# Preventing violent extremism in the Netherlands: overview of its *broad approach*

## Prevención del extremismo violento en los Países Bajos: una panorámica de su *enfoque general*

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**Abstract**: Since the Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh was murdered in 2004 by Mohammed Bouyeri, a young extremist of Moroccan descent, the Dutch authorities have been confronted with the question of how to prevent repetition of such an event. Accordingly, costly comprehensive programmes for preventing violent extremism (PVE) have been planned, implemented, discussed, assessed, and revised. In this regard, the article offers an overview of the *broad approach* taken in the Netherlands over the past 20 years with a twofold objective: a) to give an account of its most significant elements, and b) to further the discussion of two essential aspects of the Dutch PVE policy: community engagement and the phasing model, which provide a framework for the development of PVE programmes that could be useful for policymakers and practitioners. Finally, some possible lessons are drawn from this broad approach.

**Key words**: The Netherlands, preventing violent extremism (PVE), broad approach, radicalisation

**Resumen**: Desde el asesinato del cineasta holandés Theo van Gogh en 2004 a manos de Mohammed Bouyeri, un joven extremista de ascendencia marroquí, las autoridades holandesas se han enfrentado a la cuestión de cómo evitar que hechos así vuelvan a suceder. Para ello, se han desarrollado, implementado, discutido, evaluado y modificado costosos y exhaustivos programas de prevención del extremismo violento (PEV). Al respecto, este artículo ofrece una panorámica del enfoque general utilizado en los últimos 20 años en los Países Bajos, con un doble objetivo: a) resumir sus elementos más importantes y b) ahondar en la discusión de dos aspectos fundamentales de la política PEV holandesa, esto es, la implicación comunitaria y el modelo de fases, el cual ofrece un marco para el desarrollo de los programas PEV que puede ser útil para responsables políticos y técnicos. Por último, se apuntan algunas posibles enseñanzas de este enfoque general.

**Palabras clave**: Países Bajos, prevención del extremismo violento (PEV), enfoque general, radicalización

The Netherlands has experienced relatively few terrorist attacks compared to other Western European countries like Belgium or France. Even so, the Netherlands has not escaped extremist violence completely. The murder of filmmaker Theo van Gogh in 2004 by Mohammed Bouyeri, a young extremist of Moroccan descent, had a major impact on Dutch society. More recently, attacks in Amsterdam (2018), The Hague (2019), and in particular in Utrecht (2019) where four people were killed in a tram shooting, show that violent extremists have been active in the Netherlands as well. In addition, since 2012 over 300 young Dutch people have left for conflict areas in Syria and Iraq to join jihadist groups. A large majority of them have since died or have been imprisoned in camps in the region. Still, the threat of radicalism, extremism and terrorism by foreign fighters remains due to their possible return to the Netherlands.

**The broad Dutch approach aims at the early recognition of radicalisation processes in both individuals and groups and attempts to take away breeding grounds of radicalisation.**

Since the murder of Theo van Gogh, the Dutch government has formulated extensive policy programmes with the aim of preventing new attacks (Vermeulen and Bovenkerk, 2012; Vermeulen, 2014). The starting point of many of these programmes is that psychological, social and political processes are at the core of violent extremism and take place simultaneously in a radicalisation process (Van der Woude, 2009). These processes are individual, multilayered, complicated and vary in terms of timespan. In order to account for this complexity, Dutch authorities have developed a so-called 'broad approach', which targets many different factors (socio-economic, ideological, cultural or social) of violent extremism. The broad Dutch approach aims at the early recognition of radicalisation processes in both individuals and groups and attempts to take away breeding grounds of radicalisation (Abels, 2012). In 2016, the National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security (NCTV) described the implementation of the broad Dutch approach as an integral strategy in which "local, national and international governments work together with civil society organizations, companies and key figures to take preventive, repressive and curative measures" (NCTV, 2016).

While the broad Dutch approach covers a variety of different domains, it has a strong focus on tackling social issues in an attempt to prevent violent extremism. It stems from the idea that extremism is bred in a certain social environment that needs to be changed in order to prevent more people from becoming extremists (Van der Woude, 2009; Vermeulen, 2014). Therefore community engagement, in the sense of policymakers wanting to engage with communities and groups susceptible to extremist ideologies, plays an important role in the

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Dutch approach. However, community engagement comes with specific policy dilemmas, such as how to select partners (moderate or rather radical) and with what exact goal community engagement should be used (Vermeulen and Bovenkerk, 2012). Community engagement can also have negative effects such as the creation of suspect communities (Vermeulen, 2014). So even though it is an important element of the Dutch approach, it is not undisputed.

