Policy Brief Nº 11

July 2020

Improving collaboration and multi-stakeholder approaches towards addressing P/CVE in Central and Eastern Europe[1]

Catherine Lourdes Dy[2] | Programme Manager and Researcher, Peace Action Training and Research Institute of Romania

Political polarisation and right-wing radicalisation can best be illustrated as falling on a broad spectrum of 'group-focused enmity' (Küpper & Zick, 2014), ranging from attitudes and everyday actions within the population — felt through laws and regulations in institutions — to electoral successes of parties of the extreme right, the actions of extremist groups, and incidences of hate crimes. In recent years there has been a rise in popularity of extreme right parties, accompanied by more tangible everyday racism among the population in many European countries, both on the street and online. Hate has been particularly focused on the topics of migration and refugees but has also been directed against those who advocate for equality of LGBTQIA+ individuals and women, and in many instances framed by anti-Semitic or other similar conspiracy myths (Jaecker, 2004).

In response to the rising tide, numerous initiatives have been launched in the field of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE). Coming from the municipal, national, and European levels and launched by non-profit institutes, government agencies, intergovernmental and supranational agencies, and even private corporations — there is no shortage to the responses that attempt to curb the rise in polarisation and radicalisation through diverse means and frameworks. From addressing prejudice and discrimination through sport; to activities integrating third country nationals into the local communities; to work with youth susceptible to online radicalization, there is currently a breadth and depth of P/CVE activities never before seen.

A major challenge, however, lies in the fact that these initiatives are often 'silo-ed': only accessible to those directly involved and the respective funding agencies, without the possibility to share best practices or challenges with other similar initiatives. Furthermore, there is a lack of collaboration opportunities — and often a deep lack of trust — between public institutions and non-profit organisations, further limiting knowledge-sharing and cooperation even within the same cities or networks.

Key challenges

The result of the research conducted within the CHAMPIONs project showed that the vast majority of first line practitioners in Hungary, Poland, Germany, and Romania believe that collaboration among practitioners and other stakeholders at the local level would be helpful in preventing and reacting to political polarisation and right-wing radicalisation in a community (CHAMPIONs, 2020).

Indeed, there is general acknowledgement of the benefits of collaboration, including a number of white papers on the benefits of local, regional and multilateral approaches to preventing and countering violent extremism (UNODC, 2018; Haanstra, 2018). However, it is clear that while the theoretical foundations are compelling, putting such collaborative engagements into practice requires high levels of trust and institutional adaptations.

Challenges to collaboration identified by first line practitioners include the lack of time to implement activities due to existing workload; the lack of follow-up, concrete actions, and practical solutions; the lack of agency for the collaboration; and the lack of opportunities and tools for collaboration. Other challenges, such as collaborations being designed only on a short-term basis and the failure to integrate people who could benefit most from such initiatives were also recounted. Issues such as transparency are also key factors as well as excessive bureaucracy and limited funding.

The bottom line remains however that radicalisation as complex social problem can only be addressed by a team of diverse experts and practitioners working together. All efforts towards supporting collaborative engagements should be put into place.

Policy Recommendations

In this context, the following aspects are recommended to be taken into account when developing and implementing P/CVE policies:

- **Collaborations between institutional actors and other key stakeholders must be formalised and made sustainable**. Ways to ensure this include promoting shared ownership; appointing a team leader embedded in municipal structures; signing Memorandums of Agreement among institutions. Systemic solutions, for instance the creation of national agencies, are preferable.
- Policy makers must be cognisant of the fact that **different approaches and objectives** of multi-agency approaches exist **between Western Europe and Central and Eastern Europe**
- It must be ensured that the teams working on P/CVE have **decision-making powers**

and that their roles are embedded in their respective institutional frameworks.

- There should be a **heavy emphasis on trust-building** through dialogue and meeting the needs of the teams and institutions involved; **safe spaces** need to be created where practitioners can learn together with and from each other how best to address P/CVE issues
- **Framing is extremely important** and theoretical language is often unpalatable to first line practitioners who pivot towards action-oriented discussion on specific phenomena and problems
- It is necessary to progress from ad-hoc, project-based multi-stakeholder collaboration and **scale it up to standing, mandated systems** and bring together stakeholders including but not limited to first line practitioners, policy- and decision-makers, and academics in the field of P/CVE.

Consulted & Recommended Sources

CHAMPIONs. (2020). How political polarization and right-wing radicalization manifest themselves (Factsheet). Available at: https://www.championsproject.eu/media/

CHAMPIONs. (2020). Policy Reccomentations: Recommendations from the National Policymaker Roundtables: Germany, Hungary, Poland and Romania (Policy Report).Available at : https://www.championsproject.eu/wp-content/uploads/sites/20/2020/02/CHAMPIONs-Policy-Recommendations.pdf

Haanstra, W. (2018). Engaging with communities: Collaboration between local authorities and communities in PVE (Ex Post Paper), Radicalisation Awareness Network. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-local/docs/ran_local_yf-c_collaboration_local_authorities_communities_preventing_violent_extremism_22-23022018_en.pdf

Jaecker, T. (2004). Antisemitische Verschwörungstheorien nach dem 11. September. Neue Varianten eines alten Deutungsmusters. In: Politische Theorie und Kultur, Band 2. Münster: Lit.

Krekó, P. (2018). Hungary: Europa's champion on conspiracy theories. Interview with DW 12/11/2918. Available at: https://www.dw.com/en/hungary-europes-champion-of-conspiracy-theories/a-46689822

Küpper, B. and Zick, A. (2014). Group-focused enmity. Prevalence, correlations, and major causes of prejudice in Europe. In: *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Political Psychology*, P. Nesbitt-Larking et al. (eds.), Palgrave MacMillian.

UNODC. (2018). Regional and multilateral approaches to preventing and countering violent extremism. Available at: https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/terrorism/module-2/key-issues/regional-and-multilateral-approaches-to-pve-and-cve.html