

RISK ASSESSMENT IN THE PREVENTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM: THEORETICAL AND APPLIED APPLICATION OF TOOLS

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Abstract: *A violence risk assessment has been used for decades by security agencies as an important tool in assessing future violence. The currently available risk assessment protocols have questionable relevance for the assessment of violent extremism and terrorism because the factors used to assess risk are not linked to the background and motivation of this group of violent actors. This is why there is a need for a relevant risk assessment tool for the population of violent and ideologically motivated extremists. The new SPJ Protocol - Structured Professional Judgment and Violent Extremist Risk Assessment or VERA- are designed for people with a history of violent extremist violence or who have been convicted of such offenses. The paper aims to identify and compare the specific characteristics of risk assessment tools in the prevention of violent extremism in six European countries (Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina) and to highlight significant differences between the tools themselves and their application. The results show that Belgium and the Netherlands have the best practice of applying risk assessment tools, and SPJ-Structured Professional Judgment in both cases can be an excellent example for others, at least as a basis for designing new instruments and tools. For the context of Bosnia and Herzegovina, it might be useful to try the following tools: SQAT, HCR-20 and VERA-2R.*

Keywords: *Assessment, risk, prevention, violent extremism, terrorism, VERA and SP*

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the more important issues that governments face today is risk assessment – particularly of violence, extremist violence, radicalization, and vulnerability. It is generally believed that risk assessment is an important tool for security agencies and that it impacts the efficiency of institutions as well as the approaches to implementing certain programs. Thus, risk assessments of violence are becoming increasingly common in the criminal justice system, in the context of prisons, but they are also considered a key element in combating radicalization and preventing violent extremism. Despite the fact that risk assessments of violence are becoming more prevalent, there is still confusion regarding what a violence risk assessment is, how it can and should be used, and what its advantages and limitations are. There is no agreement on a unified definition of risk assessment, but it can be described as a process of estimating the possibility of individuals' future violent behaviour. This process,

ideally, should include risk management strategies to reduce the risk (Criminal justice research website). However, this broad definition does not fully cover all of the currently available tools, such as VERA-2R, since this tool is not focused only on risk assessment, but also identifies needs and protective factors. Therefore, the mentioned definition partially covers the definition of current and widespread risk assessment procedures.

Efforts to institutionalize risk assessment procedures and identify risk factors for violence date back to the 1960s and 1970s, especially following decisions like *Tarasoff v. Regents of the University of California* in 1976. This decision affected psychiatrists and psychologists, leading to the obligation to assess the potential for violence in certain individuals. Even during this period, when risk assessment procedures were quite informal, the risk assessment process took place in many different settings (e.g., before, during, and after prison, youth detention centers, psychiatric institutions, etc.). During the 1980s, J. Monahan emphasized the need for more empirical studies and research to predict violence, as clinical predictions had proven inaccurate. Furthermore, the emphasis was placed on the need for prevention, not just the prediction of future violent behavior. More recently (from the 1990s onward), researchers have continued to differentiate between various approaches and tools for risk assessment and to develop/improve the approach of structured professional judgment (SPJ), as opposed to unstructured clinical judgment, which was criticized for false positives (Criminal Justice Research - website). However, ideologically motivated violent extremism raises several questions regarding the danger posed by this type of offender. Can we identify the type of violence involved, and if there is a tool for assessing the risk of future violent extremist and terrorist acts, can it be applied to these individuals? What risk do individuals convicted of violent extremism or terrorist acts pose to society when they are at large? Is terrorist violence fundamentally different from other criminal violence, and is a terrorist merely a criminal? Are the available risk assessment protocols suitable for offenders convicted of violent extremism and terrorist acts? These are just some of the questions that we will analyze theoretically and discuss in this paper.

2. METHODOLOGY

The paper is based on a qualitative research approach grounded in a comprehensive literature review. The literature review provided information on the assessments and applications of risk assessment tools in six European countries (Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, Kosovo, North Macedonia, and Bosnia and Herzegovina) based on national reports from these countries authored by civil society organizations. The literature review helped refine the research question, which is: Are there tools for assessing the risk of future violent extremist and terrorist acts, and can these tools be applied to individuals prone to such acts?

To further refine the research questions, expand contacts, and document the approaches to applying risk assessment tools in Bosnia and Herzegovina, we conducted five face-to-face and Skype interviews with key actors involved in the implementation of these tools and in empowering security agencies to apply them.