Besides the importance of community engagement, the broad Dutch approach has a strong focus on the prevention of violent extremism (PVE). In order to prevent individuals from becoming violent extremists, one needs to have a clear idea of what constitutes violent extremism, which factors influence it and what the different phases in radicalisation processes are. In order to prevent something, policymakers have to intervene at an earlier stage when the policy problem, in this case violent extremism, has not yet occurred. Phases of that process need to be identified first before preventive policies can be formulated (Van Heelsum and Vermeulen, 2018). A first issue of creating PVE policy is therefore that such factors and phases need to be identified before one can intervene in a radicalisation process. Second, preventive measures assume a process in which an individual becomes more extreme and therefore more dangerous. Policymakers want to intervene early in that process to make sure that the group of potential extremists remains small. However, especially the first phases of the radicalisation process are contested and difficult to define (Kundnani, 2012). That is why policymakers and practitioners struggle with recognizing early signs of radicalisation, while the risk of stigmatisation is significant (Vermeulen, 2014).

Gielen (2017, 2019 and 2020) presents a useful conceptual model of policies to counter violent extremism (CVE) that entails three elements: primary prevention, secondary prevention and tertiary prevention. Primary prevention comprises broad prevention activities concentrated on eliminating the breeding grounds and root causes of violent extremism, such as community engagement and educational programmes focusing on citizenship, resilience and positive identity formation. Primary prevention relates mostly with the first phases of the radicalisation process in which it is important that practitioners are trained to identify potential extremists. Secondary prevention is more individually oriented. It focuses on vulnerable individuals and individuals who are already showing signs of extreme views and behaviour, but have not yet become violent. The Dutch person-centred approach (PGA), which will be described in more detail later, is a good example of secondary prevention. Interventions in this phase are directed towards extremist ideology and risk factors that may lead to violent extremism. In tertiary prevention the focus is also individual, but for those who have actually turned to violent extremism, such as (returned) foreign

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fighters. The objective of tertiary prevention is abandonment of the violent extremism path. Exit programmes for returned foreign fighters" are an example of tertiary multiple interventions.

In this article we provide an overview of the Dutch PVE policy over the last 20 years. This serves two different purposes. Firstly, it provides a summary of the most important elements of the Dutch policy for those unfamiliar with it. Secondly, and more importantly, it allows us to further discuss two important elements of Dutch PVE policy as discussed above: community engagement and the process/phase model. This discussion can be used by policymakers and practitioners to further consider and understand some of the critical dilemmas that play an important role in the development of PVE policy. We first provide an overview of the Dutch approach and then discuss the phase model and community engagement. We end with a short discussion about what the overview of the Dutch approach can teach us.

# An overview of Dutch PVE policies from 2000 to the present day[1]

## From 2000 to 2004: the beginning of the broad approach

The Netherlands has a fairly quiet history of terrorist attacks. During the 1970s and 1980s, Dutch society experienced a series of hijackings, hostage takings and other types of attacks from a wide range of actors, such as South Moluccan activists, the Red Army Faction (RAF) and the Irish Republican Army (IRA). After these tumultuous years the Netherlands experienced fewer acts of extremist violence and counterterrorism policy became less urgent. It was not until 2001 that increasing attention was paid to the threat of political Islam, when two young Dutch men were killed in Kashmir after they travelled there for jihad. It became clear that Dutch youth could be radicalised and recruited by terrorist organizations, and it gave the Netherlands a first-hand experience of the foreign fighter phenomenon.

At the time there was "no major risk that society will be confronted with terrorist attacks on Dutch territory in the foreseeable future", according to

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1. This section is based on Abels (2012).

