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**COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION TO THE EUROPEAN  
PARLIAMENT, THE COUNCIL, THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL  
COMMITTEE AND THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS**

**Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism:  
Strengthening the EU's Response**

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**1. INTRODUCTION**

**1.1 Trends and challenges**

Since the EU strategy for combating radicalisation and recruitment was last updated in 2008, the trends, means and patterns of radicalisation have evolved and broadened.

Firstly, terrorism in Europe now finds its inspiration in a larger variety of ideologies, as illustrated by the 2013 Europol TE-Sat report. These include nationalist and separatist ideologies, those inspired by *Al Qaida*, violent left-wing, anarchist, and right-wing ideologies.

Secondly, terrorist and violent extremist activities in the EU are not the exclusive domain of centralised and hierarchical organisations. The threat has progressively evolved to include smaller EU-based groups, cells, and lone actors operating in a more unconstrained and unpredictable way. They plan attacks with limited or no direction from an organisation, making prevention even more difficult.

Many terrorists planning attacks on European soil are themselves Europeans. Such attacks cause more than loss of life and economic damage; they can sow the seeds of division between communities in Europe, giving rise to increasingly reactionary and extremist views in other parts of society. This contributes to a breeding ground for extremism, perpetuating a vicious circle of radicalisation, aggression, and violent responses.

Europe is also directly affected by terrorist activity around the world. Europeans can be victims of attacks, as the recent atrocities in Nairobi made clear. But they can also be the perpetrators of these attacks. Often set on the path to radicalisation in Europe by extremist propaganda or by recruiters, Europeans travel abroad to train and to fight in combat zones, becoming yet more radicalised in the process.

Armed with newly acquired combat skills, many of these European 'foreign fighters' could pose a threat to our security on their return from a conflict zone. In the longer term they could act as catalysts for terrorism. The phenomenon of foreign fighters is not a new one, but as fighting in Syria continues, the number of extremists travelling to take part in the conflict is rising. And as the number of European foreign fighters rises, so does the threat to our security.

Terrorist groups and extremists are capitalising on advances in technology to find new ways of engaging with disaffected youth, taking advantage of social networking sites, online video channels and radical chat rooms. They are spreading their propaganda more widely, more rapidly, and more effectively.

Traditional law enforcement techniques are insufficient to deal with the evolving trends in radicalisation, and so a broader approach is required to prevent and counter radicalisation. This broader approach responding to trends in radicalisation must engage the whole of society.

This Communication addresses radicalisation in all of its forms and identifies areas encompassing a broad spectrum of measures to prevent and counter radicalisation to terrorism and violent extremism.

## **1.2 General approach and aim**

Member States are responsible for designing and implementing measures aimed at preventing and countering radicalisation, and the core actions are, and should remain, at national and local levels. Some Member States have done a lot of work in this area, and they can share their experience with other interested Member States.

With the growing concern about online radicalisation and the noticeable increase in openly extremist groups in Europe, more and more Member States are facing threats from radicalisation. Throughout the EU, the risk of radicalisation leading to extremist violence is growing, and Member States would benefit from increasing their efforts to effectively respond to these challenges.

Radicalisation crosses national boundaries in many ways. For example, the use of chat rooms, social media, and other online tools often has an international dimension. The type of threats Member States face are often similar, so it can be effective to take action at the EU level.

The European Commission is already supporting Member States in their efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism. In 2011, the Commission established the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), which brings together more than 700 experts and practitioners from across Europe. The RAN pools expertise and facilitates the exchange of ideas on topics ranging from the empowerment of local actors through to organising international conferences, bringing together expertise at all levels.

This Communication sets out how the European Commission, in collaboration with the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (High Representative) and with the support of the EU Counter-terrorism Coordinator (CTC), can support Member States' efforts to prevent radicalisation. With it the Commission responds to the Council conclusions of June 2013, and contributes to the broader exercise of updating the EU Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism. The following chapter outlines ten areas where Member States and the EU could take more action to prevent radicalisation at home and abroad.

The actions presented in this Communication reflect the EU's commitment to ensure security and respect the fundamental rights and freedoms of EU citizens, as enshrined in the EU Charter on Fundamental Rights, including freedom of expression and information, assembly and association, and respect for linguistic, cultural and religious diversity.

## **2. PREVENTING RADICALISATION**

The Commission, with the support of the High Representative and the CTC, and with significant input from the RAN, has identified ten areas which Member States and the EU could consider as part of their efforts to tackle radicalisation at home and abroad. This section contains brief explanations of how these ideas could add value to Member States' efforts to prevent radicalisation, and outlines in each case how the Commission could support interested Member States.

