



The Radicalisation Awareness Network:

Policy network in search of an evidence base or covert propaganda platform?

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'The ethics of researching 'terrorism' and political violence: a sociological approach'

Contemporary Social Science. 15(2) (Co-author, 2020)

'Secrecy, coercion and deception in research on 'terrorism' and 'extremism''

Contemporary Social Science. 15(2) (co-author, 2020)

'Leaving the War on Terror: A Progressive Alternative to Counter-Terrorism Policy'

(Co-author, Transnational Institute, 2019)

'Islamophobia in Europe: How governments are enabling the far-right 'counter-jihad' movement'

(Co-author, Public Interest Investigations, 2019)

'Organized Persuasive Communication: A new conceptual framework for research on public relations, propaganda and promotional culture'

Critical Sociology. 45(3), (Co-author, 2019)

'The UAE Lobby: Subverting British democracy?'

(Co-author, Public Interest Investigations, 2018)

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Acronyms

CCE	Central and Eastern Europe
CSEP	Civil Society Empowerment Programme
CSO	civil society organisation
CSTPV	Centre for the Study of Terrorism and Political Violence
CUTA	Co-ordination Unit for Threat Assessment
CVE	Countering Violent Extremism
DG	Directorate General
EFD	European Foundation for Democracy
EGVR	Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation
ENER	European Network of Experts on Radicalisation
EPC	European Policy Centre
ESCN	European Strategic Communications Network
EU	European Union
EUMC	European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FDD	Foundation for Defense of Democracies
FRA	Fundamental Rights Agency
ICCT	International Center for Counter-Terrorism
ICSR	International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation
ISD	Institute for Strategic Dialogue
OBE	Order of the British Empire
OSCT	Office for Security and Counter Terrorism
MI5	UK domestic Intelligence agency
MI6	UK foreign intelligence agency
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
PPN	Policy Planners Network
PVE	Preventing Violent Extremism
RAN	Radicalisation Awareness Network
RAN CoE	RAN Centre of Excellence
RICU	Research, Information and Communications Unit
SAVE	Sisters Against Violent Extremism
SSCAT	Syria Strategic Communication Advisory Team
UK	United Kingdom
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

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Report highlights

This report on the EU's Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) provides a comprehensive analysis of the main body used to target 'radicalisation' in the EU. The analysis reveals institutional problems, conflicts of interest and a complete failure to engage properly with the questions of 'terrorism' and political violence. Moreover we show that the RAN, which is supposed to be a practitioner led grass roots initiative, is in fact run in an increasingly top down manner and has been significantly influence by covert operations by British and Belgian intelligence agencies.

Key findings

- The RAN developed out of the new EU counter terrorism policy adopted by the EU from 2005 which followed the UK in taking a 'prevent' approach to terrorism and radicalisation. This involved a shift from police centred approaches towards those which targeted the role of ideas in political violence.
- The EU appointed two expert committees on terrorism to advise it on dealing with the new notion of radicalisation. The first recommended , amongst other things, that attention should be focused on the radicalising effects of counterterrorism. But this recommendation was ignored by the RAN.
- The RAN was set up in 2011 and developed through three iterations until the present. We show how it developed away from a proclaimed bottom up model towards a top down model focusing on civil society and on counter narratives and strategic communications.
- Our data shows the UK provided the largest number of participants to the RAN and that the key areas of activity have become community engagement/civil society and counter and alternative narratives. The development of the Civil Society Empowerment Programme has focused on youth and young people including those as young as 0-12.
- The RAN is bound by a number of ethical rules on conflict of interest. Yet, when we examined the background of fourteen members of the RAN editorial board, all were found to have significant conflicts of interest, many multiple in number. We could find no evidence that the RAN had ever taken any action to declare these conflicts or to manage these conflicts down.
- The RAN advertises itself as involving police and prison authorities, teachers, youth workers, civil society representatives, local authorities representatives and healthcare professionals. However our investigations reveal that a key role in the development of the network has been given to Belgian and UK intelligence operatives.
- We reveal that an intelligence agency covert propaganda grouping the Research Information and Communication Unit of the UK Home Office has taken a covert yet leading role in RAN activities.
- Our examination of the RAN and those involved shows that neoconservative think tanks and pro-Israel lobby groups have played a significant role.
- We show that training material provided by the RAN for practitioners has been produced not by front line practitioners but in fact by a neoconservative think tank and a hard-line Zionist group, which supports an attack on Iran, illegal settlements and the right wing Likudist politics associated with the Israeli PM Benjamin Nethanyahu.
- We examine the extent to which the activities of the RAN have been appropriately evaluated, showing that there have been inadequate attempts at evaluation and the practical activities carried out have been marred by structural conflict of interest issues.

- Despite the 2008 expert committee report recommending that the Commission pay attention to the role of counterterrorism in causing radicalization, the Commission moved in the opposite direction to embrace an approach which discounted grievances as no more than ‘perceived’, mistaken or the effect of ‘radicalisation’ or ‘Islamism’.
- The evidence base underlying the notion of ‘radicalisation’ used by the RAN is threadbare, unstable and tends towards the non-existent. There is no consensus on the definition of radicalisation in the academy.
- The use made of the concept by the RAN has not been tested or evaluated to determine whether it works or whether it has negative and discriminatory effects. Radicalisation is not an appropriate concept for understanding either the causes of or solutions to ‘terrorism’ or political violence.
- The practical activities of the RAN are overwhelmingly biased against Muslims and are a major contributor to anti-Muslim racism/Islamophobia.
- As a result we find that the RAN has actively compromised and breached six separate Fundamental Rights guaranteed by the EU.
- Overall we conclude that the RAN is not fit for purpose, that it needs to be scrapped as part of a wider rethink in the EC on how to tackle political violence which occurs – in part at least – as a result of the aggressive and militaristic activities of NATO, and the Western powers more generally

Introduction.

What is RAN and what does this investigation do?

The Radicalisation Awareness Network is a European Commission funded grouping that focuses primarily on preventing ‘terrorism’ in the future. It says it is a network of ‘frontline or grassroots practitioners’ who ‘work daily with people who have already been radicalised, or who are vulnerable to radicalisation’.¹ As such it is a ‘platform’ to ‘pool expertise and experience to tackle radicalisation’.

Created in 2011 and renewed in 2014 and 2019, the RAN emerged from a series of counter terrorism actions taken by the EU after 9/11 but especially after the Madrid bombings in 2004. The main parameters for EU counter terrorism policy were established by 2005 when the institutions took the lead from the UK (and to a lesser extent the Netherlands) in including prevention as a key part of their strategy. Among other initiatives the Commission created a group of terrorism experts from whom the Commission took advice. The RAN is at the core of all other efforts on extremism, radicalisation and prevention undertaken by the Commission and the other European institutions and agencies. So far the three contracts funded by the Commission each for 48 months has directly cost €8 million (2012-2015), €25 million (2015-19) and €61 million (2020-2023).

This report examines the RAN, looking at the evolution of European Commission efforts in this area and at the formation and operation of the RAN. It asks whether it has been successful in its own terms as well as posing some searching questions about the nature of those terms and about the evidence base underlying the very specific notion of ‘prevention’ and ‘radicalisation’ that it uses and helps to legitimize.

The report takes an investigative approach and has reviewed a wide range of material, probing between the lines following leads to examine the context in which the RAN operates as well delving beneath the surface to unearth some uncomfortable facts about the RAN.

This report is structured in chapters each of which examines differing aspects of the RAN. It begins in Chapter one with an account of the formation of the RAN in the context of EU Counter Terrorism policy. To do this it examines the development of formal arrangements to procure ‘expert’ advice on counter terrorism through two committees the Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation, then the European Network of Experts on Radicalisation. The chapter examines the expert committees finding serious irregularities in the operation of the contract to run the latter committee. It also discusses the experts involved in the committees, many of whom would later be involved in the RAN. It was from this milieu that the RAN was formed in 2011.

Chapter two gives an account of the aims and structure of the RAN, including the contracts that funded it, the contractor that runs it and the activities, practices and working groups involved. We show how RAN has evolved over time, especially in its present, third, iteration. We examine the inbuilt conflicts of interest in the RAN and show how it moved toward a more ‘top down’ focus on civil society and on ‘strategic communication’.

Chapter three examines the individuals and organisations that make up the RAN network, their stated expertise and how they are related to each other. It examines which EU member states participants are concentrated in and how participants are distributed in terms of expertise. The chapter goes on to consider how these patterns relate to participation on the Civil Society Empowerment Programme (CSEP) a civil society and strategic communications focused initiative developed in the more recent years of the RAN process.

Chapter four analyses the working groups the editorial board, the steering committee and the wider membership of the RAN, revealing new evidence on the widespread – indeed institutional - conflicts of interest affecting the RAN.

Chapter five examines European Strategic Communications Network and its work with the RAN and the CSEP. We show that despite claims that this is a project led by the Belgian government, it is in fact a covert operation led by a British intelligence agency (with the assistance of Belgian intelligence). The aim is to manipulate civil society such that ostensibly independent non profits groups actually carry intelligence agency sponsored messages across the society and especially into Muslim communities.

Chapter six shows that despite the rhetoric that it is a forum for ‘front line practitioners’, that in practice the activities are captured by ideological neoconservative and pro Israel think tanks which use the network to pressure EU members states to adopt more authoritarian and Islamophobic policies on radicalisation and ‘extremism’.

Chapter seven examines the concept of radicalisation showing it is not fit for purpose and contains within it fundamentally Islamophobic assumptions. The chapter goes on to illustrate how there play out in the RAN. Actual grievances and injustice is discounted and all eggs are placed in the basket of ‘communications’ and ‘counter narratives’ an approach which leads inexorably to encouraging Islamophobia.

Chapter eight examines the findings in the previous chapters in the light of the responsibility of the RAN - written into its constitution – to avoid breaching the fundamental rights guaranteed by the EU. It shows how much of the critique of the approach of the RAN in this report was prefigured by a Commission expert committee in 2005-6. It is a sad, but not surprising, fact that this committee was shut down in 2006. Its insights ignored the RAN has in practice – we argue – violated at least six of the fundamental rights of the EU, most obviously those touching on the human rights of Muslims.

Chapter nine reviews the findings of the report, assesses the future of the RAN and lists a number of recommendations to which EU policy makers might attend if they wish to remedy the defects manifest in the RAN experience.

1

The formation of Radicalisation Awareness Network

The Radicalisation Awareness Network was created as part of the changes in counter terrorism policy by the EU institutions. This chapter examines the development of formal arrangements to procure 'expert' advice on counter terrorism through two committees, the Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation, then the European Network of Experts on Radicalisation. It starts with a brief overview of innovation in EU counter-terror policy from 2005 onwards.

The EU and counter terrorism – 2005

The EU adopted a common counter terrorism strategy very soon after the British government had been the first in the EU to adopt a 'Prevent' counter terror strategy. EU leaders issued a joint declaration after the Madrid bombings on 11 March 2004. The declaration 'calls for the development of an EU long-term strategy to address all the factors which contribute to terrorism'.² This appeared on 30 November 2005 and was strikingly similar to the UK strategy resting as it did on four pillars, three of which were identically titled: prevent; protect; pursue; respond³ Following that, the EU developed a range of counter terrorism policies focusing strongly on radicalisation and extremism.

The 2004 declaration included an agreement to appoint a counter terrorism co-ordinator. Gijs De Vries was appointed in March 2004 and resigned in March 2007. Gilles de Kerchove was appointed Counter-Terrorism Coordinator on 19 September 2007 by Javier Solana who was then EU High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy.

Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation - 2006

The policy developments included the creation in 2006 of the Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation. This was set up by a Commission decision of 19 April 2006,⁴ with a budget of €350,000.⁵

This noted that the objective of maintaining and developing the EU as 'an area of freedom, security and justice', shall be achieved by 'combatting terrorism' and by 'addressing the factors contributing to violent radicalisation'. In doing this, the Commission, 'recognised the need to call upon the expertise of specialists in developing further its policy in the field.'

The group shall be made up of qualified individuals competent to consider matters relating to violent radicalisation and terrorism... Such competence must include experience deriving from academic research and published work... The group shall be composed of a maximum of 20 members.

In the event the group appears only to have included seventeen individuals.⁶ The commission has proven reluctant to be transparent about the membership of the group. The present authors were only able to ascertain the membership after a protracted process of request and refusal from the Commission. The members are specifically enjoined with declaring conflicts of interest:

members shall each year sign an undertaking to act in the public interest and a declaration indicating the absence or existence of any interest which may undermine their objectivity.

This formal requirement of course goes to the heart of the whole question of expertise in ‘terrorism’ or indeed ‘radicalisation’. It’s a definitional problem, as ‘terrorism’ and ‘radicalisation’ are politically loaded terms which are not of capable of neutral social scientific use. But even, were they not, very many of the experts involved have significant conflicts of interest. This intersects too with the issue of the revolving door when advisors move between policy and ‘expert’ roles with precious little in terms of ethical review.

With one exception, the members all had some kind of academic status, even if some also had other posts or affiliations that were potential conflicts of interest: Both Tore Bjorgo and Magnus Ranstorp had positions in ‘police’ or ‘defence’ institutions; Fernando Reinares the chair of the group had an affiliation at Universidad Rey Juan Carlos near Madrid, but also is affiliated with Real Instituto Elcano the neoconservative think tank notably associated with the former Spanish Prime minister Jose Maria Aznar. This is a neoconservative oriented think tank, which also receives significant sums from the Spanish government and a range of large companies with a Spanish presence including Airbus, IBM, Santander, Repsol and Iberdrola.⁷ Reinares has form for casual Islamophobia, penning an article for *El Pais* in the aftermath of the bombing of Oslo by the Islamophobic Anders Bering Brevik, blaming Muslims. It included the usual terms: "radicalization", "global jihadism" and "Muslim communities". The author requested the article was removed once it became clear that no Muslims were involved in the attack after Brevik gunned down tens of young people on the island of Utoya.⁸

The member with no academic connection was Gijs de Vries, who from 2004-2007, was the European Union’s Counter-Terrorism Coordinator. Prior to this de Vries had been an MEP (1984-94), leader of the Liberal and Democratic Group in the European Parliament (1994-98), Deputy Minister of the Interior in the Dutch government(1998-2002) and representative of the Netherlands at the Convention on the Future of the EU (2002-3). Amongst his other roles he was co-founder of the European Council on Foreign Relations and of the Transatlantic Policy Network (1992); chairman of the Atlantic Association of the Netherlands (1992-97);⁹ and chairman of the European Integration and Citizen Programme at the European Policy Centre (EPC -Brussels). Each of these policy planning roles are in themselves potential conflicts of interest. Perhaps more significant is that as counter terrorism co-ordinator (from March 2004-March 2007)¹⁰ he was in a position to be the recipient of the advice from the Expert Group, created in 2006, of which he was – at least in 2008 – a member.¹¹

The group was enjoined to:

- bring together the expertise of its members in order to give policy advice to the Commission. Such advice may be given either upon the group’s own initiative or upon a specific request from the Commission
- help the Commission identify new research areas required into the phenomenon of violent radicalisation and terrorism
- exchange expertise with networks, institutes or other bodies of the EU, in Member States, third countries and international organisations working in the same field

in particular, prepare a synthesis report by June 2006 on the state of play of research in the field of violent radicalisation.¹²

In the event the timescale was too ambitious. The group met in September 2006 and in November 2007 to produce its first report by May 2008, some two years overdue. A projected second report never materialised.

Expert group recommendations

The expert group was largely made up of orthodox ‘experts’ including highly conservative scholars such as Fernando Reinares and Rogelio Alonso both associated with neoconservative think tanks and several from, or affiliated with, the leading UK ‘terrorism studies’ centre at the time the hawkish Centre for the Study of

Terrorism and Political Violence (CSTPV) at the University of St Andrews.¹³ These included Alex Schmid, John Horgan, Andrew Silke and Magnus Ranstorp who later played a key role in the RAN.

Their thirteen recommendations were mostly uncritical calls for further research within the conceptual apparatus of the concept of radicalisation, thus 'Empirically based studies on individuals involved in terrorist groups or terrorism' to 'focus on their origin and socio-demographic characteristics so as to identify differences as well as similarities.'¹⁴ These kind of suggestions are willingly taken up in part because they lend themselves to correlational, conjectural and individualistic findings. There are two recommendations, however, that could have led to useful research. The first one was on 'foreign conflicts':

Further research is needed on the significance and impact of foreign conflicts, such as for instance those in Iraq, Afghanistan or Somalia in the case of contemporary Islamist terrorism and their effect on stimulating radicalisation towards violence in Europe.

We can see the ideological bias in this formulation, both in the anti-Muslim term 'Islamist terrorism'¹⁵ and in the implication that 'foreign conflicts' are something that Western states are not involved in and certainly didn't initiate (as actually happened in the case of Iraq and Afghanistan). But leaving that aside, proper investigation of the role of armed conflict in the genesis of 'terrorism' should be a central research team in any evidence-based approach.¹⁶

The other recommendation, a more promising and noteworthy suggestion was the need to pay 'more attention' toward 'the nexus between terrorism and counterterrorism as a potential driver for further and wider radicalisation towards violence and terrorism.'¹⁷ As Hayes and Kundnani put it: 'In other words, this group had argued that it was critical to assess the way in which policies designed to fight terrorism could in fact be contributing to its very proliferation.'¹⁸

Yet these questions were completely off the agenda in the RAN despite their potential significance in properly understanding and thus combatting political violence.

The European Network of Experts on Radicalisation – 2007-10

Perhaps as a result of this slippage the Commission's next move was to contract the administration of the group out to a private provider. In July 2007 the Commission issued an open tender to run a 'European Network of Experts on Violent Radicalisation'. The maximum amount of bids was €200,000.¹⁹ The terms of reference for the tender stated:

- The Commission has clearly demonstrated its serious approach to the issue in 2006 by investing considerable amounts of resources in studies as well as by creating an expert group of academics from various disciplines tasked with producing a report on the state of play of research in the field. The setting up of the European Network of Experts on Violent Radicalisation for which the present Call is being issued must be seen as phase two of that work.²⁰
- The objectives were in part similar to the previous group in that they focused on exchange of expertise and links with other experts centres but ne objectives included:
 - contribute to the analysis of the factors contributing to violent radicalisation within Europe;
 - support the development and evaluation of counter-radicalisation policies;²¹

This is a move towards a more practical orientation, which was more expressly seen in the later establishment of the RAN.

The contractor that won the award – on 4 December 2007 - in competition with three other bids was the London based Change Institute. The Change Institute had a previous relationship with the Commission

having been retained to produce two reports on radicalisation. The first was commissioned in March 2006 and awarded in September of that year for a total of €149,685.²² The study was delivered in February 2008.²³ The second was commissioned in 2007 as a ‘Study on best practices to prevent violent radicalisation’ at a cost of €149,700.²⁴ It was submitted in July 2008.²⁵

No.	Tasks	Timescale, details
1	Mapping of expertise, organisations and research results	Should be carried out within 6 months after the start of the project.
2	Organisation of Seminars/Workshops	The number of seminars cannot be lower than one every six months (i.e not less than 4 in the first 2 years) and a minimum of 50 people must be invited.
3	Setting up and maintaining of a web site on violent radicalisation	The network will within the first four months of the project set up a website and will have 13 separate elements.
4	Preparing analytical reports	The tenderer must be able to demonstrate its ability to set up a network capable of delivering 4 reports a year.
5	Providing guidance and advice on questions emerging on an ad hoc basis	The answers to such questions must be in English and would be expected to be 5-10 pages long.

Table 1.2 *The Tasks for the European Network of Experts on Radicalisation*

The tasks that were to be undertaken as part of this contract were as set out in Table 1.2.

While this looks to be a large body of activities – especially in the context of the fee of €200,000 - it is also plain that significant parts of this were never achieved. The evidence for this statement is as follows.

The network was ‘set up’ in 2008 according to Commission documents, ‘and became operational in 2009.’²⁶ ENER ‘held its first meeting in Brussels on 27 February 2009.’²⁷ The inaugural seminar was entitled ‘The radicalisation phenomenon in Europe: present challenges and future trajectories’²⁸

‘Seminars in 2009 and 2010 brought together social scientists, other academics and front-line practitioners to develop and exchange best practices. The topics covered include areas of dynamic evolution such as hotbeds of recruitment, engaging civil society to counter violent extremism and empowering local communities to oppose radicalisation. The seminars also aim to support the implementation of the projects initiated by the Counter-Terrorism Coordinator.’²⁹

A European Commission document in August 2011 listed four seminars undertaken ‘so far’ as:

- Present challenges and future trajectories of the radicalisation phenomenon in Europe;
- Risks to the youth radicalisation and its main settings;
- Evaluation and measuring effectiveness in counter radicalisation;
- The role of communications, media and civil society in preventing radicalisation.³⁰

A European Council document dated 17 January 2011 noted:

Since its establishment by the Commission in 2008, ENER has produced a series of policy papers and has hosted seminars for policy-makers, with the most recent taking place in March 2010, titled ‘Preventing Radicalisation: Communications, Media and Engagement with Civil Society’.

This latter seminar would appear to be the same as fourth of those listed above. So, it would appear that the ENER ran, four events in total between February 2009 and March 2010.

ENER website

The website at domain ec-ener.eu was registered by Rokhsana Fiaz on 11 December 2009.³¹ A Commission document from July 2010 notes hopefully ‘A website which is to inform on activities in countering radicalisation and facilitating communication is planned to be launched soon.’³² A European Council document dated 17 January 2011 stated that the ENER ‘is presently finalising a website that will be launched soon.’ The website ‘will serve as a resource for policy makers and practitioners on activities in countering radicalisation across the EU, alongside research, publications, news of importance and emerging trends in the field. It will also offer a moderated forum with ENER experts, alongside password protected forums for policy-makers to disseminate and share information.’³³ It appears, from Internet Archive holdings, however, only ever to have been a blank page with the phrase European Network of Experts on Radicalisation at the top and a link to the email address of Rokhsana Fiaz – at least until 22 August 2012, at which point the network had been discontinued almost two years. By June 2013 it was a password protected blank page.³³ To be fair, this may have contained materials for those with the password, but none of the public facing elements of the work as laid out in the initial contract were ever completed and the project was over.

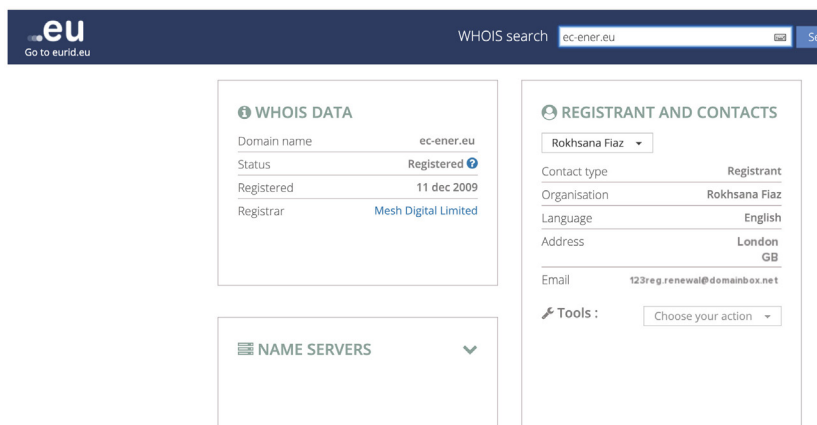


Figure 1.1 The Whois registration for ec-ener.eu

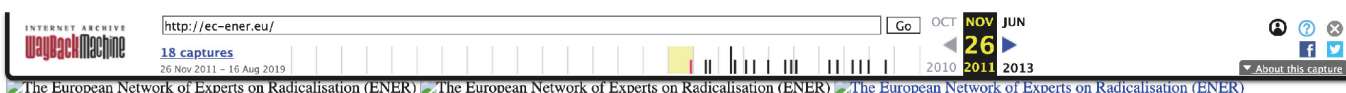


Figure 1.2 The blank website of the ENER 26 November 2011

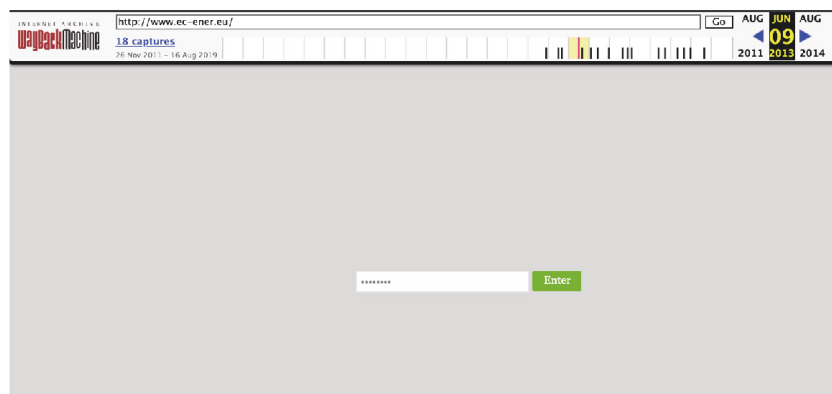


Figure 1.3 The password protected ENER website 9 June 2013

A Commission document from July 2010 it states: 'ENER work is ongoing and looks promising with regard to future policy development in this area.'³⁴ According to a European Parliament written answer from Commissioner Malmström on 16 August 2010, 'in order to support the dialogue between academics and policy-makers working in this field, the Commission set up a European Network of Experts on Radicalisation (ENER) in 2008 which meet at regular seminars and produce analytical papers on topical issues.'³⁵ The trouble is that no analytical papers would appear ever to have been put into the public domain. Nevertheless, a European Council document dated 17 January 2011 referred to further activities:

Additionally, the ENER is currently preparing its schedule of activities for 2011 including a seminar and policy paper series that will respond to developments in the study of violent radicalisation which have evolved considerably since ENER's inception as well as developments in policy and practice. This will include a focus on the routes into violent radicalisation and recruitment; the influence of extremist propaganda, the role of the internet and assessment measures.³⁶

In a presentation on 9 February 2011 to a European Economic and Social Committee meeting on 'EU Counter-Terrorism Policy: Main achievements and Future challenges', Rokhsana Fiaz described herself as the Director of ENER.³⁷ In the presentation she also listed her email address with the domain changeinstitute.co.uk.



Figure 1.4 The ENER logo circa February 2011

So, to summarise, of the five tasks:

1. The mapping document is not available on the internet
2. It would appear that four seminars happened, which would indicate that the minimum requirement of this task was completed.
3. No public website was ever launched.
4. There is no report published online by the network
5. There is no ad hoc report published by the network on the internet.

It is perhaps understandable that some EU projects do not live up to expectations. It is perhaps less understandable that for most of the period between the first event (27 February 2009) and the appearance of Rokhsana Fiaz before the Economic and Social Committee of the EU (9 February 2011) the company which traded as the Change Institute had been in liquidation and unable to trade or – indeed – to receive money from the European Commission.

Diamorphos

The Change Institute was the trading name of a company registered in the UK as Diamorphos. Diamorphos was a company originally called Mann Weaver Consulting set up in March 2001. It changed its name to Neuer Ltd also in 2001, becoming Diamorphos in June 2005, but was repurposed after the 7/7 bombings, to trade as 'The Change Institute'. There were three directors Jagtar Singh, a management consultant, Lakhbir Bhandal, a research director and consultant and Rokhsana Fiaz, who led on the work on radicalisation. Fiaz, appointed 1 February 2006, was a consultant and policy adviser who was appointed to the National Muslim Women's Advisory Group by Prime Minister Gordon Brown in 2007.³⁸ She was involved in a number of Muslim-Jewish interfaith initiatives as well as being appointed in 2009 to the advisory board of the European Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism. This was a strongly neoconservative and Zionist

oriented organisation. From 2007, directors included Jeremy Newmark, (who was later forced to resign from the Jewish Labour Movement after suspicions were raised of missing money related to his time at the Jewish Leadership Council) and Stephen Pollard, (a signatory to the British neocon think tank the Henry Jackson Society.) Pollard stepped down as Chair of the board in 2009 to be replaced by the Labour MP Denis MacShane, who was subsequently jailed for false accounting as part of the MPs expenses scandal.³⁹ Other advisors included: some of the UK's leading Neocons, such as Tory MP Michael Gove, Douglas Murray (author of *Neoconservatism: Why We Need it*), Oliver Kamm (Henry Jackson Society, Democratiya and author of *Anti-Totalitarianism: The Left-wing Case for a Neoconservative Foreign Policy*), former Tory Director of Research, Daniel Finkelstein, the 'terrorism expert' Peter Neumann and the career MI6 officer Baroness 'Meta' Ramsay. The board also included a number of Zionists such as Mike Whine of the Community Security Trust, the hardliner Emanuele Ottolenghi of the Transatlantic Institute (a front group for the American Jewish Committee). Among its patrons were other prominent Zionists such as George Weidenfeld who was active in a number of elite, right wing and Neocon connected lobby groups (such as the Club of Three, the EastWest Institute, Institute for Strategic Dialogue and the New Atlantic Initiative). We will meet Weidenfeld again later in this report.



Figure 1.5 *The directors, advisors and staff of the European Institute for the Study of Contemporary Antisemitism, circa 2009⁴⁰*

The institute produced a small number of reports before winding down in 2011. Its government funded report on 'Nazi analogies' was roundly condemned by antisemitism expert Tony Lerman 'the fact that the government can spend £20,000 in this way, backing a dubious body with no track record, is indicative of the sad politicising and devaluing of the entire field of contemporary antisemitism studies'.⁴¹

Fiaz received an OBE in 2009 and would later – in 2011 - describe herself as the Director of the ENER.⁴² In 2018 she was elected Mayor of Newham in London.

According to an account given by Rokhsana Fiaz:

Some of my colleagues and I at Focus [where she previously worked] then set up a quasi think tank/ consultancy called Change Institute where we did research and evaluation for the public sector, looking specifically at emerging issues to do with race, faith and identity. When 7/7 happened everyone wanted to know about Muslim communities in the UK and Europe, radicalisation and extremism. We pitched to do some work for the European Commission and were asked to undertake this pan-European research study on the antecedents of Islamist extremist ideology. That was my focus for the next seven years.⁴³

Fiaz was appointed as a Director of Diamorphos on 1 February 2006. The contract for the ENER was awarded in December 2007, but not activated until some point in 2008. It was scheduled to last 24 months from the date of signature of the contract. As we noted above, there appeared to be some preparatory work in 2008

and the first event of the network happened at the end of February 2009. This means that the contract will have been running for perhaps a year by 15 October 2009 when Diamorphos was forced into liquidation at the instruction of 'members and creditors'.⁴⁴ By this stage the company had not filed their accounts for the year to 31 March 2009 and so there is no record of their financial activities in the period when they were in receipt of much of the €500,000 for operating the contract for the ENER and the two studies they undertook.

The Joint Liquidators statement of account, dated 7 June 2010 revealed debts of almost £130,000 including £5,000 Employee arrears and £78,000 of debts to HMRC.⁴⁵ The company was formally dissolved on 21 September 2010.

What remained unexplained at this point was what the European Commission knew about the liquidation of the company; where they paid the money intended for the Change Institute and why both those running the contract and the Commission itself continued to refer to the Network as if it was still in operation, for many months after the company had been dissolved.

As a result of these unanswered questions we submitted Access to Documents requests to the Commission asking for details about where the money had gone, about the extent to which the contract had been fulfilled and for copies of material produced by the ENER. The Commission responded reasonably fully to our request. As a result we can state the following. The Commission disclosed nine documents submitted by the Change Institute of which three were not associated with the ENER, having been completed in relation to previous contractual agreements. The remaining six were four reports - one on each of the four seminars undertaken between February 2009 and March 2010 and two 'analytical reports', one on Right Wing Extremism and one on the role of women, dated March and July 2008 respectively. It will be recalled that the contract specified that the tenderer must be able to demonstrate its ability to deliver 4 reports a year.

Turning to the website the Commission noted in its response to us that 'We regret to inform you that the Commission does not hold ... "copies of website contents"'.⁴⁶ Other sources stated that the website documents were sent to the Commission on 24 January 2011.⁴⁷ Of the mapping of expertise and ad hoc guidance and advice the Commission states it has no record.

The failure to deliver much of what was supposed to be delivered seems to be related to the liquidation of Diamorphos. Documents released by the Commission show that after this the 'Change Institute' team running the contract attempted to move the contract with the Commission to another company. As the Commission noted in a letter to Rokhsana Fiaz in July 2011: 'During the last quarter of 2009, Diamorphos' project manager informed the Commission services that all the remaining contractual information will be transferred to LRJ Management limited.'⁴⁸ As it happens the company was only registered on 9 December of that year with Fiaz as the only director. Given the contract with the Commission ended on 26th of that same month there was not enough time to effect the transition. Eventually the transfer of the contract was made but the deliverables for the project remained outstanding. The Commission therefore proposed that

As the contractual deadline had to be rescheduled several times, the Commission services have decided to apply penalties as mentioned in the contract. As the first rescheduling fall under shared responsibilities of DG HOME and LRJ having formally taken over from Diamorphos, it has been decided to apply liquidated damages from the 7 of October until the completion of the contractual delivery meaning the 24 of January.⁴⁹

The commission proposed to deduct some €42,789.3 from the final contractual payment. In response Rokhsana Fiaz sent a thirty three page case against the retention of the funds.⁵⁰ The Commission refused the request and deducted the money. The experience that the Commission had with the ENER may be part of the explanation for the very detailed contractual requirements that appeared in the tender documents for the Radicalisation Awareness Network which appears to have been the progeny of the ENER.

The Radicalisation Awareness Network grew out of the successive expert networks and was explicitly said to be linked. For example a Council of Europe document of 2011 states that the ENER generated 'knowledge and studies have substantially contributed to the establishment of the RAN'.⁵¹ The detailed guidance on the functions of the RAN from the commission had stated that: 'the participation of renowned experts in the RAN should not be excluded.'⁵²

In practice, there was significant overlap between the earlier expert networks and the new venture. From the beginning Magnus Ranstorp a key figure in both expert groups was centrally involved in the RAN he notes that he 'helped the process of establishing RAN in September 2011 and has been an instrumental operational part of it since then.' He was co-chair of one of the first eight working groups set up by the RAN and later was appointed a staff member at RAN as Quality manager. Though the RAN is not open about the membership of this committee, other sources indicate that the following former members of the expert groups sit on the editorial board, all of them white men: Andrew Silke,⁵³ Fernando Reinares,⁵⁴ Rogelio Alonso⁵⁵ and Tore Bjorgo.

In the next chapter we explore the aims, structure and development of the RAN.

2 The Radicalisation Awareness Network aims and structure

The RAN was first announced on 22 November 2010 when the Commission adopted an 'EU Internal Security Strategy in Action'. 'The prevention of radicalisation, which can lead to acts of terrorism', was identified as a priority. The Tender for the creation of the RAN was published on 3 August 2011 with a total available budget of €8,000,000.⁵⁶

Phases of development – contracts

The inauguration of the RAN on 9 September 2011, occurred prior to the contractor being appointed.⁵⁷ A 'Charter of the RAN', was adopted at the inaugural meeting. In a statement the Commission noted that:

The Commission will provide the means necessary to set up the RAN platform and its Secretariat as well as the functioning of the network. Over 20€ million will be dedicated to the project over 4 years in the form of direct support to the Member States and the financing of various projects.⁵⁸

The outcome of the tender process was announced in December 2011 and the winning contractor - Radar Europe - commenced the creation of the RAN in 2012.⁵⁹ The contract required the contractor to 'provide a stable, focused and effective technical assistance and support to the European Commission's services with the aim of facilitating the work of the RAN.'

The main aims of the RAN were to:

- address issues of violent radicalisation at practitioners' level;
- identify, test, assess and compare good and promising practices developed;
- review and identify lessons learned from unsuccessful projects and interventions;
- promote cross-fertilisation among practitioners both within and between different sectorial groups;
- empower civil-society groups/organisations within vulnerable communities in addressing violent extremism and radicalisation and recruitment;
- help to assess financial, political and societal needs;
- facilitate the communication with national governments and EU-institutions;
- formulate recommendations to policy-makers;
- contribute to the implementation of political conclusions drawn at ministerial level;
- advise the EU-institutions in shaping their policy-making.

We can note that this list is rather anodyne and unspecific. One point to note is the mention of civil society which was an issue of interest from the beginning but, as we shall see, became relatively more important to the RAN in later years. The EU Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment (adopted in 2005, revised in 2008) 'lay the foundations for an enhanced involvement of civil society in tackling and countering radicalisation'.⁶⁰

In 2013, the Commission organised a Ministerial Conference bringing together policy makers and practitioners engaged within the RAN leading to the adoption of a series of recommendations, including the establishment of 'an EU Knowledge Hub (called hereafter RAN Centre of Excellence) pooling, deepening and

disseminating expertise in preventing radicalisation to terrorism and violent extremism.’

On 17 June 2014, the Commission hosted the second High Level Conference "From Strategy to action"⁶¹ with the objective of identifying the need, prerequisites and scope of concrete action in core areas such as exit programmes, counter narratives and communication. Discussions between RAN practitioners/members and Ministers and Government officials ‘confirmed the need for sustained support and a stable framework to involve civil society and local actors as well as the private sector in prevent efforts.’⁶²

The second phase of the RAN

A second tender for four years was announced in September 2014, with a delayed deadline of 21 January 2015. Totalling €25,000,000 it was more than three times the size of the previous contract.⁶³

High-Level Commission Expert Group on Radicalisation

In July 2017 the Commission set up the High-Level Commission Expert Group on Radicalisation to offer advice on:

ways to improve cooperation among stakeholders and Member States; the further development of policies for the prevention of radicalisation; a mechanism for future structured cooperation in this area.

In its final report the expert group acknowledges the achievements of various EU initiatives on radicalization, name checking the RAN, the EU Internet Forum aiming ‘to reduce accessibility to terrorist content online and to increase the volume of effective counter narratives.’ The report also recognised ‘the particular added value’ of the work of the European Strategic Communications Network (ESCN) assisting Member States in developing strategic communication strategies.⁶⁴ By this stage the move toward civil society and counter narratives was under way. The report goes on to emphasise this:

With the objective of supporting civil society organisation in the development of alternative or counter narratives, the Commission launched in 2017 in the framework of the discussion within the EUIF, the Civil Society Empowerment Programme (CSEP), including training to civil society organisations, workshops as well as dedicated calls for proposals under the Internal Security Fund-Police (ISF-Police) to support civil society in producing effective, alternative narratives online.

This new orientation was incorporated into the third phase of the RAN

The third phase of the RAN

In May 2019 the Commission advertised a third four year round of funding of the RAN. In total it was more than double the previous contract at €61,000,000 excluding VAT.⁶⁵ It was advertised in two lots, one worth €29,000,000 for a project titled: ‘Practitioners: Support and Exchanges on Radicalisation (Radicalisation Awareness Network RAN)’. The other was on ‘Policy Makers and Researchers: Support and Exchanges on Radicalisation’ with a budget of €32,000,000. At the end of 2019 it was announced that both contracts had been awarded to RADAR and its associated firm RADAR Advies.

The specification of each of the three tenders include a very detailed guide on what the contractor should undertake. Overall we see a pattern of increasing importance of civil society and of work on counter narratives. This is clear in the table below which compares the three tender documents over the period. The increased and changed focus on civil society involvement in counter narratives is instructive as is the emergence in the 2019 tender documents of the phrase ‘strategic communication’ which appears in the document 42 times. We will explore the significance of these changes in later chapters.

Activity	2011	2014	2019
No. of tasks	7	29	36
Amount of contract in Euro	8,000,000	25,000,000	61,000,000
Mentions of 'civil society'	6	5	24
Mentions of 'Secret'	2	0	10
Mentions of 'strategic communication'	0	0	42

Table 2.1 *Comparison of each of the three RAN tender contracts*

What this brief survey of the structure and organisation of the RAN shows is that the RAN has evolved over time toward a focus on civil society and on 'strategic communication'. In addition, there are problematic elements built into the fabric of the venture such as inbuilt conflicts of interest. However, we also need to examine how the structure works, who participates in it, how ideas are formed and shared and where they come from.

3

The RAN network – Who is involved and how are they related.

In their report on the globalisation of CVE activities Hayes and Kundnani note that ‘by the end of 2015 the RAN consisted of approximately 2,000 stakeholders from across the EU; a year later, this figure had increased to over 3,000. Who exactly these individuals are is not at all clear: the RAN does not publish lists of its members, and the Commission has not responded to our requests for information on its membership’.⁶⁶

Perhaps partially as a result of this criticism the RAN does now publish a list of participants in a database, an acknowledgement perhaps of the previous lack of transparency. We have used this database along with an analysis of the outputs of the RAN to provide the data, tables and figures in this chapter. Our purpose in doing so is to ask who are the individuals involved in RAN, what are their backgrounds and affiliations and how to they relate to one another. One key question is the extent to which those involved are ‘grassroots’ practitioners, the degree of involvement from the public and private sector, and indeed from state agencies such as the police or the intelligence services. We also examine how the participants relate to the administrative structure, activities and outputs of the RAN.

The RAN website now claims 3,200 RAN participants from around the EU. It notes, however, that only participants ‘who have provided their informed consent to have their personal details published online.’ Are included in its online database.

We scraped the RAN EU public databases of working groups and the registered participants of Civil Society Empowerment Programme (CSEP) on 16th November 2020. We found a total of 1496 Ran participants on the database and 2751 CSEP participants. We have used this database along with an analysis of the outputs of the RAN to provide the data, tables and figures in this chapter. Our purpose in doing so is to ask who are the individuals involved in RAN, what are their backgrounds and affiliations and how do they relate to one another.

RAN participants and expertise

Participation in the RAN has increased from several hundreds to several thousands. By November 2020 when we scraped the data used here there were over 6,000 participants listed on its database. We provide an overview of this data here stating with a criticism made by the European Court of Auditors in their report in 2018 on the participation in the RAN being unevenly spread by member state.

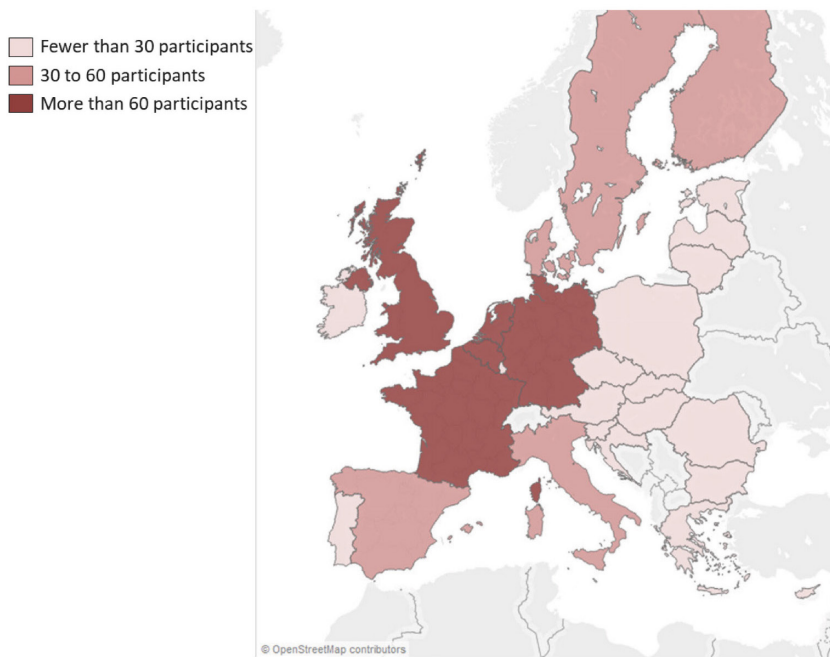


Figure 3.1 Data on country origin of participants in the RAN based on Commission data.⁶⁷

The auditors criticised the fact that ‘The Commission has not analysed the reasons why the RAN is used less by some countries than by others ... No record is kept of changes over time in participation rates by different Member States.’⁶⁸ In response the Commission said it was ‘aware of the reasons that explain the difference in participation of stakeholders from individual Member States’. It went on to state that ‘it is normal that practitioners from countries that faced higher terrorist threats or with more advanced prevent approaches and practices as well as expertise in place are more represented than others.’⁶⁹

The latter of the two reasons given can be seen as a reference to the over-representation of France, Germany, Belgium the Netherlands and especially the UK. As we shall see later in this report it is also a coded nod to the fact that British and other intelligence agencies have a key role in the RAN. To admit that openly would of course raise questions about how the Commission defines ‘normal’ in that passage.

The graphic in Figure 3.1 does not reveal the relative involvement of stakeholders within the top category. Our data does show these gradations (Figure 3.2). It was gathered in November 2020 some two years after the auditors report and shows the notable leading role of UK participants in the RAN followed by Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands. A clue to trends between 2018 and 2020 is that France appears to be much less involved that would be anticipated from the 2018 graphic and Spain appears more involved. Given the adoption of a ‘Prevent’ style policy in Spain was more recent than in France it seems that its involvement has increased. The data support this showing that in ascending order Italy, (73), Spain (89) having over 60 participants now and that Spain has equalled the number of participants of France (89). Given this it seems plausible to suggest that the top four (in ascending order, the Netherlands (110), Germany (130) Belgium (130) and the UK (177) have all increased though we can’t tell how this may have happened in relation to each other. The increase of the UK is not surprising given the strong input of the British intelligence services which we will examine in chapter 5. The UK, does, though appears to have been a leading player throughout.

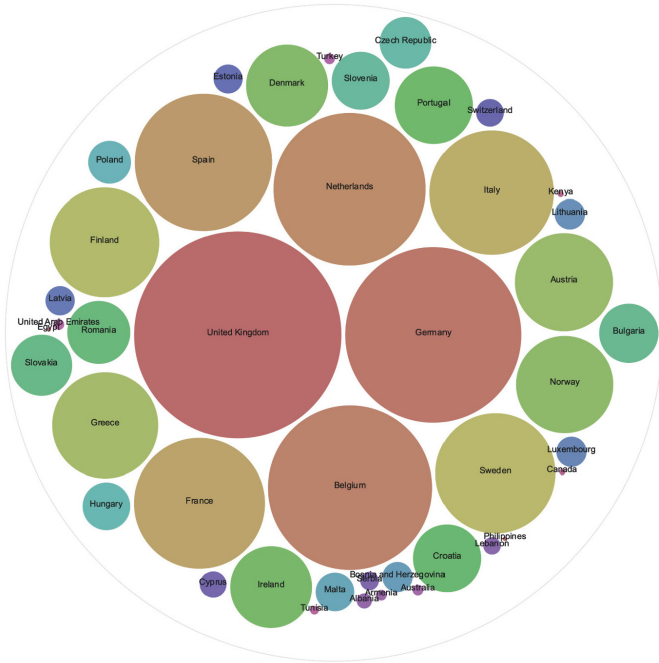


Figure 3.2 RAN participants by country



Figure 3.3 RAN participants by area of expertise

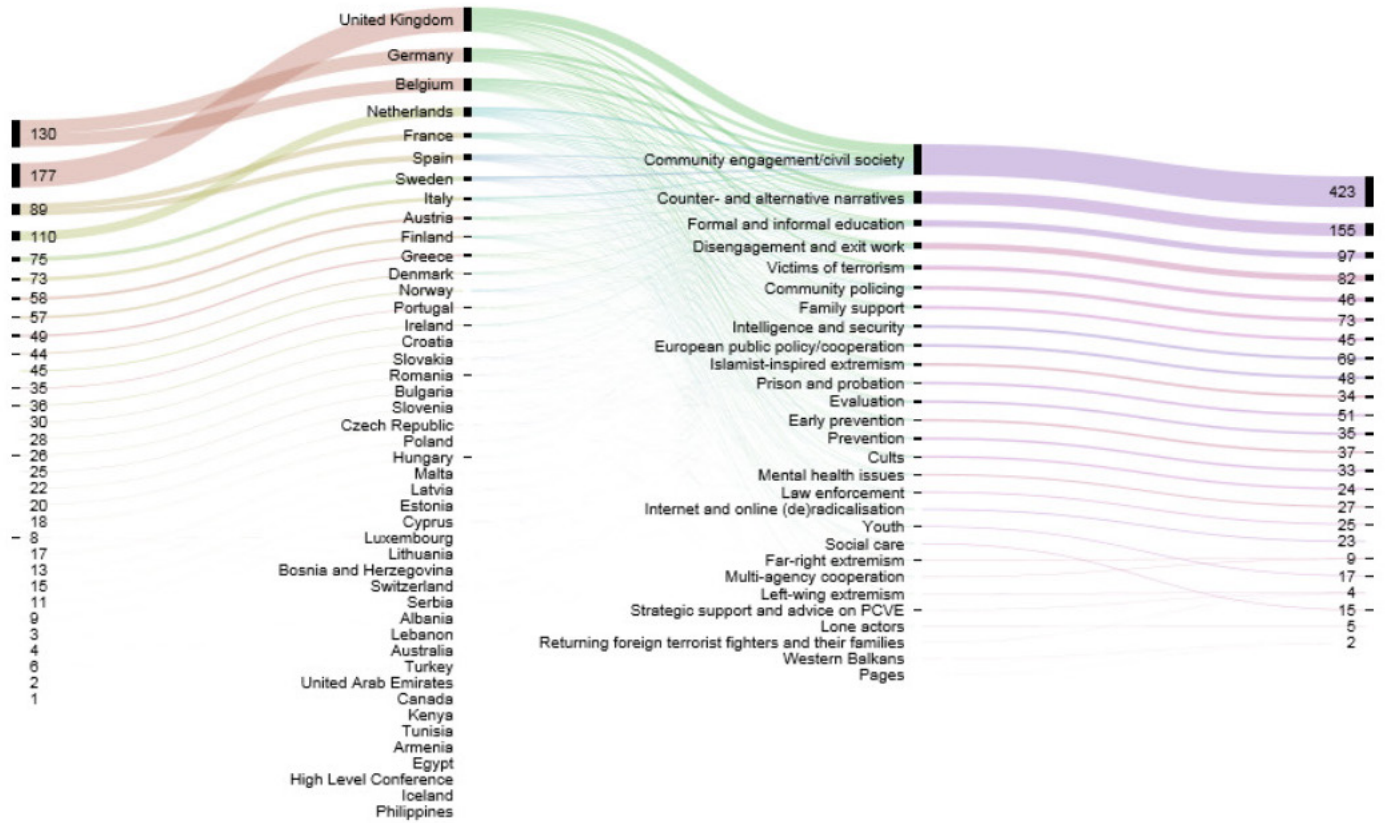


Figure 3.4 RAN participants by country and expertise

Our data also reveals the area of expertise of the participant. These are chosen from a fixed list of twenty nine by the participants themselves. Participants can choose as many categories as they like. Figure 3.3 shows the relative claims of expertise. We can note most obviously the dominant position of community engagement/civil society followed by counter and alternative narratives. This shows the key axis of operation of the RAN in 2020. We can note several subsidiary expertise claims on education, disengagement and community policing (and the associated law enforcement). We can note that the latter two are distinct from the category Intelligence and Security a clear nod to the role of intelligence agencies in the RAN which we will discuss at length in chapter 5.

The data on participants country of origin and expertise can also be presented together as is done in Figure 3.4. This shows that the leading roles of the UK, Germany and Belgium is strongly associated with the two top areas of expertise on community engagement and counter narratives.

The participants in the CSEP

The CSEP is an outgrowth of the RAN and exemplifies the development of the RAN into a forum for the management of civil society. As can be seen from Figure 3.5 the CSEP is overwhelmingly civil society organisations with small groups of attendant academics, communications and marketing firms, think tanks and public sector officials.

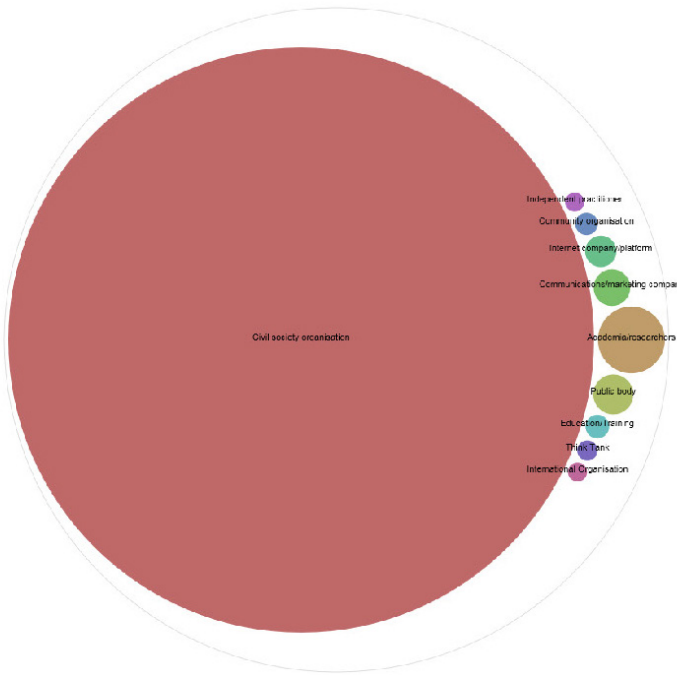


Figure 3.5 CSEP types of organisation

Figure 3.6 shows the areas of expertise reported by CSEP participants. The data show an overwhelming concentration on young people (12-18 and 18-25). The focus on children (12-18) is perhaps a little shocking, but there is also a smaller group which focuses on ‘children 0-12’ which would appear to be normalised as if it is acceptable to target babies and primary school children in relation to ‘radicalisation’. We can also note that one of the smaller clusters of expertise is ‘public relations’ and ‘strategic communication’. This includes strategic communications firms that engaged in the CSEP to advise on the need for their services and then to contract for those services with participants in the CSEP.

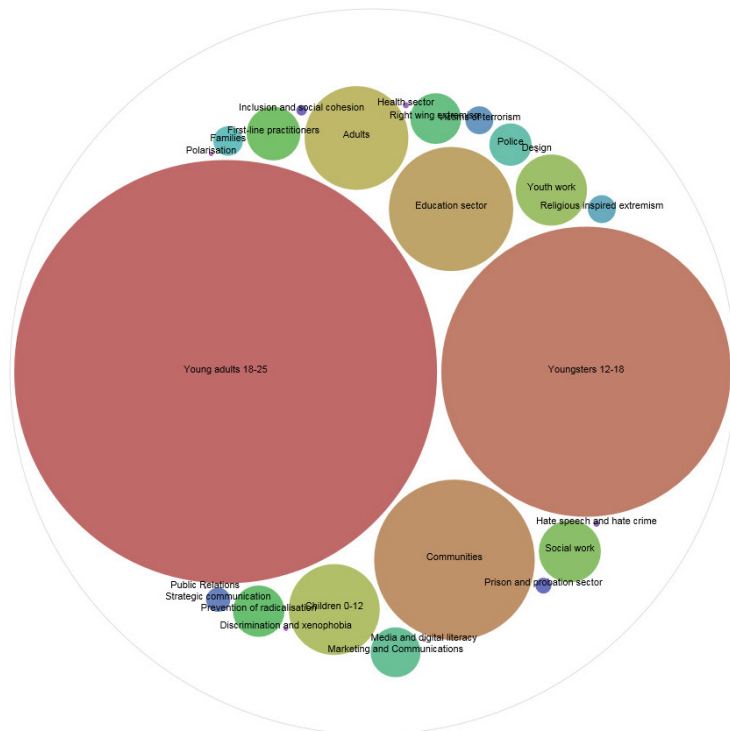


Figure 3.6 CSEP area of expertise

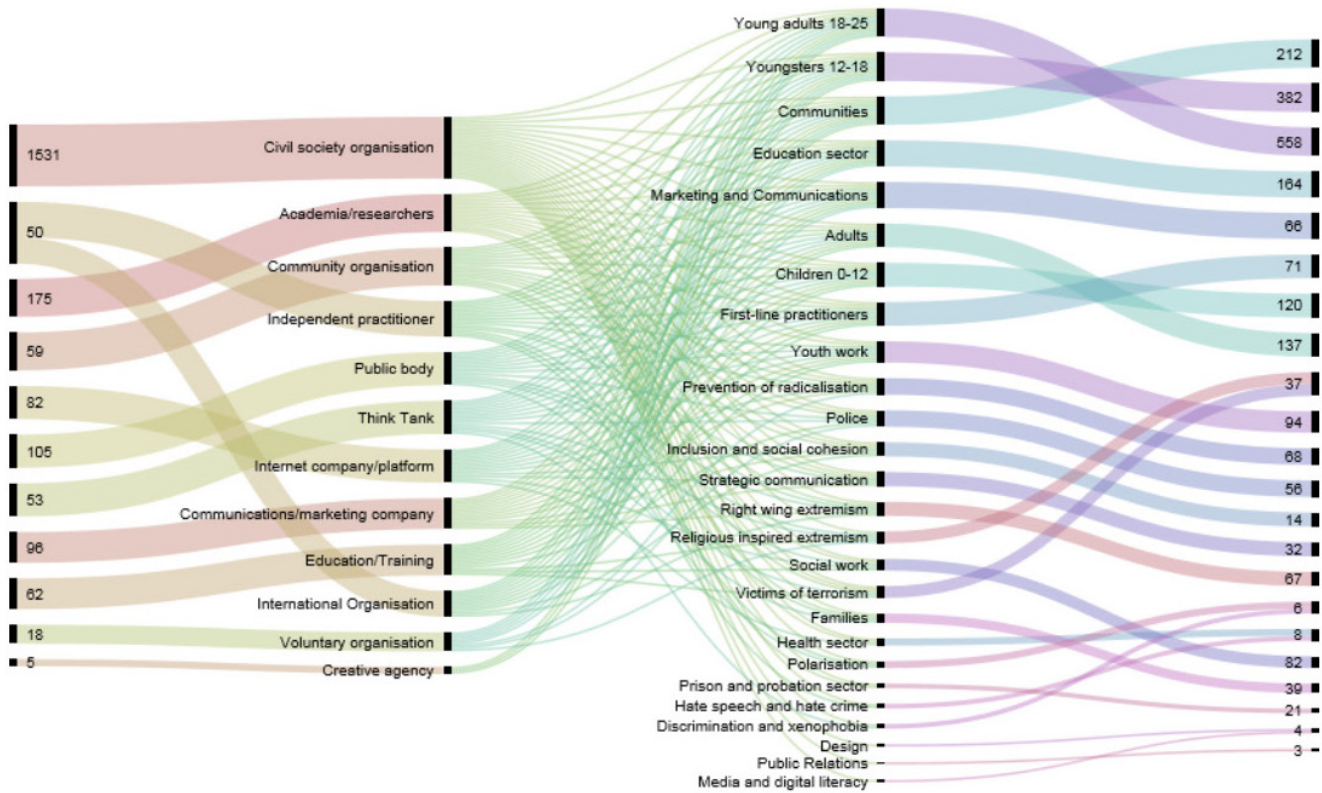


Figure 3.7 CSEP types of organisation and areas of expertise

The data visualised in figure 3.7 give the figures for the involvement of participants from the range of organisations and links this through to the area of expertise that the participants themselves affirm. It shows that the overwhelming dominance of the civil society organisations feeds through to the three largest categories of experience in young people and communities. As the data shows, however a wide range of groups involved see themselves as having expertise in these three areas.

Conclusions

Overall the data in this chapter shows the very marked predominance of participants from the UK in the RAN and the seemingly seismic shift over time to foreground civil society and counter narratives as the main activity of the RAN. The emergence of the CSEP further emphasises this trend and raises the question of the role of strategic communications, or to put it another way – propaganda – in the activity of the RAN and CSEP. We examine these questions further below.

4

Working groups, editorial board and conflict of interest

This chapter examines ethics and conflict of interest in the RAN as well as examining the editorial committee and the Working Groups.

Ethics and conflicts of interest

The documents which set up the RAN explicitly mention the role of the Commission in overseeing its activities. The EC:

will define key guiding principles of the network and specify the issues related to the RAN membership, governance, day to day work within the working groups and the role and relationship with the European Commission. The Commission will have the right to sit in the 'Steering Committee', decide on the admittance and exclusion from the RAN as well as the creation and disbanding of working groups.

The documents also mentioned two key requirements for the RAN to be accountable relating to conflict of interest and fundamental rights. On conflict of interest it is stated:

RAN members and participants shall act independently in the public interest, with integrity and discretion. RAN members and participants, but in particular Working Group Leaders, shall refrain from involving themselves or being involved in any activity that could result in a conflict of interests or is likely to provoke the perception of an existing conflict of interests by the general public.⁷⁰

Article 39 of the RAN rules of procedure states that:

Conflicts of interest shall be reported in writing to the Commission. Should a conflict of interest arise in relation to any of the activities of the RAN CoE, the Commission may exclude this person from the network or the Steering Committee, or from a particular meeting or activity.⁷¹

Elsewhere in the documents a definition of conflict of interest is given:

Declaration of honour on exclusion criteria and absence of conflict of interest
[Person x] declares that [the above-mentioned legal person][he][she]: g) has no conflict of interest in connection with the contract; a conflict of interest could arise in particular as a result of economic interests, political or national affinity, family, emotional life or any other shared interest; h) will inform the contracting authority, without delay, of any situation considered a conflict of interest or which could give rise to a conflict of interest; i) has not granted and will not grant, has not sought and will not seek, has not attempted and will not attempt to obtain, and has not accepted and will not accept any advantage, financial or in kind, to or from any party whatsoever, where such advantage constitutes an illegal practice or involves corruption, either directly or indirectly, inasmuch as it is an incentive or reward relating to award of the contract; j) provided accurate, sincere and complete information to the contracting authority within the context of this procurement procedure ;⁷²

For now we examine the members of the steering committee and the co-ordinators of the working groups since these have a leadership role and are specifically noted by the Commission.

Article 25 of the RAN rules of procedure stipulates that the RAN CoE

shall appoint a quality manager from its staff members, subject to endorsement by the Commission. The quality manager shall, with the support of a second CoE staff member, chair an editorial board comprised of at most 12 members. The editorial board shall monitor and contribute to the quality of substance deliverables, such as the two research papers, and sometimes deliver them. The editorial board shall also be engaged in the preparation of some events, for example the annual research seminar. Membership to the editorial board will rotate with the fundamental principle that at least for each WG area, a leading researcher should be part of this editorial board. Meetings will be held regularly at least twice a year.⁷³

We have already noted that Andrew Silke, Rogelio Alonso, Fernando Reinares and Tore Bjorgo, as well as the chair of the board, the quality manager, Magnus Ranstorp, form a continuity with the earlier expert networks. The RAN refused to tell us who is or has served on the editorial board, so we were limited to searching for online references to membership mostly authored by the members of the board themselves. This approach allowed us to identify fourteen members of the board of a possible maximum twelve at any one time. But since we know that membership rotates, we are unable to say what proportion we have identified of those who have so served. Suffice to say that *Table 4.1* sets out the names we were able to locate with associated affiliations and a determination on whether they appeared to have a potential conflict of interest.

Name	Affiliation	Conflict of interest
Magnus Ranstorp	Quality Manager RAN and Swedish National Defence College. Advisory board of Hedayah.	Yes. The College exists to train members of the Swedish military. Hedayah is a counter terrorism centre founded and funded by the UAE regime, a regime with a strong record of encouraging anti Muslim hate and intolerance.
Rogelio Alonso	Lecturer of Political Science, Universidad Rey Juan Carlos; Published by and attended FAES and NATO events	Yes. FAES is a leading neoconservative think tank in Spain, associated with former PM Aznar and with Rafael Bardají, part of the leadership of the far right party Vox
Katherine Brown	Lecturer at University of Birmingham;	Yes. She has conducted, according to her own account: ‘Research for, and on behalf of the British Army, the UK Ministry of Defence, the FCO... and other countries’ government agencies and international institutions.’
Francesco Farinelli	European Foundation for Democracy	Yes. The European Foundation for Democracy is a hardline pro-Israel think tank funded by ultra conservative pro-Israel sources.
Orla Lynch	Senior Lecturer in Criminology and Asc. Dean of Graduates Studies at University College Cork, Ireland. Fellow with Hedayah in the UAE.	Yes. Hedayah is a UAE based counter terrorism think tank set up and funded by the UAE regime. The regime is well known for its Islamophobic propaganda campaigns targeting in the active role of Muslims in civil society in the UK, Italy, Belgium, Germany and France as well as other EU member states. It is also a belligerent in the conflict in Syria.

Miroslav Mareš	Masaryk University, Faculty of Social Sciences, attended NATO events	Yes. NATO is a military alliance engaged in conflict in a number of parts of the world including, by its own account: Afghanistan, Kosovo, the Mediterranean Sea, Iraq, Supporting the African Union, including in Somalia, Air policing missions over Albania, Montenegro and Slovenia, as well as the Baltic region.
Fernando Reinares	Professor of Political Science and Security Studies at Universidad Rey Juan Carlos; Real Instituto Elcano	Yes. Real Instituto Elcano is a major neocon oriented Spanish think tank.
Daniela PISOIU	Austrian Institute for International Affairs (OIP), Austria; Contributor, European Eye on Radicalisation	Yes. European Eye on Radicalisation is reportedly a front for the UAE intelligence services. It is reportedly 'funded by Ali Rashid Al Nuaimi, a former Emirati intelligence officer, CEO of the Abu Dhabi-based Hedaya Forum and close confidant of UAE strongman Mohammad bin Zayed Al Nahyan (MbZ)'. Its Editor in Chief is affiliated to the Dubai based al-Mesbar Studies and Research Centre. The MSRC is itself, also reportedly a front for the UAE regime.
Andrew Silke	Professor of Terrorism, Risk and Resilience at Cranfield University.	Yes. He has worked with a variety of government departments and law enforcement and security agencies. In the United Kingdom these include, the Home Office, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Defence, the UK prison service, and several police forces. Overseas he has worked with the United Nations, the U.S. Department of Justice, Department of Homeland Security, NATO, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation.
Götz Nordbruch	Co-director of the German NGO ufuq.de and co-chair of the umbrella organisation Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft religiös begründeter Extremismus	Yes. Grants from German government ministries.
Stijn Sieckelinck	Senior researcher at the Institute for Societal Resilience at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. Coordinator of the expert lab on Resilient Identities.	Yes. Research grants from Dutch ministries.

Anita Perešin	Senior Adviser, Office of the National Security Council, Croatia; Adjunct Professor on Counterterrorism, George C. Marshall Center	Yes. State official, Croatia, according to her biographical entry on the RAN participants database; George C Marshall European Center for Security Studies is a creation of the Pentagon and the German Ministry of Defence; former Policy Coordinator, NATO Office of Security 2010 – 2012.
Lorenzo Vidino	Director of the Program on Extremism at George Washington University.	Yes. Position at the RAND Corporation, Arabic translation of book published by the UAE government connected Al Mesbar Studies and Research Center; published with ICSR, London which is funded by pro Israel and UK and Canadian government sources; Senior policy advisor at the neocon European Foundation for Democracy. Written for <i>Middle East Quarterly</i> , a journal run by the right-wing anti-Islam think tank Middle East Forum (MEF). In 2006, Vidino published another article for the Hudson Institute.
Tore Bjørgo	Professor at the University of Oslo and Director at its “Center for Research on Extremism: The Extreme Right, Hate Crime and Political Violence” (C-REX).	Yes. Adjunct Professor at the Norwegian Police University College (PHS), where he has been Professor of Police Science (since 2004) and Research Director (2005-2007). Also connected to ICCT in the Hague which is in receipt of a ‘core subsidy from the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs’ and which is supported by three key institutions, one of which Clingendael receives over 75% of its budget from the Dutch government and the remainder from a variety of sources that include the US State Department, NATO and the Government of Israel.

Table 4.1 - Members of the editorial board of the RAN and their affiliations and potential conflicts of interest.

Of the fourteen names all had clear potential conflicts of interest. Some of these were multiple in nature. Some have undertaken research for or with funds from military, police, government departments (including Defence, Foreign Affairs and interior ministries), others have held positions either paid or honorary with conflict related educational institutions such as Police or military academies, four (including the chair of the board) have a specific connection to the UAE government, and yet others have written for or are associated with neoconservative think tanks or research units in receipt of funds from the military industrial complex or from pro-Israel sources. It should be specifically noted that some of these connections are quite far along the spectrum towards active facilitation of, and support for the Islamophobia network.

Working groups and Steering committee

The RAN working groups are coordinated by the RAN Steering Committee, which is chaired by the Commission and on which the chair of each working group has a seat. A place on the Steering Committee is also reserved for the Director of the RAN Centre of Excellence and the quality manager of the RAN -Magnus Ranstorp the terrorism expert.

Article 27 of the rules of procedure stipulates that:

The Steering Committee shall be made up of the Commission, representatives of the RAN CoE, working group leaders, and others the Commission may decide to nominate. The RAN CoE shall be

represented by its Director and the quality manager, the relevant account managers for particular tasks, as well as, where appropriate, the external expert responsible for specific activities such as research, outreach and communication, support to and involvement of Member States and international relations.⁷⁴

The first RAN update listed ‘no less than eight working groups’ as having been established since March 2012. The WGs are led by people according to the RAN ‘holding a position in an organisation with expertise and a network in the field covered.’⁷⁵

We can note that there is a mix here of ‘frontline practitioners’ including public sector officials from the police, probation and health as well as a range of civil society actors and a couple of notable terrorism experts, one of whom, Magnus Ranstorp, had been on both Commission expert groups preceding the RAN. We can also note at this early stage, the involvement on the Steering Group of the neoconservative think tank the Institute for Strategic Dialogue. We will return to examine it in more depth in a subsequent chapter. As the RAN developed the working groups also evolved.

Working Groups 2012	Working Groups 2019
The WG on Internet and social media (RAN @)	Communication and Narratives working group (RAN C&N)
The WG on deradicalisation and exit-interventions (RAN DERAD)	EXIT working group (RAN EXIT)
The WG on internal/external factors (RAN INT/EXT), such as foreign fighters and diaspora	Education working group (RAN EDU)
The WG on early interventions and the prevention of radicalisation (RAN PREVENT)	Youth, Families and Communities working group (RAN YF&C)
The WG of prison and probation services (RAN P&P)	Prison and Probation working group (RAN P&P)
The WG of police officers and law enforcement officials (RAN POL)	Police and law enforcement working group (RAN POL)
The WG for the voices of victims of terrorism (RAN VVT)	Remembrance of Victims of Terrorism working group (RAN RVT)
The WG of health practitioners (RAN HEALTH)	Health and Social Care working group (RAN H&SC)
	Local authorities working group (RAN LOCAL)
	RAN YOUNG

Table 4.2 *Comparison of 2012 and 2019 Working Groups*

As can be seen the Health group has widened to encompass Social Care, Early interventions is now Youth, families and communities. The Internet and social media group and the Int/ext group has gone. New groups include Education, Young, Local authorities and Communication and Narratives, the latter of which is a development from the internet and social media group. We can note a similar spread of people involved, some of whom remain in position from 2012. We note the lack of involvement of terrorism experts by 2019 and the continued involvement of the neoconservative movement in the Communication and Narratives working group, the successor to the Internet group, via the person of Alexander Ritzmann. Though Ritzmann states his affiliation here as Brandenburg Institute for Society and Security and location as Germany, he is a long-time member, then executive director of one of the most hawkish Neocon thinktanks in Europe based in Brussels, the European Foundation for Democracy. Also of note is his other co-chair Jonathan Russell. Russell is of note for having previously worked for Quilliam, the counter extremism think tank - funded directly by the British government in its early days - and for then working for Breakthrough Media. Recently renamed the Zinc Network this is a PR firm known in the UK for its covert work with a British government strategic communications unit RICU.⁷⁶ We will come back to such connections in later

chapters. The next chapter examines closely the European Strategic Communications Network which plays a central role in the RAN.

5

Civil Society and counter narratives

– The covert role of intelligence agencies.

The role of counter narratives and the role of civil society have become central to the activities of the RAN. We have seen this already in the emphasis placed on civil society in the various contractual documents and in the centrality of the counter-narrative working group. The centrality is only emphasised by the fact that the coordinators of the group have over the years always been individuals with very close relations to the state or the neoconservative movement. The centrality of these two themes is picked up in this chapter which explores how the RAN and associated EU initiatives such as the EU Internet Forum have collaborated to create something called the Civil Society Empowerment Programme (CSEP). In reality as we shall see in this chapter the aim of this effort is not to empower, but rather to disempower organic civil society and to substitute it instead with manufactured ‘civil society’ groups and campaigns which carry messages desired by the security state with no indications that they are in fact sponsored by Western governments and thus may appear to be credible.

Before discussing the CSEP we need to discuss the creation and evolution of the European Strategic Communications Network, as it has played a key role in the direction of the CSEP.

The European Strategic Communications Network

If you Google the ESCN, there are few lengthy accounts of its activities or purpose. There are traces in a significant number of EU and other official documents which, when pulled together and compared with material in biographical notes and especially on LinkedIn profiles, enables the keen researcher to piece together a picture of the organisation which is systematically at odds with the official account of its activities and role.

We can tell this story from a number of starting points. Let’s start with Elliot Grainger who is advertised in RAN documents as being connected to the ESCN. Grainger gave the keynote address at the Civil Society Empowerment Programme Campaigns Event #02 in Dublin in November 2019.⁷⁷

This appeared to include the idea that civil society needed to ‘fight back’ against the ‘narratives’ of the extremists ‘with our own narratives’.

Civil society in the communications ecosystem

The ESCN keynote speech, by Elliot Grainger, also highlighted the workings of the communications ecosystem, giving those present a look into the state of play of the online world and the role for civil society. With radicalisation, the key question for civil society is how to prevent the influence of extremist narratives. One answer was that we have to fight back with our own narratives.

Figure 5.1 *The view from the ESCN*

The difficulty is that neither Grainger, nor the organisation he represents are part of civil society, so the references to ‘we’ and ‘our’ are ambiguous at best. Elliot himself is a communications consultant who has his own consultancy firm. He mentions this on his LinkedIn and Twitter profiles, but (circa October 2019) neglected to mention any role with the ESCN.⁷⁸ Other sources mention that Grainger is ‘head of consultancy’ at the ESCN.⁷⁹⁸⁰ Grainger himself has tweeted that he is a ‘lifelong Tory’. (Figure 5.2)



Elliot Grainger @elliottgrainger · 12 Dec 2019

So I voted. Lifelong Tory and it's been easy to vote for @jackmrankin great candidate. But this means I #BackBoris and Brexit is bad (disastrous) idea & Priti Patel should not be in charge of Home affairs, or even paperclips, but it is better than the alternative. #GE2019



Figure 5.2 Elliot Grainger: 'Lifelong Tory', 12 December 2019.

(?) The ESCN is a network of EU Member States, funded by the European Commission, which collaborates to share analysis, good practices and ideas on the use of strategic communications in countering and preventing violent extremism.

Figure 5.3 The claim that ESCN is a network of states

The ESCN, is according to the CSEP/RAN 'a network of EU member states, funded by the European Commission', which would also suggest that it is not part of civil society.⁸¹ The part about EC funding is correct. The claim that the ESCN is a network of member states is, as we will see, unusual, and goes against all that has been publicly said about the ESCN hitherto. However, if it were the case that it was a network of member states that would only undermine the idea of 'civil society' empowerment and lend more credence to the idea of state penetration of civil society.

As it turns out the ESCN is quite far from being a civil society venture. It started life as the Syria Strategic Communication Advisory Team and is in reality directed by a British intelligence agency.

Funding the SSCAT/ESCN

The Syria Strategic Communications Advisory Team was set up by the European Commission with an award of €1 million announced in August 2014. This was said to be 'in accordance with the revised EU strategy to combating radicalisation and recruitment to terrorism, in particular the sections on "enhancing Government communications" and "support messages countering terrorism"' The aims of SSCAT were 'developing and exchanging best practices in the area of strategic communication with a view to preventing and countering terrorist crime and violent extremism with a particular focus on that related to foreign fighters.'⁸²

Following the Paris attacks of 7-9 January 2015 a joint statement of interior ministers referred to SSCAT as part of the response: 'we urge all Member States to make maximum use of the Syria Strategic Communication Advisory Team (SSCAT) to be established by Belgium with European funding.'⁸³

SSCAT staff were in post by January 2015 for the year long project which would appear to have been extended into 2016 since a European Parliament Written Answer from Mr Avramopoulos in May 2016 noted that SSCAT had 'already' had 'six network meetings', which 'brought together 25 EU Member States'. Exchanges took place 'on topics such as research, social media training and communications strategies to support countering violent extremism campaigns.' The project was said to foresee a final conference 'where the findings and know-how acquired throughout the project will be shared'⁸⁴

SSCAT was renamed the European Strategic Communications Network (ESCN) in October 2016 with a mandate for a further 12 months. Official EU documents again note that it was a 'Belgian led project'⁸⁵ The initial indicative budget for ESCN was supplemented by DG Home Affairs in June 2017 by a further maximum of €1,150,000.⁸⁶ In September 2017 a further extension was granted with an indicative budget of €3,500,000,⁸⁷ and in October 2017 a new project funded by an Internal Security Fund-Police (ISF-Police) action grant was announced⁸⁸, with an indicative budget of €4.5 million. An EU counterterrorism official Hans Das is reported to have revealed that the EU has set up 'a €10m (\$11m) fund this year [2019] to support civil society-led counter-extremism campaigns.'⁸⁹

The purpose of the project was said to be:

to support capacity building of Member States, members of the network and of few targeted third countries according to the security dimension in their strategic communications response to address violent extremism, and when relevant issuing advice to EU Institutions. Results will be achieved by maintaining the network for sharing and exchanging best practice, providing tailor-made consultancy services and practical support, training, as well as enhancing the end to end consultancy services.⁹⁰

The profile of ESCN

It is notable that, unlike the SSCAT, the ESCN has a website, but that it is a locked landing page which is password protected for specific users.⁹¹ The URL was registered by the Belgian Prime Minister's office on 13 June 2018 also suggesting a Belgian led project.⁹² A Powerpoint presentation lists staff emails with the domain escn.ibz.eu, a domain associated with the Belgian Ministry of the Interior.⁹³

However, a series of clues and statements indicate that, on the contrary, this was a project associated with UK intelligence agencies, and their strategic communications unit RICU. According to the EU funded EUCPN, 'The ESCN is a members- only platform that does not operate in the public sphere.'⁹⁴ A research report commissioned by the European Parliament also noted that 'Unlike other EU-led initiatives, both the SSCAT and the ESCN do not operate in the public sphere and, as such, there is little information about either project.'⁹⁵

'During the upcoming twelve months', it is noted 'ESCN will focus its work on a group of selected Member States and support them on how to apply a strategic communications approach to develop their own domestic capacity to challenge violent extremist influence at the pace and scale required.' The phrase 'pace and scale' is an interesting clue as to those involved in actually running SSCAT/ESCN.

In 2014 the EU counter terrorism co-ordinator noted that

Given that this specific expertise is scarce and not currently available at EU level, it would be useful to build on the considerable expertise available with RICU in the UK Home Office through the creation of a 'Syria Strategic Communications Advisory Team'. This Advisory Team offered to all interested Member States, and - with EEAS support - hopefully also to third countries through regular sharing of expertise with governments such as Tunisia, Morocco, Jordan and Turkey. The Advisory Team would work with interested Member States to develop practical campaign communications solutions which could reduce the appeal for EU citizens to travel to Syria, both at local and national level. It would also build on RICU's work in the context of the UK-led work stream in the Terrorism Working Party on understanding community sentiment and tailored communications.⁹⁶

A November 2017 research report for the European Parliament revealed that: One of the key partners of both the SSCAT and ESCN is the Research, Information and Communications Unit (RICU), run by the Office for Security and Counter-terrorism (OSCT) in the Home Office of the United Kingdom. ⁹⁷ The OSCT is part of the British 'intelligence community'.⁹⁸

RICU provides, a British government memo to the Commission notes, 'consultancy services to the ESCN... as well as providing a bespoke consultancy service to network members.'⁹⁹ The report for the European Parliament adds a little more detail, reporting that 'RICU and the European Commission both work with public relations company Breakthrough Media to design campaigns that "tackle some of the world's toughest social issues, helping [their] clients counter misinformation, [and] prevent violent extremism."¹⁰⁰

A think tank report in 2016 noted that 'The team of around ten experts is funded by the European Commission, hosted by the Belgian Ministry of Interior and supported by the British Home Office (since half of the team comes from the UK)'.¹⁰¹ The direct involvement of RICU staff is acknowledged here. We can

add to that the official briefings given in January 2015 and reported in the press to the effect that ‘British intelligence, however, is slated for a key role in a new office under the Belgian government called the Syria Strategic Communication Advisory Team (SSCAT) which is “to combat terrorist propaganda and the misleading messages it conveys”, according to Sunday’s meeting’.¹⁰²

The involvement of RICU in this initiative appears to be part of a push by the British government to run propaganda operations internationally. To do this a new division of RICU has been set up RICU-I or RICU International. This has been involved in a number of projects in a range of countries including: Tunisia, Morocco and Lebanon, Jordan, Algeria and Pakistan. The unit has also organised a number of events in Finland and the Netherlands. Documents show plans to start operating in France, Belgium, Kenya, Bangladesh and Indonesia.¹⁰³

An overview of SSCAT/ESCN staff compiled from LinkedIn and other public sources suggests that despite being notionally a ‘Belgian led’ project, in practice the project was predominantly staffed by individuals with some connection to RICU the UK Home Office covert communications unit. In one case there is a previous connection with a RICU official and in another a connection with the UN Counter Terrorism Centre, another site of RICU penetration according to internal RICU documents. One case connects only to the FCO in Brussels.

1. **Richard Chalk** was head of RICU from 2012. In March 2017 Chalk was reported to be Head of the ESCN.¹⁰⁴ Chalk is also the sole director of REOC Communications Limited which was registered in 2006.
2. **Tony McMahon** was Head of Networks at The Network Hub (Nov 2017 – Mar 2019) which was part of the ESCN. McMahon says of this period that ‘I built a network of European civil society groups engaged in intervening against violent extremism - from Daesh, Al Qaeda and the extreme Right. This involved working with groups in France, Germany, the Benelux, Nordic region and southern Europe to develop communications strategies for reaching audiences vulnerable to radicalisation. I also liaised with officials from government departments across EU member states including Interior and Justice ministries.’¹⁰⁵ This role was accomplished while McMahon worked at Breakthrough Media (July 2013 – April 2019). Breakthrough lost the Home Office contract in April 2019 and as a result McMahon went on to work as a ‘consultant’ for REOC Communications a small company run by the former Head of RICU Richard Chalk.¹⁰⁶
3. **Simon Theis Jensen** was Creative Director of the ESCN in Brussels (Jan 2016-September 2017). He joined ESCN after a year-long spell (Oct 2014-Dec 2015) as Head of Art at Breakthrough Media in London.¹⁰⁷ At ESCN Jensen noted he ‘directly consulted governments and policy makers on how to build communication capacity of civil society organisation as well as inspiring positive social change in vulnerable communities through strategic and creative communications.’
4. **Hugo MacPherson** was Head of Network at ESCN (Jan 2015 – Present). His previous experience included stints as Deployable Civilian Expert (standby) for the UK Government’s Stabilisation Unit (May 2011 – Present). His specialist area is listed as ‘the Islamic World’; a brief spell at Amnesty and Save the Children; over two years at Al Jazeera; and a brief stint setting up ‘independent’ radio stations in Afghanistan, ‘With US and international backing’ in 2004-5.¹⁰⁸ Notably he ‘launched’ the MPower Youth Project - part of the government’s Counter Terrorism Prevent agenda – in the London Borough of Hounslow (November 2008 – April 2011. At the time the Principal Community Cohesion Officer at Hounslow, with oversight of Prevent spending, was Sabin Khan. Khan went on to become Deputy Director of RICU, which has oversight of ESCN.¹⁰⁹
5. **Luke Havill** Head of Advisory Team European Strategic Communications Network Apr 2019 – Present, Brussels. Previous spells as Development Director The Network Hub Mar 2018 – Mar 2019, London; Communications Adviser Europe with RICU-I (Aug 2017 – Mar 2018); and Head

Of Consultancy Syria Strategic Communications Advisory Team, Jan 2016 – Aug 2017, Brussels/London.¹¹⁰

6. **Elliot Grainger** Head of Operations and Lead Consultant, European Strategic Communications Network, Contract (Jan 2017 – Dec 2019); Team leader of a team of consultants, UN Centre for Counter Terrorism (within the Counter Terrorism Implementation Task Force) (Jan 2016-Dec 2016); Strategic Advisor, RICU (Mar 2015 – Dec 2015)¹¹¹
7. **Louis Brooke** was Team Leader ‘Strategic Communications Advisory Team’ a term which appears to be a reference to SSCAT. (Sep 2014 – Sep 2015). Prior to the SSCAT job Brooke had worked for 15 months as ‘Head of East Africa’ for Breakthrough Media and immediately following his role at SSCAT he took up the position of Managing director at the Zinc Network.¹¹² His online CV states that he worked for Breakthrough throughout the period he was at SSCAT.
8. **Alex Lawrence-Archer** Strategy consultant at Syria Strategic Communications Advisory Team, Brussels (Jan 2015 – Mar 2016). After his spell at SSCAT he moved to another project with RICU influence in the UN Centre for Counter-Terrorism in New York (Apr 2016 – Dec 2016)¹¹³ His LinkedIn page states that while at SSCAT, he ‘worked to advise EU Member States on using strategic communications to counter violent extremism. