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of the
European Expert Network on
Terrorism Issues
(EENeT)

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About the European Expert Network on Terrorism Issues (EENeT)

The EENeT is an independent, non-partisan consortium of terrorism experts from European law enforcement agencies / relevant authorities and the field of science.

It is dedicated to a multi-disciplinary and multi-agency analysis and research which is seen as a prerequisite to provide comprehensive insights into the complexity of the phenomenon "terrorism".

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1. Welcome and Introduction

Mr. Eric Freysselinard and Dr. Nacer Lalam

Institute for advanced studies of the Ministry of the Interior (IHEMI), France

After a brief welcome to the Conference attendees from Steering Committee Member Dr. Nacer Lalam, Mr. Eric Freysselinard delivered an introductory speech concerning the role of IHEMI, who were hosting the Conference. – IHEMI is 30 years old and is responsible for providing training for senior officers and managers at the highest level of state.¹ Part of its objective is to create a strategic security culture, but this requires constant survey and watch. IHEMI applies a diverse approach with inter-disciplinary studies, including radicalisation studies.

There are many issues in France, and it has previously suffered from significant terrorist violence, even before the more recent round of violence since 2012. Not enough was being done and the French approach of *Laïcité* was making it hard to differentiate between religion and violence. There were weekly meetings relating to individuals of concern, but it is difficult to know if a person would actually commit an attack. People think that the regional Prefect (*Prefet*) is powerful, but that is partially true, and they do not have a lot of devices at their hand. There is not a great deal of intelligence, it is difficult to watch terrorists and the law is prevented from doing a lot of this.

IHEMI has conducted six research projects since 2015, including a terrorist biography, a QA of terrorist acts, females in terrorism, tackling extremism in French sports clubs and the online preachers especially those considered as *ihadists*, which is just beginning. IHEMI also maintains links to the Police and since 2017 has provided the general secretariat of the *Conseil Scientifique sur les Processus de Radicalisation* (COSPRAD).² This links it to support young scientific researchers involved in university research on radicalisation.

2. Keynote Speakers

2.1 Islamist Terrorism in France: Threat assessment and future challenges

Ministry of the Interior, France

France previously suffered from terrorism in the 1990s with the *Groupe Islamique Armé* (GIA), but it was quieter during the 2000s. However, 2012 was a watershed with the attacks of Mohammed Merah, and these were followed by the Charlie Hebdo and linked attacks in January 2015 and the November 2015 Paris attacks. More recently 2020 was substantial but more constrained, with six attacks. Since then, there have only been two deaths in 2021-2022.

Police Services have disrupted eight plots since 2020, all by 'lone actors'. There is growing autonomy amongst French extremists, and they are less linked to major groups.

None of these attacks were claimed by an external terrorist organisation and there was no operational connection to an external terrorist organisation. There was only one author with links to a specific organisation. Previously they were linked to ISIL (Da'esh) in Syria etc. but now not so much. Major events do not seem to be so significant to the new generation of radicals.

¹ Institut des hautes études du ministère de l'Intérieur. Located at the Military School in Paris, and at Fort de Charenton in Maisons-Alfort, the Institute for Advanced Studies of the Ministry of the Interior (IHEMI) delivers training to senior executives in the public and private sectors. About 3,000 people train there every year. The Institute also conducts research aimed at enriching public knowledge. <https://www.ihemi.fr/>

² COSPRAD. <https://www.ihemi.fr/recherche-et-prospective/secretariat-general-du-cosprad>

The main features of the self-initiated attacks:

- The importance of the internet to a younger generation
- Their weak 'footprint' in the French *Jihad* movement
- The ideological fluidity of a new radical generation
- Their social isolation, mental health issues and fascination for extreme violence

Many use knives and other 'cold weapons' and the last firearms attack was in 2018. They look at social propaganda from various sources and there is even a pro-*Jihadi* and Neo-Nazi mix. Their extremism has been fuelled by Covid-19 and a large number have mental health issues, with many bullied at school etc. They don't belong to any specific groups and the big issue is detection. Previous to 2012 they were mainly known subjects of interest and linked to organisations, but now they don't link to groups or radical mosques, so they are very difficult to identify. Currently new profiles are adding to older ones.

There are various upcoming Counter-terrorist challenges:

- There is growing autonomy and self-motivation (Emancipation from the influence of external *Jihadist* organisations)
- The rise of conspiracy theories and 'sensitive' topics
- The risk of violent escalation with ultra-right militants. They share many things – conspiracy theories, antisemitism, anti-LGBTQ etc. They focus on one very powerful thing as young, isolated and frustrated young men. There is a risk of escalation, where the extreme right wing (XRW) and Jihadists react with each other. For example, if there was a killing in a Mosque, what would the reaction be?
- New *Jihad* theatres. There are new destinations and Syria is an exception, with the propaganda of the Caliphate. You may not find that in another theatre. There is more attention on Afghanistan. We need tools that will help stop people leaving for *Jihad*, but it is not on the same scale
- A further concern is prison releases. At present there are around 400 violent *Jihadists* in prison with a third scheduled for release in the next three years. The recidivism rate is only around 6-14% but with large numbers being released.
- There is an uncertain future for French Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF) still located in Syria and Iraq. The longer they stay the more difficult it becomes. Bringing them all back is an issue and would increase the volume in prison. The numbers and volume are the problem. There are around 400 children in the Levant and we have already brought back 200 minors from Syria, but these could become the next generation.

2.2 RTV Trend Report 2022: Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence in Western Europe, 1990-2021

Prof. Tore Bjørgo, Director of the Centre for Research on Extremism (C-REX)³, University of Oslo, Norway

C-REX was formed in 2016 as a response to the Oslo and Utøya island attacks in 2011 and a need for new and updated knowledge: the acknowledgement that the main threat from Extreme Right-Wing (XRW) violence did no longer arise from street-based neo-Nazi skinhead gangs and other organised XRW groups but rather from 'lone actors' inspired by XRW ideas.

Available data on Extreme Right-Wing violence has been of very uneven quality, often presenting spurious increases in levels of violence due to changes in definitions, data

³ C-REX – Center for Research on Extremism. <https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english/>

collection methods and efforts. In response to this, we established the Right-wing Terrorism and Violence (RTV) dataset, using consistent definitions and taking into account improvements in data collection methods.⁴ This dataset systematically documents incidents and attacks from 1990 until today in 18 West European countries. We are working to expand the coverage to include Eastern European countries, North America, Australia and New Zealand. We have also started to include foiled or failed plots. There have been some methodological developments, in particular the use of online Boolean searches and local experts to provide better coverage of serious non-fatal events. We have applied the new methods in backlogging the dataset coverage from 2015 to 2021 and we will next year go back to 2010 to improve data quality even further. We are also geolocating violent events. The dataset is open access, available to external researchers and analysts. Each year we produce a Trend Report and the latest is June 2022.⁵ This highlights a number of findings, debunking some myths:

- Far right violence is not on the rise. In 2021 we did not see more XRW violent attacks than in previous years, both when considering fatal as well as non-fatal events. Compared with the 1990s there has been a long-term decline during the last two decades.
- ‘Lone Actors’ are not the biggest threat. Instead, there are much more frequent small attacks linked with violent hate crimes, often carried out by informal groups. ‘Lone Actors’ are only behind 25% of spontaneous attacks since 2015. However, ‘Lone Actors’ are behind most fatal attacks.
- Fatal attacks by organised groups have declined
- The perpetrators of XRW fatal attacks are not young men. The age of perpetrators of fatal right wing terrorist violence in 2020-21 was 49, 52, 76 and 43.
- Ethnic and religious minorities are increasingly the main targets
- With regard to weapons used in attacks, knives are most commonly used. However, firearms are increasingly the most common in fatal attacks

There are no ‘common’ European trends, with significant differences between countries like Germany, the United Kingdom (UK) and Italy. Although the highest number of attacks take place in Germany, by population size, Greece exceeds all other countries for attacks. In Northern Europe attacks are mainly against ethnic and religious minorities while in Southern Europe, political opponents are the largest share of targets. Attacks in the UK are often carried out by gangs, whereas in Greece they are linked to the ‘Golden Dawn’ against political opponents. So, we need tailored responses.

More registered plots do not necessarily mean more terrorist activity and mature plots remain rare. The increase in foiled plots may represent the increased focus of the security forces on the XRW, intervening early. There were a limited number of mature plots and all were low intensity. Mass casualty, semi-mature plots using firearms or explosives are often detected through public or private tips, and sometimes through open-source information. In 2021 there was an increase in group-based plot activity and the increasing targeting of state institutions, such as government officials, the police and Covid-19 vaccination centres. There may be a new post Covid-19 trend of plots against governments.

⁴ C-REX, ‘Right-Wing terrorism and violence in Western Europe: the RTV dataset’. <https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english/groups/rtv-dataset/>

⁵ C-REX, ‘RTV Trend Report 2022’: https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english/publications/c-rex-reports/2022/rtv_trend_report_2022.pdf

In summary, there have been major methodological improvements and revisions in the RTV data set, including better coverage of non-fatal events and geo-location of attacks. Right wing Terrorist Violence (RTV) is still on the decline. The largest threat is from spontaneous low scale violence, with ethnic and religious individuals or groups being the most frequently targeted, but 'lone actors' are behind most fatal attacks. There is also a rise in plots against government institutions and representatives.

2.3 Current challenges in Europe from the perspective of the EU Counter Terrorism Coordinator

Ms. Phénicia Baatout

Advisor to the EU-Counter Terrorism Coordinator

The role of the EU Counter Terrorism Coordinator is cross cutting, and he is a key player in the fight against terrorism.⁶ The role was adopted in 2004 after the Atocha attack in Madrid.⁷ Gilles de Kerchove has now stepped down and the current Coordinator Mr. Ilkka Salmi was the former head of Finnish intelligence. He is responsible for EU Counter-terrorist strategy, the overview of EU instruments, following up Council decisions and liaising with the EU External Action Service. The EU Counter Terrorism Coordinator is supported by a deputy and six advisors. All the advisors are appointed by the member states to support the EU Coordinator. This provides a more coordinated approach to the complexity of internal security including cyber-space and social media.

In Europe, the direct threat has decreased, with the death of the head of ISIL *Da'esh* reducing the risk of a large-scale threat. However, the endogenous threat has not diminished, with inspired 'Lone Actors' or small groups, who are not part of the formal structure of *al-Qaeda* or ISIL. Their targets are often symbolic, a Church, Synagogue, the police or the army. They will also attack crowded public places and public transport in order to maximise casualties. They will often use knives, but rarely firearms, but we have to be aware of more sophisticated arms in the future. They are often inspired and become extremists online, with a focus on the internet in the recruitment for *Jihad*. More and more are active in cyberspace, and these individuals can slip under the radar.

