

EX POST PAPER

RAN POL KICK-OFF MEETING

“CT and CVE will be more successful if the local police are more involved”

*“Early signaling of potential radicalisation is not necessarily
carried out by the community officer”*

*“Local police is best placed to support the information sharing at a local
level”*

Introduction

RAN POL was the very first RAN working group to have a meeting. This was in March 2012. Since then, the working group has been identifying obstacles and promising practices the last couple of years. Having said this, RAN POL recently received a reboot under a new leadership, with a kick off meeting in Aarhus (Denmark). With a draft version of the annual activity plan for 2016 at hand, RAN POL veterans and new participants checked where RAN POL is at the moment and what kind of accent should be applied to the 2016 activities.

RAN POL will be led by the new co-chairs Vasileios Theofilopoulos (EL) and Navjot Sandhu (NO). Vasileios Theofilopoulos is a police officer with 20 years experience and currently works at KEMEA, the think-tank of the Hellenic Ministry's Interior and Administrative Reconstruction on homeland security and anti-crime policies. Navjot Sandhu is a police officer with 10 years experience and currently works at Organized crime, Special Operations of the Norwegian police in Oslo. She is also minority ombudsman and connected to Minotenk, a minority think tank. An interesting combination, for an interesting new phase.

This ex post paper is the reflection on the most crucial findings of the meeting. The paper will also build on RAN POL's Mission Statement, the old initial Position Paper (2012) and the ex ante paper and extensive minutes of the Aarhus meeting.

We will focus on:

- Restating the unique and underused role for local police in CVE and preventing radicalisation
- The limitations of early signalling by the community officer
- The police officer as a communicating networker

The main lesson looking back at this meeting is that networking, communicating and capacity building in local networks and communities are still the key contributions that local police can add to the fight against extremism. More than signalling early radicalisation or the actual delivering of preventive interventions, which can very often be delivered better by others.

The unique and underused role for local police in CVE and preventing radicalisation

In 2012 RAN POL already advocated the role for community policing in the challenge of preventing radicalisation to violent extremism in its Position Paper¹. At the first RAN High Level Conference (early 2013) the case was made that 'community policing has become the recognised approach for crime prevention in general, and now it is increasingly becoming recognised as a critical method of preventing radicalisation'.

In Aarhus the participants made it very clear that there is still a lot to be gained in Europe by giving the local police a bigger role. CVE can be much more effective. At the Study trip to The Hague (NL) in June-July 2015 the visiting RAN POL participants expressed their surprise about the high level of involvement for the Dutch

¹ RAN POL Position Paper (2012).

community police officers in CVE. This surprise and the conversations in Aarhus support the vision that there is a lot to be gained. There is work to be done for RAN POL.

And it can be done. Another example of effective local policing can be found in the Danish Aarhus-model. The Aarhus-model shows how multi agency working can be organised. A team of well trained and motivated police officers, supported with appropriate legislation can build a local approach. The Aarhus-model is a good example of a multi-agency collaboration with city authorities and neighbourhood representatives. The police play a central role in this model, by taking care of screening, visitation, survey and risk-assessment, based on information from suppliers like schools, prison and social services.

Early signalling by the community officer

For some the prevention of radicalisation is watered down to signalling early processes of radicalisation. In that light we need to be realistic. As shown in the research by Pieter Appelboom on experiences by well trained Dutch community police, operating in areas where there is actual radicalisation and extremism.

“It appears that the early-signalling role of potential cases of radicalisation is not one necessarily carried out by the community officer (...)

The community officers, as well as many other professionals, do not want their residents to travel to Syria and potentially join terrorist networks. This is not only because of the potential threat of terrorist activity upon their possible return, but also because of the experienced impact in those families directly involved. (...)

The role of the community officer nonetheless seems particularly present in the direct follow up of radicalisation, after been made aware of potential radicalising residents. In this role they can bring in an extra piece of a potential radicalisation puzzle, but can also act out-reaching towards those individuals or families involved. The community officer here seems to be a great fit for being able to portrait a pro-active rather than reactive role within the community, illustrating cooperation rather than being at opposite ends.”

So, if identifying the signals of (potential) radicalisation in vulnerable individuals is not the main task for community police officers, what is it then? Pieter Appelboom’s research shows that concerned people might prefer to share these signals of concern with the local authority agencies, and not with the police. This would lead the way to a shared responsibility and cooperation at the local level between the local police and the local authority.

Potential roles and contributions for local police. Police...

- have information to offer, information not known to other actors
- can be a source of expertise and advice on radicalisation and violent extremism for partners
- can deploy unique tools and measures that they only have
- are well positioned to build a strong local networking
- are very often a known and trusted partner for safeguarding, and prevention of crime and drug abuse
- can be a linking pin to national agencies and intelligence services
- can be a very effective tandem with the local authority

The police officer as a communicator and networker

The above has got implications for the local police officer. He should be acknowledged and equipped for building and maintaining a local network.

The local policeman should be tasked to go out into his area and raise awareness for the urgency to safeguard the vulnerable individuals and communities. He or she should be able to establish and maintain working relations to engage others in confronting recruitment and extremism in their environment. So it's about participation, networking and communicating. Not every police officer is suitable for these activities. This asks for the right recruitment and training.

In the RAN Collection² of practices is a description of the Irish national police service Garda, and with Ethnic Liaison Officers (ELO)³. These ELO's are hand picked and well trained police officers who manage to build relations and gain trust in ethnic minority communities.

The required skills and attitude for effective local police officers will be discussed at the RAN POL meeting on Engaging with communities (6-7 April 2016) and at the meeting on training for policemen (14-15 June 2016).

Another aspect of communication is the online communication. Since social media and the online world play a crucial role in radicalisation and recruitment, for the police there is a need to incorporate this in their work. One aspect is the role that social media play in building networks and trust at a local level. Moreover, well trained police officers can raise awareness at schools and with parents on the risk of the online world for their students/children.

Conclusion

The challenge for RAN POL in the new phase is still pressing. New is the growing support for more realistic and police specific role, in close cooperation with local authorities and other multi agency partners. And a continuing quest in identifying promising practices and approaches for engaging with communities and building trust. The police officers need to be tasked and equipped to play this role. By doing so local police can contribute significantly to successful CVE.

² http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-best-practices/ran-search/rc_0035_ethnic_liaison_officers_en.htm

³ <http://www.garda.ie/Controller.aspx?Page=154>