European Platform of Deradicalisation (EDNA):

Trends / challenges in European radicalisation awareness and prevention initiatives – inter-agency and community embedded approaches, gender issues, internet / social media

by Harald Weilnböck

More info:
PD. Dr. Harald Weilnböck (Ph.D.)
 - Co-Chair RAN-Derad –
Radicalisation Awareness Network

http://www.weilnboeck.net/

weilnboeck@cultures-interactive.de

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Current trends and challenges in European radicalization awareness and prevent initiatives are numerous – due to the high dynamic that many Member States and the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) of the European Commission are investing in the prevention of extremism. The RAN, for instance, will significantly enlarge its investment when building a RAN Centre of Excellence in 2015; with this come many opportunities to pursue in-depth work in practice, research, structure building and policy making.

Four of these trends / challenges may stand out: (1) Inter-agency cooperation between security and prevention practitioners, (2) the need for community embedded approaches, (3) the importance to recognize the gender aspects in extremism and prevention, and (4) the question of what can and cannot be achieved via Internet and social media in awareness and prevention.

(1)   Inter-agency cooperation between security and prevent initiatives seems to be an area where more effort is needed to bridge the gap between state and non-state organizations. Moreover, the predominantly security oriented programs and strategies have realized the need to work closely together with practitioners that provide prevention, deradicalisation/ rehabilitation and reintegration interventions. This is easier said than done since two quite different areas of work – and work philosophies – meet. The difficulty becomes apparent when one looks at what has been suggested as the basic principles of promising practice in prevent and deradicalisation work by the RAN working

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group on deradicalisation and rehabilitation practices (and will soon be finalized and adopted as RAN Derad working group declaration on good practice).

Some of these principles, at first sight, seem to cause dilemmas when looked at from a security angle. In detail: the promising approaches seem to be open-process, exploratory interventions that have no formal agenda or session plan. They proceed in narrative and relational ways and are based on trust and challenge – and on voluntary engagement. Therefore, confidentiality in a safe space are offered. These interventions are best delivered by skilled, specially-trained non-governmental or third-party practitioners who act independently within and across statutory institutions and are proactively assisted by the institutional staff. The main characteristics of open-process approaches are:

- focus on the development of emotional intelligence*;*

- occur within group settings as much as possible;

- touch upon biographical, familial, gender-related, and power experiences;

- employ some elements of advanced civic/ religious education when suitable;

- include members of the family, the community and civil society;

- combine both accepting and confrontational modes of interaction; and

- are accompanied by state-of-the-art quality control.

(2)	How this can be done in an inter-agency and community-embedded approach may be best observed in the Aarhus model which brings together security and prevention practitioners in inter-agency working groups that focus on individuals and assist in specially targeted mentorship for them. These working groups may encompass teachers, police, social workers, and, above all,

intelligence officers – also psychiatric and counseling practitioners. They have been particularly impactful with travelers to Syria. Intelligent measures of sharing and safeguarding confidential information have been found – while the information sharing is aimed at prevention rather than at repression purposes. There recently has been a CNN report on the Aarhus model which the Aarhus colleagues have deemed relatively accurate:

http://edition.cnn.com/2014/10/28/world/europe/denmark-syria-deradicalization-program/ .

(3)   When working with communities and families in a systemic and context embedded fashion it quickly becomes apparent how central – and often overlooked – gender aspects are in extremism and prevention. Consequently, we need to develop both *gender specific* and *gender focused* approaches (cf. the WomEx-project of Cultures Interactive, and OSCE activities).

Specifically, the following observations have been made by the WomEx project and partners:

- Women/ girls play a crucial role in all violent extremism(s) and in terrorism;
- Violent extremist organizations use women – and gender – in many strategic ways;
- Women often act as undercover supporters, as organizers, instigators or as attackers;
- We tend to overlook female extremists – law enforcement and prosecution underrate women's role in extremism;
- Hence, prevention of extremism requires gender specific approaches
- All forms of violent extremism (right-wing extremist, Jihadism, Christian fundamentalism etc.) rest on ideologies of gender inequality
- There is no violent extremist who is not also sexist and homophobic
- Young men and women join extremism(s) mostly because of social and

> gender related motives

- Extremist acts and hate crimes are often triggered by gender related affects and identity conflicts
- It often is more impactful to talk gender to young at risk people than talking ideology/ religions
- Hence, prevention of extremism requires gender focused approaches

In summary, good practice prevention emphasizes working *both* with women and on gender identities of men and women

(4) With regard to Internet and social media many demand so-called "counter narratives". Yet, first-line practitioners claim that "one cannot deradicalise on-line" – and also down-stream prevention needs direct face-to-face interaction. Various misconception and exaggerated expectations are current: Some assume counter-narratives are self-evident: some base educational material and interviews will do. Others want to learn from extremists' web-activities and "counter-radicalize" through pro-democracy values – forgetting that counter-manipulation cannot be the solution. Few even attempt to employ humour, even ridicule, ignoring that extremists lack humour and ridicule/mockery is a most explosive strategy. More helpful are modest approaches that seek to communicate government's good-will and refute misinformation and propaganda, while being clear that this will not impress radicalized people but raise awareness. Victims' testimonials may also be helpful – as long as they are conscious that radicalized young people react highly averse because they are generally victimized themselves and in strong psychological denial.

The most misleading believe, however, is that extremists' communications need to be "countered", "contested", "combated", "dismantled" and "ideology, logic, fact" be applied – disregarding that extremists feed on being countered.

The "Deradicalizing Narratives" project (EDNA, Berlin) has thus far observed:

(1) Sustainable media approaches need to observe the principles of offline good-practice;

(2) They should be embedded in an off-line intervention process. Here a 20-80 principle applies, i.e. 80% resources go into the off-line.

(3) Video production procedures should be designed as counselling interventions, i.e. are maximally participative. Clients get training in narrative interviewing and video/audio editing, they explore deradicalizing principles, co-produce their own tool for future offline use, become facilitators, and keep all the rights on the material.

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