Is the Extreme Right Wing (XRW) increasing in the EU? Certainly, it is often online and we have seen the concomitant rise of the far right in politics, particularly in the United States with Donald Trump. We have seen XRW prisoner radicalisation, the XRW disinformation in Russia and the XRW exploitation of new technologies and social networks, for example through online gaming.

We are also concerned at the amount of terrorist content online in the EU, which is now regulated by the Terrorist Content Online Regulation implemented by the EU Member States since June 2022. Illegal content and their amplification through algorithms should be addressed by the new Digital Service Act adopted in October 2022.⁸ With the various online platforms, there is also a problem over terrorist and violent extremist content, allowing extremists to promote their ideologies, such as anti-vax and anti-system material which is not illegal but nevertheless harmful. We have a dialogue with the internet companies and although their intervention and removal of such borderline material is still on a voluntary basis, they have a certain responsibility.

⁶ European Union, 'Counter-Terrorism Coordinator': <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/fight-against-terrorism/counter-terrorism-coordinator/>

⁷ See Reinares, F. (2017) *Al-Qaeda's Revenge: The 2004 Madrid Train Bombings*. New York: Columbia University Press

⁸ European Union, 'The Digital Services Act Package': <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/digital-services-act-package>

The Covid 19 pandemic has had an impact on terrorism as well as the development of Artificial Intelligence and the use of it by terrorism or state proxies. At the moment the EU Artificial Intelligence Act is currently in negotiation. Encryption and the use of metadata complicate law enforcement investigations, while access to electronic evidence outside the EU is very complex. The challenge with technology is to find the right balance between security and freedom, and to give the same capabilities to law enforcement online as they have offline.

Ukraine is not really a risk yet, but possibly in the longer term. With all the refugees, there is a need for systematic border checks. Volunteer fighters in Ukraine could pose a risk to European internal security when they eventually return to EU Member States. Indeed, they have received arms and combat training, and we know that individuals have gone there, both from left-wing extremists and the extreme right wing. The EU institutions are currently mobilizing to anticipate these possible threats.

We have also noticed the influence from Gulf Countries spreading extremist Islamist ideologies and material. We have a dialogue on this issue with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and we should also discuss it with Kuwait and Qatar so that it does not undermine our European democratic values.

2.4 EU-Initiative “RAN Policy Support” – Current achievements and outlook

Mr. Alberto Contaretti

RAN PS Project manager

The Radicalisation Awareness Network Policy Support (RAN PS) is aimed at providing support to policy makers in the field of P/CVE.⁹ In detail, it provides support services to the European Commission, EU Member States and priority third countries in general prevent work and it helps strengthen their capacity in strategic communication as well as the evidence base of policies. The RAN PS Global Agenda for 2022 is focused on six thematic priorities:

- Ideologies and Polarisation
- Prison Radicalisation, Rehabilitation and Reintegration
- Foreign Terrorist Fighters
- The Online Dimension and Strategic Communications
- Local Dimensions, Communities and Resilience Building
- Victims and Survivors of Terrorism

The RAN PS can perform three main types of activities:

- Knowledge Generation – Through policy analysis and security research
- Capacity Building – Through knowledge transfer and sharing
- Research Related – To strengthen the evidence base of policies

In detail, with its Knowledge Generation activities, the RAN PS can support policy makers by drafting specialized papers based on policy-oriented research performed by EU researchers and experts in P/CVE as well as on inputs from EU Member States and priority third countries on existing P/CVE policies and implementation. In the latter case, it systematizes the collected input to provide overviews of policy needs, requirements and good practice.

⁹ EU DG HOME, ‘RAN Policy Support’: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/ran-policy-support_en#:~:text=RAN%20Policy%20Support%20was%20launched,policy%20priorities%20at%20EU%20level.

With its Capacity Building activities, the RAN PS can disseminate existing knowledge and organize study visits and training to showcase and transfer good practice in specific policy areas for the direct benefits of policy makers. Moreover, it is available to respond to the individual requests of support from EU Member States and priority third countries by designing and delivering tailor-made support services on any of its thematic priorities.

Since its launch in December 2020, the RAN PS has delivered the following products:

- Knowledge Generation: 16 strategic communications papers, 19 research papers and 28 prevent papers
- Capacity building: 5 tailor-made support services, 8 training programmes, 29 workshops, 10 study visits and 3 stratcom meetings
- Research-Related: 11 Thematic Research Meetings and 4 Quarterly Research Reviews

In addition to the products mentioned above, the RAN PS strengthens its knowledge base through:

1. The Advisory Board of Researchers which is aimed to provide high-level scientific advice and, in doing so, to support the RAN PS in incorporating, engaging, and staying up to date with the latest developments and research in the field of radicalisation. The second formal yearly meeting of the Board has been held in Brussels in June 2022.
2. The radicalisation E-library¹⁰, established in 2022, which includes the references of about 1500 research papers related to prevent work and to the RAN PS papers envisaged for public dissemination
3. European Researchers Community on Radicalisation (ERCOR) which is aimed at exchanging knowledge and to foster closer and increased interaction among its members. This year, the ERCOR membership criteria have been established and disseminated and a first call of interest has been circulated in July 2022¹¹
4. International Research Institutes and Networks (IRIN) which is aimed at promoting the links of the RAN PS with global knowledge and networks in the area of P/CVE. Eight international institutes and networks have already become partners and will be connected through 2023

Looking at the cooperation between the EENeT and the RAN PS in view of 2023, it is worth stressing that the members of the EENeT have had the possibility to provide input to the RAN PS Annual Activity plan for 2023. Next year, the EENeT members are invited to apply to become members of ERCOR and to attend the Annual Research Seminar that the RAN PS will organize in the fall of 2023.

2.5 Europol's perspective on Counter-Terrorism

EUROPOL - European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC)¹²

According to the EU Terrorism Situation and Trend Report (TE-SAT) 2022, 2021 saw the lowest number of Jihadist attacks in years, with three completed attacks. Several groups of varying sizes were dismantled, and their members arrested for planning attacks. These numbers are clearly going down. Yet for all its efforts and successes, the Counter-Terrorism

¹⁰ EU DG HOME, 'EC Research e-Library on Radicalisation': https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/networks/ran-policy-support/ec-research-e-library-radicalisation_en

¹¹ EU, 'European Research Community on Radicalisation (ERCOR) – Call for interest'. https://radical.hypotheses.org/files/2022/07/ERCOR_Call-for-Interest.pdf

¹² EUROPOL, 'European Counter Terrorism Centre – ECTC': <https://www.europol.europa.eu/about-europol/european-counter-terrorism-centre-ectc>

community simply cannot afford to relax its vigilance. Key concerns are the radicalisation of young people and inside prisons. The question of the infiltration of Foreign Terrorist Fighters into migration flows calls for collective action and robust information exchange at European borders.

The Extreme Right-Wing threat is another concern and in 2021 in Sweden and Austria, terrorist actions were identified and stopped. Member states are increasingly focusing on the Extreme Right-Wing terrorist threat. In Iceland, a couple planned an attack using semi-automatic weapons.¹³

Larger geopolitical developments have to also be considered, such as the situation in Afghanistan.¹⁴ Although Islamic State and *al-Qaeda* have failed to carry out a large-scale attack in Europe since 2017, monitoring the activities of both terrorist organisations and their affiliates overseas remains of paramount importance.

The war in Ukraine is obviously a major source of concern for the EU for three principal reasons: the presence of European violent extremist fighters in Ukraine, the risk of terrorist infiltration into refugee flows and the huge availability of weapons. Europol has initiated a series of key actions in order to strengthen security checks at EU external borders.

National security remains a national responsibility. Yet, at the European level, ECTC has built an environment of trust for the wider Counter-Terrorism community. In the aftermath of terrorist incidents or in the course of an investigation, a dedicated ECTC investigative support team can be immediately operational at Europol Headquarters to provide any kind of support requested by the concerned Member States. A request for support can include: Digital forensics, Financial intelligence, CBRN, Expertise on propaganda, Open source intelligence (OSINT), Mobile device examination (UFED).

ECTC has promoted among others the “Terrorism Identification Task Forces” initiative. Since 2019 ECTC has developed operational cooperation between EU and non-EU CT investigative units through five Terrorism Identification Task Forces. Terrorism Identification Task Forces are action weeks organised at Europol premises, targeting special topics. The ECTC is doing its best to adapt to changing threats. Europol is involved in the development of new EU policies, including the Terrorist content online regulation (TCO).

Looking ahead, ECTC is focusing on addressing the misuse of new technologies such as the metaverse, militarised drones and 3D Printers (and their capacity of manufacturing non-registered weapons). In June 2022 a dangerous right-wing extremist was arrested in Slovakia for spreading hate speech and 3D printed weapons manuals.

Europol promotes inter-agency dialogue. ECTC is reinforcing international cooperation with key partners and regions such as the Middle East, North Africa (MENA) and the Western Balkans. CT services, international agencies but also relevant Academic research centres can help identify new trends at an early stage and make it possible to spot policy shortfalls. Europol regulation was amended in June 2022, facilitating the dialogue between the Agency, private parties, and international organisations.

¹³ Boffey, D, ‘Icelandic Police arrest four people over alleged terror attack plans’, The Guardian 22/09/22.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/sep/22/icelandic-police-arrest-four-people-over-alleged-terror-attack-plans>

¹⁴ NCTC, ‘Haqqani Network’. US National Counterterrorism Center. https://www.dni.gov/nctc/groups/haqqani_network.html

3. Presentations of the EENeT members

The following abstracts were sent by EENeT members to the EENeT Secretariat summarising the content of their presentations.

3.1 OSINT investigations of extremism in Telegram: opportunities and challenges

Dr. Alana Gramm/Germany

The presentation will deal with police OSINT-investigations of Telegram groups and channels. Two real life examples are used to illustrate opportunities and challenges law enforcement can practically face when investigating this platform. The first example is about a darknet seller using Telegram as an intermediate platform and the possibilities of investigations in this case. The second case will illustrate how Covid protestors from the so called "*Querdenker*" movement have been using Telegram for mobilization for a major event in Berlin.¹⁵ The presentation ends with a short resume about the possibilities and current limitations of OSINT investigations in Telegram.

