

EU prevention strategies

D4.3

Policy brief on the implementation of the EU's policies



Project acronym:	PREVEX
Project full title:	Preventing Violent Extremism in the Balkans and the Mena: Strengthening Resilience in Enabling Environment
Grant agreement no.:	870724
Type of action:	Research and innovation
Project start date:	01.01.2020
Project duration:	36 months
Call topic:	H2020-SC6-GOVERNANCE-2019
Project website:	http://www.prevox-balkan-mena.eu
Document:	Policy brief
Deliverable number:	4.3
Deliverable title:	Policy brief on the implementation of the EU's policies
Due date of deliverable:	31.12.2020
Actual submission date:	30.12.2020
Editors:	Kari Osland, Morten Bøås
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Participating beneficiaries:	CEPS
Work Package no.:	4
Work Package title:	EU prevention strategies
Work Package leader:	Steven Blockmans
Work Package participants:	CEPS, NUPI
Estimated person-months for deliverable:	1,0
Dissemination level:	Public
Nature:	Report
Version:	2
Draft/Final:	Final
No. of pages (including cover):	13
Keywords:	European Union; prevention; violent extremism; counter-terrorism



Introduction

Violent extremism is not a new phenomenon and terrorism has a long history in Europe, often linked to separatist movements, anarchism, and far-right and far-left extremism. The trends, means, and patterns of radicalization have evolved rapidly since the Arab uprisings flared exactly a decade ago. Counter-terrorism (CT) and preventing violent extremism (PVE) strategies have developed alongside these trends at the national and supranational level.

In the wake of a series of Jihad-inspired terror attacks in Spain, France, Germany, Belgium, the UK, and elsewhere, European Union (EU) member states ramped up their military campaigns against the Islamic State (ISIS, aka Daesh) and al-Qaeda in Syria and Iraq. But since the fall of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIS), governments' interest in fighting terrorism in the Middle East has decreased. Nevertheless, some European countries remain on the front foot in their securitized PVE approach. Although there is no apparent connection between the anti-jihad war waged by the French army in Mali and the radicalization in France, the government is calling for more support from European countries to fight against jihadi movements in the Sahel. But the appetite for costly expeditionary campaigns is decreasing.

By and large, the phenomenon of violent extremism is perceived as homegrown. And whereas large differences remain in individual countries' approaches to tackling the challenges posed by violent extremism, it has nevertheless become increasingly clear that today's security challenges – whether it is terrorism, organized crime, cyberattacks, disinformation, or other evolving cyber-enabled threats – are shared threats that require a transnational approach. Indeed, Europe as a whole faces new security issues and specific challenges for preventive work that (lone) actors and (returning) foreign terrorist fighters raise, while the internet and social media give extremist and terrorist groups and their sympathisers new opportunities for spreading their propaganda, mobilization, and communication. It is against this changed backdrop that this policy brief asks what lessons the EU can learn from best practices identified at the national level, and in the coordination efforts with the supranational institutions.

EU-level implementations of PVE strategies

The European Union is often put under a spotlight after terrorist attacks are committed. EU institutions and agencies are called upon by member states or feel the need to show 'value' in responding to such acts of violent extremism. The EU has dynamically acquired experience in anti-radicalization policy and has adopted a great deal of counter-terrorism legislation over the last two decades.¹ The entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty in 2009 has consolidated the EU's competence in this field. Full respect of fundamental rights has been at the heart of its work.

In the wake of terror attacks in Paris, Nice, and Vienna in Autumn 2020, European Council President Charles Michel and Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in several speeches highlighted the sanctity of freedom and freedom of religion and explained that without

¹ See Steven Blockmans et al., 'Working paper on EU's policies and instruments for PVE', PREVEX Working Paper, D4.2, April 2020, <https://www.prevex-balkan-mena.eu/eu-prevention-strategies/>.



security those values cannot be protected. Flanked by President Emmanuel Macron and Chancellor Sebastian Kurz, President Michel highlighted how the priority is security but that at the same it is crucial to replace the circle of hate and mistrust with dialogue, understanding, and trust.² His PVE recipe is one of engendering European values, in particular among the youth and migrant populations, combined with ‘a fight against hate’. Michel suggested incorporating these principles into the training given to imams in educational institutions. However, this proposal has raised concerns with the European Parliament and governments of the Netherlands, Sweden, Spain, Italy, and Luxembourg, since the idea only seems to take Islam into consideration as the objective of counter-terrorism. As a result, the declaration was changed to include the growing threat posed by far-right groupings.

