STAKEHOLDERS IN DISENGAGING FROM RADICALISATION IN A LOCAL COMMUNITY[1]

Branko Lobnikar[2], Krunoslav Borovec[3], Irena Cajner Mraović[4], Kaja Prislan[2]

[2]Faculty of Criminal Justice and Security, University of Maribor, Slovenia
[3]Police College, Ministry of the Interior, Zagreb, Croatia
[4]Croatian Studies, University of Zagreb, Croatia

Abstract

Radicalisation and extremism, with the potential to lead to violent extremism, are a constant security threat in modern democratic societies. In the last few decades, Europe generally, and the Western Balkan countries in particular, have been broadly viewed as a breeding ground for religious radicals and violent extremists. It is becoming clear that radicalisation-prevention strategies must be locally oriented and harmonised at the international and interagency levels. It is the intelligence agencies that deal with violent extremism since they are leading national security actors and operate using classified information. Nowadays, the police and other local stakeholders like local government, schools and NGOs are crucial for facilitating a preventative multi-agency approach, especially in local settings. Such an approach should combine measures from the area of criminal justice with policies from the fields of education, social inclusion and integration, while ensuring the timely provision of effective de-radicalisation and/or disengagement. The authors of this paper understand the term disengagement as the action or process of withdrawing from being involved in a radical activity, situation or group. It differs from counter-radicalisation (preventing radicalisation from taking place) and de-radicalisation (bringing about a change in values and ideas away from radical and/or violent ideas). The paper presents the preliminary findings of the study conducted on a sample of 108 students at the Croatian Police College of the MoI concerning the role of different stakeholders responsible for efforts towards the disengagement of individuals from radical and extremist movements in Croatia. The data were collected during the students' study courses in December 2018.

Keywords: police, radicalisation, extremism, disengagement, prevention
Address for correspondence: Branko Lobnikar, Faculty of Criminal Justice and Security, University of Maribor, Slovenia. email: branko.lobnikar@fvv.uni-mb.si

1. INTRODUCTION

Terrorism and radicalisation constitute a security challenge common to both the European Union and the Western Balkans (European Council & Council of the European Union, 2018). The international community has often recognised that better inter-agency coordination and cooperation on the regional and local levels with respect to counter-radicalisation initiatives is needed. Although the countries in the EU have witnessed far more direct threats of terrorist attacks than the Balkan countries (Europol, 2018), the region of the Western Balkans is perceived as a high-risk environment for radicalisation and violent extremism that, if not properly managed and addressed, could destabilise security across Europe (Azinović, 2017). Moreover, other threats include the return of foreigner fighters. EU member states have reported that such returnees to Europe may possess varying degrees of combat and operational experience, an enhanced capability to commit acts of terrorism, and be particularly dehumanised and prone to violence upon their return. They might also serve as role models and be involved in re-

cruiting and radicalising others (Europol, 2018). It is estimated that around 5,000 individuals from the EU have travelled to conflict areas in Iran and Iraq, and Syria. Approximately 1,000 individuals from the Balkan states (mainly Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Albania) joined Islamic State (IS) between 2014 and 2016 and it is expected a significant number will return to their former home countries (Azinović, 2017; Ruge, 2017; Petrović, 2016). For example, it is believed that (by 2018) 41 foreign terrorist fighters have already returned to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Similar numbers have been reported by other European Union countries (Europol, 2018).