3.2 Transformation of Transatlantic Counter-Terrorism

Dr. Patrick Bury/United Kingdom

There is growing evidence that, led by the U.S., a transformation of trans-Atlantic counter-terrorism (CT) has occurred since 9/11. However, a theoretically informed framework for understanding how this has happened remains elusive. Using post-Fordist industrial theory and new evidence collected from senior practitioners across the trans-Atlantic space, this article provides a novel conceptual framework for understanding how states have transformed CT organization since 9/11, primarily in response to global *jihadism*. It shows how many of these solutions are remarkably similar and based on post-Fordist business and/or military best practices, including centralisation and decentralisation; integration of core and periphery workforces; a network approach to knowledge sharing; and outsourcing. The conclusion discusses the effectiveness of these solutions and their use in meeting new policy challenges

3.3 Project KIP: Make Ideas Great Again! Opportunity structures for the Extreme Right Wing in Germany analysed through Longitudinal Monitoring of Online Extremist Content

Dr. Ali Hedayat/Germany

Right-wing narratives on social media emphasize emotions and symbolism to mobilize potential sympathizers and adherents, persuading them that culture and ideology are a means of state repression and aim to abolish native identity.

Under the theoretical framework of the scholarship on social movements, this contribution analyses systemically screened and categorized extreme right-wing claims, collected between 2019 and 2020, and proves the movement's ability to monitor and frame political and discursive opportunities (Koopmans/Olzak 2004)¹⁶ and place ideas in an intracommunity. Interactive formats such as music, lifestyle, and video games influence the younger audience, ensure visibility with attention-grabbing and entertainment-focused content, and become digital repertoires of contention for individuals or groups that oppose a public decision they consider unjust or threatening (Della Porta 2013; Tilly 1986)¹⁷.

¹⁵ See Furstenau, M, 'Germany's Querdenker COVID protest movement', Deutsche Welle, 04/03/21.
<https://www.dw.com/en/meet-germanys-querdenker-covid-protest-movement/a-57049985>

¹⁶ Koopmans, R. and Olzak, S. (2004): Discursive Opportunities and the Evolution of Right-Wing Violence in Germany. In: American Journal of Sociology. Vol. 110, No. 1 (July), pp. 198-230. The University of Chicago Press

¹⁷ Della Porta, D. (2013) Repertoires of Contention. In: Snow, D.A., Della Porta, D., Klandermans, B. & McAdam, D. (Eds.) The Wiley-Blackwell Encyclopedia of Social and Political Movements Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing Ltd.

» <https://doi.org/10.1002/9780470674871.wbespm178>; Tilly, C. (1986) The Contentious French: Four Centuries of Popular Struggle. Cambridge: Harvard University Press

Results show that it is not uncommon for topics selected by extremist groups to be in the grey zone of illegal and legal content.

The findings are part of the EU-(ISF)¹⁸ funded research and development project "Control Propaganda Online: Development of Crime Prevention Tools to Curb Extremist Propaganda and Hate Messages on the Internet."

3.4 Does gun control legislation affect terrorism? A cross-sectional analysis using the Global Terrorism Database and the Small Arms Survey

Prof. Oldrich Bures and Dr. Alexandr Burilkov/Czech Republic and Germany

The Global Terrorism Database shows that since 9/11, the use of firearms in terrorist attacks is on the rise, especially in high-income countries, and that attacks based primarily on firearms are the most lethal.¹⁹ Furthermore, in 2013 Europol reported that firearms had become the most prevalent type of weapon used by terrorists, while attacks in the US overwhelmingly use firearms, especially easily available high-capacity semiautomatic guns. Cross-sectional research shows that terrorists are consistently able to procure firearms in different countries and contexts, and most importantly, in the aftermath of mass-casualty attacks perpetrated with firearms, a common approach by policymakers across the world is to propose tightened gun control in order to restrict terrorists' access to both licit and illicit guns.

However, academic research on the link between gun control legislation and terrorism is very scarce. This paper proposes to fill this research gap by conducting a systematic cross-sectional analysis of the linkage between gun control, licit and illicit stocks of firearms, and terrorist attacks in the 2015-2019 period, based on a novel dataset that incorporates the Global Terrorism Database and the 2018 Small Arms Survey.²⁰ The results of the quantitative analysis reveal surprising insights, namely that it is the total stock of firearms, regardless of licit or illicit nature, that is a significant driver of terrorist attacks, regardless of the strictness of gun control legislation. Furthermore, contagion effects linked to different national levels of gun control leading to cross-border firearms transport are an important factor, which fits with existing findings regarding cross-border firearms trafficking and general levels of societal interpersonal violence.

3.5 Terrorist attacks against Healthcare facilities

Dr. Janos Besenyő/Hungary

My presentation is about the attacks on African health facilities including hospitals, medical staff and security inside the healthcare institutions. First, I will present a short introduction about the general knowledge concerning the situation of the terrorist assaults on the hospitals and the medical staff. I divide my presentation into several parts, which try to comprehend the most important sides of the attacks on the healthcare institutions. First, I start with armed assaults on hospitals and health workers, where I describe the dangers, the terrorists pose against the institutions and the personnel in them. Then I talk about the attacks by radicalised medical staff against their own personnel and patients, which presents a serious problem for the security officers. I will continue with attacks by explosions, hostage taking and cyberattacks on medical facilities.

¹⁸ EU, 'Internal Security Fund': https://ec.europa.eu/info/funding-tenders/find-funding/eu-funding-programmes/internal-security-fund_en

¹⁹ START, *Global Terrorism Database (GTD)*. <https://www.start.umd.edu/gtd/>

²⁰ Small Arms Survey, *Annual Report 2018*. <https://www.smallarmssurvey.org/sites/default/files/resources/SAS-Annual-Report-2018.pdf>

At the end, I will conclude my findings by giving some advice for the international community on how to resolve these problems.

3.6 State Policies Toward ISIS Associates: Challenges of Repatriation and Rehabilitation of Women and Children

Ms. Cholpon Orozobekova/Switzerland

The paper analyses the current situation in Al-hawl and Roj camps in northeast Syria where ISIS associates have been held by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF).²¹ After the defeat of ISIS, about 70,000 women and children with links to ISIS were placed into two camps and they represent more than sixty countries. The United Nations has been urging countries to repatriate children and women and to build comprehensive rehabilitation programs, whereas Iraq had already captured and sentenced thousands of third nationals, including women and children. While European countries repatriated a small number of children, several countries such as Kosovo, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan carried out bigger repatriation operations. The paper analyses state policies toward ISIS-linked women and children with the main focus on the existing repatriation and rehabilitation cases. It also analyses state obligations and legal challenges such as the absence of state authority in the region and the ambiguity of the status of women and children held in the desert. The paper provides first-hand insights into the rehabilitation and reintegration programs in four Central Asian countries - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan- which repatriated their citizens from Syria and Iraq.

3.7 The Impact of Perpetrator and Victim Identity on Emotional Reactions to Terrorism, Risk Perceptions and Counterterrorism preferences in Germany

Prof. Lars Berger/Germany

As a political strategy, terrorism depends on emotional reactions among its target audience. The spread of fear and anger are meant to help bring about political and social changes in line with terrorist aims. That is why emotional reactions to terrorism constitute a central resource for terrorist groups and state authorities seeking to undermine and disrupt the impact of terrorism. Considering the changing security environment in Germany and Western Europe, this analysis expands the common focus on Islamist terrorism via a comparative assessment of emotional reactions to right-wing terrorist violence. An online experiment helps examine the impact which group and gender identities among perpetrators and victims have on emotional responses to, and risk perceptions of, different types of terrorism in Germany. In other words, this study's interest lies in examining whether Islamist terrorism against non-Muslim victims is perceived differently from right-wing terrorism against Muslim victims. Building on this examination of possible differences in perceptions of, and emotional reactions to, terrorist violence, this study finally tests any possible associations between these perceptions and reactions with preferences regarding the type of actors preferably involved in countering terrorist threats such as police, intelligence services, or civil society organisations.

3.8 Europe at the abyss of "securitisation" – some unsaid truths about "inter-agency cooperation"

Dr. Harald Weilnböck/Germany

While combating and preventing so-called Islamist terror over the last decade, Europe has gotten to the verge of messing up what it so vigorously strives for: human rights based civil society – and serving as a humanistic role model in the world for good governance in democracy, which would require a clear-cut division of functions and powers.

²¹ See Chapter 8, 'States Responsibility: Repatriation Cases as a Model to Study' in Orozobekova, C. (2023) *Foreign Fighters and International Peace: Joining Global Jihad and Marching Back Home*. New York: Hamilton Books.

Yet, a key division – between security work on the one hand and education, social work, counselling/ rehabilitation, e.g. derad on the other – has been systematically violated through "inter-agency cooperation" for about ten years. This in turn has caused widespread "securitisation" of education, counselling etc. which is anathema to liberal democracy.

In particular, for many years, quite a number of civil society exit workers in Europe have been exchanging information about their clients in "joint case conferences" with representatives of national security agencies.²² This seems to be done on a continual basis while personal data protection is suspended – namely with clients who have been assessed by police as so-called "endangerers" / high-risk clients, according to a provisional policing concept. Additionally, and sadly, in the past decade, it was only individuals from perceived Muslim populations who were subjected to this procedure. Ongoing security and risk assessments of the clients seem to be the main purpose of this procedure.

These "joint case conferences" raise important questions of how the interaction between independent civil society deradicalisation practitioners / counsellors on the one hand and state security agencies on the other should actually be organized. For, observing any individual's unalienable fundamental rights and data protection – as well as the separation of powers and functions (as e.g. security and counselling/ educational) – is key to constitutional democracies.

Moreover, the practice of "joint case conferences" is in breach of confidentiality in the ethical codes of counselling and social work. It thus damages the public credibility/ reputation of derad / exit work – and thus limits its reach and impact.

Not to mention that any added-value to public security through these joint conferences may well be doubted since only forensic psychiatric experts could possibly add to the risk assessment – which is not the expertise of intelligence officers. In turn, "joint case conferences" (always on the level of classified administrative action!) favour collusions of interest between governmental agencies and chosen CSOs. Finally, they set a bad example for other sectors (civic education/ schools) so that even colleagues in secondary and primary prevention increasingly feel compelled to enter into such "inter-agency cooperation" with security agencies.

3.9 Extreme Right Radicalisation of Minors via Online Gaming Platforms: Insights from Research with Investigation Cases

Dr. Daniel Köhler/Germany

This presentation provides an overview of the state of research with regard to the use of video game platforms and the so-called "gaming scene" by extremist and terrorist actors.²³ Much of this research is still in its infancy and rarely goes beyond the mere description of extremist content in certain video games. In particular, their use as a "social medium" and the close connection with offline spaces in a person's life are rarely considered.