The aim of the paper is to identify and compare the specific characteristics of risk assessment tools in preventing violent extremism in six European countries, and how they complement each other. In other words, it examines how the threat of potential future violent behavior by individuals is assessed and how that threat is addressed. The descriptive method used here provides a concise overview of risk assessment tools in preventing violent extremism,

describing the positive and negative aspects of their capabilities, and how different assessment and management tools interact with each other.

3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Pressman (2009) emphasized the importance of existing analyses pointing out that there are different risk factors for different criminals, yet terrorists cannot be taken as the “usual” criminals. Not only do the violent extremists differ from other criminals, but also one another, since there is no profile that „fits” all violent extremists or terrorists. Precisely, the author mentioned how there is „no one pattern or profile of terrorists” since previous research has shown major differences while analysing their characteristics, behaviour, way of living, etc. (Pressman, 2009:5). With this being said, there is a clear need for specific risk assessment protocols and tools. There are two objectives of risk assessment for violence, as mentioned by Pressman: evaluating an individual to determine the risk of them committing violence and developing adequate interventions to mitigate the risk. To achieve this, what needs to be considered is: type, severity, nature of violence, alongside ideology, and family, peer and community support (Pressman, 2009). Besides the aforementioned, for risk assessment of violent extremists, the following should be included: political and religious views, ideology and reaction to geopolitical factors (plus psychological, environmental and social factors). The type and nature of violence are crucial for defining intervention programmes. On the other hand, some of the relevant variables developed are those by M. Sageman (based on his examination of 172 global jihadists, during the '90s – '00s). He developed 17 variables and put them into three categories. The first one is social background (geographical origins, social status, education, faith as youth, occupation, family circumstances). The second is psychological make-up (mental illness, terrorist personality) and the third is circumstances of joining the jihad (age, place of recruitment, faith, employment, relative deprivation, friendship, kinship, discipleship, worship). What was noticed as a common pattern with many violent extremists and terrorists is social and spiritual alienation (Sageman, 2004 in Pressman, 2009:7). Friendship, kinship and discipleship are mentioned as key factors through which the affiliation to a terrorist group could be achieved, as these social connections are crucial for radicalization. Kržalić et al. (2020), in their study on the profiles of individuals who went to foreign battlefields in Syria and Iraq, concluded that friendly and familial ties played a significant role identified in the motivational factor for their departure.

Further, regarding the elements of risk assessment procedures, Dolan and Doyle noted the importance of systematic and structured risk assessment approaches, as they improve the accuracy of clinical prediction of violent outcomes (Dolan and Doyle, 2000 in Pressman, 2009). Sarma (2017) and Pressman (2009) mentioned the importance of distinguishing the violent and non-violent radicalization, as well as radical and non-radical inmates. These differences are crucial for designing the approach to their deradicalization, disengagement and in the end rehabilitation and reintegration. But firstly, the importance of these differences is regarding the adequate risk assessment procedures and tools. Sarma (2017) also mentioned the lack of attention toward risk assessment in order to prevent radicalization to grow into terrorism. If terrorist violence significantly differs from the violence of other violent criminals, as indicated by authors Pressman, Maghan, and Kelly, are the factors used to assess the risk of violence for criminals then irrelevant for terrorists? Added to this is the fact that the protocols currently used to assess general violence risk were largely developed for

violent individuals in psychiatric institutions (Webster, Douglas, Eaves, Hart, 1997). If terrorists and violent extremists do not exhibit mental illnesses or personality disorders, and if there are significant differences in motivational factors and backgrounds, then special protocols for assessing the risk of violent extremists are necessary. Despite the increasing advocacy for the creation of specific tools to assess the risk of violent extremism, when analyzing open-source approaches to risk analysis, we can say that the primary focus is on the following three approaches:

1. **Unaided clinical judgment (UCJ)**, mainly criticized for having low validity, being unspecified, unreliable and informal.
2. **Actuarial approach** that uses pre-established coded data and gives a rather numerical score.
3. **Structured clinical judgment (or Structured professional judgment – SPJ)**, that uses empirical knowledge and clinical professional judgment.

What was noticed as common among a great number of open sources, in regards to risk assessments, is the emphasis on these aforementioned three approaches. Similarities are seen in regards to the description of these approaches, their benefits, limits and tools (Pressman, 2009; Hart and Logan, 2011; Monahan, 2012; Sarma, 2017; Schuurman and van der Heide, 2017; Fernandez and de Lasala 2021).

