

SPOTLIGHT

MAY 2023

POLICE
AND
LAW
ENFORCEMENT

RANI 
Practitioners



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EDITORIAL

With the rise of anti-system/anti-government violent extremism, growing distrust in governments and an increase in violent protests in recent years, the police and other law enforcement agencies are now on the frontline in responding to violent extremist activity. While they have always played a role in the detection, monitoring and pursuit of violent extremists, they now, more than ever, play a critical role in ensuring that violent extremist activities are not infiltrating non-extremist communities and that they do not become a mainstream phenomenon in our streets.

Increasingly, the police have a role in prevention work. In some Member States across Europe, the police have both the authority and trust among communities to reach out, engage, support and intervene where there is risk of radicalisation. Meanwhile, society's increasing reliance on digital technologies means young people are spending more and more time in internet chat rooms, gaming platforms and gaming-adjacent platforms, and other relatively ungoverned digital spaces.

This edition of the RAN Practitioners Spotlight magazine therefore, takes a look at the important role of the police and law enforcement in preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). The publication shines a Spotlight on the RAN Police and Law Enforcement (RAN POL) Working Group, explores how the police can work online, discusses what the rise of anti-authorities extremism means and looks at how to deal with violent protests.

As always, we want to hear from you. If you would like to contribute to future editions of Spotlight, or if you have ideas for a topic, article, interview or feature, please get in touch with the RAN Practitioners communications team at ran@radaradvies.nl

RAN Practitioners Staff

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ARTICLE
**THE ROLE OF THE
POLICE IN P/CVE**

**Marzena
KORDACZUK-
WAS**

Reflecting on the role of the police in P/CVE, it is important to note that, as with the concept of ‘violent extremism’, there has not yet been a consensus on what exactly ‘preventing’ or ‘countering violent extremism’ (PVE/CVE) means, nor what universal forms should they take. However, by studying the literature and listening to practitioners, key elements of CVE tend to involve the use of non-coercive measures to discourage individuals or groups from mobilising violence and to mitigate the recruitment, support, facilitation or involvement in ideologically motivated terrorism by non-state actors in carrying out political goals. In addition, the scope of CVE and related activities is “potentially limitless” and can include extensive action by governments and other actors to prevent radicalisation in the broad sense.

Another layer was added to the complexity of defining this work by the emergence of the term “prevention of violent extremism” (PVE). This expression and concept quickly became a priority for the global community (Frank and Reva, 2016, p. 2). Already in 2015, the United Nations General Assembly underlined the importance of PVE, noting, among other things, the promotion of “the practice of non-violence, moderation, dialogue and cooperation” (resolution 70/109). The Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Extremism launched soon after and indicated that there was a need for a more comprehensive approach that includes not only ongoing, security-based core counter-terrorism measures, but also systematic preventive measures that directly address the root causes of acts of extremist violence (General Assembly Report A/70/674, para. 6). Since 2015, the European Union also has adopted various measures to stop violent extremism leading to terrorism based on the EU leader’s joint statement to guide the work of the EU and its Member States focusing on ensuring the security of citizens, as well as preventing radicalisation and safeguarding values.

There is now consensus among researchers and practitioners, based on a definition first proposed by American sociologist Egon Bittner, that a common feature of agencies involved in policing is the legal competence to enforce coercive, non-negotiable measures to resolve problematic situations. This situation is characterised by two features, i.e. potential harmfulness and the need to address it urgently before this potential develops. Thus, the actual or threatened use of coercion allows the police to bring a quick, non-negotiable and definitive end to these problematic situations. While the role of the police in combating violent extremism is undisputed, over the years there has been, and sometimes continues to be, debate in both the police and non-police community as to whether the police really have a role to play in purely preventive field.

This is because European countries have different concepts of policing styles, police responsibilities and how the police should be organised (Jaschke et al., 2007). For example, police forces in

Northern and Western Europe have a longer tradition of placing greater emphasis on co-creating security through inter-agency cooperation and involving civil society in crime prevention. In turn, police forces in Southern and Eastern Europe have placed greater emphasis on law enforcement and repressive measures over the years, and the structuring of forms of partnership is still developing. Moreover, no matter what part of Europe the traditional view of policing is, many believe that the police are still primarily responsible for intervening when a crime has been committed or is about to be committed.