Furthermore, right-wing extremist radicalisation and recruitment processes among minors in the context of video games is explored in detail, using three criminal investigation cases from Baden-Wuerttemberg. Through this unique data exploration, it becomes apparent that more targeted prevention and systemic considerations are necessary both within the field of

²² Weillboeck, H. (2021) *Seven Reasons why the 'Joint Case Conferences' in the deradicalization of so-called 'dangerous persons' should no longer take place*. Cultures Interactive. https://cultures-interactive.de/files/publikationen/Fachartikel/2021_Weillboeck_Seven%20Reasons%20Joint%20Conferences.pdf

²³ Koehler, D. 'From Gaming to Hating: Extreme Right Indoctrination and Mobilization for Violence of Children on Online Gaming Platforms'. *Political Psychology* August 2022. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/363055223_From_Gaming_to_Hating_Extreme_Right_Indoctrination_and_Mobilization_for_Violence_of_Children_on_Online_Gaming_Platforms

preventing and countering violent extremism and counter-terrorism policing or intelligence. Minors easily come into direct contact with open right-wing extremists, which may lead to a mutual exchange and very rapid radicalisation processes towards the support and even planned use of violence, such as school shootings. The presentation will provide specific recommendations for practitioners based on the case file exploration and also highlight challenges faced in these complex scenarios.

3.10 Study on Hate and Violence towards local politicians in Germany

Ms. Kirsten Eberspach and Ms. Sarah Bitschnau/Germany

Hostility and violence against politicians, scientists, journalists, etc. have increased strongly in recent years - especially during the pandemic. In Germany, reports are accumulating that politicians at the local level are also particularly affected - local politicians, who are considered especially vulnerable. For this reason, the Federal Criminal Police Office, in cooperation with the leading municipal associations, is conducting a nationwide survey of municipal politicians on their experiences with hate, incitement and violence.²⁴

This is a longitudinal study that will be conducted at six-month intervals until 2024 in order to track current trends and developments in this area. In the long term, the results of the study will serve as a basis for developing evidence-based, targeted preventive measures for municipalities. Initial findings from the first wave of the survey show that almost every second mayor had experience of hostility, hate messages or violence in the last six months, which has implications for politicians' perceptions of threat and security on the one hand and for the stability of democratic processes on the other. The presentation will address the methodological approach, the current findings from the first two waves of results, and more in-depth analyses with the demographic data of the surveyed group.

3.11 Radicalisation within, without and against associative sport in France

Dr. Pierre-Alain Clément/France

This communication aims at exploring the links between sport and radicalisation in contemporary France. Two empirical materials are gathered.

Firstly, we conducted 123 interviews with 2 intelligence services, 20 prefectures, 20 departmental sport services, 8 regional sport services, 13 public training institutions, 32 national sport federations and 7 various sport associations.

Secondly, we built a database from open sources gathering 153 terrorist criminals from 2012 to 2021. - Data collected in interview fails to show that either "radicalisation" or "communitarianism" are structural or even significant phenomena in sport. Rather, they seem to be decreasing. Visible Islam seems to be on the rise, sometimes associated with various problems: sexism, peer pressure or identitarian closure. Sports affected are fitness sports (exercise, strength training, jogging, etc.), fighting sports and football/futsal. Football and shooting sports are less affected than generally expected. Sexual violence is a more pregnant problem. - The database fails to demonstrate a specific role of sport in radicalisation. Among the 153 "radicalised", a third practice (56/153). Among these, 59% (33/56) practice intensely and not long before the terrorist act and a third (17/56) did it in a group. As a result, we have strong hints that sport may have played a role for 11% (17/153) and weak hints for 22% (33/153). Sport practice for these 33 individuals can be likened to hardening prior to the violent act: done outdoors, outside of clubs, combining physical training and shooting. Among the 17 individuals practicing in a group, we can distinguish 5 groups between 2 and 5 members, formed outside of a club. These groups maintain a low-

²⁴ Eberspach, K. Bitschnau, S. & Kemmesies, U. 'Kommunales Monitoring: Hass, Hetze und Gewalt gegenüber Amtsträgerinnen und Amtsträgern (KoMo) – Beobachtungen und Befunde zur Ersterhebung'. MOTRA-Monitor 2021 BMI/BKA. <https://www.motra.info/publikationen/motra-monitor/>

profile training in parks, forests and mountains, except for weapons training, which forces them to go to a shooting club or fall back on replicas (paintball, airsoft).

3.12 The academic outreach programme of CUTA and its current state of affairs

Mr. Mattias van Hoey/Belgium

The Coordination Unit for Threat Analysis (CUTA- OCAM/OCAD) is responsible for processing relevant information and intelligence on terrorism, extremism and problematic radicalisation, in order to develop a picture of possible threats.²⁵ Amongst its various activities, CUTA conducts outreach to the Belgian academic world. The value of such outreach and cooperation can be identified in several ways, resulting in improvement of output, strengthening complementarity and image building.²⁶ However, in Belgium there is a lack of a culture of cooperation. Consequently, CUTA as the Belgian fusion centre and coordinator of the strategy to counter terrorism has generated accessibility and a long-term cycle to build a platform to emulate and stimulate academic research. There are four ways that CUTA has sought to structure and improve collaboration between Belgium's academic world and its security services:

- Establish an academic network – Students@CUTA
- Generating a thesis competition
- Holding a yearly conference
- Establishing the Radices Journal as a peer reviewed journal for relevant academic publications of terrorism²⁷

Through these various processes and measures, CUTA hopes to improve outreach to the Belgian academic world.

3.13 Based' and 'pilled': Analysing the convergence of far-right and Islamist extremism in online remix cultures

Prof. Kevin McDonald/United Kingdom

This paper presents research being undertaken within the Horizon 2020 PARTICIPATION project (2020-23) into contemporary radicalisation and extremism in Europe.²⁸

An important part of this project is a deeper understanding of the role played by digital cultures and communities in pathways to radicalisation and violent extremism. This is evident in conspiracy theories, meme communities and expressions of hate, all of which became increasingly evident during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The PARTICIPATION research points to the same structuring processes at work across at first what appear very different expressions of extremism and radicalisation. This is particularly evident in the convergence occurring between far-right and Islamist extremism.

This extends beyond the more obvious convergences around antisemitism, anti-LGBT and misogyny, and highlights more fundamental structuring processes involved in both subjective transformations and community formation associated with contemporary extremism.

This presentation examines this convergence in online communities (Reddit, Twitter, Facebook, and Telegram) and highlights the ways radicalisation and extremism are increasingly embedded in wider 'remix' and participatory cultures, from the production and

²⁵ CUTA, 'CUTA – Connecting the Dots': <https://cuta.belgium.be/?cn-reloaded=1>

²⁶ CUTA, 'Outreach to Academics': <https://ocad.belgium.be/outreach/?cn-reloaded=1>

²⁷ CUTA, *Radices: Interdisciplinary Journal for the Study of Terrorism & Extremism*. <https://openjournals.ugent.be/radices/>

²⁸ EU Horizon 2020 Project PARTICIPATION, 'The Project: Extremism and Radicalization – A new approach in research and preventive design': <https://participation-in.eu/the-project/#:-:text=PARTICIPATION%20is%20a%20Horizon%202020,and%20education%20policies%20and%20interventions.>

circulation of memes to experiences of being ‘based’ and ‘pilled’. Understanding the ‘remix’ and participatory foundations of online radicalisation is fundamental to responding to the challenge of preventing and policing violent extremism in Europe today, and a critical field of collaboration between researchers and Local Education Authorities (LEAs).

3.14 Gas & Governance: *Jihadi* Grassroots in Cabo Delgado, Mozambique
Prof. Felipe Pathe Duarte/Portugal

In 2013, the discovery of Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) reserves in the Rovuma Basin attracted significant international natural gas companies, with the promise of project investment of more than USD 50 billion, transforming Cabo Delgado into Africa’s Qatar. Also, this discovery has changed local social dynamics causing resentment, due to wage inequality.

Cabo Delgado, a very rural area, is the poorest province in Mozambique, with very high unemployment rates among young people. But these discoveries have internationalized the region and generated many expectations. However, locals have seen little benefit from this transformation. - At the same period, since 2017, Cabo Delgado became an evolving hub of a violent alleged *salafi-jihadi* militancy in Africa.²⁹ This growing violence already has hundreds of victims. In June 2019 the militants pledged alliance to the *Da’esh*. The group is called *Ahlu Sunnah Wa-Hamo* (or *al-Shabaab*), and the attacks are being carried out by marginal and uneducated young people. However, it is not clear who they really are, what are their strategic objectives, and who supports them. -It is a matter of agreement that the security and extractive politics in Cabo Delgado are closely intertwined. The rise of *salafi-Jihadi* movements in the region happened almost while major companies announced vast discoveries. Thus, our argument is that more than an extended arm of the *Da’esh*, as much of the literature suggests, this insurgency is, essentially, the result of the investment in extractives as well as international relations and government regional marginalization.

3.15 Developing a European framework for disengagement and reintegration of extremist offenders and radicalised individuals in prison, including returning foreign terrorist fighters and their families

Dr. Daniela Psoiu/Austria

Thousands of terrorist and extremist offenders currently populate European prisons. While a number of programmes and methods have been initiated in various European countries, we are still confronted with recidivism cases, while the effectiveness of most of these initiatives has not been definitively established.³⁰ Beyond this, there are practical aspects to consider, such as the adequacy of certain approaches in other national contexts, training needs and the ever-changing landscape of extremism in the face of new societal challenges.

