EX POST PAPER

Police prevention and countering of far-right and far-left extremism

Introduction

In Europe, extremism — both right- and left-wing — is in a state of flux. While perceptions of immigration, Islam and terrorism are shaping the far right, a new dynamic in the right-wing extremism landscape is influencing the far left, albeit partly as an autonomous development. The police need to be aware of such developments, and the Radicalisation Awareness Network's Police and Law Enforcement working group (RAN POL) held a timely meeting on the role of police in preventing and countering violent extremism (PCVE) of the far left and far right, exploring options to help reduce the size and threat of such extremist milieus.

They concluded that more up-to-date knowledge on both left- and right-wing extremism is required, if we are to keep pace with related changes in strategy and capacity. The good news is that a number of existing and tested interventions and methods seem to work well. This paper considers approaches for police engagement and dialogue as part of the PCVE effort .

'Know your enemy …

… and know yourself': these words, attributed to Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu, in *The Art of War* from the fifth century BC, still hold true. In keeping with the spirit of this proverb, the RAN POL working group held their first meeting on right-wing and left-wing extremism, where they discussed options for police prevention and countering of both these phenomena. While police expertise in PCVE of jihadi extremism has grown impressively over the past couple of years, it is now time to broaden the scope of this understanding by including other forms of extremism.

The RAN POL meeting in Rome proved useful. All the participants acknowledged that much work lay ahead. Police experts discussed similarities and differences across countries, while expressing the common need for ongoing vigilance in these branches of extremism. Although the terrorist threat of life-threatening violence in these forms of extremism appears lower than in extremist jihadism, many countries are seeing a rise in the presence, capacity and alarming actions of left- and right-wing extremism.

The paper begins by defining activism, extremism and terrorism. This is followed by a first attempt to describe both extremist milieus. Various options for the police are then identified, concentrating on approaches for engaging groups and individuals in dialogue.
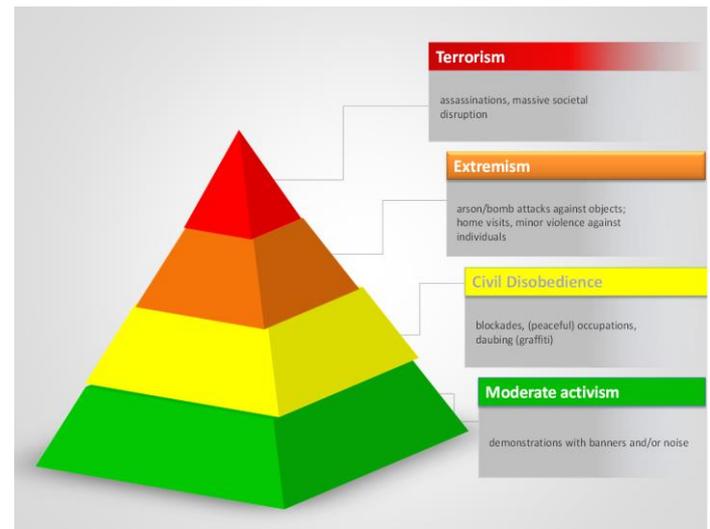
What is extremism — and what isn't?

Figure 1: Extremism pyramid (Hanselman, 2018)

RAN's mission is to contribute to the prevention of radicalisation leading to violent extremism and terrorism. The terms 'violent extremism' and 'terrorism' are not always used and interpreted consistently, and the same holds true for 'activism' and 'radicalisation'. In Rome, Hanselman showed a pyramid (see Figure 1) to illustrate the steps leading from activism to terrorism[1].

The pyramid shows how moderate activism can escalate, culminating in terrorism. Mere activism, in itself, is a democratic right. However, actions of activists concern police because of the impact on public order and safety. Activists' actions can shift from moderate activism to civil disobedience via acts of vandalism, trespass or obstruction. Despite such acts being illegal, Hanselman does not classify them as extremist, but rather places them on an intermediate tier. From civil disobedience,

[1] Hanselman, Berrie (2018). Presentation in Rome on 13 April.

the step to extremism is smaller; this can then result in terrorism.

One may define violent extremism as acts of violence committed for ideological reasons. The nature and scale of the violence is what distinguishes extremism from terrorism.

Terrorism is defined as perpetrating, preparing and threatening with deadly acts of violence and/or serious damage that disrupt society. These acts are all undertaken with the intent to bring about change in society, terrorise citizens and influence politics.

