



Bundesweites  
Netzwerk  
Extremismus-  
prävention und  
Deradikalisierung

**The Austrian Strategy  
for the Prevention and  
Countering of Violent  
Extremism and  
De-radicalisation**

## // PREFACE

Radicalisation and extremism pose a major threat for Austria, as they jeopardise the national security. For this reason, it is of particular concern to me in my function as Minister of the Interior to take appropriate and effective counter measures in this context.

In order to inhibit radicalisation from arising in the first place and to promote de-radicalisation, it is particularly necessary to enact preventive measures alongside the repressive measures, which are only taken when concrete threats arise. The Austrian security authorities have adopted a national approach in order to strengthen the interdisciplinary prevention and de-radicalisation measures.

The present “Austrian Strategy for the Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism and De-radicalisation” marks a milestone in this context. It is the first time that a nationally developed and coordinated strategy on handling radicalisation and extremism is available. This strategy is intended to serve as an incentive and guide for all actors involved in prevention and de-radicalisation work in Austria.

The “National Network for Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism and De-radicalisation” (BNED), founded by the Federal Ministry of the Interior in summer 2017 and coordinated by the Federal Agency for State Protection and Counter Terrorism, marked the starting point for this strategy. The BNED provides an overview on the respective strategies and pools the single measures of all actors working in the field of extremism prevention and

de-radicalisation in Austria. Federal ministries, civil organisations and the federal provinces are the members of BNED.

The “Austrian Strategy for the Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism Prevention and De-radicalisation” substantiates the “fight against subversive extremism and subversive radicalisation”, as it is laid down in the government programme 2017-2022. It supports the development of interdisciplinary prevention and de-radicalisation measures in the fields of internal security and integration in Austria.

I am particularly pleased that around 70 members of BNED as well as experts from various areas of society have been involved in the preparation of this strategy. It is a testimony of the great willingness to address radicalisation and extremism at a national level and to meet these challenges together. The present strategy is an essential cornerstone in this context.

I would like to sincerely thank all actors involved in compiling this strategy and I look forward to our continued excellent co-operation.

**Herbert Kickl**  
Federal Ministry of the Interior



## // HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

**In a reaction to growing radicalisation and recruitment tendencies in Austria, an increasing number of prevention and radicalisation measures were taken in Austria over the last couple of years.**

One major step was founding the “National Network for Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism and De-radicalisation” (BNED) and including as many relevant players as possible, in order to regularly exchange views on current questions concerning prevention and countering of violent extremism as well as de-radicalisation work. It is the aim of this network, to establish and legitimise new measures throughout Austria by adopting a national approach.

At the request of BNED members, the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior (BMI) in its function as initiator and coordinator of the network initiated a process aimed at developing an Austrian Strategy on “Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism and De-radicalisation”. This was the first measure taken by BNED. Compared to international standards, Austria is one of the few countries which had not had such an official PVE/CVE strategy. This situation has been changed by the present document. The fact that a large number of actors were included into the developing process emphasises the intention to view extremism prevention and de-radicalisation as an issue which concerns society as a whole.

This Austrian Strategy was developed in the course of a participative and transparent process involving

all members of the Federal Network interested in this task. Moreover, external experts from the fields of research, civil society, people with practical experience, organisations, etc. were integrated into the creation process.

The present strategy is a general and broad approach meant to be a guideline and offer orientation to all Austrian actors dealing with the topics of preventing violent extremism and de-radicalisation. Based on the present strategy, measures for the most important aspects of Austrian prevention and de-radicalisation work will subsequently be substantiated, the aim being to reinforce the strategic concept outlined in this present document by practical solutions.

## // SUMMARY

**The “Austrian Strategy for the Prevention and Countering of Violent Extremism and De-radicalisation” pools experiences and handling practices of various occupational groups who are familiar with the subject of “PVE/CVE and de-radicalisation” and it shall make a significant contribution to developing a responsible way of dealing with this topic. The present document concentrates on all forms of extremism and describes individual areas of activity that are particularly relevant for preventing violent extremism and de-radicalisation work.**

Extremism originates from radicalisation processes which can make individuals susceptible to an extremist ideology, finally causing them to use violence as a means for reaching their goals. This challenge can be countered by PVE/CVE and de-radicalisation, which are comprehensive tasks, since all forms of extremism strive to weaken democracy and the constitutional state and they mostly are co-dependent. Thus, in order to be able to meet this challenge, it seems absolutely necessary to find a solution involving society as a whole. It requires the co-operation of a large number of various players to be able to view and analyse the reasons for radicalisation from different perspectives and to resolutely counter them.

Successful PVE/CVE and de-radicalisation work in Austria is based on the fundamental principles of the constitutional state and must serve as the basis for all players involved. The essential basis in this

context are human rights and the protection of human dignity, the diversity of a democratic society and the values of coexistence negotiated within a society, such as respect, freedom of opinion, freedom from violence and a high level of individual freedom rights. Any ideology which approves violence and rejects human rights and democratic values poses a risk to social cohesion. Thus, the central focus for all players entrusted with extremism prevention and de-radicalisation work in Austria is to counter extremist tendencies with all determination, without undermining the guidelines defined in the present strategy.

When compiling the present strategy, Austria used a large number of international and EU recommendations for orientation. Exemplary in this context are the “United Nations Global Counter Terrorism Strategy” from 2015, the EU directive “Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism: Strengthening the EU’s Response” from 2014 and a “Policy Paper” by the “Radicalisation Awareness Network” (RAN) on the subject of “Development of a local prevention framework and guidelines”.

The core concepts concerning extremism prevention and de-radicalisation were included into the strategy, based on international and European documents. The term “extremism” has been defined broadly and generally refers to all forms of extremism.

## // SECURITY, THE PENAL SYSTEM AND RESOCIALISATION

Violent extremism in all its manifestations poses a considerable threat to the Austrian society. Apart from the security authorities, which play a key role in repression, preventive measures have increased in importance. In order to reinforce the aspect of prevention, co-operation of all institutions relevant in this field is necessary. One essential objective of a macrosocial approach to fight extremism is the prevention of criminal acts and the containment of radicalisation processes preceding relevant offences, and thus, threatening social cohesion in Austria.

In order to guarantee resilience of the population and the state to radicalisation and extremism in the best way possible, it is necessary, on the one hand, to have national authorities, which, according to their protective function, effectively and proactively react to possible offences, so that the desired effect caused by extremist offences cannot be brought about. On the other hand, it is necessary to continue adopting the preventive macrosocial solution approach already initiated in Austria, alongside with practical methods offering individuals a way out of extremist environments.

## // POLITICS AND DEMOCRATIC CULTURE

Strengthening democracy and democratic awareness is one of the essential prerequisites for cracking down on extremism. Interest in social matters and

the possibility to take part in social processes creates a feeling of belonging to an open and democratic society. Such a society stands united against anti-democratic and extremist forces and has enough resilience to also meet the challenges of the future.

## // CO-OPERATION AND RESOURCES

In order to be able to counter extremist ideologies, networking and co-operation is not only necessary on an international level but also on the national level. Mutual solidarity and co-operation is needed between the federal government, the federal provinces and the communities. Responding to the challenge of guaranteeing a stable democratic society in order to maintain social peace means that this aim needs to be continuously pursued, a large amount of commitment has to be displayed so that the dialogue between all players involved is promoted.

Federal networks have proven to be appropriate for the exchange between the federal ministries, the federal provinces and some specialist bodies active across Austria. It would be a strong signal of co-operation and jointly assumed responsibility, if the federal government, the federal provinces as well as the cities and communities established the respective networks in the near future by formulating concrete objectives and establishing key activities in order to guarantee continuous and consistent extremism prevention and a targeted promotion of democracy and human rights. The resources

required in this context must be guaranteed on a sustainable basis. Moreover, spaces have to be created, where the players involved can exchange target-oriented information.

Setting up a central point of coordination against radicalisation and extremism would be an effective approach for offering the widest possible range of awareness-raising measures and trainings concerning radicalisation and extremism to a broad target group and to support individuals prone to radicalisation in the best possible way and in due time. There is widespread agreement that raising awareness concerning subjects like extremism and terrorism is the basis at all levels for taking effective counter measures.

## // EDUCATION, LABOUR MARKET AND RESILIENCE

Education, be it either formal or non-formal, can considerably contribute to making individuals more resilient to radicalisation and extremism. In this context, education has to be understood in a broader sense, as vocational training or the transfer of knowledge, since it offers the possibility to remove inequalities and to promote inclusion on the job market.

An inclusive education and labour market policy supporting individuals in their abilities and needs can provide disadvantaged individuals with adequate access to education, training and the job

market, and by doing so, can significantly contribute to the prevention of radicalisation and extremism. Moreover, increased promotion of qualification offers and employment promotion can create perspectives for disadvantaged, marginalised individuals and groups. Hence, the sense of social security and social integration is strengthened, which, in turn, removes the basis for politically radical arguments, making a contribution to combatting marginalisation that way.

## // SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND HEALTH

When analysing the reasons for radicalisation, exclusion mechanisms based of a societal and structural nature have to be considered. Social responsibility and health comprise areas such as the labour market, professional education, the social security system, child and youth welfare, social work at schools, youth work as well as health promotion and health care. Likewise, different forms of discrimination, on grounds of an individual's sex or gender identity, sexual orientation, origin or religion are usually considered separately from each other. When countering radicalisation and extremism, it is important to specifically focus on these societal, social and health aspects.

## // SCIENCE AND RESEARCH

One of the essential objectives of prevention of violent extremism and de-radicalisation is to develop a responsible way of dealing with extremist ideologies and to pool the respective methods which



are based on experience and practical knowledge. It is important to continue to analyse extremist tendencies and their causes and to formulate joint solutions in order to adequately deal with this complex subject. Threats have to be specifically dealt with by applying secondary and tertiary prevention measures, without condemning and stigmatising individual groups of the population as a whole.

In order to be able to establish a systematic and interdisciplinary type of extremism research, which concentrates on a comprehensive examination of the subject fields identified and which is able to produce knowledge-based inputs for practical and political use, the respective structures need to be created first.

For this purpose, it could be useful to set up a publicly accessible data base on extremist organisations and relevant results in this context. However, another idea would be to establish an independent, scientific competence centre to better coordinate research activities and to use scientific resources and resources available to the authorities more efficiently.

## // INTERNET AND THE MEDIA

When analysing radicalisation processes, it becomes clear that the media promote these processes in many ways and can facilitate spreading extremist positions. Likewise, the media can be used for counter measures and alternative measures aimed

at the prevention of violent extremism and de-radicalisation.

It is important to deal with extremist contents in various media in a competent way. Both, technical and sociopolitical measures have to be taken. For this purpose, international networks are required, since not only media providers but also some extremist players are active across borders. It is in this area that practical implementation, but also research measures must take a stand, in order to guarantee that the respective measures can take effect. In addition, the respective authorities and internet service providers need to interact in order to create standardised regulations, as far as the use of the internet is concerned. In this context, the focus shall not only be on the fact that the media increase their competence but also on increasing their responsibility.

## // GENDER

In the field of prevention of violent extremism and de-radicalisation, the role of gender equality is often regarded as only marginally important. Radical groups partly take advantage of this fact. Apart from that, societies with higher gender equality are more resilient to extremism. Hence, it seems to be crucial to dedicate more attention to this subject in the prevention of violent extremism and de-radicalisation work and to consider it as an interdisciplinary issue in all measures to be taken.