Conceptual and theoretical issues also arise, not least with regard to the definition and measurement of recidivism, the operationalization of disengagement and the adequacy of tools.³¹ This paper takes a closer look at rehabilitation and reintegration practices in several European countries from the perspective of practitioners in prisons and probation. Based on 43 interviews, it takes stock of the challenges, achievements and ways ahead in developing a European framework to deal with this special category of inmates in the context of prison, probation and multi-agency cooperation.³²

²⁹ Duarte, F. P. ‘*Jihad, Gas or Governance? The insurgency in Cabo Delgado*’, 29/10/21, University of Lisbon.
<https://www.ics.ulisboa.pt/en/evento/jihad-gas-or-governance-insurgency-cabo-delgado>

³⁰ Psoiu, D. ‘*Radicalised and terrorist offenders released from prison: Community and family acceptance*’, EU RAN 01/08/19.
https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2019-08/ran_pp_yfc_community_family_acceptance_prague_20190606_en.pdf

³¹ EUTEx, ‘*Identifying the challenges of disengaging and reintegrating violent extremists*’, Radicalisation Prevention 18/05/22.
<https://prisonsystems.eu/identifying-the-challenges-of-disengaging-and-reintegrating-violent-extremists/>

³² OiiP – Austrian Institute for International Affairs, ‘*EUTEx Developing a European framework for disengagement and reintegration of extremist offenders and radicalised individuals in prison, including returning foreign terrorist fighters and their*

3.16 Contemporary radicalisation of pro-Kremlin entities in East-Central Europe

Prof. Miroslav Mareš /Czech Republic

Various pro-Kremlin entities with tendencies to radicalisation can be identified in contemporary East Central Europe (Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Poland).³³ The terms 'Putinisms' or Rushism/Rashism can be used as alternative labels. Radicalisation is related to aggressive behaviour, sometimes with the direct involvement of governmental actors (secret services, etc.).³⁴ As driving factors can be mentioned individual, group, societal/national, and international aspects. The direct and indirect impacts of the war between Russia and Ukraine can be observed. Specific threats are connected with radicalisation of police and army staff. Actors are 1) traditional right-wing extremist and left-wing extremist organizations, 2) new anti-systemic forces and 3) parts of the Russian and North Caucasian diaspora. Up to now the most significant threats seem to be threatening/blackmailing/shaming, etc., of political opponents (social networks), small-scale violence against opponents connected with demonstrations, small-scale 'sabotages', and vandalism (destroying Ukrainian flags, etc.), and recruitment of pro-Russian (pro-Separatist) foreign fighters. However, targeted attacks on political opponents, mass violent clashes connected with demonstrations, terrorist attacks on infrastructure or a new wave of foreign fighters who will serve in the Russian army or PMCs, or even homegrown insurgency could be forecasted as new threats in the future.

3.17 Criminal justice approaches to returning foreign fighters in Germany and France

Ms. Sofia Koller/Germany

More than 5.300 Western Europeans left their home country and travelled to Syria and Iraq to join terrorist organizations, such as the so-called Islamic State (IS), since 2012. While some were killed, returned voluntarily or fled to Idlib, thousands of men, women, and children were captured during the final days of IS, and are since then in legal limbo in Kurdish-administered camps and prisons in Northeast Syria or detained in Iraq.

Some Western European countries have been very much against the proactive repatriation of their citizens, like the UK or France, while others have started repatriating minors and, in some cases, also adult women, like Germany or Finland. Still, the remaining (assumed) IS affiliates in the camps remain an uncomfortable security, humanitarian, legal and moral challenge for their countries of origin.

One crucial contribution to the debate on (former) foreign fighters is to analyse what happens to those who have already returned, either voluntarily, via repatriation or deportation from Turkey. Germany and France are both among the countries in Europe with the highest numbers of foreign fighters who travelled to Syria and Iraq as well as returnees.³⁵ At the same time, they have adopted quite different approaches regarding repatriation, prosecution, and rehabilitation, as a first analysis of the prosecution of female returnees in Germany demonstrates.³⁶

families': <https://www.ojip.ac.at/en/projects/eutex-developing-a-european-framework-for-disengagement-and-reintegration-of-extremist-offenders-and-radicalised-individuals-in-prison-including-returning-foreign-terrorist-fighters-and-their-families/>

³³ Mareš, M. 'Countering Far-Right Extremism in Europe: Policy Recommendations', European Eye on Radicalization 28/03/19. <https://eeradicalization.com/countering-far-right-extremism-in-europe-policy-recommendations/>

³⁴ See Kreko, P. et. al. (2017) *From Russia with Hate: The activity of pro-Russian extremist groups in Central-Eastern Europe*. Political Capital. https://www.politicalcapital.hu/pc-admin/source/documents/PC_NED_summary_analysis_EN_20170428.pdf

³⁵ Counter Extremism Project (CEP), 'CEP Senior Research Analyst Sofia Koller and CEP Advisor Liam Duffy in European Eye on Radicalization Webinar', 30/09/22. <https://www.counterextremism.com/video/cep-senior-research-analyst-sofia-koller-and-cep-advisor-liam-duffy-european-eye>

³⁶ Koller, S. (2022) *Prosecution of German Women Returning from Syria and Iraq: Insights and Recommendations for Policymakers and Security Agencies*. Berlin: Counter Extremism Project (CEP). <https://www.counterextremism.com/sites/default/files/2022->

At this year's EENeT conference, I would therefore like to present results of a research project on the approaches to male and female returnees in Germany and France. Based on interviews with governmental and civil society actors, court files and secondary sources, this presentation will compare the criminal justice approaches in the two countries. It will present insights on repatriation, prosecution as well as rehabilitation of returnees and provide recommendations for policy and security agencies.

Sofia Koller, Senior Research Analyst, Counter Extremism Project (CEP)

3.18 The role of epistemic certainty, coherence and doubt in radicalisation and de-radicalisation

Dr. Jonatan Kurzwelly/Germany

To become radicalised is to assume an ideology, a set of principles or a course of action, which provide a sense of clarity, coherence and purpose. Clarity replaces doubt and resolves or hides contradictions. This paper draws on preliminary research towards a bigger project and reflects on the desire and expectation of coherence and certainty that is evident in processes of radicalisation towards extremism. How is the sense of epistemic, identitarian and affective certainty generated and what reinforces it? Radical logic usually operates on fallacious axiomatic assumptions of a reductive, reified and essentialist view of social and personal identities, a view that is otherwise also prevalent in society at large, but asserted ubiquitously in cases of extremism. Such a logic, although inaccurate, offers a reinforced and positive sense of self, a simplified moral and interpretative framework, a sense of agency, clear behavioural prescriptions, and access to categories of inclusion. On the contrary, a pluralistic view of persons, although accurate, can cause dissonance, interpretative and behavioural uncertainty, a general sense of uncertainty and ambiguity, as well as expose diverse epistemic and moral contradictions. This paper pursues the hypothesis that latent epistemic contradictions offer a potential path towards disengagement and deradicalization, a hypothesis which will be tested in forthcoming research.

3.19 Europol initiatives to address terrorist Content online

Europol CT Specialist

On 12 March 2015, the Justice and Home Affairs Council of the EU mandated Europol to establish a dedicated unit aiming at reducing the level and impact of internet content promoting terrorism or violent extremism. The EU IRU, which is part of Europol's European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC), started its operations in July 2015 with a mandate to refer terrorist and violent extremist content to Online Service Providers (OSPs) and provide support to EU Member States (EU MS) and Third Parties (TP) in the context of internet investigations.

The EU IRU's overall mission is to link the virtual face of terrorism to its physical aspect, by bridging the gap between prevention and investigation capabilities. The Unit's ultimate objective is to reduce accessibility of terrorist content online by providing a sustained referral capability to EU MS and TP, and to provide a core internet-based investigation support capability to respond to the MS' priorities and operational needs.

One of the EU IRU's strategic priorities in the field of prevention is cooperation with technology companies. The Unit engages with OSPs that are exposed to terrorist content or are being exploited in the context of a terrorist activity. The aim of cooperation is to exchange best practices in detecting terrorist content on their platforms, discuss dissemination patterns of online propaganda by terrorist organisations and/or provide examples of specific measures to improve the referral process and content moderation.

[08/CEP%20Policy%20Paper_Prosecution%20of%20German%20Women%20Returning%20from%20Syria%20and%20Iraq_August%202022_final.pdf](#)

3.20 The Malicious Use of Artificial Intelligence (MUAI) applied to cognitive warfare. Disinformation and Radicalisation along the path of progressive immersive transformation of Terrorism and Violent Extremism

Prof. Arije Antinori/Italy

The continuous expansion of the (cyber-)social ecosystem together with the growth and diffusion of AI-based technology foster the development and implementation of multi-dimensional attack strategies aimed at compromising the (cyber-)social security, as a key paradigm of national security in the converging post-truth and (post-)pandemic scenario. In this context, the Malicious Use of Artificial Intelligence (MUAI) can be one of the main resources for hostile entities such as State actors, asymmetric and proxy actors, today and in the near future.

Moreover, in a still infodemic and highly vulnerable scenario because of the conflict caused by the Russian military invasion of Ukraine, the MUAI can be used to increase the penetrative effectiveness of Cognitive Warfare. Such an evolving threat allows a more effective weaponization of citizens in the (cyber) social ecosystem, with the aim of disrupting the EU Member State's democracies from within the population.

The connection between disinformation and radicalisation as well as the progressive immersive transformation of terrorism and violent extremism determine a necessary and urgent reflection on how to prevent, counter and anticipate the MUAI applied to Cognitive Warfare threats to public and national security.

3.21 Project Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism Program, Somalia 2022

Mr. Andrin Raj/Finland

Outcome: The Government of Somalia was appreciative of the program as it provided knowledge and tools to help assist the Somalian authorities in developing a robust PCVE program.³⁷ The Government of Somalia expressed that such actions would contribute to improving capacity building projects for youth in Somalia and that a new project to support environment for youth in industrial development and entrepreneurship is being designed, while reminding that woman are particularly important in national development.

Further coordination and enhanced links between Ministries and NGOs supporting Justice structures will be implemented to strengthen the Rule of Law. This training reportedly gave many insights and taught numerous lessons that the Ministry of Justice will adapt to the Somali context, notably applying communication and behavioural skills gained in the workshop to promote the youth deradicalisation process, using best practices from Indonesia in collecting and measuring the benchmark of intolerance and finally developing awareness raising programs through different platforms to change the minds of communities as well as contributing to the trauma and social healing process.

3.22 Knowledge Management in Security Research: About Innovation, Disturbance, and Aberration

Ms. Denise Burkert und Prof Stephan G. Humer/Germany

Knowledge management in science is not a new topic: research and teaching have been organising the dissemination of knowledge for centuries; an event like the EENeT conference is a classic example in this respect. But at the latest, with the advent of mass digitisation, knowledge creation, management, and distribution have also changed dramatically in Academia. This lecture will use the Research Cluster of Excellence sub-project MOTRA at Fresenius University of Applied Sciences Berlin/Wiesbaden and Netzwerk

³⁷ Nordic CT Network, 'Somalia: Prevention and Countering Violent Extremism Project 2021 – Ongoing'. <https://www.iacsp-nctn.org/somalia-project>

Terrorismusforschung e. V. as an example to show which paths have now been taken in this regard in the digital knowledge society, and what is planned for the near future.³⁸

In this context, particular emphasis will be placed on the three focal points of innovation, disturbance, and aberration. Innovation, in this case, is already something like a classic: every institution wants to be innovative these days. But how to avoid innovation being just a hollow phrase will be presented in more detail in the lecture, especially for institutions in the field of security research. In addition, there is the element of disturbance: In an attention economy, attention must be generated, but in science - and especially in the highly sensitive and politically often delicate subject area of security research - in a conducive, profound, yet effective way. To this end, artistic-scientific examples will be cited showing how this can succeed.