For example, these sources mentioned how an actuarial approach consists of a set, specific number of questions and the answer to each counts up to a certain score. Having limited indicators and being too strict is considered not suitable for supporting risk management and prevention of violence. Still, it is considered more reliable than UCJ, which is mostly an unstructured approach. It is based on the experience and knowledge of the assessor (clinician). This leads to completely subjective results and this approach is considered informal and subjective, with vulnerability to certain biases (because it depends on professional discretion). Further, SPJ is described as a balance between these two previously mentioned approaches. Indicators within this approach are created based on existing empirical knowledge and professional practice. Its validity in comparison with the other two approaches made it a „tool of choice" for many practitioners. Firstly it included: HCR-20 and SAVRY¹ (Pressman, 2009). SPJ approach guides the assessor through the process of evaluation and allows for a broader review of the individual's context. It is important to mention that this approach includes risk assessment and management strategies, allowing further actions and measures to be taken accordingly, such as monitoring and interventions (Sarma, 2017). Besides including different risk factors, it allows practitioners to create individualized approaches based on the assessment. SPJ does not focus on statistical results but involves planning future risk management strategies and eventually can serve as a basis for DRR programmes. However, a key shortcoming of this approach is the fact that it is time and resource-consuming, with a need for training and education for its proper use. On the other hand, there is self-reporting (tool). Through the (self-reporting) questionnaires, attitudes, motives, etc. of an (radical/extremist) individual can be quantified. Self-reporting is a procedure used independently from the mentioned approaches – SPJ, UCJ and actuarial approach. This approach can enhance risk assessments as a final evaluation. However, this type of assessment regarding violent extremism has not yet been researched extensively (ICCT, 2019).

¹ Structured Assessment of Violence Risk in Youth - this tool is used for youth violence with 12-18-year-olds.

Hart and Logan divide these approaches into two categories – discretionary and non-discretionary procedures. These terms refer to „how information is weighted and combined to reach a final decision" (Meehl, 1954/1996 in Hart and Logan, 2011:6). Therefore, discretionary procedures include UCJ, anamnestic risk assessment² and SPJ. Non-discretionary include the actuarial approach. In the end, Hart and Logan criticized these procedures based on the following criteria: efficacy, effectiveness and utility. Precisely, efficacy³, would, ideally, be examined among several assessors, who would conduct risk assessments with a group of individuals, under different conditions, over a long period, which would eventually enable a base rate of violence to be analysed statistically. This assessment would include different changes, factors and events related to the individual, during a long period. In the end, efficacy refers to the consistency and accuracy of using risk assessment procedures to predict future violence in „controlled research settings" (Hart and Logan, 2011:12).

The utility would be questioned in regards to the general usefulness of risk assessment procedures related to violence – whether they are acceptable in the opinion of different „users", such as policymakers, courts, service users and providers, etc., alongside its other possible benefits (Hart and Logan, 2011).

Regardless of the efficiency and effectiveness of the three mentioned approaches, it can be concluded that only the SPJ approach can offer assistance in the „development of risk management plans based on an understanding of the causes of past violence" (Hart and Logan, 2011:16). Finally, these criteria were mentioned by Hart and Logan in „Formulation of Violence Risk Using Evidence-Based Assessment: The Structured Professional Approach", but the overall prevail for the SPJ approach rather than the UCJ or the actuarial approach is evident within a great number of different publications, some of which mentioned in this paper.

Based on the analysis, the authors recognized the need for specialized risk assessment tools, with the emphasis primarily on the following tools: VERA-2R (Canada and the Netherlands), ERG22+ [(the United Kingdom (UK)], IR46 (the Netherlands), RRAP (Portugal), VAF (UK), SQAT (USA). The first six tools are considered to be within the Structured Professional Judgment approach, and SQAT is a self-report type of questionnaire (ICCT, 2019). These are emphasized as tools that are most commonly used in many countries, but other tools like RADAR-iTE and HCR-20 are being used as well (RMA, 2021).

VERA was first developed in 2009, by Dr. Elaine Pressman. In 2012 it was modified to VERA2, based on feedback received from users and research until 2018. The last version (VERA-2R) includes additional motivational indicators (status, fear, and a search for significance) and indicators related to non-violent criminal history, personal history and mental illness. As mentioned, VERA was designed as a guide, which aims at being flexible, practical, systematic, and perhaps most importantly, evidence-based (empirically grounded). It includes factors relevant to the process of radicalization leading to violent extremism and committed political terrorists (Pressman, 2009). VERA-2R is praised for many benefits, such as comprehensive indicators and the ability to add indicators, covering different categories.

² This includes a process of assessing an individual with a history of violence and finding the connection between events that led up to committing these acts and suggesting how it can be stopped.

³ It needs evidence that would show reliability among the assessors and predictive validity within these procedures.

