WAYS FORWARD

WHO LEADS AND WHO DOES WHAT?
MULTI-AGENCY COORDINATION, COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, AND PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

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Advancing the idea of "resilience" in societies in general, and in cities from a more specific point of view, the topic of violent or violence-promoting extremism certainly has to be addressed along with the efforts to prevent and/or counter such extremist movements. This holds true for literally all cities in the European Union, albeit with different centres of gravity. Be it "traditional" political extremism – in left-wing or right-wing form – nationalist/separatist movements, or extremist religious ideologies or those with religious overtones, the political landscape has undergone some troubling developments over the last years, placing the topic of violent extremism high on any government's agenda.

This is not to deny that there is still no common understanding of "extremism", and that the approaches followed by EU member states vary considerably. Still, the experiences of several decades (in some contexts) or at least several years (especially with regard to violence-promoting Islamism, i.e. jihadism) are sufficient to draw some general observations and consequently some recommendations on how to build resilience against violent extremism, i.e. a society capability of resistance against those extremist ideologies able to influence the behaviour of significant parts of the population in today's cities.

Taking into consideration the examples presented in this edited volume (most notably those of the cities of Mechelen in Belgium and Aarhus in Denmark) this contribution on the mechanisms of a multi-agency approach takes a generalising angle. It follows the basic assumption that prevention starts – and works best – at the local level.

In this chapter I will present the different actors in local efforts to counter violent or violence-promoting extremism and their mutual dependency, the need for a holistic strategy including all governmental and non-governmental partners, the necessity of a thorough coordination of all activities under this strategy, and the importance of community engagement as part of this overall effort. Drawing on the main conclusions presented at the end of the chapter, I provide some policy recommendations for decision-makers in the field of CVE both within governmental and parliamentary positions to indicate areas

of potential improvement of already ongoing efforts, or of possible new approaches to enhancing public security – at the local as well as regional and national levels.

Who does what? Actors in local countering violent extremism (CVE)

Before one can address the question of "leading" any joint effort of various actors in CVE, it must be clear which actors should be included in the overall effort.

In the context of countering violent or violence-promoting extremism (that is, individuals or groups who engage in ideology-driven violent activities or provide support to others engaging in violent activities either through material support or through forming a community with a shared extremist worldview, thus indirectly facilitating the decision of others to engage in violent activities), many people automatically turn their attention to the security agencies, most importantly towards the police. The police – traditionally one of the most trusted public institutions (at least in western European countries) – is the default "turn to" agency in questions of security, in most Western countries complemented by one or several agencies responsible for domestic intelligence in the area of political extremism.

However, as in many areas of criminology, security agencies play an obviously important but by no means exclusive role in countering violent or violence-promoting extremism. The whole concept of preventing violent extremism – as different as the specific strategies may be in different countries – is to prevent individuals from being exposed to violence-promoting extremist views without the possibility of accessing other points of view as well, and to prevent individuals from adapting these violence-promoting extremist views themselves (also described as "radicalisation"). These developments are not the prime responsibility of security agencies, and the tools available to security agencies more often than not are not suited to dealing with these situations.

A principle often neglected is that "social policy is security policy". This rather paradoxical sounding line of thought highlights the realisation that social circumstances and the individual's social situation directly influence the individual's vulnerability to deviant behaviour. So who is taking a role in addressing these questions? The additional actors and stakeholders involved cover a broad range. They comprise – depending on the very different administrative layout in the European Union member states – various governmental bodies and agencies, to include, but not limited to:

- youth services, as teenagers and adolescents are among the most susceptible to extremist ideologies, and oftentimes have to cope with real or perceived problems that lay the groundwork for a subsequent adoption of an extremist worldview;
- social services, as personal and economical difficulties play an important role in reducing an individual's resilience against extremist ideas;
- the educational system – from child care through school to university – in a dual role: first with its task of conveying societal values and a common understanding of human rights and the rule of law, and to

provide information on extremism; and second in being observant about young people's development and possible indications of radicalisation, thus being able to refer the individual to counselling by actors in or outside the educational system;
- labour services, strongly linked to the explanation above with regard to the economic status of an individual as one factor in his or her vulnerability to extremist ideology;
- regulatory and other administrative authorities (especially migration agencies), as their decisions may influence an individual's behaviour in one way or another;
- the justice system – in criminal law as well as in civil law –from prosecution decisions over court rulings to (possibly) the prison system;

whether they are organised at the local, regional and/or state or national level.

