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# Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalisation that Lead to Terrorism: Ideas, Recommendations, and Good Practices from the OSCE Region

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## ***Executive Summary***

- There is practically no country in the OSCE that has not been affected by violent extremism. In 2016, terrorist attacks in OSCE participating States caused more than one thousand deaths. They destroyed billions of Euros worth of property and infrastructure, undermined people’s confidence in government and institutions, and created fear and suspicion between members of different ethnic and religious communities. Violent extremists not only cause death and destruction, they poison societies with hateful ideologies, and hinder peaceful development, dialogue, and cooperation. OSCE participating States have long recognised this challenge.
- It was in this context that the Austrian Chairmanship asked me to serve as Special Representative on Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalisation. My task was to sharpen the organisation’s focus, highlight existing activities, and offer practical suggestions for enhanced collaboration. The aim was to enable the OSCE to make the strongest possible contribution to what it calls Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalisation that Lead to Terrorism (VERLT), and fulfil the mandate it was given in the 2012 Consolidated Framework as well as Ministerial Declarations from 2015 and 2016.
- This report provides a summary of my findings. It seeks to (1) define key concepts and major dynamics; (2) evaluate the OSCE’s current and future role; and (3) identify areas of good practice, with particular emphasis on preventing and countering processes of violent radicalisation.
- Despite the many challenges that arise from the contentious nature of the issue and the OSCE’s size and political complexity, my overall conclusion is that the organisation can make an important contribution to countering violent extremism and radicalisation. Based on my assessment, the OSCE’s “added value” lies in three areas:
  - *Its role in preventing and resolving conflicts, promoting human rights, and safeguarding the rights of national minorities, given that terrorism is frequently linked to violent conflicts and that extremist recruiters often seek to manipulate political, ethnic, and religious fault lines;*
  - *Its strong local presence, particularly in Central Asia and the Western Balkans, where the organisation is uniquely positioned to execute local programmes, lead capacity-building efforts, and coordinate among international actors;*
  - *Its diverse membership and convening power, which can facilitate dialogue, cooperation, and the systematic exchange of good practices between participating States with different approaches and levels of capacity, especially in the area of countering violent radicalisation.*
- The report does not underestimate the difficulties that are involved. There are few issues in international politics where the underlying dynamics are as contested as with terrorism and violent extremism. Many efforts to enhance international cooperation

have failed because participants spoke different “languages” or had contradictory ideas about causes and effects. In some instances, these differences are political, while others result from a lack of clarity and empirical evidence. The report attempts to offer a more nuanced understanding of concepts like violent extremism, extremism, radicalisation, counter-terrorism, and countering violent extremism. It also highlights major dynamics of radicalisation that are rarely mentioned in government-led discussions, especially indiscriminate repression, violent conflicts, and the security implications of migration.

- The largest part of the report describes good practices on countering violent radicalisation from across the OSCE area. The aim is twofold. First, it seeks to illustrate the importance and potential impact of non-coercive approaches in dealing with violent extremism. Second, it demonstrates that neither the OSCE nor any participating State need to start from scratch, but that good ideas can often be found by reaching out to one’s partners. As mentioned above, the OSCE could play a useful role in facilitating this process, especially considering the varying levels of capacity among its participating States.
- More specifically, the report contains 22 good practice case studies from the following programmatic areas: national action plans; prison; policing; youth; education; religion; the internet; women; refugees; interventions; and returnees.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- The OSCE needs to create awareness of the importance of dealing with persistent political and structural drivers of radicalisation. New issues, such as the security implications of migration, should be pro-actively addressed.
- Participating States ought to be genuine – and forceful – in their commitment to resolving such problems, even if it means having to change course or re-examine their own policies and actions.
- The OSCE needs to intensify its capacity-building efforts in Central Asia and the Western Balkans. Given its strong and long-established local presence, the OSCE is ideally suited to take a leadership role vis-à-vis other international organisations. Participating States should support the Secretary-General in seeking local arrangements to this effect.
- The OSCE Secretariat should expand their operations to become an international “clearing house” for good practices in countering violent radicalisation. Participating States should empower the Action against Terrorism Unit to become the world’s most dynamic platform for the sharing of good practices in this area.

## CONTENTS

<i>Executive Summary</i>	<i>p. 2</i>
<i>Overview of Case Studies</i>	<i>p. 5</i>
<b>1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>p. 6</b>
<b>2 BACKGROUND</b>	<b>p. 10</b>
<b>3 CONCEPTS</b>	<b>p. 14</b>
3.1 Violent Extremism	
3.2 Extremism	
3.3 Radicalisation	
3.4 Counter-Terrorism	
3.5 Countering Violent Extremism	
<b>4 DYNAMICS</b>	<b>p. 22</b>
4.1 Indiscriminate Repression	
4.2 Violent Conflicts	
4.3 Migration	
<b>5 THE ROLE OF THE OSCE</b>	<b>p. 29</b>
5.1 Obstacles and Challenges	
5.2 Current Activities	
5.3 Adding Value	
<b>6 GOOD PRACTICES</b>	<b>p. 44</b>
6.1 National Action Plans	
6.2 Prisons	
6.3 Policing	
6.4 Youth	
6.5 Education	
6.6 Religion	
6.7 The Internet	
6.8 Women	
6.9 Refugees	
6.10 Interventions	
6.11 Returnees	
<b>7 RECOMMENDATIONS</b>	<b>p. 78</b>

## **Overview of Case Studies**

### **Chapter 6.1**

*Case Study 1: Action Plan against Radicalisation and Violent Extremism, Norway*

*Case Study 2: National Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism, Albania*

### **Chapter 6.2**

*Case Study 3: Preventing Radicalisation in Italian Prisons*

*Case Study 4: Rehabilitation of Extremist Prisoners, Kazakhstan*

### **Chapter 6.3**

*Case Study 5: Counter Violent Extremism Tailored Community Policing, Los Angeles Police Department, United States of America*

*Case Study 6: Simulation Exercises, Royal Canadian Mounted Police*

### **Chapter 6.4**

*Case Study 7: Fryshuset/EXIT, Sweden*

*Case Study 8: Active Change Foundation, United Kingdom*

### **Chapter 6.5**

*Case Study 9: The Royal Atheneum, Belgium*

*Case Study 10: Cultural and Spiritual Heritage of the Region (CSHR), Croatia*

### **Chapter 6.6**

*Case Study 11: Fol Tash, Pristina*

*Case Study 12: Countering Extremist Narratives, Uzbekistan*

### **Chapter 6.7**

*Case Study 13: Rewind, Spain*

*Case Study 14: Seriously, France*

### **Chapter 6.8**

*Case Study 15: Nahla, Bosnia and Herzegovina*

*Case Study 16: Mothers School, Tajikistan*

### **Chapter 6.9**

*Case Study 17: Advice Centre Radicalisation, Federal Agency for Migration and Refugees, Germany*

*Case Study 18: Support for Child Refugees, Turkish National Police*

### **Chapter 6.10**

*Case Study 19: The Safe House Approach, The Netherlands*

*Case Study 20: Municipal Safety Council, Novi Pazar, Serbia*

### **Chapter 6.11**

*Case Study 21: Derad, Austria*

*Case Study 22: The Arhus Model, Denmark*

## 1 INTRODUCTION

There is practically no country in the OSCE that has not been affected by violent extremism. In 2016, terrorist attacks in OSCE participating States caused more than one thousand deaths.<sup>1</sup> They destroyed billions of Euros worth of property and infrastructure, undermined people's confidence in government and institutions, and created fear and suspicion between members of different ethnic and religious communities. Violent extremists not only cause death and destruction, they poison societies with hateful ideologies, and hinder peaceful development, dialogue, and cooperation. They are diametrically opposed to the OSCE's core values and principles.

Needless to say, threats from violent extremism are constantly changing, and they come in different forms and manifestations. Many OSCE countries have been challenged by ethnic separatists, while others have struggled with militants from the extreme Left and Right. In recent years, there has been a surge in violent extremists claiming to act in the name of religion. Since 2012, more than 10,000 citizens or permanent residents of OSCE countries have joined groups like al-Qaeda and the so-called Islamic State (often referred to as Daesh, or IS) in Syria and Iraq.<sup>2</sup> Some of their supporters have carried out terrorist attacks in European cities, such as Paris, Brussels, Barcelona, St. Petersburg, Istanbul, London, Berlin, and Stockholm. While most experts believe that IS's self-declared "Caliphate" is crumbling, regional instability and terrorist threats are certain to persist.

OSCE participating States have long recognised this challenge, and they have repeatedly expressed their concern about violent extremism as a persistent threat to

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<sup>1</sup> See *Global Terrorism Database*, National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START), University of Maryland; available at <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>.

<sup>2</sup> See "Foreign Fighters: An Updated Assessment of the Flow of Foreign Fighters into Syria and Iraq", *The Soufan Group*, December 2015, pp. 7-10; available at [http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG\\_ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf](http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate3.pdf). See also "Nineteenth Report of the Analytical Support and Sanctions Team", *United Nations Security Council, S/2017/35*, 13 January 2017; available at [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/2017/35](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/2017/35).

peace and security. In December 2015, the Ministerial Council expressed its “resolute and unconditional condemnation of terrorism and violent extremism“, and committed participating States to “exchange ideas and best practices... in order to enhance practical co-operation“.<sup>3</sup>

Like previous statements, such as the 2012 *Consolidated Framework in the Fight against Terrorism*,<sup>4</sup> the 2015 Declaration emphasised the multi-faceted nature of the problem, and called on states to pursue “comprehensive and sustainable efforts“ in countering “the manifestations of terrorism“ as well as the “various social, economic, political and other factors, which might engender conditions in which terrorist organizations could engage in recruitment and win support“.<sup>5</sup> In other words, participating States agreed that it was essential to counter terrorism as well as the processes of radicalization that enabled individuals to become terrorists.

Furthermore, the Declaration made it clear that countering violent extremism was not just the responsibility of governments or security agencies, but should involve, where appropriate, “young people, families, women, victims of terrorism, religious, cultural and educational leaders, civil society, as well as the media“.<sup>6</sup> While states retained “the primary role in countering violent extremism and terrorism“, it also highlighted potential contributions from international and regional organisations, such as the United Nations and the OSCE.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> “ Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization Leading to Terrorism“, *Ministerial Council Declaration*, MC.DOC/4/15, 4 December 2015; available at <http://www.osce.org/cio/208216?download=true>.

<sup>4</sup> “OSCE Consolidated Framework in the Fight against Terrorism“, *Permanent Council Decision No. 1063*, PC.DEC/1063, 7 December 2012; available at <http://www.osce.org/pc/98008>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

## *About this Report*

It was in this context that the Austrian Chairmanship asked me to serve as Special Representative on Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalisation. My task was to sharpen the organisation's focus, highlight existing activities, and offer practical suggestions for enhanced collaboration. The aim was to enable the OSCE to make the strongest possible contribution to what it calls Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalisation that Lead to Terrorism (VERLT), and fulfil the mandate it was given in the 2012 Consolidated Framework as well as Ministerial Declarations from 2015 and 2016.<sup>8</sup>

Following my official appointment in January 2017, I made official visits to 15 participating States, six field operations, as well as the OSCE Secretariat, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) and the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM). I spoke at a dozen OSCE conferences and workshops, reviewed available documents, and engaged in countless conversations with OSCE staff, government officials, researchers, and activists from across the OSCE area. I also drew on my own knowledge and research, as well as the work of my colleagues at the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR) at King's College London.

This report provides a summary of my findings. It seeks to (1) define key concepts and major dynamics; (2) evaluate the OSCE's current and future role; and (3) identify areas of good practice, with particular emphasis on preventing and countering processes of violent radicalisation.

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<sup>8</sup> A 2016 Ministerial Declaration reinforced and reiterated some of the themes that had first been articulated in the previous year. See "Strengthening OSCE Efforts to Prevent and Counter Terrorism", *Ministerial Council Declaration*, MC.DOC/1/16, 9 December 2016.



Despite the many challenges that arise from the contentious nature of the issue and the OSCE's size and political complexity, my overall conclusion is that the organisation can make an important contribution to countering violent extremism and radicalisation. Based on my assessment, the OSCE's "added value" lies in three areas:

- *Its role in preventing and resolving conflicts, promoting human rights, and safeguarding the rights of national minorities, given that terrorism is frequently linked to violent conflicts and that extremist recruiters often seek to manipulate political, ethnic, and religious fault lines;*
- *Its strong local presence, particularly in Central Asia and the Western Balkans, where the organisation is uniquely positioned to execute local programmes, lead capacity-building efforts, and coordinate among international actors;*
- *Its diverse membership and convening power, which can facilitate dialogue, cooperation, and the systematic exchange of good practices between participating States with different approaches and levels of capacity, especially in the area of countering violent radicalisation.*

The report attempts to substantiate these findings. Following a description of the research and consultation process, it contains chapters on key concepts, major dynamics, the role of the OSCE, and areas of good practice, which I have identified as priorities for further cooperation and capacity-building. The final chapter formulates practical recommendations that participating States may wish to consider and act upon.

## 2 BACKGROUND

The report was produced between early January and late September 2017, and is based on numerous consultations, official visits, documents, and additional background research. This section provides more detailed information about my sources and approach.

### *Sources*

One of the most important sources were the meetings and consultations that took place during state visits. I took part in regional trips to the Western Balkans (Belgrade, Sarajevo, Skopje, and Pristina) and Central Asia (Astana and Bishkek), as well as visits to the Russian Federation, the United States, Turkey, France, Austria, Portugal, the Netherlands, Germany, and the European institutions in Brussels. Most of these visits consisted of meetings with government officials, researchers, and civil society representatives. During the regional trips, I also connected with local OSCE staff and learned about the programmes and activities of the various field operations.

In addition to participating State visits, I engaged with representatives of the OSCE Executive Structures. I met with half a dozen members of the Action against Terrorism Unit and the Transnational Threats Department at the OSCE Secretariat, and had consultations with representatives of relevant departments at ODIHR in Warsaw. I also visited the offices of the HCNM in The Hague, and liaised with other Special Representatives, especially those on Youth and Security, Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, as well as Combating Racism, Xenophobia, and Discrimination. Further useful meetings and consultations took place on the sidelines of the OSCE-wide Counterterrorism Conference, the Annual Security Review Conference, the Informal Meeting of Foreign Ministers in Mauerbach, as well as

Workshops organised by the OSCE Chairmanship on Youth and the Prevention of Violent Extremism in Sarajevo and Almaty.

Thanks to Tom Wuchte and Mehdi Knani of the Action against Terrorism Unit, I was able to obtain official documents, conference summaries, and other written records of OSCE events. I also gained valuable information from a study on countering violent extremism in Central Asia, which the Chairmanship asked the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) produced for the benefit of this report.<sup>9</sup> In addition, I used official visits to collect documents on relevant programmes and activities by participating States and OSCE field operations.

