



University of Maribor

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Faculty of  
Criminal Justice and Security

# **Criminal Justice and Security in Central and Eastern Europe:**

## **Safety, Security, and Social Control in Local Communities**

### **Conference proceedings**

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Ljubljana, September 2016

# DERADICALISATION OF FOREIGN FIGHTERS

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **Purpose:**

This paper examines the possibilities of deradicalisation of juveniles and young adults, who have been fighting in the jihad and came back to their countries of origin. Focus of the paper is on alternatives of criminal procedures and exploration of the possibilities of deradicalisation.

### **Methods:**

The researcher has been a member of the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) since its implementation. RAN and RAN POL are acknowledged European Commission working groups dealing with the phenomenon of radicalisation. The researcher's experiences from working in RAN and RAN POL were implemented into the paper. Furthermore, literature about radicalisation, deradicalization, and other relevant literature was evaluated.

### **Findings:**

Many juveniles from Western European Countries are radicalized by so called Jihadists and travel to countries with the purpose to participate in the Jihad. Most of them do not come back to their home countries. The few that come back are regularly confronted with criminal procedures and are expecting criminal charges. Most of them are deeply traumatized through their experiences.

### **Research limitations:**

Given that the phenomenon of radicalization and Foreign Fighters appeared, only a few years ago, the findings are still preliminary and can be improved.

### **Originality:**

Since the phenomenon of radicalisation became important only a couple of years ago, scientific findings explaining the reasons of radicalisation and possibilities of deradicalisation are still limited. Additionally, radicalisation processes have to be distinguished between right wing, left wing, and islamistic radicalisation. As Foreign Fighters are radicalised islamists, the paper focusses on islamistic radicalisation only.

**Keywords:** deradicalization, foreign fighters, Jihadists

## **I INTRODUCTION**

The processes of radicalisation leading to violent extremism have grown enormously within the last years and many juveniles and young adults have been radicalised by so called Jihadists. Extremists are no longer acting only as part of organised, hierarchical organisations but also within smaller cells, sometimes as so called lone wolves, and sometimes without ever having any personal contact to any other radicalised person. All forms of extremism have become more globalised taking full advantage of the opportunities of the interconnected world. Thus, terrorist or violent extremist actions are becoming harder to detect and predict by the authorities. Traditional law enforcement techniques sometimes are insufficient to deal with these progressing trends, particularly in relation to tackling the root causes of the problem. There is a tremendous need for alternatives to criminal procedures. One of the most urgent threats are the large number of young people traveling to conflict zones such as Syria and Iraq. Such youngsters can become foreign fighters when they join terrorist groups. There are now believed to be thousands of Europeans within the region. Apart from their potentially violent acts abroad, the threat posed by radicalised returnees, skilled in combat and with links to terrorist groups has all too painfully been revealed in some recent terrorist atrocities within the European Union (Radicalisation Awareness Network, 2015).

## **2 CONCEPTUAL MODELS OF RADICALISATION INTO VIOLENT EXTREMISM**

Within the last years several models have been developed to elucidate the process of radicalisation. Such models could be used to find means and tools that would help to stop radicalisation or, in cases when radicalisation had occurred, individuals could be deradicalised.

### **2.1 Borum's Four-Stage Model of the Terrorist Mindset**

The Four-Stage Model of the Terrorist Mindset developed by Borum (2003) attempts to explain how grievances and vulnerabilities are transformed into hatred of a target group. Such hatred can be transformed into a justification or impetus for violence. The four-stage process begins by framing some unsatisfying event, condition, or grievance ("It's not right") as being unjust ("It's not fair"). The injustice is blamed on a target policy, person, or nation ("It's your fault"). The responsible party is then demonized ("You're Evil"), which facilitates justification or impetus for aggression (Borum, 2003).