For the European Commission, radicalisation *"is understood as a complex phenomenon of people embracing radical ideology that could lead to the commitment of terrorist acts"*[2].

The radical ideology in this quote may be considered extremist ideology.

The problem with prevention of radicalisation is that because it is carried out in the pre-criminal phase, it can place activism under the scope of PCVE. For example, while a schoolboy attending a demonstration of right-wing extremists would not be considered an illegal act, it might be viewed as a worrying sign of potential radicalisation. A preventative approach might involve acting on this from a safeguarding perspective, and could require proportionate and professional interventions to halt the process of radicalisation. These various levels of escalation in Hanselman's pyramid are not delimited, exclusive zones with defined borders — they may coexist at the same time in broader movements or networks. This is evident in neo-Nazis marching in the same demonstration as concerned and angry citizens, for instance, or in animal welfare causes that mobilise mothers and children as well as cells of radicalised activists planning serious crimes like threatening or violently attacking individuals or companies. Alternatively, at a given time, extremists might prefer moderate activism to mobilise supporters over violence and other terroristic means. Or they may choose to organise a large-scale demonstration, with the intent to generate commotion and upheaval as part of a plan to deploy illegal activities like rioting, sabotage and violence.

An analysis of extremism calls for close examination of the violence involved in such acts. Not all violence is planned and extremism related. For example, hate crime is not terroristic. Likewise, not all violence at demonstrations is linked to extremism — although in some cases, it may be. Determining the nature of violence involves assessing its intent, frequency, scale and nature, and whether it is planned, provoked or desired.

Another issue for consideration is the overlap between violent and non-violent extremism. One cannot effectively prevent and counter violent-extremist milieus without dealing with non-violent extremism. Non-violent extremism can lead people to justify, accept and use violence. The Canadian centre Prevention First uses the term 'agents of radicalization' ([3]) in this respect.

([2]) European Commission. (2018, June 19). Radicalisation. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/crisis-and-terrorism/radicalisation_en

([3]) Center for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence. (2017). Strengthening our resilience to agents of radicalization and their rhetoric. Retrieved from https://info-radical.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/what-is-an-agent-of-radicalization-cprlv.pdf

"An **agent of radicalization** is a person who uses extremist rhetoric to attract individuals with different degrees of vulnerability and who may exhibit feelings of victimization or rejection, identity malaise, or certain personal or social vulnerabilities …

It is important to note that agents of radicalization do not necessarily incite their audience to engage in violent action. However, through their rhetoric they help create an insurmountable gulf between certain individuals and the rest of society which may, under certain conditions, lead to violent radicalization." (Emphasis added). (Center for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence, 2017, p.2).

Right-wing extremism

Right-wing extremism is a broad term: the extreme right in Europe shares common features, but each country is dealing with different accents and components[4]. Generally speaking, radical right (political) parties and groups may be characterised as extremist right, ethnocentric right, populist right or religious-fundamentalist right[5]. Ravndal's matrix (see Table 1) is useful in navigating the similarities and differences across Member States.

Ravndal's term for the most dangerous and extreme far right is the 'revolutionary right'. This group aims to change the system, to subvert

Organization	Political strategy	
	Yes	**No**
Strong	Elite-sponsored groups	Criminal networks
Loose	Autonomous groups/cells	Mobs/gangs/hooligans
Absent	Lone actors	Violent loners
Type of violence	Terrorism	Hate crime

Ravndal, Jacob Aalsland (2015). "Thugs or Terrorists? A Typology of Right-Wing Terrorism in Western Europe", *Journal for Deradicalization* 1(3): 1-38.

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[4] Melzer, R., & S. Serafin (Eds).. (2013). *Right-wing extremism in Europe: country analyses, counter-* *strategies and labor-market oriented exit strategies*. Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung.
[5] Idem.

democracy and abolish fundamental rights. While some members of this group are employing violence at the moment, others will resort to violence as a 'necessary' or even 'inevitable' option in the future.

This paper concentrates on this revolutionary right, for which there are four strategies overall. They vary in terms of:

- the degree of organisation: centralised or decentralised
- the degree of openness: public or clandestine.