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the National Security Service (BVD, 2001: 33). Still, increased awareness of potential extremism led to the development of the so-called 'broad approach to terrorism'. This was described by the government in a letter to parliament as an approach to "prevent processes of radicalisation by keeping political organizations or groups promoting extreme, intolerant and undemocratic goals within the boundaries of the democratic legal order through a nuanced approach" (TK, 2002a: 6). The Minister of the Interior stated that combating (Islamic) terrorism was not only about catching perpetrators, but should also, and indeed primarily, focus on the prevention of radicalisation processes (TK 2003: 10-11). Inspired by the Kashmir incident, an important part of the broad approach became tackling recruitment for violent extremist groups (TK 2002b: 2). Along these lines, the director of the General Intelligence and Security Service (AIVD) argued that the broad approach implied that "terrorism should not be combated as an isolated phenomenon but in combination with adjacent phenomena of radicalization and recruitment" (Akerboom 2003: 4). He also stated that "effective counterterrorism mainly consists of taking preventive measures" (idem: 5). This shows that already in the early stages of the development of the broad approach, the main focus was on prevention.

## From 2004 to 2011: the implementation of the broad approach

Even though the idea of the broad approach was conceived and broadly accepted, it was not immediately put into practice. In 2004, following the attacks in Madrid and on Theo van Gogh, the need for counterterrorism policy became more urgent, whereby the prevention of radicalisation received even more attention (Abels, 2012: 3). In the same year, the National Coordinator for Counterterrorism (NCTb, in its Dutch acronym) was appointed, which in 2012 was renamed the National Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Security (NCTV, in its Dutch acronym). The NCTb was given the task of making the Dutch counterterrorism policy a coherent whole, in which the preventive and repressive components dovetailed well.

In the years following the appointment of the NCTb, the Dutch anti-radicalisation policy really started taking shape, with a coherent approach aimed at both repression and prevention. In 2007 the broad approach was set out in more concrete terms in the Polarisation and Radicalisation Action Plan 2007-2011 (BZK, 2007). This report increased the scope of the broad approach by explicitly linking polarisation to violent extremism for the first time, and stressing the need to tackle polarisation as part of the counterterrorism strategy.

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The Action Plan consisted of programmes and projects that would lead to less segregation, less isolation and fewer parallel societies in the Netherlands. Indirectly this meant that the Dutch authorities had identified segregation as a factor and a first phase in the process of radicalisation. One way of making sure that immigrant communities would become less isolated was by improving ties with these communities via so-called key figures within Muslim communities, as a form of community engagement (ibid.: 22) The Action Plan also made a distinction between national and local levels, emphasizing that combating radicalisation takes place mainly at the local level (ibid.: 11). In addition, the plan stated that the removal of breeding grounds for radicalisation is not only done through policy specifically designed for PVE, but also through general policy that contributes to tackling these breeding grounds, such as promoting labour participation and combating discrimination (ibid.: 16).

## From 2011 to 2015: national counterterrorism strategies

From 2011 onwards, the NCTV has devised a National Counterterrorism Strategy every four years in order to create an integrated and coherent national approach to terrorism. The first of these was the National Counterterrorism Strategy 2011-2015 (NCTV, 2011). In this strategy, the broad approach is explicitly mentioned several times as the guideline for the national counterterrorism policy. The strategy is split up into five pillars: acquiring (information), preventing, defending, preparing, and prosecuting (ibid.: 38). Although every pillar is important in its own way, the government's focus is on preventing violent extremism (idem: 9). This means that the other pillars are either in support of prevention or become relevant once preventive measures are no longer useful.

Like many other countries, the Netherlands was caught by surprise by the issue of foreign fighters that travelled to Syria and Iraq in 2012. Due to a lack of concrete threats in the preceding years, Dutch authorities were not able to tackle the phenomenon at an early stage (i.e. the early phases of radicalisation) (Noordegraaf *et al.*, 2016: 112). In 2014, the AIVD reported that the renewed jihadist threat had developed "stealthily and partially in secret" (AIVD, 2004:11), which could explain the inability of the Netherlands to tackle the foreign fighter issue early on. Among other things, the increased threat of foreign fighters and the expansion of domestic jihadism led to the creation of the Integrated Approach to Jihadism Action Programme (V&J, 2014). The goal of this integrated approach is to combat jihadism by protecting democracy and the rule of law, weakening the jihadist movement in the Netherlands and

removing the breeding grounds for radicalisation (ibid.: 2). The approach was set up to intensify existing measures and to create new measures on the basis of the threat posed by jihadism (ibid., 2017: 5).