### **2.2 Moghaddam's Staircase to Terrorism**

Moghaddam (2005) developed the "Staircase to Terrorism" as a metaphor for the process of violent radicalization. The staircase tightens as it ascends from the ground floor and through five consecutive levels. Moghaddam claims that feelings of discontent and perceived adversity fuel for stepping initially onto the path to terrorism. Less people climb to each successive level. However, leaving a relatively small number of people who actually progress to the point where they engage in terrorism. Moghaddam asserted that people begin with a desire to lighten adversity and improve their situation. Unsuccessful attempts lead to frustration, produce feelings of aggression, which are displaced onto some perceived causal agent. Such agents are then regarded as the enemy. As their anger towards the enemy builds, some become increasingly sympathetic towards violent, extremist ideology and to the terrorist groups that act against the enemy. Some of such sympathizers eventually join an extremist group, organization, or movement that advocates for terrorist violence. At the final level among those who have joined are those who overcome any barriers to action and actually commit a terrorist act (Moghaddam, 2005).

### **2.3 New York Police Department Model of Jihadization**

A very well-known model of Jihadi-Salafi radicalization originated from the New York Police Department's (NYPD) Intelligence Division. The NYPD model describes a Jihadi-Salafi ideology that includes a linear four-stage process: Self-Identification; Indoctrination; and Jihadization. Pre-radicalization characterizes the period before an individual is exposed to Jihadi-Salafi ideology. Self-Identification marks the process of exploring Salafi Islam, adopting its ideological tenets, and affiliating with its proponents. Indoctrination is the intensification stage. The individual's beliefs and his or her commitment to the ideas, to action, and to his like-minded collective increase. Finally, Jihadization occurs. The hallmark is the individual's acceptance of his or her individual duty to act on behalf of the cause (Silber & Bhatt, 2007).

### **2.4 Precht's Model of a "Typical" Radicalization Pattern**

Precht (2007), in a qualitative review commissioned by the Danish Ministry of Justice, summarized the broad contours of radicalization in the following way: "Radicalisation often starts with individuals who are frustrated with their lives, society or the foreign policy of their governments. A typical pattern is that these individuals meet other like-minded people, and together they go through a series of events and phases that ultimately can result in terrorism. However, only a few end up becoming terrorists. The rest stop or drop out of the radicalisation process at different phases." Precht's report (2007) outlines a four-phase "typical pattern of radicalization": Pre-radicalization; Conversion and identification with radical Islam; Indoctrination and increased group bonding; and Actual acts of terrorism or planned plots. Precht (2007) identified and analysed three categories factors influencing the militant Islamist radicalization process especially in Europe. The report outlines three categories of motivational factors for radicalization.

- Background Factors include personal struggles with religious identity, experiences with discrimination, and lack of social integration.
- Trigger Factors to include people such as a mentor or charismatic leader, and events such as policy actions that might provoke or incite either antipathy or activism.
- Opportunity Factors account for an individual's degree of access and likelihood of exposure to extremist ideas or adherents within her or his sphere of activity.

Opportunity factors include physical and virtual spaces such as the Internet, mosques, penal institutions, and social groups/collectives.

It can be summarized that “home-grown terrorism can be viewed as a sociological phenomenon where issues such as belonging, identity, group dynamics, and values are important elements in the transformation process. Religion plays an important role, but for some it rather serves as a vehicle for fulfilling other goals. A common denominator seems to be that the involved persons are at a crossroad in their life and wanting a cause” (Precht, 2007).

## **2.5 Centre for Strategic and International Studies**

The Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS, 2008) summarized its findings in a report stating the following: “There is a lack of clear understanding or consensus on what motivates an individual to become a terrorist and to engage in violent acts. Without such an understanding, we are limited in our ability to employ appropriate strategies and tools for pre-empting terrorism” (CSIS, 2008). Consequently, the CSIS (2008) suggested that neither demographic nor socioeconomic factors emerge as strong predictors of radicalization. Feelings of shame and humiliation often serve to forge a bond between a vulnerable individual and a charismatic leader, and catalyse acceptance of the radical narrative and its associated values and attitudes. Travel to Pakistan or Afghanistan seemed to be one of the most consistent behavioural factors observed among those who became radicalized into violent extremism (CSIS, 2008).