The resulting four structures are illustrated in Figure 2. The **contending pyramid** structure, or vanguardism, aims at full government takeover and replacement of the rule of law. This group is public to semi-clandestine, and ambivalent towards violence. The **leaderless resistance structure** comprises lone wolves operating without a central command framework. Indeed, this lack of leadership is its key difference to the **subversive cell structure**, which follows a leader or central command. **Metapolitics,** a relatively new strategy, is being employed as a prominent and important approach within the revolutionary right. Simply described as 'no more guns, but books and suits', this movement is more European Judea-Christian Identitarian than classical neo-Nazi white supremacist. In the nineties, Europe's violent right-wing extremists reached the conclusion that violent strategies were not working and that the way forward was to influence the media, and the cultural and intellectual sphere. This also inspired the American alt-right movement. Europe is currently seeing a renewal of contacts with old/existing neo-Nazi groups and

individuals. How this will develop remains to be seen, but there is potential for violence and a corresponding rhetoric.
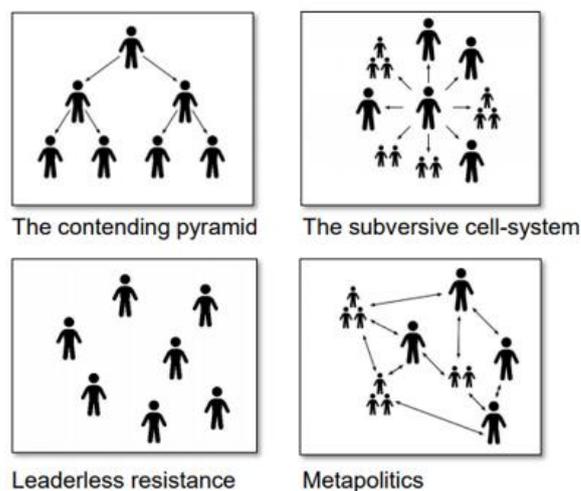

Figure 2: Strategies of right-wing extremist revolutionary groups (Ravndal, 2017)

Observations and regional distinctions

A number of conclusions were drawn from this discussion on the right-wing extremist scene across Europe. Similarities as well as enormous differences were highlighted. Member States shared their concern over developments in this arena, but also regarding the nature and scale of related actions. For instance, recent demonstrations from the Nordic Resistance movement in Sweden in September 2017 featured right-wing extremist demonstrators in riot gear with helmets and shields[6]. This had not been seen in other countries and the riot gear will most likely be prohibited in other Member States. Some countries, the UK and Germany, for instance, have a small number of proscribed right-wing terrorist organisations, but most countries don't. In Germany, there are thousands of right-wing

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[6] BBC News. (2017, September 30). Sweden: Clashes at neo-Nazi rally in Gothenburg. Retrieved from

http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-41454707

extremists prone to violence, a phenomenon not shared by many other countries. Across many Member States, football hooligans are part of the right-wing extremist scene, but they differ in terms of ideological level and links to other organisations. Organisations bearing the same name (e.g. Pegida and even Blood & Honour) may carry the same flag, but they vary significantly across Member States and also over time. In this sense, the right-wing extremist landscape is a real ecosphere with evolutionary dynamics, enabled by social media.

Overall, there is a need for better definitions and a greater understanding of the right-wing extremist scene that takes into account distinct national legislations and contexts. In response to statements that right-wing extremism is 'on the rise', we should distinguish, for example, between extremists supporting an ideology and possessing a strategy, and hate crime incidents committed by hooligans, or between populist-nationalist parliamentarians and terrorist cells. Sharp eyes and a cool head are required to truly 'know your enemy'.

Left-wing extremism

As with right-wing extremism, left-wing extremism is a broad term encompassing many types and differing from one country to another. For police willing to discuss potential areas for preventing and countering left-wing extremism, some form of classification would prove helpful.

Besides the Marxist and anarchist left, radicalisation and violence might be growing in left-wing extremists fighting fascism and other right-wing extremist forms; opponents of the migration-policy and in anticolonial and ethnic movements.

It is possible that international or national operating groups and networks might be playing some part in stimulating and facilitating other organisations. They have the intention to bridge the gap between autonomous activists and the general public. They help to mobilise demonstrators, but they are not exposed on the front line when demonstrations turn rogue. They organise 'train the trainer' sessions: on how to behave in riots, how to block streets and how to fight; on knowing one's rights and manipulating the media; and on improving one's tactics against the riot police. Overall, the left-wing extremist scene is considered difficult to contact and is more aware of safety. Police experience indicates that it is harder to make agreements with left-wing organisers of demonstrations than with right-wing organisers. Moreover, demonstrations with left-wing extremists are more likely to become violent. Violence in right-wing demonstrations is often provoked by left-wing demonstrators.