The RAN has compiled a collection of approaches and best practices from within the EU which the Commission is posting online to accompany this Communication. This collection contains a broad range of practices further addressing the actions proposed in this Communication.<sup>1</sup>

The actions outlined in the following sections are intended to be implemented using the resources of existing programmes under the 2014-2020 Multi Annual Financial Framework. They will be financed within the planned budget and in line with the programmes' objectives. Should extra human resources be needed, existing staff will be redeployed. Any task assigned to a decentralised agency will fall into the current mandate of that agency and will be accommodated within its resources for the period 2014-2020. The proposed initiatives will not entail any additional costs to the EU budget.

### **2.1 Member States would benefit from developing national strategies to prevent radicalisation**

Although terrorism has not affected all Member States directly, the threat is persistent and terrorist attacks are unpredictable. Terrorism can strike anywhere at any time. It is therefore crucial that we work together to do what we can to pre-empt this threat.

Several Member States have already implemented measures to prevent radicalisation, both internally and externally. But comprehensive approaches under the strand of the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy aimed at addressing radicalisation and recruitment are not widely used. Some Member States have such approaches, but others do not. The strategies that are in place are based on horizontal and vertical cooperation between stakeholders from the local to the international level. Effective prevention means involving non-governmental organisations, front line workers, security services and experts in the field.

These strategies require building trust within and between the communities, promoting a better understanding of each other's sensitivities and problems, engaging different sections of society, and much more. Bringing all these different aspects together diminishes the risk of radicalisation, and results in a greater chance of stopping processes leading towards extremism and violence.

As identified by the RAN, a prerequisite for effective prevention is that more Member States put in place strategies to prevent violent extremism and terrorism both within and outside the

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<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation\\_awareness\\_network/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/index_en.htm).

EU, based on their own threat analyses and specifications. National strategies could link to the revised EU strategy and could consider cooperation between Member States and other relevant actors, in order to identify innovative ways of preventing and countering radicalisation and violent extremism.

The Commission, in collaboration with the High Representative and with the support of the CTC, could also support the Member States in developing and implementing their strategies, encourage the development of new projects, and facilitate cooperation within the EU and beyond.

## **2.2 Consolidate expertise dedicated to preventing radicalisation**

There is a large body of expertise and best practice within the EU and beyond. Policymakers and other stakeholders in Member States should have access to this knowledge base and actively draw on it. Setting up the RAN was a step in that direction; the structured dialogues that it fostered should be continued and the repository of best practices that was compiled as a result should be developed further. The EU should continue to help deepen cooperation between policymakers, academia, private partners, and international forums.

To achieve this, the Commission proposes to strengthen the role of the RAN-secretariat and make it more of a knowledge hub by 2015, concentrating expertise dedicated to preventing and countering radicalisation to terrorism and violent extremism. In addition to its logistical role, the main tasks would be to:

- Primarily respond to requests for support from the Member States and the Commission in their efforts to implement the proposals on preventing radicalisation;
- Connect expertise in the field of preventing radicalisation, including drawing together and disseminating best practice, and actively helping to shape the research agenda;
- Serve as a coordination hub for prevention initiatives inside and outside the EU.

The RAN-secretariat will be run on a time limited basis following a tender.

## **2.3 Better align the work of the Radicalisation Awareness Network with the needs of Member States**

The RAN has had success in developing tools for addressing the challenges of radicalisation. The online repository of best practices is a good example of this work. Another example is the e-learning facility which allows for the remote exchange of information and ideas amongst members of the network. The RAN has also started to address specific phenomena in dedicated workshops and projects. It has recently completed work on engagement with foreign fighters, focusing on prevention, outreach, rehabilitation and reintegration. This is an increasingly relevant subject as the conflict in Syria shows no sign of abating.

In January 2013 the Commission held a high-level conference at which the RAN experts met with policymakers from Member States to draft recommendations for countering violent

extremism. This was the first step in bridging the gap between the RAN and Member State policymakers, and the Commission will continue to work on closing this gap.

