

**Civil society in preventing violent extremism:
European Fair Skills (EFS), Women/ Gender in Extremism and Prevention (WomEx), Community
Counteracting Radicalisation (CoCoRa) – within the EU Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN)**

Abstract in German:

Den zivilgesellschaftlich Engagierten und nicht staatlichen Praxisfachpersonen aus Vereinen (NGOs) kommt bei der Prävention von gewaltförmigem Extremismus und menschenrechtsfeindlichen Haltungen eine lange unterschätzte Schlüsselrolle zu. Dies betrifft sowohl die Entwicklung von lokalen gesellschaftlichen Selbstheilungskräften (Resilienz) als auch die praktische Durchführung von nachhaltig wirksamen Präventions-, Distanzierungs- und Ausstiegshilfe-Maßnahmen. Sie ist ohne nicht-staatliche Akteure schwerlich vorstellbar. Denn gewaltförmiger Extremismus impliziert immer einen Verlust von Vertrauen in staatliche Autoritäten. Jedoch muss zwei Missverständnissen entschieden entgegnet werden: Die zivilgesellschaftlichen Akteure können diese teilweise hoheitlichen Aufgaben nicht ehrenamtlich erfüllen, und sie können sie nicht alleine meistern.

Im Folgenden werden beispielhaft drei zivilgesellschaftlich basierte Ansätze/ Netzwerke vorgestellt, die mit den weit über hundert anderen Initiativen das Radicalisation Awareness Network der EU Kommission bilden: (1) Der Fair Skills Ansatz verbindet jugendkulturelle Kreativ-Workshops mit postklassischer politischer Bildung und setzt zudem Gruppenselbsterfahrung ein. Fair Skills wird derzeit bei osteuropäischen Partner-Vereinen erprobt (EFS). (2) Das WomEx-Netzwerk umfasst Ansätze der genderspezifischen Arbeit mit Mädchen/Frauen sowie der gender-sensiblen Arbeit mit Männern und Frauen im Rahmen der Menschenrechts- und Extremismusprävention. (3) Das dänische EU Projekt Community Counteracting Radicalisation (CoCoRa) entwickelt zusammen mit Vereinen aus vier weiteren EU Ländern eine bottom-up Verfahren, in dem betroffene Bezirke, Gemeinden und/oder Institutionen von unten und von ihren jungen Leuten her ein eigenes Präventionskonzept erstellen und umsetzen können.

Already in its 2009 Stockholm Programme the European Commission states that the “key to our success [in so-called de-radicalization and prevention of violent extremism] will be the degree to which non-governmental groups ... across Europe play an active part.” Since then it has become ever more evident that “organized civil society” actors are not only generally important for this topic – because, evidently, prevention of group focused enmity and anti-human rights attitudes depend on societal resilience which can hardly be maintained if civil society is not on board. But even more prevalently, non-governmental actors and specialized NGO practitioners are entirely indispensable in the key activity of disengagement/ rehabilitation and targeted prevention. Because this kind of work needs a level of trust, confidentiality and commitment on the side of the clients which governmental actors will in most cases not be able to gain – due to their status, obligations and special role as state representatives.

Given how crucial and indispensable “organized civil society” – as well as professionalized “civil society” prevent facilitators – are, two very common misunderstandings about civil society engagement need to be corrected: One: civil society cannot do this for free – at least when specialized services as disengagement and targeted prevention on a professional scale is concerned since this needs to be done professionally, be securely financed and have quality assurance built in.¹ Two: civil society organizations (CSO) cannot do this alone. While they need to delivered their services and activities on an independent basis and act independently within statutory organisations (like schools, prisons etc.), CSO need to acknowledged, supported, backed – and in a sense even liked – by the pertaining statutory staff and state representatives (working in schools and prisons etc.). Hence, in addition to public funding, an overall understanding and liaison between two groups of actors is necessary who often do not know each other much and who also tend to not trust each other: statutory and civil society actors² which need to be encouraged and accompanied in building public-civil partnerships in preventing violent extremism and group hatred.

On its way towards developing a more enhanced prevention landscape Europe has recently witnessed several civil society initiatives and networks which have become active in this area. To name but a few, ‘European Fair Skills’, ‘Women/ Gender in Extremism/ Prevention’

will be portrayed shortly in the following. These are projects and networks which are placed within the greater framework of the Radicaliation Awareness Network (RAN) which has been inaugurated on 9/11, 2011 by the European Commission.

