



# MONITOR RADICALISATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM





EUCPN



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"The prevention of  
radicalisation has  
professionalised  
at record speed,  
but still presents  
serious challenges  
to those who  
work in it."



# ABSTRACT

In 2005, the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy identified the prevention of radicalisation as a pillar of the fight against terrorism. Concrete actions started to take shape when the European Commission established the Radicalisation Awareness Network in 2011. The 2015-2020 European Agenda on Security reiterates that terrorism and radicalisation constitute one of the three priorities for security. All this means that national and European funds for radicalisation research and prevention initiatives have risen significantly, but also that radicalisation research and prevention are still frontier work.

This EUCPN monitor on radicalisation presents an overview of the current state of affairs in the prevention of radicalisation. After discussing the concept of radicalisation and the problems connected to it, it presents the most important European data on the phenomenon as well as recent trends in jihadist, right-wing, left-wing, and nationalist extremism and terrorism. Chapter three briefly introduces various strategies for the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism and goes on to list the most important European and international agencies and organisations in the field of radicalisation prevention. Chapter four canvasses the state of the art in radicalisation research and its consequences for policy and practice. Finally, the challenge posed by risk assessments, essential to many preventive efforts, is discussed. The monitor concludes that it is necessary to continue to invest in an evidence-based approach to the prevention of radicalisation and a cross-fertilisation between practice and research.

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# TABLE OF CONTENT

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<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>6</b>
1.1. European policy context	
1.2. Radicalisation: a problematic concept	
1.3. Radicalisation: a contested concept	
1.4. Radicalisation and the Internet	
<b>2. Data on radicalisation and related phenomena in the EU</b>	<b>12</b>
2.1. Terrorist attacks and casualties	
2.2. Recent trends in extremism and terrorism	
2.2.1. Jihadist extremism	
2.2.2. Right-wing extremism	
2.2.3. Left-wing and anarchist extremism	
2.2.4. Ethno-nationalist and separatist extremism	
2.2.5. Online extremist activity	
2.3. Attitudes towards radicalisation and terrorism	
<b>3. The prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism</b>	<b>22</b>
3.1. Prevention, de-radicalisation, disengagement, and counter-narrative: an introduction	
3.2. Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) and the RAN Collection	
3.3. High-Level Commission Expert Group on Radicalisation (HLCEG-R)	
3.4. European Strategic Communications Network (ESCN)	
3.5. European Forum for Urban Security (Efus)	
3.6. EU Internet Forum and the Database of Hashes	
3.7. National strategies for the prevention and countering of radicalisation	
3.8. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)	
3.9. International Centre for the Prevention of Crime (ICPC)	



3.10. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

3.11. The Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD)

## **4. State of the art in radicalisation research**

**30**

4.1. The evaluation gap

4.2. Recent EU-funded research projects

4.2.1. IMPACT: Innovative Method and Procedure to Assess Counter-violent-radicalisation Techniques in Europe

4.2.2. PRIME: PReventing, Interdicting and Mitigating Extremist events: defending against lone actor extremism

4.2.3. VOX-Pol: virtual centre of excellence for research in violent online political extremism

4.2.4. TERRA I and TERRA II

4.3. Horizon 2020 research and innovation projects to keep an eye on

4.3.1. DARE: Dialogue About Radicalisation and Equality

4.3.2. TRIVALENT: terrorism prevention via radicalisation counter-narrative

4.3.7. PERICLES: Policy Recommendation and Improved Communication tools for Law Enforcement and Security agencies preventing violent radicalisation

4.3.8. PRACTICES: partnership against violent radicalisation in cities

4.3.9. PROTON: modelling the PProcesses leading to Organised crime and TerrOrist Networks

## **5. Predicting rare events: the challenge of risk assessments and screenings**

**38**

## **6. Conclusions**

**40**

References

42

Bibliography

50

# 1. INTRODUCTION

## 1.1. European policy context

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The 2005 EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy defines four priorities. One of them is the prevention of terrorism by interfering in the radicalisation process that may lead to terrorism.<sup>1</sup> In 2011, the European Commission established the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) to support the Member States (MS) in the prevention of radicalisation. In two communications from 2014 and 2016, the European Commission stated that “local actors are usually best placed to prevent and detect radicalisation” and emphasised that the countering of violent radicalisation is essentially a competence of the MSs. However, the Commission also reaffirmed the urgency of the matter and renewed its commitment to support the MSs in their preventive efforts, e.g. by using the Horizon 2020 programme to fund relevant research and innovation projects.<sup>2</sup> In 2017, the Council revised its 2014 guidelines for the strategy for combatting radicalisation to reflect recent shifts and new threats.<sup>3</sup>

The European Agenda on Security identifies three priorities for EU action in the area of security for the years 2015 through 2020.<sup>4</sup> One of these is terrorism and radicalisation; the other two are organised crime and cybercrime. The Agenda, which subsumes also the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters (FTF) under terrorism, provided for a revision of the Council Framework Decision of 13 June 2002 on combatting terrorism<sup>5</sup> on the basis of an impact assessment. Somewhat urged by the March 2016 Brussels and other terrorist

attacks,<sup>6</sup> however, the revision was eventually presented without an impact assessment having been performed.<sup>7</sup>

The resulting 2017 Directive on Combatting Terrorism provides a European legal basis for the criminalisation of terrorist offences. These include terrorist attacks against persons, government properties, public infrastructure (transport, water, power, etc.), transport infrastructure, and threatening to do such an attack. In addition, the Directive stipulates that related activities such as organising or participating in a terrorist group, public provocation and recruitment to terrorism, providing or receiving training for terrorism, travelling or organising travel for terrorist purposes, and terrorist financing are terrorist offence too. The Directive does not address radicalisation directly, but engages MSs to remove online provocations to commit a terrorist offence. Finally, the text directs MSs to ensure proportionate and dissuasive penalties, principally custodial sentences.<sup>8</sup>

## 1.2. Radicalisation: a problematic concept

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The concept of radicalisation is central to terrorism prevention. The principal assumption is that violent extremism and terrorism are the result of an individual or collective radicalisation process that leads to the moral legitimisation of the use of violence for political goals as well as the preparedness to actually turn violent.

The start of this process is—often vaguely—described in terms of the “root causes” of radicalisation: those conditions conducive to radicalisation into violent extremism. These range from socio-economic conditions, over demographic factors and religious or political ideologies, to psychological risk factors. As we shall see below, there is limited empirical support for such root cause theories,<sup>9</sup> but it has been established that psychopathology,<sup>10</sup> socio-economic conditions such as poverty,<sup>11</sup> and ideology<sup>12</sup> cannot be considered root causes in a straightforward fashion. Group solidarity and social contact sometimes appear to be the sociological root cause of radicalisation,<sup>13</sup> but cannot explain lone wolf violent extremists. There is, to put it briefly, little consensus on the causes of radicalisation, other than that none of the factors is a sufficient or necessary condition for radicalisation.<sup>14</sup>

The end of the radicalisation process is—possibly but not necessarily—violent extremism, which in practice and in the literature is often synonymous to terrorism. Violent outcomes of radicalisation are sometimes distinguished from non-violent forms by discerning between cognitive extremism and violent extremism,<sup>15</sup> or cognitive radicalisation and behavioural radicalisation.<sup>16</sup>

The process connecting the root causes and the

possible outcome of violent extremism has been modelled in multiple ways. The two dominant models are the staircase model of F. Moghaddam (see Figure 1) and the pyramid model of C. McCauley and S. Moskalenko (see Figure 2).<sup>17</sup> However, many variants and adaptations exist. Even within such models, it is often unclear what causes the progression from one step or phase to the next. Nevertheless, it is nearly unanimously agreed that the process of radicalisation can stop out of it itself at any stage and does not necessarily lead to violent extremism or terrorism. The conceptual challenges are reflected in the definitions of radicalisation that are being used in science and policy, as well as in the frequent lack of a proper definition.

Academic consensus definitions of radicalisation (and extremism and terrorism) go a long way in precisely delineating the phenomena in question while meaningfully distinguishing them from other but related phenomena.<sup>18</sup> However, they are tediously long and have never found their way to practical policy applications.<sup>19</sup> The European Commission’s definition of radicalisation is the following:

“a complex phenomenon of people embracing radical ideology that could lead to the commitment of terrorist acts.”<sup>20</sup>

The Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN, more on which below) has not given much visibility to its working definition of radicalisation, but one may find it in certain publications as:

"the process through which an individual comes to adopt extremist political, social, or religious ideas and aspirations which then serve to reject diversity, tolerance and freedom of choice, and legitimize breaking the rule of law and using violence towards property and people."<sup>21</sup>

Taken to the extreme, a minimal definition would omit the reference to ideology altogether, as one expert has done when he referred to radicalisation as "what goes on before the bomb goes off."<sup>22</sup> Finally, while radicalism and extremism are arguably distinct phenomena,<sup>23</sup> this distinction is rarely if ever systematically maintained in practical applications.

In this monitor, the following definitions will be employed:

- Radicalisation: the process of social, psychological, and ideological changes leading to extremism and potentially violent extremism.
- Extremism: an ideological position characterised by a polarised world-view, a distrust in state institutions and democratic decision-making processes, and the legitimization of the use of violence. Because radicalism in the strict sense refers to political doctrines that seek sweeping change but do not condone violence, its use as a synonym for extremism is avoided here.
- Violent extremism: the position of an individual who actually has committed one or more acts of violence out of extremist considerations. It is used here as an equivalent to terrorism.

## 1.3. Radicalisation: a contested concept

Until 2001, the term radicalisation was used in academic literature exclusively as a technical term to indicate a shift towards more radical politics. It was rarely, if ever, used in the context of terrorism, and definitely bore no special connection with (jihadist) Islam. In the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, this gradually changed. In pursuit of a conceptual framework that allowed to theorise terrorism in terms of the causes of, and factors conducive to, violent propensities in (individual) perpetrators, scientists, politicians, and the general public alike took resort to the concept of radicalisation. In 2004 there was a significant

increase in the number of occurrences in scientific literature of the term. By this time, it was used nearly exclusively in connection with violent extremism<sup>24</sup>. The first international conference devoted to radicalisation was held in January 2008, when the then-new International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR) convened policymakers, practitioners, and academics in London.<sup>25</sup> To this day, the ICSR remains one of the prime research institutions focusing specifically on radicalisation.

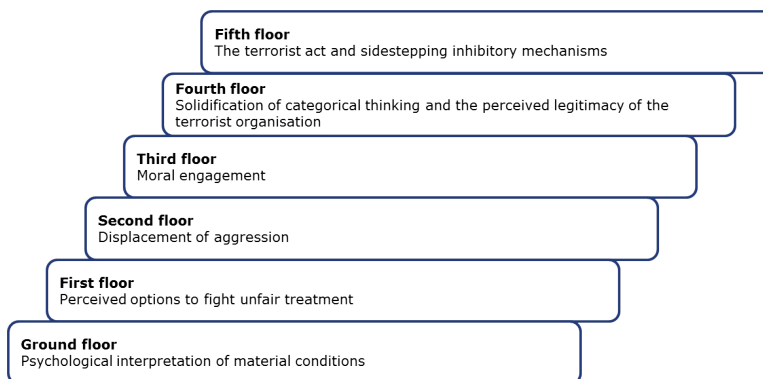


Figure 1. Visual representation of the staircase model of radicalisation (Moghaddam 2005).

