



## Local authorities in European and international guidelines to fight radicalisation

International and European organisations recommend a comprehensive approach to deal with the radicalisation process, which, by its nature, includes local authorities.

Firstly, the need to work with local authorities has been underlined in the “EU strategy on preventing radicalisation and recruitment” (2014). It states that national-level measures alone are not sufficient for tackling radicalisation, and that joint efforts at local, regional, national, European and international levels are necessary.<sup>1</sup> This necessity has been progressively established during the revision process of the EU strategy. Indeed, in June 2013, in the Council Conclusions calling for an update of the EU Strategy for Combatting Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism, it was recalled that the Council takes into account “the necessity to further develop effective actions at national and local level to prevent and counter radicalization...”<sup>2</sup>.

The Council also considers the developments that occurred during the discussions and conclusions of the Commission’s High Level Conference on Empowering Local Actors to Counter Violent Extremism (organised in Brussels in January 2013), as an improvement in the area of preventing and combatting

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<sup>1</sup> Council of the EU, EU strategy on preventing radicalisation and recruitment, 2014, page 5

<sup>2</sup> Council of the EU, Council Conclusions calling for an update of the EU strategy for combatting radicalisation and recruitment to terrorism, (9447/13), page 4

radicalisation.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the Revised EU Strategy stresses the need to support the production of counter-narratives locally in order to amplify their discourses: “We should initiate projects with these actors at all levels and work to ensure that they are appropriately empowered and supported.”<sup>4</sup> It also states the need to support research at all levels in order to better understand the phenomenon of radicalisation and violent extremism.

Finally, in its communication on preventing radicalisation, the European Commission shows that although some Member States are already implementing a comprehensive approach to tackle violent extremism, this type of approach is not yet widespread among EU Members.<sup>5</sup> In this respect, the European Commission says that the prevention of radicalisation requires the involvement of a variety of local actors (non-governmental organisations, field workers, experts...).

Furthermore, local authorities do not function merely as one level in a broader hierarchy of power; they can also implement their own autonomous actions with significant impact, sometimes outside of the national or international strategies framework. The report of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation on Countering radicalisation in Europe (2012) shows that in some cases local authorities are acting ahead of national or even European institutions. It gives the example of Dutch cities (Amsterdam, Rotterdam, The Hague...) that started to work on de-radicalisation strategies as early as 2005.<sup>6</sup>

According to the EU Internal Security Strategy (2015), radicalisation can be best countered at a local level because local authorities are closest, physically and psychologically, to the members of the community who are at high-risk of radicalisation.<sup>7</sup> This point is also underlined in the communication on the European Agenda on Security (2015), which focuses on the very nature of the local actors. It states that local actors “need to be properly equipped to recognise the signs of radicalisation” because they are closest to the field and have direct contact with the people who are most at risk of radicalisation.<sup>8</sup> Thus, a close cooperation with local authorities and civil society is required. International and European organisations recommend “*a close cooperation with local authorities and civil society and empowering*

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibidem*, page 3

<sup>4</sup> Council of the EU, Revised EU strategy for Combatting radicalisation and recruitment to terrorism, (9956/14) page 8

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, page 4

<sup>6</sup> International Centre for the Study of radicalisation and political violence, *Countering Radicalisation in Europe*, 2012, page 29

<sup>7</sup> European Commission, The EU Internal Security Strategy in Action: Five steps towards a more secure Europe, Brussels, 2015, page 8

<sup>8</sup> European Agenda on Security, 2015, page 16

*key groups in vulnerable communities.*” Local authorities have a unique capacity to detect early on individuals affected by violent radicalisation<sup>9</sup>; they are on the front line to observe the phenomenon as it unfolds. The European Parliament thus underlines that “*part of their mission is to capture weak or very weak signals*”.<sup>10</sup> The European Commission also highlights that they are better able to offer support to families and organise counselling, hotlines, etc.<sup>11</sup>

On the same note, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe sustains that prevention and de-radicalisation match the competences of local authorities whereas national authorities are more efficient on repression. Taking into account the unique positioning of local authorities, the Congress listed several actions that they could implement in order to be empowered on this subject. For example, designing local multi-agency strategies will help develop a partnership approach that complements the repressive and preventive ones. The Congress also recommends to develop communication campaigns on the local authorities’ strategies targeted to a wider public, and to provide training for the relevant actors. Training is also presented as an important means to implement effective prevention in the European Commission’s Communication on the Agenda on Security (2015).<sup>12</sup>

Finally, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) notes that local authorities’ closeness to their communities can help legitimise their actions.<sup>13</sup>

Another point that has come up in the exchanges among European local authorities at the European Forum for Urban Security, and which is not included in the existing research, is that civil society and NGOs tend to mistrust public authorities’ actions to prevent violent radicalisation, as they generally believe that every public intervention is actually promoted by the law enforcement or intelligence agencies and that information gathered through such programmes will inevitably be passed to the police. Due to their proximity and relations of trust with the population,

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<sup>9</sup> European Parliament, *Preventing and countering youth radicalisation in the EU*, Brussels, 2014 page 27

<sup>10</sup> *Ibidem*

<sup>11</sup> European Commission, Communication 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, Brussels, 2014, page 7

<sup>12</sup> European Commission, Communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the EESC and the Committee of the Regions on the European Agenda on Security, page 16

<sup>13</sup> UNODC, International Workshop of National Counter-terrorism focal points: better linking national and global counter-terrorism efforts, held at the Vienna International Centre, Austria, 12-13 October 2009, New York, 2010, page 6

local authorities can have a key role in restoring confidence in public action.

Lastly, the UNODC highlights the need to share good practices among local authorities in order to build their confidence in their capacity to confront radicalisation issues.

All these actions would help make radicalisation a priority for all local authorities, including those that think they are not concerned.

The importance of local authorities, however, goes beyond their closeness to the community. International institutions underline that repressive actions alone are not effective in curbing radicalisation, and that they must be balanced with prevention in order to effectively address the different stages of the radicalisation process. The Congress of Local and Regional authorities explains that preventive actions “*are actions that coincide with the scope and competences of local and regional authorities*”.<sup>14</sup> This view is shared by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, which underlines the need to develop tools that can empower all the people and structures that have the potential to prevent violent radicalisation.

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<sup>14</sup> Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Guidelines for local and regional authorities on preventing radicalisation and manifestations of hate at the grassroots level, 2015, resolution 384, paragraph 3

