

European Platform of Deradicalisation (EDNA):

Key recommendations for policy making in the prevention of violent extremism and hate crime (RAN Derad – 2013)

by Harald Weilnböck



*With the financial support of the Prevention of and Fight against Crime Programme
European Commission – Directorate-General Home Affairs.*

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*The European platform of Deradicalising Narratives (EDNA) is co-financed by Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung
(Federal Agency of Civic Education)*

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Recommendation 1:

Intensify the knowledge feed-up from social ground practitioners – and RAN members – to top level policy makers, i.e. enhance and intensify the processes in which the observations, conclusions and recommendations from the ground level of social intervention practices are exchanged with and handed up to the top levels of national and European policy making.

Commentary: The general experience after the first year of RAN work has been:

[a] Among European practitioners there is widely consolidated and empirically proven knowledge about how prevent and derad interventions need to proceed methodologically and which contextual conditions need to be provided for this work in order to be successful and sustainable (see products delivered by RAN Derad and Prevent during 2012/13).

[b] and yet, in many cases this knowledge does not seem to be able to travel up the administrative ladder of policy making – both on national and European level. This knowledge thus does not easily reach the key persons that determine policy making. Among the various reasons for this lack of communication and transfer three factors may be identified clearly:

- (i) the lack of a crucial minimum of direct experience on the part of policy makers with regards to the realities, field conditions, and methodological key issues of good-practice prevent and derad work,

- (ii) structural resistance factors within the dynamics of party politics and within politically underpinned governmental organisations,
- (iii) a lack of trust and cooperation on the part of governmental administration towards non-governmental practitioners and civil society actors (often also towards the more innovative and engaged statutory practitioners who sometimes find themselves alienated disempowered within their governmental organisations).

These and various other resistance factors have to be worked on in a systematic and methodical manner. The RAN high level conference, while having been widely recognized on political levels, had only limited impact in terms of knowledge feed-up. There seems to not have been enough in-depth exchange between practitioners and policy makers.

[c] In the background of these dysfunctional feed-up/exchange a prevent/derad industry of “projects”, “expert voices” and “think take activities” has come about that is perceived to increasingly revolve around itself and not get to the stage of implementation and impact so that investment does not create added value.

Conclusion: Hence, new and innovative settings of in-depth exchange have to be developed and tested in order to enhance and intensify the feed-up of experience, knowledge and recommendations from firstline practitioners from the most at-risk areas of society to policy makers on top levels of administrations.

In practical terms this means:

- (1) Identify the most suitable persons to be addressed and differentiate between persons from the *political* and the *administrational* level (locally, nationally and European). (i) On the *administrational* levels, those key persons need to be identified and addressed who are in charge of CT and Prevent policy making and local implementation but

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are not in elected posts and thus don't change as often as political (party) representatives do. (ii) On the level of *party political* representatives who have or may take political positions, those key persons need to be identified and addressed that, within their parties, have specialized on CT and Prevent issues and/or on communications and campaigning issues.

(2) For the high-level conference and similar settings of exchange/ feed-up, develop specific workshops/ seminars for those two kinds of key persons (i.e. persons from the political and the administrative level of prevent and derad policy making). By way of these workshops, facilitate the exchange of firsthand experience and knowledge from on the ground practitioners towards key persons on the political and administrative level.

- (i) With the *administrational* key persons the objective is to equip them with the minimum of in-depth knowledge about prevent and derad work that is necessary for policy writing.
- (ii) With the *political* key persons the objective is to support them in their needs to forge and influence the public discourse on issues of extremism and prevent. For the workshops with *political* key persons it is important to have a cross-party, multi-partisan selection of participants. Here using synergies with similar workshops for journalists may be helpful.
- (iii) Both kinds of workshops may be combined in one setting of *high-level conference*.
- (iv) These new workshop settings should be developed by specialists of process facilitation in the area of prevent/ derad and beyond.

(3) An important part of finding new and more effective means of *feed-up communication* must be to revisit the ways in which policy recommendations/ papers are usually written – and ask the question of whether and how such papers may be enhanced linguistically. How can policy papers become more effective in communicating recommendations from ground levels of interventions to top levels of policy making?

The general observation has been that policy papers often lack precision and concreteness and sometimes are fraught by vagueness and ambiguity. Especially editing procedures of shortening/condensing a policy paper seem to encumber transfer rather than enhance it. In the face of such linguistic hindrances new ways of drafting policy papers need to be explored. By way of example: One among other linguistic strategies that seem worthwhile of exploring may be ‘Shortening requires Sharpening’ which means: The more a paper of policy recommendation is shortened and condensed the more it needs to be sharpened in its conclusions and recommendations in order to safeguard its substance – at the risk of directly touching upon political taboos and/or over-emphasizing issues.