Although police in Europe have different roles, depending on the local context and regulations, there is no doubt that police forces have a key role to play in facilitating a preventive multi/inter-agency approach at local or regional level. They often know the community very well, which encourages the involvement of local communities in optimising preventive activities.

Violent extremism and terrorist attacks are serious forms of crime that cause physical harm to the population, as well as spreading fear among citizens. The prevention of violent extremism is therefore aimed at reducing crimes motivated by extremist ideologies and group hatred, as well as their harmful effects. On the other hand, a broad understanding of crime prevention includes actions aimed at reducing both future crime and the harmful effects of crime on victims and society. In this context, the prevention of violent extremism and terrorism is part of crime prevention making the general principles and mechanisms of crime prevention largely applicable to PVE (Bjørge, 2017). A ‘soft’ approach to crime through prevention should therefore serve as an inspiring approach to PVE with a natural role of community policing. Polarisation and evaluation are topics that the police responsible for PVE will increasingly have to deal with in the coming years (Lenos and Wouterse, 2018), so the role of the police in preventing radicalisation and violent extremism is beyond doubt.




This role is also reflected in the mandate of the RAN POL Working Group, which aims to define a more effective policing approach to P/CVE. An approach based on trust and optimising cooperation between specialised units, local police and the local community that is flexible enough to be used by many police forces in EU Member States.

Marzena Kordaczuk-Was is a co-chair of the RAN POL Working Group and a Senior Training Officer at the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Training (CEPOL).





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A paper, published by RAN Practitioners in May 2022, entitled 'Preventing and countering radicalisation of police, military and prison staff', takes a look at the radicalisation of staff and the nature of violent attacks by law enforcement personnel against other personnel or the institution. The paper explores how to invest in a healthy organisation with high professional standards as a shield against extremism. You can read the paper in full [here](#).

Radicalisation Awareness Network



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RAN POL

20/04/2021

CONCLUSION PAPER

RAN POL Preventing and countering radicalisation of police, military and prison staff

23-24 March 2022, online

Preventing and countering radicalisation of police, military and prison staff

Key outcomes

On 23 and 24 March 2022, a group of experts with experience in police, military and prisons gathered online to discuss preventing and countering of radicalisation within their organisations. With presentations and reflections, participants from different Member States shared their experiences and views on the topic.


Against the background of some well-known incidents, and some unknown cases, it was clear to all participants that no institution is immune to radicalisation of staff members or to other insider threats. Sometimes early and 'light' radicalisation is observed, but sometimes - unfortunately - we are confronted with deadly blue-on-blue attacks.

The distinction was made between PVE and CVE. On the one hand, on CVE, the discussion was about detecting, referring and sanctioning. On the other hand, participants talked about prevention (PVE) by discussing the question how to invest in a healthy organisation with high professional standards as a shield against extremism.


The following key outcomes were identified from this discussion:

- Ongoing vetting and screening of staff on insider threat and radicalisation is crucial, not only during the selection process but also systematically within the whole service.
- training and awareness-raising of staff and management on internal threats have to be constantly implemented.
- The Code of Ethics can put a bigger emphasis on keeping unwanted developments out, and can help boost high professional standards.
- Good leadership implies prevention and a healthy work culture/environment.
- There are concerns about the rising number of right-wing extremism within police, military and prison staff .