2. UNDERSTANDING AND PREVENTING RADICALISATION

Although terms like radicalisation, extremism, violent extremism and terrorism are commonly used today, they are individual phenomena that represent different and complex concepts, are supported by different processes, and characterised by a variety of factors (Lombardi, 2015). According to the European Commission's Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation (2008), *radicalism* is advocacy of, and commitment to, sweeping change and the restructuring of political and social institutions. As an ideology, radicalism challenges the legitimacy of established norms and policies, but it does not, in itself, lead to violence. People are considered radicals when they adopt radical beliefs, which happens through the processes of radicalisation. The European Commission defines radicalisation as a complex phenomenon of individuals or groups becoming intolerant with regard to basic democratic values such as equality and diversity, as well as a rising propensity to use means of force to reach political goals that negate and/or undermine democracy (European Commission, 2018). Radicalisation is not necessarily a threat to society, especially if not connected to violence or other unlawful acts, such as incitement to hatred. The important link here is the fusion with a certain type of ideology that inherently denies individual freedom (or equal rights) to persons not

part of the radical person's in-group. Only in this combination (i.e. behaviour determined by ideology based on inequality) should we recognise a radicalisation process as a threat to society, as well as a path in need of interruption by using various, individually tailored methods (Koehler, 2015). In general, located close to radicalism is the concept of *fundamentalism*, while terrorism differs from them significantly. From a process point of view (Lombardi, 2015), fundamentalism, radicalism and terrorism are linked, with terrorism being the final point of violent expression, however, these phenomena are dissimilar because the first two do not necessarily imply the use of violence, while terrorism is violent by nature. In this dynamic process from radicalism to terrorism, extremism and violent extremism occur as an intermediate stage. *Extremism* is understood as a consequence of radicalism and described by Neuman (2010) as opposing a society's core values and principles. This in fact could be applied to any ideology that advocates racial or religious supremacy and/or opposes the core principles of democracy and universal human rights. Extremist groups and parties tend to be anti-constitutional, antidemocratic, anti-pluralistic, fanatical, intolerant, non-compromising, single-minded, authoritarian and adhering to an ends-justify-the-means philosophy (Schmid, 2011). Moreover, violent extremism is regarded as the willingness to use violence, or to support its use, to further particular beliefs of a political, social, economic or ideological nature (De Leede, Haupfleisch, Korolkova, & Natter, 2017). Violent extremism therefore includes, but is not limited to, acts of terrorism (Nasser-Eddine, Garnham, Agostino, & Caluya, 2011).

Radicalism and violent extremism are terms and phenomena dealt with by counter-radicalisation and de-radicalisation strategies and processes. Since these practices are one of the central focuses of our paper, below we provide an illustration of their fundamentals. *Counter-radicalisation* is a prevention strategy aimed at preventing violence and radicalisation. Here, non-violence still preva-

ils, but there is a risk of radicalisation and violent extremism (Clutterbuck, 2015). Counter-radicalisation measures contribute to objectives relating to the fight against radicalisation and refer to proactive initiatives that are targeted towards communities to reduce the potential risk of radicalisation, such as the mass distribution of counter-extremism messages (Bertram, 2015). Further, *de-radicalisation* strategies target already radicalised individuals and groups for whom the risk for violence is thus higher. De-radicalisation may be understood as the opposite of radicalisation (Demant and de Graaf, 2010; Della Porta and LaFree, 2012); it is a process of letting go of radical thoughts. The concept of de-radicalisation can be most broadly described as the activity of encouraging individuals, already characterised by extremist beliefs or violent religious or political ideologies, to adopt more moderate, non-violent views. Koehler (2015) states that de-radicalisation denotes a process of individual or collective cognitive change from criminal, radical or extremist identities to a noncriminal or moderate psychological state. According to Rabasa, Pettyjohn, Ghez & Boucek (2010), de-radicalisation also refers to the developing of perceptions that using violence to promote social change is unacceptable. The changes de-radicalisation aims for are within the individual's system of values and include the rejection of extremist ideology and acceptance of values that are typical of the majority (Ashour, 2009; Rabasa et al., 2010). De-radicalisation has to be differentiated from *disengagement*, which describes the mere behavioural role change (from offending to non-offending) while leaving the ideological or psychological aspect to one side (Koehler, 2015). While de-radicalisation is the process of changing individuals' beliefs, disengagement is the process of changing an individual's behaviour in order to withstand the violence and withdraw from a radical group (Rabasa et al., 2010). On this basis, we may generalise that disengagement is the first step in the process of de-radicalisation. Firstly, it is necessary to change the behaviour of a radicalised individual, and

then the long process of changing individuals' beliefs and values takes place. Both de-radicalisation and disengagement usually involve interventions (e.g. by states, local communities) with the goal of promoting democratic values and encouraging the re-integration of radicalised individuals.