Over the last years, Austria has taken a large number of initiatives and has set various actions to counter extremism. Therefore, thanks to a broad understanding of prevention of violent extremism and de-radicalisation and a co-operative interaction between the civil society players, official institutions, security authorities and the federal provinces, we have arrived at an innovative and future-oriented approach. One of the essential prerequisites for successful prevention work is the successful co-operation of a large number of players. In the years to come, it will be important to establish and consolidate these structures in order to be able to continue to counter violent extremism by preventive, or, whenever necessary, by reactive measures.

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## 1.1. INTRODUCTION

**Extremism in all its manifestations causes concern across Europe and is seen as a major challenge. The population, the constitutional system as well as the institutions and bodies of a democratic state and community can be impaired or paralysed by extremism, terrorist acts (as a method of extremist actors) and hate crimes.**

The “National Strategy for Prevention of Violent Extremism and De-Radicalisation” contributes to structuring and sustainably tackling this challenge. The present document pools the experience and handling practices of various occupational groups familiar with the topic of “prevention of violent extremism and de-radicalisation” and shall make a significant contribution to handling this topic responsibly.

### // A MACROSOCIAL APPROACH AS A SOLUTION MODEL

The starting point of extremism, in all its manifestations, lies within a radicalisation process. They make individuals susceptible to extremist ideologies and ultimately to violence as a legitimate tool for achieving their goals. When analysing these processes, it becomes evident that they are very complex phenomena, which always have to be regarded in the context of socio-economic and global-political factors. Security authorities,

individuals with practical experience in prevention of violent extremism and de-radicalisation work as well as scientists agree upon the fact that different influencing factors can mutually intensify radicalisation processes and affect their course. This is reflected in the wide variety of requirements imposed on prevention of violent extremism and de-radicalisation work.

There is broad consensus that curbing extremism in all its manifestations and containing its causes pose a challenge not be met by repressive methods alone. On the contrary, numerous actors have to co-operate and such co-operation shall be based on a macrosocial solution approach. The aim shall be to analyse and evaluate extremist tendencies and their causes from different points of view and to formulate macrosocial strategies and solution approaches, which live up to the complexity of the topic.

The effectiveness of these strategies and approaches essentially depends on how and to which extent public and civil society institutions and organisations can be connected and if permanent, binding and target-oriented co-operation alliances can be established. The need for this endeavour exists at all levels of action as well as at the local and national level.

### // PREVENTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND DE-RADICALISATION AS COMPLEX TASKS

What all forms of extremism have in common is their negative attitude towards the democratic constitutional state. Fundamental democratic principles, such as the plurality of interests, the multiparty system as well as the right to opposition are being negated. Extremist groups pose a particular challenge to the democratic order. These groups are based on anti-democratic ideologies, whose aim is to undermine democracy and social cohesion.

Therefore, when analysing and developing strategies in the field of prevention of violent extremism and de-radicalisation, you cannot focus solely on individual manifestations of extremism. As a matter of fact, extremism is based on approaches and attitudes which are mutually dependent, which show reciprocal dynamics and which even provoke each other. Taking into account the similarity in character, it is thus necessary to select a broad term for extremism to contain radicalisation and extremism. In order to prevent subversive extremism, a holistic and macrosocial approach is ultimately required, integrating the inter-ministerial, institutional, administrative, non-governmental and scientific levels. This has to be taken into account when conceiving counter-measures.

Moreover, hostilities and a dichotomous pattern of “friend-enemy” provide the ideal breeding ground for

many ideologies. Their ideas focus on feelings such as fear, mistrust and rejection. Sustainable strategies and raising awareness in all sectors of society are necessary to reduce the operative ability to act and the geographical scope of extremist/terrorist associations.

Security authorities, people with practical experience in prevention of violent extremism and de-radicalisation work as well as representatives from the field of science have determined numerous challenges and threats which are relevant for conceptualising and implementing future prevention and de-radicalisation measures in Austria. Therefore, it can be assumed that anti-democratic ideologies and attitudes will not lose their appeal in the future. Progressive radicalisation tendencies and an increasing number of recruiting attempts have to be viewed as a realistic scenario, regardless of any specific form of extremism. Particular attention must be paid to the fact that offences cannot only be committed by groups but also by radicalised single perpetrators, as it has increasingly been the case. Therefore, the population, the constitutional system as well as the institutions and bodies of the democratic state and community will continue to be confronted with scenarios in the future, calling for active counteraction taken as early as possible. These actions shall be taken on the premise of a macrosocial solution approach. The present strategy shall be regarded as a foundation for these actions and shall serve as a means of orientation.



## 1.2. GUIDELINES FOR PREVENTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND DE-RADICALISATION IN AUSTRIA

**In order to manage prevention of violent extremism and de-radicalisation work in Austria successfully, basic principles and guidelines need to be defined, which offer orientation for all players involved. In the following, it is intended to give an overview of the basic principles and guidelines which shall serve as a basis for the present strategy and for the implementation of concrete prevention and de-radicalisation measures in Austria.**

One of the biggest challenges for a democratic constitutional state is how to deal with anti-democratic (up to extremist) tendencies. In order to be able to counter such tendencies in our society, rules and mechanisms are required which make it possible to act against anti-democratic and extremist tendencies, without damaging the basic principles of the constitutional state.

The Austrian federal constitution and the constitutional values derived from it form the foundation for a peaceful coexistence in Austria. At the same time, basic principles like liberalism, the rule of law, democracy, the republic state, federalism and the separation of powers, but also fundamental values such as justice, respect, tolerance, gender equality and sociopolitical participation as well as ensuring social security are further central

prerequisites without which a democratic society cannot work.

Extremist tendencies often originate from a small minority within a society. However, under certain conditions, they can have the potential of radicalising large parts of society. If a society can firmly trust in its democratic system, this confidence can serve as a fundamental protective shield against extremism in all its various manifestations. If citizens are given the opportunity to actively participate in democratic processes, extremist tendencies can be proactively counteracted. For this reason, the overriding principles of prevention and de-radicalisation work must be to strengthen the democratic constitutional state and to safeguard the conditions under which it can work.

In their daily work, all players involved in prevention and de-radicalisation activities have to consider the guidelines outlined and sustainably comply with them.

### // HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMAN DIGNITY AS BASIC PRINCIPLES

Human rights, as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights<sup>1</sup>, and human dignity as it is laid down therein, form the normative basis for all societies which are based on social and liberal principles. They guarantee that the constitutional state is oriented towards the common good and

the needs of the population. Building on this, the protection and promotion of human rights and the respect for human dignity should be in the focus of prevention and de-radicalisation work. In this way, orientation is offered for all discourses and all macrosocial negotiation processes which centre around the preservation and promotion of democratic norms.

On the basis of human rights it is specified that group rights must not violate the dignity and rights of the individual and, thus, are subordinate to the rights of the individual. Conversely, this means that collective rights, which safeguard the dignity and the rights of the individual and promote his or her participation in society, are to be welcomed and protected. Children's rights<sup>2</sup> have a particular status. Promoting these central rights of children and young individuals, developing their possibilities of participating in and shaping social life and protecting children and young individuals are top priorities.

### // IDENTITY, DIVERSITY AND AFFILIATION

In a democratic society, diversity needs to be reflected and proactively promoted in all educational, social and security-relevant service sectors. This aim is to be pursued while bearing in mind that societal diversity requires jointly negotiated values and rules for coexisting, such as respect, freedom of opinion and freedom from violence, in order to promote a respectful, social coexistence and equal opportunities for all.

Issues regarding identity and affiliation are not only dealt with at a normative but also at a material-structural level. They are linked to social, economic, political and cultural possibilities of participation. A normative discussion on coexistence of individuals must also tackle the issues of inclusion and participation against the background of social inequalities, barriers and discrimination. In prevention of violent extremism and de-radicalisation work, topics such as sensitivity and the significance of gender as an interdisciplinary issue have to be considered accordingly.

### // CIVIL LIBERTIES AS A BASIS FOR COEXISTENCE WITHIN A SOCIETY

Democratic, pluralist societies are characterised by a high degree of individual civil liberties which form the basis of our coexistence. Civil liberties can be restricted by the state authorities, in order to maintain public order and to ensure the security of the people. At the same time, the state authorities, in compliance with the principle of proportionality, are obliged to guarantee that the benefit of such measures outweighs the restrictions caused by them. Particularly, if the freedom of children and young individuals is restricted by certain measures, the focus must be on the children's well-being and the opportunities of development for children and young individuals.

<sup>1</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights (A/RES/217, UN-Doc. 217/A-(III)), URL: <http://www.un.org/depts/german/menschenrechte/aemr.pdf>, 24/01/2018

<sup>2</sup> Convention on the Rights of the Child [https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg\\_no=IV-11&chapter=4&lang=en](https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=TREATY&mtdsg_no=IV-11&chapter=4&lang=en), 24.01.2018

## // DEVALUATION IDEOLOGIES AND GROUP-FOCUSED MISANTHROPY

Any ideology which supports violence and rejects a society which is based on human rights and democratic values, poses a risk to social cohesion. Thus, any form of extremism must receive due attention. The focus of prevention of violent extremism and de-radicalisation work is not only on groups and individuals advocating violence, but also on individuals who advocate and spread tendencies which are racist, sexist or hostile to pluralism.

Group-focused misanthropy and devaluing attitudes form the breeding ground for extremism. They can assume disintegrating proportions, which might even threaten democracy. For this reason, joint efforts are needed at all structural and societal levels, in order to find solutions which can be used to effectively counter devaluation ideologies and ideologies of inequality. In order to contain these problem areas, specific measures in the fields of prevention, information and research as well as in the fight against the phenomena are required, among other things.

Freedom of opinion is the basic condition of any freedom and it is constitutive for a functioning democracy. Limitations on the freedom of opinion are to be set, when individuals or groups are being discriminated and degraded on grounds of certain characteristics. It must be seen to it that the rules

of non-violent communication are observed in all public discourses and that the means for promoting them are reinforced. In order to render prevention of violent extremism and de-radicalisation work sustainable, the borders between verbal violence and the freedom of opinion should be clearly defined, explained, communicated and executed.

To summarise, the central guideline for sustainable prevention and de-radicalisation work in Austria shall be to decisively counter extremist tendencies while preferably including all relevant players, without undermining the basic principles of the constitutional state and the fundamental values derived from it.

### 1.3. INTERNATIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS ON PREVENTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND DE-RADICALISATION

**Over the last couple of years, an increasing number of countries have developed national strategies and action plans for the prevention of violent extremism and de-radicalisation. Therefore, numerous international and EU recommendations provide guidance to Austria with regard to establishing its own prevention and de-radicalisation structures<sup>3</sup>.**

<sup>3</sup> See, among others, “United Nations Global Counter Terrorism Strategy” (UNGCTS; A/70/674, dated 24/12/2015, also adapted in July 2016 (A/RES/70/291)); EU directive “The prevention of radicalisation leading to terrorism and violent extremism: reinforcement of the EU action” (15/01/2014); Communication of the European Commission “The prevention of radicalisation leading to terrorism and violent extremism: reinforcement of the EU action” (15/01/2014) as well as the policy paper of the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) “Developing a local prevent framework and guiding principles” (November 2016).

The “United Nations Global Counter Terrorism Strategy”, which was adopted in 2015 and adapted in July 2016, constitutes an example in this context. The focus of this strategy rests upon four pillars:

- the identification of influencing factors facilitating the propagation of terrorism;
- measures to prevent and combat terrorism;
- the establishment of national resources to prevent and combat terrorism as well as strengthening the role of the United Nations in this field;
- respecting human rights and the rule of law<sup>4</sup>.