The influence of the broad approach on the action programme is clear. The programme deals not only with the prosecution of violent jihadists, but focuses on tackling adjacent phenomena such as recruitment, discrimination and Islamophobia as well (ibid., 2014). It mainly concentrates on the prevention of radicalisation and adds new measures such as the establishment of a support facility for friends and families of radicalised individuals and a rigorous fight against the spread of radicalising, hateful (online) jihadist content. It also aims to improve community engagement and cooperation with imams and other key figures in Muslim communities (ibid.: 17). Another important element of the programme is the improvement of the approach to (returning) foreign fighters, introducing new measures such as the revocation of their Dutch citizenship (idem: 6).

An evaluation of the action programme showed that the integrated approach led to better alliances within and between the social and the security domains and to the development of knowledge in organizations involved at the local level (V&J 2017: 7). The Integrated Approach to Jihadism, based on the broad approach, has thus resulted in a more streamlined fight against jihadism in the Netherlands. It has contributed to the goal of the NCTV to make the Dutch counterterrorism policy a coherent whole. The Integrated Approach to Jihadism Action Programme has therefore had a key impact in strengthening the Dutch counterterrorism policy and consolidating the broad approach.

## From 2016 to the present

In 2016, the NCTV published the National Counterterrorism Strategy 2016-2020. This strategy "connects all government partners in the joint approach to extremism and terrorism in the Netherlands" (NCTV, 2016). The broad approach continues to predominate, while like the previous strategy, the focus is on the prevention of extremism and terrorism (ibid.: 7). The purpose of the preventive part of the strategy is to prevent and disrupt extremism and terrorism, while it aims to prevent fear, accretion, threats and attacks (ibid.: 13).

During the preceding years, the Netherlands had seen more than 300 foreign fighters travel to Syria and Iraq to join the civil conflicts in the region (AIVD, 2021). The counterterrorism strategy adapted to this phenomenon, and therefore had a primary focus on the jihadist movement at both national and international levels (NCTV, 2016: 7). Terrorist attacks in Amsterdam (2018)

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and Utrecht (2019) did not have a significant impact on the counterterrorism strategy, since they 'fit[ted] within the current threat assessment' (ibid., 2019: 3). The strategy was evaluated after the attack in Utrecht and was shown to be working as expected (Woestenburg, 2021). Therefore, the strategy was not changed in response to the attacks.

Since 2016, many new organizations and institutions have been created as part of the counterterrorism strategy. One of these actors is the Social Stability Expertise Unit (ESS in its Dutch acronym), which acts as an advisor to municipalities on P/CVE policy. It plays a large role in advising municipalities on building (key figures) networks for the prevention and intervention of radicalisation and polarisation (NCTV, 2019: 8). Within the key figures (network) method, influential people in hard-to-reach communities – where the risk of radicalisation and polarisation is high – act as the 'eyes and ears' of the government (ESS, 2018). As such, it is a form of community engagement that is central to the Dutch approach. To further expand and integrate this policy, the ESS created a guide for the establishment of local networks of key figures (ibid.). The key figures method is discussed in more detail later on.

The ESS has also created an evaluation toolkit for municipalities to analyse the effectiveness of their prevention policy themselves (ibid., 2019). This is a crucial development in the evaluation in PVE policy, as there is a great need for evidence-based policies. Beside this initiative, the ESS continuously launches new initiatives for municipalities to strengthen their approach to radicalisation. For example, they organize knowledge labs on the extreme right and webinars on evidence-based work. These support programmes are part of the National Counterterrorism Strategy (NCTV, 2016: 8).

Another important part of the prevention strategy is tackling terrorist propaganda and the use of digital media (ibid., 2019: 12). In light of this goal, the Internet Referral Unit (IRU) has been set up to combat online jihadist content. Setting up this unit fits within the framework of the previously mentioned Integrated Approach to Jihadism Action Programme and its goal to fight the spread of radicalising, hateful (online) jihadist content. The programme thus continues to be valuable to the Dutch approach to counterterrorism.