For academic literature, I relied on the work done by my colleagues at the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR) at King's College London, which has been at the forefront of academic research into the causes and dynamics of violent extremism and radicalisation for nearly a decade.<sup>10</sup> Of course, I also drew on my own research and knowledge of terrorism and radicalisation, which I have been involved in studying for almost twenty years.<sup>11</sup>

The entire process would not have been possible without Johanna Fürst and John Holland-McCowan, my research assistants at ICSR, as well as Moritz Ehrmann and Ondrej Pavlik of the Austrian Chairmanship. I am deeply grateful for their support.

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<sup>9</sup> Eden Cole and Richard Steyne, "Mapping Study on 'Strengthening OSCE's Role in Central Asia: Combatting Violent Extremism by Applying Human Security Measures'", DCAF, August 2017.

<sup>10</sup> For more information, see *International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICSR), King's College London*; available at <http://icsr.info/>.

<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Peter Neumann (ed.), *Radicalisation: Major Works Collection*, Volumes I-IV (London: Routledge, 2015)

## *Approach*

The trips and consultations have generated more information than can be presented in this report. My aim has been to identify major challenges and opportunities, offer examples of good practice, and formulate recommendations for the future role of the OSCE. While all visits have been valuable, as they have deepened my understanding of radicalisation in different contexts and increased my knowledge of the OSCE's programmes and activities, there is not enough space to reference every meeting and conversation. Instead, the main chapters will focus on highlighting broader themes and questions, and reference individual consultations only where relevant and appropriate.

Furthermore, since one of the principal objectives in writing the report was to offer practical suggestions, nearly half of the document consists of examples of good practice that I have found across the OSCE area. My motivation for doing so was to demonstrate that countering violent extremism is not a revolutionary new idea, that countries can learn – and benefit – from each others' experiences, and that the OSCE could be a useful forum through which this process can be facilitated.

At the same time, the report would be incomplete if I failed to mention the many challenges that prevent such cooperation from happening. Some of these problems result from the fact that governments speak different "languages" when it comes to countering violent extremism, or lack agreement on key terms and dynamics. Other obstacles are political in nature, and reflect the fundamentally contentious nature of the issue. As a result, the "practical" part of the report will be preceded by several chapters in which I first explain key concepts and dynamics, and then describe the political challenges that prevent deeper cooperation.

The international community's failure to collaborate more effectively on countering terrorism and violent extremism is not the fault of specific countries. Rather, it is a

collective problem which can only be overcome if governments stop pointing fingers at others, and start engaging in sincere efforts to remove the political and conceptual obstacles that stand in the way of enhancing the “practical co-operation” that Ministerial Declarations have demanded.

### 3 CONCEPTS

There are few issues in international politics where the underlying dynamics are as controversial as with terrorism and violent extremism. Many efforts to enhance international cooperation have failed because participants spoke different “languages” or had contradictory ideas about causes and effects. In some instances, these differences are political, while others result from a lack of clarity and empirical evidence. This chapter attempts to define and offer a more nuanced understanding of the terms violent extremism, extremism, radicalisation, counter-terrorism, and countering violent extremism.

#### 3.1 Violent Extremism

The term violent extremism has only become popular in recent years. Its emergence is closely related to the contentious nature of the term terrorism. For nearly four decades, and despite numerous attempts, the United Nations have failed to reach consensus on an internationally binding definition of terrorism. Practically all experts agree that the reasons for this failure have been political.<sup>12</sup> In most people’s minds, terrorism is a word of condemnation reserved for actions that are considered illegitimate and morally reprehensible. There is no “good” terrorism, and therefore many governments do not want to see the term applied to groups or causes they have supported, sympathised with, or considered legitimate. Debates about the definition of terrorism have frequently ended up in heated arguments about geopolitical issues such as self-determination, foreign occupation, military interventions, “double standards”, and the “right of armed resistance”. In short, attempts to facilitate international cooperation based on the term terrorism have, for

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<sup>12</sup> See Alex Schmid, “Terrorism – The Definitional Problem”, *Case Western Reserve Journal of International Law*, 36(2) (2004), pp. 375-419.

the most part, failed to escape the logic of “one man’s terrorist is another man’s freedom fighter”.

By popularising the term violent extremism, the policymakers who introduced it wanted to shed the political baggage that was associated with the word terrorism. They also insisted that the new term was more accurate and realistic, because it covered not just terrorist attacks but the whole range of violent actions that extremist groups have been responsible for – including politically inspired riots, hate crimes, and even more conventional military-style operations, which many definitions of terrorism failed to capture.<sup>13</sup> If anything, therefore, the concept of violent extremism is broader and more expansive than terrorism, because it accommodates *any* kind of violence as long as its motivation is deemed extremist.

### 3.2 Extremism

The term extremism generates its own difficulties, however. Political philosophers like Roger Scruton have shown that extremism can have multiple meanings. It may describe *ideas* that are diametrically opposed to a society’s core values, which — in the OSCE context — could be various forms of racial or religious supremacy, or any ideology that systematically denies basic human rights. Or it can refer to the ruthless *methods* by which political ideas are realised, namely by “show[ing] disregard for the life, liberty, and human rights of others”.<sup>14</sup> By adding the adjective “violent”, the term violent extremism resolves this ambiguity, but still leaves important questions about the relationship between violent and non-violent forms of extremism unanswered.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> See Owen Frazer and Christian Nünlist, “The Concept of Countering Violent Extremism”, *CSS Analyses in Security Policy*, No. 183, December 2015.

<sup>14</sup> Roger Scruton, *The Palgrave Macmillan Dictionary of Political Thought*, 3rd ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007).

<sup>15</sup> See Peter R. Neumann, “The Trouble with Radicalization”, *International Affairs*, 89(4) (2013), p. 875-6.

Another difficulty is that the meaning of extremism depends on what is seen as “mainstream” in any given society, section of society, or period of time. Different political, cultural and historical contexts produce different notions of extremism. Labelling people or groups as extremist will often — if not always — trigger the question “in relation to what?” Indeed, history books are full of reminders that many of the rights and freedoms now taken for granted were fought for by individuals who were condemned as “extremists” by their contemporaries. Those espousing the abolition of slavery, for example, “faced violent mobs and hostile legislators who interfered with their mail and destroyed their presses”; women campaigning for their right to vote in the early 20th century were called “‘hysterical’ and ... banned from public speaking”; and the American civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr was “smeared and threatened” by the government.<sup>16</sup>

In some ways, therefore, the difficulties with the term extremism are more pronounced, and less easily resolvable, than those surrounding the definition of terrorism. For, with terrorism, there is an objectively definable core — a violent tactic, sometimes a strategy, which can be distinguished from other means and modes of pursuing violent conflict. Extremism, by contrast, is context-dependent, which means that its definition can easily be challenged and manipulated. Indeed, critics have pointed out that the definition of extremism in counter-terrorism laws can be vague and/or overly broad, enabling governments to marginalise their domestic opponents.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See Timothy McCarthy and John McMillian, *The Radical Reader: A Documentary History of the American Radical Tradition* (New York: Free Press, 2003), pp. 3–4.

<sup>17</sup> For example from Central Asia, see Cole, “Mapping Study”, *DCAF*, op. cit., pp. 59-130.



### 3.3 Radicalisation

Radicalisation is the process whereby people turn to extremism. Unlike extremism, the idea of radicalisation as a process is not particularly controversial. No one who studies radicalization believes that individuals turn into extremists overnight, or that their embrace of extremism is caused by a single influence. Virtually all academic models conceive of radicalisation as a progression which plays out over a period of time and involves different factors and dynamics.<sup>18</sup>

Furthermore, while there is no single driver of radicalisation – and therefore no single profile of a terrorist – experts have identified a number of recurring factors and dynamics.<sup>19</sup> They are:

- *Grievance*: All forms of radicalisation are based on societal tensions, conflicts, and fault lines, which may cause thwarted expectations, conflicts of identity, or feelings of injustice, marginalisation and exclusion.
- *Needs*: Being part of an extremist group satisfies followers' emotional needs, such as the desire for belonging, community, adventure, power, significance, or glory. In some cases, this involves taking advantage of psychological vulnerabilities.
- *Ideas*: For discontent to be turned into a political project, it requires ideas that “make sense” of the grievance, identify a scapegoat, and offer solutions. When those ideas amount to a (seemingly) coherent worldview, they are called ideology.

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<sup>18</sup> See Neumann, “The Trouble”, *International Affairs*, op. cit., p. 874.

<sup>19</sup> See Peter R. Neumann, *Der Terror ist unter uns: Dschihadismus und Radikalisierung in Europa* (Berlin: Ullstein, 2016).

- *People*: With rare exceptions, radicalisation is a *social* process in which authority figures, charismatic leaders or tightly knit peer groups are key to generating trust, commitment, loyalty, and (peer) pressure.
- *Violence*: Becoming involved in violence is often the result of being exposed to violence, causing individuals to seek revenge or become “brutalised”. This frequently happens in the context of violent conflicts.

In short, radicalisation processes may be complex and ambiguous, but they are not entirely random. While there is no universal formula, as pathways into radicalisation differ depending on context and location, there are patterns that governments should make an effort to understand and consider, especially when formulating counter-measures.

### **3.4 Counter-Terrorism**

Recent years have seen a proliferation of concepts and approaches in the area of counter-terrorism and countering radicalisation. The oldest and most established concept is counter-terrorism, which refers to all measures aimed at thwarting terrorist plots and dismantling terrorist organisations. This typically includes the arrest of suspected members, the disruption of terrorist attacks, recruitment, propaganda, travel, and logistics, countering terrorist finance, the protection of potential targets, and the pooling and exchange of data with foreign countries. In nearly all countries, counter-terrorism is the primary responsibility of law enforcement, intelligence services, and – in some cases – the military.

Counter-terrorism is a central pillar of any effort aimed at countering threats from violent extremism. When targeted and effective, counter-terrorism not only helps to prevent attacks and protect lives, it also preserves the integrity of the state and its

institutions, and sends a powerful message to the terrorists and their supporters that violence is ineffective. As long as terrorism is sporadic and isolated, such measures may, in fact, be sufficient to contain a threat.

However, when threats are more persistent and widespread, counter-terrorism is often perceived as inadequate, because it fails to counter processes of radicalisation and leaves the underlying political, economic, and social drivers of violent extremism unaddressed. Moreover, when counter-terrorism is purely repressive and targets the wrong people, it can become a grievance in its own right.

### **3.5 Countering Violent Extremism**

The term countering violent extremism – which is often referred to by its acronym, CVE – is a recent creation. It emerged as the result of a U.S. Presidential summit in early 2015, and was promoted by the U.S. government through a series of regional conferences. Instead of calling it “countering *radicalisation*”, which would have separated the concept from counter-terrorism more clearly, the summit organisers opted for the broader, politically less controversial but less accurate “countering *violent extremism*”, which incorrectly suggested that it was a substitute – or at least competition – for counter-terrorism.<sup>20</sup> In an attempt to distinguish itself from the American effort, the United Nations labelled its own – largely identical – approach “Preventing Violent Extremism” (PVE). Within the OSCE context, countering violent extremism is officially referred to as “countering violent extremism and radicalisation that lead to terrorism”, or VERLT – another term that is, again, largely identical to CVE.

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<sup>20</sup> During my visits, many officials were confused about the distinction, while some expressed suspicions about the U.S. government’s “hidden agenda”.

In contrast to counter-terrorism, countering violent extremism counters not terrorism but processes of radicalisation. It involves no prosecutions, arrests, or threats of force, and seeks to mobilise and empower actors that are not traditionally associated with national security, such as local governments, educators, social workers, and civil society. The aim is not to reach active terrorists, but create resilience among populations that are seen as potentially vulnerable (“prevention”), or assist individuals who are open to turning away from extremism (“de-radicalisation”):<sup>21</sup>

- *Prevention* seeks to “inoculate” non-radicalised individuals against the appeal of violent extremism. The underlying logic is identical to other forms of prevention – for example, drug, alcohol, or gang prevention – where “at risk” populations and their wider communities are encouraged to participate in programmes that create awareness and strengthen the mental, intellectual, and social capacity to resist recruitment. This includes public information campaigns and capacity-building across entire communities, as well as targeted programmes in specific locations, such as schools, universities, youth and sports clubs, in mosques and churches, prisons and refugee centres, or on the internet.<sup>22</sup>
- *De-radicalisation* is aimed at radicalised individuals. It is based on the assumption that not everyone who becomes radicalised remains committed to their cause, and that every extremist movement has followers who are disillusioned, have doubts, or simply want out. In practice, de-radicalisation programmes target radicalised individuals at different stages of the extremist “lifecycle”: immediately before joining a group or network, as active members, or following their exit. The objective may be to stop their involvement in

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<sup>21</sup> See Peter R. Neumann, “Preventing Violent Radicalization in America”, *Bipartisan Policy Center*, August 2011, pp. 17-19.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

violence (behavioural de-radicalisation), or change their attitudes and ideological assumptions (cognitive de-radicalisation). Just like radicalisation, de-radicalisation is a process which plays out over time and draws on a combination of instruments, including – but not limited to – psychological counselling, ideological re-education, vocational training, re-socialisation, and job opportunities.<sup>23</sup>

The strength of countering violent extremism lies in offering a systematic framework for the mobilisation of groups and individuals that are not typically involved in security issues. By giving a role to mayors, teachers, religious leaders, youth workers, bloggers, and even students, it reaches out to all sectors of society and defines the struggle against violent radicalisation as a collective task. In doing so, it recognises the social roots of the problem, enables early interventions, promotes non-coercive solutions, and serves as an early warning system for emerging conflicts and grievances. Indeed, even governments who have been suspicious of the “CVE agenda” tend to agree that, in the long term, threats from violent extremism cannot be contained through security measures alone.

There are also risks, however. Critics have pointed out that the effects of countering violent extremism programmes can be difficult to measure.<sup>24</sup> Others have argued that countering violent extremism has “securitised” civil society by turning religious leaders and educators into government “spies”, while failing to address the underlying structural drivers and root causes from which manifestations of violent extremism cannot be separated.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> See Omar Ashour, *The De-Radicalization of Jihadists: Transforming Armed Islamist Movements* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009); Tore Bjorgo, “Processes of disengagement from violent groups of the extreme right” in Tore Bjorgo and John Horgan (eds.), *Leaving Terrorism Behind: Individual and Collective Disengagement* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008); Aladin El-Mafaalani *et al*, “Ansätze und Erfahrungen der Präventions- und Deradikalisierungsarbeit”, *HSFK-Report*, 6/2016, pp. 15-20.

<sup>24</sup> See Peter Romanjuk, “Does CVE Work? Lessons Learned from the Global Effort to Counter Violent Extremism”, *Global Center on Cooperative Security*, September 2015.

<sup>25</sup> For an eloquent critique, see, for example, Larry Attree, “Shouldn’t YOU be Countering Violent Extremism”, *Saferworld In Depth*, 14 March 2017.

## 4 DYNAMICS

Some of the major drivers of radicalisation are rarely mentioned in government-led discussions about counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism. This chapter aims to highlight several of these drivers – indiscriminate repression, violent conflicts, and migration – and demonstrate how they impact on processes of radicalisation.