At the European level, the most relevant directive in this context is the one from the year 2014, “The prevention of radicalisation leading to terrorism and violent extremism: reinforcement of the EU action”. The document indicates that the responsibilities for designing and implementing measures to prevent and combat radicalisation lie with the member states, but that the phenomenon of radicalisation is, in many ways, supranational. This directive focusses, among other things, on the following recommendations for preventing radicalisation:

- prevention of radicalisation by consolidating expert knowledge,
- training in the prevention of radicalisation,
- development of exit strategies for violent extremism,
- closer co-operation with civil society and the

- private sector,
- further research on radicalisation tendencies and evaluation of existing practices,
- closer co-operation with partner countries to prevent and combat radicalisation within and outside of the European Union<sup>5</sup>.

In addition to these two official documents, the European Union published a policy paper of the “Radicalisation Awareness Network” (RAN) in 2016, entitled “Developing a local prevention framework and guiding principles”. This document specifically highlights the importance of co-operating at a local level.

The following points are included in the report:

- a suggestion for a common framework for structuring prevention and action points to develop a local strategy or an action plan;
- practical advice on specific problems in the field of prevention;
- concrete practical experiences concerning the definition of problems and guiding principles, which, in the form of a “checklist”, will subsequently support individuals doing practical work in developing their own action plans or strategies<sup>6</sup>.

As early as in 2014, the European Commission called upon member states to develop their own prevention strategies<sup>7</sup>. This demand is met by the

<sup>4</sup> Translated from English; see UNGCTS, July 2016 (A/RES/70/291) : <https://www.un.org/counterterrorism/ctitf/en/un-global-counter-terrorism-strategy>, 25/05/2018

<sup>5</sup> See communication of the European Commission, January 2014 [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009\\_2014/documents/com/com\\_com\(2013\)0941\\_/com\\_com\(2013\)0941\\_de.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/com/com_com(2013)0941_/com_com(2013)0941_de.pdf), 25/05/2018

<sup>6</sup> See RAN strategy paper 2016: [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation\\_awareness\\_network/ran-papers/docs/policy\\_paper\\_developing\\_local\\_prevent\\_framework\\_guiding\\_112016\\_de.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/policy_paper_developing_local_prevent_framework_guiding_112016_de.pdf), 25/05/2018

<sup>7</sup> See communication of the European Commission, January 2014: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009\\_2014/documents/com/com\\_com\(2013\)0941\\_/com\\_com\(2013\)0941\\_de.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/com/com_com(2013)0941_/com_com(2013)0941_de.pdf), 28/05/2018

present document. Following international and EU recommendations, the topic of de-radicalisation and prevention of violent extremism cannot be analysed separately for each member state. On the contrary, it appears expedient to continuously exchange views on this topic through co-operation within the international association and to create suitable networks in this context. The focus should not only be on the co-operation at the “policy level” but also on the promotion of co-operation between science and civil society. These demands and experiences form the basis and guidelines for the present Austrian strategy for the prevention of extremism and de-radicalisation.

#### 1.4. DEFINITION OF TERMS

**In the following chapter the essential terms relevant for the present strategy are defined. These terms are to be regarded as working definitions and are oriented towards European and international documents dealing with prevention of violent extremism and de-radicalisation.**

##### // RADICALISATION

Radicalisation is the process of individual, cognitive and behaviour-based adaptation to a political,

religious or any other ideological world view aiming at bringing about fundamental changes in the classification system of a society. Radicalisation does not inevitably result in the use of violence and violation of the law. In a democratic state based on the rule of law, the mere conviction about a radical idea per se is not criminally relevant. Extremism often comes in when violence is used to push through an individual conviction.

##### // EXTREMISM

The term extremism derives from the Latin word “extremus” meaning “utmost”. “Extremism”, thus, describes a political, religious or ideological attitude which has arrived at its “utmost” form. The aim is to completely change the classification system of a society. In order to achieve this goal, the use of violence and force is a legitimate tool in extremism. The present strategy does not list individual forms of extremism. In this way, it is made clear that it is essential not to focus on individual forms of extremism when implementing prevention and de-radicalisation measures, but to always keep an eye on extremism in all its various manifestations.

##### // TERRORISM

The term “terrorist act” refers to one of the intentional acts listed below, which, given their nature or context, may seriously damage a country

or an international organisation and is defined as a criminal act according to national law, if it is committed with the aim

- I. of seriously intimidating a population or
- II. unduly compelling a government or an international organisation to perform or abstain from performing an act or
- III. seriously destabilising or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or an international organisation<sup>8</sup>.

##### // PREVENTION

In the context at hand, prevention refers to the identification and conception of strategies and measures which aim at containing the risk of radicalisation and extremism.

##### // PRIMARY PREVENTION

Primary or universal radicalisation prevention aims at reaching as many social groups as possible. The objective is to build awareness of the general risks of radicalisation among the target groups addressed. For primary prevention this means strengthening social security, democratic culture and human rights education. Primary prevention is not addressed to any specific target group.

##### // SECONDARY PREVENTION

As for secondary prevention, this target group can be defined more accurately and support for challenging life situations is offered. This target group generally comprises individuals who are at risk of radicalising themselves and who engage with individuals showing the first signs of radicalisation. This target group has not yet committed any acts relevant to criminal law. That is why the aim is to consider the social, legal and the socio-psychological situations of the individuals concerned and to counter any violations of legal norms. On the one hand secondary prevention addresses the individual difficulties of these people, while on the other hand anti-discrimination training programmes are offered to the identified groups of individuals.

##### // TERTIARY PREVENTION

Tertiary prevention is aimed at individuals having committed offences punishable under criminal law. The intent is to prevent them from resuming their extremist patterns of behaviour. This target group comprises, among others, individuals stemming from pertinent extremist environments and persons who want to leave this environment. Tertiary prevention aims at re-integrating and re-socialising individuals by offering social, legal and socio-psychological care facilities on the one hand and ideology-critical work and discussions on violent-extremist views of the world on the other.

<sup>5</sup> Siehe Mitteilung der EU Kommission, Jänner 2014: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009\\_2014/documents/com/com\\_com\(2013\)0941\\_/com\\_com\(2013\)0941\\_de.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/com/com_com(2013)0941_/com_com(2013)0941_de.pdf), 25.05.2018

<sup>6</sup> Siehe RAN-Strategiepapier, November 2016: [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation\\_awareness\\_network/ran-papers/docs/policy\\_paper\\_developing\\_local\\_prevent\\_framework\\_guiding\\_112016\\_de.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/policy_paper_developing_local_prevent_framework_guiding_112016_de.pdf), 25.05.2018

<sup>7</sup> Siehe Mitteilung der EU-Kommission, Jänner 2014: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009\\_2014/documents/com/com\\_com\(2013\)0941\\_/com\\_com\(2013\)0941\\_de.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/com/com_com(2013)0941_/com_com(2013)0941_de.pdf), 28. 05. 2018

<sup>8</sup> Council Common Position of 27 December 2001 on the application of specific measures to combat terrorism, 2001/931/GASP



## // DE-RADICALISATION

De-radicalisation comes in, if the degree of radicalisation is very advanced and the risk arises that individuals endanger themselves and/or others. Efforts are made to initiate a dialogue with these people, to motivate them to accept changes and to trigger processes inducing them to distance themselves from ideologies.

## // DISENGAGEMENT

Disengagement rather refers to the behavioural than to the cognitive level and signifies dissociation from extremist or terrorist activities.

## // ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVES

Alternative narratives are positive alternatives to extremist propaganda. They primarily aim at deconstructing or at de-legitimising extremist narratives.

## 2. SECURITY, THE PENAL SYSTEM AND RESOCIALISATION

### // THE MEANING OF SECURITY AS A CENTRAL TASK OF THE STATE

**Security is a fundamental human need. As it is the case with all basic needs, it only acquires individual meaning, if it is non-existent or severely lacking. The prosperity and quality of life of a society considerably depend on the security prevailing in a country. Social security, social justice and the protection of fundamental human needs are prerequisites for social peace in a society and can, therefore, be essential resilience factors against radicalisation and extremism.**

For this purpose, on the one hand measures to avert dangers are required. The threat analysis forms the respective foundation for managing the use of means and resources and for a crisis-proof management structure of the state. On the other hand an increased focus should also be put on the psychological component when conveying a sense of security. This component substantially influences the way dangerous situations are being dealt with. In addition to this, and by providing objective information, the threat analysis shall also oppose false, socially effective narratives, which can lead to an inaccurate threat assessment, followed by fighting the wrong causes.

### // THREAT ANALYSIS WITH REGARD TO RADICALISATION AND EXTREMISM

Violent extremism in all its manifestations poses a considerable threat to the Austrian society. Timely detection and aversion of threats, which can be posed by radicalised individuals or groups, are the challenges the state needs to tackle.

Long-term trend descriptions provided by the Austrian security authorities dealing with security-related developments indicate a growing polarisation and fragmentation of our society. These circumstances can provide the respective breeding ground for radicalising groups, which are also prepared to use violent extremist methods to articulate their goals. An increasing number of social tensions, disenchantment with politics, ethnical conflicts within the society, challenges posed by local separatist movements (mostly in the urban environment<sup>9</sup>) and the acceleration of change processes caused by digitalisation (e.g. filter bubbles, parallel societies, objective facts or pseudo-truths) all are manifestations of this development. On the one hand globalisation increases the importance of internationality and its consequences on daily life, but on the other hand, it also leaves parts of the society with a feeling of powerlessness and being on the losing side. Another trend to be observed concerns the dwindling role of the state vis-à-vis its own society. This role could partially be taken on by other actors.

<sup>9</sup> Developing so-called "No Go Areas", to which public organisations and security authorities do not have any access (or just restricted access). These areas can be based on an ethnic background or a(n) (organised) criminal background. In most cases, it is a mixture of both.

The polarisation perceived in public discourse is particularly relevant in terms of security and is one of the increasing challenges for the entire Austrian society when it comes to maintaining public peace, order and security. Continuous analyses and preventive measures adapted to the latest development tendencies are required to successfully deal with these developments also in future.

When analysing and planning measures, it is essential to comprehend the phenomenon of extremism at a social and individual level. The concrete danger always emanates from individuals; they either instrumentalise other people or carry out acts of violence themselves.

In the radicalisation process of an individual, numerous aspects play an important role, which can also be highly influenced by external actors<sup>10</sup> and an individual's social environment. Therefore, a reflective discussion about the topic of security in Austria cannot be held without addressing the external influences and the social situation in Austria.

## // PREVENTION AS A TOOL FOR THREAT MITIGATION

Alongside classic repressive measures taken by a state, which are specifically used to avert danger and to minimise the damage, prevention as an instrument has assumed an increasingly important role being an additional tool for mitigating the threat

potential. As a consequence of structures which are perceived as being more and more motivated by politics and ideologies and which are formed apart from public and democratic processes, it has become increasingly necessary to implement an additional number of prevention measures to avert radicalisation and recruitment processes. In recent years, this approach has been progressively adopted.

Prevention work has to be based on the approach of thinking globally and acting locally, as the borders between internal and external security become increasingly blurred. Security agencies, which due to statutory regulations are assigned the task of safeguarding public peace, order and security, continuously monitor and analyse the security situation outside of Austria and in Europe in order to be able to offer appropriate responses to threats.

An effective threat prevention is only possible, if radicalisation and extremism are dealt with at a national ("Whole of Government Approach") and/or macrosocial ("Whole of Society Approach") level. The Austrian security authorities have considerable interest in regularly exchanging views with as many actors from the field of prevention of violent extremism and de-radicalisation work as possible in order to ensure a high degree of quality when processing this subject matter.

