

Expert Group meeting on Violent Extremism

6 March 2024, Prague, Czech Republic

Participants:

1. Daniel Wolter (Germany) – chair of the EG
2. Jiří Ondovčák (Czech Republic)
3. Nadya Radkovska (Bulgaria)
4. Ariel Planeix (France)
5. Jouni Holappa (Finland)
6. Paul Dirken (The Netherlands)
7. Ioan Durnescu (Romania) – *attending online*
8. Margarida Maceido (Portugal) – *guest speaker*

Apologies:

1. Sandrine Hauswirth (Switzerland)
2. Robert Orell (Sweden)

Background

On 6 March 2024 a face-to-face meeting of the Expert Group on Violent Extremism took place. A focus of this meeting was brought on the topic of violent extremism and mental health. The group further discussed and developed the work plan for the upcoming period.

Report

Daniel Wolter welcomed all EG members to the meeting. He informed that two members (Sandrine Hauswirth and Robert Orell) could not attend in person and one member will join the meeting online (Ioan Durnescu). He also welcomed a new member representing Finland, Jouni Holappa, and a guest speaker Margarida Maceido from Portugal.

After a short round of introduction Daniel gave word to Mirka Jakesova to briefly discuss the organization and logistics, goals, objectives and expectations on the work of the expert group as well as to present the work of the previous expert group and introduce other expert groups run by CEP.

The participants asked about the possibility to get linked with the Mental Health Expert Group on a joint meeting. Mirka Jakesova informed that there is a call open to nominate representatives but it is to be discussed for sure. Also there is a possibility to send a replacement in case a member cannot attend, however, it is required that a person replacing the member is fully informed on the work in progress.

Daniel Wolter stressed that the outcome of the work of the expert group should serve to all CEP members and it is to be developed during this meeting and worked on in the follow-up meetings.

State of play – update based on the information in the report from the [2023 online meeting](#)

Sweden – information provided via email

- The situation in Sweden is currently without much change since the previous report. Quran burnings have decreased over the past months, but the polarizing effects of them still continue.
- The information campaign against the Swedish social services, who are said to "kidnap Muslim children" is still ongoing in primarily non-European countries.
- In the Swedish probation, the Entré program continues – for more information please see the [CEP Vodcast interview with Elvar Jonson](#).
- One of the main challenges of the last few years is the ongoing, violent criminal gang conflict where bombings and shootings are happening monthly, sometimes weekly. This has unprecedentedly stressed the juridical system, the prison capacity, and law enforcement.
- As mentioned in the previous meeting, the RAN is coming to an end at the end of June 2024. It will be replaced by the EU Knowledge Hub on the prevention of radicalization. One of the changes is that the Knowledge Hub will gather practitioners, policymakers and researchers in contrast to the 2 RAN networks that currently exist (RAN Practitioners & RAN Policy). Not much else is known right now. The Commission is reviewing the applications for the tender. The Knowledge Hub is expected to start in September.
- For the RAN Rehabilitation working group, we will have two more meetings under RAN. The first will be in Zagreb on the 14-15th of March - the theme is gender in Rehabilitation. The second meeting will be on 4-5 June in Riga on the theme of synergies and lessons learnt between Rehabilitation and the field of peacebuilding, mediation and restorative justice. Keep an eye out on the RAN communications platform and newsletters for the Calls for participants.
- The EU project R2COM aims to strengthen European NGOs' involvement in P/CVE work, particularly concerning the post-release reintegration of former VEOs. The R2COM project offers online training for NGOs and probation staff: <https://www.r2com-project.eu/training.html>

The Netherlands

- The winner of the General Elections is the populist RW party (up till then rather a marginal party and always in the opposition), a process of forming government currently on with expectations that there will be a populist RW



cabinet for the time coming so this will affect the way probation is being looked upon.