2.2 Multi-agency preventive approach

Countering radicalisation and violent extremism requires both effective criminal-justice action against those who incite others to violence and seek to recruit others, and comprehensive, multi-disciplinary efforts to address conditions that are conducive to radicalisation, violent extremism and terrorism (OSCE, 2014). Countering extremism was traditionally an exclusive task for security sector agencies, however, in the light of contemporary international initiatives, more preventive and soft-oriented approaches to prevention are being developed. For effective prevention, the problems of radicalisation and extremism must be understood as involving several intertwining core elements that together create virtually infinite possible ways for an individual's radicalisation (Prislan, Černigoj & Lobnikar, 2018). Prevention programmes need to address various contributing factors, including different actors, and consider the social and cultural characteristic of local environments. In a local setting, shared responsibility, multi-agency cooperation and community-policing strategies play a pivotal role (Fleming & Wood, 2006). The police service is in fact a crucial actor in facilitating a preventive approach at the local or regional level. The police is also the leading agent for promoting a preventive multi-agency approach and maintaining cooperation among the different stakeholders. This is particularly the case in local environments where police officers have established a vast and strong network of contacts. Besides the police, individuals and institutions from the local environment are the main source of information regarding the development of radicalisation. Individuals living and conducting their day-to-day routines in the local area are most familiar

with the goings-on in that environment (Prislan, Černigoj & Lobnikar, 2018). The preventive work typically includes the following areas and sectors: children and adolescents, employment and social inclusion, equal opportunities and integration, cultural diversity, voluntary efforts, participation and affiliation, healthcare and foreign policy. Although not all violent extremists are young, preventive programmes and policies can produce significant effects by tailoring their aims and objectives particularly to young people. Namely, it is very important to include formal educational institutions, communities and families in efforts to counter extreme violence and radicalisation (Veenkamp & Zeiger, 2015).

In the following, we present research findings concerning police officers' perceptions of who might be included in a multi-stakeholder and cross-sectoral approach to preventing radicalisation and violent extremism in Croatia. Another study aim was to evaluate whether, by using such training design, it is possible to strengthen the notion of institutional interdependence in police officers' efforts in the area of facilitating and supporting disengagement from radicalisation.

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE METHOD, SAMPLE AND INSTRUMENT

3.1. Sample description

To evaluate the effectiveness of the various institutions that are involved in preventing radicalisation leading to extremism, a study was conducted on a sample of 108 students from the Croatian Police College of the Ministry of the Interior. The data were collected during the students' courses in December 2018. Respondents who were regular students without any work experience in the police accounted for 28.1 percent of the sample, with the rest working on the local level – police stations (66.7 percent) and regional level – police department (4.6 percent). Those respondents who were employed by the police possessed 1 to 11 years work experience (on average 5.7 years; standard deviation 2.93).

3.2. Instrument

We used a questionnaire developed in the *First Line[1]* project dedicated to the training of various stakeholders (e.g. representatives of the police, local governments, NGOs, education, and health) in the area of radicalisation and strengthening deradicalisation/disengagement processes in the Western Balkans (Prislan et al., 2018). For the purpose of the study, we adapted the questionnaire to suit the Croatian environment, including altering different parts of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was composed of several sets of questions. Respondents were asked to share information about the extent of their knowledge in the area of radicalisation and to assess the presence of various types of radicalisation in their local environments. Respondents assessed the extent to which the various stakeholders are able to successfully prevent radicalisation through adequate and professional conduct (Cronbach alpha 0.898; 13 items). Responses were provided on a five-point scale, where 1 meant the lowest possible level (of occurrence or agreement) and 5 the highest (of occurrence or agreement).