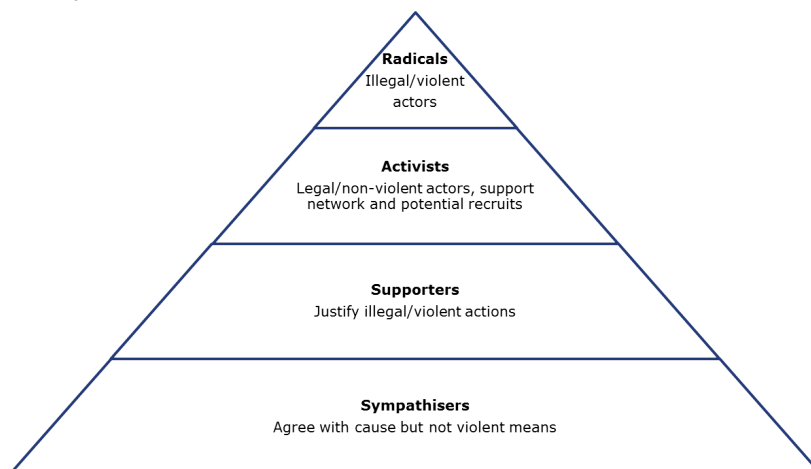


Figure 2. Visual representation of the pyramid model of radicalisation (McCauley & Moskaleiko 2008).

As soon as the idea of radicalisation gained traction in academia and among policymakers and practitioners, it became the subject of

fundamental criticism. It was argued by some that the radicalisation framework inherently and inordinately favours ideology as a causative factor. Against the backdrop of the apparent predominance of jihadist terrorism, this meant that Islam could be framed as a factor conducive to radicalisation and terrorism, critics said.<sup>26</sup> This criticism never waned, and now also targets government funding of radicalisation research, government adoption of radicalisation research, and the pervasive lack of empirical evidence to back the efficacy of preventive measures.

In that regard, it is worth looking at the results of Derek Silva's 2018 review study of radicalisation research.<sup>27</sup> This review is based on 503 academic titles on radicalisation and 155 government funding programmes and counter-radicalisation programmes in the US, the UK, and Canada. The review revealed that 2012 witnessed a shift in radicalisation research, from what the author has categorised as cultural-psychological approaches towards theories that incorporate ideological characteristics. This shift coincides with, and is potentially also influenced by, the increased threat and incidence of home-grown terrorism and FTFs. A second finding is that a vast majority of government-funded research on radicalisation is instrumental to current counter-radicalisation practices and policies, e.g. by identifying ideological or psycho-social indicators of radicalisation and hence uncritically embracing the radicalisation paradigm. Governments, in turn, almost exclusively adopt and cite those same studies that they funded and which support existing policies. They tend to disregard critical research. This, according to Silva, casts a dark shadow on the evidentiary standards of the funded research as well as government claims to evidence-based practices

and policies.

Silva's critique is pressing, but should not be taken as a reason to completely dismiss radicalisation research. From its inception, radicalisation studies as a discipline accepted critical voices challenging and warning against the "theological" approach. During the abovementioned seminal radicalisation conference, the theological approach took the back seat. The paper produced by the work group chaired by Olivier Roy dismissed the idea that jihadist terrorist organisations have Islam at the core of their programmes. Roy argued that such organisations offer a narrative of self-significance rather than a religious or political ideology. De-radicalisation efforts should therefore address this narrative rather than religion.<sup>28</sup> A similar argument was developed from a different perspective by Mustafa Cerić, the then Grand Mufti of Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>29</sup> Other contributions emphasised altogether different parameters, such as economic factors and (geo-)political conflict.

Moreover, the dominant models and visualisations of radicalisation to violent extremism do not attach much weight at all to ideology or, in the case of jihadist terrorism, Islam.<sup>30</sup> In their pyramid model of radicalisation (see Figure 2), McCauley and Moskaleiko see victimisation, political grievance, group ties, and socialisation as potential causes of radicalisation. All in all, they envision the radicalisation process as "a trajectory of action and reaction in which state action often plays a significant role" and see the change in beliefs as the outcome rather than the cause of radicalisation.<sup>31</sup> Moghaddam too, in his 'Staircase to terrorism' (see Figure 1), models perceived injustice, lack of democratic options to fight unfair treatment, and the displacement of aggression as antecedent to, but not necessarily leading to, the moral engagement with a group and its ideology.<sup>32</sup>

Finally, issues of suboptimal research design, lack of empirical evidence, and unproductive funding schemes have been pointed out not only by outsiders, but also by members of the radicalisation studies community. In a 2013 meta-study, Neumann and Kleinmann, for instance, investigated the methodological rigour and empirical basis of a sample of 260 publications in the field of radicalisation studies. Despite the fact that all of the sampled studies claimed to be based on empirical data, they found out that 45% were of poor methodological quality, poor empirical quality, or both. The researchers speculated that an “overreliance on (poorly controlled) government money” in the field was to blame.<sup>33</sup>

## 1.4. Radicalisation and the internet

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In many cases, radicalisation appears to be a process that happens largely online. Social networking sites, online exchange of information or propaganda, and encrypted online communications may all play a role in what amounts to “online radicalisation”. This appears of particular relevance in connection with so-called lone wolf extremists, whose only contact with peers is often online.

As of yet, there is little reason to believe that there is a causal link between the Internet or online means of communication on the one hand and radicalisation on the other. It is safe to say, nonetheless, that the dissemination of information and propaganda through the Internet and the online construction of shared identities can at

least facilitate radicalisation. A 2017 review of 550 studies on the role of the Internet in radicalisation has revealed that, much as is the case with radicalisation studies in general, many have methodological shortcomings and most are merely descriptive, i.e. not based on empirical data. As a result, there is limited evidence regarding people’s motivations to visit extremist sites and engage with extremist groups on social media. Research also provides little insight into the reasons that certain individuals are influenced by online extremist content and led onto a path to violent extremism, while most are not.<sup>34</sup>



## 2. DATA ON RADICALISATION AND RELATED PHENOMENA IN THE EU

### 2.1. Terrorist attacks and casualties

There is virtually no data on radicalisation at the EU or state level. This is accounted for by the absence of a unified definition or concept of radicalisation and the fact that it is not a crime in and of itself. MSs usually refrain from quoting numbers, yet certain national datasets of radicalised persons allow to estimate the scale of the phenomenon. In both France and the UK, approximately 20.000 individuals have been reported as radicalised, which corresponds to approx. 0,030% of the total population in both cases. Germany has reported 11.000 (approx. 0,013%) Salafists “with a shift towards a more violence-prone and terrorist spectrum.”<sup>35</sup>

Europol’s Terrorism Situation and Trend reports (TE-SAT), published annually since 2007, provide reliable, EU-wide data on terrorist attacks and activities.

The number of foiled, failed, or completed terrorist attacks shows a slight falling trend, but annual data fluctuates considerably (see Figure 3). From 2015 onwards, there is a significant increase

in both the number and share of jihadist terrorist attacks compared to the years before. 2015 also saw a very steep increase in the number of fatalities as a result of terrorist attacks (from 4 in 2014 to 151 in 2015; see Figure 4). The number of fatalities remained at that level in 2016 and, although it fell by more than half, was still high in 2017. This high death toll in the period 2015–2017 is exclusively accounted for by jihadist terrorist attacks; the number of fatalities as a result of other types of terrorism has remained stable.<sup>36</sup>

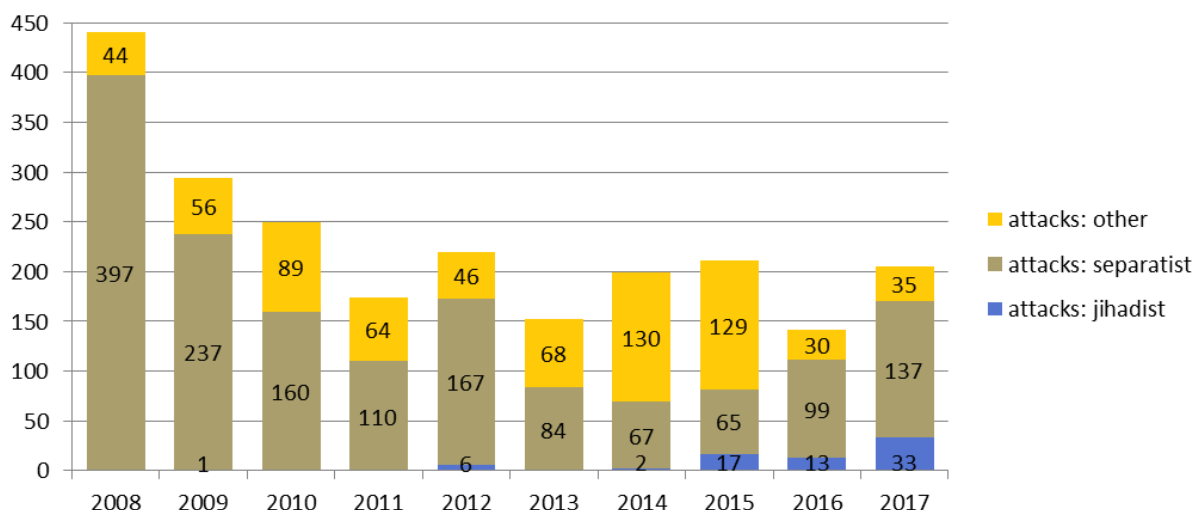


Figure 3. Number of failed, foiled, and completed jihadist, separatist and other terrorist attacks in the EU, per year. Note that for the years 2008–2015, UK data did not specify attack type. Data: Europol, TE-SAT 2009–2018.

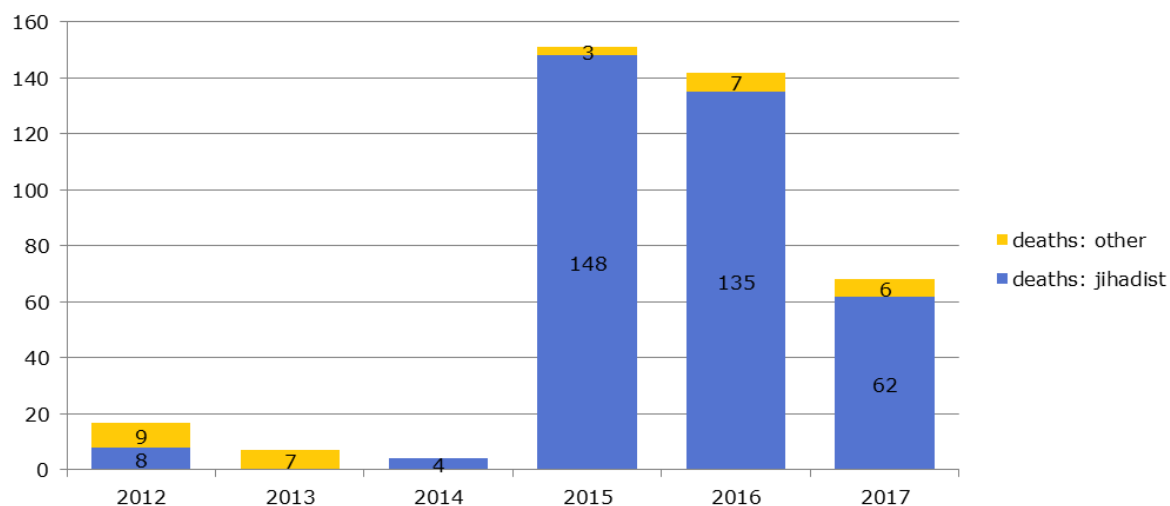


Figure 4. Number of fatalities caused by jihadist and other terrorist attacks in the EU, per year. Data: Europol, TE-SAT 2013-2018.