In concrete terms of communicational practice this ensues: Those readers who are perplexed, fascinated, or maybe taken aback, challenged/ shocked etc. by a sharpened recommendation are implicitly encouraged to look into the extended version of the policy paper for more detailed clarifications on reasoning, context and practice options. This enhances/ intensifies communication, innovative thinking, as well as feed-up and transfer across different levels.

The current way of policy writing seems to be based on the opposite logic: Whoever is curious/intrigued, doubtful, dissatisfied etc. about some not so sharp but rather general and well moderated recommendation, may look into the extended paper. This does not enhance communication and feed-up. Since moderated statements do not motivate to engage; also statutory

setting and administrative procedures are generally not very supportive of expressions of curiosity/intrigue, doubtfulness, dissatisfaction.)

This enhances and intensifies communication, innovative thinking, and feed-up across several different levels.

Prevent and Derad needs to be developed as a cross-disciplinary and cross-intervention practice in the sense that may be integrated into existing practices and areas of interventions. The often recommended attitude of risk-friendliness in prevent and derad interventions here means: 'Shortening requires Sharpening'

Recommendation 2:

Develop and install a *train-the-trainer program for prevent and deradicalisation facilitators* on European and national level. By way of this training program, provide a good-practice deradicalisation methodology and skills for facilitators on European and national level. (cf. Policy Recommendations 2012, RAN Derad.)

Recommendation 3:

Provide assistance and a pool of experienced practitioners and field expert in order to assist the local implementation of training and interventions. When national and local governments intend to introduce a training program for prevent/derad practitioners, make sure there is a pool of expert practitioners and consultants available that may assist in the local implementation and adaptation and provide on-the-job coaching – also proper quality assurance. (cf. Policy Recommendations 2012, RAN Derad.)

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Recommendation 4:

As to the base setting of the actual prevent and derad work within statutory organisations (prison, probation, schools): Use external practitioners who come from outside the institutions. These external practitioners should enjoy a certain degree of independence and discretion vis-a-vis the institutions, and may go along with their clients across various institutions (e.g. from school to employment; from prison/ probation to training/ education/ community etc.).

These independent external practitioners may be trained individuals from civil society, professionals and social entrepreneur, facilitators from NGOs or other similarly situated practitioners. (If the use of independent external – and non-governmental practitioners is not feasible, for whichever practical or political reasons, a compromise may be to use statutory employees from a different institution, e.g. staff from a different school, prison etc.)

At the same time, on the part of the institution and statutory overhead: Provide support and a conducive institutional context for the external practitioners, i.e. provide the means for quality management, training, on-the-job coaching, case-supervision etc. In particular, facilitate exchange and close cooperate between the statutory organisations (prison, probation, community, school, employment etc.) and the external practitioners. This is also important in order to be able to provide a sound change management for at-risk clients may be provided when they pass from one institution/ realm of life to another

Commentary: The need to use independent external practitioners – and provide quality management – goes back to the widely established fact the impactful prevent and deradicalisation interventions are entirely reliant on being able, among other things, to provide a safe and confidential space and to build trust and resilient work relationships with the clients. Due to their position as governmental employees who report to superiors, statutory are limited in their capacity to provide such confidential space and to build a

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trustful and resilient work relationships (for further context also see RAN Derad Policy Recommendations 2012 and attached literature).

Recommendation 5:

As to practitioners, training, structure building, and financing of firstline prevent and deradicalisation work (both statutory and independent external practitioners): Here the plain guideline of policy should be: “Finance careers/ persons rather than projects” – i.e. put in place a secure and reliable mode of *long-term financing* for external practitioners of prevent and deradicalisation, including training programmes, on-the-job coaching, case supervision, quality control etc. Furthermore, provide career plans for practitioners and procure a suitable infra-structure.

In the countries that have a longer tradition of prevent and derad/exit interventions it has shown that short-term project activism, while it might have been inspirational in the beginning, resulted in brain-drain and loss of expertise in the long run because most capable persons tended to go elsewhere after not finding reliable career opportunities within the project dynamic of existing prevent and derad/exit programs.

