

# EX Post PAPER

## RAN High Level Conference on radicalisation

### Introduction

Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, Dimitris Avramopoulos, and Commissioner for the Security Union, Sir Julian King, hosted the High-Level Conference (HLC) on Radicalisation on 9 November 2016 in Brussels. The HLC brought together Ministers, policy makers and practitioners to discuss ways forward to effectively tackle emerging challenges of radicalisation towards violent extremism and terrorism. The event provided an opportunity for the RAN Centre of Excellence (RAN CoE) as well as RAN practitioners to brief Ministers and policy officials on the challenges and insights of their work on the ground, to present recommendations and concrete deliverables, highlight RAN's support to Member States and develop action on emerging challenges.

## Tackling the challenges to prevention policies in the context of the growing polarisation in society

### Challenges

The refugee crisis poses a number of challenges, one being in relation to its potential impact on fuelling violent extremism. The refugee crisis, in combination with the terroristic attacks, is exacerbating the

Dimitris Avramopoulos Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship: “At a moment of rising nationalism, xenophobia and extremism, our challenge is to create and maintain a cohesive and inclusive society for all, to ensure the security of all our citizens. This is why reaching out to all communities is so essential, and in particular the religious communities”.

existing growing tensions in quite a number of Member States. The process leading to a climate of “**us and them**” thinking is called **polarisation**. Polarisation is a construct, **based on identities and groups**. It needs fuel; it thrives on talking about identities in combination with judgment. Therefore, polarisation leads to a fertile breeding ground for extremist recruiters with their propaganda. Both right wing extremists and extremist jihadists are on the rise and in response there is an

increase of extreme left activities too. This interaction between different groups culminates and leads to **reciprocal radicalisation**.

For more background information please see the **RAN HLC paper on polarisation** [here](#).

### Practitioner perspective

The City of Enschede (NL) planned to open an asylum seekers home, which led to an increase of polarisation and radicalisation. It started with non-violent protests, but eventually led to extremists groups being violent to the police and mosques. The local strategy in addressing these developments exists of:

- **Police is close to polarised groups** and knows their profiles and names;
- Local practitioners are **aware** of polarisation in their city and they also need to focus on the silent majority and not only on the polarised groups.
- **Social media** is followed continuously to see what is going on in the city;
- The mayor is in **direct contact** with the leaders of all religious groups;
- There is a need for more **research** in the social media, on substance and on developments of new extreme groups to better understand what is going on. These groups are not well structured, have no spokesperson and it is unclear how big they are.

Sir Julian King, Commissioner for the Security Union: “For me, the RAN is about apparently soft measures that deliver hard results. In the fight against radicalisation, I think that it is this grassroots, engaged civil society, long-term approach that is key”.

### Summary of discussions on the topic

- In Europe there are different ideological groups who are showing hatred and violence. This is a threat to democracy. Malta will work on it during the presidency of the EC and thanks the RAN for addressing this issue.
- The Belgian reception centres created a training (with support of the RAN) on radicalisation, how to signal radicalisation, how to act and how to work with vulnerable people.

- There are also concerns about polarisation in schools, between pupils, but also between parents and staff members. Schools need to be aware of the tensions and need support on how to scale down these tensions. There is a need for **training for teachers** and to **involve youngsters in the discussions**.
- Governments, but also practitioners should be aware that the focus on polarisation and radicalisation can lead to stigmatization, especially to Muslims. **Be clear on the terminology**.
- Polarisation is causing a fertile breeding ground for extremists. Hooligans are fighting Salafists, Left wing organisations opposing Muslims, violent ethnic ideologies etc. Polarisation also extends to citizens not engaged in violence. We need to involve the **resilient moderate leaders in the communities** to cool down the tensions.
- The UK revised their prevent strategy on CVE, as social cohesion policy was not part of the CVE strategy. **CVE strategy should focus on all ideologies and includes social cohesion policy**.
- **Do not over focus on vulnerable groups**, as there are many examples of radicalised youngsters with good education, good families and good socio-economic situation, but who radicalised in the end.