The respondents also gave details of their work experience (length of service) and work area (local, regional or national level).

3.3 Description of the process

In the framework of the bilateral Slovenia–Croatia project "*The community policing and the role of the police in preventing violent radicalization in Slovenia and Croatia*", we prepared a 4-hour training session. The participants were briefed on the latest trends concerning terrorist attacks in Europe and the different approaches to preventing and disengaging from radicalisation. The study participants were interviewed at both the start and end of the

training to determine how the training had influenced their knowledge and attitudes regarding the preventing of radicalisation and violent extremism.

4. RESULTS

Table 1 presents the results of the respondents' assessment of the extent to which the various stakeholders are able to successfully prevent radicalisation through adequate and professional conduct. *Columns A* show the answers the participants gave prior to the training, while *columns B* presents answers to the same question after the training had been completed. The last column compares the mean values in column A and column B. A *t-test* was used to analyse statistically significant differences between the pre- and post-training responses.

Table 1: Which institutions listed below are able to effectively prevent radicalisation processes in Croatia through proper/professional conduct in their field?

Organisations/institutions	A: Before training			B: After training			Sig.
	Mean	STD	4+5 %	Mean	STD	4+5 %	(t-test/p)
Police officers in local environment	3.16	.99	38.9	3.80	1.15	64.9	-6.14/.000
Specialised police departments/units	3.67	.92	60.2	4.01	.88	73.1	-3.79/.000
Intelligence services	3.89	1.06	65.7	4.26	.84	80.5	-3.85/.000
State authority – the government	3.94	.99	65.7	3.89	1.01	67.6	NO
Authority in local communities – the municipality	3.17	1.08	38.3	3.79	.99	63.9	-5.92/.000
Management of accommodation centres	2.99	1.14	33.3	3.51	1.05	50.0	-5.03/.000
Social services – SWC	2.66	1.07	20.4	3.27	1.00	37.1	-5.64/.000
Healthcare services	2.33	1.01	12.0	3.02	1.07	30.6	-6.29/.000
Politicians, political parties	3.45	1.29	56.1	3.46	1.19	53.7	NO
Non-governmental organisations	2.81	1.18	29.6	3.25	1.08	42.1	-4.71/.000
Schools	3.12	1.26	39.8	3.50	1.11	50.0	-2.90/.004
Media	3.83	1.05	70.4	3.83	1.04	67.6	NO
Religious organisations	3.42	1.08	46.7	3.77	1.03	64.8	-3.15/.002

Legend: A scale from 1 to 5 where 1 means they can do nothing to prevent it, and 5 that they can do a great deal.

The degree of awareness of the interdependence of the various institutions in preventing radicalisation was statistically significantly higher after the training had been conducted. The average score (see column B) exceeds 3 on the 5-point scale, showing the tendency for a higher level of general awareness and the significance of the roles held by the majority of stakeholders for preventing radicalisation. However, the respondents believe the greatest potential for preventing radicalisation is held by the intelligence services, specialised police units and equally the government and the media. Somewhat less significance in that sense is attributed to police officers in the local environment and religious organisations. The respondents also believe that not much can be done in this area by healthcare services, the management of accommodation centres and NGOs. The results show the respondents still mainly see the prevention of radicalisation as a task of the security sector agencies and their hard security measures. Since the respondents stressed the role played by the core government institutions, one may assume the respondents continue to lack certain knowledge about the influential factors and drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism, where such drivers

typically originate from the local environment, social interactions and situational circumstances. In order to better understand the respondents' attitude to the involvement of the various institutions in the preventive radicalization programmes, we performed a factor analysis. With this analysis, we wanted to check whether the different institutions for helping individuals disengage from radicalisation can be grouped together (see Table 2).

