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CONCLUSION PAPER

RAN Plenary

21-22 October 2020

Digital meeting

RAN PLENARY “RESILIENCE AND ADAPTATION”

Introduction

After 9 years of RAN, and with a network of over 6 000 first-line practitioners and 9 Working Groups, this year’s first ever online RAN Plenary was highly **influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic**. The pandemic caused the RAN constituency to meet in a digital way and it also affected the topics that were discussed. Due to the pandemic, the root causes for radicalisation are growing and the landscape of extremism is rapidly changing. This also **resonates** in the topics and issues for **2021** mentioned during the Plenary.

This discussion paper covers the main outcomes that were discussed during the RAN Plenary. It describes what themes will require the attention of RAN participants in 2021 and beyond. In addition, this paper reflects outcomes from the discussion on what **working formats** and ways of **dissemination** could be applied by RAN – especially due to the fact that currently most of the work is done **online**.

Key elements of the opening words by European Commissioner Johansson for Home Affairs at the start of the RAN Plenary

- Commissioner Johansson shared with the audience that security is about trust –in society and in our institutions to protect us. RAN practitioners are the trust builders, they work in the neighbourhoods of Europe and do a very important job to keep our society safe.
- The Commissioner noted that we need law enforcement and security forces in order to foil plots and arrest terrorists, but, we also need prevention work, as it is better to prevent than to cure.
- Commissioner Johansson explained that success of prevention is hard to measure, but still very important. Successful prevention work leads to vulnerable citizens actively seeking help and radical people deciding to disengage from their extremist ideology.
- The Commissioner shared that recruiters target the vulnerable youth. Recruiters get them to perceive their world in black and white. To show vulnerable people there is an alternative, we need to work on inclusion.
- According to Commissioner Johansson, pressing topics that we need to continue to focus on are the removal of terrorist propaganda from the Internet, the current pandemic that feeds into conspiracy theories, rising Right Wing Extremism and the permanent threat of Islamist Extremism.
- Commissioner Johansson concluded by stating that we need to create an inclusive place for all citizens and offer them a return home. It is not “us” versus “them”, there is just “us”.

Practitioners’ testimonials

On day 2 of the Plenary, three testimonials by practitioners provided participants with inspiration and insights on overarching themes that will require extra attention in 2021.

Islamist extremism: The president of AfVT (*Association française des Victimes du Terrorisme*) shared his thoughts and experiences on Islamist extremism from the perspective of the victims of terrorism. The association is involved in prevent work by developing projects with teachers and victims of terrorism to deliver testimonies in schools. This kind of initiative is becoming more and more important, and should be implemented in more schools, but at the same time it is becoming a big threat for the victims and participating teachers, who are seen as possible targets. Given that one of the students of the recently murdered teacher Samuel Paty helped the perpetrator to identify the teacher, it becomes clear that prevention work in schools should be extended.

Conspiracy narratives: A senior expert and manager of Moonshot gave participants insights into the phenomenon that people believe in conspiracy theories about the world being run by elites. One observation she made is the increasing accessibility of conspiracy narratives in the world. The global pandemic provides food for conspiracy narratives. These narratives are shared on social media, which is particularly concerning because a large percentage of social media users is under the age of 24. A large percentage of terrorists seems to be motivated by some kind of conspiracy ideology, so understanding these as well as the different strands of ideology they contain has never been more relevant.

Violent Right-Wing Extremism: A filmmaker and practitioner from Germany, shared her experiences as a victim of violent extremism and a filmmaker on this topic. She has experienced a lot of racism in her life and was beaten by right-wing extremists. She decided to find a way out of this “wheel of hate and rage” and found out that dialogue is crucial. She has directed several documentaries, in which she treats the issue of racism and Violent Right-Wing Extremism. Her conclusion of these dialogues is that

we¹ need to get to know the strategies of extremists. Starting a dialogue early in extremists' radicalisation paths – before they become violent – is key.

Working Groups' focus in 2021

This section reflects the outcomes of the discussions in the break out groups of day 1 of the Plenary, listing the themes the Working Groups wish to have on their agenda in the forthcoming year.

Communication and Narratives Working Group (RAN C&N)

Helping communicators to communicate in response to crisis. The (first) response after a terrorist attack or other crisis is crucial to the further development of the situation. In 2021, we want to organise a meeting to support practitioner communicators or practitioners supporting communicators in their organisation on how to best communicate to the general public in times of a crisis.

Conspiracy narratives. Building on the activities in 2020, we will further define and examine specific conspiracy narratives such as QAnon to better understand them, assess their harmfulness, find answers to why they resonate with their audiences, and provide expertise on how to deal with them in a preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) setting.