## **2.6 Conclusion of Findings**

Radicalization is multi-determined and is driven and sustained by multiple causes. Causal factors often include broad grievances that push individuals toward a radical ideology and narrower, more specific pull factors that attract them. Ideologies develop within the human ecology of nested contexts and systems, including family, economic, social, and political structures. Different pathways can lead to radicalization. Religion in some cases leverages the attachment to a grievance.

## **3 PROGRAMMES STOPPING RADICALISATION OR SUPPORTING DERADICALISATION**

All over Europe, numerous programmes, practices, and approaches have been developed to stop radicalisation or to support deradicalisation. They all have in common that they attempt to be alternatives to criminal procedures. The following examples mirror the variety of efforts that have been spent all over Europe.

### **3.1 Back on Track**

“Specifically targeted are inmates and remand prisoners, who are charged with or convicted of terrorism and/or inmates vulnerable to radicalisation. The aim is to help the inmates - by the intervention of a mentor - to become better at tackling everyday situations, problems and conflicts by:

- Motivating them to opt for a lifestyle free of crime;
- Involving the inmates network outside prison (family, friends etc.);
- Assisting with concrete challenges surrounding release (finding a home, job etc.)” (Direktoratet for Kriminalforsorgen, 2011).

An important part of Back on Track is also to train mentors to strengthen their competencies in relation to various dialogue techniques, coaching and conflict management skills. The mentors will have mentor coaches who can support and supervise them throughout their work (Direktoratet for Kriminalforsorgen, 2011).

### **3.2 Jump**

Jump (2016) on the one hand aims to improve the sensitivity of professionals (especially pedagogic) and otherwise engaged people within the social spaces in contact with individual right-wing

extremists and youth sympathising with right-wing extremist ideologies potentially willing to leave the scene. This is done during interactive, practice orientated workshops for different target groups (e.g. pedagogic professionals, social workers, staff of job centres, students of educational disciplines) as well as individual and group counselling. We call this “education and counselling”. The aimed sensitivity contains the needs and challenges of those irritated right-wing extremists. Linked to this we want to prepare them to “have an eye on” those potential formers, to begin with causing constructive irritation and act as an instance which is forwarding willingly clients to jump. During the exit-process we refer back to these “signal generators” within the social spaces for assistance in special social work issues (e.g. job, drugs, debt). On the other hand, jump offers the “exit-assistance” for right-wing extremists and youth sympathising with right-wing extremist ideologies (sympathisers, fellow travellers, activists) willing to leave the scene and the surrounding field. This encompasses: gaining social security (especially in terms of housing, qualification and work) and shaping perspectives for the future; reflecting the experiences (of hate, violence and crimes but also of comradeship and appreciation) inside and outside of the scene, supported by developed methods (e.g. a “scale of self-positioning” and confrontation with and reflection on moral dilemmas based upon a method developed by Lawrence Kohlberg); identifying and handling “trigger-mechanisms” (words, situations, music etc.); developing sustainable courses of action to avoid relapses into mind-sets and acts characteristic to the right-wing extremist scene (Jump, 2016).

Both parts of jump are strongly linked and aim to counter radicalisation (physically and mentally) and to shape a professional local surrounding, able to unfold a preventive influence, in a long-term perspective” (Jump, 2016).

### **3.3 Aarhus model: Prevention of Radicalisation and Discrimination in Aarhus**

“Description Intervention consist of two areas of intervention:

*General population:*

1. Raising awareness to professionals and the public. Achieved via presentations and workshops for professionals and teaching institutions; and
2. Collaboration with local communities. Respectful and assertive dialogue with mosques, cultural societies and other major players in local communities (East Jutland Police, 2010).