A tool that „overlaps" with VERA-2R to a certain extent is ERG22+, which is considered simpler, requiring less classified information to complete the task. The ERG22+ is based mostly on casework. Firstly, 21 indicators were identified from 20 different cases of violent extremists in the UK. The final version includes 22 indicators, in three categories, leaving the possibility of adding potentially relevant new factors, alongside literature review (ICCT, 2019).

HCR-20 (Historical, clinical risk management) was developed in the 1990s as one of the first risk assessment tools. It is reported as being used very widely, for the general population of inmates and inmates with mental illnesses – its focus is on those with a history of violence and the potential presence of mental illness (Pressman, 2009).

IR46 (Islamic Radicalization, 46 indicators) is used by local police for recognition of early signs of Islamic radicalization (12 y/o and older). IR46 helps the police, intelligence services and those services that are in close contact with specific persons whom they consider vulnerable to radicalization or extremism, in order to recognize signals of Islamic radicalization at an early stage. IR46 is developed based on an international literature review, interviews with experts, and case studies and is updated every three years (ICCT, 2019).

Another tool, RRAP (Radicalization Risk Assessment in Prisons Tool Kit) was created within a project regarding the prevention of radicalization in prisons. It is focused on emphasizing risk and vulnerability in the general prison population, not only terrorists/extremists. The goal of RRAP is to help prison staff identify risks and assess potentially vulnerable inmates in the general prison population. Different sources of information can be used with RRAP (interviews with inmates and reports). It has 9 categories: emotional uncertainty, self-esteem, radicalism, distance, societal disconnection, the need to belong, legitimization of terrorism, perceived in-group superiority, identity fusion, identification, and activism. Finally, a decision-maker makes the final decision on the risk level, including the risk category and need for intervention (ICCT, 2019).

VAF (Vulnerability Assessment Framework) is used in the UK, by different stakeholders on the local level within the Channel programme.⁴ This tool is used to assess whether individuals are vulnerable to potential radicalization and if they need the support to suppress the influence. Precisely, VAF is used by staff in education and health sectors, local authorities and youth services, for identifying individuals before they commit acts of violence (Sarma, 2017).

RADAR-iTE (Rule-based analysis of potentially destructive perpetrators to assess acute risk – Islamist terrorism) was developed in Germany (2017) by the German Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) and academics from the University of Konstanz. It is supposed to work as a „predictive policing system" for jihadists: to identify extremist Islamist individuals who are likely to engage in violent behaviour. The focus is firstly on those already considered to pose a very high risk, followed by incarcerated Salafists about to be released from prison. It is considered a standardized risk assessment procedure of an individual through a quantitative and qualitative estimation. This tool includes 2 phases: gathering information and a questionnaire (73 questions – yes/no/unknown). These questions are regarding personal and social life events, social network, proof of jihadi-motivated travel, history of violence, etc. It

⁴ A programme that focuses on identifying and supporting people vulnerable to being drawn into terrorism. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/channel-and-prevent-multi-agency-panel-pmap-guidance> 27.02.2023.

classifies individuals into a 2-category risk scale of extremist Salafism: „moderate" and „high", to determine the need for intervention. This assessment does not subsequently include any measures – the police conduct a case-by-case assessment within the framework RISKANT (risk analysis of those inclined to act on Islamist motivations). This tool is used by trained police agencies in Germany and is considered to be the first nationwide assessment of the militant Salafis known to the German police. This tool seems to have a great potential to minimize the communication gaps between agencies and it is also explored in Finland to introduce an instruction card to be used for the commissioner's and general police training purpose⁵ (Fernandez and de Lasala, 2021).

On the other hand, according to the Radicalization Awareness Network Centre of Excellence (RAN CoE) issue paper, a small number of risk assessment tools have been studied and proven to be fully efficient. After describing the main three approaches, the authors of this issue paper underlined the apparent need for a multiagency process, common understanding in all state agencies regarding the procedures of risk assessment and the use of different tools. Still, they mentioned how formal, official training for the use of some risk assessment tools should not be mandatory. Besides mentioning the most commonly used risk assessment tools, the authors also noted how these tools can be modified for use with FTFs, yet did not explain which aspects need to be modified and how. Further, they mentioned how gender and minor (children) aspects should be included in the risk assessment procedure. In conclusion, risk assessment tools should be one part of a „multi-method assessment strategy involving specific tools to be used in multi-agency settings" (Schuurman, van der Heide, 2016, p. 29). The authors of this issue paper also provided a RAN tool – RAN CoE Returnee 45. It is considered as a risk investigative tool specifically to be used with returnees, to help in planning potential interventions and reduce the threat of violence. This tool was created because existing tools, according to the authors, are not fully adequate to be used with FTF returnees (Schuurman, van der Heide, 2016).