And that is only the state actors to be involved – a different, but nevertheless vital role can (and should!) be played by non-governmental stakeholders, to include community organisations of different kinds, religious communities, welfare organisations, and especially organisations offering counselling in social affairs (or even those specialised in preventing or countering extremism).

On "leading" (or: the multi-agency approach)

Acknowledging the multitude of actors and stakeholders to be considered in developing and implementing CVE activities prompts the next question: Can this broad range of relevant governmental and non-state actors be led effectively?

In an ideal world, all government agencies would interact seamlessly and harmonise their activities effortlessly towards a joint aim. Unfortunately we do not live in this ideal world yet. Inter-agency cooperation was and still is an area that needs constant work, especially when trying to combine the activities of the multitude of actors described above. But even within one area of the executive branch (say, different police forces) conflicts or at least a lack of coordination have occurred in the past. Here, as with all other actors, the agencies (at the institutional level) and the agents (on a personal level) have to acknowledge and embrace the fact that they contribute to the same overall effort.

Experiences of the past have shown time and again that the well-designed and flawlessly executed activities of one agency can be completely negated by an ill-timed decision of another agency; not out of ill will, in most cases, but because of different strategies and, most important, a lack of communication and coordination.

Nevertheless, with all these actors involved, a concept oftentimes called for is obviously not realisable in a modern administrative state: there is no apparent "lead agency" to direct all the others – that holds especially true for the security agencies. Given the diverse responsibilities of the various government branches, and adding a certain degree of conscious separation of powers to the mix, it becomes clear that no "leader" can be identified to command all activities in this area.

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Thus, to effectively implement a joint governmental strategy to prevent and/or to counter violent or violence-promoting extremism it is paramount to ensure a common understanding of the task and a common strategy to deal with it – that is, weaving all particular avenues into one holistic approach. Whatever terminology your organisation utilises, be it jurisdiction (law enforcement), area of operation (military), or field of responsibility, all actors have not only to understand, but to accept and pursue their respective role in the overall approach.

The military has long since coined an expression for this avenue: The combined and joint operation. In the civilian world, the "multi-agency approach" describes the same concept.

Of course, efforts have to be made so that all actors (both at the institutional and individual levels) not only (grudgingly) accept this approach, but embrace it and orient their efforts towards this joint strategy.

However, even the most inspired, pro-active and aggressive collaborative efforts of a variety of actors are prone to failure if there is no provision for at least a basic level of information sharing and harmonisation – i.e. a coordinating role. This local CVE coordinator should ensure optimal cooperation and collaboration between the agencies and other governmental actors involved, as well as the focused use of the available resources. Additionally, the local CVE coordinator should serve as the main (but by no means exclusive!) point of contact for the outreach to non-governmental partners, thus ensuring a truly holistic approach *(see below on community engagement)*.

The importance of a local/municipal approach aside, it would be a mistake to focus solely at the city level, though. While it is true that every city has its own specific characteristics and challenges, many topics can be found in multiple or even in all cities. To provide for quick sharing of experiences, it is advisable to establish corresponding CVE coordination positions at the regional and the national levels that may act as information-sharing hubs for all local CVE coordinators. This is even more important when there is – like in Germany – no joint national strategy on preventing and countering violent or violence-promoting extremism, as there is no consensual framework within which to operate.

To summarise:

Countering violent or violence-promoting extremism is an area of responsibility, especially at the local level. To successfully address this topic all efforts should be integrated into a holistic overall strategy including all governmental and non-governmental actors and stakeholders. While, due to the broad variety of actors involved a "command structure" does not seem feasible, effective coordination is key to ensuring efficient cooperation.