In her reaction to the latest spate of violent extremism, Commission President von der Leyen urged implementation on three levels: prevention, protection of the external borders, and action.³ This approach follows on from that endorsed by the Council of Ministers on 20 November 2015, after the Bataclan terrorist attacks in Paris.⁴ This package has since been reinforced at the end of 2020: on 9 December the Commission presented a new European agenda on combating terrorism,⁵ which focuses on strengthening the co-operation between security services, giving border guards the modern technology they need, stepping up EU efforts to prevent radicalization, and better protecting public spaces. Backed up by new guidelines on cyber security and the digital services act package of 15 December 2020,⁶ the innovations to the EU’s approach CT/PVE approach can be characterized by the following:

- Tackling root causes by investing in socio-economic advancement opportunities, inclusion, and commonality to create prospects for the future. A new European action plan for integration and inclusion of 24 November 2020, is underpinned by an agreement in the Council among EU member states that there is a need to improve social cohesion in Europe, that ‘integration is a two-way street’, and that the effort should come from the migrants as well as support from the EU.

² European Council, ‘Remarks by President Charles Michel after the video conference on Europe’s response to the terrorist threat’, 10 November 2020, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2020/11/10/intervention-du-president-charles-michel-a-l-issue-de-la-videoconference-sur-la-reponse-europeenne-a-la-menace-terroriste/>; ‘European Council, ‘A word from President Michel’, 12 November 2020, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/da/european-council/president/news/2020/11/12/20201112-pec-newsletter-4/>.

³ European Commission, ‘Statement by President von der Leyen at the joint press conference with Chancellor Kurz, Chancellor Merkel, President Macron, and President Michel, following the videoconference on the fight against terrorism’, Brussels, 10 November 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/statement_20_2072.

⁴ Conclusions of the Council of the EU and of the Member States meeting within the Council on Counter-Terrorism, 20 November 2015, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2015/11/20/jha-conclusions-counter-terrorism/>.

⁵ European Commission, ‘A counter-terrorism agenda for the EU: Anticipate, prevent, protect, respond’, COM(2020) 795 final, 9 December 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/pdf/09122020_communication_commission_european_parliament_the_council_eu_agenda_counter_terrorism_po-2020-9031_com-2020_795_en.pdf.

⁶ European Commission, ‘Proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on a single market for digital services (Digital Services Act) and amending Directive 2000/31/EC’, COM 2020/825, Brussels, 15 December 2020, https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/europe-fit-digital-age/digital-services-act-ensuring-safe-and-accountable-online-environment_en#documents.



- The development and strengthening of the European network of experts in the field dealing with preventing radicalization (5,000 experienced members – teachers and police officers, social workers and physicians).
- The recognition that the internet is a (COVID-accelerated) source of radicalization, where it is crucial to take down the terrorist online content as soon as possible and make the (gaming) platforms (in practice US big tech companies) more accountable.
- Gaps in the Schengen Information System (SIS) need to be addressed beyond the package adopted on 9 December 2020, as well as the implementation of the 2017 directive on the acquisition and possession of weapons. From January 2021 onwards, the new European Border and Coast Guard will be working at the external borders, with updated databases, making it easier to register entries and exits of third-country nationals with visas, and those who can enter the area without a visa through the European Travel Information and Authorization System (ETIAS) authorization system. As part of the internal Schengen security goal, it is crucial to strengthen the institutional capacity of systems devised to identify and track people considered at risk of radicalization; this can be done by strengthening Europol (the EU agency charged with cross-border police cooperation), finalizing European legislation on access to digital evidence, and enabling access to encrypted data and metadata. At the end of November 2020 the first Schengen Forum took place and to assess strengths and weaknesses. A new Schengen strategy will be presented by March 2021. Part of it will be to strengthen the European Dactyloscopy (EURODAC, the EU fingerprint database), as well as Europol, by increasing their competences and accessibility to information.

After the recent attacks a few member states have already made progress, fostering co-operation and exchange of information. Entities financing terrorism are much better tracked, the acquisition of firearms is better regulated, and tools to prevent the admission of dangerous individuals inside the EU have been implemented on the border.