### 4.1 Indiscriminate Repression

When terrorists attack a society, governments are under pressure to formulate a strong and immediate response that protects people's lives and preserves the integrity of the state. When doing so, they can be tempted to show strength and satisfy public demands for action by targeting the supporters of a wider political, ethnic, or religious cause. After all, members of such communities often have similar ideas or aspirations and are less difficult to find than the actual terrorists.

Yet research demonstrates that indiscriminate acts of repression are usually counterproductive. When governments lash out against communities based on their presumed association with a terrorist group, this strengthens the terrorists' narrative, makes people conclude that non-violent opposition is futile, and creates a self-fulfilling prophecy, as previously uninvolved community members become more inclined to shelter, support, or even join the terrorists.<sup>26</sup>

What governments sometimes fail to consider is that their (excessive) response may, in fact, be part of the terrorists' plan. Many terrorist groups actively seek to provoke an over-reaction, which targets entire populations and allows the terrorists to portray themselves as "defenders" of their communities. Revolutionary strategists, such as

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<sup>26</sup> See Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani, *Social Movements: An Introduction*, 2nd. ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006), pp. 130-2.

Carlos Marighela, argued that, for terrorism to succeed, it was essential to create a situation in which the government's response surpassed any notion of proportionality, so that it would be the government – not the terrorist group – whose actions would be regarded as excessive. In his view, people had to become convinced “that this government is unjust, incapable of solving problems, and that it resorts simply to the physical liquidation of its opponents”.<sup>27</sup> This, he believed, would create a “breeding ground” of disaffection, alienation, and the desire for retaliation in which terrorist groups could radicalise people and recruit new members.<sup>28</sup>

In a globalised world, the consequences of indiscriminate repression extend far beyond a single country. As events during the “War on Terror” have demonstrated, images of torture and abuse travel across boundaries, and help extremist groups in promoting a narrative in which their violence is portrayed as a response to “global oppression”. Among people who identify with the ethnic, religious, or political communities that have been targeted, these images can create feelings of shock and trauma, and may result in what the French sociologist Farhad Khosrokhavar has described as “vicarious humiliation”.<sup>29</sup> Groups like al-Qaeda and IS have frequently – and systematically – used them in their propaganda in order to justify their own brutality, portray themselves as “defenders of Islam”, or recruit foreign terrorist fighters.<sup>30</sup>

## 4.2 Violent Conflicts

Another important driver of violent radicalisation are violent conflicts. According to the Global Terrorism Index, which draws on data from the University of Maryland,

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<sup>27</sup> Carlos Marighela, *Minimanual of the Urban Guerrilla* (Montreal: Abraham Guillen Press, 2002).

<sup>28</sup> Peter R. Neumann and M.L.R. Smith, *The Strategy of Terrorism* (London and New York: Routledge 2008), p. 40.

<sup>29</sup> Farhad Khosrokhavar, *Suicide Bombers: Allah's New Martyrs* (London: Pluto Press, 2005), p. 152-4.

<sup>30</sup> Charlie Winter, “The Virtual ‘Caliphate’: Understanding Islamic State’s Propaganda Strategy”, *Quilliam Foundation*, July 2015, pp. 24-5.

the vast majority of terrorist attacks take place in the context of conflicts in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East. In 2015, countries that were involved in such conflicts accounted for more than 90 per cent of all terrorism-related deaths. Nearly 80 per cent were concentrated in just five countries: Iraq, Syria, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Nigeria.<sup>31</sup>

In many of these conflicts, violence begets violence. Numerous studies have documented vicious and self-destructive cycles of revenge. Others highlight the “cultures of conflict” from which many fighters originate. We also know about “economies of war” and the powerful material incentives that keep conflicts going. In some places, joining an extremist group can be profitable. In others, it is a way to escape poverty.<sup>32</sup>

All of these dynamics can be observed in today’s Syria and Iraq. The longer the conflict continues, the more people feel they have to avenge their families’ deaths; “cultures of martyrdom” become deeply ingrained; and fighting turns into a way of life. Similar dynamics can be observed in Libya and Yemen, where cycles of violence risk being institutionalised and large numbers of people are drawn into conflicts that become increasingly entrenched.<sup>33</sup>

Even countries outside a conflict zone can be affected. Neighbouring states often serve as bases for terrorist networks, planning and recruitment. Where groups have global agendas, terrorist attacks “at home” can be inspired by foreign conflicts or serve as retaliation for a country’s alleged interference. Radicalised citizens may become foreign terrorist fighters, commit war crimes, and return to their home countries as conflict “veterans”. In countries, where the memory of a conflict is

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<sup>31</sup> See “Global Terrorism Index 2015”, *Institute for Economics and Peace*, 2015; available at <http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Global-Terrorism-Index-2015.pdf>. “Global Terrorism Index 2016”, *Institute for Economics and Peace*, 2016; available at <http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Global-Terrorism-Index-2016.2.pdf>.

<sup>32</sup> Neumann, *Terrorism ist unter uns*, op. cit., pp. 131-3.

<sup>33</sup> Excerpt from Vaira Vike-Freiberga and Peter R. Neumann, “La violencia y sus causas”, *El País*, 26 October 2015.



recent and societies continue to be divided along ethnic and religious lines, terrorist attacks can cause polarisation and instability.

### 4.3 Migration

One of the most hotly debated political issues in recent years has been the connection between migration and terrorism. Many politicians and public figures have portrayed the two phenomena as closely linked, suggesting that migration often – if not inevitably – leads to terrorism, while others insist that they are completely different issues and must never be conflated. Against this background, it is important to develop a nuanced, evidence-based understanding of the underlying processes and dynamics.

First, and most importantly, there is no empirical evidence to support the claim that migration *as such* causes terrorism. Instead, the link seems to change depending on the circumstances in which migration takes place and the kind of terrorism it may (or may not) produce. It makes no sense, for example, to suggest that migrants play a significant role in extremist groups that are ideologically opposed to migration, such as white supremacist or neo-Nazi groups. Likewise, ethnic separatist movements tend to recruit their members from within a country, though diaspora communities are known to be a frequent source for funds and ideological inspiration.<sup>34</sup> In the current context, the potentially most relevant connection is between immigration and groups like al-Qaeda and IS.

Even if such links can be plausible, it is important to keep in mind that only a miniscule percentage of migrants will ever turn to terrorism. Just like all other populations that are thought to be “at risk”, the vast majority will remain peaceful.

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<sup>34</sup> See Bruce Hoffman et al, *The Radicalization of Diasporas and Terrorism* (Santa Monica: RAND, 2007).

Violent radicalisation remains a rare event, and saying that migrants are “prone to terrorism” is misleading, even in the context of specific groups and circumstances. Even so, understanding risks and vulnerabilities – however small – is essential to reducing their potential impact.

### *Distinctions*

The first group that is frequently mentioned are *fake migrants*, that is, terrorists who pose as refugees and use migration routes in order to cross international borders. This has little to do with migration-related radicalisation, since they are not genuine migrants and their radicalisation took place before they left their countries of origin. In essence, they are covert terrorist operatives who exploit migration flows as a way of entering a foreign country. Although exact numbers are disputed and estimates vary,<sup>35</sup> this has happened on several occasions since IS declared its so-called Caliphate, most prominently in the case of the November 2015 attacks in Paris.<sup>36</sup>

In the second category are so-called *new migrants*, that is, genuine migrants who become vulnerable to radicalisation as a result of their migration experience. The underlying driver may be a sense of cultural and social dislocation – being removed from family and friends, overwhelmed by a new country, culture, and language, and with no clear perspective or certainty for the future. Over time, this sense of dislocation can be amplified by thwarted expectations, experiences of rejection, and economic frustrations. From the extremists’ perspective, such migrants offer a pool of grievances and potential resentments that can be activated and channelled into violence or an extremist political project.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Public estimates range widely from “a few dozen” to “thousands”. I am grateful to Dr. Thomas Hegghammer for providing me with this information.

<sup>36</sup> Among the individuals who carried out the attack were two individuals who had registered as refugees on a Greek island a month earlier. See “Two Paris attacks suspects extradited to France from Austria”, *Agence France Press*, 29 July 2016.

<sup>37</sup> I am grateful for this insight to Dr. Thomas Hegghammer.

The group which has received the most attention from researchers and academics are *the descendants of new migrants*. Strictly speaking, they are no longer migrants, because they were born in their country of residence, speak its language, and – in many cases – are full citizens. Nevertheless, based on their names, physical appearance, religion and/or cultural background, some governments describe them as people with a “migration background”.

As many studies have shown, people with migration backgrounds often experience crises of identity which result in them questioning their sense of belonging. While they no longer identify with the culture and traditions of their parents or grandparents, whose countries they often only know from holidays, they are equally alienated from their countries of residence, where they feel unaccepted and sometimes experience discrimination.<sup>38</sup>

Many scholars believe that this is the principal dynamic which explains why especially second and third generation descendants of Muslim immigrants have sometimes been receptive to groups like al-Qaeda and IS.<sup>39</sup> After all, for extremist groups, the sense of alienation that “crises of identity” produce is a “cognitive opening”<sup>40</sup> in which to insert their narrative of the “West vs. Islam” that simultaneously provides an explanation for people’s discomfort and offers a new and seemingly more powerful identity.

As with new migrants, efforts aimed at countering radicalisation among the descendants of new migrants should consist of disrupting terrorist recruitment

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<sup>38</sup> See, for example, Robert S. Leiken, “Europe’s Mujahideen: Where Mass Immigration Meets Global Terrorism”, *Center for Immigration Studies*, April 2005; Peter R. Neumann, *Joining Al-Qaeda: Jihadist Recruitment in Europe* (London: Routledge, 2009); Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam* (London: Hurst, 2004); Marc Sageman, *Leaderless Jihad: Terror Networks in the Twenty-First Century* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2008).

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> For an explanation of the concept of “cognitive opening”, see Quintan Wiktorowicz, “Joining the Cause: Al-Muhajiroun and Radical Islam” in Peter R. Neumann, *Radicalization, Major Works Collection, Vol. 1* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015).

(counter-terrorism), creating resilience (countering violence extremism), and wider political efforts, such as human rights education, promoting inclusion, as well as combating intolerance and discrimination (see 6.9). While many of these efforts are nationally focused and should always reflect the specific circumstances in a given country or society, regional and international organisations, such as the OSCE, can also play a role.

## 5 THE ROLE OF THE OSCE

In addition to being the world's largest regional organisation under Chapter VIII of the United Nations Charter, with 57 participating States and 11 partner countries, the OSCE is the only such organisation with a comprehensive security mandate. Countering terrorism and sub-state political violence, particularly in the context of violent conflicts, has long been an important part of its mission.

Especially since the September 11, 2001, attacks and the subsequent establishment of the Action against Terrorism Unit in 2002, the organisation has systematically increased its portfolio of relevant activities, which now include events and programmes across all of its three so-called dimensions, that is, political-military affairs, economic and environmental issues, and the human dimension.<sup>41</sup> Countering violent extremism – which the OSCE refers to as countering violent extremism and radicalisation that lead to terrorism (VERLT) – has been an increasingly important subset of these activities.

This chapter provides an assessment of the OSCE's current role and capacity in countering violent extremism, or VERLT. It begins with a description of the principal obstacles to generating political consensus in the wider area of fighting terrorism, and continues with an overview of the organisation's current activities in relation to VERLT. The last section highlights areas and activities in which the organisation's contribution is valuable and unique, and could potentially be strengthened.

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<sup>41</sup> Raphael F. Perl, "Countering Terrorism: The OSCE as a Regional Model" in Alex Schmid and Garry Hindle (eds.), *After the War on Terror: Regional and Multilateral Perspectives on Counter-Terrorism Strategy* (London: RUSI, 2009), pp. 63-4.

## 5.1 Obstacles and Challenges

Many policymakers believe that international cooperation against terrorism should be “easy”, because fighting terrorism is a “shared concern”. While this may be true at the level of declarations, the practical consequences are often unclear and mired in political controversy.

The constraints that are described in this section provide the political context against which the OSCE’s activities and potential need to be judged. They are not the fault of a single country or group of countries, but a collective challenge that requires every participating State to re-examine their positions and attitudes. Indeed, as decades of diplomacy have shown, many of the obstacles that arise from international cooperation against terrorism are not unique to the OSCE but common to virtually all multilateral fora in which such cooperation has been pursued – not least the United Nations.<sup>42</sup>

One of longest-standing problems is *disagreement on the meaning of terrorism*. The absence of a definition or list of specific groups that are considered “terrorist” or “violent extremist” often results in political grandstanding and seemingly endless debates about the difference between terrorists and “freedom fighters”. It also allows governments to arbitrarily accuse others of “sponsoring terrorism”, or portray domestic political opponents (including, in some instances, journalists) as “terrorists”, even when there is little evidence that they have engaged in violence.

Related to this are *different priorities and levels of enthusiasm*. Despite the dramatic language of declarations, which emphasise that terrorism is a global scourge, has no justification, and poses a threat to everyone and everywhere, individual governments’ commitment and sense of urgency can be vastly different in practice.

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<sup>42</sup> Jeffrey Laurenti, “The United Nations and Terrorism” in Leonard Weinberg (ed.), *Democratic Responses to Terrorism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 69-90.

States that have recently been attacked are typically the most aggressive, while countries that do not consider themselves to be targets of a particular group or movement are sometimes less enthusiastic.

Another obstacle are *excessive sensitivities over language*. While everyone agrees that “words matter”, and that describing a problem in universally accepted language can go a long way towards facilitating international action, debates on fighting terrorism frequently appear to be dominated by arguments over terminology rather than substance. Where such debates prevent agreement, or result in wording that is obscure or insufficiently precise, the effect can be confusion, misunderstandings, or misrepresentations of the phenomena that the terms are seeking to describe. Simply put, reaching agreement to use the term “Daesh” instead of Islamic State is not the same as defeating Daesh.

Equally problematic is governments’ *lack of introspection*. When states speak about terrorism in other countries, they are quick to highlight underlying conflicts, structural problems, and government policies which are said to have given extremist groups opportunities to radicalise and recruit. When talking about their own countries, however, they angrily reject such suggestions, preferring to blame “evil ideologies” and external influences. This “double standard” is often seen as part of the unavoidable “political theatre” in multilateral fora like the OSCE and the United Nations. At the same time, it creates conflict, unnecessary arguments, and is empirically false. As explained in the previous chapter, violent radicalisation is rarely – if ever – the result of a single factor, but thrives where underlying conflicts and grievances connect with powerful ideologies and sophisticated recruitment networks. International debates on countering violent extremism could be more productive – and less acrimonious – if countries had the courage to confess to their own problems before pointing their fingers at others.