Community engagement

Having contemplated the structure of a promising CVE approach, I want to turn to some select aspects of how to integrate non-governmental actors into the overall approach, and how to create active involvement of society in this development.

For the sake of the topic at hand, the improvement of a city's resilience against violent or violence-promoting extremism, community engagement may be defined as inclusion and coordination of civil society with governmental activities.

The prevention of an individual slipping into an extremist worldview is the best way to counter the societal threat of extremism, of course – if it is possible to preclude the spread of extremist views, the threat emanating from individuals or groups adhering to these views is obviously smaller than if society has to deal with a large movement. This is not to belittle the efforts made in the field of deradicalisation, but preventing a fire almost certainly needs fewer resources than extinguishing it.

As Rik Coolsaet convincingly put it, cities (or urban populations) are most vulnerable to violence-promoting extremism because they provide the critical mass that on the one hand due to their sizes fuels a notion of the individual's alienation, and on the other hand enables structures of kinship or friendship crucial for radicalisation.

Therefore, urban communities have to face special challenges in targeting violent or violence-promoting extremism, and should not withdraw to a purely governmental approach, but reach out to civil society and make PVE/CVE a community mission.

Community engagement in this context has many forms and flavours and goes far beyond the scope of this text to provide a comprehensive account of the importance of community engagement in a modern society.

But obviously community engagement has to start from common ground. There have to be principles everyone agrees on, the most important one (in the context of coordination with law-enforcement and other security agencies) being a general acceptance of the rule of law. It is paramount to insist that there are no areas of loosened law, or that there are – especially politically motivated – criminal offences that may be seen as less serious because of their political context. In the modern nation-state it is the government's role to ensure that the law applies to everyone equally, regardless of his or her political, ideological, or religious views or affiliation.

Thus the most important aim for governmental outreach in the realm of security is to encourage the population to take part in upholding the safety and security of their society – an idea that seems to be more obvious than it actually is, as many people seem to have mentally "outsourced" any of their own responsibility to safety and security agencies, not seeing an personal role in the overall context.

Inclusionary narrative

To help with this approach, it may be useful to create a new narrative of inclusion or to emphasise an existing one – a sense of belonging to a larger group, which in this context means the societal community, incarnated in the municipality or city. In providing such a narrative, one that is not rooted in ideas like ethnicity, religion, nation, political affiliation or wealth, the population can bond in a non-exclusionary fashion, thus strengthening the concept of belonging while accepting diversity.

So in the context of preventing or countering violent or violence-promoting extremism the most important task seems to be to avoid groupthink that alienates certain individuals. In most extremist ideologies the cohesion of the ideology's followers is accomplished through a more or less elaborated dichotomic worldview – the in-group being in a constant struggle against the out-group. In several movements this dichotomy has even been discussed quite openly (notably in the left-wing extremist movements of the 1970s, and right now by the jihadist propaganda of the so-called Islamic State, which explicitly calls for the overcoming of what they describe as "grey areas", i.e., societal areas where Muslims and non-Muslims live together in peace and thus deny their simplistic view of a god-given fight between the true believers and the infidels).

One person may have multiple "identities", depending on the context (for example, one might be male, German, Catholic, whereas another one might be female, Turkish, Muslim) but if a society succeeds in proffering a common identity (such as "citizen of Bremen" or "living in Germany"), these other identities may less easily be misused as means of separation.

Cooperation with security agencies

As already pointed out in the first section, security agencies are not the primary actors in governmental approaches to enhance community engagement. They do play a role, however, and it is strongly advisable that they do so.

That said, I might point out the obvious one more time: Outreach of security agencies in community engagement is about information and raising awareness, not about gathering intelligence. Cooperation of security agencies with non-governmental groups or organisations is sometimes mistaken (and quite often actively mislabelled by opposing groups) as spying on the community in question, whereas the idea of "community policing" employed by modern law enforcement agencies at the local level is to provide mutual trust and to establish communication structures for use by both the official and the civic actors.