¹ RAN Derad Declaration of Good Practice – Principles of Sustainable Interventions in Disengagement and Rehabilitation (Deradicalisation) from Involvement in Violent Extremism and Group Hatred. Access at: http://cultures-interactive.de/tl_files/publikationen/engl/Draft_RAN-Derad_Declaration-of-Good-Practice_Harald.pdf.

² Why are we still messing it up? A new Marshall Plan for preventing violent extremism – youth work, gender, mental health. Access at: http://cultures-interactive.de/tl_files/publikationen/George_Marshall_Paper.pdf.

The 'European Fair Skill' network

The young and fledgling 'European Fair Skill' network (EFS) has been inaugurated by Cultures Interactive (NGO, Berlin). The EFS approach originated from a German Federal Model Project which was developed and implemented in the National Program of preventing right-wing extremism, xenophobia and antisemitism (Vielfalt, 2010). The "Fair Skills" approach (FS) reaches out to young people from various at-risk communities, brings them together in one external facility and trains them as youth-cultural workshop facilitators in a peer-learning setting (three one-week workshops). These peer-facilitators then go back to their communities where they form Fair Skills youth teams and give workshops themselves, while being coached by CI's FS team. In their home communities the FS peer facilitators will be assisted by local development round tables in which CI brings together local and national stakeholders to raise awareness of the project, its objectives and look for possibilities of community support.

The "Fair Skills"-method combines (i) facilitated peer-learning in youth-cultural activities with respective youth cultural facilitators (e.g. in Rap/ Slam Poetry, Breakdance, Skateboarding, Comic/ Graffiti/ Visual Design, DJ-ing, Digital Music Production, and others) with (ii) exercises from civic education/ pedagogical anti-bias and mediation, and (iii) adds psychologically based self-awareness group-work as an element which is drawn from mental health care and adapted to the youth work setting.

Hence, '(Youth-)Cultures' are employed in a way that has 'interactive', preventive, and in part deradicalising/ rehabilitative impact with difficult to address groups of young people who are at risk of turning away from the school system and from mainstream society altogether. In this way FS systematically supports participants' emotional intelligence, social skills as well as biographical and political awareness and delivers specific non-violence and mediation methods, enabling the young people to informally promote civil society values and skills in their communities.

The Fair Skills practice is currently being piloted in and adapted to three Eastern European states together with the non-governmental partner organisations Kontiki Szakképző (Hungary), Eruditio Publica o.p.s. (Czech Republic) and REACH (Slovak Republic). These partner constitute the first three cross-border members of the European Fair Skills network (Internal Security Fund 2015-16). The EFS initiative comprises training for social workers, educators and youth culture stakeholders for primary and secondary prevention work with youth. The sustainability of EFS activities is particularly enhanced by the FS element of the "local development round tables" in the home communities of the young FS peer facilitators. These roundtables bring together local and national stakeholders (from government, administration, civil society, social work, schools, etc.) to raise awareness of the project, its objectives and look for possibilities of community support.

Women/ Gender in Extremism and Prevention (WomEx)

One particular aspect of the Fair Skills approach is the module of gender oriented and gender sensitive work with young people since field practitioners have found that gender identity concepts

of being male and being female – hence, practices of acting out masculinity and femininity – are of key importance for issues of violent extremism and prevention.

The WomEx approach is based on the key observations (i) that there is hardly any violent extremist, terrorist, or hate crime offender that does not also hold sexist and homophobic attitudes, i.e. manifests highly rigid and conflictive gender identity issues (especially within the two major threats of violent extremism, right-wing extremism and religious fundamentalism, both Muslim and Christian), (ii) that these conflictive gender issues do not only coincide with but are key psychological driving forces behind violent extremism and hate crime and (iii) that methods which address issues of gender and gender identity may therefore have a quite powerful and sustainable effect in prevention and deradicalisation interventions – often more powerful than ideological/ religious issues.

For example, practitioners have recurrently found that violently extremist young men compensate insecurities in their sense of male identity and manliness by acting-out in hateful ways against women, homosexuals, and generally all persons that by appearance or behaviour confuse their restrictive gender role order. Moreover, women that are active in extremism overwhelmingly tend to agree to and actively reconfirm such restrictive gender roles. They thus share the sexist and homophobic attitudes and draw motivation from them for their activities, while they, at the same time, enjoy an empowerment impulse from their newly gained opportunities of extremist engagement and activities (e.g. serving as ideological supporter, providing internal social cohesion, helping to prepare attacks, also committing hate crimes and terrorist attacks themselves sometime).

In turn, extremist movements take advantage of the socially given gender roles strategically in that they position their female followers in places of society that allow them to propagate extremism and at the same time make it look more normal and mainstream. For instance, in Germany rightwing extremist women enter child day care, parents' organizations, schools, family welfare and professional social work in order to infiltrate and to support the current mainstreaming of rightwing extremist attitudes into middle classes.

