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European Union and United States: Common trends and challenges in violent radicalisation leading to terrorism[1]

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Europe is now affected by a polarised climate, which has resulted into phenomena like hate crime and radicalisation. These are consequential effects of social imbalances such as the economic and refugee crisis, the spread of terrorist attacks, the lack of confidence at institutions and political parties, as well as the growing power of right-wing and populist parties, and nationalist ideologies (Akghar, Wells and Blanco, 2019: 12). Similar threats are currently faced by the United States. Specifically, five common trends of radicalisation have been identified among the two sides of the Atlantic. However, States still struggle to identify effective prevention and counter policies. By looking at similarities and differences of the two case studies, this policy brief identifies recommendable P/CVE practices.

Common trends of radicalisation

First and foremost, States are facing the issue of **prison radicalisation**. The rise and collapse of Islamic States well as the spread of separatists and right-wing radical movements caused a sharp increase of prisoners convicted of terrorist crimes, prisons into breeding grounds for violence (Europol, 2019: 15-16, 33). This requires States a clear grouping policy for terrorist offenders and a standardised application of risk assessment tools. In the case of Europe, it is not just about 'keeping' measures, but rehabilitation and reintegration policies to ensure, within the next decade, a safe reintegration of around 500 individuals who have been convicted in Europe for terror-related crimes or radicalised in prison and will be released.

Europe: a trendsetter?

The identification of five general common trends of radicalisation helps to understand the

Marginalisation and **discrimination** of certain groups of civil society concern another generalised issue. While in the US this mostly refers to second and third generations which lack a sense of community; in Europe factors such as limited education, low employment, and high criminality rates have been causing social exclusion. Such elements are mostly used by hate preachers, a figure diffused in Europe, who prey on deprivation to drive individuals into radicalisation (Ranstorp, 2016: 3). The third trend is related to political factors and **social narratives** used by extremists to radicalise individuals. In both regions, opposite forms of extremism tend to share common narratives like the distrust of political leaders and public institutions as well as a feeling of helplessness or ineptitude about how to find success and fulfilment in modern society (Europol, 2019: 42).

An alarming trend refers to the re-gained importance of **ideology** and the fact that different forms of extremism, especially Jihadism and right-wing extremism, happened to help each other growing (TSC, 2019: 28). Finally, the last trend regards the use of **social media** for terrorist and extremist purposes. Although in Europe social media likely accelerate the process of radicalisation, but do not really initiate it as in the US, the presence of the Internet and social networks transformed radicalisation into a more individualistic phenomenon, highly difficult to detect, and it also helped connecting internationally like-minded individuals – transforming, in most of the cases, extremism into a trans-national threat (TSC, 2019: 40-41)

size of the phenomenon, driving the conclusion that the United States and Europe often

experience similar threats, although responding differently, and might collaborate by sharing experiences. To this concern, reflections on the role of Europe in countering violent radicalisation are relevant. Despite commonalities, in fact, Europe shows some distinct, relevant elements that might convert it in an example to follow at least when referring to results on interns' social reintegration and the terror-mental issue nexus (Europol, 2019: 32). Due to the different sentencing times that terror-related inmates are facing in the US and EU, European States will be the first dealing with the release of such individuals. This leads Europe to be pioneer in the application of certain rehabilitation programmes, offering future lessons learnt to the US. The same can be said on the research studies on mental disorders that will be carried out.

Policy Recommendations

All considered, concrete steps to undertake the problem of violent radicalisation have been identified:

- In the case of prison radicalisation, Europe should focus on reintegration and rehabilitation, leaving behind de-radicalisation itself, and maintaining a tailor-made approach. In terms of rehabilitation, restorative justice practices are considered to be highly effective; while concerning reintegration, the engagement

with communities and families' interns are crucial.

- The still significant offline component that has European radicalisation as well as the low cyber capabilities terrorist groups suggest to focus on face-to-face interactions and open chats instead of the dark web, which is not the primary source radicalised individuals have access to. In this specific domain, the collaboration with former extremists is key to indicate online spaces and to operate trying to persuade people to no-longer perceive extremist believes.

- Phenomena such as social exclusion show a certain gap between the policy world and the community itself, which could likely be solved by working with grass-root organisations and practitioners, who should be the lead in the prevention process. A good example of grass-root approach is the EFD's Empowerment programme "Liberal Muslims network".

- Due to the relevant role ideology is still playing in radicalisation, it is highly suggestable not to engage with radical groups in new process of policing, because although they are not violent, they tend to justify violence and they are against European values.

Consulted & Recommended Sources

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The Soufan Center (2019). *WHITE SUPREMACY EXTREMISM: The Transnational Rise of the Violent White Supremacist Movement*. The Soufan Center (TSC).

[1] This Policy Brief presents information gathered during the Policy Event "Sharing the insights on the US and EU approaches in radicalisation and violent extremism" organised by MINDb4ACT consortium on March 21, 2019, in Brussels.

[2] The author is solely responsible for its content, it does not represent the opinion of the European Commission, who is not resrresponsible for any use that might be made of data appearing therein.