There are also indications that some left-wing extremist groups may finance their activities through bank robberies.

Observations

First, in the cases of tit-for-tat violence between left and right, police feel that left-wing extremists commonly provoke violence. Left-wing demonstrations also tend to result in more public disorder and violence than the smaller-scale, more orderly, organised right-wing extremist demonstrations. However, following on from this observation is the second point: lack of knowledge and data to back up this theory. Third, it appears to be very difficult to formulate generic lessons to cover all Member States. Beyond the internationally operating groups and networks, local context — history and developments — generates significant differences. Fourth, anarchists tend to be well organised and internationally networked. They aim to overthrow the system and have a proven capacity for violence.

The fifth observation is that the antifa and the anarchists seem to pose the greatest challenge, although this may differ across Member States. It appears that some anarchist networks will support and promote any group opposing the state.

There are some indications that for left-wing extremist groups, personal contact with family and friends may play a greater role in recruitment than online contact. By contrast, it appears that online contact is more critical for right-wing extremists.

Reciprocal violence and radicalisation between left and right

The changing scale and nature of both left- and right-wing extremism frequently results in violent incidents between members or supporters of rival extremist milieus. It can also lead to a specific strategy of intimidation: the publishing of lists of persons who are considered a threat. These lists contain photos, aliases and home addresses. Families and colleagues associated with perceived right-wing extremists receive phone calls and emails, as part of the attempt to mobilise counter-forces. There are physical attacks on (perceived) members of the opposing side. Demonstrations are met with aggressive counter-demonstrations. The extremist left publishes lists online of attacks and misbehaviour from the extreme right. Violent attacks by the extremist left on the right-wing are not as regularly published and updated online. This state of affairs makes it harder to prove, for instance, statements such as 'right-wing

extremism is on the rise' or 'left-wing extremism more frequently incites violence'.

There is more to this issue than violent reaction and retaliation. **Reciprocal radicalisation** goes beyond such tactics: the process of radicalisation alters the ideology and group identity — it changes the nature of groups in the direction of violent extremism — and even terrorism. The nature of radicalisation and its reciprocal dimension is explained in Berger's research paper 'Extremist construction of identity: How escalating demands for legitimacy shape and define in-group and out-group dynamics'[7]. Berger defines a 'ladder of identity construction' (p. 57). It describes the mechanisms that make in-groups radicalise in response to the real and perceived actions of a threatening out-group. Berger, observing the processes that make identity groups morph into extremist groups, draws the following conclusions.

- Identity movements are oriented towards establishing the legitimacy of a collective group (organised on the basis of geography, religion, ethnicity or other prima facie commonalities).
- Movements become extreme when the in-group's demand for legitimacy escalates to the point where it can only be satisfied at the expense of an out-group.
- Trigger events can prompt an acceleration in polarisation, catalysed and facilitated by mass media channels and social media. Fake news, framing incidents and so-called information bubbles enforce the process.