- In 12/2023 a threat level increased from 3 to 4 (out of 5 level scale) indicating that there is a realistic possibility that an attack will take place. 3 things behind this increase: attacks and treats from jihadists, Israel-Hamas war, lone attackers difficult to recognize.
- Another phenomena – online radicalization of young jihadists and RW extremists is becoming the main driver -> the Dutch probation service deals only with people age of 18 and above, currently there are requests to assessing threats regarding minors (a completely new thing).
- Anti-institutional movement and Sovereign citizens – see the previous report – are still an issue. Core group of 10 000 people that are anti-institutional, relatively small parts are willing to use violence.
- Main problem is that probation stays at the backend of the line.
- 100 individuals currently supervised or assessed by the Probation Service - close to 50 of them are with jihadists background, 2 LW extremists, 10 cases of individuals in religious sects, then offenders from anti-institutional and RW movements, 2 people collecting funds for Hamas etc.
- Revoking of Dutch nationality (for more see the previous report) – probation took a stand (these clients are not eligible for any help). However, it is more complicated in cases of foreign fighters when revoking can only happen after the convictions in the NL – many of them remains abroad so revoking cannot be proceeded.

Bulgaria

- The political instability creates a ground for populists and radicalism, and impacts a lot of services including security, probation, prison etc.
- Bulgaria faces lots of immigrants coming from Syria, Iraq etc, crossing Bulgaria with no intention to stay, heading either to Western Balkan or Scandinavian countries.
- The presence of marginalized communities in small villages and isolated neighborhoods can be used by foreigners to disseminate Islam in different contexts.
- Roma population – large population.
- Probation and prison face new profiles of clients to work with and new phenomena like false compliance, radicalization of staff, staff safety.
- Bulgaria not so much impacted with the VE phenomena in prison and probation setting, in prison the situation remains the same as last year with 2-3 cases, no case in probation.

- Monitoring implemented inside prisons, more difficult for probation. Multi-agency cooperation increases to have a more comprehensive picture on persons prison and probation are dealing with.
- Increase in organized crime and organized crime groups that the service faces.

Projects Bulgaria is involved in – HOPE, INDEED, PROBATIONET – for more information [please see the attachment 1](#).

Finland

- Lots of similarities with France.
- Finnish Security and Intelligence Service (Supo) – threat remains at level 2 on the 4-point scale. The threat comes from lonely actors and small groups advocating far right or radical Islamist ideology.
- Update from the 2023 report - there are approx. 350 individuals (not 3500) identified counter-terrorism targets in Finland.
- Online radicalization towards juveniles and in general is increasing using various propaganda, memes, tactics etc.
- Far right extremism -> active clubs for young men training martial arts, going to nature – many of these are hard-core Nazis preparing themselves as some kind of soldiers. Members of these clubs are fighting in Ukraine (similar to French Identitaire).
- In prisons 2 convicted terrorists – 1 jihadist, 1 far right neo-Nazi.
- 60-70 radicalized inmates sentences for convictions from other crimes.
- Jihadist scene quite low after the defeat in Syria and Iraq.
- Prison trains staff to identify inmates radicalized within prisons.

France

- [New case](#) in Belgium with 4 arrested for an attempt to carry out an assault on a nightclub like the one that occurred in France on November 13, 2015.
- High level of threat in France remains, most jihadist terrorist in jail, yet, still there are ongoing trials for returnees – currently approx. 520 inmates among which 490 are convicted for jihadism, 27 far right extremists, some leftists.
- Concern with returnees, especially women returnees from Syria and children. Legislation changed back in 2016 – women returnees systematically put in jail. Around 100 children raised in camps that are now in France handled by social workers and judicial social workers with a specific attention to risk - a specific procedure on identification and assessment.
- Far right extremism increases constantly – measures put in place to prevent the risk of attacks.