Alongside the ESS and the IRU, there is a wide range of actors involved in the Dutch counterterrorism strategy. The School and Safety Foundation (SSV, in its Dutch acronym) is an organization that supports schools in creating and maintaining a socially safe climate. With regard to radicalisation, they have been giving training courses since 2015 to teachers and others on identifying, reporting, preventing and reversing radicalisation. The National Extremism Support Centre (LSE, in its Dutch acronym) provides advice and guidance

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to for instance professionals or family members of radicalising individuals. In this way further radicalisation (of others) can be prevented. Professionals and volunteers who work with young people can also contact the Youth Extremism and Polarisation Prevention Platform (Platform JEP, in its Dutch acronym) for information, knowledge, advice and action perspectives with regard to radicalisation. The LSE therefore supports people that encounter actual radicalisation, while Platform JEP focuses on young people and is also aimed at the prevention of radicalisation and extremism.

A final important part of the Dutch counterterrorism strategy is the person-centred approach (PGA, in its Dutch acronym)[2]. The PGA is used when individuals become radicalised themselves, radicalise others or try to become a foreign fighter. The idea behind the PGA is that there is no 'one size fits all' approach to intervening in individual radicalisation processes, because "combating radicalisation needs customisation" (NCTV, 2016: 4). Whereas the PGA used to deal solely with disrupting terrorist activities (the latter phase in the phase model), from 2011 onwards it has been characterized by a 'softer' approach also implemented in earlier phases, which is "focused on positive interventions and is primarily based on the principle that the conscious person can build a 'normal' life as quickly as possible, as an alternative to the radicalisation process in which he or she is involved" (ibid., 2011: 68). The PGA became more prominent when it was further expanded in the National Counterterrorism Strategy 2016-2020. In short, the PGA starts when signals of radicalisation are picked up at the local level. The signals can be detected by the police, security services or other local actors. In response to these signals, a multidisciplinary discussion meeting is set up, in which municipalities and their local partners assess the threat and work out a plan to intervene in an individual's radicalisation process (ibid., 2016: 14). As a part of the approach, a network analysis is conducted to detect people vulnerable to radicalisation who are close to the targeted radicalised individual. The PGA also offers family support (VNG, 2015: 6). The PGA is essentially an embodiment of the broad approach, since a wide variety of actors work together to deliver preventive, repressive and curative measures in order to combat radicalisation and violent extremism.

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2. For more information on the PGA: the NCTV and the Ministry of Security and Justice produced a manual for municipalities, the police, the Public Prosecutor's Office and other involved partners in the chain (NCTV 2017). A shorter manual was created by the Association of Dutch Municipalities (VNG 2015). This report discusses the tasks of municipalities in combating radicalization.

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This brief overview of the core elements of the broad Dutch approach against violent extremism shows that the country's counterterrorism strategy has a primary focus on prevention. It is a decentralized strategy in which a wide range of actors at both the national and local levels work together on the creation and implementation of P/CVE policy. The next section discusses the practicalities and main dilemmas for policymakers and practitioners that arise when formulating and implementing policy within the broad Dutch approach.

# Phase model to prevention for policymakers and practitioners[3]

**The analysis of the core elements of the Dutch broad approach against violent extremism shows that the country's counterterrorism strategy has a primary focus on prevention. It is a decentralized strategy in which a wide range of actors at both the national and local levels work together on the creation and implementation of P/CVE policy.**

Based on work by Slootman and Tillie (2006), Van Heelsum and Vermeulen (2018) presented a model with four phases that is often used by policymakers to formulate PVE policy when using a broad approach such as the one described in this paper. Some sort of phase model thinking seems inevitable for any form of preventive policies, as policymakers and practitioners need a pre-constructed notion of the order in which the phases of radicalisation process develop. What, and when, are the different possibilities to intervene either in a primary, secondary or tertiary manner? This policy-oriented model provides such a framework and can be linked with the PVE policy of the broad Dutch approach described.

Phase 1 in this model focuses on the breeding grounds from which extremist ideas and ideologies can further develop. Policymakers intervening in this phase find the first opportunities to react when certain people or groups show signs of radicalisation. These signs can be frustration or unhappiness, for instance caused by poor social conditions of the group they identify with, but also personal

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3. This section is based on Van Heelsum and Vermeulen (2018).