### ***Topics for further consideration***

- The main consideration is to develop a **holistic counter-violent extremist (CVE) approach**, including all potential forms of radicalisation and polarisation in defence of fundamental values against any form of extremism. From a policy point of view, it is important to pay attention to potential blind spots, (being uninformed of challenges in society because of ignorance or prejudices) and make sure the concerns and grievances of all vulnerable communities and groups are covered. Therefore, having a comprehensive understanding of polarisation on a local and national level is paramount.
- To tackle polarisation as part of CVE, in view of a better inclusiveness, with **direct interventions to "people in the middle"**. The silent in the middle, the nuanced, those not taking part in polarisation. They could be neutral, scared and/or indifferent.
- To invest in training, awareness and resilience for **practitioners**: not exclusively on risks and signals of radicalisation, but also on how they can team up with mothers, families and refugee communities.
- To invest in **strategic communication** and media relations.
- **To foster national coordination and local empowerment**: coordination and expertise at national level can result in a better support for local governments to develop multi-agency structures.

Commissioner King: "So, although without any doubt, the most immediate priority is the threat posed by Islamic extremism, our response and our prevention actions need to go wider if we are to avoid falling into the trap of focussing only on today's problem at the expense of tomorrow's".

### ***RAN deliverables***

RAN CoE organised a Thematic Event in 2016 on polarisation and the effects of the refugee and migrant crisis for those working to prevent radicalisation. In response to the Thematic Event, four workshops for Member State were organised on the issue and a conference paper has been drafted for the HLC. In 2017 the topic will be discussed in various RAN working group meetings. The RAN working groups Police and

Education will organise a joint meeting to discuss and collect practical approaches for police and working methods for schools to tackle polarisation, as well as guidelines for the two categories to be strong partners instead of opposing forces. Furthermore a study visit will take place to show a successful example of cooperation with resilient communities, RAN YFC will organise a meeting on building resilience to radicalisation through strengthening community voices, and finally, a cross-cutting thematic event will be organised on responses to polarisation and reciprocal radicalisation.

## Tackling the emerging challenge of children raised in a radicalised environment

### *Challenges*

How to respond to the situation of children returning to Europe having either been born or travelled to Daesh-held territories in Syria/Iraq as well as non-European children travelling from Daesh territory to Europe as a result of forced displacement? An estimation of the number of children who have travelled from Europe to Iraq and Syria is difficult; estimates for individual countries vary from 24 to 70 children. Similarly unknown it is the actual number of children born (or to be born) in Syria or Iraq from European parents. Daesh actively recruits children to their cause. Their roles include active service, but also tangential support for the regime. Regardless of the role, **indoctrination** is omnipresent. The impact of both indoctrination and the **experience of war** is problematic. The role of a **radical ideology** (while not necessarily linked to action) is protective in a conflict setting. The role of (extreme) ideology, and the relationship between this ideology and the child's identity must be considered as a psychologically protective factor for children emerging from a conflict zone but also a socially expected response to hardship. But the radical ideology is problematic when it opposes the norms of society for those returning or migrating to Europe.

For more background information please see the **RAN HLC paper on children** [here](#).

### *Practitioner perspective*

The advisory centre on exit work "Legato" in Hamburg is advising the State of Baden-Württemberg on their exit and family support activities. A lack of experience on the issue of child returnees is evident in the field: however, there is a lot that practitioners can learn from similar cases. **Every case** is different in itself and one profile does not fit all individual cases. The role of the **parents** is key and their cooperation is of utmost importance for the social worker. From a practitioner perspective, it is key to have a **holistic approach** on both a structural level, in terms of cooperation between police, youth work, education, communities, and on an individual level. Practitioners should be well equipped by their national and local governments to properly address the phenomenon in their daily work: therefore, this requires an investment in **long-term approaches**.

### *Summary of discussions on the topic*

- In radicalised families, signals are often not clear and often there are no visible risk factors. Practitioners should work more in **partnership**, strengthen the multi agency approach and develop **tools to get access to the families** in order to work with them.