- Specific legislation in France – when you are planning and preparing for an attack, intend to use weapons, define target or in general you are ready to go to action – you can be arrested immediately by the intelligence services.
- For prisons minors are a constant problem (fragile and receptive to identification, heroization of VE acts etc), need to set up certain policies to prevent radicalization and set up multi-agency cooperation.
- MH issue – problematic cooperation with medical services and psychiatrics, around 20% of terrorist attacks connected to mental health issues.

Czech Republic

- Long history of RW extremism since 1990s. As of 10/2023 the situation has not changed so significantly - 2 protests against Czech government and its support of Ukraine. RWE are present among organisers of those protests using peoples dissatisfaction for their own agenda -> 2 two weeks ago Czech farmers prepared big protest in Prague against EU rules and regulations in agriculture, in the end a lot of anti-establishment activists, RWE speakers joined them. So before the afternoon most of farmers decided to stop their protest as the protest against EU regulations became the protest against government and Ukraine. The speakers openly supported Russia and its right to attack Ukraine.
- During last period of time there were several small protests in Prague for support of Palestinians. Organisers proclaimed they organise those protests to make people aware of genocide of Palestinian people. According to Czech police and intelligence service there were several LWE from anarchist movement among protesters. Also, there is rise of RWE/LWE comments in internet discussions about Palestina and Gaza situation. Some people are already prosecuted for the serious crime Defamation of a nation, race and ethnic or other population group or Inciting hatred towards a group of persons or restricting their rights and freedoms. And of course, victims are Jewish people.
- Public opinion about safety has changed. The Czech Republic belonged for a long time among the safest countries in the world (for example, according to the Global Peace Index for 2023 the Czech Republic stated on the 12th place). But that image has [changed last December](#) when one university student shot and killed several people. After that people started to feel vulnerable, they were previously used to watch news and to see tragedies like that in the USA or other European countries but not in CZE.
- As a result of this a discussion about right to have weapon – CZE quite a liberal country with some regulations about weapons. Person, who wants to have weapon, must pass the theory test, shooting test and have positive medical reference. And after that he or she can buy unlimited amount of weapons (even semiautomatic rifles – sale of automatic rifles is prohibited here). Now there a discussion on if it would be better to restrict how many weapons one person can

own, what kind of weapons, etc. And opinions on that topic are different of course – some are for and some against restriction.

- This discussion revealed another problem – how easy can one obtain a permit for holding gun and risk related to it that some violent extremist can use it for their plans. Discussion still continues.
- General elections to take place in 2 years – as everywhere there is a far-right party that is against membership in NATO, EU etc.

Germany

- Recently media uncovered that there was a [secret meeting](#) discussing on the mass deportation of non-German citizens back in 2023, and one taking place in February 2024. It caused protests.
- Violence against refugees has been increasing. Federal Government changed legislations which makes it easier to deport refugees/asylum seekers, discussion on budget cuts in some federal states that offer social support for children, refugees, immigrants etc.
- More people share RW and right populist attitudes – see the previous report. Another elections are to take place in two Federal States – RW parties can win the elections the first time after the WWII.
- Threats to politicians – in the past 1-2 years, active at the moment causing outstanding problems.
- As other expert members said, the situation in Germany is more less similar to other countries – people from RW and right populist movements attend various demonstrations (e.g. farmers protests hitting Europe) and steal the demonstrations for themselves and set their own agendas.
- Positive view –there is a nationwide working group including prison and probation services, civil society and NGOs that mostly work on deradicalization, the aim is to define a nationwide quality criteria in the deradicalization work. Two new projects introduced on how to deal with family members in deradicalization work – more money budgeted for NGOs working in the field of deradicalization. New NGO established dealing, among others, with development of new concept on how to deal with disinformation in the work of people working in the field of deradicalization.

Romania

- 14-15 March there is a RAN meeting in Zagreb on the topic of radicalization and gender.
- There is a work going on in the Balkans within the framework of the Council of Europe project developing new pre- and post-release programs for VE in Kosovo and pre-release programs in Albania. The aim is to draft a policy guideline for the region informing policy makers, politicians and all stakeholders involved

about what to do in terms of legislation to support rehabilitation and reintegration of VE offenders.

