

# Preventing violent extremism in North Africa and the Sahel

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## **D6.3**

### **Workshop: European Café Debate and presentation of initial findings from North African cases**



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SSSA and AUI organised a public webinar to disseminate and discuss the findings of PREVEX WP6 first deliverable, the Policy Brief on “EU and other stakeholders’ prevention strategy towards violent extremism in the Maghreb and the Sahel”. The webinar was hosted by SSSA and took place on 13 January 2021, from 2 to 4 pm (CET), i.e. just a couple of weeks after the publication of the Policy Brief, so as to exploit the momentum and maximise the impact of the publication. It was held in French, with a view to encouraging the participation of local stakeholders from Maghreb countries, under the title: “Contrecarrer l’Extrémisme Violent au Maghreb: le Rôle de l’UE en Discussion”.

44 participants from several European and North African countries joined the event, including officers of EU institutions and agencies, officers of international and regional organisations (UN, INTERPOL, Arab Maghreb Union), public servants of European Member States, think tank experts (DCAF, Clingendael, Global Initiative Against Transnational Organised Crime), European and North African academics and students, journalists, as well as members of NGOs and CSOs from North African countries.

The webinar was opened by the introductory remarks of Professor **Francesco Strazzari** and Dr **Luca Raineri** (SSSA), who introduced the overall PREVEX research project and contributed to situating this discussion in the broader framework of the project’s time span and cross-case comparability. The session was chaired by **Virginie Collombier**, Part-time Professor at the European University Institute (EUI) of Florence, Scientific Coordinator of the Middle East Directions Programme at the Robert Schuman Center for Advanced Studies, and well-known international expert on violent extremism in North Africa.

The first speaker was **Mostafa El Rezrazi**, Associated Professor in Security at the University Mohammed VI Polytechnique, as well as Director of the *Observatoire Marocain sur l’Extrémisme et la Violence* (Moroccan Observatory on Extremism and Violence). Since the terrorist attacks that killed 45 people in Casablanca in 2003, the Kingdom of Morocco has introduced a number of programs to tackle violent extremism with activities focusing on prevention, rehabilitation and reintegration. The Moroccan approach to P/CVE has largely focused on individual detainees convicted for terrorism-related charges. Their numbers and profiles have considerably changed over time, but the largest majority of them (albeit by no means all of them) include poorly educated people, coming from urban settings (both large cities and small towns), who appear to be affiliated more to small criminal gangs than to well-established terrorist organizations. Moroccan authorities have attempted to separate individuals convicted for terrorist charges from other inmates involved in general crime, so as to foster prevention and avoid recruitment. Since 2017, the Moussalaha program help provide legal assistance, religious education and psychological support with a view to fostering deradicalization and reconciliation while avoiding any shame and guilt feelings amongst detainees, which would hijack their involvement in the rehabilitation phases.

El Rezrazi highlighted the importance of confidentiality and discretion in the implementation of these programs, owing to their sensitive nature. At international level, overt international cooperation programs have proved less effective than informal diplomatic backing and sharing of best practices. At domestic level, the involvement of older and former detainees in the rehabilitation programs may increase their social acceptance, but it can also backfire: bringing ‘converted’ former extremists into the public space may erode their legitimacy vis-à-vis younger detainees as well as the public opinion.



The second speaker was **Djallil Lounnas**, Professor of International relations at Al Akhawayn (AUI) and member of the WP6 PREVEX research consortium. Professor Lounnas introduced the content and main findings of the Policy Brief on “EU and other stakeholders’ prevention strategy towards violent extremism in the Maghreb and the Sahel”, of which he is a co-author. After a brief description of the Brief’s methodology and theoretical framework, Professor Lounnas focused on the national P/CVE strategies of the North African countries studied by PREVEX. Algeria’s approach to P/CVE is rooted in the national reconciliation strategy that put an end to almost a decade of civil war. The strategy included amnesties and reintegration programmes in favour of former extremist fighters who accepted to demobilize. Algerian authorities have proved worried of protecting their domestic sovereignty in this domain, and while no external actor was involved in the design nor implementation of the national reconciliation strategy, Algeria has authorised only small, bilateral cooperation programs to step-up its anti-terrorism law enforcement institutions. Overall, then, the role of the EU in Algeria’s approach to P/CVE has been limited. This contrasts sharply with the cases of Morocco and Tunisia, where the EU has played a key role in supporting and shaping domestic P/CVE strategies: less overtly in Morocco, and more visibly in Tunisia, especially in the security and law enforcement domain. The Libyan case is more ambiguous, since the concept of violent extremism is locally captured in a thick network of manipulation, politicization, and polarization fuelled by local and international dynamics and actors. Struggling to make sense of this cacophony, EU policymakers have been tempted to reduce the complexity of the Libyan security predicament by looking at the country through the lenses of a migration crisis only.