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Radicalisation Awareness Network



CONCLUSION PAPER
Preventing and countering radicalisation of police, military and prison staff
Page 5 of 7

- Have trusted persons or safe spaces where you can discuss your own problems or concerns about a colleague.
- Small group training to raise awareness.
- There are four pillars or building blocks to build a PVE resilient organisation, as presented by the Frankfurt police department (see figure 1).
- There are job-related reasons that make police susceptible to radicalisation (see figure 2):

General risk factors	Specific background conditions
High emotional pressure for police officers working in hot spot areas/frustration in daily work	Lack of political education/lack of media literacy
Processes of group dynamics in hierarchical organisations	Effects of social and political changes (rise of right-wing populism, increasing refugee movements)
Long-term negative experience (police work is focused on negative aspects of society)	Private problems
Authoritarian law and order mentality	Ignorance of political offences

Figure 2 Reasons for Misconduct³

Recommendations for training

- Training prepares management to consider insider threats as a priority.
- Training should focus on the bigger picture and also include polarisation and societal tensions. These could be pre-conditions for radicalisation and extremism of staff.
- Training for the people who do the screening and recruitment on radicalisation.
- Train staff to see, understand and intervene.
- Training throughout the year: bottom-up training because input will come from the staff itself.


Relevant practice

In **Hessen, the Frankfurt/Main Police Department, initiated an extensive approach** in response to a couple of cases of right-wing extremist content in private chat groups of officers. It started with research to understand the mechanisms behind the unwanted behaviour followed up by three strands of activities.

1. Transparency Meetings (up to 200 participants), with a presentation of a political scientist about the media strategies of the New Right/Alt-Right and a presentation of memes/conversations with racist, antisemitic, etc. contents, that occurred within private chats of Hessian police officers. This was followed by Transparency Talks in which senior officers talk in small groups about the contents. A first meeting

³ Presentation of Dr. Marvin Gamisch, Polizeipräsidium Frankfurt am Main.

Product of the Radicalisation Awareness Network
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Jana FROLOVA-
ALFERJEV

FEATURE

Web Constables

In 2022, the number of digital police officers in Estonia who help and advise people on social media, has grown from three to 13. The activities have been expanded to provide a better quality, more accessible and more personalised service.

FEATURE

The first web police officer was Andero Sepp, who began his online work in 2011. The role was created as a pilot project to enable young people to ask about cyberbullying and other Internet offences. However, as interest increased among adults, so the service has expanded.

To make the service more personalised, new positions have been created in police stations. Previously, people could address their questions and concerns to three web police officers – Jana Frolova-Alferjev, Andero Sepp and Karmen Raud. With increasingly more people using social media, there was also a need to increase the number of uniformed officers in the digital world. People can now get in touch with a web constable in their own region who not only has a good knowledge of what is happening on the web but also of what is going on in the region.

The main role of web police officers is to be active in community groups, share information, prevent and spot threats and monitor what is happening online. If a web constable notices inappropriate online behaviour, for example, if someone is being threatened, he or she will contact the offender. In the case of a criminal offence, for example, when a video of someone being beaten is shared online, the web police officer will forward the information to the police station where the case is dealt with.

Web police officers also train people in their region on internet safety, so that young and old alike are aware of the dangers on the web.

Moreover, web constables support the structural units of the Police and Border Guard Board by gathering information, searching for and exchanging contacts and assisting in the provision of operational information.

A citizen can also contact web constables for any other questions and concerns not related to the Internet, for instance, if you have been the victim of a fraud or bullying or sexual

abuse. It is important to stress that if the incident requires urgent police intervention, it is essential to call 112.

The aim of the police is to be where people are. Today, Facebook is the channel of communication for web police officers, but we are also monitoring what is happening on other platforms and we are thinking of making ourselves available on other social media channels in the future.

“The main role of web police officers is to be active in community groups, share information, prevent and spot threats and monitor what is happening online. If a web constable notices inappropriate online behaviour, for example, if someone is being threatened, he or she will contact the offender. In the case of a criminal offence, for example, when a video of someone being beaten is shared online, the web police officer will forward the information to the police station where the case is dealt with.”

RAN Practitioners recently travelled to Brussels to meet with Superintendent Luc van Taelen, from the Federal Belgian Police – who is co-chair of RAN Practitioners’ Police and Law Enforcement Working Group (RAN POL) – to discuss the role and make-up of the Working Group, the P/CVE challenges it has been addressing and its agenda for this year. You can watch the video in full on the RAN Practitioners YouTube channel [here](#).



