Project Based Collaboration (PBC)
on Violent Right-Wing Extremism (VRWE)

September 2021

WORKING DEFINITION FOR VIOLENT RIGHT-WING EXTREMISM (VRWE)

EU Member States participating in the Project Based Collaboration on Violent Right-Wing Extremism (Bulgaria, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Sweden) decided to adopt the following non-legally binding working definition of violent right-wing extremism (VRWE):

Violent right-wing extremism (VRWE)

are acts of individuals or groups who use, incite, threaten with, legitimise or support violence and hatred to further their political or ideological goals, motivated by ideologies based on the rejection of democratic order and values as well as of fundamental rights, and centred on exclusionary nationalism, racism, xenophobia and/or related intolerance.

1. Origins of the definition

The working definition is a result of the work of EU Member States within the project-based collaboration facilitated by the European Commission. The works on the definition started during the Finnish Presidency in 2019 and finished in September 2021 during the Slovenian Presidency.

2. The purpose of the definition

During the PBC works, it was underlined that a non-legally binding working definition at EU level is essential to **identify**, better **understand**, and **acknowledge** the extent of the problem, and thus help EU Member States **to effectively address** this common threat. In particular, the definition could:

- help the competent authorities **identify and name** such acts**,** thus facilitating possible prosecution under the relevant criminal laws;

- improve the **recording** of incidents and statistical **data collection,** and allow for their comparison (and potential standardization) and ease reporting procedures (e.g. also Europol's TE-SAT);
- allow, on the bases of reliable statistics, to comprehensively and representatively **assess the threat** situation at EU and national level;
- strengthen **evidence-based advice for policy-making**, also at EU and national level;
- provide input for the creation of **guidance for the moderation** of violent right-wing extremist content online[1];
- help to better understand the motivations of violent right-wing extremism supporters and thus **help design better prevent interventions** (e.g. exit programmes, prevent programmes for schools, national prevent strategies, and EU projects);
- enable local-level actors to **better spot and understand** violent right-wing extremist activities and facilitate communication between national and local-level actors in preventing and countering this form of extremism;
- **support law enforcement** (e.g. in designing indicators for risk analysis, designing training for law enforcement officers for **easier identification, detection, investigation** of violent right-wing extremist suspects, monitoring violent right-wing extremist acts, cross-border cooperation, etc.);
- contribute to a better **understanding of the phenomenon by the media** - playing an important role in communicating and presenting facts and thus preventing the polarization of society – and by organisations and specialists in strategic communication designing alternative narratives to radicalizing discourses;
- when widely endorsed, give additional clarity to policy discussions also at **international level**.

3. Rationale of certain elements of the working definition

Member States participating in the PBC identified two main elements that are essential to the definition: "behaviour/acts" and "ideology/motivations".

Countering violent manifestations of right-wing extremism is a key part of that challenge. While it is recognized that right-wing extremism operating legally within a democratic system might be a nurturing environment for violent right-wing extremism, it is important to underline that holding radical or extreme views may not be illegal in a given legal system. However, inciting a person to commit an offence in the name of any belief is.

3.1 Acts

Violence

The first part of the definition qualifies violence with a set of particular <u>goals</u> beyond the act itself as opposed to other forms of violence.

The goals can be classified as **political (**for example seeking to destroy democracy, overthrow the government, create a state based on authoritarian rule, intense nationalism, and racial purity,

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[1] The EU Internet Forum, under the lead of the Commission and Europol, is working on a reference list of symbols, codes, manifestos and groups related to violent right-wing extremism, with the objective of supporting the internet industry in identifying and moderating violent right-wing extremist content that could potentially lead to violence.

or to stop immigration). They can also be **ideological** (belief in white supremacy, antisemitism, anti-Muslim hatred, belief in the "great replacement" or upcoming genocide of the white race).

The term "violence" carries different meanings, but generally refers to an act of physical, verbal or psychological force, not excluding other modus operandi, that causes or is intended to cause harm against people or property. As such, right-wing extremist violence may be defined as any physical or psychological attack, or act of public disorder, whose target selection is based on extreme right-wing beliefs.

Violence is a key part in the definition.

Hatred

In line with the Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA, 'hatred' should be understood as referring to hatred based on race, colour, religion, descent or national or ethnic origin, an intentional conduct of which is punishable.

Some violent right-wing extremism criminal acts can amount to hate crimes. This would be the case if indicators occur which imply that the violent right-wing extremist perpetrator was motivated by racism, xenophobia and/or other intolerance and/or selected the target because of their (perceived) protected characteristics, such as race, colour, religion, descent or national or ethnic origin, gender, sexuality or disability.

Given the nature of hate crimes, it is essential that the criteria for the assessment of a hate crime are violent right-wing extremist perpetrator-oriented as well as victim-oriented.

Supporting violence and hatred

"Supporting" is used in the definition to encompass various ways in which violent right-wing extremists aim to aid, instigate, and abet the commission of a violent act. Support means here active and/or material support such as providing any tangible or intangible goods or services (including currency or monetary instruments or financial securities, financial services, lodging, instruction or training, expert advice, or assistance, safe houses, false documentation or identification, communications equipment, facilities, weapons, lethal materials, explosives, personnel and transportation, ideological materials, etc.). This also includes online support activities, notably through social media.

3.2 Perpetrators

The affiliation of a perpetrator with violent right-wing extremist milieus oftentimes proves difficult to identify due to the non-homogeneous violent right-wing extremist scene in which clear organisational boundaries and formal group membership are slowly turning into more informal groups. In addition, many individuals sharing violent right-wing extremist ideologies no longer explicitly adorn uniform clothing or adopt physical appearances (such as skinhead) which have been traditional signifiers of adherence to violent right-wing extremist ideologies.

