Council of the European Union

NOTE

From:	Presidency
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Countering radicalisation: fighting the influence of ideologies spread by extremist individuals and entities

Courtesy translation

Although the number of arrests on suspicion of terrorism on European soil significantly decreased in 2020 compared to previous years[1], great vigilance against violent extremist individuals and entities must be maintained.

Although the threat now comes from violent extremist movements of both -right- and left-wing persuasions, jihadist terrorism remains the most widespread and deadly phenomenon within the Member States of the European Union. Recent attacks have been committed by individuals who are '*isolated but not solitary*[2]' and have relatively sophisticated means.

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[1] Europol, European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report ("TE-SAT", presented (to the European Parliament) on December 7, 2021 https://www.europol.europa.eu/publications-events/main-reports/tesat-report

[2] Hearing of Mr. Gilles de Kerchove, European Union counter-terrorism coordinator, before the French Senate, November 12, 2020.

Online radicalisation or the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters has been addressed several times in European discussions. However, as the most recent research shows (e.g. Hugo Micheron[3]), radicalisation phenomena can also emerge from ecosystems evolving at the heart of certain European societies, in which extremist ideologies claim to govern all aspects of everyday life. These ecosystems, in which social pressure is exerted on individuals, are characterised by the adoption of social practices based on rigoristic ideologies and the organisation of activities that refute the fundamental values of the European Union. These radical practices aim to establish a new social order based on ideological or religious primacy.

Faced with these rapid changes and the cross-border nature of the threat, unilateral action by Member States is insufficient to protect European citizens. Cooperation between internal security forces, professionals working in the field of prevention and European agencies seems essential to guarantee the security of the continent and to prevent terrorism by fighting against the fertile grounds of radicalisation. Awareness-raising and training of professionals in the field are needed both to provide appropriate support to the various groups and to detect the types of people likely to act. The adoption of the European Union's Security Union Strategy for the period 2020-2025[4], supplemented by a first progress report[5] and a series of measures developed under the four-pronged counter-terrorism programme (Anticipate, Prevent, Protect, Respond)[6], is a timely response to these challenges.

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[3]   *Le Jihadisme français. Quartiers, Syrie, prisons*, 2020. Hugo Micheron favours the geographical explanation and highlights the "Islamist ecosystems" as a source of religious proselytism and as a breeding ground for radicalisation.

[4]   10010/20 [(COM(2020) 605)]

[5]   14019/1/20 + ADD 1 and 2 (COM(2020) 797)

[6]   13967/20 [(COM(2020) 795)]

Online radicalisation: a better known phenomenon

The Internet is a powerful vector for radicalisation, both in its visible form and on the Darknet. Individuals are self-radicalising online, using manuals or tutorials or viewing freely available propaganda images. It is also used by terrorists to spread their ideology and to inspire, recruit, prepare and finance their attacks. Work by the *Radicalisation Awareness Network* (RAN)[7] highlights the fact that the 2019 attack on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, the images from which were posted online in real time by the perpetrator, inspired other attacks later that year, such as the one in Halle, Germany. In France, the beheading of a teacher, Samuel Paty, in the autumn of 2020, also highlighted the viral nature of violent discourse and deadly images through the misuse of social networks. On another note, Europol's TE-SAT report[8] indicates, for example, that the use of video games to spread extreme right-wing terrorist content to young audiences increased in 2020.

The implementation of the regulation on addressing the dissemination of terrorist content online (TCO)[9], which provides for injunctions against hosting service providers to remove such illegal content, is therefore an appropriate response to protect European citizens from exposure to such content and from the risks it poses, more generally, to susceptible audiences. The regulation will apply from 7 June 2022.

However, it does not apply to hate content or to the dissemination of false information.[10]

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[7]   *Lone actors in digital environments*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2021 https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/system/files/2021-10/ran_paper_lone_actors_in_digital_environments_en.pdf

[8]   Europol*, European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report*, 2021, p. 20

[9]   Regulation (EU) 2021/784 of 29 April 2021 (OJ L 172, 17.5.2021, p. 79)

[10]   [Yet, several legislative projects aimed at strengthening the removal of harmful content are underway: ...]

Radicalisation can also be rooted locally

Violent extremist ideologies - whether of Islamist, far-left or far-right inspiration - can also be promoted within our societies by individuals and entities that use socialisation spaces, such as associations, religious and cultural organisations, educational or training establishments, tutoring and languages courses. As the work carried out under the direction of Bernard Rougier[11] has shown, these 'ecosystems' promote an insider culture that leads to rejection of the European way of life and values, and imposes its own norms on the individuals evolving within them and whose adhesion can thus be forced.

The phenomena of online radicalisation should not, therefore, obscure the local dimension of certain radicalisation processes. In recent years, cases have involved large urban centres, medium-sized cities (such as Lunel in the south of France), and even radicalisation centres in rural areas.