Table 2: Grouping of institutions through factor analysis

KMO: 0.86	Factors (total 66.45% of variance explained)		
	Social welfare institutions (30.83% variance explained)	*Security agencies* (20.85% variance explained)	*Government and politics* (14.77% variance explained)
Healthcare services	.828		
Schools	.801		
Social services – SWC	.779		
Non-governmental organisations	.730		
Media	.620		
Authority in local communities – a municipality	.566		
Religious organisations	.546		
Managements of accommodation centres	.466		
Specialised police departments/units		.836	
Police officers in the local environment		.728	
Intelligence services		.712	
State authority - the government			.821
Politicians, political parties			.802
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis; Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalisation			

We found that institutions for preventing and deterring radicalisation can be divided into three types. The largest group contains institutions from the wider area of social welfare, local authorities and the media, the second group consists of security agencies, and the third the state and political parties. Preventing violent radicalisation is not simply a state-agency issue. Since complex situations are involved whereby relevant information is potentially spread through different people and organisations, and some approaches may need to rely on multiple parties, it is important that agencies cooperate well together. Namely, first-line professionals encounter many people in different situations every day. During these encounters, they may see 'signs' or 'indicators' that reveal a person is being radicalised or is radicalising someone else.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Although the prevention of radicalisation is not a new concept, in recent years practitioners and international communities have been dealing with the question of how these strategies can be better tailored to suit the local settings and specific characteristics of operating in local environments where the mentioned diversity is much more apparent. Tackling violent extremism has historically been seen as an exclusive task for security sector agencies, namely police, military and intelligence services. States have traditionally reacted to terrorism with hard power, which means that counter-terrorism policy and practices have

been very top-down, driven by the nation-state and dominated by geopolitical power plays, thereby marginalising and even potentially stigmatising communities (Spalek, 2012). With respect to the growing awareness of the multidimensional nature of radicalisation and violent extremism, the strategies in place today increasingly emphasise intervention and prevention-oriented strategies. With the proper coordination of local and national stakeholders working in the field and with the community's involvement, the police can more efficiently identify issues of relevance to preventing and countering radicalisation and violent extremism. While the participants in our research on preventing and deterring radicalisation in Croatia still mainly rely on the security agencies, we established that with appropriate training we can strengthen awareness of the interdependence of the various stakeholders engaged in these efforts. The fact that global trends and the contemporary global and regional security situation, radicalisation and violent extremism will continue to be a persistent security threat to liberal and democratic societies makes it essential to develop carefully planned prevention strategies customised to the specific features of local and national settings. In summary, comprehensive prevention includes both top-down and bottom-up approaches that involve nation-state policies, criminal-justice actions and soft proactive prevention that addresses conducive conditions and individuals at risk. For this purpose, a multidisciplinary and evidenced-based approach that incorporates the research community as well is necessary, along with the cross-sectoral cooperation and inclusion of organisations from local environments.

LITERATURE

Ashour, O. (2009): The deradicalization of Jihadists: Transforming armed Islamist movements. New York and London: Routledge.

Azinović, V. (2017). The foreign fighter phenomenon and radicalization in the Western Balkans: Understanding the context, 2012-2016. In V. Azinović (ed.), Between salvation and terror: Radicalization and the foreign fighter phenomenon in the Western Balkans (pp. 9-20). Sarajevo: The Atlantic Initiative.

Bertram, L. (2015). How Could a Terrorist be De-Radicalised? Journal for Deredicalization, 5: 120-149.

Clutterbuck, L. (2015). Deradicalization Programs and Counterterrorism: A Perspective on the Challenges and Benefits. Middle East Institute. Retrieved from https://www.mei.edu/sites/default/files/Clutterbuck.pdf (January 28, 2019.)

De Leede, S. Haupfleisch, R., Korolkova, K, & Natter, M. (2017). Radicalisation and violent extremism – focus on women: How women become radicalised, and how to empower them to prevent radicalisation. Brussels: European Parliament, Policy Department for Citizen's Rights and Constitutional Affairs.

Della Porta, D., LaFree, G. (2012): Processes of Radicalization and De-Radicalization. International Journal of Conflict and Violence 6 (1): 4–10.