Another important tool, which is somewhat different is the SQAT (Significance Quest Assessment Test), which is a self-reporting tool. For example, VERA-2R has a focus on the risk of an increased willingness to contribute to violent extremism. Similarly, SQAT's basis proposes that the level of radicalization suggests the level of commitment to these goals, using violence as a means. This tool is mostly used in prisons to assess the risk posed by an inmate while allowing to understand the influence of DRR programmes (ICCT, 2019).

4. ANALYSIS OF RISK ASSESSMENT TOOLS AND THEIR APPLICATION⁶

Among the more broadly used tools, VERA-2R and ERG22+ have the greatest rate of success. VERA-2R can be used for all types of extremism. It applies to young people and it is not limited to male extremists/terrorists only. VERA-2R does not depend on interviews with the target users.

ERG22+ and VERA-2R are recommended to be used by multiple assessors because one professional can hardly complete this task fully on their own. Furthermore, it can ensure the validity of the final results.

⁵ For first time users.

⁶ Analysis of risk assessment tools includes components which the authors have created in the report within the DRIVE on the Right Path project, funded by the EU.

On the other hand, some of the challenges for VAF are:

- the risk predicted is not specified
- there is no clear theoretical background on connections between risk factors and terrorism
- the evidence used for the identification of risk factors is quite weak, and
- there is a “lenient threshold” for categorizing individuals as being at risk, which can lead to a great number of people being assessed as “high risk”, while it would not be completely correct (Sarma, 2017).

Even though this tool is similar to SPJ tools, Sarma (2017) mentioned how there is no information on how these professionals/assessors gather their information, how they formulate their cases and how they achieve the risk management.

To summarize the list of the mentioned tools, they will be divided into categories based on their target groups and intended users (ICCT, 2019). This will be presented in the table below.

Risk assessment tools	Intended users	Target group
VERA-2R	Forensic mental health experts, police, probation and prison staff	Violent extremists’ offenders and radicalized individuals
ERG22+	In prison: frontline staff and decision-makers	Convicted extremists in England and Wales
SQAT	Prison and probation staff, religious advisors, volunteers and academia	Radicalized individuals in and after prison
IR46	Police, security services	For persons 12+ y/o that show signs of radicalization
RRAP	Prison staff	Inmates potentially vulnerable or already in process of radicalization
VAF	Local authorities, education and health staff	Individuals potentially vulnerable to radicalization

RADAR-iTE	Trained police agencies in Germany	Potential extremist Islamist individuals who are likely to engage in violent behaviour
HCR-20	Prison staff	The general population of inmates

Table 1: Overview of Analyzed Risk Assessment Tools

4.1. Comparison/analysis of six country reports

Based on 6 country reports, it is evident that improvement regarding risk assessments of returnees is necessary. These tools seem to be the most developed in Belgium and the Netherlands.

For example, in the country report for the **Netherlands**, the mentioned approaches for conducting risk assessments are the actuarial approach and the Unstructured clinical judgment (UCJ). However, the most commonly used approach in the Netherlands is the Structured professional judgment (SPJ), which uses the benefits of both actuarial approach and UCJ. SPJ tools used in the Netherlands are VERA-2R and IR46.

VERA-2R is used by Dutch practitioners and includes 34 indicators (in 5 categories⁷) and allows the inclusion of additional indicators⁸ (11 additional indicators). The final assessment with this tool is based on the analysis of all available information related to these indicators but also considers the context of the individual. This tool is mostly used within the criminal justice system. Frontline practitioners find VERA-2R very helpful because it allows them to create a risk profile, and to determine factors from which the development of different measures or plans is possible.

On the other hand, IR46 is used mostly by Dutch local police forces. This tool is used mainly for early warning (screening of community for signs of radicalization), i.e. to recognize if there is a radicalized (Salafi) individual willing to commit violence, while it also allows for the addition of the subjective opinion of police officers.

Besides these tools and approaches, there are some efforts for the creation of a broader database – the European database of Terrorist Offenders (ETD). Within this database would be a "comprehensive judicial information" of terrorist convicts, and it would be considered useful for future research, alongside the improvement of understanding the radicalization and indicators of risk assessment tools. Also, a new strategy is seemingly being devised, which aims at "integrating the outcomes of various risk assessments into one model"⁹.

In Belgium, there is also a variety of tools used before, during and after prison, alongside the threat assessment on the national and individual level conducted by the Coordination Unit for Threat Analysis (CUTA). Further, CUTA launched a risk assessment tool named Root37 (37

⁷ 5 categories: belief and ideology, social context, history, commitment and motivation, and protective factors.