## // TAKING MACROSOCIAL ACTION AGAINST RADICALISATION AND EXTREMISM

The sustainable achievement of goals requires a number of national measures, which are entrenched in different governmental and non-governmental sectors. At the same time, target-group oriented and awareness-raising measures promoting a better understanding of violent extremism play a central role, but so do specific interdisciplinary, cross-ideological and multiprofessional de-radicalisation measures adopted by qualified professionals.

The essential goal at the individual level is to detect and stop the propensity to violence. Individually tailored decisions on implementing support measures and necessary coercive measures are essential. When implementing individual measures, it is important to evaluate the resource- and solution-oriented approach and to bear in mind the perpetrator-victim-issue.

Individuals who do not have sufficient and complete access to the economic opportunities in our society and who do not have a determining influence on society are particularly vulnerable to being compromised by extremism.

However, education and the possibility to participate alone do not guarantee that individuals do not become radicalised. There are many current and historical examples proving that extremist groups are also led by educational elites.

Individuals who have already attracted attention due to their divergent and dangerous behaviour, with regard to extremism, need to be provided with an individually tailored support service as early as possible. This support service shall offer the possibility to work on their criminal behaviour and shall provide them with perspectives and alternatives to their actions so that they can live their lives according to the principles of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Tertiary prevention can only be successful, if essential protective factors for social rehabilitation and/or reintegration are provided and reinforced.

In order to reach these goals, a professional and interdisciplinary approach is required as well as a qualified and interlinked staff. A continuous and transparent exchange between the professionals involved and of their observations is an essential prerequisite for reducing further delinquencies. Strengthening the resources and pinpointing risks seems to be the essential task and in order to complete this, a deliberate use of primary, secondary and tertiary prevention is required as well as a clear understanding on the part of the institutions concerned and interdisciplinary thinking on the part of the stakeholders. In addition to this, working in a connected work environment and being familiar with the tasks, orders and objectives of the other institutions also is beneficial.

A fundamental prerequisite for a successful prevention of radical and extremist tendencies is

<sup>10</sup> These external actors (states, state-like and other organisations disposing of instruments of violence and having violent potential) are to be allocated outside of the Austrian society and they want to fight it, no matter the national territory they are currently in. Thus, every actor taking action against the Austrian state and its society in a structural fashion is to be regarded as an external actor.



offering people perspectives, enabling them to participate in social standards. Social security can only be established, if the goal of our society is inclusion and the necessary future perspectives are offered to arrive at this aim. At the same time, it has to be ensured that the perspectives offered are also accepted.

## // THE PENAL SYSTEM AND SOCIAL REHABILITATION

Compared to the rest of Europe, the Austrian legal situation and jurisdiction set forth that individuals who are detained for having conducted (or attempted to commit) offences relating to extremism and terrorism are dealt with relatively strictly. The number of individuals detained (in provisional detention or in prison) for the most relevant extremist offences (pursuant to § 278b to f and 282a of the Austrian Penal Code) has constantly been increasing and poses new challenges for the Austrian law enforcement authorities. Nevertheless, the members of this group amount to less than one percent of all prison inmates (as of July 2018), which is a manageable number.

Also, the reports and convictions for National Socialist reactivation pursuant to the National Socialism Prohibition Act have increased over the last couple of years and hate and slander have not only become a pressing problem on the Internet. The amount of support services provided for individuals

sentenced to conditional imprisonment shows that, compared to other extremist manifestations, there have been significantly more convictions pursuant to the National Socialism Prohibition Act.

It is also relevant for the penal system to know the reasons for radicalisation and the formation of cognitive and violent extremism. Ultimately, appropriate de-radicalisation and dissociation measures (in the sense of “disengagement”) can only be taken, if reliable scientific answers to these questions exist. Especially dissociation measures must be of particular importance for the penal system, as their goal is to ensure the legal conduct of the convicted offender following his or her release from prison. Alongside the numerous challenges posed by detainees accused or already convicted for extremism motivated offences, a major problem is constituted by the fact that detainees in general are more responsive to extremist patterns and systems of interpretation.

Prisons are always institutions in which risk factors tend to culminate. At these institutions, troublesome individuals are detained under difficult conditions, which are often also partially caused by the large share of foreign detainees (over 50 % in 2018). For this reason, prisons always have to be seen as critical locations with regard to radicalisation and the formation of cognitive or violent extremism and they are significant areas of recruitment. Even though it cannot be assumed at the moment that radicalisation in prisons is numerically relevant, appropriate secondary measures always have to

be taken in the preliminary stages, apart from de-radicalisation and dissociation measures, although they have comparatively little influence.

Even though experience has been gathered within the penal system over the last decades of how to deal with political extremism, various forms of religious extremism sometimes still pose new challenges. As extremists do not form a homogenous group in prison either, the motivation and problem areas to be taken into account when developing de-radicalisation and dissociation measures are manifold. That is why the individualisation principle has to be applied in the penal system, insofar as possible and appropriate. Since neither general crime-conducive factors can already provide sufficient explanations for radicalisation processes nor can the mere establishment of correlations between social or socio-economic prerequisites and the different manifestations of cognitive and violent extremism in its own right form a solid basis for differentiated and specific counter-measures.

Especially in prison environments, the vast majority of individuals show a certain type of characteristics or a combination of characteristics, which is why concepts following the disintegration theory (marginalisation, alienation, discrimination, etc.) only have a subordinate explanatory value. With particular regard to the role of the political and/or religious ideology and the significance of group dynamic processes, an ideographic theory, a pattern of the conditions and/or a case concept have to be developed for every single detainee as a basis for any

further action. The determination of the necessary security measures shall also be included.

The aim is to adopt an individualised approach with a differing indication, whereas the individual decisions concerning the indication always depend on the estimated danger the respective detainee poses (no binary characteristic, but a continuous, multidimensional one). Particularly with extremist detainees with very distinct risk features, being expressed in different areas of life, prisons are required to provide interdisciplinary team work on the common basis of the case concept. A professional co-operation between the judicial police and the specialist departments as well as through the support of external experts and centres providing follow-up support, alternatives to the extremist explanation and indoctrination patterns have to be presented, offering an escape from fatal group dynamics.

However, it always has to be considered that alleged or real injustices and experiences of helplessness or humiliation can easily be seen as a confirmation of a personal and/or structural disadvantage experienced due to an ideology, giving rise to an acceleration of concepts of the enemy on the part of the detainee. Such a momentum can effect and impede the efforts made for social rehabilitation even until after an individual's release from prison or custody.

However, it is in any case essential to acknowledge that acquiring a full understanding of de-radicalisation and taking into account all forms of

extremism is vital. In order to contain all forms of extremism, measures in the field of early detection, prevention and de-radicalisation aiming at disengaging the structures are especially important.

The key components for a successful and sustainable strategy against radicalisation in prisons are:

- a functioning security system in prisons (“dynamic security”);
- functioning information systems within and outside of prisons;
- continuous education and training of prison guard officers;
- de-radicalisation and general education programmes offered to detainees at risk in the context of prevention work;
- multidisciplinary support services;
- development of positive perspectives for the time following the release from prison;
- a structured and fair co-operation with other departments and other relevant stakeholders (pertinent counselling centres, parents, relatives, probation service, etc.);
- co-operation at a European and international level;
- risk management (approved instruments for risk assessment for an early detection of radicalisation processes).

Regarding any measures taken in prison, you have to bear in mind that it is limited to the time of the prison sentence and is adopted in a closed system, which is almost completely sealed off from additional influencing factors existing in life outside of prison.

Depending on the extent of the sentence, being proportionate to fault and the crime committed, processes of change can at best only be initiated. Thus, sustainability is the goal to be achieved in this context.

Therefore, a close co-operation with institutions, especially the probation service, during the early preparation for the release from prison is essential, in order to ensure a smooth transition from prison into a life in freedom. Early involvement of the probation service makes it possible to plan measures to reinforce norms as well as to stabilise de-radicalisation for the time following the release from prison (e.g. social net conferences). In this way, stable, social and existential structures can be developed being there for the individual on his or her return into life in freedom. This is especially important for this group of people, as due to strong stigmatization, they encounter major obstacles when accessing resources. After their release from prison, their decision to opt for extremist ideologies may be connected with an unsuccessful social rehabilitation following their release from prison, especially if they had negative experiences on the labour market.

As further support of detainees can only be ensured in the case of a conditional release, it is of utmost importance, with regard to the release from prison, to carefully consider how the goal of sustainable disengagement on a case-by-case basis can be reached best: Either by serving the full sentence or by a conditional release with the possibility to also attend to the detainee after his or her release

from prison for the determined duration of the probationary period.

In the context of prisons and social rehabilitation, developing positive perspectives together with the individual at risk of being radicalised is of particular importance. Experiencing an increased sense of marginalisation and feeling excluded can make the respective individual opposed to society even more strongly and he or she can be moved towards radicalisation once again.

### 3. POLITICS AND DEMOCRATIC CULTURE

**When dealing with growing radicalisation and extremism, the most fundamental aims are to protect the democratic constitutional state and democratic order and to strengthen and to promote democratic thinking and acting. On the one hand these aims are to be achieved by teaching democratic values in order to increase the resilience of society to extremism. On the other hand the idea is to specifically counter extremism on the basis of the promotion of democracy.**

A democratic social system offers the opportunity to decide on matters concerning community as a whole on equal terms. In order to make such a system succeed, active participation extending beyond the mere participation in elections is

decisive. This active participation must be made possible by the respective structures, which have to be easily accessible and comprise large parts of the population. At the same time, there must be the willingness to take responsibility for society as a whole through active participation. This means that the participation must be actively assumed by the citizens. In order to be able to participate in the process of shaping public opinion and policies to a justified extent and to fulfil one's part within the joint responsibility, it is also necessary to have a comprehensive humanist education. All members of a society should be capable of dealing with information and backgrounds openly and critically in order to be able to form an opinion for themselves.

Furthermore, a democracy needs a legal basis in order to be able to effectively repress extremist and anti-democratic forces. Wherever extremist and anti-democratic tendencies threaten the basic values of our society and the functionality of democratic and constitutional institutions, it is necessary to counter them with the means available under the rule of law. In doing so, attention is to be given to keeping a balance between the necessary basic principles regarding prevention and the interference with fundamental rights.

## // PROMOTION OF DEMOCRACY AS A GUARANTEE FOR THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM

In a society based on respect for human dignity, the fundamental rights and the principle of democracy, extremist tendencies will not meet with broad support. Wherever the social and political climate is characterised by intolerance, xenophobia or anti-democratic tendencies, extremist ideas fall on fertile ground. Therefore, it is necessary to reinforce a democratic and integrative narrative which focusses on equal participation and social cohesion in order to present alternatives to anti-democratic ideologies.

The most effective way of creating a resistant democracy is to repeatedly lay down and strengthen democratic acting and thinking. This can be done by encouraging individuals to dedicate themselves to matters of public interest. It becomes clear, thus, that democracy is more than a form of government. Democracy stands for jointly accomplishing tasks and implies participation, involvement and active shaping of societal matters on the part of every single individual. Only then the concept of democracy is filled with life.

A society which trusts in the democratic system and its capability to meet challenges is an essential prerequisite for its legitimacy. In order to increase this confidence, it must be guaranteed that the members of the society can actively participate in and are integrated into political decision-making

processes. Moreover, in order to make people understand political decisions, it needs a high level of transparency, information and communication. In this context, initiatives intensifying the exchange and dialogue between the government and the authorities, on the one hand, and between the government and the people on the other, can be envisaged. A regular exchange with political decision makers - particularly at the local level - can generate new important impulses. Furthermore, modern means of communication offer plenty of options for the exchange of information and the interaction between politics and people.