The distribution of terrorist attacks of all types across Europe is highly uneven. The vast majority were reported by Western European countries. In the past five years, the following eleven countries reported failed, foiled, or completed terrorist attacks: Belgium, Germany, Denmark, Greece, Spain, Finland, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, and the UK (see Table 1).

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
<b>BE</b>	0	1	0	4	2
<b>DE</b>	0	0	0	5	2
<b>DK</b>	0	0	2	0	0
<b>EL</b>	14	7	4	6	8
<b>ES</b>	33	18	25	10	16
<b>FI</b>	0	0	0	0	1
<b>FR</b>	63	52	73	23	54
<b>IT</b>	7	12	4	17	14
<b>NL</b>	0	0	0	1	0
<b>SE</b>	0	0	0	0	1
<b>UK</b>	35	109	103	76	107
<b>EU</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>211</b>	<b>142</b>	<b>205</b>

Table 1. Number of failed, foiled, and completed terrorist attacks per MS (2013-2017). Data: Europol, TE-SAT 2014-2018.

During the same period, jihadist attacks were reported by all these countries except Greece, which reported left-wing attacks exclusively. Arrests and convictions for terrorist offences are somewhat more widely distributed but are still chiefly reported by Western European MSs. Both the number of arrests and the number of verdicts for terrorist offences has slowly risen in recent years (see Table 2). The percentage that results in a conviction fluctuates and varies across countries, but hovers around 90% for the EU. In recent years, acts related to jihadist terrorism account for the lion's share of arrests and convictions.

	Arrests	Pct. jihadist	Verdicts	Pct. jihadist	Pct. convictions
<b>2015</b>	1077	63,79%	527	37,57%	79,13%
<b>2016</b>	1002	71,66%	587	60,99%	90,80%
<b>2017</b>	1219	57,83%	569	61,86%	88,58%

Table 2. Number of arrests and completed court cases (verdicts) for terrorist offences in the EU (2015-2017). Data: Europol, TE-SAT 2016-2018; Eurojust.

## 2.2 Recent trends in extremism and terrorism

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Below is an overview of current trends in extremism and terrorism in Europe, based on the qualitative and quantitative data provided by the EU MSs and collected by Europol.<sup>37</sup> The trends are dealt with separately for each type of terrorism, because each of them evolves differently. The types are jihadist, right-wing, left-wing, and separatist extremism. Single-issue terrorist attacks, for instance by animal rights or environmentalist extremists, have not been reported in the last three years and were very rare even before that, so they are not discussed here. There is a separate section on online extremist activity.

### 2.2.1 Jihadist extremism

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Jihadist extremism is characterized by the legitimization of an armed struggle (jihad) to establish an Islamic world order or state based on Sharia law. Jihadist extremists reject other forms of state (among which democracy) and non-believers (including Muslims of other sects or tendencies). Of all types of terrorism, jihadist terrorism constituted the main concern for EU MSs over the past three years. The impact on the general public is relatively high. Attacks committed by perpetrators who are somehow affiliated or sympathetic to jihadist groups such as Islamic

State (IS, also called Daesh) generate the highest death toll. Attacks are directed mostly at urban, soft targets (instead of, for instance, critical infrastructure or the military), often symbols of Western lifestyle, and aim at intimidating the public and inviting a lot of media attention.

Most jihadist terrorist cells are domestic, but perpetrators often have some connection to foreign or international jihadist terrorist organisations (including IS and Al-Qaeda subgroups). Some of the perpetrators have travelled to and returned from conflict areas where such organisations are active (Syria and Iraq, but also Yemen, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Chechnya, Libya, Mali, and Somalia), some have tried but failed to travel, others have exposed themselves to online propaganda produced by such organizations.

More and more jihadist extremists are home-grown lone actors, having radicalised, often within a short time span, in their country of residence and without having travelled to join a terrorist group abroad. A substantial share had criminal pasts. They typically act alone or—more often—in small groups, and while they may be inspired by or identify with terrorist groups, they often do not have direct links with these groups. Yet most have contacts who are aware of their plans and tolerate or support them. Germany has signalled that radicalised individuals who have been prevented from travelling abroad or who otherwise failed to travel to Syria, Iraq, or

elsewhere, may constitute a particular threat.

The threat of jihadist radicalisation, extremism, and terrorism is unequally distributed across the European Union, with Western European MSs accounting for most of the cases and Eastern European MSs being mostly unaffected by it. Members of the anti-IS coalition in the EU are particularly vulnerable to IS-linked activity and threats, which in the period 2015-2017 accounted for most of the activity in the category of jihadist terrorism. France, the UK, Belgium, and Germany endured the most attacks and suffered the biggest losses in terms of casualties; they also registered the highest numbers of (predominantly home-grown) jihadist terrorist attacks, arrests, and FTFs.


EU estimates hold that by 2015 more than 5.000 jihadist foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) had left the EU for Syria and Iraq to join IS, including many women and minors. The four MSs mentioned above account for three quarters of that number. There is likely to be a 'dark number', however, and in November 2016 Turkey had approximately 7.670 individuals from EU MSs on its suspected FTF no-entry list. At any rate, the number has not increased significantly since 2015, with all MSs now reporting that the flow of FTFs has nearly stopped. The number of currently active FTFs is estimated to be 2.500 at the most; about 1.000 have died and up from 1.500 have returned.

Like the number of FTFs, the number of FTF returnees has diminished significantly. Travelling to and from Iraq and Syria has, due the military situation and concerted action of the EU and Turkey, become difficult. Thus, in 2017 Belgium reported five returnees, the Netherlands four, and Switzerland three. There is, nonetheless, a threat emanating from these returnees. Early returnees often returned because they were disappointed by the 'caliphate'. Later returnees have often

stayed longer, have more experience in operating in a terrorist organisation, and may have acquired the skills necessary to launch terrorist attacks. They are less likely to be disappointed in the organisation and may play a role in the recruitment and radicalisation of others, also in prison. Moreover, IS has claimed it trains children of FTFs to become fighters who may threaten EU MSs. All in all, however, the number of new returnees is small, and some MSs, such as Belgium, estimate the terrorist threat of returnees to be lower than that of home-grown actors.

Whereas Europol reported in 2016 that at that time, there was no evidence that terrorist travellers systematically use migration flows to enter the EU, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Italy, and Austria have since reported isolated cases. It was also the case in connection with the November 2015 Paris and March 2016 Brussels attacks. It is estimated that discontent refugees, especially Sunni Muslim refugees, run an elevated risk of becoming vulnerable to radicalisation.

Jihadist ideology offers simplistic narratives for fundamental, complex grievances. IS especially actively uses propaganda to recruit both men and women, specifically targeting vulnerable people. Now that travelling to Syria and Iraq has become more difficult and less attractive, IS has changed its recruitment tactics and now states that performing attacks in the West is preferred to joining IS in the Middle East. It uses videos and images that appeal to young people, e.g. videos that mimic the visual style of computer games. Aside from propaganda in the strict sense, there are ongoing social media contacts between combatants abroad and like-minded individuals in Europe. One of the latest trends is an increased female-to-female recruitment, especially by IS. Female IS sympathisers reach out, through the Internet, to other women in order to mentor and



mobilise them. Besides IS, Al-Qaeda, especially its AQAP (Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula) branch, remains a factor to be considered. Both Al-Qaeda and IS disseminate operational instructions for lone-actor attacks alongside their ideological propaganda.

### 2.2.2. Right-wing extremism

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Right-wing extremism is based on an ideology characterized by a sympathy for national socialism and a belief in white supremacism. Increasingly, the fear of a perceived Islamisation and hatred of Muslims forms a core part of their agenda. This finds expression in Islamophobia or the use of Nazi imagery. Right-wing extremists usually reject state migration and asylum policy, and may target groups with different ethnic, racial, or religious backgrounds. They have also targeted anarchist groups. One aspect particular to right-wing extremism is the organisation of paramilitary or combat training on European soil in preparation of a so-called race war.

There is an increasing threat emanating from right-wing extremism which affects every EU MS, even though in the last three years attacks have only been reported in France, Spain, Italy, Greece, and the Netherlands. In terms of casualties, arrests, and convictions, right-wing extremism remains a marginal phenomenon compared to jihadist extremism. In 2017, for instance, the number of individuals arrested for offences


related to right-wing terrorism nearly doubled, but still reached only 20. It has also been pointed out, however, that underreporting and low media coverage may lead to an underestimation of the phenomenon.

Right-wing extremists are mostly organised in small, local groups. More and more, however, they form international identity movements. This shift towards an international movement centres primarily on Islamophobia. This happens both online and offline. Propaganda, ideas, and imagery are routinely shared on social media, while many groups also foster more profound contacts with peer groups. There are loose ties with (democratic) right-wing populist parties which share part of their agenda.

### 2.2.3. Left-wing and anarchist extremism

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Left-wing extremism is based on an ideology comprised of Marxist, Leninist, and/or anarchist elements. It is characterized by a generalised aversion to the state and state institutions and a strong enmity to right-wing political parties, which appears to be a substantial force of mobilisation. Their rhetoric also encompasses a distrust in the criminal justice system and solidarity with migrants. A number of attacks are committed out of solidarity with imprisoned members of anarchist groups. Left-wing extremists usually target government property, officials, police officers, and critical infrastructure.



In recent years, left-wing terrorist attacks have occurred almost exclusively in Greece, Italy, and Spain. Both France and Germany have reported left-wing attacks committed by perpetrators active in Greece (through the use of parcel bombs). Without exception, perpetrators belong to local anarchist groups or loose collectives. While they claim to be united in international organisations, operational cooperation has not been observed. Online activity consists mostly of expressions of solidarity or support for like-minded groups.

In terms of the number of attacks, left-wing terrorism rivals jihadist terrorism, but they cause much less casualties. In 2016 and 2017, the number of attacks was up from the two years before (27 and 24 vs 13), but the number of arrests has markedly decreased (from 67 in 2015 to 36 in 2017).

## 2.2.4. Ethno-nationalist and separatist extremism

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Ethno-nationalist extremism is based on a separatist agenda. It targets mostly police and government infrastructure. Almost all incidents in Europe can be traced to Dissident Republican groups in Northern Ireland, Basque separatists in Spain, and the Kurdish nationalist PKK (Kurdish Workers' Party). Since a ceasefire was signed in 2011, ETA (a Basque nationalist organisation) has not perpetrated any attacks, but some attacks were committed by dissident groups. The PKK uses Europe as a base for logistics and recruitment (reported by France, Austria, Romania, and Belgium), but also targets Turkish consulates, institutions, and associations in Europe. This

accounts for separatist attacks reported by France, Belgium, and Germany.

While the impact of ethno-nationalist extremism is localised and limited in terms of casualties, separatist attacks account for about two thirds of all completed, failed, foiled terrorist attacks in Europe (69,72% in 2016, 66,83% in 2017).