⁸ Additional indicators, as mentioned in the report include the three following categories: criminal history, personal history and mental disorder.

⁹ EFSAS - The Netherlands country report

indicators in 5 categories) which was created for accurate assessments of individuals¹⁰ (to be) included in Common Database (CDB). Different stakeholders (institutions and agencies) provide relevant information. It uses a *mixed-method*, made up of a qualitative and a quantitative aspect. Besides these assessments, Root37 helps analysts „to identify information gaps in CUTA's database and CDB", which allows for individuals to be included or excluded in these databases. Further, this tool helps CUTA „to identify risk management strategies and make recommendations to monitoring agencies"¹¹.

Another risk assessment tool used in Belgium is VERA-2R. It is used by psycho-social services in prison, through 8 categories (each with 2 to 8 indicators). It is important to emphasize that prison staff is trained for usage of this tool. This tool informs prisons regarding the analysis of recidivism risk and helps to decide whether an early release and probation can be realized.

On the other hand, some issues (could) occur even with these specific tools existing. For example, the exact method of analysis/assessment does not explicitly appear in relevant laws. Further, there is a lack of information in these previously mentioned databases, which can prolong and aggravate the procedures of risk assessments. When it comes to Root37, it should be mentioned that it does not include personal or non-violent criminal history, motivation, or indicators that could reduce risk through positive changes in behaviour. Some of the shortcomings of VERA-2R have already been mentioned previously, but in Belgium, some policy workers are questioning the need to use this tool so often, because of the mentioned issues regarding time and resources. However, an overall shortcoming for risk assessment tools is the lack of research – empirical studies which would confirm their validity. Research limitations are mostly related to the lack of access to classified documents regarding terrorists and/or violent extremists, as Herzog-Evans (2018) mentioned.

These two countries have a similar approach to the risk assessment of terrorist convicts/returnees, since the use of SPJ (i.e. VERA-2R) is common both in Belgium and the Netherlands, with the actuarial approach on the side. Having said that, other country reports show how the development and usage of risk assessment tools are present to a lesser extent, if they are present at all.

However, within these reports, there are some shortcomings with all these tools and approaches. The actuarial approach is considered "too rigid" and UCJ is seen as "intuitive", hence the lack of accuracy in the resulting data. Still, even SPJ-based instruments have some issues, since they are more time-and-resource consuming and they require a certain institutional capacity (especially VERA-2R, with more time and need for training for practitioners).

In **Italy**, risk analysis is done mostly case-by-case, with Italian police showing their ability to carry out these tasks. Currently, risk assessment in Italy is based on two types of data: the duration of FTF's stay in the conflict zone and the reason for their return. These include 4 categories of risk levels, mostly based on interrogation and conversation with returnees. It includes: 1) those who voluntarily left the conflict zone, 2) opportunists (returned because of family, illness, etc.), 3) prisoners or those forced to return and 4) leaders of cells, networks in Europe (for conducting attacks). Also, the Security Committee of Italy emphasizes the

¹⁰As per the Belgium report, this database is to include FTFs still in Syria, returnees, and convicted terrorists, among others.

¹¹ Egmont - Belgium country report

importance of certain measures aimed at improving the effectiveness of preventive action. This statement could be supported with the information that, as it seems, there are some unified texts of laws under examination and they should include measures for the prevention of violent radicalization. However, these instruments are mostly defined as repressive measures, as the prevention is described as barely existing, even with the efforts to adapt current repressive measures and efforts to put more focus on the prevention of violent radicalization and extremism.

For example, **Kosovo** is finding a way to use VERA-2R and ERG22+ (by Kosovo Police and Intelligence), even though the results of these assessments may not be fully compatible with Kosovo. Different types of reports are being conducted in Kosovo (based on monitoring visits, the behaviour of prisoners, interviews and reports done by the Kosovo Correctional Services (KCS) Intelligence Unit), but this process of reporting is not standardized (it is not based on fixed indicators). The Council of Europe has helped Kosovo through some projects, i.e. it „assists Kosovo with the development of basic tools needed for radicalization identification and carrying out risk and need assessments of violent extremist prisoners and radicalized inmates"¹². Still, there is a lack of structured procedure for risk assessments, lack of training, lack of data, and quite limited cooperation between Kosovo Probation Services (KPS) and KCS regarding data sharing.