*Individuals:*

1. First-line staff of the Task Force performs risk evaluation of individuals and groups;
2. Advising professional staff on how to deal with cases concerning radicalisation;
3. Advising individuals and next of kin in cases concerning radicalisation;
4. Mentoring for persons, who are at risk of radicalisation or are involved with violent extremism; and
5. Contingency for foreign fighters and their families” (East Jutland Police, 2010).

### **3.4 Nicol**

“This is a DVD table-top exercise which aims to break down barriers between the police and Muslim communities by providing an understanding of how police counter terrorism operations work. The decision making process is assisted by a number of national experts in the field of counter terrorism investigations, and from critical partners including Senior Investigating Officers (SIOs) from counter terrorism units” (NCTPHQ Prevent, 2009).

### **3.5 Conviction**

“This is a 30-minute thought provoking DVD produced by the UK Southwest Counter Terrorism Unit. Conviction is designed for first line staff from partnership agencies and gives an overview of a real life case study based on the convicted terrorist Andrew (Isa) Ibrahim. Using a real life case study, the exercise allows partners to understand the vulnerabilities Ibrahim presented

before being arrested” (Office of the National Coordinator Prevent, National Counter Terrorism Policing Headquarters, 2010).

### 3.6 Pathways

“Pathways is a DVD based drama, which aims to explore extremist narratives from different perspectives. Interweaving characters from the same communities and exploring different faiths and ideologies, the story focuses on how young people can be coerced into terrorist activity. This short film follows the unfolding parallel stories of two characters being drawn into extremism, one towards the far right and the other towards Islamist extremism” (UK National Counter Terrorism Policing HQ, 2012).

### 3.7 To Prevent is Better than to Cure

“Making visible and strengthen the role of mosques in preventing radicalisation and polarization by building communal social (and - indirect - religious) resilience.

Aims:

- To enlarge the social role of mosques
- To include, inform and attend Muslim youngsters and their social environment (parents, friends and family)
- To create resilience amongst Muslim youngsters against radical tendencies of Islam, discrimination and exclusion
- To support, attend and train members of boards and/or commissions of participating mosques
- To advance the cohabitation of different ethnic and religious communities and to counteract islamophobia, radicalisation and polarisation” (Zasja, 2016).

### 3.8 Time to Think

“The Denkzeit (meaning Time to Think) Training programmes address youngsters (ages 13 through 25) at school, in prison or on probation, who have a track record for violence, partly also for committing extremist motivated violence. Well-directed intervention strategies aim at developing or strengthening social-cognitive competences that enable clients to handle interpersonal conflicts better than before in a socially acceptable way. The working method of Denkzeit comes from a clinical background and combines a pedagogical approach with a psychological approach. Denkzeit offers a variety of programmes for different target groups. All programmes are modelled as individual processes with one trainer who works with the client. The programmes have different phases called “modules”. It starts off in cognitive phase (1), then the emotion managing phase (2), the ethical and moral phase (3) and last level is the live-through phase (4). The first three modules are manualised with a fixed structure in terms of their goals, methods and examples. To start with the programme, both trainer and youngster have to agree on the framework that states firm, supportive agreements and consequences” (Denkzeitgesellschaft e.V., 2016).

### 3.9 Never Again Association

The Never Again Association is a Polish and Eastern European antiracist organisation. The mission of the Never Again Association is to promote multicultural understanding and to contribute to the development of a democratic civil society in Poland and in the broader region of Central and Eastern Europe. Never Again is particularly concerned with the problem of education against racial and ethnic prejudices among the young (Never Again Association, 1996).

Activities of Never Again include:

- Social campaigning and educational programmes. - Monitoring and publishing data on racist incidents and other xenophobic crimes committed in Poland as well as sharing information and analysis on hate crime and extremist and racist groups operating in Poland and in the rest of Europe. - Sharing expertise and cooperating with researchers, media, policy makers, national and international organisations.