The evolution of narratives of emerging threats such as Incels. Entirely new violent extremist threats such as Involuntary Celibates (Incels for short) related violence has been on the rise over the past years and has been linked to numerous attacks or deaths, mainly in North and South America and in Canada. In 2021, we want to look into these new trends and their influence on extremist narratives in Europe.

Gamers. Building on the 2020 C&N exploratory meeting on "Extremists' use of video gaming", in 2021 we will dive deeper in the digital grooming and recruitment perspective by bringing together experts who examine these processes with P/CVE practitioners to further explore the digital grooming tactics used on videogaming (adjacent) platforms and what practitioners can do to prevent and counter this.

Families, Communities & Social care Working Group (RAN FC&S)

Supporting families in fostering resilience against (COVID-19-related) conspiracy narratives.

The current rise in conspiracy narratives shows the need to speak about these conspiracies within families. In 2021 we want to take on this topic, by examining the question whether media literacy/dialogue techniques can be used to address sensitive issues related to conspiracy narratives in families. **Involving communities in reintegration and rehabilitation efforts.** Former violent extremists are currently reintegrating into society: how can communities be supported in reintegrating former violent extremists and accommodating them in their community?

Lessons learned from COVID-19. What are innovative ways to reach out to vulnerable families and individuals when they are most isolated in the future, also taking into account the increase of domestic violence during the pandemic?

Working with far-right extremists in your community. VRWE being more present in P/CVE work also demands from communities to work with vulnerable individuals in order to prevent them from turning to violence. We want to dive deeper into the ways in which communities can tackle the challenges in dealing with VRWE, also with regard to the topic of gender related issues in the VRWE movements.

Mental Health Working Group (RAN HEALTH)

Mental health practices and interventions in P/CVE. RAN HEALTH will focus largely on the dissemination of knowledge on mental health issues in P/CVE to a wider audience, also focussing on practitioners working in fields other than the mental health sector (for instance in education, prisons, police, etc.). The aim is to produce an overview with several case-studies, (evidence-based) interventions and best suited practices.

¹ In this conclusion paper, on some occasions the word 'we' is used. This refers to the practitioners within RAN.

VRWE lone-actor terrorism. The aim is to look into the specific mental health problems of VRWE lone actors committing attacks, since there has been a rise in these attacks over the years.

Releasing and reintegrating terrorist offenders from a mental health perspective. Former violent extremists are currently reintegrating into society: how can we best bring forward mental health perspectives and knowledge to their reintegration? Focus should be on both promises and risks.

P/CVE training for mental health practitioners and other practitioners (prison staff, educators, youth workers etc.). By bringing together experts on P/CVE and mental health, we will discuss the key lessons learned that practitioners (also from adjacent fields) should integrate in their daily practice and develop a framework for training.

Local authorities Working Group (RAN LOCAL)

Is the COVID-19 pandemic enlarging the breeding ground for radicalisation and polarisation?

It seems that the pandemic is opening “cognitive windows” for people to become (more) radicalised. The economic consequences of the pandemic also have a big impact on peoples’ opportunities in life and on the job market. Practitioners want to get a better understanding of the dynamics that are present in our societies in these challenging times. RAN LOCAL wants to work together with RAN HEALTH on this topic.

“Bring your professional troubles to the table: how to bring your local strategy across”. In order to be effective in our approach to radicalisation and polarisation, we need the help of the communities in our cities. How to build trust on a local scale when there is growing distrust of the government? How can we better “sell” the local approach to the citizens and communities in times of increased polarisation?

Changing landscape of polarisation, radicalisation and extremism. In the last years there have been quite a few changes in the landscape of polarisation, radicalisation and extremism in Europe. Due to the pandemic it is changing even more rapidly. How to further develop the local strategy to be more flexible and suited to the changing landscape?

Current status and challenges: the local comprehensive approach & multi-agency work. The local approach of P/CVE is one of the cornerstones of P/CVE work. It is important to keep this approach up-to-date. RAN LOCAL is planning to organise a meeting, during which different participants involved in multi-agency work will help grasp the essentials of the lessons that have been learned on multi-agency work over the years.

Police and law enforcement Working Group (RAN POL)

How to raise awareness and build capacity locally. Understanding the importance of the specific competences held by individual actors in the local community is important to properly identify risk factors and manifestations of radicalisation and to prevent or mitigate specific causes of radicalisation. In order to increase the effectiveness of activities, together with RAN LOCAL, RAN POL wants to improve awareness and knowledge of these competences to allow practitioners to build an effective plan of personalised help.

Community officer goes online. Incorporating the online environment into the daily work of police is key – to stay in touch with communities and youngsters particularly in times of COVID-19 and to stay up to date on (global) developments that have an impact on P/CVE (community) work. The goal here is to provide guidance to police officers and organisations to expand the community or proximity of police in the online world where youngsters and angry citizens meet as well. RAN POL will include contributions from C&N and Y&E in this meeting.