circumstances such as dropping out of school or unemployment. Psychological literature about people in insecure situations, who perceive exclusion and feel disconnected from society in general, shows that they could typically be inclined to 'turn their back on society' and look for an alternative group with extreme ideas (Doosje *et al.*, 2016). Perceived deprivation can – according to some authors – lead to a defensive reaction involving fighting unfair treatment, which in the long run might be the first step towards an extremist ideology for some individuals (Moghaddam, 2005: 163). This has inspired policymakers to see poor socio-economic conditions (individual or collective) as the breeding ground for extremist ideologies and the possible start of a radicalisation process. Following the logic of the process, the aim of preventive policies in this phase is that potentially threatening individuals should be stopped from climbing Moghaddam's staircase and eventually getting recruited into a terrorist organization. This basically means addressing their grievances before it is too late. Personal victimisation and political grievances are two of the potential mechanisms at the individual level (McCauley and Moskalenko, 2008: 418), so these could be addressed by policymakers. Dutch authorities have often used this as the starting point for their primary preventive policy programmes (Vermeulen and Bovenkerk, 2012). Since 2004, all kinds of social activities and programmes involving young people who have been labelled as susceptible to possible extremist ideologies have been carried out in the Netherlands. An example of this is the previously mentioned Polarisation and Radicalisation Action Plan.

Stopping ingroup-outgroup categorisation, which easily occurs in the minds of frustrated individuals who reinforce each other, is another relevant strategy within the phase model, particularly halting the negative stereotyping of an outgroup (Tajfel and Turner, 1979 and 1986; Allport, 1954). In the worst cases, when a conflict extends, the outgroup members are described as 'wild' or 'strange' or they are dehumanized. Policy interventions that relate to this phase might be directed at discouraging susceptible individuals from getting to this disaffected state and/or blocking the step from general discontent to stereotypical and radical ingroup-outgroup thinking. Many different social programmes targeting stigmatisation, polarisation and discrimination have been part of Dutch preventive policy measurements since 2004, as has been described above.

Phase ii focuses on coping with extremist ideology itself, and here we enter into the secondary preventive realm. Individuals in this phase are not willing to have any kind of discussion about these rules and regulations and find it increasingly difficult to function in an environment where others have different opinions and follow different value systems. For instance,

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a person feels it is impossible to work with colleagues of the opposite sex, which will hinder him or her in participating in the labour market. This is the step from general dissatisfaction to finding the 'solution' in a certain ideology such as religious conservatism or extreme scapegoating of a certain group. In this phase, policymakers might try to engage with extremist ideologies in the sense that they present a counter narrative or explain to individuals embedded in radical networks what the possible consequences are of their lifestyle – they may lose connections with family and old friends, for example, and will most likely encounter difficulties in finding work. Parts of the aforementioned Dutch person-centred approach (PGA) fall into this phase.

Phase III in the policy model is meant to stop individuals or groups that have been identified as radical but that have not (yet) entered into the phase of planning or executing (political) violence. Here we are in between a secondary and tertiary form of prevention. The aim at this point is to halt negative reasoning of individuals or potential group processes. Subgroup formation might have taken place, based on shared opinions such as 'society should not have allowed our exclusion', or 'the rules and laws in this society are not sufficient or maybe even wrong'. The policy in this phase is an attempt to channel collective criticism towards the existing system of rules and laws, before – according to this model – it develops into the vision that the laws are unfair or simply wrong and before the phase of de-legitimisation of the political system is reached. This can advance further, with (some) individuals taking the law into their own hands. Most of the PGA can be linked to this phase.

The last phase, phase IV, focuses on the radicalised individual who is planning or actually using violence, which is clearly part of tertiary preventive policy programmes. The policy interventions that deal with this fourth phase are related to police or security service efforts, rather than regular social policy efforts by municipalities, and focus on the individual. Local governments consider it their task to arrange preventive measures that are not exactly police work, for instance tracking potential terrorists to avoid the extreme damage they could potentially cause. For policymakers, it is highly relevant to distinguish the moment and circumstances when negative attitudes transform into actual violent behaviour. However, this is extremely difficult to predict and remains a big issue for policymakers and practitioners.

# Community engagement[4]

Community engagement is, as mentioned, part and parcel of the broad Dutch approach to countering violent extremism. One of the main instruments for local authorities in community engagement is setting up partnerships with community-based organizations, mosques, (self-appointed) community/religious leaders, and other key figures from the community (Roex and Vermeulen, 2019).