Recommendation 6:

Acknowledge the recurring observation throughout RAN work that the terms radicalisation/ deradicalisation are perceived by practitioners as problematic on many accounts. Moreover, these terms do not communicate well with practitioners in various member states for various reasons. In effect local practitioners that are highly relevant for RAN’s objectives do not recognize themselves easily as belonging to RAN. In many instances the terms are associated with national intelligence reports’ terminologies of rightwing, leftwing and religious extremism that tend to measure extremist activities along the lines of how and to what degree they threaten the state and

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democratic order as such. Also they are regarded as focusing too much on issues of ideology which have been found by practitioners to be less important for the actual on the ground work. The view on state affairs and ideology is perceived by many practitioners as being too narrow – and, in a sense, as selfish on the part of the state.

Most of all, however, the concept of de-/radicalisation and its implicit focus on state affairs and ideology is seen as being largely ineffective for purposes of target group identification, risk assessment and intervention. In turn practitioners tend to privilege concepts of “hate crime” and “group-focused hostility” on a broad scale, and stress the aspect of violent perpetrator work. In so doing they tend to use a perspective of human rights and civil liberties (violations) because they have realized in their practical work that the rejection of and violation of human rights is the most precise and applicable indicator for spotting their target group. This is due to the fact that the most divergent and opposing forms of extremism all converge in that they ignore and/or repudiate at least some parts of the human rights and liberties. Also, focussing on human rights consciousness and skills has been found to be the most helpful and productive methodological orientation for devising sustainable prevent and derad interventions. In other words, facilitating the clients’ personal understanding of what human rights mean and fostering the clients’ sense of practicing, granting and thus proactively enjoying human rights has been recognized as the most effective strategy for any prevent and derad intervention.

In light of these findings practitioners tend to replace “deradicalisation” by terms like, distancing, work-through of hate crime, personal growth/empowerment, rehabilitation process, enhancement of resilience and independence etc.

In consequence terms of hate crime and group-focused hostility should be more explicitly included in the terminology. Moreover the different national and local practitioner fields should be encouraged to develop their own terms and definitions of the subject matter before their relevance and

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overlap with RAN Derad's working definition of radicalisation and violent extremism is determined. Hence, it is recommended to encourage a bottom up definition of terms and concepts.

Recommendation 7:

At all levels of implementation, training, and context setting of prevent and derad/exit programs and interventions, assure that the principles and guidelines of good-practice are acknowledged – and further evaluated and refined – as they have been established in prior intervention research (including RAN workshops).

These principles and guidelines have been formulated as work in progress:

“The Narrative Principle: Good Practice in Anti-Hate Crime Interventions, within the Radicalization Awareness Network” (in: Right-Wing Extremism in Europe – Country analyses, counter-strategies and labor-market oriented exit-strategies. Ed. by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation 2013, p. 379-408.)

- ... are *open-process interactional work*, i.e. they do not follow a fixed curriculum or session plan. Open-process work is by definition maximally *participatory* and *exploratory* and they require methodological flexibility of the facilitators
- ... are *voluntary* in principle, while clients may be motivated beforehand through interviews (not so much by incentives) and join on the basis of incremental buy-in
- ... are *narrative*, i.e. they facilitate processes of story-telling in the sense of relating *personally lived-through experience* and subjectively perceived occurrence. Narrative approaches steer away from rational argumentations and ideological debates.

- ... are always based on *relationship building* and are thus predicated on mutual *trust, confidence*, and personal *commitment* – and on *confidentiality*. This is why these interventions are ideally facilitated by *external non-statutory practitioners* who have license to act independently within and across statutory institutions in an *inter-agency framework* and are supported by governmental staff and state-of-the-art *quality-assurance* measures. Moreover, in developing a resilient and trusting *work-relationship* (which is personal and authentic but not private) these interventions are capable of combining both *accepting* and *confrontational* modes of interaction.
- ... focus on *social skills and emotional intelligence* – in particular in areas of conflict, anger, shame, and anxiety. This is why good-practice interventions prefer (social) *group settings* as much as possible (accompanied by one-on-one settings if needed).
- Such open-process and narrative (group-)work generally leads up to accounts of the clients' actual *life-world context, biography, family, issues around victimization, gender, power and violence, experiences of extremist recruitment*; it will also look at *personal resources* and successes – and then may eventually be develop towards in-depth *perpetration/ offense narratives* about instances of *hatred* and acts of *hate crimes*.
- Furthermore, good-practice intervention will and should touch upon *political and religious issues* – as well as on personal and social *grievances*. This may also bring up certain media narratives/films fictional or documentary which can be used in the intervention.
- Hence, open-process group-work of this sort is supported and encouraged by state-of-the-art *group facilitation* and elements of *civic education* and ...
- ... may include representatives of *family, community* and civil society that are invited into the intervention from outside at certain instances.

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