According to the country report, **North Macedonia** is in a similar scenario. The focus seems to be mostly on the prevention of violent extremism. There are screening tools for the detection of radicalized individuals, but regarding monitoring (of behaviour, communication of prisoners, etc.) in prisons, certain multidisciplinary teams are established. Members within these teams are staff - prison police, the resocialization department, and other sectors relevant to this issue. Also, there is a handbook for prison staff, created by the Council of Europe, for recognizing signs of radicalization. Still, instead of actual risk assessment tools, as they do not exist in N. Macedonia, internal documents are more commonly used. These documents, alongside conversations, are used to gain insight into these individuals. They include risk assessment questionnaires and psychological tests for stress and anxiety, but these are not specialized only for FTF returnees.

However, a screening tool is not yet applicable in N. Macedonia (there are no conditions for its implementation). Also, these monitoring teams have quite poor organization, as they do not seem to function properly, lacking resources and capacities. In fact, there is no effective mechanism for monitoring the spreading of radicalization in prisons. Even though the Court asked for 52 risk assessments during 2021, they were not provided, since there are no explicit tools/instruments for risk assessment.

The case of **BiH** is not much different from N. Macedonia and Kosovo. There are certain procedures/risk assessments done by security and intelligence agencies, but the information regarding their methodology is not available publicly. Mandatory risk assessments are being done in prisons as well (classic and additional form). They are revised every 6 months and the aim is to have a prognosis of inmates' behaviour and detect potential additional security risks. These assessments in prison are conducted by the Special department for reception and observation. In addition to these, there is a process of reclassification of every inmate, in order to take necessary measures in the future. Having in mind these two forms – classic and additional (provided by Council of Europe) – it can be assumed that a certain methodology is

¹² KCSS - Kosovo country report

included in these procedures, but no information was provided during interviews nor is it publicly available. These forms include, however, contact with inmates, monitoring of behaviour, appearance, hobbies, etc. to gain detailed insight (BiH National Report, CSS, 2022). Another way of conducting an assessment is through the Coordination team for repatriation and reception of BiH citizens from the conflict zone, and it is done by police agencies and the Intelligence-Security Agency of BiH. These assessments are in terms of security, criminal prosecution, protection of rights, health, social support, economic support, the inclusion of local community participation, etc. This is done to improve the reintegration process of returnees. Also, this assessment is a basis for the Repatriation Plan and the Reintegration, Rehabilitation and Resocialization Program. Further, the only mention of risk assessment in laws is within the Law of BiH on the Execution of criminal sanctions, detention and other measures. According to this, risk assessments are to be done at the first reception of inmates and later while deciding about the use of benefits. These are done to establish the level of risk for the community in case of escape and evaluate the possibility of trying to escape. None of the interlocutors were familiar with risk assessment tools such as VERA-2R or ERG22+. However, one prison official (DRIVE02) mentioned how they managed risk assessment on their own before the Council of Europe provided the classic and additional form. In conclusion, there are no standardized mechanisms or tools in BiH to be used on the national level, and the methodology of the existing ones is unknown to the public.

As for best practices already developed by authoritative sources, the closest examples could be that of Belgium and the Netherlands. The SPJ-type of assessment in both these cases can be a great example for others, at least as a basis for designing new instruments and tools in other countries. VERA-2R is also a useful tool, but as mentioned, it is very time and resource consuming, which can discourage some countries/practitioners. Still, these tools (and others mentioned) have space for improvement, which can probably be attributed to the nature of radicalization and violent extremism as phenomena.

5. CONCLUSION

Risk assessment requires consideration of the type, severity, nature, and other characteristics of violence. Theoretical approaches indicate that the concept of "risk" is contextual and linked to the environment in which an individual resides, with ideology recognized as an important component of this context. Given that practitioners partially understand the concept of "risk" and that "risk" cannot be predicted with certainty, it is reasonable to devise risk assessment tools that are as specific and relevant as possible. As stated in the Dutch report, the lack of understanding of radicalization affects the validity of risk assessment tools. Additionally, current challenges in research for creating these tools or instruments should be noted – limitations are evident in difficulties accessing relevant information, which are mostly confidential. It can be concluded that training and education are needed for using SPJ tools, as most practitioners lack the necessary clinical skills (experience with psychology). Furthermore, local/national conditions appear crucial for creating adequate risk assessment tools. However, if tools are to be evidence-based in practice, the question arises of how many violent extremists (who have committed crimes) need to be analyzed to produce a final (statistical) assessment and create an appropriate risk assessment tool.

On the other hand, national strategies, analyses, and laws should provide a legal basis for stakeholders to use appropriate risk assessment tools. Therefore, the lack of the

aforementioned sources confirms the importance of legislative frameworks and institutional/intergovernmental cooperation, particularly considering the potential for high levels of post-penal recidivism. Improvements are needed in legislation, prison security measures, information exchange, and practitioner education and training. It is evident that the main deficiencies (data exchange, cooperation, and training) stem from the lack of a legislative framework.