A related challenge is how international cooperation against terrorism can be *overshadowed by wider political disagreements*. Precisely because terrorism is frequently the result of violent conflicts, in which countries support different sides and have different stakes (see 4.2), the issue of counter-terrorism can end up being secondary to other interests. Syria is a good example. There is no OSCE participating State that does not consider IS to be a significant threat, but because the group's rise and territorial ambitions have been closely tied to the Syrian conflict – in which participating States support opposing sides and have developed different ideas for how it should be resolved – countries have failed to agree on a common approach. The same has occurred in relation to other conflicts and bilateral issues where unrelated disagreements have sometimes spilled over into the area of fighting terrorism.

Lastly, counter-terrorism approaches are based on *fundamentally different philosophies*. Some countries continue to view countering terrorism mainly as a security problem, and are generally suspicious of the involvement of actors other than law enforcement and the intelligence services. Others, by contrast, see it as the result of deep-seated social and political problems that need to be countered by a number of actors and through a variety of measures and instruments. Each accuses the other of making the problem worse by being either “too soft” or “too repressive”. In short, while all governments agree that terrorism is a threat and that more international action is needed, their underlying philosophies – and the practical ideas that result from them – continue to be vastly different, despite the considerable – and undoubtedly helpful – progress that has been made at the level of Ministerial Declarations.



## 5.2 Current Activities

As mentioned earlier, the OSCE has long considered fighting terrorism an important part of its mission. With the 2008 Ministerial Council Decision on “Further Promoting the OSCE’s Action in Countering Terrorism”, countering violent extremism and radicalisation that lead to terrorism, or VERLT, became part of its portfolio.<sup>43</sup> In 2012, the *Consolidated Framework for the Fight against Terrorism*, which defined the organisation’s approach and spelled out its main areas of activity, named countering VERLT as one of eight “strategic focus areas”. It also highlighted the OSCE’s comprehensive approach to security, as well as its multi-stakeholder framework and complementary executive structures as “comparative advantages”.<sup>44</sup> In 2015 and 2016, Ministerial Declarations reiterated this mandate, and further strengthened the role of countering VERLT.<sup>45</sup>

Today, countering VERLT is one of the cornerstones of OSCE programming, with activities in practically all areas of the OSCE region. This section provides an overview of the organisation’s current portfolio, which includes activities of the Secretariat’s Action against Terrorism Unit and the field operations, especially in South-Eastern Europe and Central Asia. It also refers to relevant programmes by other OSCE organs, which – though not explicitly framed as countering violent extremism – contribute to addressing the “conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism”.<sup>46</sup> This includes structural drivers and grievances such as “negative socio-economic factors”, human rights violations, discrimination and intolerance, as well as violent conflicts.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> “Further Promoting the OSCE’s Action in Countering Terrorism”, *Ministerial Council*, MC.DEC/10/08, 5 December 2008.

<sup>44</sup> “OSCE Consolidated Framework”, op. cit., PC.DEC/1063;

<sup>45</sup> “Preventing Countering Violent Extremism”, op. cit., MC.DOC/4/15; “Strengthening OSCE Efforts”, op. cit., MC.DOC/1/16.

<sup>46</sup> “OSCE Consolidated Framework”, op. cit., PC. DEC/1063.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

## *Secretariat*

The Secretariat's Action against Terrorism Unit serves as a centrally located "focal point", "information resource" and "implementation partner" for all OSCE counter-terrorism activities. In addition to countering VERLT, this involves:

- Maintaining the Counter-Terrorism Network, a newsletter for counter-terrorism professionals from across the OSCE area;
- Helping to organise the yearly OSCE-wide Counter-Terrorism Conference, which attracted over 550 participants in May 2017;
- Promoting the implementation of international legal conventions and enhancing criminal justice cooperation on counter-terrorism;
- Developing an e-learning module on countering terrorists' use of the internet, with support from the governments of Austria, Luxembourg, and Spain;
- Protecting non-nuclear critical energy infrastructure via public-private partnerships;
- Strengthening travel document security through workshops for law enforcement and border guards;
- Countering terrorist finance by training relevant officials, typically in collaboration with United Nations agencies.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> "Tentative List of TNTD/ATU Activities in 2017", *TNTD/ADU*, 2017.

Based on a “tentative list“ of activities, countering VERLT now constitutes the largest single area of work within the Action against Terrorism Unit.<sup>49</sup> There are six priorities:

- Serving as a point of contact for participating States and responding to their requests for information and assistance;
- Maintaining online repositories of relevant policies and National Action Plans for countering violent extremism. (These are accessible to governments and members of the public via the OSCE’s website.)
- Supporting participating States in the process of drafting National Action Plans, usually in cooperation with field operations;
- Collaborating with field operations on table-top exercises and regionally focused events, such as a series of workshops initiated by the Austrian OSCE Chairmanship for young experts from different parts of the OSCE area, which produced recommendations that were presented at the OSCE-wide Counter-Terrorism Conference;
- #UnitedCVE, an online communications campaign aimed at raising awareness about “the corrosive appeal of violent extremism by promoting tolerance, mutual respect, pluralism, inclusions, and cohesion“.<sup>50</sup> The campaign generates tweets, short videos, interviews, and statements from OSCE conferences and workshops. According to its own records, #United CVE has reached more than 16 million people on the internet, “especially youth, across the OSCE area and beyond“.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> “OSCE United in Countering Violent Extremism: #UnitedCVE Campaign“, *OSCE leaflet*, 2017.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

- *Leaders against Intolerance and Violent Extremism (LIVE)*, a grassroots capacity-building initiative for civil society leaders. The objective is provide training for young people, women, and religious leaders who are committed to countering violent extremism, and are both credible and influential in their societies, so they can pass on their skills and mobilise civil society. It also aims to create an OSCE-wide network of “graduates” that will exchange ideas and good practices, develop new projects, and “promote peer-learning”.<sup>52</sup>

### *Field Operations*

In contrast to other international organisations, the majority of OSCE staff is not located at the organisation’s headquarters but in field operations across the OSCE region. This reflects the OSCE’s ethos, which, from the very beginning, has focused on strengthening local government capacity, encouraging peaceful transformation, and providing practical assistance in the prevention – or resolution – of conflicts. Most field operations are based in the Western Balkans and Central Asia. They vary in size and responsibilities, depending on local needs and agreements with host countries. Nearly all are involved in programmes related to countering terrorism and VERLT, which represents a growing area of activity.

According to an internal OSCE report, field operations had undertaken 107 VERLT-related activities between 2009 and early 2016. Nearly all of them took place in the Western Balkans and Central Asia. They are estimated to have reached 10,000 “beneficiaries”, of whom the majority were multipliers – for example, youth and religious leaders, or government officials – whose influence would allow knowledge and skills to “cascade down”. Moreover, most field operations did not conceive of countering VERLT as a “stand-alone” activity, but made conscious efforts to connect

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<sup>52</sup> “OSCE Leaders against Intolerance and Violent Extremism”, *OSCE Leaflet*, 2017.

VERLT-related programmes and events with existing workstreams.<sup>53</sup> The thematic focus areas can be summarised as follows:

- General awareness-raising and facilitation of information-exchange;
- Support for the development of national counter-terrorism strategies and countering violent extremism action plans;
- Promoting community-policing approaches;
- Empowering youth and women;
- Assistance with the implementation of OSCE-wide campaigns, especially #UnitedCVE.

Since the report's completion, field operations' involvement in countering VERLT has further intensified. Examples of recent or ongoing activities include:

- Assisting the Albanian government with the implementation of its National Countering Violent Extremism Strategy;
- Supporting the Islamic Community in Bosnia and Herzegovina in training more than 1,000 imams;
- Facilitating the participation of government and civil society representatives from Montenegro in a regional table-top exercise on Foreign Terrorist Fighters;

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<sup>53</sup> "Report to the OSCE Permanent Council on Past, Current and Possible Future Activities of OSCE Field Operations to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism, as per MC.DOC/4/15", *OSCE Secretariat*, SEC.GAL/76/16, 23 May 2016.

- Providing expert advice on the setting up of Municipal Safety Councils in Serbia;
- Training police officers from the FYR Macedonia in community policing and countering VERLT;
- Raising awareness of violent extremism among parents in Tajikistan;
- Hosting an international workshop on community policing in Uzbekistan;
- Organising VERLT-focused seminars for youth leaders in collaboration with the Kazakhstan-based Central Asian Youth Network;
- Training prison staff in Kyrgyzstan and developing a strategy to ensure better coordination of countering VERLT-related resources within the national prison system.

### *Other Organs*

Beyond countering terrorism and VERLT, the OSCE is involved in all aspects of supporting countries to become more peaceful, stable, and democratic. As shown in the previous chapter, though not explicitly linked to countering VERLT, many of the organisation's other activities can have a significant impact on the "conditions that are conducive to the spread of terrorism", for example because they reduce the likelihood of violent conflict, or because they help security agencies avoid human rights violations and indiscriminate repression. Rather than *VERLT-specific*, they are sometimes referred to as *VERLT-relevant*.

This is especially true for the work of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), which “promote[s] democracy, the rule of law, human rights, tolerance and non-discrimination”,<sup>54</sup> the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), which seeks to reduce tensions involving national minorities by “addressing short-term triggers of inter-ethnic tension or conflict, and long-term structural concerns”,<sup>55</sup> the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, which safeguards and promotes freedom of expression,<sup>56</sup> the Conflict Prevention Centre (CPC), and the Office of the Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA).

For example, ODIHR and the Representative on Freedom of Media have participated in numerous countering VERT activities – especially on issues such as prison reform, community policing, or combating hate speech and hate crime – which have reduced opportunities for violent extremists to radicalise and recruit while promoting democracy, stability, and the rule of law.

### **5.3 Adding Value**

In principle, the OSCE is well positioned to facilitate cooperation on countering terrorism and violent radicalisation. Its participating States and partners cover much of the Northern Hemisphere, bringing together not only East and West but also countries with vastly different capacities and experiences in countering terrorism. At the same time, the organisation remains small enough to avoid the degree of paralysis that has sometimes characterised debates about countering terrorism at the United Nations. With a focus on security and cooperation in Europe, all participating

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<sup>54</sup> Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) website; available at <http://www.osce.org/odihr>.

<sup>55</sup> High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) website; available at <http://www.osce.org/hcnm>.

<sup>56</sup> “OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media”, *OSCE*; available at <http://www.osce.org/representative-on-freedom-of-media>.

States understand that negative developments can rarely be contained, and that – ultimately – everyone’s security depends on everyone else’s.

One of the OSCE’s greatest strengths are its field operations. Countering violent extremism programmes are frequently criticised for producing short-term, superficial engagements. Especially international organisations are regularly accused of having only limited knowledge of local dynamics and conditions, resulting in programmes that duplicate work, reach the wrong people, or undermine the very actors that should be strengthened.<sup>57</sup> Having permanent field operations, which are locally staffed and possess deep knowledge of the societies in which they are based, overcomes these problems, in addition to embedding counter-radicalisation programmes within the OSCE’s wider – and longer term – efforts to strengthen local civil society and accountable government.

Both Central Asia and the Western Balkans, where most of the OSCE’s field operations are located, offer opportunities for sustained counter-radicalisation programming. Despite many differences, participating States in both regions have struggled to formulate coherent approaches towards engaging vulnerable populations and countering the structural drivers of violent radicalisation. In both regions, governments view support for groups like al-Qaeda and IS as a form of “religious deviance” which can easily be fixed by bringing people back into the fold of “state-sanctioned Islam”.<sup>58</sup> While it would be naive to think that OSCE-led counter-radicalisation programmes can singlehandedly resolve deep-seated problems like corruption, lack of opportunities, ethnic tensions, and excessive state repression, which are widely perceived as drivers of radicalisation in both regions, they can create awareness and provide legitimate channels for grievances to be aired.

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<sup>57</sup> See, for example, “CVE Workshop: Opportunities and Challenges for Bilateral and Multilateral Donors: Workshop Report”, *Royal United Services Institute*, 17 June 2016; available at <http://www.organizingagainstve.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/CVE-Donor-Workshop-Report.pdf>.

<sup>58</sup> Official visits. Also Cole, “Mapping Study”, *DCAF*, op. cit., pp. 59-130.



Furthermore, the OSCE's comprehensive security mandate ensures that issues like violent radicalisation will never be looked at in isolation from the wider political, economic, and societal fault lines that give rise to them. Although much of the work that takes place on countering terrorism is located within the first – that is, political-military – dimension, various Ministerial Declarations have made it clear that the organisation's approach towards countering terrorism and violent extremism stretches across all three dimensions, including social and economic issues as well as human rights and good governance. This is consistent with all empirically grounded models and theories of radicalisation, which have shown that terrorism does not occur in a vacuum, but seeks to leverage wider grievances, frustrations, or other “conducive conditions”.<sup>59</sup> It also echoes the United Nations' Action Plan on Preventing Violent Extremism,<sup>60</sup> the views of civil society representatives in practically all the countries I have visited, as well as the conclusions of the workshops on youth and violent extremism that the OSCE has hosted in the most affected areas in the OSCE region.<sup>61</sup>

### *Focus Areas*

Based on this assessment of the organisation's institutional strengths and advantages, its experience and current activities, as well as the challenges in facilitating international counter-terrorism cooperation, I believe that the OSCE's most powerful contributions to international efforts at combating terrorism and violent radicalisation lie in the following areas:

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<sup>59</sup> See Peter R. Neumann (ed.), *Radicalization, Major Works Collection, Vol. 1: Models and Theories* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>60</sup> “Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism”, *United Nations Counterterrorism Implementation Task Force*, January 2016; available at <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/ctitf/en/plan-action-prevent-violent-extremism>.

<sup>61</sup> See “Youth and the Prevention of Violent Extremism: Workshops”, *OSCE Secretariat*; available at <http://www.osce.org/secretariat/310416>.

- *Its wider contribution to preventing and resolving conflicts, promoting human rights, and safeguarding the rights of national minorities*, which help to address the conditions in which violent extremism can thrive. Even when countering VERLT is not mentioned as an explicit objective, or in cases where linking programmes or activities to countering terrorism would deter participants or be negatively perceived, the OSCE should claim – and be given – credit for the counter-terrorism and counter-extremism benefits of the work it does to promote peace, stability, inclusion, and good governance.
- *Its strong local presence, particularly in Central Asia and the Western Balkans*, where it has the ability to run VERLT-related programmes and activities that are sustainable and deeply informed by its field operations' knowledge of local conditions and dynamics. Given that many of the countries in those regions are frequently mentioned as strategic priorities in the fight against violent extremism by the United Nations, the European Union, and significant donor countries, the OSCE should be given a lead role in coordinating international efforts.
- *The systematic exchange of good practices*, which benefits from the OSCE's wide membership and convening power. This could be particularly useful in the area of countering violent extremism, where the disparities between participating States in terms of approaches and levels of capacity are especially stark. In doing so, the aim would not be to harmonise efforts, impose arbitrary standards, or "copy and paste" programmes that may (or may not) have worked in entirely different contexts, but to promote cooperation, allowing participating States to learn from their partners' successes and failures, while avoiding having to "reinvent the wheel".