State-level implementations of PVE strategies

The terror attacks in Paris and Nice have pushed the French government to systematize and make more explicit its policy towards radicalization. The conceptual premise is that the source of the problem is a religious radicalization among Muslims that entails two connected phenomena: (1) the ‘separatism’ of entire segments of the Muslim population, who abide by tenets of sharia for their everyday life in the destitute neighbourhoods; and (2) the choice of violence and terrorism by a part of the youth groomed in this religious environment. Consequently, the objective of the government is to fight ‘Islamist separatism’.⁷ In essence,

⁷ See the speech by President Emmanuel Macron, ‘Fight against separatism – the Republic in action’, Les Mureaux, 2 October 2020, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/coming-to-france/france-facts/secularism-and-religious-freedom-in-france-63815/article/fight-against-separatism-the-republic-in-action-speech-by-emmanuel-macron>; Emmanuel Macron, ‘Letter: France is against “Islamist separatism” – never Islam’, *Financial Times*, 4 November 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/8e459097-4b9a-4e04-a344-4262488e7754>.



violent radicalization is seen as the tip of the iceberg of a more profound societal phenomenon. The idea is that by countering religious radicalization one could undermine the ‘Islamist radical ideology’ that is motivating the terrorists.

French government policy raises two issues:

- With the exception of the army and to a lesser extent in prisons, religion is seen as the problem, not as a part of the solution. Secularism is not just neutrality: it is defined explicitly as a value system. Such a policy raises many questions: does it impinge on religious freedom (which is not only a freedom of belief but also a freedom of practicing)? Does it impinge on freedom of expression? Or simply does it work? And could values be implemented through compulsory teaching?
- It is a purely top-down authoritarian approach: it does not take into account the everyday practices of mainstream Muslims nor request participation from the existing local imams and members of Muslim associations.

While France currently represents the sharp edge of the wedge in European strategies in dealing with terrorism and violent extremism, there is still a lack of a common EU policy across much of the PVE board mainly because there is no real consensus about the roots of radicalization.⁸ President Macron, while acknowledging the solidarity shown by the EU countries after the terrorist attacks in Paris and Nice, complained that ‘*laïcité*’ (secularism) is not understood by many partners.⁹ There are, indeed, differences among EU countries about the space and role of religions, as shown by the controversy around the cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad: while EU countries agree on supporting freedom of expression, there are divergent views on the need to constrain the different faith communities to accept a ‘right to blasphemy’. Nevertheless, following the attack in Vienna in October 2020, the Austrian Prime Minister named the source of the threat as ‘political Islam’. That said, the main issue is to find a common conceptual approach.

But even if in other EU countries rhetorical sensitivities exist about separating Islamist separatism from other strands of violent extremism, there is a growing practice that points to religion being the major issue, both as a factor of radicalization or as a factor of de-radicalization. This finding exposes new challenges to tackling the multi-pronged issue, in particular in the sphere of cross-border co-ordination and co-operation. If the supranational institutions of the EU are supposed to add value to what member states can do individually, then these practical obstacles will need to be overcome first.

At the state level, the main gap between the EU ambition in formulating a common strategy to counter violent extremism resides in the lack of an efficient and rapid exchange of data and information among the member states. This is mainly due to conflicts of interests among the different national security agencies as well as different rules governing the issue of sharing private information in the different member states. After the Autumn 2020 attacks, Germany and France have called for closer EU co-operation in the fight against terrorism. In their joint declaration both countries insisted on tackling the continuing threat posed by terrorism and extremist outbursts in close co-operation with the member states of the Council

⁸ Information gleaned from interviews H-P; see the Annex for a full list.

⁹ Macron, ‘Letter’.



of the European Union. From her side, German Chancellor Angela Merkel said Europe needed to urgently make reforms to the open-border Schengen area in light of recent terrorist attacks, arguing that it's necessary to know who comes in and who leaves the Schengen area.¹⁰

At the civil society level, many NGOs are part of the Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN), which connects frontline practitioners from across Europe with one another, and with academics and policymakers, to exchange knowledge, first-hand experiences, and approaches to preventing and countering violent extremism in all its forms. However, one big problem with RAN activities is with the length and language of its publications. Many people involved in the PVE initiatives read only their national languages. They do not have access to RAN publications in English or find it too long.