- Running of the 'Delete Racism' project to combat racism and anti-Semitism on the Internet and conducting high-profile educational campaigns in the field of popular culture, 'Music Against Racism' and 'Let's Kick Racism out of the Stadiums'.
- UEFA EURO 2012 'Respect Diversity – Football Unites' programme: major educational and awareness-raising activities that took place before and during the European Football Championships in Poland and Ukraine" (Never Again Association, 1996).

"The Never Again practitioners come from various professional backgrounds as political and social studies, social work, legal, educational. A particularly promising aspect of the Never Again approach is combining work on many different levels - international networking alongside domestic and local projects, integration of football work and general societal work, collaborating simultaneously with other NGOs, risk groups, policy makers and practitioners, as well as with local and national authorities. Such approach combined with Never Again's broad network of volunteers across the whole country and the region enables the Association to diagnose and respond quickly to any issues that may come up within the scope of its work" (Never Again Association, 1996).

"At present, Never Again is approaching the field of prison work and has already become a reference point for those involved in deradicalisation work. The Association provides help with regards to carrying out first-line work, as well as advises on how to approach and deal with extremists and hate crime offenders. The Association also broadly promotes implementation of best practices regarding both combating racism and hate crime, as well as promoting a positive, inclusive public discourse on multiculturalism and diversity" (Never Again Association, 1996).

### 3.10 Extremism Information Centre

"The Extremism Information centre is a nationwide contact point for parents, teachers, social workers or any other person seeking advice concerning issues of violent extremism. We apply a broad definition of extremism, which includes politically motivated extremism as well as religiously motivated extremism" (Extremism Information Centre, 2014).

"The Extremism Information Centre was installed in December 2014 and is financed by the Ministry of Family and Youth. It offers a free helpline, face to face counselling and a broad variety of workshops and trainings on issues such as anti-discrimination, anti-Muslim racism, jihadism and right wing extremism" (Extremism Information Centre, 2014).

"The Extremism Information Centre offers anonymous counselling free of charge. It provides a counselling model for sustainable solutions together with stakeholders and an interdisciplinary team of experts. We help to assess the situation and to determine appropriate interventions. Is the reported behaviour a sign of radicalisation towards terrorism? Is it rather a sign of rebellion and provocation? We provide general information (on legal issues) and specific information. We refer to other institutions such as family counselling centres, open youth work organisations or the labour market service and we offer face-to-face counselling" (Extremism Information Centre, 2014).

"When we work with individuals at risk, the voluntary engagement of the client is a precondition. We have a long-term approach and try to detect underlying problems and drivers of radicalisation. We focus on the affective aspect. The first advice we give parents is to stay in contact with their children, to maintain a relationship, to speak with their children, to encourage them to share their ideas and not to argue on ideological issues" (Extremism Information Centre, 2014).

"The aim of our intervention is to provide the individuals with emotional support and to find ways to give back trust and cooperative attitudes by strengthening the family and adolescents within their social environment. We create a support system and provide alternative social contacts and alternative perspectives regarding school or job. We include a broad spectrum of professionals from the fields of probation work, youth work, family counselling centres, official bodies, job centres, therapists and (religious or other) experts. We work closely together with the Security Service and the police, but they are only involved if requested (by the clients) or in cases of immediate danger" (Extremism Information Centre, 2014).

## 4 CONCLUSION

There is a great need for alternatives to criminal procedures for those youngsters who became radicalised and are going to participate in the so called Jihad. The reasons for such radicalisation have not been fully evaluated but there is scientific evidence that radicalization is multi-determined and is driven and sustained by multiple causes. The process often includes broad grievances that push individuals toward a radical ideology and narrower, more specific pull factors that attract them. There are different pathways that can lead to radicalization. Religion only in some cases leverages the attachment to a grievance. However, there are enormous efforts all over Europe to stop youngsters being radicalised, or – if radicalisation has been occurred – find ways to deradicalise such young people. This paper made the attempt to present a sample very valuable examples for such efforts.

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