## 2.2.5. Online extremist activity

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Online extremist and terrorist activity can be found mostly on the surface web, much less so on the dark net. Over 150 social media platforms, in addition to file sharing sites and bot services, are being abused by terrorists and extremists for extremist propaganda purposes (all types of terrorism).

From 2015 onwards, mainstream platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube have taken measures to take down extremist content. This has contributed to the decrease of public extremist content. However, such efforts are limited, covering only particular groups or languages. Detection rates grew throughout 2016 for English IS-related content, but Arabic IS content has remained present on certain platforms long after English content had been removed; other types of extremism are even less affected. IS, which despite severe military losses has succeeded in keeping its centralised media apparatus operational, has therefore set up coordinated campaigns to flood platforms like Twitter in moderately successful attempts to escape censorship. Nonetheless, the net result is a decline of the use of mainstream platforms for extremist purposes, including hate speech.



More and more, extremists and terrorists prefer smaller platforms or private and/or encrypted means of online communication. Gab, for instance, is a Twitter alternative that champions free speech without censorship. It is mostly associated with right-wing content and has become a favourite of right-wing extremists.<sup>38</sup> IS sympathisers, on the other hand, have mostly taken resort to Telegram, an encrypted messaging service that has now replaced Facebook and Twitter as the group's preferred networking and communication tool. However, such channels of communication are less suitable for outreach to individuals not yet initiated. Because they cannot be (fully) searched or indexed, they have limited recruitment potential in comparison to mainstream platforms.

### 2.3. Attitudes towards radicalisation and terrorism

The 2016 Special Eurobarometer on terrorism and radicalisation provides a useful insight in the European public opinion on the terrorism threat and the fight against terrorism and radicalisation.<sup>39</sup>

In 2016, 40% of all Europeans (weighted average) estimated the risk of a terrorist attack to be high (8 to 10 on a scale of 1 to 10). Another 47% believed there was a medium risk (4-7 on a scale of 1-10; see Figure 5). The risk was considered the highest in France (64% responded 8 to 10 on a 1-10 scale), the UK (55%), and Belgium (50%). One might suspect that this public opinion is the result

of the significant rise in the number of attacks and casualties in 2015 and the first three months of 2016 (data was collected in April 2016). However, also in the years before, when both the number of attacks and the number of casualties reached record lows, Europeans considered terrorism a sizable threat to security. In 2011, 25% of Europeans (EU27) considered terrorism one of the most important challenges to their national security and 33% considered it a major threat to European security, in both cases second only to economic and financial crisis. At that time, religious extremism was also considered a major threat to national security by 6% and to European security by 6% as well.<sup>40</sup>

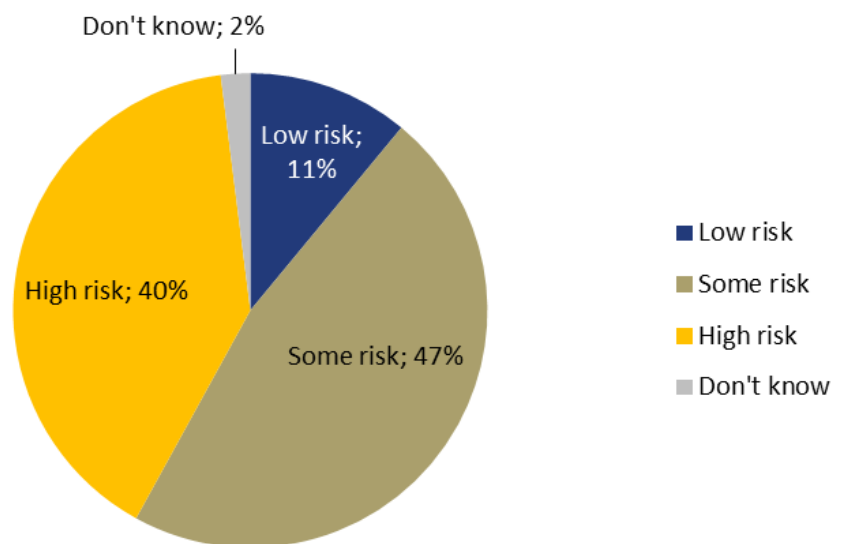


Figure 5. Risk level that a terrorist attack happens in your country, according to EU citizens (data: Special Eurobarometer 2016).

The 2016 survey also indicated that 69% of all Europeans (weighted average) thought the EU acted insufficiently with regard to the fight against terrorism, up from 60% in 2011; 82% fosters the expectation that the EU takes more action. Asked



to select up to four (out of 13) priorities for the EU with respect to the fight against terrorism, 41% of the respondents picked “the fight against the roots of terrorism and radicalisation”. With 42%, only “the fight against the financing of terrorist groups” was considered a higher priority. When subsequently asked to select up to four (out of 12) priorities with specific regard to the fight against radicalisation, 39% identified “the fight against social exclusion and poverty”, followed by “the fight against radical websites and the removal of illegal content from the Internet and online social networks” (35%), “communication campaigns to raise awareness amongst the youngest and the most vulnerable about the risks of radicalisation” (32%), and “promoting dialogues between different cultures and religions” (31%) (see Figure 6).

Finally, most Europeans perceive a supranational level to be the most efficient to combat terrorism, with 38% preferring a global approach and 23% preferring an EU level approach. Another 10% answered “all together” (also including the local and national levels).

In 2017, a Eurobarometer survey polled the EU citizens’ attitudes towards internal European security and challenges to security. The survey did not cover radicalisation and extremism, but clearly shows that terrorism is a major concern.<sup>41</sup>

Asked to rate the importance of specific challenges to European security, 95% of EU citizens rated terrorism important or very important, up from 91% in 2011 and 92% in 2015. National results are also consistently high (86% to 99%). Terrorism also leaves organised crime, natural and man-made disasters, cybercrime, and EU external borders behind.

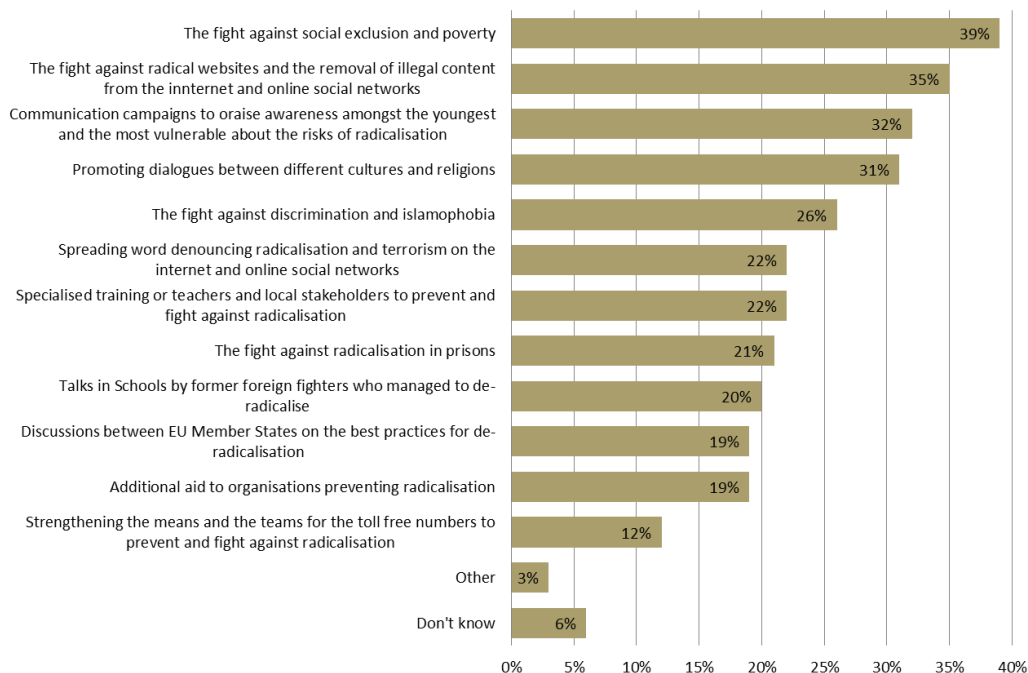


Figure 6. Priorities in the battle against radicalisation according to EU citizens, in percentage of respondents that selected the answer as one of four answers max. (source: special Eurobarometer 2016).

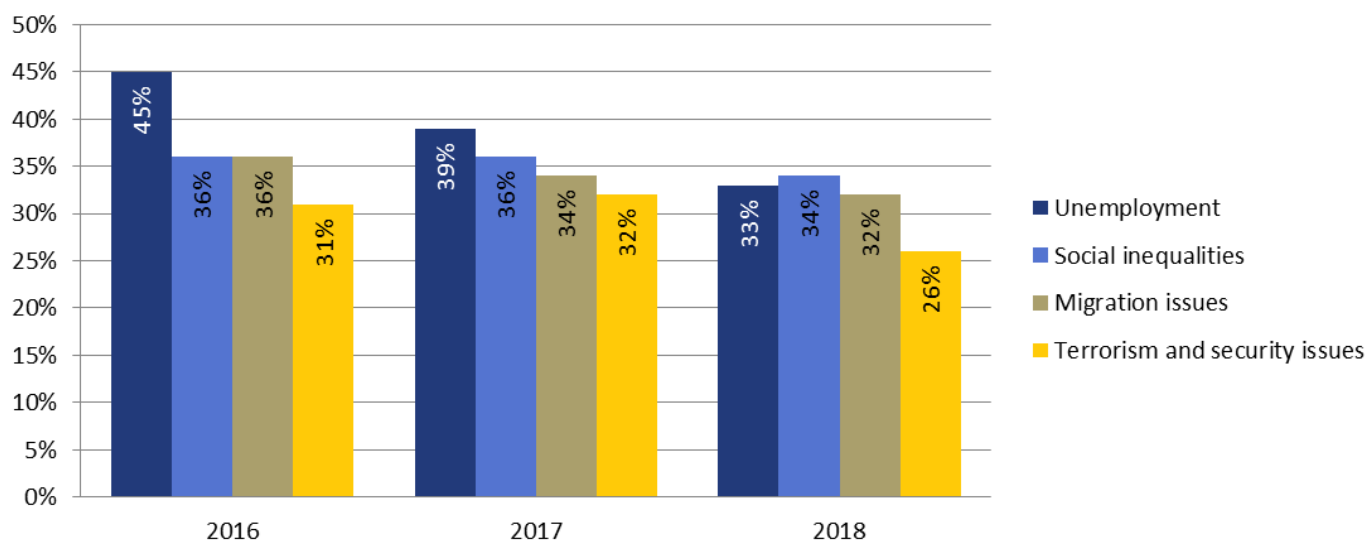


Figure 7. Main challenges facing the EU according to EU citizens (max. 3 out of 10)  
(data: Eurobarometer 89; Special Eurobarometer 451, 467)

The results vary only marginally across socio-demographic groups (age, education, and social professional category). 63% of European citizens agree that police and law enforcement authorities in their country are doing enough to fight terrorism, and 65% are of the opinion that their national authorities cooperate adequately. The majority holds that national authorities should share information with other countries to fight crime and terrorism; this ought to be done in every case according to 69%, and on a case by case basis according to another 29%.