- It is difficult to signal problems and it **takes time** to work with radicalised/traumatised children. Radicalisation is often a **long term process**. Children often hide or deny their trauma and are ashamed. Practitioners should work with children based on **hope and optimism**.
- There are many **practices and approaches in other areas that we can learn from**. For example to work on the cognitive behaviour of children, we can use existing approaches of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and Autism. There is also a lot of experience in exit work for children in cults.
- In Germany 80% of the children growing up in radical environments are not connected to migration, most of their parents are German or are at least 10 years in Germany.
- The prevention work with children raised in radicalised environments should also be done by **independent organisations**, not only by state bodies and law enforcement bodies.
- Most children initially don't want to cooperate. We need to **build trust and confidence**. Some MSs are using sticks to get people to cooperate with an intervention, like cutting on child allowances, but on the other hand it is really about building trust and relationships.
- **Never disrespect the parents**. Always look for a positive adult in the child's environment.
- Children need to **choose their practitioner themselves**, it should be someone they feel comfortable with.
- **Continuity, relationships and passion** are the key words to work with traumatised children.
- In Sweden the ombudsman for children is tasked to do a study on children raised in radicalised environments. It would be good if RAN could support this important work.

## *Topics for further consideration*

### Interventions

- All interventions must be **evidence-based**. The work on the needs of child returnees must be informed by already existing best practices in the field of child protection and conducted within national established child services networks.
- **Early intervention** is vital for children and where child returnees have been involved in violence, a criminal justice solution has the potential to further traumatize the child, foster future recidivism, and limit opportunities for rehabilitation and reintegration.
- Expert psychologists should contribute to the **management of identity and ideology issues** in conjunction with social experts (e.g. cultural experts, regional experts, community leaders etc.). The availability of a **community** for alternative support will be vital to the construction of a new social identity. Enabling **relationship building** will help the child in shaping its own identity: "**continuity, relations and passion** are key elements". There may be a role for **former foreign fighters** to engage with older children returnees, both as a positive role model and to assist in identity transition.
- **Resilience** should be recognised and fostered to support the child through a stage of transition.
- Support services that already exist in education, social care and psychological services should **adopt trauma informed practices**. There is a need to equip social workers and their organizations with trauma informed organisational frameworks to support interventions.

### The role of the family in developing interventions

- Refugee/returnee families should be **approached with an assumption of trauma** even when the symptoms may not be immediately obvious.
- Children should be **supported in the context of the family** which has the potential to be a protective factor; this requires supporting parents' positive mental health, stability and employability. Child returnees and their family should be actively engaged in any decision-making that impacts their future. A sense of control over one's own life is important for individual and group wellbeing. **Stability** (family, education, home environment and support services) is vital to enable relationship building which is essential to ensuring engagement and thus rehabilitation.
- Where the family is a risk factor and statutory care is deemed appropriate, children should be placed with a family of the same ethnic origin; detention should be avoided and a **single key worker should maintain a relationship with the child**.

### ***RAN deliverables***

The issue of child returnees has been discussed at the RAN Health and Social Care (RAN H&SC) working group in 2016 and an issue paper on this topic has been produced. The RAN H&SC working group will organise a joint meeting with RAN YFC on family support and safeguarding children in radicalised environments. Also a cross-cutting thematic event will be planned around this topic. There is a need for additional guidelines and a handbook on traumas specific for children, accessible to practitioners working with traumatized children. The RAN CoE could play a role in developing this deliverable.