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[7] Berger, J. M. (2017). Extremist construction of identity: How escalating demands for legitimacy shape and define in-group and out-group dynamics. ICCT. Retrieved from https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/ICCT-Berger-Extremist-Construction-of-Identity-April-2017-2.pdf
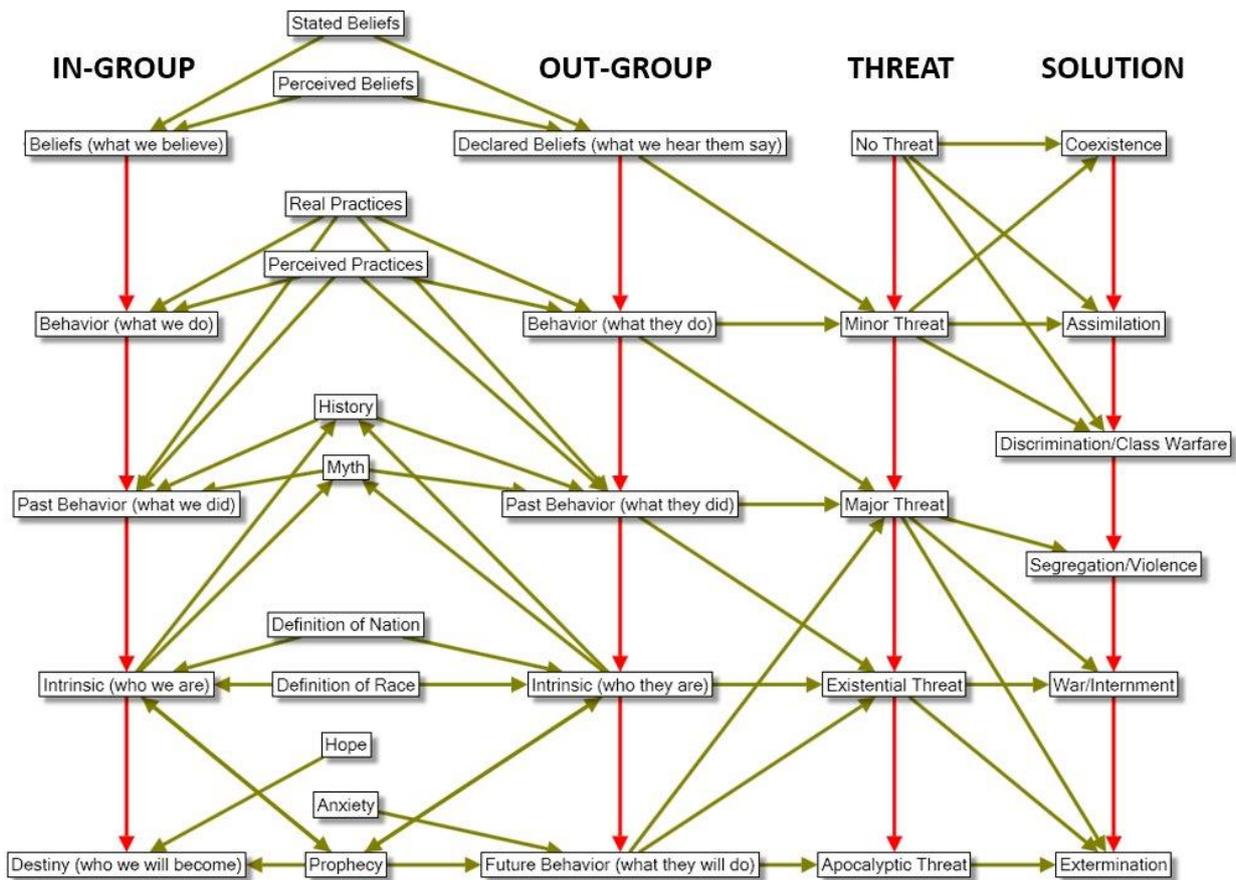
Figure 3 Identity groups evolving towards extremism (Berger, 2017

PCVE options for police

Due to the many different ways in which left- or right-wing extremism can present itself, there is no one way to prevent or counter these types of extremism. Distinct types of extremism call for corresponding responses.

And there is a need to respond. Preventing and countering extremism is at the core of our civil liberties and rule of law, and the state should be seen to uphold the law and address the imposition of violence in a just way. The complicating factor is that both right- and left-wing extremist voices use state violence and repression in their extremist narratives as justification for illegal actions.

The goal or intended result of our actions is paramount, taking precedence over so-called hard or soft measures. The 'do no harm' principle is

fundamental. In 'Counter-terrorism as crime prevention: a holistic approach'[8], Bjørgo wrote:

"The main objective should be to reduce future occurrence of such [terroristic] crimes, as well as the harmful consequences. In other words, our primary approach to terrorism should be crime prevention in a broad and holistic sense." (p. 26)

1. Bjørgo defines three main models of crime prevention, overlapping to some extent, but also appear to a great degree to be competing ways of thinking. Bjørgo states that they, because they have very different theoretical bases and concerns, to some extent appear incompatible, both theoretically and practically. the criminal justice crime prevention model
2. the social crime prevention model
3. the situational crime prevention model.

He suggests combining these into a **holistic model**, covering nine prevention mechanisms:

- **establishing and maintaining normative barriers**
- **reducing recruitment**
- **deterrence**
- **disruption**
- protecting vulnerable targets
- reducing harm
- reducing rewards
- incapacitation
- **desistance and rehabilitation.**

In all these mechanisms, police play a role — sometimes the key role. In the RAN prevention context, one could claim that the first four

mechanisms and the last two are perhaps most pertinent. Without detracting from the significance of the other mechanisms, we will concentrate on these six mechanisms, as they best reflect the mission and the limitations of RAN POL.