Over the past several years, Germany has made significant progress towards developing a nuanced, multi-agency approach to preventing radicalization and extremism. However, there is still more work to be done. On the state level, Germany needs to ensure better national co-ordination, including regular exchanges of information and expertise between the actors involved to reduce the possibility of lost information and pointless repetition of work. On the civil society level, the country also needs to develop transparent regulations for the work of counselling centres, critical evaluation, as well as a public communication strategy co-ordinated on a national level, in order to strengthen trust between PVE practitioners and the 'radicalized' persons and their families.

Since 2004, Spain has been a member of an informal working group on jihadism known as the '5+5'. This unofficial network consists of defence ministers from Spain, Portugal, France, Italy, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya. The group exchanges information on threats posed by Islamic extremism and foreign fighters in the region. The Spanish Civil Guard also utilizes Europol information to combat terrorism and organized crime.¹¹ Spain continues to assist the EU to co-ordinate the Joint Action Days under the umbrella of the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT), which have resulted in several arrests and investigations.

Like most other EU member states, Ireland enjoys constructive co-operation and contribution with several international partners, most notably the EU, through institutions such as the Counter Terrorism Coordinator, the European Counter-Terrorism Centre at Europol, the Counter-Terrorism Fusion Centre at Interpol, and the internal and external-facing counter-terrorism working groups.¹² Much of the co-operation is based on the sharing of information and intelligence. For instance, the Garda National Crime and Security Intelligence Service is responsible for encompassing SIS, a sharing system for information and co-ordination of activities between EU member states.¹³ This is in keeping with the commitments to dutifully

¹⁰ Thomas Escritt and Matthieu Protard, 'France, Germany push for tighter EU borders after attacks', *Reuters*, 10 November 2020, <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-europe-security/france-germany-push-for-tighter-eu-borders-after-attacks-idUKKBN27Q24P>.

¹¹ Europol, European Union terrorism situation and trend report 2019 (TE-SAT)', June 2019, <https://www.europol.europa.eu/activities-services/main-reports/terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-2019-te-sat>.

¹² UN, 'Statement by Ireland', <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/ctitf/sites/www.un.org.counterterrorism.ctitf/files/S4-Ireland.pdf>

¹³ An Garda Síochána, 'Garda national crime and security intelligence service', accessed 29 December 2020, <https://www.garda.ie/en/about-us/our-departments/garda-national-crime-security-intelligence-service1/garda-national-crime-security-intelligence-service.html>.



implement national legislation transposing the EU Directive on the processing of Passenger Name Record (PNR) data; or indeed applying the EU's PNR Regulations from 2018, which cover the transfer of full data to another member state or to Europol 'where there are reasonable grounds for believing that transmitting the full data is necessary for the purpose of preventing, investigating or prosecuting terrorist offences or serious crime'.¹⁴

While Ireland has a lot of experience when it comes to domestic terrorism because of the Troubles, this has not necessarily been shared at the international level. Part of the reason for this limited information sharing is a sense of Ireland's CT fight as being different than other (especially jihadi) forms of violent extremism.¹⁵ It seems though that Irish co-operation and co-ordination with the EU will increase after Brexit. Ireland has worked in close co-operation with Britain in order to secure their common borders. This work has included the sharing of biometric and biographic information.

The UK government acknowledges the importance of multilateral organizations, especially the UN and the EU, in their work to combat violent extremism. While there are limits to what Britain has the authority to do internationally in the preventive space, it engages in preventive measures overseas through funding. The UK is also part of RAN,¹⁶ and has played a leading role with regards to Europol, which is tasked with co-ordinating member states' police primarily on cyber-crime and counter-terrorism.¹⁷ In 2017, former Europol chief Rob Wainwright referred to the Prevent strategy – an early, multi-agency intervention programme to protect those at risk from radicalization – as a 'best practice model in Europe' when it comes to handling extremism. As a result, the Home Office communications unit was tasked to lead an EU-wide counter-extremism campaign. Part of this task was the running of a European strategic communications network, which was established to tackle the threat of online radicalization. In this network, the UK was to provide support and consult with other member states, based on their experience with the Prevent programme. This occurred despite critique from the Council of Europe's human rights commissioner, who claimed that Prevent was 'discriminatory against Muslims and potentially undermines free speech, civil liberties and even counter-terrorism efforts'.¹⁸ As in Prevent, the focus of the EU is on the frontline workers – schools, hospitals, healthcare- and social workers, and the prison units.

The Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU) was established by the UK Office of Security and Counter-Terrorism in the Home Office in 2007 as a domestic counter-terrorism communications unit. Its aim was to 'coordinate Government communications about the terrorist threat and our response to it and to facilitate and generate

¹⁴ Irish Statute Book, 'European Union (Passenger Name Record Data) Regulations 2018', S.I No. 177 of 2018, 7–9, <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2018/si/177/made/en/pdf>.

¹⁵ Findings gleaned from interview D.

¹⁶ Simon Hooper, 'EU embraces UK counter-extremism policies despite human rights concerns', *Middle East Eye*, May 2017, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/eu-embraces-uk-counter-extremism-policies-despite-human-rights-concerns>.

¹⁷ Lately, the UK has placed a lot of emphasis on the terrorist use of the internet, working together with other international partners in order to put pressure on tech organisations to take down or stop terrorist content from coming up.

¹⁸ Findings gleaned from interviews B and C.



challenge to terrorist ideology'.¹⁹ After RICU had developed a campaign aimed at preventing people from travelling to Syria, the EU took an interest in the unit. This interest has involved into an international team, based in Brussels and working with the Belgium interior ministry, which works on developing joint programmes with countries overseas and how to link up with third countries.

The main question regarding international co-operation in Britain is how Brexit will affect the UK's counter-terrorism commitments after the expiry of the transition period on 31 December 2020. While the UK certainly has contributed to the information- and intelligence-sharing networks of the EU, the British government still continues to view the United States (US) as its closest ally when it comes to counter-terrorism.²⁰ The UK is deeply rooted in the Five Eyes community, an intelligence alliance consisting of Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the US, in addition to the UK.²¹ The aim of the alliance is, among others, to compare best practice, encourage transparency, and discuss points of interest and concern.²² The historical ties between these countries are tight. However, there is limited information available to the public, making the extensiveness of the alliance hard to determine.

While there is uncertainty regarding how the UK will continue to work with the EU regarding counter-terrorism and the prevention of violent extremism, it would be in the UK's best interests to keep the bonds that have developed over the decades. At the end of the transition period, the UK will have to be prepared to lose a number of internal security measures, such as the European Arrest Warrant, a tool which lets an EU member state force the repatriation of a suspected or convicted individual taking cover in another member state.²³ Additionally, the UK cannot be a full member of Europol, although they can still enjoy close co-operation. Neither will the UK be given access to databases such as the SIS.²⁴ However, depending on which deals the UK will be able to negotiate in the future, they might come to an agreement with the EU and with member states that will ensure that both the UK and the EU will continue to be able to enjoy sharing information.

Lessons learned and best practices

¹⁹ Home Office, 'Prevent strategy', CM 8092, June 2011, 47–48, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97976/prevent-strategy-review.pdf.

²⁰ Home Office, 'CONTEST: The United Kingdom's strategy for countering terrorism', CM 8123, July 2011, 110, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/97995/strategy-contest.pdf.

²¹ The National Counterintelligence and Security Center, 'Five Eyes Intelligence Oversight and Review Council (FIORC)', accessed 28 December 2020, <https://www.dni.gov/index.php/ncsc-how-we-work/217-about/organization/icig-pages/2660-icig-fiorc>.

²² Five Eyes Intelligence Oversight and Review Council, 'Charter of the Five Eyes Intelligence Oversight and Review Council', 2017, 1, <https://www.dni.gov/files/ICIG/Documents/Partnerships/FIORC/Signed%20FIORC%20Charter%20with%20Line.pdf>.

²³ Charlotte Glaser and Kevin Roberts, 'European Union: UK–EU extradition arrangements post Brexit', 31 August 2020, <https://www.mondaq.com/uk/human-rights/980570/ukeu-extradition-arrangements-post-brexite>.

²⁴ Chris Morris, 'Brexit: Will the UK and the EU co-operate on security?', *BBC News*, 20 October 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/54613967>.