The third speaker was **Michael Ayari**, Tunisia senior analyst of International Crisis Group. The Tunisian case represents an example of thick cooperation not only between the EU and a North African neighbouring country, but also across different EU programs and agencies, leading to an integrated approach to security. Scholars consider Tunisian violent extremism largely as a political and ideological answer to national socio-economic shortcomings faced by many young people in peri-urban settings. The EU, however, appear to consider Tunisian radical milieus as closely connected to many terrorist attacks that hit Europe between 2015 and 2016. Critical observers have noted a major asymmetry in the implementation of P/CVE projects and programmes in Tunisia, including those sponsored by the EU. Tunisian coastal cities have been the most frequently targeted areas, while the relative neglect of central and southern regions may be seen as having reproduced the marginalisation of peripheral areas which amounts to one of the drivers of violent extremism in the country.

Ayari has also contributed to a UNPD-sponsored study on the main factors driving violent extremism in Tunisia. This research noted a considerable change of violent extremism dynamics in Tunisia over the past couple of years, as a result of both international and domestic dynamics. Both domestic terrorist attacks and foreign terrorist flows from/to Tunisia are in decline. This may be partly attributed to the substantial military defeat of Daech, both in Syria and in Libya. The prospect of an Islamic State is no longer seen as viable, and its ideology and propaganda is less and less attractive for the Tunisian youth. At the same time, Tunisian authorities appear to have adopted a more effective strategies, with a careful balance of repression and prevention targeting both the supply side (entrusted to reformed law enforcement units) as well as the demand side (entrusted to the respected Commission Nationale de Lutte Contre le Terrorisme) of violent extremism.



These thought-provoking interventions triggered a lively debate among the audience. The audience engaged the panellists with questions and remarks, and the discussions focused in particular on the following issues: whether and to what extent there is a link between criminal activities and groups and violent extremism in North Africa; the relative weight of domestic trajectories, international assistance and global dynamics in shaping the transnational phenomenon of violent extremism and explaining the different situations experienced by North African countries; how gender issues can be leveraged to tackle violent extremism in a context- and conflict-sensitive way, drawing on the example of the Murshidat in Morocco; how can returnees from Libya and Syria be best integrated in their societies, the extent to which they still represent a threat especially in Tunisia, and what Tunisian authorities have done to address this challenge; the phenomenon of Makdhalism, as a variant of violent extremism that typically eludes EU-sponsored P/CVE measures, and its impact on the security predicament of Libya and Algeria; whether and how violent extremist groups have been able to exploit the social crisis generated by the Covid-19 pandemics in their own propaganda, and to what effect; how violent extremist narratives are changing in the online sphere, and the growing attractiveness of Africa-based violent extremist groups as compared to Middle-Eastern groups.

In conclusion, all the speakers acknowledged that the lack of adequate assessment of P/CVE strategies – focusing on outcomes rather than on outputs – still poses a challenge to an effective and evidence-based approach to violent extremism. They also highlighted the importance of a gender-sensitive approach. While female combatants recruited by violent extremist groups in North Africa remain confined to a few cases, it is true that violent extremists benefit from both gendered social relations prevailing in the area, as well as from the instrumentalization of feminism by social elites and local liberal parties.



## Annex 1: List of Attendees

Name	Affiliation
Adel Ourabah	
Ahmed Mohamed	INTERPOL
Alex S	
Alice Farina	SSSA
Amina Cheballah	Tharwa nfadhma nsoumer (TNFS)
Annachiara La Greca	
Bayloq S. Cédric	French Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Boas Morten	NUPI
Camilla Silvi Marchini	SSSA
Chiara Fogo	University of Trento
Clara Süß	HSFK
Dario Mentone	FRONTEX
Davide Cortese	
Fatima Lahnait	
Gilad Ben-Nun	Universitaet Leipzig, Centre for Area Studies
Guillaume Lacaille	DCAF
Hatem Ghemari	Arab Maghreb Union
Ilaria Briglia	University of Trento
Kari Osland	NUPI
Laura Berlingozzi	SSSA
Luca Raineri	SSSA
Lydia Letsch	SNS
Marta Furlan	University of St Andrews
Marwa Ghith	LDA Tunisia
Massimo Fusato	UNDP
Michelangelo Dondi	SSSA
Naima Korchi	
Rachid Daoudi	Al Akhawayn University
Raouf Farrah	Global Initiative against Transnational Organized Crime
Rezrazi Mostafa	Observatoire Marocain sur l'extrémisme et la violence
Rida Lyammouri	Clingendael Institute
Romy El Haber	SSSA
Samuele Bernardi	SSSA
Silvia Carenzi	SNS
Tarik Hafid	
Thibaut Girault	UNDP Tunisia
Yon Janssen	Euromed rights
Zahra Bel Arache	SSSA
alessia busi	SSSA
chiara loschi	University of Bologna
djallil lounnas	Al Akhawayn University
jean cardona	Délégation UE Maroc
michael shaw	United Nations
virginie collombier	European University Institute