Although not pertaining to radicalisation and terrorism per se, Eurobarometers regarding the future of Europe contain some recent data on the public opinion on terrorism and the fight against terrorism, but none on radicalisation.<sup>42</sup>

The findings are twofold. First, Europeans consider terrorism and security issues the fourth most important challenge to the EU out of ten. Asked which three challenges were the most important ones from a list of ten, more respondents answered unemployment, social inequalities and migration issues than terrorism in 2016, 2017, and 2018 (see Figure 7).

The percentage that responds terrorism and security issues is furthermore slowly decreasing (31% in 2016; 32% in 2017; 26% in 2018). Secondly, more than 80% of Europeans are of the opinion that in the fight against terrorism, more decision-making is needed on the European level; only 12% (2018) to 15% (2016) think less is needed (see Figure 8).

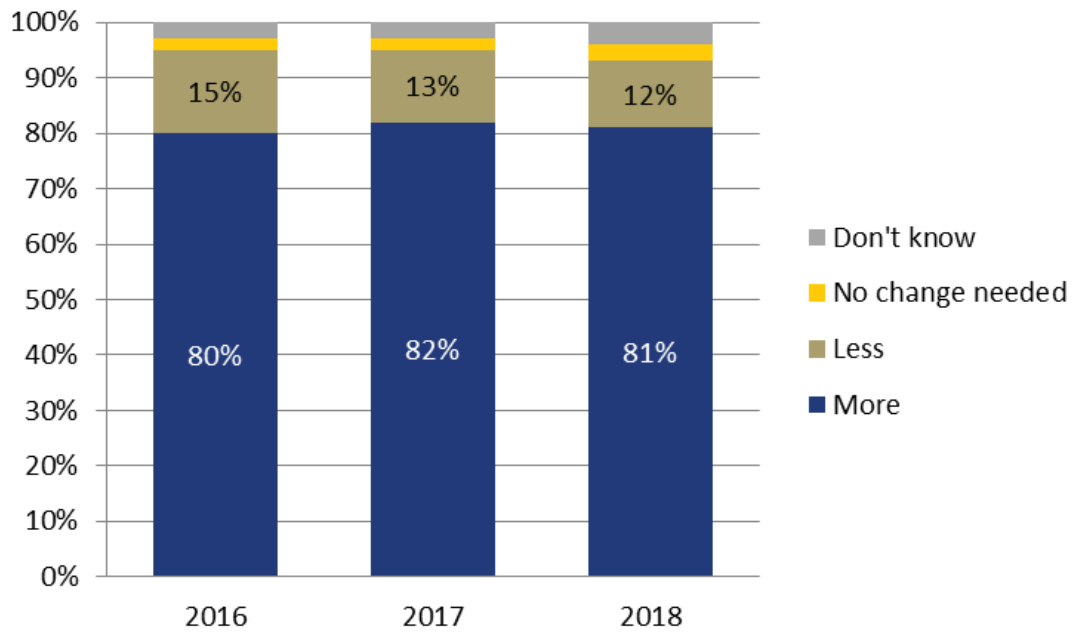


Figure 8. Level of decision-making needed on the EU level with regard to the fight against terrorism, according to European citizens (data: Eurobarometer 89; Special Eurobarometer 451, 467)

### 3. THE PREVENTION OF RADICALISATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM

#### 3.1. Prevention, de-radicalisation, disengagement, and counter-narrative: an introduction

Preventing or countering radicalisation is not an easy enterprise. Because of the multifaceted nature and variability of radicalisation processes, the prevention of it requires a well-designed and adaptable multi-agency approach.<sup>43</sup> Prevention is further challenged by the difficulty of predicting rare events and the lack of evidence-based impact evaluations of prevention programmes (more on which below).

There are many ways to categorise strategies to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism; one convenient categorisation is according to target group. The primary prevention of radicalisation targets large groups or even entire populations. It includes approaches such as awareness raising, stimulating intercultural abilities, and citizenship training. The secondary prevention of radicalisation requires that smaller groups or individuals at risk of radicalising or committing acts of extremist violence are identified first and subsequently targeted. It includes approaches such as resilience training, practices aiming at mitigating polarisation, community policing approaches to radicalisation, and outreach work. Tertiary prevention aims at preventing recidivism, and therefore targets individuals who have already radicalised and committed extremist violence. Usually, members of violent extremist groups who legitimise the use of violence but have not yet committed violent acts themselves, are also considered subjects of tertiary prevention. It

mostly concerns individuals in the prison or probation system or people who voluntarily apply for a crime prevention programme.

Three approaches to crime prevention are specific to the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism: de-radicalisation, disengagement, and counter-narrative. While the first two target known radicalised people, often on a voluntary basis and within the prison and probation system, the third could also constitute primary or secondary prevention.

The goal of de-radicalisation is to prevent that radicalised individuals (again) commit violence by reversing the radicalisation process, so that they denounce the ideology that legitimises the use of violence and return to society. The strategic component of de-radicalisation aims at breaking the cycle of violence caused by terrorism and harsh state reactions to it.<sup>44</sup> In the case of physical disengagement, radicalised individuals, often members of extremist or terrorist organisations are offered help in leaving this group and returning to society, without them (necessarily) denouncing the extremist ideology that legitimises the use of violence. The prime example is the Exit programme for right-wing extremists. Pioneered by Tore Bjørgo in Norway in 1996-7, the programme was later adopted by Sweden and Germany, and similar programmes were developed in other European countries. One of the key aspects of the

Exit approach is the facilitation of disengagement without substantially discussing the ideology itself.<sup>45</sup>

Counter-narrative or counter-messaging is a particular strategy which has drawn a lot of attention in recent years. It consists of the creation and dissemination, in practice often online, of a narrative that challenges or offers an alternative to the extremist narrative. It may be directed at individuals vulnerable to extremist narratives (secondary prevention) or individuals already imbued with extremist narratives (tertiary prevention). Government strategic communication, i.e. presenting policy in a positive way to all citizens (primary prevention), is sometimes considered part of it as well.<sup>46</sup>

Many other names are in use for the prevention of radicalisation. These include countering radicalisation, countering violent extremism (CVE), and preventing violent extremism (PVE). Such terms could be considered inaccurate because they are almost always applied to the prevention of radicalisation rather than the “countering” of the resulting acts of extremist violence itself.

In the EU, the MSs are responsible for prevention and de-radicalisation strategies. The expanding EU role consists of coordinating, supporting, and promoting such strategies and actions and relaying information about them. Below is an overview of the most important European, national, and international agencies, organisations, and projects engaged in the prevention of radicalisation, de-radicalisation, disengagement, and counter-narrative.

## 3.2. Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) and the RAN Collection

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RAN is a European information exchange network connecting first-line practitioners—youth and social workers, community police officers, teachers, prison guards, etc.—who may encounter radicalised persons or persons at risk of radicalisation. It was founded in 2011 and is being funded by the Internal Security Fund of the European Commission. It operates within the policy framework of the European Commission's Communication on Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism and the European Agenda on Security.<sup>47</sup>

The RAN Centre of Excellence (CoE; established 2015) collects, consolidates, and disseminates information regarding the prevention of radicalisation. It supports the European Commission and advises the latter regarding the European research agenda. The network itself is structured around nine working groups:

- Communication and narratives (RAN C&N);
- Education (RAN EDU);
- Exit (RAN EXIT);
- Youth, families and communities (RAN YF&C);
- Local Authorities (RAN LOCAL);
- Prison and probation (RAN P&P);
- Police and law enforcement (RAN POL);
- Remembrance of victims of terrorism (RAN RVT);
- Health and social care (RAN H&SC).

In each working group, practices and experiences are exchanged among practitioners and experts.

RAN's output and deliverables consist of the following. The RAN Collection is a continuously updated collection of promising practices regarding the prevention and countering of radicalisation. It is designed to be a tool and source of inspiration for practitioners and policymakers. It currently covers eight approaches, presenting the methodology, lessons learned, and 178 selected practices. The eight approaches are:

- community engagement and empowerment;
- delivering counter or alternative narratives;
- educating young people;
- exit strategies;
- family support;
- multi-agency approach;
- prison and probation interventions;
- training for first-line practitioners.<sup>48</sup>

RAN also publishes a series of policy and issue papers targeting policymakers and national authorities.<sup>49</sup> In 2017, the Network published a manual on responses to FTF returnees and their families.<sup>50</sup> Additionally, RAN organises the annual High Level Conference attended by high-level policymakers, practitioners and experts, and, upon request, offers training and counselling to MSs. Finally, RAN bridges policy and practice with science and the academic world by bringing in academic experts, identifying research gaps,<sup>51</sup> and helping to shape the EU research agenda.<sup>52</sup>

### 3.3. High-Level Commission Expert Group on Radicalisation (HLCEG-R)

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In July 2017, the Commission decided to set up a High-Level Commission Expert Group on Radicalisation (HLCEG-R), consisting of competent authorities of the MSs, Europol, Eurojust, Cefpol, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the European External Action Service (EEAS), RAN, and the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator.<sup>53</sup> The HLCEG-R, which has been operational for the duration of one year, was tasked with offering advice on the improvement of cooperation among all stakeholders and the development of policies for the prevention of radicalisation. In its final report, the HLCEG-R has identified a number of priorities and voiced a series of specific recommendations.<sup>54</sup>

These recommendations to the Commission cover radicalisation in prisons, online propaganda and communications, ideology and polarisation, cooperation at the local level, education and social inclusion, and children returning from conflict zones and raised in a radicalised environment. While tailored to the Commission, the document's usefulness extends to other policy levels as well, since it identifies and addresses current challenges in the prevention of radicalisation.

To enhance MS involvement and cooperation, the HLCEG-R recommended the establishment of an EU Cooperation Mechanism, an advice the Commission intends to follow up with the creation of a steering board, a coordination and support structure, and a network of national prevention policy makers.<sup>55</sup>



### 3.4. European Strategic Communications Network (ESCN)

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The European Strategic Communications Network (ESCN), a Belgian-led project, started operations in October 2016. It is built on the past work of the Syria Strategic Communication Advisory Team (SSCAT) project.<sup>56</sup> Upon request, it offers specialised consultancy to assist MSs in developing strategic communication strategies by organising and facilitating a network to share best practice on the use of strategic communications in countering terrorism and violent extremism. It is co-financed by the Internal Security Fund-Police (ISF-Police) action grant. The ESCN also identifies credible partners for interventions and has explored the role of traditional media in countering violent extremist narratives. The ESCN is a members-only platform that does not operate in the public sphere.

### 3.5. European Forum for Urban Security (Efus)

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Efus is a European network of nearly 250 local and regional authorities focusing on urban security. It was founded in 1987 under the auspices of the Council of Europe. It has a strong commitment to prevention, human rights, and the co-production of security. The organisation's role in the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism stems from the fact that many such preventive actions materialise at the local level. Efus, which has partnered with RAN, supports local authorities

by helping them overcome challenges and liaising between them. It has led several projects co-funded by the EU regarding the prevention of radicalisation.<sup>57</sup>

#### LIAISE 1 and LIAISE 2: Local institutions against violent extremism

The two LIAISE projects, from 2014 to 2016 and 2016 to 2018 respectively, centred on determining the role of local communities in preventing violent radicalisation, designing training tools for local stakeholders, implementing pilot projects, and formulating policy and methodological recommendations. Ten cities from six countries participated in LIAISE 1, whereas LIAISE 2 connected 18 cities in 10 countries.