## **Tackling the challenges of returnees**

### ***Challenges***

As of early 2016, the number of individuals who had travelled to conflict areas in Iraq and Syria to join various Islamist insurgent and terrorist groups as 'foreign fighters' had risen to over 42,000. A significant portion of these individuals originate from European Union (EU) Member States: they might account for up to 4,294 individuals, if not more. By early 2016, almost **a third** appeared to have **returned** to their countries of origin. These fighters are our **fellow citizens** in by far most cases. Foreign fighter returnees are a major security concern because of their battlefield experience, training in the use of weapons and connections to international terrorist networks. Member States have dealt with the problem from the criminal justice angle mainly by criminalising terrorist acts and then prosecuting and detaining foreign fighters. However, most individuals who are convicted of terrorism-related offenses will also be released at some point in the future. Also, returnees constitute a **diverse group** and therefore successful interventions for reintegration in society vary on an individual basis. Any effort to reintegrate extremists or terrorists should start with an assessment of the individual's needs, narratives and networks, using specific risk assessment methods for violent extremism. In order to be used effectively, any tool has to be adapted to local circumstances and staff needs training to apply the methodology appropriately. Furthermore, an appropriate follow-up and extensive information exchange between the networking partners is key.

For more background information please see the **RAN HLC paper on returnees** [here](#).



### ***Practitioner perspective***

In Copenhagen the municipality indicated that many radicalised youngsters have shown **severe mental health issues** not properly addressed. Returnees had been exposed to torture or extreme violence: they may be severely traumatized, and suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder issues. Therefore, they are in need of treatment. Dignity (Danish Institute against torture), deals with traumatized youngsters. They state that the psychological issues of radicalised youth and returnees are vastly unidentified, under-assessed and underestimated. These youngsters also need support on their lack of social skills, emotional control, aggressiveness and critical thinking. From a practitioner perspective there is a need for: **easy and immediate access to help** for these people, smooth **referral**, and good **cooperation with other agencies, confidentiality** and build on **long term approaches and practices**.

Commissioner Avramopoulos: "Our work to prevent and counter it should not be directed from Brussels. It should be developed and executed by you, the practitioners that see the real challenges on the ground. This is bottom-up approach is the uniqueness of the RAN".

### ***Summary of discussions on the topic***

- France has been hit hard by extremism and terrorism and there are many FF returnees. First there is a firm approach from the judiciary and police system. Also local police and local administrations are aware, when someone returns from Deash. At the same time, we have to work on resocialisation. This work has been picked up by the French regions with mobile teams to work with vulnerable individuals and we are building up 13 centres on deradicalisation work in France.
- Experience from practitioners working with FF returnees in Norway stresses the importance of building trust with the family and the returnees themselves. It is a challenge for the family system, as the returnees and the family are traumatised, excluded by society, together with very negative reporting by the media. It is a challenge to get in contact with the family, building trust and give them confidence. Also knowledge on traumas is key. Norway has implemented a trauma treatment training for all youth workers to implement this in their regular work.
- In Gothenburg 20 people returned, mostly children and women, some men. Not all of them are open for help. Practitioners are more successful when they work in a multi-agency structure together with the family of the returnees and NGO's.

### ***Topics for further consideration***

- The aim must be to **reintegrate all returnees**; even those convicted, as they will be released at some point.
- There is critical **lack of reintegration programmes** for returnees specifically and in turn a lack of evaluations.
- **Collect data on terrorist recidivism** in the EU; this critical information will enable an understanding of the extent of the problem and provide a rough yardstick for identifying effective programmes, which can in turn be used to isolate best and worst practices.
- The tailoring of the reintegration programmes should follow from a sound **risk assessment**, determining adherence to the extremist narrative, individual needs and social networks. It is important to ensure **reintegration efforts are flexible and tailor-made**.

- Returnees who have distanced themselves from terrorism (**'formers'**) can be valuable too.
- **Immediate engagement** upon return is key and **pursue both de-radicalisation and disengagement**
- Some sort of **relationship of trust** between programme staff and clients need to be established.
- In most cases, **families are potential partners** instead of hotbeds of extremism, and therefore partnerships with families need to be explored and actively pursued.
- **Staff** should be well-trained.

### ***RAN deliverables***

The issue of Foreign Fighters is one of the key topics of the RAN in the last few years. In 2016, there was a specific focus in the RAN working group meetings on the return of Foreign Fighters. Working groups were covering the issues of de-radicalisation programmes, how to deal with returnees in the prison and probation system and how to cooperate on a local level. In 2017 the RAN CoE is planning to draft a manual on returnee responses, including a checklist. The working groups RAN LOCAL, EDU, C&N and EXIT will address the issue in their early 2017 meetings. RAN POL will look into responses to returnees, and establish learnings on differentiating potential sleepers from disillusioned and traumatised returnees. Also a cross-cutting thematic event on this issue will be organised in 2017 and a study visit to the UK to explore new prison and probation strategies to deal with returnees.