Third country and public funding of radical entities

The European Union's ability to fight radicalisation processes effectively also depends on its ability to detect funding intended for organisations or projects that are contrary to the values of the European Union - whether this funding comes from third countries, public bodies located on European soil or even donations from private individuals.

The European Union therefore faces intervention from certain foreign states, which finance projects for the construction of places of worship or schools and also support Europe-based associations (school support, religious training, health, social action, etc.). Some Middle Eastern states or foundations have been incriminated in this way. Other funding channels, more difficult to identify, go through 'springboard countries', including in Europe.

That is why, in its conclusions of 11 December 2020, the European Council recommends '*addressing foreign influencing of national civil and religious organisations through non-transparent financing*' [12].

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[11]   *Les territoires conquis de l'islamisme, 2020.* Bernard Rougier documents precisely the meshing of local space which, from places of worship to spaces of leisure and professional activities, leads to the constitution of territories at odds with society

[12]   European Council meeting (10 and 11 December 2020) - Conclusions (EUCO 22/20)

Cases of funding by European public bodies of organisations that promote discourse contrary to the fundamental values of the European Union also demonstrate that particular vigilance must be exercised over the funding of the associative sector. The lively controversy that followed a recent communication campaign, designed by a consortium notoriously affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood and relayed by the Council of Europe, must lead us to question the way in which European funding can serve ideological projects that are foreign to the fundamental values of the European Union.

These phenomena call for a collective response aimed at limiting non-transparent foreign financing and at better detecting ideological projects contrary to our values when the latter are justifying requests for subsidies from national and European public organisations.

It is with that in mind that the European Union supports, through the RAN, the Dutch initiative aimed at exploring the mechanisms implemented within the Member States to fight against undesirable foreign funding. The first results of the study carried out by RAN Policy Support will be presented at the conference '*Prevention of Radicalisation in Europe: Review and Perspectives*' which will be held in Paris on 24 and 25 February 2022.

Accompanying radicalised prisoners and their relatives

As highlighted by the work of the RAN working groups, prevention and disengagement from violent extremist ideologies are essential elements in the fight against radicalisation. As part of a preventive approach, a range of actors should be mobilised to accompany radicalised individuals or those in the process of being radicalised, in order to prevent them from acting on their radical views. This approach is particularly relevant in the context of care for former prisoners, minors and their family and social circles.

The prison environment can be a breeding ground for extremist ideologies and radicalisation[13]. Depending on the prison regime, prisons can enable the socialisation of individuals convicted of terrorist acts, who may meet other individuals incarcerated for related acts and inmates likely to join them. RAN's work on the reaffiliation of convicted prisoners[14] emphasises that prison conditions can also undermine participation in disengagement programmes.

Family and friends are often the first to witness signs of radicalisation. Family members are affected by the phenomenon and are usually the last to sever ties with a radicalised individual. Thus, they can be stakeholders in the process of disengagement of the individual, whether he or she is in the process of radicalisation or has already been radicalised, for example following a stay in prison. Actions to support families seem necessary, as family members can contribute to the rehabilitation process of radicalised individuals, but can also, in some cases, be sensitive to extremist ideologies and form an ecosystem in which the radicalism of a member is only the apparent symptom. Minors must be offered systematic, multidisciplinary care (somatic and medical-psychological assessment, schooling, delinquency prevention, etc.) that corresponds best to their individual situation. Training of the staff who provide this care is also essential. Under the RAN and through project-based collaboration on this issue, an exchange of good practices has enabled a presentation of the systems put in place in the Member States to train pople working with this particular target group.

More generally, training professionals and raising awareness in the social circles of radicalised people or those in the process of radicalisation are essential (covering family and relatives, school environments, religious communities, health professionals and prison staff, social workers, etc.).

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[13] Lorenzo Vidino, *Radicalization, Linkage and Diversity: Current Trends in Terrorism in Europe*, RAND Corporation, 2011 and Hugo Micheron, *Le Jihadisme français. Quartiers, Syrie, prisons*, 2020. Lorenzo Vidino cites prisons as active places in the radicalisation phase of individuals, among other risk areas where encounters between radicalised extremists and future followers occur. Hugo Micheron describes a prison world permeable to Salafist networks in the open.

[14] Rehabilitation work with convicted offenders outside of prison, Publications Office of the European Union, 2021

Questions

– What are your findings on the spread of extremist ideologies and on the influence of certain individuals and entities that promote them within your national territory? Do you encounter difficulties in detecting them, both online and offline?

– Does your national framework provide for specific measures to impede and sanction entities that promote disruptive speeches or encourage radicalisation and violent extremism, and if so, which measures?

– What detection capacities and means of action are available to Member States to combat the funding, from either public bodies or foreign sources, of entities promoting discourse that is at odds with European values?

– A dialogue to make the European approach in the field of prevention more effective is underway with the European Commission, in particular on devising the EU Knowledge Hub on the prevention of radicalisation. Do you have any ideas on how to proceed in this respect? Do you think that COSI should be kept informed about this work?

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