Camille
ANTUNES

FEATURE

The EU Internet Referral Unit (IRU): Addressing terrorist content online

Online platforms and social media channels have given new opportunities for terrorists to reach more audiences, significantly enhancing their ability to radicalise and recruit. As a result, online monitoring has become vital to prevent the dissemination of violent extremist and terrorist content online that can contribute to radicalisation, and counter-terrorism operations.

FEATURE

As stated in the Europol European Counterterrorism Centre (ECTC) Blueprint, the EU Internet Referral Unity (EU IRU) – which is located in The Hague in The Netherlands – acts as a service for all EU Member States, to help reduce terrorist propaganda content on the Internet and support internet investigations, while building partnerships with the public and private sectors. Originally focusing on jihadism, the unit has widened its scope to also cover Violent Right Wing Extremism (VRWE) and terrorism since October 2021.

The EU IRU flagship capabilities include the Check the Web (CtW) collection and the Referral Action Days (RADs):

The Check the Web (CtW) portal is an electronic reference library of jihadist and Violent Right Wing Extremist online propaganda. It contains original statements, publications, videos and audios produced by terrorist groups or their supporters. EU Member States can access this content, and analysis of it, via Europol's secure network.

CtW helps EU Member States to identify new media, content, groups, threats, trends and patterns. Its goal is to improve the EU intelligence picture on the Modus Operandi of online terrorist propagandists and online counter terrorism (CT) challenges in EU Member States and beyond.

In order to ensure the effectiveness of the collection, analysis and disruption of online propaganda, the EU IRU has built dedicated databases (DBs) for different online platforms and designed an analytical capability that can:

- assess the propaganda dissemination flow;
- collect the identifiers linked to terrorist content creation and dissemination;
- analyse the network(s) linked to these identifiers,
- secure the identified selectors for further judicial purposes,
- provide a strategic assessment of content dissemination processes.

In parallel, the EU IRU has developed a referral capability able to adapt to a constantly changing landscape and fast technological developments. EU IRU experts coordinate referral activities and knowledge sharing, by flagging terrorist and violent extremist content online to Online Services Providers (OSPs) for voluntary assessment against their terms of services.

Referrals to Online Services Providers are made following requests received from EU Member States and as a result of Open Source Scanning by the EU IRU. A referral activity does not constitute an enforceable act. Thus, the decision and removal of the referred terrorist and extremist online content is taken by the concerned OSP under their own responsibility and accountability.

Apart from daily referral, the unit organises Referral Action Days (RADs) with EU Member States, Third Parties and tech companies. These are intensive referral campaigns, focusing on a theme, a specific content on a specific platform or high profile content relayed by high profile accounts (i.e. terrorist attacks or resilient networks abusing platform specific features).

Since the establishment of the unit in July 2015 content has been located in more than 430 online platforms. As well as sending referrals, the EU IRU also offers support to OSPs to build their capacity against terrorist exploitation. On a regular basis, EU IRU experts share key trends and indicators for OSPs to reinforce their detection and moderation systems.

The EU IRU is also in charge of the EU's coordinated response to crisis situations suspectedly related to violent extremist and terrorist incidents. The EU Crisis Protocol, endorsed by the EU Internet Forum in October 2019, applies to extraordinary situations where normal operating procedures are insufficient. This voluntary protocol establishes the roles for national Law Enforcement Agencies, OSPs that are members of the EU Internet Forum, the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT) and other forum members. If activated the EU IRU sets up a 24/7 Coordination Team to support national law enforcement, operational partners and OSPs in content containment, de-confliction and investigation.



In this context, the EU IRU has also developed unique expertise in facilitating cross-border access to electronic evidence (e-evidence) and deploying technical support. As e-evidence is at the cornerstone of any counter terrorism (CT) case, the EU IRU has also specialised in the access and analysis of e-evidence from foreign-based OSPs, in the context of criminal investigations. At the end of 2018, the team launched SIRIUS (Shaping Internet Research Investigations Unified System) a platform that, beyond providing investigative capabilities, caters for the need of investigators for comprehensive open-source intelligence (OSINT) best practices and tools.

