

EU approach to PVE and lessons learnt

Elements of Intervention delivered by Birgit Loeser in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan on 11 November 2016 at the occasion of the Regional Conference organised by the EUSR on 'Preventing Violent Extremism in Central Asia – Challenges and Responses at Community Level'

1. General EU approach:

- radicalisation is a concern of almost every society nowadays; almost no country is spared
- the first step potentially to violent extremism and terrorism – but no automaticity
- we have heard earlier about the pull and push factors that determine the drivers of radicalisation classically and that can be structural, individual and enabling factors; they are on the one hand almost everywhere identical, but at the same time also much depend on specific local circumstances
- in Europe too, there has been a rise in radicalisation over the last years due inter alia to (i) the economic crises with growing youth unemployment and a growing social divide; (ii) there is an identity crisis post-cold war still felt, but also in light of globalisation that opens new opportunities but also threats; and, yes, (iii) in this context, the effects of the migration crisis last year too are playing a role
- we also heard of the fact that radicalisation happens locally but concerns whole societies and leaves a roles and responsibilities for each, also governments
- the European Union is aware of all of this and has already back in 2005, when it developed first a strategy on counter terrorism, included 'Prevention' as one of the four pillars for its strategy; prevention then was understood to 'stop people turning to terrorism by tackling the enabling environment' - a broad formula
- in the same year still, a first counter radicalisation strategy was adopted that put the primary responsibility for taking measures to MS, but that already foresaw a role for the EU institutions
- the underlying principles included the following: (i) the need to know the environment - no one size fits all; (ii) a balanced approach is needed - a mix of repressive and enabling measures; (iii) emphasis on the holistic approach - counter radicalisation must be a joint effort at all levels of society
- in this context, what the EU as an institution was to bring was the following: research, evidence building, monitoring, network facilitation, counter narratives, prisons, promotion of EU values, youth aspects, security aspects and external dimension
- this strategy got updated earlier this year (2016) and now lists the following measures requiring action: (i) still the need to understand; (ii) the need to bring justice and security to all, (iii) the need for voices of mainstream and common values to prevail; (iv) the need for governments to enhance their communications; (v) the support to counter narratives; (vi) engagement with front line professionals such as teachers, psychologists etc; (vii) the building of resilience; (viii) the countering of online radicalisation and (ix) reinforced rehabilitation and disengagement programmes

- what is conceptually driving the EU is of course the UN framework and standards set, notably the recently adopted UN PVE Action Plan to which we actively contributed and that the EU fully subscribes to and seeks to implement
- the UN plan advocates collective and systematic measures to address drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism with 70 concrete recommendations, including and importantly the development of national and regional PVE action plans
- the EU also gets inspiration of the work it does within the GCTF that has finalised this year an important document, the 'Lifecycle of Radicalisation' Toolkit with 9 best practice documents for each of the three phases of radicalisation: (i) prevention; (ii) detection/identification, (iii) rehabilitation/reintegration as well as (iv) cross cutting aspects; this is excellent reference material that I recommend each of you to retrieve from the GCTF website: www.theGCTF.org. The material exists in French, English and Arabic languages.

2. What is the EU exactly doing?

Internally,

- main effort of actual CT and CVE work lies with MS, but the EU as an institution adds value by helping standardise approaches and by creating joint platforms and institutions that assist MS in their work
- thus, the European Commission continues to work on necessary legislation to be implemented by MS (criminalisation)
- it has turned the RAN, a European network of CVE practitioners, into a Centre of Excellence that now works with around 2.400 practitioners that exchange on a daily basis best practice and lessons and that have established nine working groups covering education, prisons, exit, health and social aspects, youth, families, communities, communication and narratives, local authorities and police and law enforcement; the RAN is a very cost-effective mechanism easy to replicate for other regions
- the EU is also running a strategic communications cell to counter Da'esh narratives as well as the Internet Referral Unit at Europol that helps identifying inappropriate websites that we then suggest the providers such as facebook or google to take off, appealing to their own ethics policies, thus fully respecting the principle of freedom of speech

Externally,

- the EU promotes global consensus on CT and CVE approaches, notably within the framework of the UN, but also the GCTF, the G7 Roma/Lyon Group and the Anti-ISIL Coalition working groups
- the EU undertakes Political Dialogues with 3rd countries where it advocates implementation of relevant UN policies and standards
- the EU mainstreams CVE into assistance programmes; priority countries at present are the MENA region and the Arab world, but we also very actively engaged in the Horn of Africa

(see Strive programme) and the Sahel (see College Sahelien and CT Sahel programmes); main efforts consist in raising awareness of counter radicalisation, empower youth and women, provide training and mentoring where needed etc.

- the EU has developed operational guidelines on Human rights mainstreaming in our external programming of assistance in 3rd countries, specifically for CT and organised crime related assistance
- the EU finances and co-steers as board member work of the three GCTF-inspired institutes Hedayah (CVE Centre of Excellence), IJJ Malta (best practice and training institute for justice sector, very active in the Horn of Africa) and GCERF (a fund for local micro-projects in the field of CVE; Kenya is a pilot country)
- the EU is part of a small group called 'Donor community of Practitioners on Development and PVE' led by DK and the US that seeks to identify best practice in external assistance to resilience
- the EU is part of the GCTF CVE WG

3. Key lessons

- investment in prevention is key and most urgent
- involvement of front line practitioners too
- the use of credible voices has proven very efficient
- only a multi-agency and whole society approach bring tangible results
- do tailor-made interventions based on solid research on the specific local context as this can differ quite a bit and thus the response has to match

4. Conclusions

- the EU takes a keen interest in the situation of Central Asia which has a geopolitical importance and where organised crime links pertain directly to the security of Europe
- we are concerned about the great number of Foreign Fighters
- we are ready to support further the region with a view to help build resilience, to beef up the rule of law and good governance
- we already finance a number of projects, but also those of the OSCE and the UN that are active here
- we have an EUSR that covers also security aspects and stays in constant dialogue with you helping to identify specific trends and needs - this seminar here is a good example of his dedication