In RAN POL meetings, several interventions and approaches were presented that contribute to the prevention and countering of left- and right-wing extremism.

Prevent and safeguarding

Safeguarding schemes like the well-known UK Prevent programme[9] form the cornerstone of PCVE. And these schemes can play this part not only for extremist jihadism, but for all forms of extremism. The Prevent strategy in the UK is an example of a strategy focused directly on preventing successful recruitment by extremists. The multi-agency Channel panels are the main tool. These are not a police approach, but the police do stimulate, do provide input, and facilitate and contribute to it. . People who consider an individual in their environment susceptible to recruitment and at risk of radicalisation can refer this individual to Prevent. A multi-agency panel will then assess the person and try to safeguard the individual by addressing vulnerabilities and building resilience.

This results in multi-agency cooperation at a local level. Police team up with schools, mental health professionals and family support, and use official Intervention Providers — people serving as mentors. This multi-agency cooperation allows for custom-fit interventions that can prevent individuals from joining extremist milieus or right-

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[8] Bjørgo, T. (2016). Counter-terrorism as crime prevention: A holistic approach. *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression*, 8(1), 25-44.

([9]) National Police Chiefs' Council. (n.d) Delivering Prevent. Retrieved from http://www.npcc.police.uk/CounterTerrorism/Prevent.aspx

wing extremist groups. In March 2018, the UK government reported an uptake in referrals, due to concerns over recruitment and radicalisation related to right-wing extremism[10].

Opportunities in dealing with right-wing and left-wing extremist events and demonstrations

Police play an important part in extremist demonstrations and events. Democracy grants groups the right to assemble, demonstrate and practice freedom of speech. Such occasions present police with the opportunity to work on several of the nine preventative mechanisms mentioned above.

Inspiring example: disrupting a right-wing extremist annual party

In the right-wing scene, concerts and other festivities are key for bonding, recruiting, fundraising and publicity and marketing. At the RAN meeting, participants put forward the example of police successfully disrupting an annual international extreme right-wing concert. This was achieved through several measures: for instance, by preventing certain known international extremists from entering the country, and by scrutinising licenses for venues and the sale of alcohol. As a result, organisers had to contend with a lack of venues that would accept them, and consequently, their meeting was smaller than their previous annual meetings. Left-wing extremists also took the opportunity to discredit and shame them online. Ultimately, such events erode their capacity to raise funds and recruit new members.

Engaging and liaising with demonstrators

Another way to interact with extremist groups, as part of a preventive approach, is to establish contacts — or better yet, a working relationship — with a group leader and/or other influential group members wishing to demonstrate.

People have the right to demonstrate, as long as they remain within the limits of the law. The police are responsible for maintaining public order at such events. The Dutch approach presented at the RAN meeting uses dialogue to manage public unrest at demonstrations. A small team of officers has been recruited to engage and liaise with demonstrators and activists. By talking with demonstrators, police garnered information about the group: they learned members' names and their positions in the group (e.g. leaders), and gained a better sense of the group's organisation. They thus gained some insight into the group's dynamics and an understanding of its members. Moreover, by proactively reaching out to the leaders of extremist groups preparing to demonstrate, police could take the opportunity to remind them of the rules, and make arrangements, thereby ensuring that the demonstration was as peaceful as possible. This provides some form of mutual respect between police and right-wing extremists, in particular, who appreciate contact with the police. Humour is a useful tool when speaking with demonstrators, as it facilitates the contact and the conversation.

By engaging extremists in conversation, the police de-escalated the situation. Police operations at demonstrations are a delicate balancing act — an

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(10) The Guardian. (2018, March 27). Far-right referrals to Prevent programme up by more than a quarter. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/uk- news/2018/mar/27/far-right-referrals-prevent-programme-up-by-more-than-a-quarter-counter-extremism

excessive show of power or an overwhelming presence can backfire if demonstrators feel oppressed or provoked, which can result in an escalation or even cause individuals to radicalise. Using dialogue as soft measure can therefore be a way for de-escalating a demonstration.

The approach presented by the Dutch participant was recognised by other countries employing similar approaches. There is for example some similarity with the Swedish liaison officers. The difference with police hooligan spotters was observed to be the nature of the interaction —the police contact officers are primarily trying to open communication lines.