At the local and community level in particular, participatory structures for members of society are to be reinforced, since it is at this level that the possibility to directly influence one's living environment can be experienced particularly well. Providing people with the opportunity to become actively involved in a cultural, political, social or sports organisation helps them to overcome frustration, which can sometimes be a catalyst for radicalisation. If individuals can participate in and have access to decision making, they develop a strong sense of social cohesion, which, in turn, reduces the feeling of alienation. Individuals from civil society already active in the fields of democracy promotion, prevention of violent extremism and de-radicalisation make an important contribution concerning these matters and shall continue to be supported.

As far as democracy promotion is concerned, political education is of particular importance in this field, especially at schools, where the foundation for democratic understanding is formed. Especially against the backdrop of a society which is characterised by growing plurality, attention has to be paid to teaching people skills in the fields of democracy, human rights and living together in freedom and mutual responsibility in order to strengthen the “democratic skills” of children and young people and, thus, be able to prevent exclusion mechanisms and segregating tendencies at an early stage. Ideally, democracy promotion should commence before children start attending school. Experts point out that as early as at the time when children attend elementary educational institutions, the course for developing democratic and participatory skills in the field of democracy and participation is set by making children familiar to the principles of participation and responsibility. Democracy promotion in this field also comprises education and training of teachers, so that the respective competences can be taught and exemplified in everyday life. Apart from the programmes already existing in the field of democracy promotion, the idea of shifting the focus more strongly towards political education in an effort to teach democratic and constitutional principles as part of the school curriculum should be considered. It is essential that the education in human rights and democracy as a form of government and a way of life is not regarded as concluded, when formal education has been terminated; it should be continued for adults in formats tailored to the needs

of the participants. The aim should be to create comprehensive measures across Austria in order to strengthen individual judgement and critical thinking towards anti-democratic movements among young people - as well as adults - as comprehensively as possible.

Apart from providing the appropriate structures, it requires the commitment of an independent, self-determined and free society, which is ready to stand up for the democratic system and social cohesion. In this context, voluntary work and the membership in clubs and associations in Austria are important, for example in the fields of youth work, open child and youth work, sports and security (e.g. voluntary fire brigade, voluntary participation in the rescue service). This commitment considerably contributes to social cohesion, a vivid solidarity and mutual respect and, thus, considerably supports the Austrian society. The appreciation and promotion of voluntary work, charitable associations and voluntary action should, thus, continue to remain an important matter.

## // DEMOCRACY IN THE CONTEXT OF SOCIETAL CHANGES

Changes can create a climate of insecurity and over the last decades social processes have undergone major changes. Technological progress expanded our way of communicating, giving rise to a comparatively high percentage of immigration and



decisive changes in the world of work. In order to be able to guarantee cohesion in society despite these changes, it is necessary to define and strengthen common interests. Consequently, the fundamental values of coexistence, which are based on the principles of democracy and human rights, have to be strengthened and supported by all parts of the population. This holds true for both, individuals who immigrated or fled from countries with different sets of values and for those who have been rooted in Austria for several generations.

At the same time, democratic culture also stands for being open to new developments and accepting the participation of new members. At times of increasing migration flows and global networking, a diverse society has become a reality in Europe. This diversity repeatedly poses a challenge to a democratic society and prompts it to reflect upon its common fundamental values. At the same time, diversity can mean an added value for society as a whole. For this purpose, a common basis of values is needed, which provides the foundation for social togetherness, to allow cohesion to develop from societal diversity. If the idea of tolerance is misconceived, if social, cultural or religious differences are accepted without any limits and if certain groups of the whole society are devaluated - this can bring about counterproductive effects fostering polarisation and radicalisation.

One of the core challenges for social cohesion and, thus, for democratic order, are tendencies aimed at segregating or separating society. These include, for

example, organisations and ideologies which favour the isolation of individual groups of the population, obstructing successful integration that way. Movements based on anti-democratic, ideological or religious world views, which do not comply with the fundamental values and which oppose them, must be countered, regardless of the foundation their set of values is based on.

In order to strengthen social cohesion and to promote participation in democratic processes, it is important to bolster the sense of belonging to the Austrian society, reinforcing, thus, the idea of a common identity. If the sense of belonging to Austria is too weak in some groups of the population, and if this sense has even significantly diminished over the last years, it is necessary to actively counter such tendencies. Any democratic society lives on the open exchange among and the cooperation between its members. If, due to segregated problematic milieus, solidarity is missing within a society, mutual distrust will soon follow, which again can promote the development of extremism.

An essential measure in countering this problem is to teach all parts of the population the values of coexistence as they are laid down in the Austrian constitution, concentrating on individual target groups. Moreover, mutual understanding and respect can be strengthened within society through intercultural dialogues. In the course of such dialogues, which, among other things, shall include issues such as language competence, education, the situation of women, the relation between state

and religion as well as the individuals' identification with Austria, an open exchange between common interests and differences can take place. In this context, the limits of cultural development are to be clearly communicated. Engaging in a broad dialogue including all strata of society can help to give a voice to moderate groups and individuals, and thus, strengthen the centre of society. In this context, also the manner in which dialogues are held between politics and cultural as well as religious groups is crucial. When it comes to institutionalising social dialogue, the media and educational institutions assume special responsibility.

#### // COMPETENCE AND CO-OPERATION AS A GUARANTEE FOR THE PROMOTION OF DEMOCRACY

Due to the fact that extremist groups often act in a decentralised way, the individual federal provinces and communities are confronted with different forms and dimensions of extremism. For this reason, it is of utmost importance to develop competences and to strengthen co-operation between the federal government, the federal provinces, communities and the civil society in the field of democracy promotion. For this purpose, a network between the individual players and the exchange of knowledge are fundamental prerequisites. By building on existing institutions in the respective regional contexts, targeted measures to promote democracy shall be established and expanded.

## 4. CO-OPERATION AND RESOURCES

**Effective and sustainable prevention of violent extremism and de-radicalisation work requires well-functioning forms of co-operation at all levels. For this purpose, the necessary structures and resources have to either exist or become established at the local, provincial and federal levels.**

Interdisciplinary, cross-institutional and cross-system co-operation requires, among other things, agreement on common goals, the definition of tasks and competences/responsibilities as well as binding rules for information exchange. The specific forms of co-operation, the type of co-operation involved as well as the number of co-operation partners depend on the respective local circumstances.

Prevention of violent extremism can only be effective, if the focus is on sustainability and if the necessary resources can be guaranteed. This holds true for both, continuous or project-related measures and their evaluation as well as for a qualified realisation of key functions, for example of the local, regional or the nationwide network management. Further necessary resources for the prevention of violent extremism are the availability of a sufficient amount of information, the expertise of players in specific fields of action, the promotion of awareness of public and private system partners and the commitment of civil society.

## // OBJECTIVES OF NETWORKING AND CO-OPERATION

The overall objective of networking and co-operation is to have an active participation of public, civil-society and scientific institutions and to involve as many parts of society as possible into the prevention of violent extremism. An active participation of several players strengthens democratic identity and underlines the declaration of belief in the legal system, the defence of human rights and fundamental common values.

At the operational level, interdisciplinary, multi-professional, institution- and system-wide co-operation aims at enlarging the common information base and at preventing information loss. The idea is to pool available, and if necessary, additionally collected information within the scope of legal provisions, to process it and make it available to co-operation partners. Moreover, co-operation aims at pooling and efficiently using and, if necessary, at enlarging existing resources. The objective is to avoid parallel structures and structural deficits. Finally, target-oriented co-operation is meant to extend the competence to act of the players involved and, thus, support the accomplishment of the goals of prevention of violent extremism.

## // CO-OPERATION AT THE LOCAL/ REGIONAL LEVEL

The local or regional level comprises the respective living environment of an individual, his or her social environment, their “hood”, the surroundings individuals live and work in, where they spend their leisure time and where they are active in organisations and associations. It is here, where individuals of different ages, milieus and cultural origins come into contact with each other. It is at this level that individuals live together respectfully and peacefully, but where we also find resentment, transgressions of personal boundaries and where hostilities are shown towards certain groups of individuals. The individuals involved directly benefit from initiatives promoting networking and co-operation as well as from resources used in this context for the development of values and democracy and prevention. Local politics can play a key role here, serving as a role model, mediator and as an active creator.

## // MONITORING OF SOCIAL AND SOCIETAL DEVELOPMENTS IN THE COMMUNITY/ REGION RELATING TO DEROGATIVE ATTITUDES AND ANTI-DEMOCRATIC TENDENCIES

Individual, group-related and social developments become visible and perceptible in the respective social environments. Therefore, it seems to make

sense to exchange and discuss the experiences and findings made by different stakeholders and political representatives on the social microclimate within the communities in regular networking talks. These analyses shall serve as the basis for planning and developing measures intended to promote constructive coexistence as well as projects of social cohesion.

## // DEMAND-ORIENTED PLANNING, IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION OF PRIMARY, SECONDARY AND TERTIARY PREVENTION

Contact points providing advice and assistance to individuals affected by extremism, racism and discrimination (especially victims, perpetrators and other individuals involved) can be established in larger municipalities and regions, which co-operate with counselling centres at the provincial and federal levels. In this context, it is possible to resort to existing offers and the experience made when organising the respective contact points. At the primary and secondary levels, projects and measures should be adequately evaluated and developed further. Communities should be supported in terms of content as well as financially, in order to be able to develop demand-oriented projects and measures. In order to be able to realise these plans, it is necessary to raise the awareness of all stakeholders involved in terms of prevention of violent extremism and the promotion of democracy.

## // RELEVANT ACTORS - POSSIBLE PARTNERS OF CO-OPERATION

Apart from the political representatives of the communities, above all the mayors being the politically primarily responsible ones, ideally all relevant organisations, district authorities and civil society groups active in the individual communities shall be included, among them: the fire brigade, the Red Cross, religious organisations (parishes, mosque associations), social organisations (particularly youth workers), pedagogical organisations (nurseries, schools, adult education facilities), associations - particularly sports clubs, regional media, cultural organisations and associations, information centres for women, girls and men ,etc.

## // POSSIBLE FORMS OF CO-OPERATION

Democracy-building measures and prevention of violent extremism should be established in all organisations of the community as a cross-sectional subject matter. At the same time, the idea is to organise networking meetings, in which regional situations are analysed and measures are initiated, which are then implemented in the communities and in the respective organisations. Co-operation should be organised in the form of dialogues and by involving all parties concerned, in order that form matches the content.



## // CO-OPERATION AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL

At the federal level, a number of actors play a central role in the prevention of violent extremism and de-radicalisation. In this context, the federal ministries and institutions from civil society, science and education are relevant. It is their core task to develop national countermeasures to oppose violent extremism. Likewise, individuals doing practical work are relevant in prevention of violent extremism. The fields of action of these individuals working at the federal level clearly differ. While the federal ministries mainly focus on strategic development and on providing resources for measures to be taken in the field of prevention of violent extremism and de-radicalisation, a large number of other institutions focuses on practical implementation and intervention.

In this context, it is important to be aware of the fact that all actors must co-operate at the federal level in order to be able to pool the large number of national single measures, to develop common projects and to counter violent extremism that way.