3.3 Motivation

Ideologies

Violent right-wing extremists adhere to a wide and malleable range of ideologies. The term "ideologies" is thus used in plural.

Anti-democracy

The reference to the rejection of <u>democratic order and values</u> serves the purpose to distinguish extremist motives advocating for violence from radical right ideas which may not be anti-constitutional or violent.

Violent right-wing extremism rejects the fundamental principles and values (freedom and equality), procedures and institutions of the democratic constitutional state (notably political pluralism and the protection of minorities).

Anti-democratic sentiment is understood as a combination of anti-pluralism and a rejection of the fundamental equality of humans and thereof derived fundamental rights. The substance of democracy includes a belief in the value of diversity and hence tolerance of difference (i.e. pluralism), the principle of political equality (i.e. fundamental equality of human beings), and the valuing of, and respect for, civil and political freedoms.

Exclusionary nationalism

Exclusionary nationalism is the core doctrine of violent right-wing extremism. It is mainly based on a heteronormative ethnic and racist conception of the nation that stresses the expulsion of the "other" (that is, all individuals who do not fit their ideological system of belief) and the defence of a conception of a homogeneous community of men and women and their fixed roles in this community. Due to the exclusionary ideology, some non-native persons and ideas are fundamentally threatening to the homogeneous nation-state[2]. In the definition, we therefore point to this form of ethnic (and hence exclusionary) nationalism.

Linked to exclusionary nationalism is the concept of supremacism or the idea that a certain group of people sharing a common element (nation, race, etc.) is superior to all other people. Seeing themselves in a supreme position, the particular group considers it their natural right to dominate the rest of the population.

Racism and xenophobia

Racism[3] and xenophobia are manifestations of exclusionary nationalism and supremacism. According to the racist doctrine, there is a nature-given hierarchy and irreconcilable biological or cultural differences between ethnic groups, which should therefore not mix. In the hierarchy, people with ethnic minority and immigrant backgrounds are seen as posing a threat to the higher ranked race or culture – i.e. based on the same racist doctrine (fear, hate or hostility regarding foreigners). It is the interconnectedness of these beliefs that explains why, even if they are not always referred to explicitly, the notions of racism and xenophobia are included in the description of violent right-wing extremism.

In the contemporary violent right-wing extremist environments there are groups and individuals that present themselves as having distanced themselves from biological racism, antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred (to decrease the possibility of wider social, political, or electoral delegitimisation which may occur more readily if they are easily identifiable as racist[4]). Instead,

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[2] Mudde, Populist Radical Right Parties, op. cit., Ref. 13, p. 19.

[3]"racism" shall mean the belief that a ground such as race, colour, language, religion, nationality or national or ethnic origin justifies contempt for a person or a group of persons, or the notion of superiority of a person or a group of persons" (https://rm.coe.int/ecri-general-policy-recommendation-no-7-revised-on-national-legislatio/16808b5aae)

[4] Rydgren, op. cit., Ref. 39, p. 428.

they promote an ethno-pluralist doctrine that states that in order to preserve the unique national characters of different peoples they have to be kept separated. According to this argument, they consider that "mixing" of different ethnicities only leads to cultural extinction. This concept is, however, also racist, because the possibility to acquire the citizenship of a state then would be dependent on the ethnic origin of a person.

4. Targets

When defining the targets of violent right-wing extremists it is important to underline that examples of targets given below do not form an exhaustive list. The targets, as history shows, are quite diverse in nature and have shifted over time. They also differ between EU countries, while non-EU countries and regions present other formulations of violent right-wing extremism, which exceed the considerations of this work.

The targets can be **individuals, groups or communities** that are considered by violent right-wing extremists as "others" (according to the abovementioned meaning) and/or those associated with those "others". The targets are selected because of their (real or perceived) ethnic, racial, ideological, religious background and/or sexual identity and/or gender, and because they are perceived in opposition to what violent right-wing extremism stand for. A **property** (such as a building, school, refugee centre, place of worship or cemetery, or monument) can also be a target of violent right-wing extremists. These properties get selected because they are, or are perceived to be, linked to the targets described below.

Immigrants, ethnic and religious minorities are at present the main target of right-wing violence in the EU. Among **such minorities**, in particular **Muslims** and **Jews** constitute targets.

Political opponents, perceived as enemies (e.g. left-wing activists, pro-immigration activists, anarchists, anti-fascists, public figures, different representatives of the media, including certain journalists) and **parts of the establishment** (e.g. politicians, government officials and police) are other possible targets.

Hostility towards individuals and groups like the **homeless** and **persons with disabilities** is common, as they represent an internal threat to those who should compose the "in" group according to violent right-wing extremist ideologies.

Violent right-wing extremists regularly target **lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, non-binary, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) individuals and advocacy groups**,[5] falsely contending that non-heteronormative identities are a threat to the patriarchal norm and to the present and future of the "in" group, most specifically the group's children. As a result, violent right-wing extremists often maliciously equate these identities with criminal acts, such as paedophilia and bestiality.

Gender equality and feminism challenge violent right-wing extremist worldview where women are responsible for bearing children and raising them in line with their traditional role.[6] Individuals and groups challenging this patriarchal order, such as **feminists and publicly visible women**, are also among targets.

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[5] https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english/news-and-events/right-now/2020/development-of-right-wing-violence.html

[6] Violent right-wing extremists can also harbour misogynist beliefs. In a video live streamed prior to the attack, the Halle synagogue shooter was seen listening to misogynist music and railing against feminism, arguing it was to blame for declining birth rates in the West. He intertwined this with a perceived threat from mass immigration, a common conspiracy theory known as the "Great Replacement": https://icct.nl/publication/male-supremacism-and-the-hanau-terrorist-attack-between-online-misogyny-and-far-right-violence/