These obstacles could assist researchers and professionals in designing specific risk assessment tools, as one of the biggest limitations is limited access to information (i.e., offenders). In the analysis of the application of risk assessment tools in six analyzed countries, there is a recognized need for specialized risk assessment tools and/or their adaptation to (local) circumstances. Such tools should include quantitative and qualitative methods, simultaneously allowing for the addition of potential indicators (SPJ approach). As these tools have shown differences, it is important to consider various factors, such as post-prison assessment (or pre-prison and during); risk of violent extremism or potential radicalization spread; affiliation with a terrorist group/network; whether the threat (risk) is at a national or individual level; current and future risk; whether it is based on behavior or mental state. Moreover, there is a need for psychologists and criminologists to engage in consultations on counter-terrorism practices and how to improve/create better risk assessment tools. The focus should be on an individual-oriented approach. SPJ tools must be part of risk management (risk assessment + risk management).

All these factors should be taken into account when creating or adapting existing tools, as not every tool is suitable for every situation and circumstance, nor for every country/region. Some tools are used structurally, while others are used ad-hoc. Almost every tool requires training for its proper use. Given their "young" history of use for extremist violence or terrorism, it is certain that more research is needed, including improving understanding of key issues related to this type of risk assessment (radicalization, extremism, violent extremism, and terrorism). Based on the literature review, it can be concluded that the best approach to risk assessment is continued risk management, leading to proper intervention. DRR programs should be based on risk assessment to best meet the needs of returnees. Therefore, the use of correct tools/instruments is crucial, along with appropriate training and education for practitioners.

For the context of BiH, it is important to mention some key information which led to recommendation no. 4. Based on previous research, it seems that there is no methodology/established procedure for conducting threat assessments on the national and individual levels. Additionally, there were no mentions of any kind of risk assessment tools or instruments used for (convicted) violent extremists. Consequently, it would be (temporarily) beneficial to use risk assessment tools that do not require extensive training to be done. Lack of communication and data sharing have already been mentioned as an important shortcoming. With that being said, it would be beneficial to find a risk assessment tool that can be used by different actors/agencies independently. SQAT can be useful as it would not be time-consuming for practitioners nor does it need training (precisely, the need for training is not completely established). The use of a tool for the general population of criminals could also be of use. HCR-20 is already mentioned as widely used and for the general population of inmates (alongside inmates with mental illness). However, one of the most comprehensive tools, VERA-2R, even though it is time and resource-consuming and requires proper training – would be beneficial to be used as it includes different actors as its

users. This tool would, of course, be used only when proper training and education are done accordingly.

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PROCJENU RIZIKA U PREVENCIJI NASILNOG EKSTREMIZMA I TERORIZMA: TEORIJSKA I APLIKATIVNA PRIMJENA ALATA

Sažetak: Procjena rizika za nasilne osobe se decenijama koristi kao važan alat sigurnosnih agencija u procjeni od budućeg nasilja. Protokoli za procjenu rizika, posebno nasilja koji su trenutno dostupni, imaju upitnu važnost za procjenu nasilnog ekstremizma i terorizma jer faktori koji se koriste za procjenu rizika nisu povezani sa pozadinom i motivacijom ove grupe nasilnih aktera. Zbog toga je nastala potreba za relevantnim alatom procjene rizika za populaciju nasilnih ideološki motiviranih ekstremista. Novi protokol strukturirano profesionalno prosuđivanje (SPJ) i procjena rizika od nasilnih ekstremista ili VERA su dizajnirani da se koriste sa osobama koje imaju istoriju ekstremističkog nasilja ili su osuđene za takva krivična djela. Rad ima za cilj da identifikuje i uporedi specifične karakteristike alata procjene rizika u prevenciji nasilnog ekstremizma u šest šest europskih zemalja (Nizozemska, Belgija, Italija, Kosovo, Sjeverna Makedonija i Bosna i Hercegovina) i da se istaknu značajne razlike između samih alata ali i njihove primjene. Rezultati pokazuju da najbolju praksu primjene alata procjene rizika imaju Belgija i Nizozemska dok strukturirano profesionalno prosuđivanje u oba slučaja može biti izvrstan primjer drugima, barem kao temelj za osmišljavanje novih instrumenata i alata. Za kontekst Bosne i Hercegovine moglo bi biti korisno isprobati alate kao što su: SQAT, HCR-20 i VERA-2R.

Ključne riječi: Procjena, rizik, prevencija, nasilni ekstremizam, terorizma, VERA i SPJ