Collecting and first draft of local training programme. Bring-and-share exchange of training programmes and their separate modules, audio-visual materials, cases and exercises, a meeting for developers of training programmes at local level aimed at awareness raising and capacity building. RAN POL is planning to work together with RAN LOCAL on this subject.

In-depth case diagnosis workshop. To further the exchange of practices within police forces across the EU, RAN POL will organise a workshop with police officials from different countries to share thoughts

and ideas on the “diagnosis” and on how to deal with a real-life example of a P/CVE case. During the workshop, the following questions will be discussed: What is going on in this case? Which procedures and tools can be used for diagnosis? What could be follow-up actions?

Prisons Working Group (RAN PRISONS)

Dynamic security: work-floor experiences with Violent Extremist or Terrorist Offenders (VETOs). Building on the RAN PRISONS Working Group meeting on the “Use of Risk and Needs Assessment Tools”, RAN PRISONS wants to provide practitioners (e.g. correctional officers) with guidelines on how to implement concepts like “dynamic security” (a comprehensive way of working with and treating detainees) in their prisons, using a checklist, information sheet or manual.

Experiences with Foreign Terrorist Fighters and Violent Extremist or Terrorist Offenders: questions and needs for the future. Using the approach that is described in the RAN Manual on Rehabilitation and Reintegration of returning foreign terrorist fighters, RAN PRISONS wants to discuss what kind of training prison staff needs to be prepared for handling this difficult group. What does the work floor experience teach us on how to deal with potential threats?

How to better prevent reoffending of violent extremist and terrorist offenders? On this subject, RAN PRISONS wants to work together with RAN REHABILITATION to reach a better understanding on what is needed by practitioners to have more continuity in the treatment of the offender so as to achieve a sustainable improvement. In order to best establish disengagement, deradicalisation and rehabilitation, a comprehensive way of multi-agency work is required. How can this best be achieved?

Rehabilitation Working Group (RAN REHABILITATION)

Mental health struggles in the context of rehabilitation. Rehabilitation workers need clear guidelines on what the warning signs are and who to involve in case of potential mental health problems of an individual. These guidelines will be developed using input from mental health experts with good knowledge on P/CVE (from RAN HEALTH), followed by in-depth discussions of how these can be integrated into rehabilitation practice and how sensible modes of referral to mental health professionals can be devised.

How to work with financially and socially stable, middle-aged target groups? What can rehabilitation offer them? Because there is hardly any leverage to get people who are quite well-off to actively participate in their rehabilitation, this is a particularly difficult target group. Taking stock of what current rehabilitation work offers to existing target groups entails analysing what can be transferred and which new elements are necessary.

Creating a common basis for multi-agency understanding. A unified and holistic treatment from all parties involved is important during the process of rehabilitation. Fostering mutual understanding and respect amongst the different logics of functioning of security as well as non-security actors working on rehabilitation, we want to create this common basis by debating common understandings of risk (e.g. security vs. non-security).

Incorporating evaluation in exit work. Consolidating the discussions of the previous Working Group meetings (each of which featured a dedicated part on evaluation), RAN REHABILITATION wants to produce a tangible checklist for both evaluators and staff of a programme under evaluation. The issue is what to keep in mind and what not to do.

Victims of Terrorism Working Group (RAN VoT)

Supporting the voices of victims of terrorism with a particular focus on supporting young victims. In a multi-meeting with RAN Y&E, RAN VoT wants to work on a guideline/handbook for professionals working with young victims.

Memorials and commemorations. How can memorials and commemorations be used to support P/CVE more directly? What are different approaches across the EU Member States? By obtaining an overview of the situation in Member States, RAN VoT wants to gain a better idea of how memorials and commemorations are being used in different contexts, supporting practitioners.

Restorative approaches. In a multi-meeting with RAN REHABILITATION, RAN VoT wants to describe how victims can be involved in restorative approaches without risking secondary victimisation. This meeting will result in a practical guideline.

Preparation of Remembrance Day 2022. Building on the experiences, evaluation and survey results of Remembrance Day 2021, RAN VoT will be working towards Remembrance Day 2022.

Youth and Education Working Group (RAN Y&E)

Cross-collaboration for a “pedagogical climate” around youth. “It takes a village to raise a child”, therefore, there is a need to work together with parents and societal organisations to establish a unified approach to the upbringing of youth (the “pedagogical climate”). RAN Y&E want to look into the role of youth workers and teachers in how to best do this. As a teacher or youth worker – what possibilities exist to create this shared pedagogical climate?

Conspiracy narratives in the classroom, focus on capacity building for teachers. We will develop connective, empathetic and alternative counter-narratives building on a previous meeting on COVID-19 narratives that polarise. Teachers could use these narratives as a powerful tool to increase empathy, critical thinking, digital skills and shared values and reduce polarisation and conspiracy thinking. RAN Y&E is planning to work together with RAN C&N on this topic.