For the OSCE to play a strong and effective role along these lines requires political will and a genuine commitment by all participating states. It is not sufficient to agree that

terrorism is bad, and that countering terrorism should be a priority for international cooperation, without – at the same time – agreeing on what should be done and how. In the area of countering violent extremism, this implies a sincere commitment to the principles and ideas of the 2015 and 2016 Ministerial Declarations, which described terrorism as a multi-faceted problem requiring a “multi-stakeholder approach”. Needless to say, this approach can make governments uncomfortable, because it requires the participation of civil society and may bring up problems and issues which governments have failed to address.

In summary, therefore, the OSCE is well equipped in principle to play a powerful role in developing a modern and truly comprehensive approach towards countering terrorism, because its three dimensions allow it to combine more traditional aspects of counter-terrorism, such as technical training, capacity-building, and information exchange, with localised efforts to counter violent extremism and the processes of radicalisation that lead to terrorism. Whether it can realise this potential depends not just on the organisation itself, but equally – if not more importantly – on the political will and commitment of its participating States.

## 6 GOOD PRACTICES

This part of the report highlights good practices on countering violent extremism from across the OSCE area. The aim is twofold. First, it seeks to illustrate the importance and potential impact of non-coercive approaches in dealing with violent extremism. Second, it demonstrates that neither the OSCE nor any participating State need to start from scratch, but that good ideas can often be found by reaching out to one's partners. As mentioned earlier, the OSCE could play a useful role in facilitating this process, especially considering the varying levels of capacity among its membership.

Some limitations are worth keeping in mind. Although some countries have more experience than others, there is no participating State that is exemplary in every respect. Even countries with long histories of involvement in countering violent extremism can benefit from new ideas and perspectives. Likewise, there is no programme or activity that should simply be copied. To a certain extent, all projects reflect local conditions and context, and require careful study and adaptation before being transferred to a different environment.

Moreover, there are plenty of worthwhile projects and initiatives that could not be included in the report. The ones I have selected serve to highlight the diversity of approaches across the OSCE area, and are illustrations of the potential for co-operation and mutual exchange. Other examples can be found in the “good practice collections” of the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF), the European Union’s Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), or the Hedayah Center in Abu Dhabi.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> “Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism: Approaches and Practices”, *European Commission Radicalisation Awareness Network*, 2017; available at [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation\\_awareness\\_network/ran-best-practices/docs/collection\\_of\\_approaches\\_lessons\\_learned\\_and\\_practices\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-best-practices/docs/collection_of_approaches_lessons_learned_and_practices_en.pdf); “Good Practices”, *Hedayah*; available at <http://www.hedayahcenter.org/good-practice>; “Countering Violent Extremism”, GCTF; available at <https://www.thegctf.org/Working-Groups/Countering-Violent-Extremism>.

Lastly, I have been conscious of the criticism that many prevention programmes – including those in the field of countering violent extremism – lack robust instruments for evaluation, making it difficult to assess how effective they are. Governments across the OSCE area have started to pay more attention to this issue. Several Western countries and the European Union, for example, are currently developing evaluation instruments that are germane to counter-radicalisation.<sup>63</sup> Where possible and appropriate, I have highlighted projects with clear evidence of assessment and evaluation.

The chapter is organised according to areas of programmatic activity. It begins with national action plans, and is followed by sections on prison, policing, youth, education, religion, the internet, women, and refugees. The last two sections deal with good practices on interventions (early warning) and returnees (exit and re-integration).

## **6.1 National Action Plans**

In his 2015 *Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism*, the United Nations Secretary-General encouraged member states to develop national plans of action, which set “priorities for addressing the local drivers of violent extremism and [complement] national counter-terrorism strategies where they already exist”.<sup>64</sup> Such plans or national strategies remain the ultimate test for whether a government is serious about countering violent radicalisation. In no other field of policymaking would it be acceptable for different actors to work on a matter of significant national interest more or less on their own – without any coherence, common goals, or coordination.

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<sup>63</sup> See, for example, Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Peter Romaniuk, and Rafia Barakat, “Evaluation Countering Violent Extremism Programming: Practice and Progress”, *Global Center on Cooperative Security*, September 2013; available at <http://www.globalcenter.org/publications/evaluating-countering-violent-extremism-engagement-practices-and-progress/>.

<sup>64</sup> “Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism”, *United Nations Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force*; available from <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/ctitf/en/plan-action-prevent-violent-extremism>.

In countering radicalisation, this is particularly fatal, because separate ministries and different levels of government need to be aligned, while resources have to be joined up, duplications avoided and lessons shared. Yet, according to an OSCE survey from late 2016, only 26 of the 57 participating States had adopted such plans, which means that more than half of the participating States had not.<sup>65</sup>

At their most basic level, national action plans define aims and objectives, establish priorities, and allocate roles and responsibilities. This makes it possible to formulate targets, hold agencies accountable, and show civil society stakeholders how their activities and programmes fit into the whole. They also compel governments to make realistic statements about the nature of the threat and carefully consider the drivers of extremism in their societies.

Of course, adopting such documents does not automatically lead to action. Nor does it guarantee that there will be money for their implementation. But they are the foundation for a “common understanding”<sup>66</sup> of the threat and a more systematic, sophisticated, and effective approach towards countering it, which – in turn – helps facilitate funding and sustain the interest of policymakers, local and foreign governments, as well as international institutions.

More information can be found in the Hedayah Center’s booklet *Guidelines and Good Practices: Developing National P/CVE Strategies and Action Plans*.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> “Inventory of Policy Documents and Legislation adopted by OSCE Participating States and Partners for Co-operation on VERLT”, OSCE, 14 December 2016; available at <http://www.osce.org/secretariat/289911?download=true>.

<sup>66</sup> “12 Principles for National Action Planning”, International Center for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague, 30 June 2016; available at <https://icct.nl/update/12-principles-for-national-action-planning/>.

<sup>67</sup> “Guidelines and Good Practices: Developing National P/CVE Strategies and Action Plans”, Hedayah Center, September 2016; available at <http://www.hedayahcenter.org/Admin/Content/File-1792016192156.pdf>.

### *Case Study 1: Action Plan against Radicalisation and Violent Extremism, Norway*

Norway's current Action Plan was published in 2014 and is based on an extensive process of consultation. Over a period of several months, a working group, which consisted of representatives from all relevant ministries, met with stakeholders from the police and security services, different parts of the administration, local government, researchers, civil society, and other Nordic governments. The resulting document highlights threats from far-right extremists and violent jihadists, and explicitly recognises the risk of cross-community polarisation.<sup>68</sup> In the main part, it describes 30 concrete measures in five areas of activity: "knowledge and expertise", "co-operation and co-ordination", "preventing the growth of extremist groups and helping to promote re-integration", "preventing radicalisation and recruitment through the internet", and "international cooperation". All commitments are transparent and targeted. For each of the measures, it identifies the government departments that are responsible, and obliges them to publish updates and progress reports via a public website ([www.radikalisering.no](http://www.radikalisering.no)).<sup>69</sup> Rather than being static, the Action Plan is designed to be a "living document", as new measures can be added in response to changes of the perceived threat. This has happened on several occasions since 2014.

### *Case Study 2: National Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism, Albania*

Albania's National Strategy, which was published in late 2015, draws on international frameworks and initiatives, including those of the United Nations, the United States, the Global Counterterrorism Forum, and the OSCE. Though not explicitly mentioned, it views groups like al-Qaeda and IS as the principal threat, and defines the

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<sup>68</sup> "Action Plan against Radicalisation and Violent Extremism", *Norwegian Ministry of Justice and Public Security*, 2014, p. 10; available at [https://www.counterextremism.org/resources/details/goto\\_url/679/8923](https://www.counterextremism.org/resources/details/goto_url/679/8923).

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

preservation of Albania as a peaceful and secular democracy as its overriding aim. The main part of the document contains ten measures that are grouped into three priority areas: “community outreach and engagement”, “countering extremist propaganda while preserving democratic values”, and “developing long-term comprehensive CVE policies”. The lines of accountability are clear: one department is responsible for each of the priority areas, while the Prime Minister’s Office is in charge of developing an inter-agency structure. Although some of the commitments are vague, the strategy deserves credit for its strong emphasis on the involvement of civil society, and the creation of social and educational opportunities for young people.<sup>70</sup>

## 6.2 Prison

Prisons are frequently described as “hotbeds” of radicalisation, because they are places in which (predominantly) young men experience personal crises and are cut off from traditional social relationships, such as family and friends. There is evidence that al-Qaeda and IS consider prisons to be “fertile grounds” for radicalisation and recruitment, and that terrorist plots have been forged by individuals who met behind bars. At the same time, prisons can offer opportunities for de-radicalisation and disengagement, and enable terrorists to re-integrate into society.<sup>71</sup> With increasing numbers of returnees from Syria and Iraq, they are likely to become focal points for counter- and de-radicalisation efforts.

Practically all participating States have been affected by radicalisation within their prison systems. One of the principal – and near-universal – lessons is that overcrowding makes the situation worse, because it provides terrorists and radicalisers

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<sup>70</sup> “Albanian National Strategy: Countering Violent Extremism”, *Republic of Albania – Council of Ministers*, 2016; available at <http://tinyurl.com/y8ey8wqm>.

<sup>71</sup> See Peter R. Neumann, *Prisons and Terrorism: Radicalisation and De-radicalisation in 15 Countries* (London: ICSR, 2010).



with opportunities to spread their messages. Long before thinking about more ambitious schemes, safe and orderly prisons should be every government's first priority. Another important measure is the training of prison staff, especially frontline guards who are typically the first ones to notice suspicious behaviours. Having officers who can recognise signs of radicalisation and extremist recruitment not only ensures that such activities can be detected, but also guarantees prisoners' right to practice their religion. This should be complemented by sophisticated systems of reporting and intelligence, which make it possible for prison authorities to report information and consult with national authorities and intelligence systems.<sup>72</sup>

In recent years, many governments have promoted the institution of the prison imam, especially in countries where terrorist groups claim to act in the name of Islam. The underlying rationale is that imams can minimise – if not deny – the (spiritual) space that might otherwise be available to extremists. In many cases, prison imams are expected to provide not only religious and spiritual services, but serve as counsellors, social workers, experts in radicalisation, and – more generally – interlocutors between the prison authorities and Muslim prisoners. While prison imams can be useful and effective in all of these roles, it is important not to overburden them with expectations.<sup>73</sup>

For more information, see the Council of Europe's *Handbook for Prison and Probation Services Regarding Radicalisation and Violent Extremism*.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., pp. 32-3.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>74</sup> "Council of Europe Handbook for Prison and Probation Services Regarding Radicalisation and Violent Extremism", *Council of Europe*, PC-CP (2016), December 2016; available at <https://rm.coe.int/16806f9aa9>.

### *Case Study 3: Preventing Radicalisation in Italian Prisons*

Although Italy has a Muslim population of just 2.5 per cent, the share of Muslims in Italian prisons is estimated to be between 15 and 20 per cent. This, as well as recurring reports about radicalisation among inmates, prompted the Italian Prisons Department to formulate a comprehensive strategy for preventing radicalisation in prisons. Part of this strategy has been to create a “centralised investigative unit” for collecting and sharing information, as well as classifying the individual risk of prisoners according to academic models of radicalisation. The Department also offers relevant training courses, which 20 per cent of prison staff and directors are reported to have taken.<sup>75</sup> The strategy’s third element is to increase the number of prison imams. For this purpose, the government recently signed an agreement with the Italian Union of Islamic Communities and Organisations, which provides resources and access, while ensuring that all imams are vetted and commit to promoting principles of equality, citizenship, and Islamic pluralism.<sup>76</sup>

### *Case Study 4: Rehabilitation of Extremist Prisoners, Kazakhstan*

Since 2014, the country has created a sophisticated system of prison-based programmes and rehabilitation centres that aim to create resilience among the general prison population, detect cases of radicalisation, and offer radicalised individuals opportunities to turn away from extremism. For example, a specialised group of imams is responsible for holding lectures and raising awareness across the prison system, while also running individual classes for terrorist convicts and those who are deemed at risk of radicalising. Despite the emphasis on religion, the curriculum involves educational classes, vocational training, sessions with psychologists, video conferences with close family members, as well as assistance

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<sup>75</sup> Frances D’Emilo, “Italy invites imams into prisons to deter extremism”, *Associated Press*, 12 July 2017.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

with employment and legal difficulties. Following release, a regional network of rehabilitation centres continues to mentor individuals, offering specialised care and making sure that the recidivism rate remains low. One of the centres is focused exclusively on women, including those “who have returned from... Syria or Iraq, whose husbands have been killed... or who are serving time in prison on related charges”.<sup>77</sup> Although the programme has not yet been fully evaluated, it can be described as the most ambitious of its kind within the OSCE area.

### 6.3 Policing

While police forces are mainly responsible for counter-terrorism, they can also make a positive contribution to countering radicalisation. One of the most effective ways is through “community policing” – a decades-old approach with many applications that has recently been adapted to countering violent extremism. Simply put, the idea is that policing becomes easier, and communities safer, if police forces are not seen as distant authority figures who only turn up when there is trouble, but are part of the communities they serve, build relationships, and gain people’s trust, especially among communities which have traditionally been hard to reach or suspicious of state authority. The hoped-for results are increased community resilience, more co-operation, and the ability to de-escalate tensions and avoid vicious cycles of polarisation, for example in the aftermath of terrorist attacks or hate crimes.<sup>78</sup>

In practice, community policing boils down to three core principles. The first is an emphasis on *partnerships* with community organisations and leaders, including youth, women, religious and ethnic minority groups, as well as business and other civil society organisations, which police should engage and seek to build honest, long-

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<sup>77</sup> Cole, “Mapping Study”, *DCAF*, op. cit., p. 63.

<sup>78</sup> See David Schanzer *et al*, “The Challenge and Promise of Using Community Policing Strategies to Prevent Violent Extremism”, *U.S. National Institute of Justice*, January 2016.

term relationships with. The second is *problem-solving*, which means that police should listen to communities and be responsive to their concerns, even when they are not high on its own list of priorities. Finally, community policing is meant to be *proactive* and *preventive* because it seeks to educate and mobilise people before a problem has festered or turned into criminal activity.<sup>79</sup>

Studies have shown that community policing can be effective in increasing people's trust in the police.<sup>80</sup> Its application to countering violent extremism is important and positive, though police forces should never be the only – or main – vehicle through which counter-radicalisation programmes are delivered to communities.

Furthermore, when police forces are seen as “policing thought”, this can undermine their authority and lead to allegations that counter-radicalisation is, effectively, a “spying programme”. Indeed, building trusting and co-operative relationships with communities is not something that police forces should do with the sole – or immediate - expectation of increasing tip-offs or countering violent radicalisation, but for its own sake.

For more details and examples, see the OSCE booklet *Preventing Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: A Community-Policing Approach*.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> See, for example, Linda S. Miller, Karen M. Hess, and Christine Orthmann, *Community Policing: Partnerships for Problem Solving*, 7th ed. (Clifton Park, NY: Delmar Cengage, 2017).