Lastly, the element of aberration will be addressed. This refers to creating a meaningful and people-oriented error culture that really allows learning from mistakes and in which aspects of forgetting, in particular, can play a unique role. With numerous examples from the three focal areas, the lecture will show how institutions and scientists can manage their results from security research and application better, faster, more effectively, and more successfully.

3.23 The Metaverse: A New Freedom or Breeding Ground for Extremists?

Dr. Octavia Madeira/Germany

The moment Mark Zuckerberg unveiled his company's vision for the future of the Internet in December 2021, the term Metaverse started to circulate all across the online media landscape. The Metaverse was presented as a new immersive form of social interaction in the digital space by incorporating virtual and augmented reality among many other promising technologies such as Blockchain. In brief, the Metaverse is set out to radically transform the internet and its use as we know it today. However, these changes might also affect how extremist actors can radicalise, organise and act.³⁹ Therefore, the concern about the "dark side" of this revolution of human interaction lies at the heart of this paper. As part of the German MOTRA research project (Monitoring System and Transfer Platform Radicalisation), our expertise lies in the area of technology assessment in reference to radicalisation and violent extremism.⁴⁰ In other words, we look at new emerging technologies and assess their potential for extremist use. We believe that the metaverse will undoubtedly have a significant impact on how extremists operate and how radicalisation takes place online. Vision Assessment as an analytical framework of technology assessment allows us to look past the hegemonic vision of the metaverse as presented by its advocates and draft alternative developments of the metaverse vision. We decided to use scenario development as a method to unearth these alternative Metaverse visions.

For this, we invited experts from various areas to a two - day workshop in Karlsruhe in May 2022 and defined the terms freedom and security as main drivers for extremist activity on the platform. The resulting scenarios show how extremist operations and radicalisation in a future Metaverse change, depending on how the Metaverse will be designed, policed and secured.

³⁸ BKA, 'Monitoringsystem und Transferplattform Radikalisierung – MOTRA.

https://www.bka.de/DE/UnsereAufgaben/Forschung/ForschungsprojekteUndErgebnisse/TerrorismusExtremismus/Forschungsprojekte/MOTRA/motra_node.html

³⁹ See Elson, J. et. al. 'How Terrorists could exploit the Metaverse for recruitment, plotting and attacks', MarketWatch 7/01/22. <https://www.marketwatch.com/story/how-terrorists-could-exploit-the-metaverse-for-recruitment-plotting-and-attacks-11641567798>

⁴⁰ Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT), 'MOTRA-TM – Technology monitoring as part of the collaborative project Monitoring System and Transfer Platform Radicalization'. https://www.its.kit.edu/english/projects_kusc19_motra.php

3.24 The case study of Jurgen CONINGS; a fine example of overlap between Right Wing Extremism and COVID-19 conspiracies.

Mr. Frank Geens/Belgium

Just like in most other West-European countries we have witnessed in Belgium since 2020 a panoply of contacts between leaders and members of right-wing extremist groups and the wide variety of organisations against Covid 19 measures, conspiratorialists and anti-authority groups in general. There exists a mutual influence and overlap between those scenes, in the real world as well as in the virtual world.

This mutual interference increases societal polarisation, in its turn creating more fertile breeding grounds for mostly right-wing extremist ideology. In some cases, it can lead estranged individuals to take up arms and plot and even commit attacks.

Belgium witnessed a textbook case of this potential danger in the spring of 2021 when an experienced soldier disappeared with a stock of sophisticated weapons, threatening to kill several people.⁴¹ His potential targets ranged from virologists, over his former military chiefs to ex-family members. At the time this case received worldwide media attention until it ended with the discovery of his body a month after his disappearance.

This case study will explain not only his motives and radicalisation process against the background of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also the continuing polarising effect it continues to have on some parts of the general population.

4. Podium Discussion

Covid driven radicalisation –

curse or blessing in disguise and future fears from emerging threats

Moderators:

Dr. Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn, Leiden University, The Netherlands

Prof. Marco Lombardi, Catholic University of Milan, Italy

Participants:

Prof. Tore Bjorgo, Ms. Phenicia Baatout, Ms. Julia Irving, Ms. Britt Mathys, Dr. Richard Warnes

Introduction: Covid driven radicalisation from an academic perspective

Dr. Richard Warnes, Research Consultant, United Kingdom

Initially Dr. Warnes outlined previous research on the impact of Covid-19 (C-19) on terrorism he and colleagues had conducted for the NATO Centre of Excellence – Defence Against Terrorism (COE-DAT).⁴² This was based on the textual analysis of thirty policy documents, including NATO publications and press releases. Using a ‘Grounded Theory’ approach, the report had identified a number of key emerging themes around the key headings of environment, terrorist response and policy implications:

⁴¹ See Collis, H. ‘Fugitive Belgian soldier Jurgen Conings found dead’, Politico 20/06/21. <https://www.politico.eu/article/jurgen-conings-dead-fugitive-belgian-soldier-found/>

⁴² Aydogu, S, Warnes, R. and Harley, S. (2021) *Developments in Terrorism and Counter-Terrorism during the Covid-19 Pandemic and Implications for the Future*. NATO COE-DAT. https://www.tmmm.tsk.tr/C19_ResearchReport.pdf

Environment:

- C-19 impacted across a wide range of phenomenon
- Economic indicators were worse than 1929 'Great Depression' acting as a catalyst for radicalisation and racism
- Revival in terrorism, violent extremism and ethnic separatism
- Negative impact on Counter-Terrorist funding and support, especially in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA)
- C-19 has exposed a window on the potential of a bioterrorist attack, heightened by global travel, urbanization, technology, the development of WMD and state proxy actors

Terrorist Response:

- Initial Denial – Many terrorist groups in affected areas stated C-19 did not exist or only affected their enemies
- *Volte Face* – Once embedded some groups established treatment centres and PPE, seeking to replace state provision
- Terrorist Activity – Most groups attempted to maintain or increase their tempo of activity
- Communication – Initially ignored, but increasingly used to highlight the incompetence and corruption of government responses
- Exploitation – Extreme Right-Wing groups exploited C-19 with conspiracy theories and racist narratives

Policy:

- Specific Recommendations:
 - Enhance core tasks that prepare for bioterrorism or global pandemics
 - Challenge the inadequacies of terrorist groups
 - Prepare to respond to the threat and impact of bioterrorism
 - Increase the focus on human security and enhance civil preparedness
 - Maintain collective security from both hostile sub-state and state actors exploiting the C-19 pandemic
- General Recommendations:
 - Improve information sharing of best practices and lessons
 - Consolidate and innovate strategic communication
 - Increase Military Aid to Civil Authorities (MACA) capabilities and preparedness
 - Strengthen defence cooperation and integration of military and civil capabilities

Each of the podium panel then discussed their perspectives and insights regarding Covid driven radicalisation. This led to a wide-ranging discussion with a number of key points raised

- Terms such as 'radicalisation' should be used with caution, since radicalisation and criticism of the system are basically legitimate, but limits must be set as soon as criticism turns to violence or the spread of conspiracy theories gets out of hand
- The C-19 pandemic was exploited by some extreme right-wing groups in the virtual world

- The pandemic saw the generation of numerous conspiracy theories and 'anti-authority' and 'anti-everything' thinking -> "Anti-systemic-extremism"
- On the other hand, the Covid lockdown and associated lack of public activity dampened down terrorism
- Some terrorist groups, particularly outside Europe in SSA and MENA exploited the vacuum to provide medical services the state was failing to deliver to the public (such as *al-Shabab* and *Hezbollah*)
- The C-19 pandemic highlighted the fine balance between the right to protest, freedom of speech and state security
- The C-19 protest movement is very diverse and consists of many different groups with different motives BUT right-wing groups try to infiltrate the movement
- The C-19 pandemic can be seen as a catalyst for social polarization
- Loss of trust in the system and hostility to the state are serious challenges to which authorities must respond and do so with a united voice
- New forms of communications: Verbal lapses, threats and hostility have increased dramatically, especially through the use of social media, and the platforms are being used to spread disinformation - especially during the lockdown
- Challenge for state security and politics to counter the threat - also because it is difficult to hold the companies concerned responsible for "controlling" the Internet
- Lack of understanding of democracy
- The education and school system play a major role in teaching understanding of how a democracy works
- Critical thinking must be promoted - also in order to be able to recognize disinformation
- We need to be careful when discussing this field, because Covid related protests as such are part of a normal, healthy civil society. The relevance and question going forward is how it might (or might not) eventually lead to elements of extremism and terrorism

5. World Cafe

5.1 World Café 1: Released Inmates

Dr. Nacer Lalam, IHEMI, France

How is an inmate (convicted of terrorism) “monitored” after being released from prison?

In the next few years in Europe, several hundred people convicted of terrorism will be released from prison. Several questions arise challenging several policies around the balance between the rule of law and the prevention of terrorism.⁴³ The parliamentary debate on this issue is sensitive and polarised. Public expectations are very high, as any recurrence would be a collective failure. If the popular reaction is anything to go by, we can expect “zero tolerance” for the risks posed by this threat.

In this sense, the trend in public policy is towards repressive measures, in particular, control measures in the event of:

- Parole
- placing under electronic supervision
- outside placement
- semi-liberty
- or constrained release

The members of the network considered that it was necessary to look at this problem from a temporal perspective: before the release from prison and afterwards.

France will release nearly 400 prisoners in the next few years, making it one of the most affected countries in Europe.⁴⁴ It can share its experience in the assessment of radicalised people in prisons. The need for a precise follow-up of these prisoners is fundamental. The development of educational measures with the help of university programmes seems to be a feasible public policy within the prison environment.

The assessment of an inmate’s dangerousness is a key point, requiring a fine monitoring and working with the probation services. A lot of knowledge does exist and needs to be integrated into the public policies.

After their release, the social stability of the former inmate is a condition to avoid recidivism, especially in the area of housing and employment.

The debate also focused on the aspects of communication:

- towards the public to prepare the exit of these inmates;
- towards a specific sector such as social networks because of their reputation. The idea is to promote the right to privacy

⁴³ See UNODC (2016) *Handbook on the Management of Violent Extremist Prisoners and the Prevention of Radicalization to Violence in Prisons*. Vienna: United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime.
https://www.unodc.org/pdf/criminal_justice/Handbook_on_VEPs.pdf

⁴⁴ See EU RAN, ‘RAN Study Visit to Paris on Effective management of the prison-exit continuum, online event 07-08 December 2021’: https://home-affairs.ec.europa.eu/whats-new/publications/ran-study-visit-paris-effective-management-prison-exit-continuum-online-event-07-08-december-2021_en

There is no doubt that any reintegration process requires trust from both the beneficiaries and their environment. The best post-custodial regime for these prisoners will be one that can reconcile strong social reintegration and control measures. In other words, proportionality in a long-term perspective.

The multi-disciplinary approach as developed in Belgium (security cells) is promising.

5.2 World Café 2: Post Covid Radicalisation/ new trends in radicalisation

Dr. Nick Petropolous, KEMEA, Greece

The topic of the discussion was "Post-Covid-Radicalisation/ new trends of radicalisation".

The aim of the discussion was to examine the different and various dimensions of the post-covid era radicalisation and, in particular, whether the pandemic has given birth to new trends in the radicalisation landscape in different European countries and/or globally

Although during the discussion it was highlighted that there is no consent that the pandemic per se is over, the discussion focused on a number of interesting and thought-provoking issues that pertain to the radicalisation process and the effect Covid-19 had on it.⁴⁵

One of the main issues that were discussed was the difference between online and offline radicalisation and how the use of social media during the Covid-19 era facilitated the tremendous increase in fake news/disinformation campaigns. As people spent more time isolated at their homes, they became more prone to online propaganda and disinformation. An interesting dimension raised by a few participants was the fact that in a number of European countries social tensions increased during the pandemic, in part due to different approaches within the society regarding the policies imposed by the governments to contain the spread of Covid; for example, while some countries like Portugal saw the vast majority of the population conforming with the mandatory vaccination strategy/campaign of the government and demonstrations/anti-vaccine protests were kept to a minimum, in other countries -especially in Eastern Europe- more than one third of the population refused to take the vaccine and there was a dynamic reaction to the measures imposed by the government to contain the spread of the virus with demonstrations and frequent clashes between protestors and the police. As a result, polarisation within societies increased although as mentioned there were significant differences between different countries across Europe in terms of lack of trust in the government. An interesting trend though, that appeared in a number of countries, was the co-existence of far-right and far-left groups in frequently heterogeneous groups in anti-government demonstrations during the pandemic; although at first this looks strange, it actually makes perfect sense as the "enemy" of both groups is identical: the government.

Moreover, an interesting topic raised during the discussion was that "the pandemic speaks to everyone" regardless of socio-economic status; that said, literally everyone was vulnerable during the pandemic in terms of propaganda and conspiracy theories, the spread of which skyrocketed during the lockdown period.

A number of participants highlighted the role of the different narratives that were promoted during the Covid-19 pandemic and the fact that there seems to be an increase of antisemitism and a more aggressive rhetoric against democratic values by extremist groups across the ideological spectrum.

⁴⁵ See UN CTC. (2021) *Update on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on terrorism. Counter-terrorism and countering violent extremism*. New York: United Nations.

https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/ctc/sites/www.un.org/securitycouncil.ctc/files/files/documents/2021/Jun/cted_covid_paper_15june2021_1.pdf

However, although during the discussion not all participants agreed that society is now more violent than it was in the pre-Covid 19 era, most participants emphasized the fact that there are now movements that can be easily mobilised and get on the streets posing significant security challenges to the law enforcement and intelligence authorities. Using the internet made these voices louder, although they do not represent the majority of the citizens.

A final point that was raised during the discussion was the new post-Covid 19 potential “crises” – like the energy crisis for example- and how elements are going to exploit the polarisation created over the last couple of years.

As far as potential solutions and policies to address the above-mentioned challenges are concerned, most participants agreed that the lack of sufficient explanations on behalf of the governments regarding their decisions during the Covid-19 era fuelled anti-government sentiments and facilitated the spread of fake news and disinformation. Last but not least, there is a need for increased accountability and transparency on behalf of governments to restore faith in democracy.

5.3 World Café 3: New Trends in right-wing extremism

Mr. Gert Vercauteren, CUTA, Belgium

A starting point was the observation that there is a certain blurring of the lines in right-wing extremism. A lot of right-wing extremists have for instance embraced the anti-COVID protests and are now blending into wider movements of anti-establishment protesters.⁴⁶ Their common ground is a general distrust and (sometimes) hatred towards government, administrations, experts and even the regular media, which they see as puppets in the hands of an elite that seeks to control and silence the regular citizens. Another example is the phenomena of *Reichsbürger*⁴⁷, survivalists, preppers, etcetera who might have (partially) a right-wing extremist inspiration, but who cannot be labelled as pure right-wing extremists, because they are driven by many other – non-ideological - factors. But they as well share the distrust of the government and the official instances.

This brought us in all the groups to the rising phenomenon of anti-establishment, anti-systemic or anti-government movements. A participant labelled this trend as post-organisational extremism, seeking to combine forces around a certain issue or event.⁴⁸ In this sense, it has become impossible to identify a real group with a clear consistency or coherence, we must see it as networks instead of groups. The fact that there is no consistent ideological framework, is not important, was added. Ideologies are always inconsistent, it's a form of magic, people can live with inconsistencies. Another participant saw this trend as a symptom of the shift from a political party system to a post-party system. Political parties are facing a growing lack of legitimacy, and citizens turn towards 'movements' as an alternative. The anti-systemic movements have no ambition to replace the old ideological framework by a new one, they are just against any form of governmental organisation. Their 'leitmotif' can be resumed as: 'Join the need, not the ideology'.

⁴⁶ See IJ (2021) *IJ Criminal Justice Practitioner's Guide – Addressing Racially or Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremism*, Valletta, Malta: International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law. https://www.theij.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/J10434-IJ-REMVE-Practitioners-Guide_ENG-WEB-v04.pdf

⁴⁷ See Early, S. & Goldenberg, 'The Reichsbürger movement in Germany', Deutsche Welle 9/01/20. <https://www.dw.com/en/the-reichsb%C3%BCrger-movement-in-germany/g-41074914>

⁴⁸ See Davey, J. et. al. (2021) *A Taxonomy for the Classification of Post-Organisational Violent Extremist & Terrorist Content*. London: Institute for Strategic Dialogue. <https://www.isdglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/12/A-Taxonomy-for-the-Classification-of-Post-Organisational-Violent-Extremist-Terrorist-Content.pdf>

The discussions made it abundantly clear that both the academic world and the security services are struggling to find a well-suited definition for this phenomenon. Several valuable suggestions were made, such as: Forms of extremism that seek to delegitimize the state and its institutions; 'sovereignism', the notion of wanting control over one's conditions of existence; or anti-systemic extremism. The latter term was heavily criticized by certain participants. In their view, extremism is by nature always anti-systemic. And everybody sometimes has grievances against the system or the government. It was pointed out that governments sometimes tend to overreact, which can (rightfully) trigger anti-government feelings and protests. There is also a strong risk of abuse of the term, others argued, e.g., in countries where the government itself can be seen as undemocratic and repressive.

As for the future, said another participant, it will be important to manage the effects of this rising phenomenon. New forms of democracy might be developing, in which people are elected on narratives, no longer on (party) programs. Conspiracy theories can affect the course of affairs. They have always existed and have always accused the government of doing nothing or not enough (Eurabia, the Great Replacement), but since recently the government itself has become 'the evil' (QAnon⁴⁹ etcetera).

While the short-term effects of these conspiracy theories do not translate into a peak of extremist or terrorist violence, in the longer run they risk playing into the hands of populist extreme right-wing politicians. The far right is already benefiting from the fact that we have one crisis after another and has increased its political powerbase in many western countries.

Finally, several participants stressed the need to be watchful for external influences by third countries that seek to undermine our western democracies.

5.4 World Café 4: Protective Factors

Dr. Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn, Leiden University, The Netherlands

The aim of this world café group was to dive deeper into a question that is increasingly getting attention in the academic literature. Rather than only understanding how and why people radicalise, or perhaps better, to understand why they eventually decide to use violence, this group looked at understanding why most people, fortunately, never take that step.⁵⁰ The starting point was to look at those who were already engaged in certain "radical milieus" or who already had extremist worldviews, but who then do not take the step of engaging in extremist or terrorist violence.

First of all, the more conceptual question was whether or not we can consider "protective factors" to be the opposite of factors that explain terrorism, or radicalisation factors in reverse. We did not really answer this question, but in the answers that were given, it seemed that the basic assumption among our audience was that protective factors are indeed mostly radicalisation factors in reverse. It would, however, be useful to do more research to see if this assumption is actually based on empirical evidence.⁵¹

⁴⁹ See LaFrance, A. 'The Prophecies of Q: American conspiracy theories are entering a dangerous new phase'. The Atlantic June 2020. <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2020/06/qanon-nothing-can-stop-what-is-coming/610567/>

⁵⁰ See Marsden, S. & Lee, B. (2022) *Protective factors for Violent Extremism and Terrorism: Rapid Evidence Assessment*. CREST. <https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/protective-factors-for-violent-extremism-and-terrorism-rapid-evidence-assessment/#:~:text=Individual%2Dlevel%20factors%20were%20the,activism%20and%20civic%20attachment%20factors.>

⁵¹ See Wolfowicz, M. et. al. 'A Field-Wide Systematic Review and Meta-analysis of Putative Risk and Protective Factors for Radicalization Outcomes'. *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 36, 407-447, Nov. 2019.

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/337548836_A_field-wide_systematic_review_and_meta-analysis_of_putative_risk_and_protective_factors_for_radicalization_outcomes/link/5ddda31aa6fdcc2837ed8178/download

Then looking at the factors that were mentioned, several categories could be distinguished: 1) social, 2) psychological, 3) practical.

For instance, several people mentioned having meaningful relationships with others or being attached to others in a social setting as a potential protective factor. This was across the four groups the most often mentioned factor. Other factors that were discussed were the importance of education: to teach people that there is not one correct point of view, to critically engage with material they are presented with, such as fake news, conspiracy theories. Yet, for these and other factors, there was also disagreement in the groups, as many people also said that there has been no link proven in research between levels of education and engagement in violence. Also, in relation to having a social group and social ties: these could also be exactly the factors that lead people into violence. So, for these and other factors, the conclusion was that they are also context-dependent: what could be a protective factor for one person, could perhaps be a factor for engaging in extremist violence for someone else.