Based on the experience drawn from the RAN, the Commission will:

- Organise a second high-level conference in mid-2014;
- Instruct the RAN to focus on supporting Member States in implementing the measures suggested in this Communication;
- Welcome Member States' initiatives to create national platforms – based on the RAN's model wherever appropriate – aimed at providing more detailed guidance to national and local policymakers and non-statutory stakeholders;
- Support a conference on foreign fighters in Syria due to take place in early 2014 and led by the RAN. This conference will bring together representatives of all relevant sectors (law enforcement, healthcare, etc.) from the cities in the EU where foreign fighters are causing the most concern. Local practitioners and national experts will share practices and exchange ideas on preventing potential fighters from going to Syria and engaging with foreign fighters after they return.

#### **2.4 Train practitioners to prevent radicalisation**

Based on the experience from the RAN, local actors need to be properly equipped to recognise radicalised behaviour. This is especially true for those who are in direct contact with individuals at risk of radicalisation. These front line workers include social workers, educators, healthcare workers, police, prison staff, and probation staff. Although these professionals are not all security personnel, their training and awareness of the needs of individuals at risk means that they are often the best placed to recognise those individuals in the process of being radicalised. But front line workers do not always have a good understanding of the process of radicalisation or know how to respond to it. Training is therefore needed to help them to recognise and interpret signs of radicalisation, and to help them judge whether an intervention is appropriate or not.

Throughout Europe, courses and training have already been developed to raise awareness and understanding among front line workers working with individuals or groups at risk. But as the threat continues to evolve, it is becoming clear that a more comprehensive approach in and amongst sectors is needed. Such an approach should build on existing training and incorporate the latest thinking. Some Member States have set up training programmes for a variety of sectors, but others limit their training programmes to the more traditional target groups, such as law enforcement personnel and prison staff. Recent trends in radicalisation require training modules to be expanded to other sectors, such as social services, healthcare, and education.

The Commission will:

- With input from the Member States, task the RAN with setting up a European programme to 'train the trainers', offering both sector-specific and cross-sectoral training;

- Where appropriate, task the RAN with conducting the training courses it develops;
- With support from the RAN, work with the European Police College (CEPOL) to develop a training module for law enforcement professionals on how to recognise and prevent the process of radicalisation.

## **2.5 Member States would benefit from developing 'exit strategies' to help individuals leave violent extremism**

Even someone who has been radicalised to the point of violent extremism or terrorism can renounce violence and its underlying ideology. 'Exit strategies' can help radicals disengage (renounce violence without giving up the ideology underpinning it) and de-radicalise (renounce both violence and the underlying ideology). These strategies range in ambition, from dissuading extremists from violence to reintegrating the former radical into society. Every radical is an individual with his or her own motivations and rationale, so exit programmes must be tailored to individual needs.

Exit strategies generally rely on individual mentoring consisting of psychological support and counselling. This is combined with social and economic support to facilitate reintegration. Mentors need to possess the specific professional competences, be adequately trained, and be supported by other practitioners.

Exit strategies should be embedded in the wider societal context. Such strategies should engage with families and communities, which are often best placed to contribute to de-radicalisation, by encouraging discussion of difficult issues, enlisting help from the wider community, and staying alert for worrying changes in behaviour.

Experiences from the RAN have demonstrated that national and local authorities could benefit from supporting greater engagement with families, helping them to understand and challenge the radicalisation of their relatives, or, where possible, prevent it. Counselling, hotlines, and local support networks can provide crucial support in difficult circumstances.

With such an approach, exit strategies must be designed and implemented in collaboration with a broad range of state and non-state stakeholders. This is known as the multi-agency approach. The efforts to promote exit strategies may draw on cross sector collaboration between relevant authorities such as police, prison and probation services, social service providers, schools, etc. They should take a long-term perspective, taking into account underlying socio-economic factors, and have dedicated resources at their disposal.

To help the Member States develop such exit programmes, the Commission, in close cooperation with the Member States, will task the RAN with gathering knowledge and expertise to support them, at their own request, in setting up effective de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes. Such support would include:

- Organising EU-wide workshops with Member States to explore different de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes and to discuss referral mechanisms for families, communities, and front line workers;

- Setting up training for local practitioners who help individuals disengage and de-radicalise;
- Working, at each Member State's request, with its central administration and local authorities to support the setting up of national de-radicalisation or disengagement programmes.

## **2.6 Cooperate more closely with civil society and the private sector to address challenges faced online**

Modern communications technology offers unprecedented access to information. Radicalisers are taking advantage of this by using online tools to spread their hateful messages more effectively than ever. Moreover, today's internet users can access extremist material in the privacy of their own homes. Furthermore, radicalised individuals can communicate easily with people at risk of radicalisation. Magazines, such as Al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula's *Inspire*, which is published online, show a skewed picture of life as a terrorist. Promotional videos for groups like Al-Shabab are easy to find. And even graphic videos depicting acts of terrorism can be found on popular mainstream web platforms.