LIAISE 1 consisted of several trainings offered to the project's local partners. A guidebook on the various axes of local radicalisation prevention strategies was developed for the sake of these trainings. LIAISE 2 added a methodological guide on developing local strategies for the prevention of radicalisation and four thematic papers. All publications as well as a series of introductory videos are available online.<sup>58</sup>

The LIAISE projects have also resulted in a number of policy recommendations from local authorities regarding the prevention of radicalisation, included in the Efus Manifesto.<sup>59</sup> They recommend that local prevention initiatives be based on an evidence-based, local diagnosis and embedded in a global local security policy. Local authorities should be involved in the development and implementation of national policies, and the many European initiatives should, according to Efus, be better coordinated to make more efficient use of resources and information.

#### Local Voices

Local Voices is dedicated to the local dimension of strategic communications and counter-narrative



campaigns. Its rationale is that counter-narratives are most efficient when delivered by messengers who get through to the target audience. Hence, local authorities are suited best to deliver and disseminate alternative narratives tailored to local needs. However, due to issues of scale, local authorities are less likely to invest in the digital infrastructure and technology to effectively do so. Therefore, Local Voices supports eight local authorities in creating online campaigns from January 2017 until December 2018. On the basis of this experience Local Voices will produce a series of recommendations on the implementation of local strategic communications.<sup>60</sup>

#### PREPARE: Preventing radicalisation through probation and release

The growing concern about radicalisation and extremism in prisons has caused an increasing interest in the role of prisons in de-radicalisation and disengagement. An essential part of those processes, however, is reintegration into society, for instance through probation. This necessitates a localised, multi-agency approach; in some countries, such as Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands, the central role of local authorities in the disengagement of convicts has already been acknowledged. The aim of PREPARE, which runs from October 2017 to October 2019, is to develop programmes in support of local authorities confronted with this challenge.

### 3.6. EU Internet Forum and the Database of Hashes

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The EU Internet Forum, launched by the European Commission in 2015, brings together governments,

Europol, and technology companies with the specific goal of removing online terrorist and extremist content and hate speech. The Forum was one of the commitments made in the European Agenda on Security.<sup>61</sup> In 2016, the EU Internet Forum together with the industry announced a database of known terrorist content, called the Database of Hashes after the technology used to exchange information on such content. The database facilitates the detection of terrorist propaganda and other extremist content across platforms, so that it can be removed according to national law or company policy. Once operational in early 2017, the technology resulted in a quick decline in the online presence of terrorist and extremist content.<sup>62</sup>

The database is also fed by the EU Internet Referral Unit (EU IRU), part of Europol's European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC), which detects and investigates malicious online content. In its latest publication, the EU IRU reported having done almost 45.000 referrals for terrorist content; in 92% of the cases the content was removed. The group also organises coordinated referral campaigns together with EU MSs. By reducing the public accessibility of online terrorist content, the EU IRU and the EU Internet Forum explicitly aim at preventing violent extremism and terrorism.<sup>63</sup>

### 3.7. National strategies for the prevention and countering of radicalisation

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Prevent Strategies of Member States is an online list of national policies and strategies to prevent and counter radicalisation leading to violent extremism or terrorism. The list, which is based on

publicly available data, was originally compiled by RAN and is now hosted and maintained by the Directorate-General Migration and Home Affairs.<sup>64</sup>

The list reveals that most Western European countries have one or more national counter-radicalisation strategies in place. These strategies typically do not comprise concrete programmes or policies. Instead they define general plans of action and national long-term goals, and leave the execution and implementation of concrete programmes to other policy levels and institutions, not least to local actors. However, counter-terrorism programmes in the stricter sense are more often implemented by national authorities and institutions.

Central and Eastern European MSs, which are less likely to suffer from violent radicalisation and terrorism, often do not have national strategies in place (or at least such strategies have not been reported). Such is the case for Austria, Slovenia, Romania, Greece, and Italy. Several other MSs do not have dedicated counter-radicalisation and counter-terrorism strategies, instead (summarily) treating these phenomena in their general security strategies. Such is the case for Hungary, Lithuania, and Estonia.

### 3.8. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

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The OSCE is an intergovernmental organisation focusing on security with 57 Member States, covering most of the northern hemisphere. Decisions are taken by consensus and are politically but not legally binding. One of its focuses is the implementation of effective measures to

prevent and combat terrorism. The OSCE has done counter-terrorism field operations in Kosovo, Macedonia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.<sup>65</sup>

The OSCE has published a number of resources regarding the fight against terrorism. Among them are a guidebook on a community-policing approach to countering extremism and radicalisation (2014)<sup>66</sup> and a report on recommendations and good practices from the OSCE region in countering radicalisation (2017).<sup>67</sup> The organisation considers the prevention of violent extremism and the protection of human rights as “mutually reinforcing goals”. It therefore emphasises the importance of non-coercive approaches to radicalisation.

### 3.9. International Centre for the Prevention of Crime (ICPC)

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The ICPC<sup>68</sup> is a global NGO, based in Montreal, focusing on crime prevention and community safety. Recently, it has also worked on the prevention of radicalisation. In 2015, the ICPC published a systematic review of 483 documents on the prevention of radicalisation, research which was funded by the Comité interministériel de prévention de la délinquance (CIPD) of France. This study maps terrorism and terrorism-related phenomena, captures the state of radicalisation research, and explores mechanisms and measures for preventing radicalisation and violent extremism. Because of its wide scope, this systematic review is still a good reference on the prevention of radicalisation, but unfortunately it has not been updated since 2015.<sup>69</sup>

In a follow-up study funded by Public Safety Canada, the researchers narrowed the focus to front-line workers and intervention issues. The study is based on interviews with 90 front-line workers from 64 organisations based in 27 countries. The resulting report discusses the experiences of intervention workers, particularly the practical implications of our limited understanding of the phenomenon itself. It also articulates a series of recommendations regarding the preparation and execution of an intervention. Among them are the adoption of approaches tailored to the local setting, the inclusion of community leaders, and the creation of a relationship of trust between worker, participant, and the latter's family and friends.<sup>70</sup>

### 3.10. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)

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In 2006, the UN adopted the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Terrorism prevention was one of the pillars of the Strategy, but it did not unequivocally include prevention of radicalisation or measures against extremism. By the time of the fifth review, however, radicalisation prevention had become an integral part of the strategy.<sup>71</sup> It recommended implementing the UN Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, presented by the Secretary-General a few months before.<sup>72</sup> The most notable UN offices and organisations working on counter-terrorism are the UN Counter-Terrorism Centre (UNCCT) within the UN Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force (CTITF)<sup>73</sup> and the Terrorism Prevention Branch (TPB) of the UN Office on Drugs and Crime

(UNODC).<sup>74</sup>

The UN organisation most active in the prevention of radicalisation, however, is UNESCO. UNESCO assists its member states in the prevention of violent extremism. In doing so, its focus lies on the organisation's priorities: education, youth, strategic communications, and gender equality.<sup>75</sup> As such, UNESCO concentrates its efforts on preventing rather than countering extremism. UNESCO has open-sourced a number of resources that may be useful to third parties. These resources include both a guide for teachers and a guide for policymakers regarding the prevention of violent extremism through education.<sup>76</sup>

Together with the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations (UNAOC), UNESCO is promoting media and information literacy all around the world, and they have established the Media and Information Literacy and Intercultural Dialogue (MILID) network to be the research branch of this agenda. One of MILID's deliverables is an annual research publication, the 2016 edition of which zoomed in on the role of media and information literacy in general and the MILID toolbox in particular in the primary prevention of violent extremism.<sup>77</sup>

In 2017, the organisation published a review of existing research on violent extremism on social media. Analysing over 550 recent (from 2012) studies in English, French, and Arabic, and covering online radicalisation worldwide, the report is the most comprehensive resource on the role of social media in the radicalisation of youth. The report shows that while there is evidence of a correlation between online extremist propaganda and recruitment, there is insufficient evidence of a causal relationship between the two.<sup>78</sup>

### 3.11. The Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD)

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ISD is a London-based international “think and do tank” with offices in Washington DC, Amman, Beirut, and Toronto. The organisation’s work encompasses research and policy advice on the prevention of right-wing and jihadist extremism. The organisation has worked for and partnered with a host of European and other national governments, the European Commission, and tech companies such as Google, Microsoft, Facebook, and Twitter. Research reports and educational resources are frequently published on its website.<sup>79</sup> Among those, ISD’s handbooks on online counter-narrative stand out. One deals with the design, content, and online delivery of counter-messages, with special attention to the engagement of the target audiences.<sup>80</sup> The second handbook, co-funded by the Prevention of and Fight against Crime Programme of the EU, is dedicated exclusively to the monitoring and evaluation of counter-narrative approaches to the prevention of radicalisation.<sup>81</sup> Both constitute invaluable resources on countering extremist narratives.

ISD also facilitates and maintains several international practitioners’ networks, the most important of which are the Strong Cities Network (SCN) and the Policy Planners’ Network (PPN). SCN is a global network of municipal-level policymakers and practitioners. It aims at facilitating the sharing of knowledge and expertise on building social cohesion and community resilience to violent extremism.<sup>82</sup> It now comprises more than 120 cities, among which several European cities. Membership is free. PPN is an intergovernmental network that aims at improving national policy and action plans to prevent violent extremism. The network includes representatives from the UK, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Belgium, Spain, Finland, Norway, and Victoria State (Australia).<sup>83</sup>

## 4. STATE OF THE ART IN RADICALISATION RESEARCH

### 4.1 The evaluation gap

Policies and practices for the prevention of radicalisation and de-radicalisation are commonly expected to be effective and evidence-based. Unfortunately, to this day such evidence is more often than not absent. Moreover, many studies that claim to evaluate the effectiveness of such programmes suffer from the same disregard for evidentiary standards as radicalisation studies in the broader sense (cf. *supra*). This problem is not unique to radicalisation—it applies to the prevention of other types of crime as well—but it is particularly striking with regard to radicalisation. For a review study of radicalisation research, Feddes and Gallucci sampled 55 studies (up to July 2014) that offer evaluations of de-radicalisation programmes. They calculated that in only 12% of them empirical data regarding the effectiveness of an intervention was presented. In 39% of the cases the evaluation was theoretical in nature, testing the intervention against existing theories but not adducing empirical evidence. In the remaining 49%, evidence was merely anecdotal. More than 40% of the sampled studies only included an economic or process evaluation, as opposed to an impact evaluation.<sup>84</sup> Perhaps even more acute is the complete absence of evaluation. In a 2016 research gap analysis for RAN, Pisoui and Ahmed identified programme evaluation as an important research gap. Their criticism extends beyond the research community. That prevention or

de-radicalisation programmes are often implemented and published (or open-sourced) by authorities without having an impact evaluation in place is, according to Pisoui and Ahmed, problematic, especially in view of the fact that radicalisation work has professionalised and consumes considerable funds. Generally, the authors state, “measures aimed at combating and preventing radicalisation need to be more intimately connected to the insights we have on how radicalisation functions in the first place” lest they have “little chance of success”. Therefore, “the current structure of research funding needs to be changed”.<sup>85</sup>

In a 2017 study on countering extremist narratives commissioned by the European Parliament’s Policy Department for Citizens’ Rights and Constitutional Affairs at the request of the LIBE Committee, the authors arrive at the same conclusion for this specific approach to the prevention and tackling of radicalisation: “Metrics and evaluations represent a significant gap in the field of practice.” The authors point out that even basic things such as target audience assessments, which are essential to strategic communications campaigns, are often absent from such campaigns.<sup>86</sup> Even when target audience assessments and reach and retention analyses are favourable, the question remains whether the counter-narrative generates the expected effect. As a study of the Institute for Strategic Dialogue illustrates, when it comes



to impact, it usually comes down to the subjective hope that counter-messages “plant a seed of doubt that later matures into a change in attitudes and behaviours.”<sup>87</sup>

A 2018 assessment of the European Commission’s support of MSs in their fight against violent radicalisation and terrorism, the European Court of Auditors (the EU’s official audit organisation) was predominantly positive. It also reveals some sticking points, however. The auditors found that the Commission insufficiently evaluates the success of its actions in terms of their effectiveness. Instead, reports often “list what has been done rather than measure success in achieving policy goals.” The auditors advise that the effectiveness of counter-radicalisation projects be routinely measured and that the results of such evaluations are fed back to policymakers and researchers by publishing them in collections of practices such as the RAN collection.<sup>88</sup>

Fortunately, this criticism has not been ignored. The list of recent and current EU-funded research projects below demonstrates that there is now a substantially stronger emphasis on impact and the practical implementation of policy and programme evaluation than a few years ago. It appears the gap is getting closed.