In 2022, the EU Regulation on addressing the dissemination of terrorist content online (TCO Regulation) entered into application. The EU IRU is a key actor in the implementation of the Regulation and has developed an EU Platform on addressing illegal content online (PERCI) to support the implementation of the Regulation. This way, Europol ensures that Hosting Service Providers will receive removal orders from Member States through a common secure channel and detect overlap in case of an ongoing investigation into the same content in other Member States.

Since the establishment of the EU Internet Forum, and even more with the implementation of the Regulation, there is no doubt that the EU IRU has become a key instrument of the EU to counter the promotion and impact of online terrorist activities.

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A paper, published by RAN Practitioners in December 2022, entitled 'The challenges of anti-authorities extremism for police', takes a look at some new violent forms of protesting, namely violence and intimidation targeted against authorities and institutions. The paper explores how ideology-driven violent extremists, from violent right-wing extremism and anarchism, are instigating, hijacking and abusing legitimate protests by citizens. You can read the paper in full [here](#). Subsequent work done by the RAN and information shared by Member States in the dedicated Project-based collaboration, has shown how anti-system extremists are not merely moved by right wing extremist ideologies, but rather by a more mixed range of ideologies and target-based motives.



05/08/2021

CONCLUSIONS PAPER

RAN POL working group meeting – Community police and the online dimension
5 July 2021 09.30 – 13.00 CET and 6 July 2021 09:30 – 13.00 CET, online

Community police and the online dimension

Key outcomes

Community police officers are a highly effective asset in preventing and countering radicalisation leading to violent extremism and terrorism (P/CVE) at local level. Since extremist discourses are increasing online, community police officers must also focus on this digital space. Digital community policing (DCP) means curating an online presence and ensuring police are visible and approachable to their communities: following and engaging with these communities helps police remain informed and aware of prevalent problems.

In an online meeting on 5 and 6 July 2021, police officers and experts discussed what community policing looks like today, the response to the online dimension in police work, the various experiences of DCP, what competences and tools are required, and what training is needed.

The key outcomes are as follows.

- It is promising to see an investment across Europe in **innovation in community policing**, as this is crucial to keeping police involvement in P/CVE up to date.
- Following the shift online of the general public and subcommunities is essential for community police officers, but it also presents opportunities: **going online will keep officers engaged** and abreast of developments in their area and their communities.
- There are promising examples of DCP. For community police officers to be effective online, police need to invest in **training and tools**; they can gain from cooperation with academia, the private sector and NGOs.

Relevant practices

The relevant practices from the meeting are outlined below. The concept of DCP varies across countries.

1. **Dutch Community Police Officers (1), the Netherlands**
Each regional unit has the option to appoint one of its regular community police officers to become a digital community police officer (50 %). At the moment, there are around 50 digital police officers, and they have formed a network. The Dutch police tendered a nation-wide training programme for digital police officers.
2. **Internet Patrol Unit, Norway**
All 12 regional units in Norway have an Internet Patrol Unit. In this three-person unit, Operator One engages with individuals and groups in spaces like Discord and Minecraft, through a 'blue police profile' rather than as an identifiable individual officer with a face and name. Operator One is supported by Operator Two, who carries out the relevant open-source intelligence. The third member of the patrol unit is the team leader who oversees the operation.
3. **Web Constables, Estonia**
In Estonia, web constables are police officers operating actively on Facebook with 'personal' police profiles. With their names and profile pictures visible, these officers are welcoming, approachable and easy to contact for citizens, especially minorities. Thanks to their Facebook profiles, the web constables are not perceived in the same way as the more 'daunting' police patrolling the streets. Both male and female citizens find it easier to contact the web constables. The Facebook police patrol online, seeking harmful content and interacting with citizens to remove it.
4. **Xabia Proximity Police, Spain**
The proximity police are an integral part of the local or municipal police: they bring police closer to the different communities and neighbourhoods that increasingly require assistance and services. The online dimension enables the assessment and quantitative and qualitative improvement of the proximity police. The proximity police officers follow a three-step guideline: Step 1 entails developing community police skills through training, Step 2 entails achieving community integration by engaging with local communities, and Step 3 entails addressing needs and problems through constant evaluation.
5. **The Lisbon Community Police Model, Portugal**
The Lisbon community police (CP) model is a community-based participatory planning approach for building safer neighbourhoods, partly through online work. The model is preventive, proactive and participative. It is run through joint planning and operation thanks to a local partnership between local police and communities, in a four-step process. In Step 1, a local partnership is established and named as the security group. In Step 2, the partnership undertakes a local security needs assessment in the community. In Step 3, the partnership designs the CP team's ideal profile for the given neighbourhood. Step 4 entails the recruitment & training of the CP team.