In many instances, local preventive policies against radicalisation include partnerships with different organizations and spokespersons from local communities (for a further description of the community engagement approach as described here, see Roex and Vermeulen, 2019). O'Toole *et al.* (2016) argue that local governments often seek to instil discipline and 'self-governance' among Muslims by establishing partnerships with actors from the Muslim communities (see also Martin, 2014). Communities are thus formulated as the battlegrounds for policy programmes to reject the ideology of violent extremism and to moderate entire communities (Heath-Kelly, 2013). This process

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entails a series of wide-ranging interventions in Muslim religious, social and civil structures, with the aim of reforming, managing, regulating and 'disciplining' the conduct of those who are seen as potentially risky (O'Toole *et al.*, 2016). These preventive policies can easily result in creating suspect communities, as the entire community is targeted and expected to participate in this self-disciplining process (Vermeulen, 2014; Cherney and Hartley, 2015).

In general, within community engagement strategies, a broad institutional engagement with 'moderate' representatives of a group is pursued in an attempt to 'normalise' communities (Laurence, 2009). This is done to try and make them more 'similar' to mainstream society, so to speak. Warren (2001: 34) states that governments, when confronted with violent underrepresented groups, often seek to deflect political problems and issues onto quasi-corporatist structures. Governments will look for some sort of 'voluntary' self-regulation rather than a

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4. This section is based on Roex and Vermeulen (2019).

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direct resolution of the issue of underrepresentation and social inequality itself in order to anticipate the threat that comes from these groups. Akkerman *et al.* (2004) argue that there are good reasons to distrust such quasi-corporatist structures from above. They believe that networks and associations involved in state-initiated policymaking will become dependent on state aid in order to function. The problem is not only that associations become vulnerable to shifts in public policy, but also that such networks become skewed excessively in the direction of the state. Only organizations and community leaders willing to work within a fixed policy approach can participate – organizations and leaders that are not necessarily the most relevant actors[5].

In such preventive and 'government through community' approaches (Rose, 1996; Roex and Vermeulen, 2019) there seems little room for agency of the actors and community organizations, as authorities decide upon policy measures and the way communities play a role in them. O'Toole *et al.* (2016) call for a more practice-based approach to this issue. Partnerships and quasi-corporatist structures can theoretically also open up the possibility that actors within governance spaces may adapt or change formal rules of community governance. Such an approach recognizes the potential for the exercise of agency by different actors in reinterpreting, appropriating, contesting or resisting governance practices. In studying local practices of approaches targeting violent radicalisation, they found significant different possibilities for community actors to interpret the rules applied and use the funds to realise their own visions. Vermeulen (2014), studying local approaches in different European cities, also illustrates different examples in which Muslim actors in different circumstances attempt – sometimes relatively successfully – to negotiate the terms in which policies and programmes targeting violent extremism are implemented. It is important to note here that this differs from the traditional model of pre-emption. In the traditional model, as described above, authorities use preventive arguments to further marginalize groups to make sure that these groups can no longer pose any threat.

Within the community-based approach, one of the policy measures that was very successful in the Netherlands before 2015 was the so-called key figures method (Kouwenhoven and Blokker, 2017). In this method, influential people in hard-to-reach communities – where the risk of radicalisation and polarisation is high – are used as the 'eyes and ears' of the government (ESS, 2018). A key

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5. For further descriptions of the community engagement approach, see Roex and Vermeulen, 2019; Rose, 1996; Marinetto, 2003; Uitermark, 2014; and Raggazi, 2016.

figure is a socially engaged individual with access to broad and diverse informal and formal networks. He or she is able to establish connections between these networks and can therefore occupy a key position in a municipality, district or neighbourhood. Key figures are able to reach groups that are sometimes difficult for municipalities and regular institutions to reach (ibid.).

Key figures can occupy a variety of formal or informal positions, including youth workers, community police officers, teachers, and board members of migrant organizations or religious institutions. Municipalities can choose to work with individual key figures or to build a key figures network (ESS, 2018). Within a network, key figures work together to carry out their tasks. The main advantage of a network is that knowledge and expertise can be shared between the key figures. This allows them to perform their tasks better, and key figures in their neighbourhood, district or municipality are not alone.

The first preventive aim of the key figures policy is removing the breeding ground for radicalisation. This mainly concerns increasing awareness and resilience within communities. This can be done, for example, by organizing events aimed at promoting social cohesion, connection, solidarity and dialogue. Another example is debate and discussion meetings about polarisation and radicalisation with young people and/or parents. A second aim is mediation after incidents that are the result of radicalisation or polarisation or that can promote radicalisation and polarisation. Key figures can probe the community after major international, national or local events. They can keep an eye on developments in their community and try to ensure that emotions do not run too high.