The task at hand for practitioners and policymakers is not to get paralysed by such criticism but to carry on the good work and make it even better by integrating the results of state-of-the-art research. Alastair Reed, himself a critic who speaks of the lack of empirical foundations as an “inconvenient truth”, warns against the conclusion “that the lack of empirical evidence to support the current approaches to countering terrorist narratives means that they do not work at all.” He sums up the current state of affairs as follows:

“In an ideal world, we would stop all current efforts and plough all of our time and money into more fundamental research until we can come back with the answers. However, terrorism won’t wait for us to carry out research!”<sup>89</sup>

It is therefore imperative, he states, that all preventive or counter-narrative projects are grounded in theory, that evaluation is an integral part of these projects from the beginning, and that new insights are continuously fed back into research and practice.<sup>90</sup>

## 4.2. Recent EU-funded research projects

### 4.2.1. IMPACT: Innovative Method and Procedure to Assess Counter-violent-radicalisation Techniques in Europe

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IMPACT<sup>91</sup> was a research project funded by the European Union’s Seventh Framework Programme for research. It ran from January 2014 to June 2017. Its aim was threefold: to develop a toolkit to help practitioners evaluate their policies and programmes with regard to tackling violent radicalisation; to collect the results of such evaluations in a database; to develop training kits for practitioners using these tools.

The tools have been published online, along with manuals and quick guides.<sup>92</sup> The evaluation guide assists policymakers and project leaders with evaluating their project. It helps them select the appropriate methods and approaches along the course of the project—from the planning stage

("Design") to the actual evaluation ("Conduct"). The "Methods" page contains an overview of 24 evaluation methodologies. For each one, it explains what it is and how it works, what it can and cannot measure, and whether there may be ethical issues connected with it. The list includes a wide variety of evaluation techniques—descriptive statistics, interviews and focus groups, randomised control trials, quasi-experimental design, and many more—which may each be applicable to different prevention and de-radicalisation programmes.<sup>93</sup> One can also find references to examples and resources.

The interventions database itself offers advanced search capabilities and is particularly useful as a source of inspiration or to compare different interventions with similar goals. It contains European as well as non-European interventions. Unfortunately, it does not contain web links or contact details for the interventions included in the database. The same is true for a different database of 69 (global) counter violent extremism (CVE) interventions that have been formally evaluated. This collection once again reveals the precarious state of affairs: out of 20 interventions that claim high levels of effectiveness, only 4 are supported by "some evidence" regarding the effectiveness; the remainder is supported by "weak evidence" and none are supported by "strong evidence".

Evidence-based policies and interventions imply evaluating the effectiveness of interventions. In the "lessons learned" sections, the IMPACT research reminds policymakers and project leaders that such evaluation should be an integral part of the project. The evaluation should be planned in the design stage and methodologies should be made explicit. Provisions should be made to collect empirical data. It is important to test whether the intervention reaches its goals

("Test what you want to know, not what is easy to do"). Methods that are already applied in neighbouring fields, such as randomised control trials, quasi-experimental designs, logic model/ theory of change, contribution analysis, policy scientific approach, and realist evaluation could, and should, be applied to the prevention of radicalisation and de-radicalisation.

#### 4.2.2. PRIME: PReventing, Interdicting and Mitigating Extremist events: defending against lone actor extremism

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PRIME<sup>94</sup> was an interdisciplinary research project funded by the European Union's Seventh Framework Programme for research. It ran from May 2014 to April 2017. Its aim was to produce a scientific knowledge-base on lone actor extremist events (LAEEs), terrorist attacks carried out by individuals acting largely alone. This type of terrorism is on the rise. PRIME's theoretical foundation, a risk analysis framework, was translated to a series of data needs and extensive data collections. The whole project leans heavily on empirical data. The largest of two datasets (n=125) produced by the consortium contains all lone actor events from the period 1990 to 2015 for which full data was accessible to PRIME researchers. The results offer highly useful insights regarding the detection of lone actors and intervention opportunities in various stages of LAEEs, among which radicalisation and attack planning.

The project has produced a sizable list of publications, which offer state-of-the-art, evidence-based insights in lone actor



radicalisation.<sup>95</sup> One of the more pertinent findings is that lone actor extremism is a misnomer. Violent extremists, also those of the type generally nick-named “lone wolf” who do not belong to a known terrorist group, rarely radicalise alone and out of the blue. PRIME researchers found that in most cases, social ties play an important role in the radicalisation and planning of terrorist attacks. They warn that the lone actor concept has “closed off avenues for detection and interdiction that do, in fact, exist.” Even in groups as small as two or three individuals, the usual sociological dynamics, such as peer pressure, leader-follower interactions, and group polarisation, are at play. Exactly these processes may be at the centre of attempts to detect and prevent radicalisation. The contributors conclude that the “lone wolf” is an inappropriate typology that has persisted in counterterrorism discourse on account of the “event-driven”, vis-à-vis data-driven, character of research and policymaking.<sup>96</sup>

### 4.2.3. VOX-Pol: virtual centre of excellence for research in violent online political extremism

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VOX-Pol<sup>97</sup> is a research project funded by the European Union’s Seventh Framework Programme for research. It started in January 2014 and ended in December 2018. It brought together researchers in violent online political extremism, online radicalisation, and the intersection of the Internet and terrorism. It has also created a Network of Excellence (NoE) of researchers, the Internet industry, civil society, and policymakers. One of the deliverables of VOX-Pol is an archive of politically extreme Internet-based content and

related URL database, which in turn can become the basis for new research.

The project has produced innovative publications on online jihadist and right-wing extremist online discourse, a literature review on the impact of digital communications on radicalisation<sup>98</sup> an empirical study of Internet use by convicted terrorists with substantial policy consequences,<sup>99</sup> an impact evaluation of taking down terrorist online content,<sup>100</sup> and a host of related topics and case studies. In addition, VOX-Pol maintains an online library collecting in excess of 700 publications related to various aspects of online extremism. The database, which can be consulted on the project’s website, is a valuable research, teaching, and policy resource.

### 4.2.4. TERRA I and TERRA II

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TERRA I (2012–2014) and TERRA II (2014–2016) were projects funded by the European Commission Directorate-General Migration and Home Affairs. The project was composed of a European network-based prevention and learning programme. The first phase produced the TERRA Toolkit, a European resource for people working with populations which may be vulnerable to radicalisation. The toolkit consists of five manuals targeting different actors: teachers and youth workers, police officers, prison officers and religious leaders. They also produced guidelines for journalists reporting on terrorism and minorities, as those may influence radicalisation. The second phase added a train-the-trainer manual, delivered to Spain, the Netherlands, and the UK, in order to enhance the dissemination of the toolkit and

enable frontline workers to start using it independently. TERRA II also produced UCARE, a citizenship curriculum for secondary school students, predominantly aimed at raising awareness of democratic means of conflict resolution.<sup>101</sup> Finally, TERRA II delivered an evidence-based policy advice to help national policymakers address the complex breeding ground of radicalisation.<sup>102</sup>

It should be pointed out that the policy advice is not based on empirical impact evaluations of the approaches studied or promoted by the consortium. Instead, it is based on literature reviews and interviews with experts from, and site visits to, four practices which the TERRA project had identified as good practices in an earlier phase. These practices are the Dutch integration policy, the UK's Prevent Strategy, the Danish Aarhus Model, and the German Exit and Hayat programmes. The nevertheless useful policy advice is broad in scope and covers strategy, structure, key partners, and tactics.

### 4.3. Horizon 2020 research and innovation projects to keep an eye on

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A database of past and present research and innovation projects funded by the European Commission is available at the website of the Community Research and Development Information Service (CORDIS).<sup>103</sup> Below is a list of the most relevant, ongoing projects.

#### 4.3.1. DARE: Dialogue About Radicalisation and Equality

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DARE<sup>104</sup> is a research project that focuses on people aged 12 to 30 and approaches them as social actors rather than victims or perpetrators. DARE's goal is to advance our understanding of the causes and dynamics of the radicalisation process by generating new, high-quality empirical data.

The DARE project runs from May 2017 till April 2021 and is executed by 15 partners in 13 countries: Belgium, Croatia, France, Germany, Greece, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, the Russian Federation, Tunisia, Turkey and the UK.

#### 4.3.2. TRIVALENT: terrorism prevention via radicalisation counter-narrative

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The goal of the TRIVALENT research project<sup>105</sup> is to provide an improved understanding of the root causes of radicalisation in order to advance the development of counter-measures such as early detection techniques. It focuses specifically on the role of online radicalisation and the development of computerised tools for the automated detection radicalisation.<sup>106</sup>

TRIVALENT is a coordinated effort of 21 partners from ten countries: Albania, Belgium, France, Israel, Italy, Latvia, Poland, Portugal, Spain, and the UK. It runs from May 2017 until April 2020.

### 4.3.3. MINDb4ACT: developing skills and building a community of practice for innovative, ethical and effective actions against violent extremism

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MINDb4ACT<sup>107</sup> aims at overcoming limitations in conventional approaches to radicalisation by having all stakeholders—academia, law enforcement, private sector, public offices, and first-line respondents—collaborate to co-create new practices. The evaluation of the resulting practices, based on empirical evidence, is an integral part of the project.

17 partners from Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain, and the UK, participate in MINDb4ACT. The project started in September 2017 and is scheduled to end in August 2020.

### 4.3.4. GRIEVANCE: Gauging the Risk of Incidents of Extremist Violence Against Non-Combatant Entities

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GRIEVANCE<sup>108</sup> is an interdisciplinary research project of University College London, running from January 2018 to December 2022. It challenges the offender-centred radicalisation approach itself, which it considers to have been proven unproductive and impractical. The project's objective is to offer alternatives by shifting the focus to the situational aspects of violent extremist behaviour. The first results indicate that

regarding target selection, for instance, extremists differ from other criminals as far as the effect of guardianship (CCTV, fencing, etc.) is concerned. However, that does not make extremist target selection unpredictable: they prefer public, often iconic or symbolic places.<sup>109</sup> Moreover, lone actors and members of small networks tend to select targets close to home, work, or other familiar places.<sup>110</sup> Such findings have yet to be translated to policy and practice, but open up vistas for future terrorism prevention.

### 4.3.5. INSIKT: novel social data mining platform to detect and defeat violent online radicalization

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Insikt Intelligence<sup>111</sup> is a Spanish private enterprise that develops complex investigative tools that provide law enforcement agencies with vital intelligence on online crime. They focus, among other things, on online radicalisation and violent extremism. The current project is executed between October 2017 and September 2019. Its aim is to trial Insikt's technology, based on natural language processing and social network analysis, in four European law enforcement agencies.

### 4.3.6. CPR: a cross-country comparison of Communications designed to Prevent Radicalisation

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The CPR project<sup>112</sup> investigates counter-radicalisation communications in Denmark and the UK, which it says are, as in most Western-European states, ineffective. The project will gather and analyse empirical data on the challenges to effective preventive communications as well as the policy requirements of a more effective counter-radicalisation communication strategy. The project is executed by the University of Aarhus from November 2017 until October 2019.

### 4.3.7. PERICLES: Policy Recommendation and Improved Communication tools for Law Enforcement and Security agencies preventing violent radicalisation

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The PERICLES project,<sup>113</sup> geared primarily towards law enforcement and security agencies, aims to develop a comprehensive approach to the prevention and countering of radicalisation. It has promised to deliver advanced and validated counter-propaganda techniques that are target-group specific—more details on the validation are as of yet unknown.

PERICLES researchers have already produced a report on certain national and local radicalisation programmes in twelve countries.<sup>114</sup> These were

selected primarily for practical reasons: languages used in the project, access to detailed information on the projects, and access to the projects themselves. The countries covered in the report are Bosnia and Herzegovina, Switzerland, and the following EU MSs: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and the UK. The report offers a useful overview of the national situations and general prevention programmes in these countries; for a collection of practices, one had better turn to the continuously updated and much more comprehensive RAN Collection. The project started in May 2017 and will be finished in April 2020.

### 4.3.8. PRACTICES: partnership against violent radicalisation in cities

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PRACTICES<sup>115</sup> is a network that engages with scientists, practitioners, local and national policymakers and other stakeholders, and which conceptualises radicalisation to violent extremism as an urban security issue. Part of the programme is to evaluate current practices in order to identify best practices.

The PRACTICES project, which runs from May 2017 until April 2020, will be executed by a consortium of 25 partners from the following countries: Austria, Belgium, France, Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Tunisia.

#### 4.3.9. PROTON: modelling the PProcesses leading to Organised crime and TerrOrist Networks

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The goal of the PROTON project<sup>116</sup> is to improve insights into the process of recruitment to organised crime and terrorist networks. It integrates social and computational sciences and will support evidence-based policies at the international, national, and local levels. PROTON's activities are structured along three axes: organised crime, terrorist networks, and organised crime and terrorism in cyberspace.

PROTON started in October 2016 and is scheduled to end in September 2019. 19 partners from Belgium, Germany, Israel, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the UK, and the US, participate in the project.

## 5. PREDICTING RARE EVENTS: THE CHALLENGE OF RISK ASSESSMENTS AND SCREENINGS

Policies and practices regarding the secondary prevention of radicalisation face a particular challenge. Whereas primary prevention (e.g. citizenship training, intercultural awareness, stimulating social inclusion) targets large groups or even entire populations and tertiary prevention (e.g. de-radicalisation, disengagement) targets known and mostly voluntarily participating perpetrators or convicts, secondary prevention requires that those “at risk of radicalisation” are identified and somehow approached.

It is important, in this respect, to be aware of the fact that radicalisation and non-violent radicalism usually do not constitute or entail crime. The ultimate goal of the prevention of radicalisation is to prevent violent extremism or terrorism, not radicalism per se. In a handbook on the prevention of terrorism, OSCE puts it as follows: “Incitement to, and recruitment for, terrorism should be criminalized and prosecuted”, but “holding views or beliefs that are considered radical or extreme, as well as their peaceful expression, should not be criminalized in line with international human rights standards”.<sup>117</sup> This presents a huge challenge to first-line practitioners, who for lack of objective risk analyses often have to pull the trigger. The detection of early signs of radicalisation—and consequently also the decision whether or not someone belongs to the target group of a specific programme—is all too often subject to the practitioner’s subjective judgment.<sup>118</sup> According to

an ICPC study, front-line workers themselves identify the lack of conceptual consensus as one of the principal challenges of radicalisation prevention. They complain that at the practical level they often have to improvise. Most front-line workers take the risk of stigmatising certain communities seriously, and indicate that they avoid doing so by adjusting the focus of their work.<sup>119</sup> The insights of practitioners evolve, however, and the practitioners’ experience in the form of best practices constitute a useful source of information in itself.

Moreover, the challenge of identifying persons at risk interacts with the challenge of developing evidence-based practices. The concept of radicalisation that a national or local authority or prevention initiative adopts may be inaccurate and inconsistent with scientific insights. This concept then shapes counter-radicalisation policies which in turn are insufficiently submitted to empirical impact tests.<sup>120</sup> This in turn may lead to not only ineffective but even counterproductive practices, as when high numbers of false positives lead to profiling of youth by school personnel etc.<sup>121</sup> Again, front-line workers often bear the burden, as they “find themselves between a rock and hard place: between the constraints and dictates of donors and governments on the one hand, and the needs of the communities they work with on the other.”<sup>122</sup>

Such disconnects between evidence on the



hand and policy and practice on the other are continually being called out by both scientists and critics of the policy. The UK's Prevent Counter-Extremism Strategy, for instance, has been called into question many times,<sup>123</sup> with critics going as far as to say it is counterproductive.<sup>124</sup> In fact, the strategy has solicited the foundation of Prevent Watch, an organisation offering a hotline and support to "people impacted by prevent". These include people who are unjustly identified as radicalised (or at risk of radicalising) on the basis of generic criteria (e.g. a young, male, observant Muslim). On its website, the organisation maintains a list of critical and sceptical research, which addresses the pitfalls of counter-radicalisation strategies and policies.<sup>125</sup>

The European Commission too has drawn some (much less sharp) criticism for adopting a view of radicalisation that focusses on what people think rather than do.<sup>126</sup> The Commission is nevertheless well aware of the challenge, explicitly conditioning any preventive policy on the safeguarding of fundamental rights such as freedom of expression<sup>127</sup> and warning that "the EU response to extremism must not lead to the stigmatisation of any one group or community."<sup>128</sup> In practice, those who have to decide who to target and who not need to be equipped to do so (and now sometimes refuse to make such decisions because they feel ill-equipped<sup>129</sup>). While structured professional judgment (SPJ) tools for risk assessments for terrorist offenders exist and are being used in the prison and probation system, the development and implementation of such risk assessment tools for non-offenders remains a challenge.

Two offender risk assessments in particular are in common use in the prison and probation system: the Extremism Risk Guidance 22+ (ERG22+) and

the Violent Extremist Risk Assessment 2 Revised (VERA-2R), which were specifically developed for that purpose. A third tool, the Radicalisation Risk Assessment in Prisons (RRAP), developed with the financial support of the European Commission, is designed to screen for radicalisation risk among prisoners who were not convicted of terrorist offences. VERA-2R is the most widely used risk assessment tool in Europe. It has also been used for risk assessments among the general (prison) population, even though it is not suited for that task.<sup>130</sup> ERG22+ too has seen uses other than its intended purpose. The Vulnerability Assessment Framework (VAF), a tool to assess the vulnerability to radicalisation for individuals from the general public, is an ERG22+ derivative based on the same 22 indicators. The problem with that is that ERG22+, which is effective as long as it is used as intended, was developed on the basis of known terrorism offender profiles. The indicators extracted from these profiles were then used by VAF to predict a different risk (radicalisation rather than extremist or terrorist violence) among a different population.<sup>131</sup>

Finally, other risk assessment tools, among which specific ones for lone actors and FTF returnees have also been proposed.<sup>132</sup>

## 6. CONCLUSIONS

### Data on radicalisation and

**terrorism.** There is little data on radicalisation and extremism in the EU. We have little clues as to how many radicalising or extremist individuals there are in Europe and to what extent these radicalised individuals are at risk of turning violent. EU terrorist attack rates are down from a decade ago. Most are committed by terrorists with a separatist agenda, but the largest impact by far in terms of people wounded and killed is generated by jihadist terrorism. Due to this type of terrorism alone, the number of casualties reached a record high in 2016. Right-wing extremism is on the rise and thus a threat to look out for.

### Perceptions of radicalisation and terrorism in the EU.

On average, Europeans consider terrorism a substantial threat to security. They see the fight against terrorism as a priority and consider the prevention of radicalisation a very important aspect of it. Most European citizens are of the opinion that international cooperation is needed in the fight against terrorism; over 80% holds that more European decision-making is necessary.

The prevention of radicalisation is still in its infancy. Of the many things that can be said of the prevention of radicalisation, perhaps the most important one is that it is all still very new. Before 2004, the term “radicalisation” was rarely used, and barely ever in the sense of a process potentially leading to violent extremism or

terrorism. RAN was established in 2011; the UN produced a plan of action for radicalisation prevention as recent as 2015. The first international conference on radicalisation was held in January 2008 and it took until the beginning of this decade for multidisciplinary research projects on radicalisation prevention to be initiated. In addition, many approaches to the prevention of radicalisation have not (yet) been subjected to impact evaluations. Collections of “best practices” are, therefore, rather collections of practices.

### The radicalisation process is not yet fully understood.

Current practices and policies have been developed without a clear understanding of the radicalisation process itself. While both research and practical experience continuously expand our knowledge of radicalisation, there is still no conclusive agreement on the causes of radicalisation, or what makes it stop. This is aggravated by the fact that research on radicalisation and radicalisation prevention is often insufficiently based on (independent) observation and too much on anecdotal information. Uninformed (government) funding has been cited as a reason for this disregard of evidentiary standards. Fortunately, current research, especially projects funded by the EU, pay significantly more attention to empirical evidence.

## **Problems with prevention and de-radicalisation.**

The prevention of radicalisation has professionalised at record speed, but still presents serious challenges to those who work in it. Many prevention initiatives require the identification of radicalised individuals by detecting early signs of radicalisation. In doing so, front-line workers of any profession carry a heavy burden. Not supported by a consensus framework of radicalisation prevention, they often have to take decisions for which they feel ill-equipped. Among those is the decision to identify people who are at risk of becoming radicalised. False positives may render prevention efforts counterproductive since targeting certain individuals or groups contributes to stigmatisation.

**Recommendations.** Because so little is known for sure, policies and practices should continue to be developed with the insights gained from cutting-edge research in mind, and vice versa. The primary challenge for the future is to attach greater value to evaluation, which should always be an integral part of practices and policies from the early design stages on. With the current Horizon 2020 research and innovation projects, the European Commission has already stimulated research with a strong empirical component. Smart research funding remains an area of concern, however, as even the very process of radicalisation is still not fully understood. Only when the results of such empirical research are heeded, does it contribute to an evidence-based approach to the prevention of radicalisation. Only then will it be possible to say conclusively what works.

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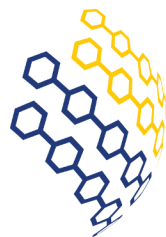
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