(1) For more information on Dutch digital community police officers from the national police website, see <https://www.politie.nl/informatie/de-digitaal-wijkagent.html>

Interview: A day in the life of... **Victor Muñoz Ruiz**



**Victor Muñoz
RUIZ**

We spoke with **Victor Muñoz Ruiz**, from the Unit of Information and Documentation at the **Guàrdia Urbana de Barcelona**, and asked him about some of the **P/CVE** challenges that the police face in Spain.

1. What are the main P/CVE challenges that the police have to deal with in Barcelona?

Violent extremism has different faces in the city of Barcelona. Apart from the spread of jihadist propaganda, which is easily accessible from online and offline networks by the city's Muslim population, there is an increasingly accentuated literature from the extreme left that fuels mistrust against the system. Of course, this is nothing illegal, but organised groups are present at rallies and other social events. At times of high discontent and political turmoil this can lead to public disorder. The extreme left, moreover, propagates a counter-narrative about the extreme right.

2. How have these challenges evolved in recent times?

Obviously the last time period has been marked by the restrictions imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The isolation caused by the forced confinement generated a massive increase in Internet consumption among people. Terrorist groups were perfectly aware of this reality and took the opportunity to flood extreme propaganda networks to radicalise individuals. This, together with the increasingly evident dependence (not to call it addiction) of young people to new technologies and screen-devices, created a breeding ground of which we have not yet seen all the consequences.

3. Are there any examples of when Barcelona police have had to tackle a (violent) extremist incident?

There are many examples. The most common is an individual who threatens to undertake some violent or harmful action in the name of religion. In most cases we are talking about individuals suffering from some type of medical mental health problem, but the mere fact that they use religion to justify their violent action shows that extremist propaganda has reached and influenced them. Often these people do not subscribe to jihadist ideology, they only care about being able to justify the end.

4. What does your Unit within the Barcelona police do?

The Information and Documentation Unit of the Guàrdia Urbana de Barcelona (UID-GUB) is in charge of monitoring all those situations that may affect the normal day-to-day development of the city, from the actions of the different social movements present in Barcelona (such as rallies, parades or space occupations), to finding out about the events that may be generated as a consequence of a specific festive period (such as Ramadan, the period in which we find ourselves right now). As many of these acts are not reported, but their willingness to carry them out is published on the internet, we also constantly monitor social networks to uncover activities of which the city council is not aware. Thanks to this, the UID is in charge of organising the agenda for all these public activities, analysing their possible risk, and sending this information to the local government through reports. In other words, the UID is dedicated to the production of intelligence.

5. What is your role within the Unit and what are your main responsibilities?

One of the realities of the city is the presence of oratories and Islamic communities that respond to the need for spiritual and religious shelter of the large Muslim population of Barcelona. My role is to maintain a relationship with their representatives, ensure their safety and help them if they have any problem. I also analyse the different incidents in the city that may constitute a hate crime with links to jihadism.

6. What are the biggest challenges of your work?

One of the biggest challenges is dealing with Islamic communities that are not used to local customs, for example, the bureaucratic procedures involved in securing permission to undertake building work in a mosque, or making a request for a public space to carry out a prayer. In addition, the Muslim community itself is very heterogeneous. Different groups have different characteristics, personalities and traditions, which

must all coexist in Barcelona. Another important challenge is gaining their trust. They are an ever evolving community in and it is important to help them see that cultural exchange and integration is a win-win for everyone. Some are more reluctant because they tend to hang out with their groups and see the police as a threat. You have to respect that too, of course.