## // CO-OPERATION BETWEEN ACTION LEVELS

In prevention of violent extremism, too, needs-oriented co-operations between the provinces and cities and municipalities, and, where applicable, the performance of various tasks in the local/

regional proximity are necessary (for example by guaranteeing a continuous information transfer on essential social developments, national objectives and strategies as well as on research and best practice; the co-ordination of cross-regional prevention measures, the implementation of awareness-raising and qualification measures; the support of inter-communal co-operation, public relations work, etc.).

Essential prevention measures can be taken by promoting the culture of democracy, human rights education, media education and participation on the one hand, while guaranteeing social security for all individuals legally staying in Austria on the other. Challenges in prevention of violent extremism today are and will be in future the areas of education, immigration and asylum, social security, health as well as foreign and European policy.

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## // CO-OPERATION BETWEEN ACTION LEVELS

Likewise, co-operation between the federal level and the federal provinces is essential. Nationwide networks create suitable co-ordination and communication structures guaranteeing the flow of information and avoiding duplications. The “National Network for Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism and De-radicalisation” (BNED) is of particular importance in this context.

Federal networks do not only promote co-operation between the individual levels but also between the federal provinces. Thus, existing and proven forms of exchange and co-operation, such as e.g. the Conference of the Heads of Country Sections shall be used regarding important fields of action (e.g. integration) for the prevention of violent extremism.

The federal ministries make an essential contribution

in the field of prevention of violent extremism when planning and realising measures in their field of competence, together with the federal provinces.

These structures shall not be limited to the federal level alone, but ideally shall also be applied between levels. That means they have to penetrate down to the provincial or communal level. It is in this way only that an effective and well-organised mutual exchange, support in the realisation of measures or the common creation of projects is possible in the field of prevention of violent extremism and de-radicalisation.

## 5. EDUCATION, LABOUR MARKET AND RESILIENCE

**Individuals are confronted with many changes, transitions and challenging developments, especially during childhood and adolescence. This time period is characterised by physical and psychological changes, social expectations and the quest for individual goals and values as well as for one’s own identity. This phase is also marked by a search for orientation and a purpose in life. This search for meaning is connected to a yearning for security, recognition, confidence, care, belonging, but also for autonomy and self-efficacy. The young individual approaches the “outside” world and experiences various social structures. Alongside with the family home, school and the first vocational training (formal education), friendships and the life outside of the classroom (non-formal**

**and informal education) assume an increasingly important role with increasing age.**

These factors can contribute to empowering people and to making them strong for the demands of life, to reinforcing their resilience, or to doing the exact opposite of it. Experiencing exclusion and discrimination, violence, a lacking social recognition as well as a missing discursive framework for processing frustration can, apart from other factors, make it easy to influence or tempt individuals. Other factors concerning vulnerability are the question of perspectives, chances on the labour market, structural economic disadvantages, discrimination and marginalisation. Therefore, there is not only one factor which encourages people to turn to extremism and to subsequently become radicalised, or which prevents them from it, there are rather many factors connected to each other. Having experienced discrimination (subjective deprivation) plays an important role and does not necessarily need to correspond to actual discrimination; however, it nonetheless has to be regarded as a relevant factor.

Therefore, it seems essential to support people in the field of education and further training and to give them the opportunity to reflect upon ethics and philosophy, their own life and upon perspectives for their future in a protected environment and to give them the opportunity to make a constructive and valuable contribution to society, which is also recognized. For the latter, (vocational) education forms the foundation. Since it is a fact that people

with a low qualification run a higher risk of becoming unemployed or are forced to take up low-paid and precarious employment<sup>11</sup>.

In order to be able to continue living invigorated, access to education is essential at all ages. In this context, lifelong learning is not only a catchword but also the foundation for processing individual experiences in life and to harness them and to put them to use in society. That is why the public cultural offer as well as state and private measures for adult education are of utmost importance for life satisfaction and thus, for resilience to temptation, easy promises and ultimately to extremism and radicalisation of any kind.

**// EDUCATION AS THE KEY TO STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE**

Education is not only a human right but also an essential requirement for strengthening resilience to various forms of radicalism and extremism and it involves interaction and communication. If people do not speak the same language – and this does not only include language in the traditional sense but also the mutual understanding of the messages conveyed – this leads to isolation on the one hand, and to inability to act on the other. That is why it is of high importance to the society to keep education accessible to everyone living in Austria (and to break down barriers, if necessary) in order to promote the social and cultural mix when acquiring knowledge and receiving education. This does not only lead to

better understanding between people with different life plans, it also promotes social justice.

In this case, education is more than vocational training or the mere transfer of factual knowledge. Education offers the great opportunity to break up existing social inequalities, including gender inequality. Sociopolitical discourse opportunities offer the possibility to support men and women, regardless of their gender, in developing different potentials in their individual personality.

In general, various targets need to be pursued simultaneously in order to support a person in his or her individual educational aspirations. The “Paris Declaration 2015” has established an essential framework and formulated objectives, thus forming a basis<sup>12</sup>. Beyond the goals of formal education, out-of-school youth work (Open Youth Work, association-related youth work and youth information<sup>13</sup>) constitutes a substantial support for human rights and democracy education. Especially encouraged and acknowledged youth participation is the cornerstone for developing resilience to ideologies of devaluation and extremism.

**// FORMAL EDUCATION – ACCESS TO EDUCATION**

From a certain age on, it is beneficial for the development of children, if they turn from their family towards larger social peer groups (e.g. at

nursery school, as the first institutional education institution). This is where, in most cases, the first contact with society is established, i.e. with groups of people not belonging to one’s closest family. Subsequently, formal education does not only offer the possibility to acquire knowledge but also allows for personal and skill development.

Likewise, it is the task of schools to establish a climate in which bullying and violence are prevented at every single school and to introduce a zero tolerance policy relating to violence at all school levels, as part of the school culture. In order to succeed in this context, some general principles need to be taken into account. These principles were formulated in the above-mentioned “Paris Declaration 2015” and serve as a basis and guide for all efforts undertaken in this field. These principles involve imparting democratic values and fundamental rights for children and adolescents as well as critical thinking and media competence, promoting education opportunities for disadvantaged young people with special needs and encouraging the intercultural dialogue in all forms of teaching and learning.

In order to be able to cope with these demands in a competent way, the teachers and other support persons working at schools (educational psychology, social work at school, youth coaching, etc.) have to undergo continuous training in the fields of diversity, inclusion, political education and European and Global Citizenship. Respective training programmes and expert dialogues or workshops

<sup>11</sup> “Individuals, who do not have a higher education than compulsory schooling, run the highest risk of unemployment. In February 2018, this quota amounts to 25.7 %, for women to 20.7 %, for men to 30.2 %.” (translated from German, see: [http://www.ams.at/\\_docs/001\\_am\\_bildung\\_0218.pdf](http://www.ams.at/_docs/001_am_bildung_0218.pdf))

<sup>12</sup> Cf. [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education\\_culture/repository/education/news/2015/documents/citizenship-education-declaration\\_de.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/news/2015/documents/citizenship-education-declaration_de.pdf), 25/05/2018

<sup>13</sup> For a definition of terms (in German) see <https://www.frauen-familien-jugend.bka.gv.at/jugend/jugendarbeit.html>, 17/08/2018

should be provided and held at University Colleges of Teacher Education. Here, too, the aim should be to cooperate with non-school institutions and to use their experiences and knowledge at school. School administration as a whole has to meet these challenges and has to find an appropriate way to govern/lead a school. The decisive factor is the inclusion of all school partners, such as students, parents, and teachers as well as education psychologists, social workers at school or youth coaches. Democratic and participatory school culture should always be considered in this inclusion. Within this culture, people are encouraged to form a social environment and are taught to do so. Co-operation with ministries and civil society is another important contribution.

Recurrent inspection of the educational content and the learning materials used (textbooks, handouts, etc.) is required in order to keep them up-to-date. The progress and changes in the (political) world, in science, but also in the composition of the population and in social norms and rules should be regularly incorporated in the learning materials.

In this context, it is important to bear in mind that not every school has the same conditions and frameworks. Schools with a higher demand for support in order to fulfil social and educational tasks need to be provided with a sufficient amount of the necessary resources to be able to do so. Effective strategies on how to deal with these challenges always involve all school partners and also focus on the social and cultural background of the school's catchment area.

## // NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

The substantial difference between non-formal offers<sup>14</sup> and formal education is voluntary participation. This non-binding nature means challenge and opportunity at the same time. It poses a challenge at the content and methodological level. Non-formal education opportunities have to be tailored to the wishes and needs of the target groups. Especially offers for young people have to be oriented towards and influenced by their living environments, they have to be easily accessible and without any financial obligations. The voluntary participation in non-formal education provides individual education opportunities and also allows people to experience equal opportunities, regardless of gender-stereotyped attributions or any social, cultural or religious background.

If support is provided for developing a positive attitude towards basic values and institutions of democracy, for social orientation and for the practical development of perspectives (e.g. in one's professional career), this enhances the resilience to extremist thoughts and ideas advocating violence.

However, it should be noted in this context that a society is not a static entity. In fact, experiences and adventures change from one generation to the next. Thus, the transfer of knowledge in connection to extremism has to be adapted to the changing social framework. On the one hand pedagogical concepts have to meet the target groups where they are in their respective reality of life, but they also have to promote the skills and strengths of people. On the

other hand they must not abandon their aspiration to reach a specified goal when imparting knowledge and skills.

In this respect, the non-binding and easily accessible offer by various institutions also enables access to groups, which otherwise only have limited access to the formal education system.

Active participation of people is an especially important principle in non-formal education. This involves participation in the development of the offer itself, but also in the promotion of an active social/political participation. By participating in design processes in the immediate environment, people are supported in their capacity of organising themselves and encouraged to voice their interests. When developing activities and co-determining the structures of offers, participants can experience active participation and see how democratic processes work.

## // ACCESS TO THE LABOUR MARKET

Essential contributions to the prevention of extremism are to maximise sustainable integration into the labour market and to achieve social and economic security that way. By offering perspectives and chances for the future and by providing access to socio-economic resources, the resilience of individuals and entire groups of people to extremist and radical influences can be significantly increased.

Feelings of security and belonging are essential resilience factors against extremism of any kind.

The risk of unemployment and subsequently the risk of poverty and social marginalisation can be reduced by providing access to education and training. Education and training contribute to preventing the marginalisation of vulnerable target groups while at the same time promoting inclusion and participation in society.

That is why policy endeavours and measures taken with regard to the labour market should continue to put their focus on disadvantaged groups and groups facing the risk of unemployment and poverty. What seems to be essential is, for instance, the extension of specific offers for acquiring job-related qualifications. Only then true perspectives can be opened up and, thus, precarious and low-paid employment can be prevented.

Government measures and benefits play an important role in better overcoming times of unemployment and in ensuring a quick reintegration of individuals into the labour market. Receiving the respective benefits (such as unemployment benefits, unemployment assistance or a guaranteed minimum income) safeguards livelihood in times of unemployment. If those benefits, which secure the livelihood of people, are to be reformed, the focus should be put on maintaining the opportunities for people at risk of marginalisation to participate in society, in order to prevent radicalisation tendencies of any kind.

<sup>14</sup>E.g. open or association-related youth work



Ensuring access to the labour market is the basic prerequisite for legal gainful employment and receiving an income. Ensuring this access is one of the most important measures in the fight against poverty and social exclusion and, therefore, also an important factor in the prevention of extremism.