Demant, F., de Graaf, B. (2010). How to counter radical narratives: Dutch deradicalization policy in the case of Moluccan and Islamic radicals. Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, 33 (5): 408–428.

European Council & Council of the European Union (2018). EU-Western Balkans summit in Sofia. Retrieved from https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2018/05/17/

European Commission. (2018). Glossary - Radicalisation. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/content/radicalisation-0_en (January 28, 2019.)

European Commission's Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation. (2008). Radicalisation Processes Leading to Acts of Terrorism. Retrieved from http://www.rikcoolsaet.be/files/art_ip_wz/Expert%20Group%20Report%20Violent%20Radicalisation%20FINAL.pdf (January 29, 2019.)

Europol. (2018). European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report. Retrieved from https://www.europol.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/tesat_2018_1.pdf (January 28, 2019.)

Fleming, J., Wood. J. (2006). New ways of doing business: networks of policing and security. In: Fleming, J.,

Wood, J. (Ed.), Fighting crime together: The challenges of policing and security networks. South Wales: University of South Wales Press, 1-14.

Koehler, D. (2015). De-radicalization and Disengagement Programs as Counter-Terrorism and Prevention Tools. Insights From Field Experiences Regarding German Right-Wing Extremism and Jihadism. In: Lobardi, M., Ragab E., Chin, V. (Ed.), Countering radicalisation and violent extremism among youth to prevent terrorism, Amsterdam: IOS Press, 120-150.

Lombardi, M. (2015). Violent Radicalization Concerns in the Euro-Mediterranean Region. In: Lobardi, M., Ragab E., Chin, V. (Ed.), Countering radicalisation and violent extremism among youth to prevent terrorism, Amsterdam: IOS Press, 83-100.

Nasser-Eddine, M., Garnham, B., Agostino, K., Caluya, G. (2011). Countering violent extremism (CVE) literature review. Edinburgh South Australia: Counter Terrorism and Security Technology Centre, DSTO Defence Science and Technology Organisation.

Neuman, P. (2010). Prisons and terrorism radicalisation and de-radicalisation in 15 countries. London: Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR).

Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe [OSCE]. (2014). Preventing Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: A Community-Policing Approach. Vienna: OSCE, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

Prislan, K., Černigoj, A., Lobnikar, B. (2018). Preventing radicalisation in the Western Balkans: The role of the police using a multi-stakeholder approach. Revija za kriminalistiko in kriminologijo, 69 (4): 257-268.

Petrović, P. (2016). Islamic radicalism in the Balkans. Issue Alert, 24. Brussels: European Union Institute for Security Studies.

Rabasa, A., Pettyjohn, S., Ghez J., Boucek, C. (2010. Deradicalizing Islamist Extremists. Santa Monica, CA: RAND. Retrieved from https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2010/RAND_MG1053.pdf (January 29, 2019).

Ruge, M. (2017). Radicalization among Muslim communities in the Balkans: Trends and issues. Retrieved from https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/061417_Ruge_Testimony_REVISED.pdf

Schmid, A. P. (2011). Glossary and Abbreviations of Terms and Concepts Relating to Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism. In: Schmid A. P. (Ed.), The Routledge Handbook of Terrorism Research Routledge, London, New York: Routledge, 598-706.

Schmid, A. P. (2013). Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review. ICCT – International Centre for Counter-Terrorism. The Hague. Accessed: https://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Schmid-Radicalisation-De-Radicalisation-Counter-Radicalisation-March-2013.pdf

Spalek. B. (2012): Communities and Counter-Terrorism: Somefinal reflections. In: Spalek, B. (Ed.), Counter-Terrorism: Community based approach to preventing terror crime, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 181-207.

Veenkamp, I., Zeiger, S. (2015). Countering Violent Extremism: Program and policy approaches relating to youth through education, families and communities In: Lobardi M., Ragab E., Chin V. (Ed.), Countering radicalisation and violent extremism among youth to prevent terrorism, Amsterdam: IOS Press, 151 – 163.