## **Additional RAN CoE deliverables**

### ***RAN Framework for designing effective strategies and interventions at local level***

Local municipalities, together with and supported by national governments, are key frontline defence against radicalisation and violent extremism. Individuals at-risk live locally and interact with extremist milieus embedded within local communities. It means that **it is at the local level that prevention and early detection can be most effective.**

Frontline practitioners such as teachers, community police officers, youth and social workers play a key role in detecting radicalisation and preventing violent extremism.

Commissioner King: "We are engaged in a battle for hearts and minds, particularly of young and vulnerable people. And for me, that is something where local actors are better placed than state authorities, not least because of disaffection with the system, disaffection with the establishment is a common theme for those who are at risk of becoming radicalised".

The RAN CoE reached out to 22 Municipalities across Europe<sup>1</sup>, identifying some of the major **priority issues, challenges and guiding principles** in local prevention work<sup>2</sup>. It provides a checklist of issues and challenges to consider **when setting up multiagency cooperation** and action points and practitioner-based guiding

<sup>1</sup> Austria (Vienna), Belgium (Villvorde, Antwerpen), Denmark (Aarhus, Copenhagen), Finland (Helsinki), France (Strasbourg), Germany (Augsburg, Dusseldorf, Hesse), The Netherlands (Rotterdam, Zoetermeer, Delft, the Hague), Norway (Oslo, Larvik, Fredrikstad, Larvik), Sweden (Gothenburg, Malmö, Örebro), United Kingdom (Leicester)

<sup>2</sup> helpline/hotlines, the role of mentors, psychological support, family intervention, gender-based interventions, handling returnees of foreign fighters, rehabilitation from prison, social media (the role of alternative-/counter-narratives), how to engage with communities and civil society actors.



principles working across different intervention methods. As such it is a living document – a roadmap towards building a toolbox of prevention initiatives. This is something RAN CoE will develop and deepen together with local municipalities and MS support throughout 2017.

For more background information please see the [RAN HLC paper on developing a local prevent framework here](#).

### ***RAN Young platform to empower young people in tackling radicalisation***

It is key to engage with young people, offer them opportunities to influence the discourse and to bring in new solutions that fit in their own reality. RAN will practice what it is preaching and help grow the initiatives to include young people through the RAN Young platform.

Three key recommendations that the RAN Young platform will develop further:

- Developing an advisory team through which young people's voices can feed into politics, policy and media;
- Set up a helpline by young people for young people who have concerns about radicalisation and extremism in their social environment;
- Create an open community for content creators who generate content for free and connect with existing online youth platforms to disseminate as widely as possible.

Commissioner Avramopoulos: "But most importantly, the majority of those radicalised, whether here or abroad, are young. This is why the launch of the RAN Young Platform today is a concrete step forward in involving young people in the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism, and empowering them to take an active role".

The RAN Young platform will consist of young people (age 18-27) who are role models, influencers, change makers, activists, victims, experts by experience etc., who are able to reach vulnerable youngsters and who are motivated to develop their knowledge and skills to do so. RAN Young activities will offer them:

- Opportunity to meet other young people across Europe who want to take a role in preventing radicalisation and extremism;
- Support from the wider RAN network with first line practitioners, policymakers and researchers
- A safe place to share views and formulate recommendations, both for first line practitioners and policy makers
- Empowerment and self-esteem to pro-actively do more in their own communities.

The RAN Young platform allows the RAN to continue activities with young people. This will not be done in a vacuum and connections with other youth initiatives such as DG EAC's role model network, YouthCAN, OSCE youth ambassadors, the European Youth Forum and the Extremely Together Initiative (Kofi Annan Foundation) will be forged to multiply the positive effects of these initiatives.