Long-lasting unemployment is not only seen as problematic by the individuals concerned. Due to the increasing dependence on transfer payments, this problem also is a burden for the welfare state. In addition to this, it could also become a threat to democracy: Long-term unemployed individuals and underprivileged people much less frequently make use of their right to vote. Their abstention from voting is the last consequence of their feeling of not belonging to society. Especially people who feel excluded can become susceptible to the easy answers ideologies offer, and therefore, to radicalisation processes.

## 6. SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND HEALTH

**One of the conditions favouring the development of violent extremism is the existence of “push factors”.<sup>15</sup> Among others, social, psychological and health factors are to be mentioned in this context. Also, if individuals have experienced violence at some point, they are more prone to join extremist groups and follow extremist ideologies.**

**Hence, any type of prevention must be based**

**on the creation of positive life perspectives, the opportunity to sustainably change one's life style and the access to alternative social networks (i.e. strengthening of health-promoting factors). For a stable, democratic social order, it is crucial that everybody, regardless of his or her origin (family background, region, migration) and sex has the possibility of social mobility and social advancement with regard to his or her education, income and social status.**

Promoting social security means preventing the risk of segregation and isolation, radicalisation and extremisms caused by poverty and exclusion and strengthening common use of public spaces.

Guaranteeing a sustainable system of social security, healthy living and working conditions and a public system of healthcare and psychosocial care equally accessible to everybody, can help to prevent and avoid extremisms and radicalisation processes and help to identify them at an early stage. Social intervention must commence at a stage, when there still is no need for action and before stigmatisation of certain groups of individuals sets in.

### // SOCIAL SECURITY AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

A safe job and affordable living are two factors which are essential for safe social coexistence. If discrimination is actually experienced or just perceived in these fields, this is also seen as a factor

for radicalisation.

Groups, whose aim it is to incite individuals to extremism, regularly use actual or alleged injustice as a narrative. In secondary prevention, it has to be ensured that these aspects are particularly taken into account when working with individuals showing an affinity to violent extremism.

### // CHILD AND YOUTH WELFARE, YOUTH WORK

Children and young people have specific needs and the conditions, under which children and young people grow up, are crucial for their opportunities and developments throughout their lives. Thus, if children and young people find supportive conditions, society will benefit from it in the long term.

It is particularly important to support children coming from families which are socio-economically disadvantaged and to increase their equal opportunities. In this context, child and youth work taking place outside of school can decisively complete school activities and its requirements. In Open Youth Work, children and young people are given the opportunity to develop their self-referred abilities (e.g. self-awareness, self-assurance, self-confidence, etc.) and social competences as well as dialogue and conflict abilities in a setting adapted to their age group and life situation. By providing diverse forms of offers and methods, their resources and competences are promoted and strengthened.

If these people find favourable conditions and are supported by stable reference persons, they can become individuals with educational and professional perspectives, a sustainable social network and personal competences enabling them to also overcome difficult situations, to develop self-efficacy and not feel completely helpless when confronted with difficult situations in life. Especially disadvantaged and unsettled young people can be susceptible to the promises of salvation offered by radical-extremist ideologies which help them to develop an identity.

It is important to support young adults in developing and protecting their resources and competences, particularly their emotional and social competences which are, for instance, necessary for constructively solving problems and conflicts and for productively dealing with fears and sorrows, and to promote their resistance to stress and setbacks.

This also means enabling young individuals to live their lives autonomously and self-confidently and offering them structures, activities, actions and ideals which give them support and orientation, while at the same time they are motivating and meaningful.<sup>16</sup>

It is particularly important to inform children about their rights, especially the right to freedom from violence, and to support and to protect them, in case they are at risk.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. The Root Causes of Violent Extremism, Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2016

## // INTEGRATION AND SOCIAL COHESION

“An integrated society is characterised by social mobility and openness. It enables individuals to live their lives independently, without being discriminated on grounds of their origin, language or skin colour. Integration aims at having individuals participate in economic, social, political and cultural processes, while having to fulfil the obligations related to it.”<sup>17</sup>

Apart from learning the German language, it is essential to teach individuals the core values of social coexistence in Austria, such as democracy, freedom of opinion, freedom from violence, gender equality and the rule of law. Knowing these values on the one hand, while, on the other hand, living according to them every day, promotes social cohesion.

Individuals, who for various reasons do not feel part of a society, are more prone to drift into violent-extremist milieus and are often selectively targeted by them. Hence, integration has to be seen as a process including society as whole and in order to be successful, everyone in Austria has to contribute to it. “Integration as a process involving society as a whole requires a coordinated approach of the individual players active at the state level and in civil society and it presupposes that every individual living in Austria makes a contribution according to his or her possibilities.”<sup>18</sup>

Individuals who are committed and motivated to organise themselves are of particular significance for integration. Cooperation between public bodies and these individuals is crucial in this context. Successful prevention work, above all, requires confidence and cooperation. They should already be established before problems arise.<sup>19</sup>

## // PSYCHOSOCIAL SECURITY AND ASPECTS OF VIOLENCE

Psychosocial well-being is an essential factor for an individual's quality of life. Challenging conditions and experiences causing traumatising and stress, or which cause people to deal with their own emotions and fears in a destructive way, can, under certain conditions, make these individuals vulnerable to problematic ideologies. Consequently, it is important to promote psychosocial well-being in all phases of life and to reduce psychosocial strain and stress, wherever possible.

Particular attention should be given to strengthening social and emotional competences and measures for the prevention of violence. Violence can be physical, sexual or psychological and may involve deprivation or neglect. This also involves gender-specific violence, that is violence directed against individuals on grounds of their sex, or which affects

them disproportionately. It is essential that every phenomenon of violence or conflict must always be analysed from the viewpoint of gender and role models.

Moreover, it is essential to give individuals, who have already seen violence and traumatising, the possibility to come to terms with their painful experiences as best they can and to develop new perspectives in life.<sup>20</sup>

Many professional groups can, if they are adequately trained and supported and if they have the necessary financial resources, help to avoid and detect radicalisation tendencies at an early stage and can take the respective counter measures, in cases where it is necessary.

In general, it is to be noted that a nationwide psychosocial supply network, equally accessible to all individuals in Austria, is essential for social coexistence.

## // THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

Social cohesion is of particular importance for the quality of life within a society, both within and between the different generations and sexes and socio-economic and socio-cultural groups. In a pluralist society, handling diversity in a respectful manner, the possibilities for everybody to participate in contributing to society as a whole as

well as developing and strengthening democratic competences are important in order to be able to guarantee social cohesion. A strong solidarity within a society, the possibility for all individuals living in Austria to be accommodated in this country and support for those who are less privileged minimise the temptation of turning to extremist ideologies or joining extremist groups. These factors are protective factors.

On the one hand integration of all population groups and individuals into society must be made possible, while on the other hand this integration must also be accepted. Thus, it is important to create the respective conditions enabling society to support the offers regarding the promotion of democratic competences, the sense of community and mutual learning (among others, in the fields of voluntary work in civil society, sports and physical exercise, the arts and culture). In a society which is characterised by individual responsibility, it is crucial that the respective members actively take advantage of these offers. For developing these participatory processes, it is essential to make the respective temporal and spacial resources available to everybody at all relevant levels.<sup>21</sup> Players from civil society can assume an important role in this context.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. BMGF; Austrian Health Target 6, “To ensure conditions under which children and young people can grow up as healthy as possible”, Report of the working group Vienna 2014, edition 2017

<sup>17</sup> Austrian Integration Fund (ÖIF), National Action Plan for Integration 2009, preamble, p. 2: [https://www.bmeia.gv.at/fileadmin/user\\_upload/Zentrale/Integration/NAP/Bericht\\_zum\\_Nationalen\\_Aktionsplan.pdf](https://www.bmeia.gv.at/fileadmin/user_upload/Zentrale/Integration/NAP/Bericht_zum_Nationalen_Aktionsplan.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> Federal Act on the Integration of Individuals Legally Residing in Austria Without Having the Austrian Citizenship (Integration Act – IntG): <http://www.ris.bka.gv.at/GeltendeFassung.wxe?Abfrage=Bundesnormen&Gesetzesnummer=20009891>, 21/08/2018

<sup>19</sup> See EU-RAN Community paper: [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation\\_awareness\\_network/about-ran/ran-yf-and-c/docs/ran\\_yf\\_c\\_strengthening\\_community\\_resilience\\_29-30\\_06\\_2017\\_en.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-yf-and-c/docs/ran_yf_c_strengthening_community_resilience_29-30_06_2017_en.pdf), 17/08/2018

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Federal Ministry for Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection - BMGF; Health Target 9, “To promote psychosocial health in all population groups”, Report of the working group. Vienna, 2017.



## 7. SCIENCE AND RESEARCH

**The EU-strategy against radicalisation, which was revised in 2014, emphasises the importance of acquiring knowledge of and fundamental research into the prevention of radicalisation in order to gain a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. Radicalisation, de-radicalisation and the prevention of extremism at all levels in Austria require comprehensive and profound knowledge of these phenomena. In addition to this, it is necessary to know which methods have proven to be successful in which context. In order to be able to sustainably refine prevention and de-radicalisation methods, exit programmes as well as projects regarding the fields of prevention of violent extremism and de-radicalisation, an independent and scientifically sound evaluation research is required. By transferring knowledge, the gathered research findings are applied in practice, providing scientifically sound evidence there. Furthermore, prevention of violent extremism requires an understanding of the individual causes for radicalisation and the social conditions for the formation and success of extremist ideologies, such as the social polarisation increasingly witnessed and the crisis of confidence in representative democracy, political institutions, legal authorities, the education system as well as social security systems and the media. Research assumes a predominant role in order to acquire an understanding of these processes.**

### // THE FUNDAMENTALS OF PREVENTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Scientific research enables us to better understand and explain radicalisation and extremism: The causes, forms and processes of radicalisation plus manifestations and developments at an individual, group-related and societal level become more apparent and based on this, effective and efficient prevention and de-radicalisation measures can be developed and implemented. Research projects in the fields of extremism and radicalisation should be carried out by adopting a comprehensive, interdisciplinary and holistic approach. In addition to this, the specific needs and demands for knowledge and research of the social protagonists active in the fields of extremism and radicalisation have to be identified. Due to the fact that prevention work at various levels requires involving every day life of vulnerable individuals, it is indispensable that all protagonists included have a thorough knowledge of the subject (especially in the pedagogical field as well as in the areas of social and police work). Appropriate solution proposals can be formulated on that basis. Among other things, (knowledge) bases for prevention and de-radicalisation projects should be established at various levels. Research allows for evidence-based practice and therefore promotes clarity on the implementation of these practices in framework requirements and projects through synergies as part of the desired interconnection. At the same time, it is necessary to (further) develop scientific evaluation methods for projects in this

field, which try to solve the predicament of not being able to measure successful prevention. It should be continued to put a focus on critical approaches and overlaps of various forms of discrimination. Another focal point of future research is to promote co-operation with national and international partners and research centres. This will facilitate not only an exchange of experiences but also the recourse to and usage of already existing knowledge on extremism at a European level.

### // CAUSES, MECHANISMS AND REPERCUSSIONS

Austria can resort to a series of research projects and scientific studies concerning extremism. So far, the majority of the research projects conducted focussed on the ideological and discursive aspects of this phenomenon. However, studies dealing with concrete radicalisation processes were scarcely conducted and most of the time limited to small samples.

Large-scale, interdisciplinary and comparative research studies are required to identify the causes, mechanisms and repercussions of radicalisation processes. This means that the phenomenon has to be investigated at several analytical levels – on the micro-, meso- and macro-levels. In order to develop appropriate measures, it is indispensable to produce results which allow for analytical models and tools to be used in politics and in practice.