- Ioan also referred to the paper published back in 2021 about the far right foreign fighters.

Switzerland – update in May 2024 online meeting

- Swiss Intelligence Service will publish report on the current state of the threat in June 2024.
- As of March 2024 3 arrests in two months took place: 1st case with minor – 15 yo man [attacked a Jewish man](#) (not linked directly to ISIS, however, it welcomed the act); 2nd case in German-speaking part of Switzerland – 3 young offenders planned a [bomb attack](#); 3rd case in French-speaking part of Switzerland – linked to Belgium -> all three cases related to jihadism, no links inside Switzerland (German-speaking to French-speaking part etc), all cases connected rather to countries – France, Germany, Belgium.
- RW extremism is of concern too but not such a priority.
- Other issues – climatic extremists, Eritrean population (clashes among each other over the domestic Eritrean political situation), the situation is very similar in Sweden.

Key outcomes

- Level of threat remains high.
- Different experience across Europe but possible to find similarities and same trends – polarization of society, new clients in probation and prison, increase in far-right extremism etc.
- Probation and prison face new profiles of clients to work with.
- Monitoring within probation settings more complicated – need for further trainings of probation staff.
- Probation at the backend of the line – it is noticed when something outstanding happens. While together with prisons it can be the beginning in the line of radicalization.
- Mental health issues – problematic cooperation with medical services, increasing number of cases in general, not only in connection to the VE cases. Need to further elaborate on that.
- Far right extremism increases all across Europe but we can see the support for different streams, e.g. in Finland far-rights are pro-Ukrainian, in CZE pro-Russian, in France – originally for both sides, upon the war they needed to decide on which side to support for --> change in disposition of identification, profiles of potential clients, in general, are blurred.
- New phenomena - protests against some specific issue is often “stolen” by far-right and populist extremists.

- Online radicalization, especially for juveniles, causes major issues with all expert members countries – important to take into account that not all probation services across Europe work with juveniles.
- Disinformation vs freedom of speech – question on how we recognize what is disinformation, fake news etc --> closer cooperation with police, probation, prison and others is needed.

Presentations

1. **Case study – Portugal** – Ms. Margarida Maceido, Portuguese Prison and Probation Service - *for confidentiality reasons the presentation shared with EG members only.*
2. **Psychosocial support after the shooting at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University in Prague** – Dr. Simona Hoskovcová, Police of the Czech Republic and Ms. Jana Hrubá, Probation and Mediation service – for more information see the presentation.

Work plan

Upon a discussion on the work plan a group agreed to proceed with the following topic - **New developments and geopolitical dimension of extremism with a focus on young people (until the age of 25).**

To do list

1. To collect data: age (break at the age of 25), when radicalization occurred, number of cases, number of cases detected with MH issues and what kind of MH issues, legislation breakout – collection of cases detected with terrorism and extremism crimes– to be collected by 15 May 2024 and discussed on 22 May 2024.
2. To arrange a presentation from a professional dealing with the topic – Nadya will provide a contact for a RAN member + all will come up with suggestions by the end of March.
3. To carry out a small research on published researches, papers, documents covering the topic – all by 22 May 2024.
4. Based on the results of the data collection - development of questionnaire for the CEP members – to be further discussed on 22 May 2024.

Actions

- Next online meeting scheduled for Wednesday **22 May, 11 CET** – Mirka will share a Zoom invitation.
- Draft Report to be shared by Mirka – commenting period **by 15 May 2024.**
- Work plan – first tasks (see above) to be discussed on 22 May 2024 online meeting, **deadline to submit by 15 May 2024.**

- Link to the Mental Health Expert Group once to be set up.

Links (to the website, YouTube, social sites etc): <https://www.cep-probation.org/recap-expert-group-meeting-on-violent-extremism/>