<sup>80</sup> “Community Policing to Counter Violent Extremism: A Process Evaluation in Los Angeles”, *National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START)*, July 2017, p. 1.

<sup>81</sup> OSCE, *Preventing Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: A Community-Policing Approach* (Warsaw: OSCE, 2014); available at <http://www.osce.org/atu/111438?download=true>.

*Case Study 5: Counter Violent Extremism Tailored Community Policing, Los Angeles Police Department, United States of America*

In 2008, the Los Angeles Police Department launched a specialised section for community outreach within its Counter-Terrorism and Special Operations Bureau. Currently staffed by 25 officers, this unit has created an extensive programme for engaging with Muslim communities on issues related to violent extremism. Over the years, it has hosted hundreds of events at all levels and with all kinds of stakeholders. Outreach activities range from the annual Muslim Forum, which brings together community leaders with the force's most senior officers, to participation in workshops, townhalls, lectures, inter-faith seminars, training sessions, community celebrations and festivals, as well as countless one-on-one meetings and relationships. In addition to threats from groups like al-Qaeda and IS, the partnership has addressed issues such as hate crime, Islamophobia, and tensions with other communities. It has also supported the development of a community-led intervention programme, which identifies and supports individuals who are considered to be at risk of violent radicalisation. An independent process evaluation has identified numerous good practices and reached generally positive conclusions.<sup>82</sup>

*Case Study 6: Simulation Exercises, Royal Canadian Mounted Police*

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police's community outreach department regularly conducts simulation exercises in which members of communities that have been affected by terrorism investigations switch sides and play the role of investigators. After briefings from the police, the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service, and the Public Prosecution Service, participants are divided into small teams and presented with new inputs and scenarios that require difficult decisions. Each

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<sup>82</sup> "Community Policing", *START*, op. cit.

decision needs to be discussed, finalised, and documented within set periods of time. Step by step, participants learn about the complexities of terrorism investigations, and the various dilemmas and trade-offs that are involved in trying to stop a terrorist attack while meeting public expectations, responding to political pressure, and being consistent with the law. According to the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, at the end of the two-hour simulations, participants “have successfully interrupted a terrorist plot, but more importantly, they leave with an improved understanding of the realities of a terrorism investigation”.<sup>83</sup>

#### 6.4 Youth

Young people are disproportionately affected by violent extremism, both as victims and perpetrators. That young people are more likely to become radicalised than other age groups should be no surprise. Psychological studies have shown that young people act more impulsively, have more confidence, and are prepared to take greater risks. They also lack experience, have no settled place in society, and are ready to experiment with new values and identities, often in deliberate opposition to the status quo.<sup>84</sup> Not least, they have fewer commitments that stop them from engaging in activities that people with jobs and families would consider irresponsible, stupid, or crazy.<sup>85</sup> In other words, there are plenty of reasons why radical and revolutionary movements are full of young people – and why young people are, on average, more vulnerable to extremist ideas and dangerous behaviours.

The purpose of youth work in general is to stabilise the lives of young people, strengthen “protective factors” such as family, friends and education, inoculate them against negative behaviours, and minimise their exposure to them. Countering

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<sup>83</sup> OSCE, *Preventing Terrorism*, op. cit., pp. 99.

<sup>84</sup> Andrew Silke, “Holy Warriors: Exploring the psychological processes of jihadi radicalization”, *European Journal of Criminology*, 5(1) (2008), p. 107.

<sup>85</sup> This is what sociologists call “demographic availability”. See Della Porta, *Social Movements*, op. cit., p. 39.

violent radicalisation pursues the same goals, except in relation to young people who are believed to be “at risk” of extremism rather than crime or other forms of delinquency. This means that the methods are not fundamentally different. Just like youth work generally, counter-radicalisation projects that target young people seek to strengthen family bonds, healthy relationships, and their sense of embeddedness within a local or national community. They work out problems and obstacles, and provide young people with the skills and confidence to pursue their goals within the system and by using acceptable – that is, non-violent – methods. And they expose them to the appeal and arguments of those who operate outside the system, and show them the likely consequences.

If successful, youth work will not only accomplish its negative goal – that is, to prevent violent radicalisation – but also its positive goal, which is to empower young people to speak out against extremism and violence. As long as governments accept that young people cannot be easily manipulated, and that those who have been empowered to speak out against violence and extremism will also be empowered to articulate other grievances, youth is not just a problem but can be the solution.

Additional lessons and experiences can be found in the OSCE’s guide on *Youth Engagement to Counter Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism*.<sup>86</sup>

#### *Case Study 7: Fryshuset/EXIT, Sweden*

Established in 1984, Fryshuset is a large centre for young people in Stockholm. It offers a vast array of activities and social projects, including schools, vocational training, arts, theatre, music, as well as specialised projects for youth affected by

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<sup>86</sup> “Youth Engagement to Counter Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism”, *OSCE ODIHR*, July 2013; available at <http://www.osce.org/atu/103352?download=true>.

honour crimes, gang violence, disabilities, racism, and bullying. Since the late 1990s, it has hosted EXIT, a project which helps members of neo-Nazis and white nationalist groups to turn away from extremism. The staff consists of former neo-Nazis themselves who collaborate with psychologists and psychotherapists in providing practical assistance as well as social and emotional support to the extremists and their relatives. Being integrated into the Fryshuset means that EXIT can draw on the youth centre's vast resources, whose activities and facilities are available to EXIT participants throughout the programme. EXIT has been so successful that it has recently been able to start a new project – *Passus* – which uses the same methods to help people turn away from criminal gangs.<sup>87</sup>

#### *Case Study 8: Active Change Foundation, United Kingdom*

The Active Change Foundation in a youth centre in Walthamstow, East London. In addition to the full range of services that are available to young people from the area, it launched a Young Leaders Programme in 2012. The programme runs each year and is open to up to 50 talented 16-17 year olds from communities that have experienced tensions and social problems. It seeks to develop their skills, educate them about the dangers of violence, and give them the ability to “challenge injustice” and “make their voices heard”. It involves a series of workshops, events, and a leadership conference at which participants are expected to advocate for a cause they feel passionate about. Although violent radicalisation and extremism are among the programme's recurring themes, they are not discussed in isolation from other – and sometimes related – challenges, such as crime, identity, community cohesion, Islamophobia, and discrimination. In 2016, the programme won the United Kingdom's Charity Award for Children and Young People.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> “Exit Fryshuset”, *Exit*; available at <https://exit.fryshuset.se/english/>

<sup>88</sup> See “Young Leaders Programme”, *Active Change Foundation*; available at <https://www.activechangefoundation.org/Pages/Category/young-leaders-programme>.



## 6.5 Education

Family and school are the two social environments in which young people spend most of their time. Schools are particularly important, because they are places where young people make their first friends and begin to shape their ideas on society and the world around them. Indeed, teachers are often overburdened with responsibilities and expectations. Not only are they meant to teach young people to read and write, but also convey democratic values, turn them into responsible citizens, and stop them from taking drugs, becoming obese, or drinking too much alcohol. Violent Radicalisation is just the latest in a long list of social ills that teachers are meant to cure.

In practice, some of schools' most significant contributions require no new content or activities that are explicitly linked to countering radicalisation. When schools teach critical thinking, make students reflect and question, or help them understand nuances, they create resilience against the uncritical acceptance that is usually demanded by extremist groups. Equally, when schools promote diversity, counter stereotypes, create belonging, and make young people understand differences, they protect students against extremist narratives which rely on "us versus them".<sup>89</sup>

At the same time, schools can be places in which the first signs of radicalisation become obvious. For many teachers, this creates a dilemma. While wanting to create safe spaces in which young people can experiment with ideas and engage in free and open debate, they have a responsibility – in some countries, a legal obligation – to stop students from radicalising into violent extremism, and prevent their schools

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<sup>89</sup> "The role of education in preventing radicalisation", *RAN Issue Paper*, December 2016; available at [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation\\_awareness\\_network/ran-papers/docs/role\\_education\\_preventing\\_radicalisation\\_12122016\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/role_education_preventing_radicalisation_12122016_en.pdf).

from developing into recruitment grounds. Rather than creating “checklists“, which are often too rigid to capture a complex social phenomenon, many countries have chosen to offer teachers training on how to detect and respond to radicalisation, while obliging schools to establish procedures for dealing with potential cases swiftly and appropriately.

Further guidance is available in UNESCO’s *Preventing Violent Extremism through Education: A Guide for Policy-Makers*.<sup>90</sup>

### *Case Study 9: The Royal Atheneum, Belgium*

The Royal Atheneum in Antwerp is a secular state school with a large number of Muslim students. For years, it experienced rising tensions over issues such as the wearing of the headscarf. At the beginning of the decade, extremist groups were starting to recruit in the school’s neighbourhood. In addition to a security response, the school launched a four year programme which focused on creating a “common base of shared human values and rights“, and involved “making practical agreements [among the students as well as between students and teachers,] and setting clear limits“<sup>91</sup> in relation to what was acceptable. The programme included rigorous intercultural dialogue, projects on identity and citizenship, systematic training for teachers in all subjects, as well as arts projects in which students were able to express delicate issues without having to articulate them verbally. From an institution that was, according to its headmistress, on the verge of a “clash of cultures“,<sup>92</sup> the Royal

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<sup>90</sup> “Preventing Violent Extremism through Education: A Guide for Policy-Makers“, UNESCO, 2017; available at <https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/247764e-2.pdf>. See also “A Teacher’s Guide on the Prevention on Violent Extremism“, UNESCO, 2016; available at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002446/244676e.pdf>.

<sup>91</sup> Karin Heremans, “How to counter jihadist radicalisation in schools“, presentation at the *European Policy Center Policy Dialogue*, 4 July 2017.

<sup>92</sup> Quoted in “Antwerp’s Muslim headscarf row, the story on the ground“, *The Economist*, 17 September 2009.

Atheneum has gradually recovered and has yet again become a functional and successful school.

#### *Case Study 10: Cultural and Spiritual Heritage of the Region (CSHR), Croatia*

CSHR is an intercultural dialogue project that is jointly run and funded by the Nansen Dialogue Centre, a Croatian non-governmental organisation, and the Croatian Education and Teacher Training Agency. It seeks to address the deep social and ethnic divisions in the countries of the former Yugoslavia by inoculating young people against stereotypes that may lead to tensions and even violent conflict. With the help of the programme, children and youth in 23 schools in Croatia are systematically exposed to the ethnic “Other” via lessons and teaching, but also – and more importantly – through personal contacts, joint activities, and trips. Instead of defining other children as “Serb” or “Croat”, they are encouraged to discover nuances and commonalities, co-operate, make friends, and learn to co-exist. Although, in many ways, a reflection of the post-war conditions of the countries of the former Yugoslavia, the programme’s underlying principles, and many of its innovative techniques, can easily be transferred to other locations and environments. In 2015, an independent evaluation confirmed the programme’s success.<sup>93</sup>

## **6.6 Religion**

Terrorism and violent extremism are not associated with any one religion or belief. History has shown that virtually any idea or belief system – no matter how seemingly good or bad – can be used to justify violence, and that complex and multi-faceted religions like Christianity and Islam, which are not monolithic and have no unified

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<sup>93</sup> “Preventing Radicalisation”, *RAN*, op. cit., p. 229-36.

hierarchies, can be twisted to allow for extremist interpretations that contradict the views of the vast majority.<sup>94</sup> Scholars of religion agree that such twisted interpretations often owe more to the history and politics of a particular time or region than scripture, and that it is the peaceful adherents of those same religions that often become their first victims.<sup>95</sup> Simply put, just like the Ku-Klux-Klan does not represent Christianity, IS does not represent Islam. And just like the Ku-Klux-Klan persecuted Catholics and other Christian minorities who did not follow their version of Protestantism, IS declares all Muslims who do not agree with their twisted and hateful views to be “apostates”.

It should be no surprise, therefore, that “religious literacy” – the knowledge and understanding of one’s own religion – has been found to be a protective factor against the appeal of extremists who claim to act in the name of religion.<sup>96</sup> Various studies have demonstrated that members of groups like al-Qaeda and IS often had low levels of religious knowledge at the time of their radicalisation and recruitment, and that both groups attract a disproportionate number of converts who have no grounding in Islam but are attracted by the groups’ simplistic worldview, the promise of quick salvation, and its “counter-cultural” element.<sup>97</sup> Clearly, therefore, the solution is not “no religion”, but – on the contrary – more of the right kind of religion.

This means that representatives of mainstream interpretations should not stay silent but be proactive in reclaiming the narrative. It is important and laudable, for example, that so many leading scholars from all mainstream orientations of Islam have come out with statements against IS, condemning the group and showing how

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<sup>94</sup> See Mark Juergensmeyer, “Religion as a Cause of Terrorism” in Louise Richardson (ed.), *The Roots of Terrorism* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>95</sup> See, for example, Peter Mandaville and Melissa Nozell, “Engaging Religion and Religious Actors in Countering Violent Extremism”, *USIP Special Report 413*, August 2017; available at <https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR413-Engaging-Religion-and-Religious-Actors-in-Countering-Violent-Extremism.pdf>.

<sup>96</sup> See Marc Sageman, *Understanding Terrorist Networks* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania University Press, 2004); Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Radical Islam Rising: Muslim Extremism and the West* (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005).

<sup>97</sup> See, for example, Olivier Roy, *Jihad and Death: The Global Appeal of Islamic State* (London: Hurst, 2017).

its ideas contradict consensus views of Islam.<sup>98</sup> It is equally important, however, that this message does not remain “hidden” in complicated theological statements but reaches those who may be susceptible to IS. Religious leaders need to become better communicators, speak the language and identify with the life situations of the young people for whom they preach, try harder to reach those who are hard to reach, and be present in the (virtual) spaces in which extremists are currently peddling their twisted ideologies without challenge or competition.

For principles and other good practices, see the *Wilton Park Statement on Religion, Radicalisation, and Countering Violent Extremism*.<sup>99</sup>

#### *Case Study 11: Fol Tash, Pristina*

*Fol Tash*, which is Albanian for “Speak Now”, is an online media portal based in Pristina. It was founded in 2015 by a group of Islamic theologians, imams, journalists, and researchers, who believed that the official Islamic body, the “Islamic Community of Kosovo”, was not proactive enough in confronting the rise of extremist ideologies. The website ([www.foltash.com](http://www.foltash.com)) provides sections on the Quran and Islamic Sciences, with short and well-written contributions on key questions and debates, as well as articles on the latest news, the economy, and even sports. The aim is to defend the Albanian Islamic tradition, which the website’s editors say is modern, pluralist and committed to values like tolerance and citizenship, against the small minority of fanatics and extremists that have come to dominate the public discourse and perception. In doing so, Fol Tash engages not just online but has participated in

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<sup>98</sup> For an overview, see “Global Condemnations of ISIS/ISIL”, ING: available at <https://ing.org/global-condemnations-of-isis-isil/>.

<sup>99</sup> “Statement: Religion, Radicalisation, and Countering Violent Extremism”, *Wilton Park*, 29 April 2016; available at <https://www.wiltonpark.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/Statement-on-religion-radicalisation-and-countering-violent-extremism.pdf>.

numerous public debates in which they stood up against extremists but also criticised the faith's official representatives for being too complacent in their response.<sup>100</sup>

### *Case Study 12: Countering Extremist Narratives, Uzbekistan*

Since 2015, the Uzbek government has implemented a series of measures to counter violent radicalisation. Particularly prominent has been the use of counter-narratives as a way of challenging IS's representation of Islam. The government launched an online magazine – *The ISIS Fitna* – which has been featured in the country's most prominent online media portal. It also worked with a number of state-sponsored civil society organisations that have published magazines, books, and websites on IS's understanding of religious concepts and the dangers of religiously motivated extremism.<sup>101</sup> The most significant measure has been the release of Hayrullo Hamidov, a prominent journalist, poet, and religious leader, who had been imprisoned on charges of promoting religious extremism. Described as “Central Asia's first independent religious celebrity”, Hamidov's was popular among young people because he was independent from the state's official religious structures and criticised corruption.<sup>102</sup> Since his release, he has used his celebrity to speak out against IS, and has written a number of poems condemning the group's actions in Syria and Iraq.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> “Kosovo Islamic Body Accused of Tolerating Extremists”, *Balkan Insight*, 29 October 2015; available at <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/kosovo-islamic-body-accused-of-tolerating-extremists-10-28-2015>.

<sup>101</sup> Cole, “Mapping Study”, *DCAF*, op. cit., pp. 122-3.

<sup>102</sup> “Uzbekistan: Hayrullo Hamidov, prominent journalist and independent religious figure, freed”, *HRW*, 18 February 2015; available at [https://www.ifex.org/uzbekistan/2015/02/18/hamidov\\_freed/](https://www.ifex.org/uzbekistan/2015/02/18/hamidov_freed/).

<sup>103</sup> Cole, “Mapping Study”, *DCAF*, op. cit., pp. 122-3.

## 6.7 The Internet

Extremist groups were some of the internet's earliest adopters, and continue to be among its most enthusiastic users. The ability of a group like IS to create a global "brand", spread its message, and mobilise 30,000 fighters from all over the world would not have been possible without access to the internet. Likewise, the growth of hate speech and incitement to violence – often directed against minorities, such as Muslims and Jews – is closely linked to the rise of social media.

Policymakers and technology companies have long grappled with this phenomenon. The most obvious solution is to remove illegal content, although this can be technically difficult given its volume and the number of channels through which it is disseminated. Moreover, not all content that is hateful, offensive, or extremist is necessarily illegal, which means that content removal – or censorship – can only ever be part of the answer.<sup>104</sup>

Another approach is to push back against extremist content, for example through so-called counter-narratives or alternative narratives. From this perspective, the internet is not a threat which needs to be curtailed or censored, but an opportunity to reach people, challenge their views, and prevent them from being sucked into extremism. "Counter-speech", as it has recently been called, seeks to counter extremist content as well as engage with people who are looking for answers and may be vulnerable to extremist radicalisation and recruitment. This can take many forms: videos and advertisements, comments on Facebook pages, or one-on-one conversations that eventually move from online to offline.<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> See Tim Stevens and Peter R. Neumann, *Countering Online Radicalisation: A Strategy for Action* (London: ICSR, 2009).

<sup>105</sup> See Peter R. Neumann, "Options and strategies for countering online radicalization in the United States", *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 36(6) (2013), pp. 431-59.

The key to producing more and better content is to reverse the top-down approach that many governments instinctively favour, and – instead – empower young people and civil society to take the lead. This may happen through contests, grassroots funds, or projects like *Peer to Peer (P2P)* which organises counter-speech competitions among university students.<sup>106</sup>

Further guidance can be found in *Developing Effective Counter-Narrative Frameworks for Countering Violent Extremism*, a paper by the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague.<sup>107</sup>

### *Case Study 13: Rewind, Spain*

#Rewind ([www.oficialrewind.com](http://www.oficialrewind.com)) is a communications campaign that was created by a group of students from San Pablo CEU University in Spain. Upset by the amount of hateful and extremist content on social media, they created a hashtag that encouraged people to “rewind”, that is, to re-consider their comments and stop engaging in abusive or offensive behaviour. Using different online platforms – such as Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, and a website – as well as media interviews and offline events, the hashtag became well-known and developed into a powerful symbol against online hate speech. It was widely used and often had the intended effect of mobilising users to push back against hateful and abusive comments. Reaching more than two million people in less than a year, the campaign educated large numbers of young people about hate speech and empowered them to stand up against it. The entire campaign cost less than €3,000, and was the winner of this year’s *P2P: Facebook Global Digital Challenge*, which was held in partnership with the OSCE.

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<sup>106</sup> “Peer to Peer”, *EdVenture Partners*; available at <https://edventurepartners.com/peer2peer/>.

<sup>107</sup> “Developing Effective Counter-Narrative Frameworks for Countering Violent Extremism”, *International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – The Hague*, September 2014; available at <https://icct.nl/publication/developing-effective-counter-narrative-frameworks-for-countering-violent-extremism/>.



## Case Study 14: Seriously, France

*Seriously* ([www.seriously.org](http://www.seriously.org)) emerged in response to the polarisation of French society that occurred in the wake of the 2015 terrorist attacks. Run by the think-tank *Renaissance Numérique*, it is an internet platform that works to counter hate speech by helping users formulate arguments to respond to extremist online content. The website allows users to paste in the hate speech comment they want to react to, and then provides a step-by-step approach for building a counter-argument. First, the comment is categorised — for example as anti-Muslim, anti-Semitic, or homophobic — before the website provides a range of relevant facts and quotes that could be used to push back against it, along with tips on how to structure the response. Users can also select their favourite facts and illustrations. *Seriously* is funded by the public *Fonds du 11 Janvier*, as well as Facebook, Google, and Twitter. Partner organisations include *Parle-moi d'Islam*, an inter-religious group set up to educate the public about Islam, as well as the Council of Europe.<sup>108</sup>

## 6.8 Women

Terrorism was long seen as a “a man’s world”<sup>109</sup> in which women could be supporters, bystanders, or crying mothers, but rarely took decisions or influenced events. This perception has never been true, though women’s roles in violent extremism have only recently become a subject of interest to policymakers, researchers, and counter-radicalisation practitioners. No doubt, this is related to the increasing role and visibility of females in IS. While it was long believed that groups like al-Qaeda and IS would use females operatives only in cases of emergency, the

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<sup>108</sup> Charlie Winter and Johanna Fürst, *Countering Extremism in Europe: A Comparative Case Study Approach* (London: ICSR, 2017).

<sup>109</sup> Naureen Chowdhury Fink, Sara Zeiger, and Radia Bhulai (eds.), *A Man’s World? Exploring the Roles of Women in Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism* (Washington DC: GCCS, 2016).

declaration of the so-called Caliphate in 2014 resulted in the systematic recruitment of hundreds of women from across the OSCE area. Few of them have been involved in actual fighting, but many have played active roles, especially in recruitment and propaganda. Contrary to widely held assumptions, they were just as aggressive and confident in their beliefs as their male counterparts.<sup>110</sup>

At the same time, women can be instrumental in preventing or disrupting processes of radicalisation, especially in the family context. As studies have shown, parents are typically the first ones who notice changes of behaviour. And they are often the last ones who maintain contact after their child has decided to go “underground”. Though fathers are important too, it is mostly the mothers who serve as channel of communication and influence. In the words of a foreign terrorist fighter who went to Syria, “Losing my family was the thing that almost stopped me”.<sup>111</sup>

There are principally three ways in which the role of women in countering radicalisation can be systematically strengthened. The first is to tailor *reintegration and rehabilitation efforts* towards women, especially the wives of fighters who are returning from conflict zones like Syria and Iraq. Their situations can be exceptionally difficult and confusing, often involve children, and therefore require special focus and attention. Another priority are programmes that seek to raise awareness – and empower – women who can *detect, influence, and/or disrupt processes of radicalisation*. In most cases, this involves mothers. Lastly, gender-specific aspects should be considered in *all countering radicalisation programmes*, even if they are not specifically aimed at women.

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<sup>110</sup> See Melanie Smith and Erin Saltman, *Till Martyrdom Do Us Apart: Gender and the ISIS Phenomenon* (London: ICSR and ISD, 2015).

<sup>111</sup> Quoted in Peter R. Neumann, *Pain, Confusion, Anger, and Shame: The Stories of Islamic State Families* (London: ICSR, 2016).

For more advice, see the Global Counterterrorism Forum's *Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism*.<sup>112</sup>

#### *Case Study 15: Nahla, Bosnia and Herzegovina*

Founded in 2001, Nahla is a centre for Muslim women in Sarajevo. Its main objective is to provide a safe space while promoting the active participation of Muslim women in Bosnian society. According to its director, Nahla seeks to “pass on knowledge, make women independent, and increase their self-confidence”. The aim is not to convert people, or promote the Islamic faith, but to “put [Islamic] values into practice by doing good for the whole community”.<sup>113</sup> Nahla’s activities and events range from professional and personal development to creative workshops, fitness training, and lectures on psychology and the Islamic faith. They are attended by 5,000 women each year. Though not explicitly aimed at countering radicalisation, Nahla provides young Muslim women in Bosnia with the skills and confidence to live in accordance with Islamic values while succeeding in a democratic and pluralistic society.<sup>114</sup>

#### *Case Study 16: Mothers’ Schools, Tajikistan*

Following a meeting in the Tajik city of Khujand in 2012, in which local women complained about extremists trying to recruit their children, Women without Borders, an Austrian NGO, conducted a largescale survey to find out what role parents – and specifically mothers – could play in creating resilience against

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<sup>112</sup> “GCTF Good Practices on Women and Countering Violent Extremism”, *GCTF*, August 2016; available at <https://toolkit.thegctf.org/sites/default/files/document-sets/source-document-uploads/2016-08/Good-Practices-on-Women-and-CVE.pdf>.

<sup>113</sup> Quoted in Pieter Stockmans, “Muslim women in Sarajevo”, *Mondiaal Nieuws*, 17 March 2017; available at <http://www.mo.be/en/interview/muslim-women-sarajevo-our-starting-point-prejudice-against-us-makes-us-stronger>.

<sup>114</sup> “Interview with Sehija Dedovic”, *Nahla*, 13 March 2012; available at <http://www.nahla.ba/tekstovi1.aspx?tid=1>.

radicalisation. The findings inspired the first “mothers school“, which involved 45 mothers from Khujand and was held in 2013. During the 10-week course, mothers learned about their own roles as mothers, their children’s psycho-social development, issues like self-doubt and self-esteem, as well as recognising risks to their children, such as radicalisation and extremism.<sup>115</sup> The course was seen as useful by a vast majority of the mothers who took part, and has since been replicated in Asia, Africa, as well as OSCE participating States such as the United Kingdom, Belgium, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.<sup>116</sup> In Tajikistan, it was part of a wider government programme called “Parents against Terrorism“, which has sought to create awareness of extremism and provide practical advice for how to recognise and respond to early signs of radicalisation.<sup>117</sup>

## 6.9 Refugees

The influx of refugees into OSCE participating States in recent years has created concerns about radicalisation and extremist recruitment. Although, as highlighted in Chapter 4.3, migration *as such* is rarely a cause of violent radicalisation, the migration experience can result in grievances which extremist recruiters are seeking to exploit. Since 2015, OSCE participating States have seen a number of incidents in which individuals who had recently arrived in Europe have attempted to carry out terrorist attacks, typically in support of IS.<sup>118</sup> While those incidents represent a small minority

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<sup>115</sup> Edit Schlaffer and Ulrich Kropiunigg, “A New Security Architecture: Mothers Included!“ in Fink, *A Man’s World?*, op. cit., pp. 54-75.

<sup>116</sup> Charlotte McDonald-Gibson, “Moms of Young Muslims Enlist in the Fight against ISIS“, *Time*, 15 September 2016.

<sup>117</sup> See “Lessons learned from OSCE’s ‘Parents against Terrorism’ training project“, *OSCE*, 28 October 2015; available at <http://www.osce.org/tajikistan/195021>.

<sup>118</sup> See, for example, Kate Connolly, “Syrian man seized in Germany ‘was planning Isis bomb attack’“, *The Guardian*, 10 October 2016; available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/oct/10/german-police-capture-syrian-man-suspected-of-planning-bomb-attack>. Also Melissa Eddy, “Syrian Refugee Arrested in Germany after Fatal Knife Attack“, *New York Times*, 24 July 2016; available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/25/world/europe/syrian-refugee-arrested-in-germany-after-fatal-machete-attack.html?mcubz=1>.

of the overall number of terrorist attacks during that period, participating States are well advised to formulate appropriate – and population specific – responses.

Many governments' first priority is the detection of "fake migrants", that is, terrorists who pose as refugees in order to cross international borders. This is the principal responsibility of law enforcement and the intelligence services, although awareness raising efforts among the employees and volunteers at refugee holding centres, as well as the refugees themselves, can contribute to making sure that suspicious individuals are found and reported. Indeed, as various examples have shown, it is by enlisting the support of the vast majority of law-abiding refugees that the authorities are most likely to detect the small number that are intending to cause harm.<sup>119</sup>

To prevent (genuine) refugees from becoming vulnerable to radicalisation, it is essential to provide the full spectrum of counter-radicalisation responses. Where possible, the authorities need to prevent extremist groups from gaining access to refugee centres and monitor refugees who are believed to have been recruited, while staff, volunteers and the refugees are well positioned to recognise early signs of radicalisation and pay attention to changes in behaviour. This means that reporting, intervention, and support mechanisms that are available to non-refugees need to be tailored – and made available – to refugees.

Most importantly, given that refugees are likely to feel overwhelmed by a new culture, language, and environment, and many experience feelings of dislocation and anxiety (which – in turn – can be exploited by extremists), it is vital for policymakers to create certainty, establish clear pathways, ensure that decisions are taken transparently and swiftly, and support their integration as soon as it has been decided that they can stay.

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<sup>119</sup> See, for example, Dunja Ramadan, "Damit niemand sagt, alle Flüchtlinge seien Terroristen", *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 11 October 2016; available at <http://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/terrorverdacht-in-chemnitz-damit-niemand-sagt-alle-fluechtlinge-seien-terroristen-1.3200908>.

More information can be found in *The Refugee and Migrant Crisis: New Pressing Challenges for CVE Policy*, a paper by the European Commission's Radicalisation Awareness Network.<sup>120</sup>

### *Case Study 17: Advice Centre Radicalisation, Federal Agency for Migration and Refugees, Germany*

Launched in 2012, the German Federal Agency for Migration and Refugee's *Advice Centre Radicalisation* ("Beratungsstelle Radikalisierung") maintains a hotline through which concerned citizens – in many cases, family members – can report suspected cases of radicalisation. Following an initial evaluation, cases are either dismissed or referred to a nationwide network of local intervention providers and civil society organisations that have specialised in assisting vulnerable individuals and their families. Since 2016, the number of refugees and recent migrants that have been reported has increased rapidly. The Advice Centre currently receives between 80 and 100 calls a month, of which an estimated 20 per cent are referred to local providers for further consultation and support.<sup>121</sup> To deal with the increased volume, and the challenges of working within refugee centres, local providers have been allocated additional resources, so they can hire more staff and build up local networks and contacts. While the Advice Centre's emphasis is on support rather than repression and local providers are exclusively non-governmental, there are strict protocols for involving law enforcement when interventions are unsuccessful.

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<sup>120</sup> "The Refugee and Migrant Crisis: New Pressing Challenges for CVE Policy", *RAN Ex Post Paper*, 8 May 2016; available at [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation\\_awareness\\_network/ran-papers/docs/ran\\_ex\\_post\\_paper\\_the\\_refugee\\_and\\_migrant\\_crisis\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/ran_ex_post_paper_the_refugee_and_migrant_crisis_en.pdf).

<sup>121</sup> "FAQ: Beratungsstelle Radikalisierung", *Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge*; available at <http://www.bamf.de/DE/Infothek/FragenAntworten/BeratungsstelleRadikalisierung/beratungsstelle-radikalisierung-node.html>.

### *Case Study 18: Support for Child Refugees, Turkish National Police*

Working in collaboration with a number of government ministries<sup>122</sup> as well as the Presidency of Religious Affairs, the Turkish National Police is in the process of implementing an outreach programme for refugee children from Syria, which builds on a number of existing programmes that are aimed at promoting migrants' integration into Turkish society. Of the 3.1 million Syrian refugees in Turkey, more than 800,000 are children. Most of these children are dispersed across the country, with 40 per cent that are currently unable to attend school. The programme's objective is to involve those children in meaningful activity, conduct seminars, and organise family visits as well as cultural and sports events in order to create a sense of belonging and connect them to a wider community. It is based on a similar programme that sought to create resilience against recruitment into the Kurdish Workers' Party (PKK), which was widely considered a success. A workshop was organised with participation of all government stakeholders in July in Ankara, and the programme will be launched in the near future.<sup>123</sup>

#### **6.10 Interventions**

For policymakers and practitioners, (early) interventions are the most tangible element of countering radicalisation. They are meant to deal with individuals who have exhibited changes in behaviour or started being vocal in their support for extremist groups, but have not committed any chargeable offences. Rather than doing nothing, interventions seek to support individuals' voluntary exit from extremism, typically through individually tailored packages of measures, which may

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<sup>122</sup> The Ministry of Family and Social Services, the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Youth and Sport, and the Ministry of Interior.

<sup>123</sup> Information obtained during official visit and from the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

include psycho-social support, housing, theological debate, or assistance with employment and education. In essence, interventions are mini-deradicalisation programmes that aim to stop and reverse processes of radicalisation at an early stage – ideally before people’s views have hardened and they have isolated themselves from moderating influences such as family and friends.

The intervention programmes that have recently been launched by governments across the OSCE area typically have three elements in common.<sup>124</sup> The first is *voluntary participation*, as coercing people into interventions tends to be ineffective. (Unwilling participants are unlikely to be responsive and may, in fact, harden their views.) The second element are “*assessment tools*”, which enable practitioners to measure individual risks, needs, and changes in behaviour. Finally, interventions usually require contributions from multiple actors, and therefore necessitate *channels of coordination* between different government agencies and non-governmental organisations, such as community groups or religious leaders.<sup>125</sup>

Needless to say, interventions are no silver bullet. That they *often* work does not mean that they *always* work. Like every instrument, measure or programme, interventions can result in mistakes or failures. As the case studies show, they take different forms depending on context and location. And their success always, and ultimately, relies on the commitment, skill and experience of the individuals that are directly involved with affected individuals.

Detailed guidance is available in *Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism: Multi-Agency Approach*, a paper and collection of good practices from the European Commission’s Radicalisation Awareness Network.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> See Neumann, *Terrorist unter uns*, op. cit, Chapter 2.

<sup>125</sup> “Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism: Multi-Agency Approach”, *RAN Collection of Approaches and Practices*, 2017; available at [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation\\_awareness\\_network/ran-best-practices/docs/creating\\_counter\\_violent\\_extremism\\_infrastructures\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-best-practices/docs/creating_counter_violent_extremism_infrastructures_en.pdf).

<sup>126</sup> Ibid.



### *Case Study 19: The Safe House Approach, The Netherlands*

Each major city in the Netherlands runs a so-called safe house – a place where local government, street workers, and the police can sit at the same table and discuss individuals that have come to their attention. Unlike the United Kingdom, where the police is in charge of interventions and has frequently faced accusations of “spying on Muslims”, the Dutch approach empowers local governments. This makes it easier to mobilise local resources, such as housing and social welfare, and lowers the threshold for reporting cases. It also facilitates close relationships with religious communities, street workers, and youth centres. Most significantly, instead of singling out radicalisation and treating it as an entirely different problem, it deliberately creates synergies with combating non-ideological crimes such as gangs, which recent reports have shown are often precursors for radicalisation.<sup>127</sup> Dutch officials are convinced that the safe house concept, which is central to the country’s counter-radicalisation efforts, is a major factor reason the Netherlands have been less affected by foreign terrorist fighters and domestic terrorism than its neighbours.<sup>128</sup>

### *Case Study 20: Municipal Safety Council, Novi Pazar, Serbia*

From Novi Pazar several individuals left to join IS in Syria and Iraq. Following the terrorist attacks in Paris in November 2015, the Municipal Safety Council – a partnership between police, prosecutors, city council, and civil society – organised a regional conference in which participants discussed local drivers of radicalisation and agreed on a plan of action. Supported by civil society organisations, the Safety

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<sup>127</sup> Rajan Basra and Peter R. Neumann, “Criminal Pasts, Terrorist Futures: European Jihadists and the New Crime-Terror Nexus”, *Perspectives on Terrorism*, 10(6) (2016), pp. 25-40.

<sup>128</sup> Conversations during official visit to the Netherlands, April 2017.

Council launched a public information campaign, which raised awareness of violent radicalisation. When leaders of the local Muslim community became involved, this created the opportunity to offer more targeted support. Though improvised, the Safety Council has been able to bring together relevant agencies and stakeholders to perform several interventions that stopped people from going to Syria. The structure of the Safety Council, which had been created in 2013 in order to promote the idea of community policing, turned out to be ideally suited for this task, because it was designed to bring together multiple agencies for the purpose of tackling local security problems.<sup>129</sup>

### **6.11 Returnees**

Foreign terrorist fighters are not a new phenomenon, but their number has exponentially increased since the beginning of the Syrian conflict. With the likely destruction of IS as a territorial entity in Syria and Iraq, many fighters are believed to want to return to their countries of origin. Estimates vary, but nearly 40 per cent are believed to have returned already, with hundreds more that are stranded in neighbouring countries such as Jordan and Turkey.<sup>130</sup> Although the threat from returnees can easily be exaggerated and is certain not to materialise all at once, dealing with the “veterans” of the Syrian conflict will be a challenge for OSCE participating States for many years to come.

Studies demonstrate that returnees have diverse motivations, which means that each case needs to be dealt with individually.<sup>131</sup> Some are disillusioned and want to turn away from extremism, while others are traumatised and need psychological treatment. Yet others are dangerous and pose a significant risk, not least because

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<sup>129</sup> Conversations during official visit to Serbia; May 2017.

<sup>130</sup> See Hamed el-Said and Richard Barrett, “Enhancing the Understanding of the Foreign Terrorist Fighters Phenomenon in Syria”, *United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism*, July 2017.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*

they have taken part in a violent conflict, acquired fighting skills, and have integrated into international terrorist networks. moreover, there are women and children who have not participated in fighting but may have radicalised to varying degrees.<sup>132</sup>

Based on United Nations Security Council Resolution 2178, many countries have made it easier to stop individuals from participating in foreign conflicts and prosecute them upon their return. Even so, prosecution may not always be appropriate, effective, or sufficient. In many cases, prosecutors find it hard to prove individuals' membership in a terrorist organisation or their involvement in atrocities, resulting in acquittals or very short sentences. Given the large number of ongoing investigations, governments have prioritised cases in which the evidence is clear or when suspected individuals pose an imminent danger.

Even when returnees have been successfully prosecuted, it can still be useful – and in some cases, necessary – to provide opportunities for them to disengage, de-radicalise, and eventually re-integrate into society. To make this possible, countries need to create appropriate structures, including methods of risk assessment, coordination mechanism, and well-trained staff.

For good practices, see the Hedayah Centre's catalogue of *Foreign Terrorist Fighter Related CVE and Returnee Programmes*.<sup>133</sup>

### *Case Study 21: Derad, Austria*

Derad is an Austrian initiative which works in prisons and assists individuals who have radicalised and have been convicted of terrorism-related offences. This has also

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> "Foreign Terrorist Fighter Related CVE and Returnee Programs", *Hedayah*; available at <http://www.hedayahcenter.org/ftfprograms/>.

involved a number of returnees from the Syrian conflict. Like similar initiatives, Derad provides individual counselling and mentoring, and seeks to address people's personal and psychological needs as well as theological and ideological issues. When individuals have served their sentences and are released from prison, Derad facilitates their re-integration into society, which may involve assistance with employment, education, as well as dealing with the many challenges that are associated with exiting from an extremist milieu.<sup>134</sup> Based on its success, Derad has been asked to be part of a new nationwide network for extremism prevention, which brings together civil society organisations like Derad with government departments and agencies and sets up effective channels of communication and coordination.<sup>135</sup>

#### *Case Study 22: The Aarhus Model, Denmark*

The Danish city of Aarhus was one of the first cities in Europe to build a comprehensive system for dealing with radicalised individuals, including early warning, de-radicalisation, outreach to Muslim communities, and general prevention efforts. Based on a partnership between schools, social services, and the police, efforts to deal with returnees from Syria started at the end of 2013. In each case, a risk assessment is followed by an individually tailored process of counselling and guidance for the returnee and his relatives. If individuals are willing to “exit”, they are assigned a personal mentor who helps with housing, education, employment as well as psychological and/or medical treatment. This, however, is dependent on individuals' progress and their adherence to a written “agreement of cooperation”. Throughout the process, members of the police continuously assess risks and stand ready to take over in case a returnee “relapses”.<sup>136</sup> Of the 16 men from Aarhus who

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<sup>134</sup> For more information, see “Derad – eine Initiative für sozialen Zusammenhalt, Prävention und Dialog”, *Derad*; available at <http://www.derad.at>.

<sup>135</sup> Eva Winroither, “Der Kampf gegen den Extremismus soll effizienter werden”, *Die Presse*, 8 February 2017.

<sup>136</sup> Toke Agerschou, “Preventing Radicalization and Discrimination in Aarhus”, *Journal for Deradicalization*, Winter 2014-15, pp. 5-22.

had returned from Syria by mid-2015, none have become involved in violent extremism. Since the project started, only one more person left Aarhus to join the conflict.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>137</sup> Manfred Ertel and Ralf Hoppe, "A Danish Answer to Radical Jihad", *Der Spiegel*, 23 February 2015.

## 7 RECOMMENDATIONS

There can be no doubt that violent extremism – in all its forms and manifestations – will continue to represent one of the major challenges to peace and security in the OSCE area. Violent extremists not only threaten people’s lives, they polarise societies, spread hatred and suspicion, and create tensions between ethnic groups and religions. They are the very antithesis of the aims and values that the OSCE and its 57 participating States are committed to promoting.

As this report has demonstrated, international cooperation in the area of countering terrorism and violent radicalisation is marred with political difficulties. Despite the language of Declarations, in which countering terrorism is always portrayed as a “shared concern”, many participating States have fundamentally different assumptions, approaches, and priorities. This problem is not unique to the OSCE but common to all international organisations, and helps to explain why practical progress in this area has been limited.

If participating States are serious about empowering international institutions to play a larger – and more effective – role in counter-terrorism and countering violent radicalisation, they need to make a sustained effort to generate broader consensus on the root causes of terrorism and the methods that are acceptable in countering it. Rather than being quick to point their fingers at others, this may – in some cases – involve a critical examination of their own actions and policies.

Despite these limitations, my analysis has demonstrated that the OSCE is well positioned to make an effective contribution, not least because of its diverse membership and the organisation’s comprehensive security mandate, which guarantees that political and military issues are never looked at in isolation from human rights as well as economic and environmental factors. In particular, there are three areas in which the OSCE can “add value“:

- 1) **Promoting conflict resolution, human rights, and the rights of national minorities**, as extremist groups often seek to exploit unresolved conflicts, human rights violations, as well as political, ethnic, and religious tensions;
- 2) **Leading international capacity-building efforts in countering violent radicalisation, especially in Central Asia and the Western Balkans**, which are often said to be strategic priorities in the fight against violent extremism;
- 3) **Becoming a “clearing house” for good practices in countering violent radicalisation.**

### *Actions*

Regarding the first area, there are no new mechanism or institutions that are required, since conflict resolution, human rights, and the rights of national minorities have always been central to the OSCE’s mission. It is nevertheless important that the OSCE creates awareness of the importance of dealing with persistent political and structural drivers of radicalisation. New issues, such as the security implications of migration, should continue to be addressed. Participating States, on the other hand, ought to be genuine – and forceful – in their commitment to resolving structural and political problems that are contributing to radicalisation, even if it means having to change course or re-examine their own policies.

In relation to capacity-building, the OSCE should intensify its efforts in Central Asia and the Western Balkans. Given its strong and long-established local presence, the OSCE is ideally suited to take a coordination role vis-à-vis other international organisations. This will help to avoid duplications and the waste of donor money, as well as ensure that VERLT programming is sustainable and based on a deep

knowledge of local dynamics. Participating States should support the Secretary-General in seeking local arrangements to this effect.

The OSCE Secretariat – especially the Action against Terrorism Unit – should expand their operations to become an international “clearing house” for good practices in countering violent radicalisation. As this report has shown, there are many such practices from across the OSCE region which can be identified. Doing so would make it easier for practitioners to learn from each other, and avoid costly and counterproductive mistakes. The sharing of practices could happen through publications, newsletters, an online platform (which may have open and password-protected sections), as well as through conferences and workshops. Based on the Ministerial Declarations from 2015 and 2016, participating States should empower the Action against Terrorism Unit to become the world’s most dynamic platform for sharing good practices in this area.

Sadly, there is no reason to believe that the threat from violent extremism will end any time soon. As long as the OSCE has been in existence, terrorist groups have attacked participating States and their people, and they will continue to do so. There is no single measure that will eradicate terrorism or eliminate the drivers of radicalisation. Rather than expecting the OSCE to singlehandedly resolve this issue, a more realistic approach is to improve its capabilities, build on its strengths, and focus its efforts. Implementing the recommendations in this report will make a significant contribution towards doing so.

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