7. How has RAN helped you and why is it valuable to be part of the network?

As part of the analysis reports we carry out, we need a strong theoretical basis to help us examine each case or incident as effectively as possible. The studies published by the RAN Practitioners network allow us to do just that. These publications are a constant source of knowledge that allows us to stay up-to-date and interact with other security professionals, both academic and law enforcement. This allows me to give a response in a certain direction to a problem that arises with a specific community. A good example is the recent RAN LOCAL meeting in Barcelona, where we were very satisfied with the information exchanged.

8. Are there any lessons learned from Barcelona that you would share with the network?

We believe that it is important to create a common space where police units in charge of intelligence production, can coexist with universities and people from the educational field. This interaction is necessary to produce counter-narratives that limit or eliminate the propaganda effects of extremist groups and that allow us to help schools, neighbouring communities and families. However, this evidence is often given only at a theoretical level and does not produce an authentic relationship of co-participation. In addition, the agents dedicated to analysis deserve to have the best possible training in the field of what they analyse. It is logical to think that universities can offer credible training for the police, even if we are only talking about a local force.

A paper, published by RAN Practitioners in December 2022, entitled 'The challenges of anti-authorities extremism for police', takes a look at new forms of protesting, namely violence and intimidation targeted against authorities and institutions. The paper explores how ideology-driven extremists, from violent right-wing extremism and anarchism, are instigating, hijacking and abusing legitimate protests by citizens. You can read the paper in full [here](#).

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POLICE

17/11/2022

CONCLUSION PAPER

RAN POL "The challenges of anti-authorities extremism for police"

23-24 June 2022, Copenhagen, Denmark

The challenges of anti-authorities extremism for police

Key outcomes

On 23 and 24 June 2022, the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) Police and law enforcement Working Group (POL) organised a meeting for a group of experts with experience and expertise in recent violent protests and anti-authorities extremism¹. Through presentations and panel and group discussions, participants from different Member States shared their experiences and views on this burning and relatively new topic. In almost all countries, the COVID demonstrations were huge and sometimes even with violent outbursts. Police are confronted with not only legitimate protest against specific measures but also a variety of anti-authorities sentiments and conspiracy narratives. Most police were confronted with protest movements displaying a variety of ideological factions and even people without a clear ideological goal or agenda. There were some familiar faces but many new protesters and organisers also took part. The risk is that ideology-driven extremists, from violent right-wing extremism and anarchism, are instigating, hijacking and abusing the protest of citizens who have the fullest right to protest and express their anger and criticism. The following key outcomes were identified in the meeting:

- Anti-authorities extremism is a new hybrid form of extremism that is different from the "original" or classic forms of extremism. Police in many countries are challenged by new forms of protesting, new protesters, and more violence and intimidation targeted against authorities and institutions. Targets range from politicians and governments to the health sector, scientists, journalists and police. The meeting's participants saw huge similarities in these new challenges for European police.
- There is a need to better understand this "blurry" and hybrid anti-authorities extremism. Sometimes it is not clear what the ideology or the political demands are. We need to better look at who is protesting and demonstrating, and who is *not*. We need to better understand what the drivers and triggers are and what role the social media play. And who is paying, facilitating and organising?
- Facilitating citizens in using their democratic right to protest is a task for police in democracies. Dealing with illegal extremist elements and influences interfering with citizens protesting can be seen as protecting protest and citizens in open societies.
- Especially in times of surging distrust in authorities, police should be perceived by the public as professional and neutral. This also requires differentiating the approaches of specific individuals, organisations, and segments of protest and mass demonstrations.

¹ Different terms are used to describe this phenomenon: anti-authority, anti-government, anti-establishment and anti-system extremism. They are all about the same. Since this is for police, the working group choose to use anti-authorities extremism.