Engagement and dialogue at individual level: prevention and exit

Bjørgo's prevention mechanisms of 'reducing recruitment' and of 'desistance and rehabilitation' are essentially about 'less in' and 'more out'. And the police are given a unique opportunity to contribute to these mechanisms. From the moment an individual is put into custody, there is a perfect window of opportunity to start a conversation.

These talks might also have more of a psychological slant, focusing on the individuals' dreams, their position in life, what they hope to achieve and how they think they might achieve their goals. If they are in the process of radicalising, these talks could help them to shift their focus. For underage children, these empowerment conversations — often held together with their parents — are a good tool for creating an arena in which a common understanding of the problem can be reached[11].

For police, it is essential to understand why people are radicalising or are (at risk of) committing a crime. Only then can (young) people can be guided towards reconciliation and consideration. This means asking open-ended questions and practicing active listening, allowing the individual to speak and their voice to be heard[12].

Empowerment conversations (Norwegian police)

The empowerment conversations are a well-developed prevention tool used by Norwegian police. In the 'Policing PVE Toolbox', this method is categorised under social prevention and targeting at-risk groups.
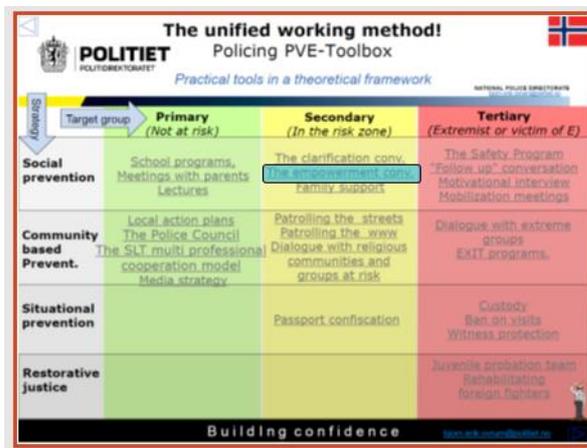

Figure 4. Empowerment conversations in the toolbox

Although the empowerment conversation model was originally developed for preventive police work with racist youth groups, it can be applied to many types of youth offences. The Norwegian police have recommended it for more general use; youth workers, teachers and other professionals

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(11) Radicalisation Awareness Network. (2018, June 19). A guide to police empowerment conversations.

RAN Collection: Exit Strategies. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/node/7418_en
(12) Idem.

are also being trained to apply it, and results so far are very promising. However, it is believed to have a particularly strong impact when police call in parents and child for a conversation.

The technique is chiefly applied to young people, but it can be used for adults too. This 'soft' approach is usually unexpected, often causing individuals to open up about their experiences. In these conversations, police specifically address the actions of the individual, and not the underlying ideology. Norwegian police therefore make no claims about this tool's success for de-radicalisation, but rather for 'de-criminalisation'.

The empowerment conversations method doesn't focus on ideology or attitudes, but rather on the actions of the youngster. The police provide the young person with information on the personal and legal consequences of a specific behaviour, and the rest is up to the individual. The conversation is then shifted to focus on subjects like money, leisure, adventure, school, family and friends, self-perception and personal relationships.

One of the key techniques used in the empowerment conversations is the stairs model. The police select people for this method whom they believe would benefit from visualising where they are in life and where they are heading. Are they moving 'up' on the so-called **happy stairs** (e.g. security, love, education, job, respect and honour) or are going 'down' on the crime stairs (e.g. trespassing, burglary, robbery).

The empowerment conversations are not focused on the short term per se. Instead, police try to plant seeds of doubt in people's minds, and revisit to reap the benefits once the individuals show signs of being ready to make a fresh start. The

individuals are encouraged to propose tasks and measures themselves that would help them get back on course. Together with the police officer, they then settle upon certain agreements. Empathy, compassion and love were mentioned as chief assets in helping individuals disengage from extremist milieus [13].

Key messages

More research, information and resources are needed on far-left and far-right extremism.

In order to develop effective counter-strategies, more up-to-date knowledge on far-right and far-left extremism is required. We also need clear, unambiguous, agreed definitions of terms commonly used to describe activism and extremism.

Police can benefit from peaceful engagement with groups wishing to demonstrate. Engagement with radicals and extremists can prove very beneficial.

The Norwegian empowerment conversations are an inspiring example of how police engagement can contribute to PVE.

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[13] Idem.