More can be done to prevent this dangerous propaganda from proliferating and reaching its target audience, and to respond to it. Member States and service providers do cooperate on an *ad hoc* basis to remove illegal material, but since many extremist websites are hosted outside the EU this is a difficult task. The Audiovisual Media Services Directive already obliges authorities in every EU country to ensure that audiovisual services do not contain any incitement to hatred based on race, sex, religion or nationality. All actions taken under this Directive must respect fundamental rights, including the right to free speech.

Countering extremist propaganda means more than just prohibiting or removing illegal content. A positive and carefully focused message needs to be spread, and it needs to be spread widely enough to offer vulnerable internet users an easily accessible alternative to terrorist propaganda.

The Commission is willing to offer support to Member States, third countries, the private sector, civil society, and individuals in their efforts to create positive online counter-messaging and to keep illegal content from public access. To achieve this, the Commission will take the following actions:

- Set up a forum with key players in the industry to discuss the magnitude of the problem, the steps interested parties are taking, and opportunities for closer cooperation. The participants will discuss a broad range of issues, including ways to make it easier for the public to flag offensive or potentially illegal material, to promote the creation of online counter-narratives, and to make available easily accessible alternative messages that stimulate critical thinking. This forum will have regular high-level and technical meetings, and will report back on its activities;
- Continue to encourage community groups, citizens, victims and former extremists to develop counter-narratives. As part of this effort the Commission will task the RAN



with developing innovative online counter-narratives featuring former terrorists and victims of terrorism. The aim is to produce a range of online videos and messages targeting people at risk. The reach and impact of these videos will be measured, and a report should be produced for the Commission and the Member States on effective online counter-narratives.

## **2.7 Empower victims to help prevent radicalisation**

Victims of extremist violence suffer great harm and need to be supported in their recovery. Given the right kind of backing, they may choose to speak out against violent extremism and terrorism. Precisely because their suffering is so personal and direct, they are highly credible witnesses, and their impact is greater than any statutory organisation could hope to achieve. They can bring home the real consequences of terrorism and violent extremism and form a more effective counterweight to the one-sided propaganda of extremists.

The Commission is committed to helping the victims of terrorism and extremist violence, and will:

- Continue to strengthen victims' rights and to support groups and networks, both within the EU and beyond;
- Fund projects that enable victims to tell their stories, both as part of their personal recovery and as part of the effort to create new counter-narratives;
- Increase public awareness of the situation of victims by commemorating Victims' Day on 11 March each year, and by setting up exhibitions dedicated to victims' stories.

## **2.8 More could be done to encourage young people to think critically about extremist messages**

People are at their most impressionable in adolescence and early adulthood, and many of the values and attitudes they develop at this stage stay with them for much of their lives. Not surprisingly, therefore, those most at risk from radical propaganda are adolescents and young adults. In the past, access to extreme material could be better controlled by parents, teachers, and community leaders. However, with new technologies and the spread of this material, this is no longer the case.

Young people often use the internet alone, when no one else is around to criticise harmful material. This increases the danger that the message takes root and drives young people to violence. But while young people may be exposed to harmful material online, they may also find positive counter-narratives. Steps need to be taken to encourage young people not to remain passive but to think critically, to challenge extremist views and pick them apart. The RAN has identified intercultural dialogue and personal exchanges between young people as a key method of building resilience to extremist propaganda. Civic engagement and participation in communities also helps build up positive attitudes.

The RAN has recognised that education, training, and youth work sectors are often best placed to help young people develop their critical thinking skills. To maximise the impact of counter-radicalisation efforts, Member States' policymakers in the areas of education, non-formal youth activities, and security could cooperate more closely to develop more effective programmes.

To achieve this, the Commission will take the following actions:

- Support Member States by identifying and distributing programmes designed to foster critical thinking skills. Exposing flaws in extremist and terrorist propaganda will encourage young people to challenge the views this propaganda puts forward. The Commission's activity on media literacy within the Creative Europe Programme offers Member States and experts ways to discuss and develop effective tools in this area;
- Use Erasmus+, the EU funding programme for cooperation in education, training, youth, and sport to offer substantial opportunities in 2014-2020 for mobility of students and teachers and to support partnerships between stakeholders. This will increase skill levels, enhance the quality of teaching, modernise education and training systems and ultimately help youths in developing their resilience to extremist views;
- Support local and community groups working with former violent extremists and with victims of extremist violence to show young people that there is another side to the story. The Commission will also task the RAN with setting up a pool of practitioners, victims of terrorism, and former terrorists for the benefit of schools interested in addressing these issues in more depth.

