.

Member States agreed on a list of **findings** and provided **recommendations** including the importance of better connect research and policy (and practice) sustainable in the long term, identifying a common language between policy makers, practitioners and researchers. They also raised the issue of the difference between academic research runs for many years and applied research, considering the fact that policy makers need quick actionable insights. They finally pointed out the need to be predictive to provide policy makers with foresight scenarios to anticipate what may come next.

Detection, support and management risks posed by individuals with mental health issues showing signs of radicalisation

The overall **objective** of the project was to provide a comparative view on the challenges faced by EU Member States regarding radicalised persons with mental health issues and to understand how authorities detect, approach and support individuals with mental health issues, which make them more vulnerable to violent extremism.

The growing body of research into the subject of mental health and violent behaviour is of great interest when considering the relationship between violent radicalisation and mental health. As a part of the project, relevant literature was reviewed (examples of the key articles are available in the appendix). During the project, it became clear that this is only the first step and work should continue in this field.

The Member States met twice to work on this complex issue. Finland and Romania led the project; Belgium, Denmark and France actively took part in this project. They discussed a range of related issues, including definitions of mental health and mental disorder, how these related to radicalisation, and what policies and process have been developed to tackle the issue. The final report focused on the following different aspects: main findings of a selected number of research studies – literature review; innovative approaches identified by the Member States; next steps.

The Member States identified the need to map public policies related to the link between radicalisation and mental health issues: legislation, plans, and the public structures involved. This map would enable the authorities to gain new insights.

One area where the Member States would welcome **further work is** in studying the specific links of radicalisation in prison and mental disorders: there is a need to work on the prevalence (or existence) of mental disorders among radicalised detainees, the specific vulnerability of detainees regarding radicalisation, and the grooming process.

Member States also identified that further research into returnees and on lone actors would be needed, as well as a comparison of different types of ideology/radicalisation (hooligans, radical Islamists, far-right extremists, mass murderers) regarding mental disorders.

At local level, Member States could create a comprehensive response that can be implemented on the ground. Further work with the PBC on national support to local authorities could be envisaged.

Evaluations in tertiary prevention in the field of Islamist extremism: practical guideline for policy-makers and practitioners

This document provides an overview of the project-based collaboration on the **tertiary prevention of Islamist extremism**, 'Evaluation of deradicalisation measures in the field of Islamist extremism', led by Germany with the support of the European Commission.

Representatives from Germany (DE), Belgium (BE), Czechia (CZ), Denmark (DK), France (FR), Italy (IT) and the Netherlands (NL) were present at the meetings, along with experts from the European Expert Network on Terrorism Issues (EENeT), the European Strategic Communications Network (ESCN) and the German Youth Institute.

The **objective** of the expert meetings was to **develop a guideline** for practitioners and policy-makers who work in the field of deradicalisation and exit programmes and who need to evaluate them. The general goal was to have a focused and practical document with non-complex wording, which supports the relevant groups who are dealing with evaluations.

The '**Practical guideline** for policy-makers and practitioners for planning, implementing and following up on evaluations in tertiary prevention', whose format and content is based on the discussions and written input by participants, highlights points worthy of special attention regarding the planning, implementation and follow-up of evaluations. Thus, it raises awareness of the challenges involved in conducting a targeted evaluation with meaningful outcomes.

The guideline also offers practical advice on how to deal with these challenges and helps policy-makers and practitioners to make informed choices when it comes to evaluation. It is applicable to measures carried out by state actors and those carried out by civil society organisations (CSOs). Therefore, the guideline reflects a holistic approach, combining the perspectives of practitioners, researchers and policy-makers.

An important point related to evaluations is to resist the temptation to see an evaluation as a generally acknowledged answer to all issues. An evaluation's scope will always be limited to certain aspects and can only work with the data that is available to the evaluator.

The participants recommend that it would be very useful to continue the PBC 'Evaluation' work in 2020. Particularly with the focus on transferring the findings to the fields of primary and secondary prevention, transferring the findings to the topic of right-wing extremism and developing a common language/methodology for policy-makers, practitioners and researchers in the field.

The 'Practical guideline for policy-makers and practitioners for planning, implementing and following up on evaluations in tertiary prevention' is attached at the end of the report.