Originally emerging out of 'Girrl Power' workshops (delivered by Cultures Interactive/ NGO), WomEx has produced various methods in which young at-risk persons work on gaining awareness about gender roles and how they have affected key situations of conflict, hatred and escalation in their lives. In particular, WomEx interventions aim at making participants more aware of the intrinsic connection between rigid/restrictive gender roles, polarization and violent extremism. Also participants will realize about how certain biographical and milieu specific conditions (violent/ relational/ sexual abuse, neglect, degradation, psycho-trauma) may lead to adopting restrictive and exclusionary gender role concepts and at the same time become susceptible to engaging in violent extremist behavior. Eventually, WomEx methods work on promoting alternative and more inclusive modes of male and female identity practices and engage in training alternative patterns of behavior which comply with a human rights based and pro-social sense of gender within democratic citizenship.

Hence, both gender specific interventions with girls/ women and gender focused methods across different settings (with men and women), as they are provided by the partners of the WomEx network, are a necessary component of any civil society prevent strategy and may be applied with great impact in deradicalisation and prevention settings.

Community Counteracting Radicalisation/ CoCoRa

The Fair Skills approach in particular shares one basic observation with many other European practitioner colleagues: that a bottom-up and inclusive approach is needed to preventing violent extremism. The CoCoRa project, too, departs from the observations that in previous efforts, there seems to be a skepticism about the involvement of local communities and civil society resources in the activities, especially when we talk about communities of citizens with a Muslim background, and especially when pointing at imams and religious authority figures. This reluctance may, however, maintain the dichotomy between “us-and-them”, which leads many youngsters with Muslim background to distance themselves from the surrounding society and, in worst case, to pave the way for violent Islamistic and Jihadist sympathies.

Before this background, the rationale of the CoCoRa project is to develop and test a new prevention strategy that involves local communities and citizens with a Muslim background directly and actively in the prevention of radicalization and violent extremism through the process of empowering young people from these communities to feel belonging and positive citizenship. Partner organisations from 5 European countries work together and pursue the overall aims:

- To contribute to the improvement of prevention efforts against militant Islamist radicalisation and violent extremism among young people with a Muslim background.
- To strengthen empowerment and active citizenship among young people with a Muslim background, be it both in attitude and action, and be it both on a cognitive and emotional level.
- To strengthen the efficiency in the prevention efforts against radicalization and violent extremism by improving the collaboration between professional youth workers and local communities in civil society.
- To relate the prevention efforts clearly to the perspective of an equal and active citizenship.

Following these overall aims, the CoCoRa project will develop and test a new community-based prevention strategy, composed by the following activities:

- The CoCoRa Collaborative Programme, to establish a concrete collaboration with local communities of citizens with a Muslim background in order to cooperate on the building and planning of a new prevention programme for young people from the collaborating communities. The idea is to involve the knowledge, contacts, status and resources of

representatives – also counting young representatives - from the local communities so as to meet the actual prevention needs among the youngsters.

- The CoCoRa Prevention Programme, to implement the new prevention programme in continued and close collaboration with the local communities being involved in the project. The prevention programme will be a long-term course of various activities, focusing on issues and dilemmas dealing with equal and active citizenship in practice, antidiscrimination, democracy and citizen's right and duties, religiousness in a secular society, empowerment and the so-called self-including equality etc.
- The CoCoRa Ambassador Programme, to further train young people from the prevention programme in becoming spokesmen for young people with a Muslim background towards local authorities and professionals in the general prevention effort. The Ambassador programme will provide the young ambassadors with communication- and dialogical skills to make presentations on workshops for authorities and professionals on the actual – and often invisible – needs and aspirations among the youngster, so to articulate mutual preconceptions and prejudices, and so to start an appreciative and intercultural dialogue on the possibilities to build efficient prevention activities on a local basis etc.
- The CoCoRa Prevention Strategy, to finalize the project with the development of a total prevention package, composed by available, usable and transferable methods and tools from the community-based strategy. The package will consist of interactive methodical handbooks, presenting all materials from the CoCoRa programmes to , ie the building of local collaboration, the prevention programme for youth and the ambassador programme.

In summary, the CoCoRa project provides an innovative approach to the European prevention scene by developing and implementing a community-based prevention strategy, built on 1) the active involvement of local communities and 2) the systematic linking of prevention and empowerment to active citizenship on democratic terms.

Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN)

The Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN), which was established by the European Commission in September of 2011, ten years after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, recognizes that while it is necessary to bolster intelligence and security networks in order to counter hate crimes, violent extremism, and terrorism that strategy in and of itself is insufficient. Public safety requires that we embed intelligence and security functions into civil society at large, by raising awareness of the problem and by developing sophisticated, effective techniques for preventive measures with at-risk groups and for intervening with would-be offenders. Accordingly, the RAN – as an umbrella organization composed of local actors, professional intervention practitioners, research experts, policy makers, and civil society groups – incorporates diverse perspectives and operates across a variety of social arenas. The intention here is to increase community strength and resilience in the face of the challenge posed by

violent extremism. By design, the RAN is divided into a number of working groups, which currently include Community Policing, Deradicalization and Exit Interventions, Inner- and Outer European Dimension (Diasporas), Internet and Social Media, (Mental) Health Services, Prevention (Early Interventions), Prison and Probation Services, and Victims of Terrorism. The collective aims of these working groups are to exchange experiences, knowledge, and good practices, and to draft policy recommendations for the EU and its member states.

Early on, during the RAN's preparation phase, it was understood that specialized social entrepreneurs and independent practitioners from grass-roots organizations have vital roles to play in delivering anti-hate crime messages to the public, conducting anti-extremist interventions, and training staff members. These non-governmental field actors frequently share the same cultural background as their clients. Moreover, they are often able to access even the most at-risk and hard-to-reach environments, and to penetrate the language, habits, and cultural narratives of radicalized individuals. As such, they are in a better position than government officials to build relationships of mutual trust and confidentiality with clients. Trust and confidentiality, in turn, are indispensable in facilitating deradicalization. Thus, it is not surprising that NGO practitioners often have achieved better rates of success at lower cost than governmental bodies, which tend to lack access to and respect among disenfranchised, radicalised communities, and may even sometimes unwittingly "exacerbate division" (EC Combating Radicalization 14781; January, 2005). Hence, as early as 2009, the EC's Stockholm Program stated that the "[k]ey to our success [in deradicalization] will be the degree to which non-governmental groups ... across Europe play an active part" (17024/09).

To that end, the RAN decided to establish "Derad," a working group on deradicalization, exit interventions and hate-crimes prevention that comprises experienced first-line practitioners from various EU Member States. These individuals have many stories to tell, concerning the different contexts of their work, the methods and strategies they have employed, their successes and failures, and the levels/lacunae of public awareness in the national media and partisan discourse, in light of the ever-present risks of populism and sensationalism. Some of these individuals are engaged in training and quality management, and/or are willing to contribute to a "good practices" approach that is designed to be transferable and adaptable to different working areas and EU member states. The Derad group is concerned with violent extremism of all kinds, whether motivated by religious/cultic or political visions or other forms of ideology, by ethnic issues or gang related codes of conduct. Its working definition of violent extremism and/or terrorist radicalisation are fulfilled by any individual and/or organization that support attitudes contrary to accepted principles of human rights, civil liberties, and suggest violent means for combating the constitutional order and the rule of law. They convey resentful worldviews and an unyielding in-group out-group distinction to their followers and encourage conduct grounded on basic ideologies of superiority/ entitlement, separation/discrimination/ exclusion, and sometimes encompass the legitimacy of group-focused hostility, hate crime, and violence. Typically, such organizations aggressively recruit young susceptible people and draw them into a condition of enthusiasm and obedience as well as dependency and fear. Thus far,

the Derad working group has gathered many deradicalization practitioners, mostly from NGOs. However, the group also includes statutory first-line prevent practitioners working in prison, probation, sometimes even intelligence services and community policing.

Author

Harald Weilnböck (PD / Ph.D.) – works both as practitioner and academic researcher; as trained psychotherapist (mostly in group settings) he practices deradicalisation interventions with young people in prison and community settings. HW’s focus in studying violent extremism is “intervention research” on how successful methods of prevention and deradicalisation work and what their principle impact factors and necessary conditions are. HW’s general areas of scientific expertise are culture/media studies, social/ biographical and psychotherapy research and interdisciplinary narratology. HW studied and worked in New Haven, Los Angeles, Paris, Zurich and Berlin; he received his Ph.D. at UCLA (Los Angeles) and his ‘habilitation’ in Leipzig. HW designed and implemented numerous research projects, governmental model-projects in extremism prevention and EU practice R & D projects of tool/ methods development. In 2011 HW consulted on building-up the ‘Radicalisation Awareness Network’ of the European Commission (RAN, Brussels/ EC DG Home) where he now co-chairs the working-group ‘Deradicalisation and Exit Interventions’.

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