In the context of preventing and especially of countering radicalisation to extremist views, these structures may be used to provide information for the community, to educate people on current trends of extremist organisations and their approaches to recruiting new followers, and to offer assistance in various stages of a radicalisation process, and conversely as a means for community members to pass on information to social workers or, if applicable, to security agencies to enable them to intervene in radicalisation processes, thus having the chance to help before any real threat develops or a criminal offence is actually committed.

Public-private partnerships

Special attention should be paid to cooperation with private enterprises as they can play a significant role within a local action plan. The topic of public-private partnerships in preventing and countering violent or violence-promoting extremism has to be viewed with two points in mind:

One: Private enterprises as commercial partners in state-run or state-led PVE or CVE activities. Private enterprises and organisations are very often employed in governmental activities to prevent or counter radicalisation processes, covering the entire range from (assistance in) strategy development through consulting and mediation to first-line fieldwork in education, counselling, or even direct deradicalisation.

Two: Talking about resilience, private enterprises have to be considered as partners of governmental actors to empower them to play an active role when confronted with possible incidents of radicalisation.

The exact form of cooperation in this field has to be tailored to the specific situation in any city, but may include:

- **raising awareness** about political and religious extremism;
- **informing** about radicalisation;
- **advising** on possible help capabilities;
- **encouraging** the playing of an active role in community well-being; and
- **acknowledging** the efforts made by commercial actors.

So whether private enterprises are part of the picture as commercial partners in governmental activities or as addressees of a specialised kind of outreach, cooperation and respect, it is key to ensure that they support the overall effort in countering violent or violence-promoting extremism.

Conclusions

So what are the lessons to draw from these considerations? The most important conclusions result into the following three findings.

First of all it is both evident and necessary to view the task of countering violent or violence-promoting extremism not only as the responsibility of security agencies, but as a societal challenge to include many state and non-state actors and stakeholders. It is a complex task that includes many actors at the local, regional, national, and even international levels. Therefore building resilience against violent or violence-promoting extremism has to be seen as a local challenge with strong ties to other cities, and implications for society on a wider scale.

Secondly, due to the complexity of the task and the plurality of actors and stakeholders, preventing and countering violent or violence-promoting extremism cannot be conducted in a centralised top-down manner, especially not as a security-driven effort. The necessary prerequisite for a successful concept is an inspired and willing multi-agency approach in which all actors understand and fully accept and pursue their respective role in the overall approach.

Thirdly, to provide for a truly joint effort, this holistic approach's multitude of endeavours has to be orchestrated by a local CVE coordinator entrusted to ensure optimal cooperation and collaboration between the agencies and other governmental and non-governmental actors involved.

Furthermore, regional and national CVE coordinating hubs should take care of a timely and non-bureaucratic exchange between these local CVE coordinators, ideally as part of an overarching national strategy on countering violent extremism.

Recommendations

So what consequences result from these conclusions? The following policy recommendations address decision-makers in the field of CVE both in governmental and parliamentary positions to indicate areas of potential improvement of already ongoing efforts, or of possible new approaches to enhance public security – at the local as well as at the regional and national levels.

- To improve cities' resilience against violent or violence-promoting extremism, the city should pursue a holistic approach, integrating state actors at the local, the regional, and the national levels, as well as including non-governmental stakeholders in a joint strategy tailored to the specific needs of the community.
- This strategy should take into consideration the lessons learned (both good practices and less successful approaches) in other communities, ideally integrated into a national CVE strategy.
- The governmental part of the local strategy should be viewed as a multi-agency approach: not directed by one branch of the government, but effectively tying in all activities of agencies at the local, the regional, and the national levels, each within their respective areas of responsibility.
  However, to ensure optimal cooperation and collaboration as well as the focused use of – more often than not limited – resources, these activities should be coordinated through a local CVE coordinator. The CVE coordinator should serve as the main (but not exclusive!) point of contact for the outreach to non-governmental partners.
- To provide for quick sharing of experiences, it is advisable to establish corresponding CVE coordination positions at the regional and national levels to act as information-sharing hubs.

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