At the same time, closer co-operation of science,

practice and politics should be promoted. Research can impart important findings to multipliers through knowledge transfer and translation work and by collecting and evaluating data, it can make a decisive contribution to the needs assessment. At the same time, the exchange and co-operation with these protagonists ensure the quality of the data collection and the relevance of scientific analysis which allows for an improved coordination of future research needs.

Any connections to fundamental research areas, such as research on peace, conflict and democracy as well as to broader research areas in the field of extremism research should be promoted. Especially against the backdrop of strengthening democracy, this seems to be relevant as an essential form of prevention.

Furthermore, specific individual areas, such as extremism in schools and/or in the education system in general, continue to require close attention. The same holds true for other areas as well, such as the networks of extremist groups and their influence on the education system, ranging from elementary pedagogy to university and adult education; conspiratorial narratives and anti-Semitism as a vehicle for extremist ideologies/narratives; the role of (social) media; radicalisation processes within the enforced context of prison, from both a preventive and repressive point of view; the role of communities and families and how they can be involved into the prevention process; similarities between different forms of extremism, especially between the narratives and ideologies of different extremist groups as well as concerning socio-psychological

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Federal Ministry for Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection – BMGF. Austrian Health Targets. Guiding proposals for a healthier Austria – Abridged Version. Vienna 2012, edition 2017 with an updated foreword.

aspects of radicalisation processes; research into key transnational, extremist and terrorist protagonists and networks, especially into their propaganda and recruitment strategies, military strength and irregular warfare, all of which, as we know, have direct repercussions on radicalisation in Austria and Europe. When discussing extremist narratives and ideologies as well as their use for recruitment attempts, the inclusion of gender concepts is of utmost importance. Generally speaking, gender-sensitive research, intensively discussing gender-sensitive questions and gender constructions, is required at all levels.

A comprehensive effectiveness research and/or evaluation of de-radicalisation measures as well as of prevention and the existing methods and plans for dealing with extremism is required. Still, in the field of prevention, it is even more difficult to measure effects. In this context, research projects should be discussed with people from civil society with practical experience and the aim should also be to distribute and/or “translate” research findings to and/or for multipliers. Research projects can make an important contribution to creating “counter-narratives” which address specific needs (establishing an identity, group membership, recognition, etc.).

## 8. INTERNET AND THE MEDIA

**When analysing radicalisation processes, it becomes apparent that the Internet has become**

**an increasingly important instrument used in radicalisation over the last few years. The Internet allows for networking and planning across all types of extremism.**

One decisive change brought about by the Internet is the fact that publishing content has become easier. On the one hand this constitutes a remarkable democratisation of the access to public media, but on the other hand it makes it easier for representatives of extremist positions to gain attention. In this way, conventional media and the Internet further consolidate in political discussion and turn into venues of numerous discussions while at the same time being used to disseminate misleading information.

There are many reasons why the media are suited for promoting radicalisation processes: This interplay becomes especially apparent in social networks and in the online fora of the media. Algorithms determining the depiction of content on social networks can also amplify the effect of especially emotionalising and extreme positions, which therefore draw attention. As a consequence, extremist positions could spread more easily in digital media and, thus, become more widely accepted. Moreover, the Internet can be used specifically for radicalising and recruiting individuals. Digital media can even represent an opportunity: They can be used effectively for campaigns organised in the fields of prevention of violent extremism and de-radicalisation, for counselling victims and their reference persons as well as for the method of

alternative narrative. However, development work still is to be done in this field.

### // THE ROLE OF THE MEDIA IN PREVENTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM

In the field of the media, two areas are especially important: On the one hand effective and useful measures need to be taken by the providers, while on the other hand users have to become more media-savvy when dealing with dubious contents and influences of that kind. There are many reasons why the media are suited for promoting radicalisation processes: Especially social media platforms are used by extremist groups for recruiting and spreading reactionary role models. Recent research indicates that especially women are the target group in this context, as they are harder to reach via public sphere accesses. The media is also suitable for disseminating misleading information, which subsequently can be used by relevant groups for manipulating and raising awareness.

Media providers need to react and act effectively to new phenomena and to those already known. This includes, for example, the possibility to report and delete illicit content. However, also providers, who have their registered offices outside of Austria, and, thus, do not innately feel bound by Austrian laws, are concerned. Both, legal aspects, such as the compliance with laws which can contradict the community standards of providers, and the

implementation of proper technical solutions for reporting and deleting contents play a role.

To support this endeavour, especially with regard to the relevance of national conditions, counselling centres and clearing houses, which can also act as trusted flaggers in internationally active networks, are useful. They always guarantee immediate action. Another important field is the provision of contents in the media which can be classified as trustworthy by a broad social consensus. In order to achieve this, the right parameters need to be established, such as appropriate working conditions in journalism.

### // MEDIA COMPETENCE

With regard to improving the media competence of users, numerous objectives shall be pursued. First and foremost, these objectives concern information skills. In this context, the use of Internet sources, the assessment of online contents, but also the evaluations of further actions with these contents are relevant. The basis for these skills is developing a profound understanding of the role the Internet and/or the media play in our society and also in the radicalisation processes and with regard to extremist acts. In addition to this, transferring knowledge and creating awareness for civil and criminal responsibility, which has to be considered when remarks are made on the Internet, are necessary in any case, and so is the need to educate people about the fact that the Internet is neither a place exempt from punishment and responsibilities nor does it

provide complete anonymity.

In conjunction with this, knowledge should be enhanced while at the same time the practical life of democratic principles should be increased. What also plays a role in this respect is to be able to assess and evaluate the intention of why certain media content is spread. Likewise, proper media behaviour should be established, which ensures that you can also escape from your own filter bubbles in order to be exposed to different opinions. In order to arrive at this aim, an intensified interplay with the education system is required.

## // CREATION OF DIFFERENT NARRATIVES

The media should play a special role in the prevention of violent extremism by e.g. spreading gender-specific counter-narratives and by raising awareness of individuals for the communication and recruitment strategies of extremist groups. Last but not least, a sustainable, comprehensive prevention of extremism will also depend on how societies deal with media realities. This becomes apparent, if you take into account the subjective sense of security experienced by the society.

On the one hand it is possible to raise the awareness of the reference persons of these users conducting extremist actions, with regard to how they can interpret their media forms of expression and/or how they can draw conclusions from it for dealing with the actors. On the other hand it is important to adopt

alternative narratives or de-radicalisation measures in mediatised public spheres. Even if the views of individuals, who are already carrying out extremist actions, cannot be changed in mediatised public spheres, or these individuals cannot be swayed, it is nonetheless important to confront them with other ideas and views as well. However, effective measures for this field have yet to be tested, analysed and implemented.

## 9. GENDER

**Over the last couple of decades, extremist ideologies have increasingly counted on terrorist acts with the aim of polarising and destabilising society. Even though gender equality and human rights had thus been called into question, CVE (Countering Violent Extremism) programmes barely took notice of the phenomenon. In the meantime, increasing evidence has emerged that CVE strategies and related methods, which want to continue without gender-sensitive approaches, not only are inefficient, but do also undermine the rights of women.**

At the same time, societies with greater gender equality are more resilient to violent extremism<sup>22</sup>. This effect has to be harnessed at all levels of society, if the aim is to prevent violent extremism in a meaningful and sustainable way.

Taking gender aspects into account means to not exclude any part of “reality”, to address all sexes

equally and to negotiate and respect role models in various forms. The demand to apply gender-specific approaches and measures in the prevention of extremism arises from various findings which are related to each other. Rigid role models which have been passed on for generations do not leave the parent generation a lot of leeway in the field of the personal development of boys and girls. Thus, alternatives to the classic role models are enforced, occasionally also by psychological and physical violence, even though in these cases the gender aspect often falls victim to simplified categories of “visible masculinity” and “invisible femininity”. Only recently, which is rather late in any case, international research has started to follow up on the links between socialisation under the conditions of domestic violence and ensuing radicalisation processes.

Not least, though, do rigid norms of masculinity and femininity hamper peaceful approaches in conflict management. Such patterns can, in further consequence, appear as a factor generally boosting violence, for instance in form of peer violence or violence against women, and they can promote the development of enemy stereotypes (e.g. islamophobia, homophobia). In a nutshell: individual and complex conflicts preceding radicalisation processes are often unconsciously influenced by gender topics, which is why consciously taking up this topic is a necessary prerequisite for a successful prevention strategy. A general marginalisation of gender issues makes it easy for extremist ideologies to build on this shortfall:

They use exactly this issue as their starting point and thus, pursue recruiting channels for women and men, which sometimes differ. In addition to this, radical groups generally take advantage of the fact that women oftentimes are not assigned the role of a politically active individual and therefore, they are less in the focus of or under observation by the security structures – that is why women are also used for carrying out acts of violence. According to current research reports, potential female extremists should not benefit from a positive “security bias”, especially with regard to the expected increase of returnees.

The action plans which have been developed for the prevention of violent forms of extremism always have to also focus on gender-specific discrimination and exclusion mechanisms. In this case, an intersectional approach is required which keeps the various forms of discrimination and privileges and their connections under review without hierarchising them, e.g. social classification, ethnic group, access to education, financial resources and religion.

## // PRACTICAL EXPERIENCE AS A MEANS OF ORIENTATION FOR THE FUTURE

In practice, the capacity of women in the fields of prevention and rehabilitation, especially in their role within the family, has become increasingly important, as women are the first instance of socialisation adolescents have most direct access to.



In the framework of grassroots projects, gender has thus been increasingly taken into account, for instance by enshrining differentiated approaches regarding family systems in local prevention measures. Consequently, existing projects use the potential of mothers and fathers to protect their children from radical extremism. In addition to this, there are projects, for instance within the framework of Open Youth Work, in which male and female identities and role models are being worked on. Hence, this debate is directly related to the prevention of extremism, as in this context, people are made aware of gender stereotypes which can be reflected upon, acceptance for different gender identities is created and thus, important prerequisites for gender equality in society can be established.

Numerous experts demand that gender aspects and dynamics have to be included into prevention work, as they are decisive factors of an ideological attitude and pivotal when individuals consider turning to extremism.

That is why a comprehensive understanding of the perceptions of gender roles and the narratives is so important, as they are the foundation forming the methods individual extremist ideologies use when addressing specific target groups. Thus, cooperating with and supporting institutions which have established themselves with gender-specific approaches in the field of prevention of violent extremism is recommended. The knowledge gained shall be discussed with different actors from the fields of politics, education, the civil society and

religion and summarised into measures, which can be conveyed to all social levels.

Based on the knowledge that rigid gender norms present a fertile nourishing ground for various forms of extremism, it is important that at a government and social level, the goal remains to strive for comprehensive gender equality and for the plurality of gender and gender roles, as it is only in this way that resilience to any propensity for violence can be increased, as it has already been proven.

Not only in the context of family but also in civil society have women played their role. A systematic enhancement of the capacity of this female potential allows for prevention strategies to be implemented timely and effectively. Even in rehabilitation the two areas of family and civil society assume considerable importance by promoting female leadership and therefore, they have to be identified, recognised and implemented as part of an effective and innovative counter-terrorism strategy. If nothing else, it will be of vital importance to which extent a gender-sensitive approach will also be able to keep the complementary role of men as stakeholders within the family and their functions in civil society under review. At the level of primary prevention, measures in favour of gender equality are indispensable and have to be incorporated into the national prevention strategy. Both in secondary and tertiary prevention, the critical reflection of the roles of men and women plays an important role, as it can, for instance, counteract a rigidly heteronormative gender ratio.

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