Youth and mental health. How can we deal with the mental health problems amongst youth due to COVID-19, as these increase the vulnerability to conspiracies or radicalisation? The goal here is to increase understanding about mental health issues and stimulate cooperation with the mental health field.

The online world of youngsters. The online world and the offline world are merging: for youngsters nowadays there is hardly any distinction between them. What does this mean for teachers and youth workers? Should teachers/youth workers be trained on online literacy? Or is more needed? Building on earlier Y&E meetings, this meeting aims to provide concrete examples of online behaviour of youngsters and possibilities for youth workers and teachers.

Cross-cutting issues

The following cross-cutting issues defining the work within RAN were discussed: ‘*conspiracy narratives*’, ‘*the influence of the digital world on radicalisation and P/CVE*’, ‘*Violent Right Wing Extremism (VRWE)*’, ‘*evaluation of interventions*’ and the ‘*consequences of COVID-19 in P/CVE practice*’. Shortly before the RAN Plenary an attack by an Islamist terrorist was carried out in France, where the teacher Samuel Paty was murdered for teaching children about freedom of expression. During the Plenary, it was underlined that we should also *keep our focus on Islamist extremism*.

Besides the topics RAN is dealing with, during the Plenary the participants also spoke about RAN as a network to *receive and give support* to fellow practitioners within RAN. Especially during the pandemic, without any physical RAN meetings, people have learned that the network also provides for “helping the helper” during times of crisis. RAN should try to facilitate this, as we will be working online for more time to come.

New working methods and products for 2021

On day one, the participants focused on possible topics for each Working Group in 2021, on day two the discussions evolved around innovative working methods. The RAN Working Groups produced the following ideas:

- **Involving families** in development of material could prove to be very helpful, as well as involving different Working Groups on one topic (RAN FC&S).

- Methods should always be developed under consideration that there is **no division between the online and offline world in a youngster's environment** (RAN POL).
- Small scale **practical case study sessions** could be implemented – ad hoc topics or case studies could be tackled in a smaller setting (RAN HEALTH).
- A **supervision for practitioners** dealing with difficult cases or need for training of clinic staff-consultancy could be provided – either by RAN experts or in a peer-to-peer mode (RAN HEALTH).
- E-workshops, live-streaming, as well as **online training in a multi-agency setting** can put more focus on a specific and newly-arising challenge – such as the new circumstances given the COVID-19 pandemic (RAN POL).;
- Between two and four weeks after a meeting, RAN could provide a **short (digital) catch up where participants reflect** and review on the outcomes of the meeting (RAN Y&E).
- **More (digital) study visits** (and similar formats such as job shadowing) can foster more knowledge exchange and include all the participants involved at the local level (RAN LOCAL).
- **Online prep meetings to set the scene** can be held before in person meetings, which can then focus on producing deliverables (RAN REHABILITATION).
- A more intensive and lasting exchange between Working Groups can be fostered if Working Group **co-chairs are informed about the meetings of all Working Groups**. They can then decide to participate in this meeting as a guest – a RAN co-chair debriefing following each meeting could explore possible ways of cooperation between Working Groups (RAN VoT).
- An (on- and offline) **exhibition** with pictures and stories of victims of terrorism during the European Remembrance Day for Victims of Terrorism can add to the concept of all victims being able to contribute to this event (RAN VoT).
- A cross-cutting idea is that **free-to-join-online meetings without an agenda** help support practitioners in their networking; through these meetings, practitioners can meet other practitioners who might be working in a similar field but engage in different Working Groups.
- Additionally, **digital exchange via social media** (e.g. WhatsApp) can enable a more topic-independent exchange among practitioners. This could help practitioners exchange thoughts aside from the topic-related meetings facilitated through the Working Groups;

Throughout all Working Groups, participants had a large number of innovative ideas concerning possible new deliverables to be produced:

- **More practical products** should be created **which help a specific group of practitioners** make sense of newly emerging trends (e.g. handbooks for teachers on conspiracy narratives, guidelines on how to discuss sensitive topics with children).
- **Information could be tailored to the target group:** e.g. if specific products are created for teachers and youth workers, they can then translate these to students.
- Production of **videos or podcasts of practitioners in their working environment** can strengthen and support the network of practitioners within RAN.
- **E-learning packages can be produced with evidence-based methods** on specific topics (e.g. mental health and P/CVE).
- **Videos with demonstration role plays** and explanations / reflections on the methods used can help practitioners expand their repertoire.
- **Parallel physical meetings in several locations** with an online connection could help solve COVID-19-based challenges and restrictions.
- **More use of digital whiteboards** during online meetings can help visualise the outcomes.
- **Serious gaming** – the production of games that have the aim to convey information and education rather than entertainment – should be included in the fund of RAN-products.