Identifying radicalisation within the community is the first task of intervention by key figures. Key figures are close to potentially radicalising young people and can receive signals of radicalisation. These signals can be shared with other key figures and/or municipal officials. A second task is de-escalation of radicalisation and polarisation. This is not about deradicalisation, but about removing tensions around radicalisation and polarisation. Key figures can provide practical, emotional and social support and guidance in preventing radicalisation and polarisation. They can also mediate in polarisation between or within population groups.

Like the personal approach of the PGA (see above), the key figures method is an embodiment of the *broad approach*. The policy is primarily aimed at removing breeding grounds for radicalisation, and is therefore preventive in nature. Instead of focusing on tackling perpetrators, an attempt is made to tackle the problem at its core. In addition to preventing radicalisation, action is taken when people are already radicalising. The key figures method therefore also has crucial repressive and curative components, and is an important example of

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how the broad approach is put into practice. Vermeulen and Bovenkerk (2012) identified three policy dilemmas linked to community engagement within a PVE policies framework:

1. The *dilemma of representativeness*: If policymakers want to cooperate with a certain community, there is a need for representative spokespersons. The usual question here is: who represents a particular community that is diverse and consists of different fractions? The search for representative key figures can lead to insufficient representation, or result in the unwanted reinforcement of the position or identity of a specific sub group, which can in turn give rise to (more) polarisation and possible extremism. This is one of the biggest dilemmas policymakers are confronted with when selecting key figures.
2. The *dilemma of determining* who "the *enemy*" is, and who is a credible, loyal and reliable partner: Authorities, policymakers and policy practitioners want to clarify which groups and organizations can be trusted, and do not pose a threat, and which organizations cannot, and do. However, by using a broad definition of the enemy, groups can be too quickly stigmatized and excluded, which can further enhance breeding grounds for extremism.
3. The *dilemma of choosing* suitable partners: Through cooperation with orthodox groups, local authorities can come into contact with the target group. At the same time, it can provide an opportunity for extremist organizations to become involved in policy implementation and gain political influence. This dilemma is closely related to the question of whether authorities should cooperate (selectively) with Islamic organizations in the fight against terrorism in the light of principles such as the neutrality of the government and the separation of church and state.

## Conclusion

In this paper we have described the main characteristics of the Dutch counterterrorist approach. Over the past 20 years, the *broad Dutch approach* has become much more coherent, especially because of the NCTV that was formed to coordinate the efforts by different state agencies and has been able to link different policy actors and develop an overall policy framework for different parts of national and local government. This coherent set of policy measures is characterized by the so-called broad approach – broad in the sense that extremism and radicalisation is understood as a complex phenomenon with different explanatory factors on different levels. Targeting such a phenomenon needs a multi-disciplinary approach

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that involves different agencies and actors inside and outside the state apparatus and at different levels. The person-centred approach (PGA) and the community-based key figures (network) approach are clear examples of how this broad approach is being developed, interpreted and implemented.

This paper further illustrates that the Dutch approach can be understood as a policy model that takes a sort of phasing modelling as the starting point for the preventive elements in its programmes. This means that extremism and radicalisation are understood as a process with individual and collective elements in which a person or a group becomes more and more extreme in their thinking and ideologies and potentially also in their behaviour. Different policy programmes are designed for different phases. Policymakers understand this process as something that is based on a particular interpretation of a perceived unequal situation (individual and/or collective), which is also known to be a breeding ground for radicalisation and extremism.

The final conclusion to be drawn from this overview is that in the last 20 years the focus of Dutch counterterrorist policies has been on prevention. The phrase "Prevention is better than cure" (NCTV 2019: 7) can still be seen as the best way to describe the broad Dutch approach in the policy domain of counterterrorism. It brings a wide variety of public and (semi-)state agencies and actors together in an attempt to prevent the Netherlands from experiencing further violent extremism, albeit not without certain policy dilemmas that remain unresolved.

> **The Dutch approach can be understood as a policy model that takes some sort of phasing modelling as the starting point for the preventive elements in their programmes. This means that extremism and radicalisation are understood as a process with individual and collective elements in which a person or a group becomes more and more extreme in their thinking and ideologies and potentially also in their behaviour.**

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