### **2.9 Further research into trends in radicalisation and evaluation of existing practices should be carried out**

We cannot develop a well-targeted response to emerging challenges of violent extremism unless we understand what drives the process. Research carried out at an EU level can add value when its aim is to map and analyse broad trends in radicalisation. The Commission is currently funding research into the motivations of lone actors and why they turn to violence, the shift from moderation to violent extremism, and the creation of a toolkit for evaluating the impact of programmes tackling radicalisation. More research is needed to understand how and why people radicalise or de-radicalise. This research should address the roles played by ideology, new internet-based recruitment techniques, and role models.

To support further research the Commission will:

- Use the Horizon 2020 programme to fund research into Secure Societies, a collaborative effort which includes research into radicalisation and recruitment;
- Use the Disaster Resilience and Fight against Crime and Terrorism funding streams (future Internal Security Fund) to fund further research into ways to address radicalisation;

- Work with national policy makers, the RAN, and researchers, to ensure that research remains targeted.

### **2.10 Work more closely with partner countries to prevent and counter radicalisation both inside and outside the EU**

In parallel to actions taken internally, the EU and its Member States should promote initiatives in third countries, with particular emphasis on fragile or conflict-affected countries, countries in transition or those characterized by weak governance. Vulnerability to radicalisation does not stop at the EU's borders; it is well known that the process of radicalisation happens outside the Union as well, in terrorist training camps and conflict areas. Therefore, in parallel to these internal measures, the EU and its Member States should encourage partner countries to take measures of their own.

As there is a clear connection between internal and external dimensions, the Commission will work closely with the High Representative and the CTC to ensure that internal and external aspects of the European response on Preventing Radicalisation are properly aligned. These aspects need to address the right priorities and be well informed by risk analyses undertaken or other conflict assessment tools used in third countries. At the same time, special attention should be given to the transnational and transcontinental dimensions of programmes and projects addressing radicalisation.

To this end, the Commission and the High Representative will take the following actions:

- Increase external capacity-building efforts focusing on preventing and countering radicalisation and make sure this work is integrated into the action plans and political dialogues between the EU and its partner countries. External work carried out to prevent radicalisation has become an increasingly important component of the EU's counter-terrorism cooperation, and further investment in this area is planned, especially under the Instrument for Stability. The EU will support projects on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) in the Horn of Africa and in South Asia. Additional funding for these activities in West Africa is planned. The EU also aims to launch projects through the International Centre of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism in Abu Dhabi (the Hedaya Centre) to develop, among other things, internal training programmes to share sector-specific skills with front line practitioners in partner countries;
- Emphasize the links between education and security programmes financed through external assistance instruments so that children and young people in third countries are encouraged to develop a critical thinking from early stages of their education and thus preventing them from becoming victims of radicalisation, extremist violence or terrorism;
- Support the media as a key actor for enhancing the dialogue with the civil society organisations, local authorities, private sector actors, academics, regional or international organisations in third countries in preventing and countering radicalisation;

- Help shape the Global Fund for Community Engagement and Resilience recently launched by the Global Counterterrorism Forum. This Fund supports grass-roots counter-radicalisation initiatives and operates partly with private resources;
- Incorporate strategies to prevent radicalisation and violent extremism into traditional development cooperation tools and instruments, particularly in fragile states prone to violent extremism;
- Establish external networks to promote preventive strategies between EU delegations and EU Member States' embassies in priority regions, and ensure that delegations can identify opportunities for supporting civil society engagement and CVE projects. The Commission and the High Representative will also support EU delegations to survey attitudes towards the EU and assess how the EU's messages are being received in priority countries.

### **3. THE WAY FORWARD**

This Communication has identified actions that Member States and the EU could take to prevent and counter radicalisation more effectively. The Commission, in collaboration with the High Representative and with the support of the Counter-terrorism Coordinator, offers the Member States tools and support for their work.

This Communication is also intended to feed in the views of the Commission to the revision of the EU Strategy to Combat Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism, to be initiated in 2014.

The Commission, working with the High Representative and the Counter-terrorism Coordinator, will present a report on the implementation of the different actions contained in this Communication towards the end of 2015.

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