Radicalisation Awareness Network
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Practitioners

CONCLUSION PAPER
The challenges of anti-authorities extremism for police
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This paper presents the main conclusions of two days of presentations and lively group discussions. Since this was the first time RAN POL had a meeting on the complex phenomenon of mass protest in combination with anti-authorities sentiments and extremists, a large portion of the first day was spent on sharing experiences and understanding variety in the phenomenon. On the second day, the group drafted lessons and recommendations.

Highlights of the discussion

The different faces and targets of anti-authorities extremism and protest

An assessment among the participants of the different Member States showed that the evolving phenomenon of anti-authorities extremism is manifesting itself in several ways.

- "Police for freedom" and veterans and other military are showing up, sometimes in mash-ups of real and made-up uniforms, and pretending to defend the protesters against the government and police.
- Squares fill with demonstrators, ranging from right-wing and autonomous and anarchist to "yogi", desperate bar owners and angry ordinary citizens. The protest crowds are fragmented and transversal because there is a wide range of grievances.
- Criticism against anti-COVID measures and anti-authority sentiments are sometimes also present among police personnel. This creates confusing and unwanted interactions with demonstrators.
- There are legitimate protests but the underlying extremism could be anti-Semitic or xenophobic.

- A lot of doxing and online intimidation of researchers, medical staff, politicians and police officers.
- Targets: An unknown perpetrator attacked the house of the commander of state security with gas bombs.
- Sometimes the anti-authorities extremists are armed and dangerous: The "Reichsbürger" (meaning sovereign citizens) are denying state authority. This dangerous group was already in existence but is now triggered by the anti-COVID-measures movement.
- There seems to be a lot of copying from the United States and Canadian way of campaigning and protesting. Trump and MAGA (Make America Great Again) signs are being used and international support is being exchanged.

Anti-authorities extremism, what is it?

Based on discussions on Dr Francesco Marone's presentation:

- All types of violent extremism promote **radical change** and are **targeting authorities** like politicians and state institutions. So does the new hybrid anti-authorities extremism.
- The first step of anti-authorities extremism is a **deep-seated distrust in public authorities**. This, in combination with crises that call for tough government policies, creates a potential breeding ground for recruitment and mobilisation.
- **Radical conspiracy theories** (QAnon, Great Replacement, Great Reset) **exacerbate attitudes of generalised distrust** in public authorities, with narratives of hidden elites playing dirty games. These are facilitated by **social media**.
- Conspiracy narratives tend to flourish in a complex world where citizens may feel they are **losing their grip on their lives and that their voice is not heard**.
- In small sectors of the population generalised distrust may turn into **delegitimation of public authorities**. Delegitimation can lead to **active hostility** and, in extreme cases, even to **violence**.
- Anti-authorities extremism can combine with **traditional types of violent extremism**, even encouraging unusual convergences; as an alternative, it **may remain without a clear ideological articulation**.

Highlights: **RAN Practitioners activity**

The role of law enforcement in P/CVE has been addressed within a number of RAN Practitioners activities in 2022. Stay tuned for updates on future events in the RAN Practitioners Update and on RAN Practitioners social media channels.

For more information about RAN Practitioners activities please visit the Calendar on the RAN website [here](#).

RAN POL 25–26 June 2023

'Zeitgeist: How to prepare for future scenarios and are our police measures enough?'

Cross-cutting event 28 November

'Cooperation between MH professionals and security forces'

RAN POL 30 November 2023

'How can police deal with heated debates and disruptive protests without adding oil to the extremist fire?'

LIBRARY: DISCOVER MORE

IF you would like to discover more about the role of the police and law enforcement in P/CVE you can get in touch with the RAN Practitioners Staff and take a look at the [RAN Collection of Inspiring Practices](#) or read through some of the latest [RAN papers](#). We have included some of these papers in a carefully selected collection of interesting and relevant articles below.

RAN Practitioners (2022)

['Police role and contribution in the holistic, multi-agency case diagnosis of at-risk individuals, groups and neighbourhoods'](#)

RAN Practitioners (2020)

['Lessons from crime prevention in preventing violent extremism by police'](#)

RAN Practitioners (2020)

['Radicalised police, military and prison staff'](#)

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