

Expert Group meeting on Violent Extremism

12 March 2025, Cologne, Germany

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. Sandrine Hauswirth (Switzerland)
7. Paul Dirken (The Netherlands)
8. Ioan Durnescu (Romania) – *attending online*
9. Robert Orell (Sweden) – *attending online*

Background

On March 12, 2025, the Expert Group on Violent Extremism held an in-person meeting in Cologne, Vienna. Building on the discussions and progress made in 2024, the group convened to further develop an overview of best practices for preventive interventions targeting violent extremism among juveniles and young adults up to the age of 26 under probation. This document aims to support CEP member jurisdictions by providing insights and a collection of interventions successfully implemented by colleagues across the EU. The completion of the report is scheduled to continue throughout 2025.

State of play – *update based on the information in the report from the 2024 meeting*

Sweden – *information provided via email*

2024

- 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>

2025 – to be followed in online meetings

The Netherlands

2024

- 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.

2025

- The NL is facing a big influx of young people aged 12-18 radicalizing online – pushed in extreme right direction, some of them jihadists.
- The request for the Dutch Probation Service from authorities is to work with minors – their risk assessment to be included in the plan of authorities working with minors.
- The government (coalition) has been formed. Since it is a coalition, the policies adopted are not so much into RW as previously expected.
- Anti-institutionalists are on the rise. Recent case with 8 people trialed for abducting and trying to kill a mayor who was not “on their side”.
- Threat level remains on 4 (out of 5).

Bulgaria

2024

- 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.

2025

- Bulgaria is facing an increase of violent behavior among young people - inspired by social media as well as by the global increase of violence in general
- Increase of hate crimes in the past 7 months against various groups (LGBT, Roma population, those supporting the war in Ukraine etc.).

Finland

2024

- 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.

2025

- The situation is similar to other countries – Finland is dealing with far-right extremism and radical Islamism.
- There is a case of 2 far right stabbings by young males, both with mental health issues.
- Finland also deals with the MMA clubs (see 2024).

France

2024

- 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.

2025

- France is facing the similar situation with young people – there are bands of young violent girls fighting among each other. Among other minors involved in plots inspired by ISIS, the youngest offender was 14yo or a murder of the teacher by 17yo etc.
- In 2024 there were elections in France – the first round was won by RW's National Rally. New Minister of Justice who used to be the Minister of Interior.
- Minors – evaluation of attacks since 2015 provided by Ariel – rise
- 207 inmates convicted for act of terrorism on probation / 420 radicalised inmates during their sentence, 350 convicted for act of terrorism – 270 men, 80 women, 6 minors – RW 63 person, LW 22.
- Focus also on organized crime.
- Terrorist criminal conspiracy – mentioned back in 2024 – for the intention and willingness to commit the crime you can be arrested immediately by the intelligence services.
- Recidivism rates for this group is, in general, lower than in the normal population but in theory you want it to be 0%.

Czech Republic

2024

- 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.

2025

- Situation with young people like other countries – violent attacks among elementary school children, especially girls. The fights are then published on social media. Inspiration by MA fighters with far-right ideals. There was a threat to copycat a 2023 shooting at the Faculty of Arts.
- In general, the society is polarized, increase of verbal and physical violence.
- Changing public opinion on Ukraine and support for Ukraine. Lots of clients sentenced for violent acts against Ukrainians because of their nationality – committed by individuals, not organized.
- State institution have prepared for a big change – border controls in Germany and refusal of the entry for immigrants might cause issues.
- In the autumn 2025 there are the General election. Current government is supporting restorative justice and development of probation and mediation activities. A very harsh campaign is expected.

Germany

2024

- 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.

2025

- There have been several attacks in different places in Germany in recent weeks and months: Knife attack in Augsburg, A car has crashed into a crowd of people in Mannheim and Munich. The background is not yet entirely clear. The perpetrator of the attack in Munich is said to have an Islamist motive. The police assume that the perpetrator of the attack in Mannheim has a mental illness.
- The federal elections took place. As a result, it can be assumed that attitudes in criminal policy and migration policy will become tougher. The far-right party AfD has won over 20 percent of the vote in Germany: it is the second strongest political party now.
- New funding from the federal government: By 2028, a cooperation network must be established and developed for the whole of Germany in order to bundle expertise and knowledge in exit and distancing work. They will be responsible for quality control and further development throughout Germany.
- The project funding of Demokratie Leben in the area of probation and the prison system has been extended.
- DBH is receiving more and more requests for training on how to deal with clients who are increasingly showing a right-wing attitude during consultations/appointments/trainings.

Romania

2024

- 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.

2025 – to be followed in online meetings

Switzerland

2024

- 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.

2025

- The security report was published in October 2024: Jihadist threat remains on a high level; increase of radicalization among young persons via social media; RWE and LWE stabilized but on a high level; organized crime present.
- Domestic violence as a big issue – 8 femicides in the last weeks.
- The most preferred party is right oriented.

Key outcomes

- Level of threat remains high.
- Polarization in the society, incline to far right ideals.
- Increase of violence among young people – fights, inspiration found on social media, MMA fighters etc.
- Probation and prison face new profiles of clients to work with.
- 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.

Presentations

During the meeting, Julian Störmer from the Violence Prevention Network GmbH, Germany, presented the *exChange* project. This initiative focuses on deradicalization processes, primarily within prison settings but also in probation contexts. The program addresses the underlying needs that fuel extremist ideologies, utilizing a combination of group training sessions, one-on-one meetings,

workshops, and seminars. It incorporates various methodologies, including cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) approaches and pedagogical techniques.

Links

<https://www.miragenews.com/22-year-study-teen-risk-behaviors-down-mental-1427948>

<https://www.economicsandpeace.org/global-terrorism-index/>

<https://www.europol.europa.eu/publication-events/main-reports/european-union-terrorism-situation-and-trend-report-2024-eu-te-sat#downloads>

<https://gnet-research.org/2024/01/19/764-the-intersection-of-terrorism-violent-extremism-and-child-sexual-exploitation/>

<https://gnet-research.org/2023/08/03/cultic-religious-groups-order-of-nine-angles/>

https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/document/download/38d0557a-a45a-4a7e-ad94-b9cc8f2650c9_en?filename=ran_collection_approaches_and_practices_en.pdf

<https://www.orpheusproject.eu/en/home>

Work plan

Topic - **New developments and geopolitical dimension of extremism with a focus on young people (until the age of 26).**

Actions

1. To collect data missing – deadline by the mid-May 2025. Robert will help with Denmark and Sweden.
2. Mirka will share the links provided by the group.
3. Update the preliminary report on all answers – by the end of May
4. Finish drafting the text as per the structure agreed – October 2025.
5. Online meetings in between – the first in June – Mirka will arrange.
6. Final report to be published by the end of the year.
7. Mirka will once again send an invitation to the shared folder.
8. Next meeting in 2026 – preferably a 2-day meeting in May/June 2026.
9. 2027 or 2028 – possibility of hosting a workshop or roundtable – to be discussed and planned by the CEP office in cooperation with the EG.

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