The findings presented above lead to the observation that there is still a lack of a common European policy across much of the PVE board mainly because there is no real consensus about the roots of radicalization. The place of religion and the conception of what is the scope of religious freedom (and, by contrast, of freedom of expression) may vary from one European state to the other, but this very diversity could be an opportunity to open spaces for Islamic theology research and teaching institutions, on the model of the existing Christian faculties of theology. Countries where it is legally possible to set up such institutions could open their ranks to students from all EU countries, with courses in different languages. In fact, the EU might be well advised to co-operate with the Faculty of Theology of Sarajevo – an independent faculty (founded by the Austro-Hungarian emperor Franz Joseph) that is not under the control of foreign states and has a tradition of functioning in a secular context – to set up a curriculum for European imams. The French institution of Muslim military chaplaincy might also be a model for other European defence forces who enlist Muslim recruits.

Highly centralized countries like France and Spain have their own strengths in organizing CT and PVE strategies. But they have proven unable to prevent new, high profile attacks. Overall, they have probably also done a lesser job at improving social cohesion. The delegation of tasks and responsibilities to local authorities does not go fast and far in these member states. In Spain, ‘Local Groups to fight against violent radicalisation’ (GL-LCRV) consist of local police delegates, regional police, city hall officials, members of the judiciary, experts from the penitentiary, and representatives from schools and social entities, but all more or less strictly co-ordinated via an inter-ministerial administrative structure.²⁵

Seen from a systemic perspective, the federal model of Germany offers lessons that can be more readily applied to the EU in rolling out CT and PVE strategies. After all, each of the *Länder* (states) have their own governmental structures – their own prime ministers, their own ministries for the interior or for social affairs, their own criminal investigation offices and constitutional protection agencies. There is no formal national strategy that prescribes the uniform implementation of specific policies across all the different parts of the union. Instead, the central authorities offer a common framework of guidelines, which the states should observe when they are designing their own strategies. A permanent exchange of ideas and good practices between the hub and the spokes of government promotes the implementation of a unique prevention architecture that the EU could learn from.

- **Establishing a common anti-terrorism database**

Germany has developed a joint anti-terrorism database, which enables state authorities to assess what terrorism-related information has been passed on to other authorities, thereby allowing a systemised view of the chain of information-sharing.²⁶ Such a framework would be equally

²⁵ Fernando Reinares and Carola García-Calvo, ‘Spain’s shifting approach to Jihadism post-3/11’, in *De-Radicalization in the Mediterranean*, ed., Lorenzo Vidino (Milano: Ledizioni, 2018), 51–52.

²⁶ Philipp Grüll, ‘France and Germany demand closer EU co-operation in fight against terrorism’, *EURACTIV.de*, 4 November 2020, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/justice-home-affairs/news/france-and-germany-demand-closer-eu-cooperation-in-fight-against-terrorism/>.



feasible at the EU level. There must be a means that ensures information sharing among the different national security services in the EU in a reliable and efficient manner. To achieve this goal, the EU needs a rigorous registration process at the border and an efficient common information system, including the development of common databases and greater information exchange. Work in this field is ongoing.

- **Including social work and family support in PVE initiatives**

While prevention work in Germany was initially pushed mainly by police and intelligence authorities, the balance has tipped during the last few years in favour of a multi-agency-approach. Moreover, the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs has begun to provide generous funding for prevention-related projects, including the establishment and funding of many local counselling centres. Family members and acquaintances are encouraged to call a helpline if they have concerns about a person suspected of radicalization, or are in danger of being radicalized. One important lesson from the German experience is that effective measures against radicalization must not solely rely on police and intelligence work, but also need to include a strong social work and family support strategy. In terms of programming of (multi-)annual budgets, the European Commission could reinforce its co-operation with member states to align priorities in tackling the root causes of violent extremism and offer social care and other forms of assistance, for instance to facilitate the re-integration of former foreign fighters from Iraq and Syria, as well as Western Balkan countries.

- **Engaging with religious communities**

To tackle the phenomenon of ‘Islamist separatism’, engaging in a trusting dialogue with Muslim organizations is indispensable for preventing radicalization processes. This requires joint efforts by the political leadership, Islamic religious communities, and civil society. Many people of the German Muslim community play an integral part in different prevention initiatives. An interesting example can be found with YUMA (Young, Muslim, Active), which is a project to empower young Muslims by giving them opportunities to discuss social and political issues, like diversity and migration, in an effort to increase participation of Muslims in society and politics.²⁷ Furthermore, Muslim social workers are active employees of many counselling centres. Social cohesion is quickly becoming a buzz-phrase in the European Commission’s ‘two-way street integration’. It is by learning from member state experiences that the EU can improve its track record in providing transnational support to extrapolate best practices like those established in Germany.

²⁷ Benham T. Said and Hazim Fouad, ‘Countering Islamist radicalisation in Germany: A guide to Germany’s growing prevention infrastructure’, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, The Hague, September 2018, 8, <https://icct.nl/publication/countering-islamist-radicalization-in-germany-a-guide-to-germanys-growing-prevention-infrastructure/>.



- Establishing a platform to share good practices and blending with locally orientated approaches

To co-ordinate the efforts of the individual agencies and to provide a platform through which intelligence can be shared, the Joint Counter-Terrorism Centre (GTAZ) was set up in Germany in 2004. GTAZ is not an autonomous authority but a joint co-operation and communication platform used by 40 internal security agencies. GTAZ's working group 'Prevention and De-radicalisation' serves as a platform for the exchange of best practices. Many ideas that were discussed within the working group have been implemented, which shows the effectiveness of this institution and the authorities participating in it. There would be barely any federal or state funding for prevention and counselling offices without the advice given by the working group. The German experience has also shown that to address the local environment leading to radicalization, one needs to involve local actors who are familiar with this environment. The main challenge is the co-ordination of all these local efforts and projects and to ensure that relevant information and experience is shared within the prevention community and to identify blind spots of prevention work. Similarly, agencies like Europol and the office of the EU counter-terrorism co-ordinator could benefit from the upstream dynamic generated by learning lessons shared through anti-radicalization networks like RAN. Such positive feedback loops could help to improve traditional top-down methods and break siloed approaches.

While there is reason to hope for improvement, one should nevertheless end on a note of caution about the alleged positive impact of these and other (co-ordination) mechanisms. After all, there is still a lack of concrete evidence about what actual measures work and which don't in terms of devising prevention strategies in general.²⁸

²⁸ A recent extensive literature review on P/CVE interventions in Europe showed that, at the time of writing, there was no evidence-based interventions that tackled the prevention of the intention of committing acts of violent extremism. See Isabella Pistone et al., 'A scoping review of interventions for preventing and countering violent extremism: Current status and implications for future research', *Journal of Deradicalization*, no. 19 (2019): 22, <https://journals.sfu.ca/jd/index.php/jd/article/view/213>.



Annex: List of interviews

- Interview A. University of Oslo, 3 November 2020.
- Interview B. University of St. Andrews, 12 November 2020.
- Interview C. UK Office for Security and Counter-Terrorism, 11 December 2020.
- Interview D. University of Cork, 17 December 2020.
- Interview E. Elcano Royal Institute, 25 November 2020.
- Interview F. European Parliament, LIBE committee, 28 October 2020.
- Interview G. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain, DG for International Cooperation against Terrorism, Drugs and Organized Crime, 11 December 2020.
- Interview H. European Commission, FPI.2 – Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP), 10 November 2020.
- Interview I. European External Action Service, Syria desk, 26 October 2020.
- Interview J. European External Action Service, SECDEFPOL 3, 12 October 2020.
- Interview K. European External Action Service, EU Delegation to Bosnia and Herzegovina, 16 October 2020.
- Interview L. European Commission, DG Development Cooperation, B5 - Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism Programmes, 1 October 2020.
- Interview M. European Commission, Foreign Policy Instruments Service, 18 November 2020.
- Interview N. European Commission, DG NEAR, D.5 – Western Balkans Regional Cooperation and Programmes, Sector Rule of Law, Security, Migration and Reconciliation, 20 October 2020.
- Interview O. European Commission, DG HOME, Prevention of Radicalisation, Unit D.3 (Western Balkans), 21 October 2020.
- Interview P. European Commission, DG HOME, Prevention of Radicalisation, Unit D.3 (MENA), 21 October 2020.
- Interview Q. Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ), 1 December 2020.
- Interview R. Researcher/practitioner from Germany, 17 November 2020.