## Annex 2: Invitation






CAFÉ DÉBAT

# Contrecarrer l'Extrémisme Violent au Maghreb : le Rôle de l'UE en Discussion

**13 Janvier 2021**  
**14h00 - 16h00 (UTC +1 Rome, Brussels, Tunis, Rabat)**

Lien d'inscription: <https://bit.ly/38dS3ld>

Suite à l'adoption de la stratégie antiterroriste de l'Union Européenne, la lutte contre l'extrémisme violent est devenue l'un des objectifs clé de l'action externe de l'UE, en particulier dans la zone de son voisinage (élargi). Mais **que fait réellement l'Union Européenne pour contribuer à la prévention et à la lutte contre l'extrémisme violent au Maghreb ?** Cette question est au cœur du projet de recherche Horizon2020 **PREVEX (Preventing Violent Extremism in the Balkans and the Mena : Strengthening Resilience in Enabling Environment)**. Grâce à la collaboration de chercheurs d'Europe et du Maghreb, un nouveau **Policy Brief** fait l'état des stratégies, projets, actions et récits sous-jacents par lesquels l'UE met en œuvre son engagement à prévenir et à lutter contre l'extrémisme violent dans la pratique. S'appuyant sur une vaste collecte de données et des entretiens avec des acteurs clés, le Policy Brief comprend des études approfondies des cas de l'Algérie, de la Libye, du Maroc et de la Tunisie, ainsi que l'analyse des stratégies nationales et des tendances régionales et interrégionales.

Organisé conjointement par l'**Université Al-Akhawayn d'Ifrane (Maroc)** et l'**Ecole des Hautes Etudes Sant'Anna de Pise (Italie)**, ce Café Débat offre une occasion de présenter les résultats du Policy Brief et de stimuler un échange avec des experts de l'extrémisme violent au Maghreb. Le format en ligne, permet de recueillir les voix du terrain et de les porter à l'attention des décideurs politiques, en vue d'aider la communauté internationale, et l'UE en particulier, à développer une approche plus sensible et efficace à la prévention et à la lutte contre l'extrémisme violent. La participation de la société civile, des chercheurs et des étudiants intéressés aux enjeux de l'extrémisme violent au Maghreb est vivement encouragée.

**Intervenants:**

**FRANCESCO STRAZZARI ET LUCA RAINERI (Ecole des Hautes Etudes Sant'Anna)** *Mot de bienvenue et présentation du projet PREVEX*

**DJALLIL LOUNNAS (Université Al-Akhawayn)** *Présentation du Policy Brief 'The EU and other stakeholders' prevention strategy towards violent extremism in the Maghreb'*

**EL MOSTAFA REZRAZI (Observatoire Marocaine sur l'Extrémisme et la Violence)** *L'approche marocaine à la prévention contre l'extrémisme violent*

**MICHAEL AYARI (International Crisis Group)** *Les facteurs de radicalisation au Maghreb : le cas de la Tunisie*

Débat avec les participants modéré par **VIRGINIE COLLOMBIER (European University Institute)**

**LUCA RAINERI** *Synthèse et conclusions*



### Annex 3: Screenshot

The screenshot displays a Cisco Webex meeting interface. At the top, it indicates 'Cisco Webex Meetings' and 'En train de parler : Luca Raineri (Coorganisateur), Francesco Strazzari (Coo...)'. The main area is a grid of 20 video thumbnails. The top row shows 'PREVEX project' (Organisateur, moi), two active video feeds for 'Franc...' and 'Luca...' (both Coorganisateur), and 'Rachid Daoudi Al Akh...'. The second row includes 'Alex S' and 'Alice Farina'. The third row shows 'amine', 'Camilla Silvi Marchini', 'CARDONA Jean DELE...', 'Cédric Bayloqç S.', and 'Chiara Fogo'. The fourth row has 'chiara loschi', 'chiara loschi', 'Clara Süß', 'Guillaume Lacaille', and 'HATEM GHEMARI-U...'. The fifth row features 'Kari Osland', 'Laura Berlingozzi', 'Massimo Fusato', 'michael shaw', and 'Morten'. A 'Rétablir le son' button is visible over the 'michael shaw' thumbnail. The right sidebar shows 'Participants (30)' with a search bar and a list of participants including 'PREVEX project', 'Luca Raineri', 'Francesco Strazzari', 'Alex S', 'Alice Farina', 'amine', 'Camilla Silvi Marchini', 'CARDONA Jean DELEGA...', 'Cédric Bayloqç S.', and 'Chiara Fogo'. Below this is a 'Chat' window with messages from 'CARDONA Jean DELEGATION UE MAROC à Tout le monde' and 'Djalil à Tout le monde'.



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