Several other people commented upon psychological factors: for instance, the ability to deal with ambiguity, the ability to see things from different points of view. One participant spoke about the “human condition” as being key: the fact that people generally do not like to use violence. Although perhaps not necessarily a psychological factor as such, there was also discussion about religion being a protective factor: some participants mentioned that *ihadists* have a distorted view of Islam. Others, however, disagreed and said that religion in that case was the explaining factor why people engage in terrorist violence.

Finally, some people discussed practical obstacles: e.g. not being presented with an opportunity to engage in extremist violence. Or not having a (charismatic) leader or someone else asking you to perform certain tasks. Or perhaps no presence of the victim/target group that matches their ideological views.

When discussing these factors, it frequently became clear how context-dependent these were, as mentioned above. The protective factors against extreme left-wing terrorism in the 1970s probably look very different than those against *ihadist* violence today. So, participants warned that there is no one-size-fits-all solution here. Nevertheless, we concluded that it is still valuable to better understand protective factors and their contextual relevance in order to see how we can stop people from becoming terrorists.

6. Business meeting

Mr. Uwe Möws

Head of the EENeT Secretariat, Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA), Germany

Mr. Moews opened the business meeting and announced among other network internal information that Dr. Jeanine de Roy van Zuijdewijn of Leiden University/The Netherlands, leaves the EENeT Steering Committee (SC) due to a new work commitment, but will remain a member of the network. Prof. Miroslav Mareš from the Faculty of Social Studies of the Masaryk University in Brno/Czech Republic was nominated as a new SC member of the EENeT.

The future SC members are subsequently the following:

Dr. Uwe Kemmesies, Germany

Dr. Nacer Lalam, France

Prof. Marco Lombardi, Italy
Prof. Miroslav Mareš, Czech Republic
Dr. Nick Petropoulos, Greece
Mr. Gert Vercauteren, Belgium
Mr. Richard Warnes, United Kingdom

Mr. Moews stated that the report of the annual conference 2022 will be published as “EENeT Working Paper Series (EWPS7)” in the EENeT’s Internet website most probably at the end of this year.

7. Evaluation of the Event

Evaluation of the EENeT Conference 2022: Questionnaire

The EENeT members that participated at the conference were asked 8 questions by means of a questionnaire with a 1 to 5-point system:

1 Excellent 2 Very good 3 Good 4 Room for improvement 5 Poor

Additionally, they were asked to give any comments through the following question:

We would also appreciate any additional comments regarding the event e.g. what you liked and what can be improved for the next conference

7.1 Here are the main results as overall rating of the responses with very positive results.

1. Content of the Keynote speaker’s presentations: 1,92
2. Presentations of the EENeT members: 1,62
3. Usefulness of the Podium Discussion: 2,38
4. Results of the World café discussions: 1,85
5. Networking opportunities: 1,15
6. The organizational part of the event: 1,23
7. The event atmosphere: 1,23
8. Suitability of the event location: 1,54

7.2 Here are some comments from the participants:

“The conference was excellent. The atmosphere and networking opportunities were fantastic. I especially appreciated the coming together of academics and practitioners. What I think could be improved, is the format of presentations of EENeT members. I found it too rushed and too dispersed between these three rooms. I really would have wished to be able to listen to all presenters, and to have a little bit more time to listen, ask questions, and gather my thoughts before the next speaker. Thank you for organising this wonderful conference! I am already looking forward to the next one!”

“The conference was conducted professionally and with the utmost attention to detail. The presentations were useful, interesting and provided the participants with a compact overview regarding the working areas of all the partaking organisations. The networking possibilities were excellent to say the least. During and after the seminar there was a lot of time to get to know each other and work out if there are overlaps in your work. Uwe Moews and the Secretariat made myself as a new member feel welcomed from the beginning until the end. Special thanks also to Richard Warnes for guiding us through the seminar and being such a good spirit.”

“In my opinion, it was an excellent conference! One point that could probably be improved is giving the speakers at the World Café more time for their presentations while reducing the number of presentations a bit.”

“It would be great to have the EENeT members' presentation spread to more slots to avoid the need of 3 parallel sessions = one has to miss a lot of interesting presentations.”

“I really enjoyed the open exchange at the world café discussions and the format itself. There was a good variety of EENeT member presentations and opportunities to network. I would prefer more or longer opportunities to stick our heads together, collect ideas to topics, propose preliminary solutions, discuss problems and conflicts. Thank you for the excellent organization!”

8. Summary, Conclusion and Outlook

8.1 Summary

First Day: After welcomes and introductions with Dr. Nacer Lalam, we heard from Mr. Freysselinard regarding the work of IHEMI, providing top level research and training to senior officials and officers at the highest level, including six major research projects on terrorism since 2015. We then heard from an expert of the French Ministry of the interior regarding the threats and future challenges associated with *Islamist* terrorism in France. He explained that after the GIA terrorism of the 1990s, the earlier 2000s had been quieter, until the watershed attack of Mohammed Merah in 2012. Most recently, following the major attacks in Paris, they have disrupted eight plots since 2020, all by ‘lone actors’. This reflects the growing autonomy amongst French Islamist extremists, who are less linked to major groups. He identified six upcoming counter-terrorist challenges:

- Growing autonomy and self-motivation
- The rise of conspiracy theories
- The risk of violent escalation with the ultra-right
- New *Jihad* theatres
- Forthcoming prisoner releases in the next three years
- The uncertain future of French FTF in Syria and Iraq

Then we heard from Professor Tore Bjørgo regarding the work of C-REX and Extreme Right Wing (XRW) terrorism and violence in western Europe since 1990, in particular the detailed findings of the research in the RTV (Right Wing Terrorism and Violence) trend report 2022. Key findings were:

- Far right violence is not on the rise
- XRW ‘Lone actors’ are not the biggest threat, except in fatal attacks, but rather more frequent small attacks and violent hate crime
- Perpetrators of fatal XRW attacks are not young men
- Ethnic and religious minorities are increasingly the main target
- With weapons, knives are mostly used, but firearms are increasingly common in fatal attacks

Ms. Phénicia Baatout outlined the current challenges in Europe from the perspective of the EU Counter Terrorism Coordinator. Although the direct threat has decreased, the concern is

now the indigenous threat by inspired 'lone actors' or small groups, who are not part of a formal structure. Their targets are often symbolic, such as a church or synagogue, or police or military personnel. They will also target crowded spaces and public transport to maximise victims, often using knives.

The role of RAN Policy Support (RAN PS) was detailed by Mr. Alberto Contaretti, supporting EU policy makers in the field of P/CVE, from both the Commission and Member States. The primary role was to strengthen the evidence base of politics and this was achieved through:

- Knowledge generation - through policy analysis and security research
- Capacity building – through knowledge transfer and sharing
- Research Related – through strengthening the evidence base of politics

RAN PS has developed an Advisory Board and an E-Library and is establishing the European Researchers Community on Radicalisation (ERCOR) and International Research Institutes and Network (IRIN).

Europol's perspective on counter terrorism was explained based on detailed findings in their annual TESAT 2022. The lowest number of *Jihadist* attacks for years occurred in 2021 with only 3 recorded in the EU. However, the speaker explained we cannot relax as there are concerns regarding the radicalisation of young people, FTF and the control of EU borders. There is also the XRW threat with the example of a couple in Iceland who were planning an attack with semi-automatic weapons. The impact of larger geo-political developments, such as the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the war in Ukraine also had to be considered. Future areas of focus for Europol will be on CBRN, drones and the use of 3-D printers to produce non-registered weapons.

The presentations of the keynote speakers were then followed by a veritable variety of EENeT expert's presentations. These covered the spectrum of terrorist ideologies, radicalisation, weaponry and tactics, as well as a range of technologies and measures introduced to counter them. They were followed by the Podium Discussion of 'Covid driven radicalisation – curse or blessing in disguise and future fears from emerging threats'. While the epidemic was exploited by some XRW groups in the virtual world, the lockdown 'dampened down' terrorism. However, it also led to conspiracy theories, exploitation for radicalisation and an 'anti-everything' outlook. Outside of Europe some terrorist groups had stepped in to exploit the medical vacuum and provide services to win the support of local communities. The exchange with the audience led to a wider discussion of the balance between protest, freedom of speech and state security.

Second Day: Following a summary of the first day, the bulk of the morning was devoted to the World Café and an examination of its results. This was designed to maximise and exploit the expert knowledge of the audience through four moderated discussions on specific topics that each person would rotate through. The resulting points raised in debate were recorded, to inform the summaries detailed earlier in the report. The four topics discussed were:

- Released Inmates
- Post Covid Radicalisation/ new trends in radicalisation
- New trends in Right Wing Extremism
- Protective Factors

The results of the World Café discussions were then presented, which are detailed earlier in the report. These were followed by the business meeting and a summary of the second day and outlook before the Conference ended.

8.2 Conclusion: The Conference appeared to have been very successful, with a number of positive unsolicited comments from the various academics and practitioners attending. The hosting of the first physical conference of the EENeT since its meeting in Athens in 2019, and the following period of Covid-19, resulted in three major benefits:

- Firstly, the Conference provided a forum for the sharing and dissemination of expert knowledge and information. In particular, given the particular fields of research of some members and the operational experience of others, it enabled a unique insight across a wide range of aspects associated with terrorism and counter-terrorism
- Secondly, having a Conference 'in person' following the virtual/hybrid conference last year during Covid, allowed numerous sidebar discussions and the sharing of knowledge, information and intelligence in ways that could not have been achieved through 'Virtual' meetings
- Thirdly, the Conference provided a great networking opportunity, particularly following the years of Covid, allowing researchers and practitioners to connect and exchange ideas and information on threats and countermeasures against terrorism
- Finally, the Conference allowed collaboration between the various practitioners and academics, not just during the Conference itself but potentially in other ongoing and future projects

In conclusion, given the nature of the EENeT as a forum bringing together experts on terrorism and counter-terrorism from across the fields of policing, intelligence and academia, the Conference helped break down the traditional barriers between practitioners and academics. This generated a fruitful sharing of information and ideas across the fields and resulted in a greater understanding of the current terrorist threat and measures to mitigate it across all groups at the Conference.

8.3 Outlook: Now that the EENeT is able to meet up again following Covid, we are looking at future opportunities for the next annual conference in 2023. Already, there are several possible options in different countries, courtesy of the support of EENeT members. These are currently being followed up to see whether they can be pursued and developed for next year. As things develop, the EENeT members will be informed. ////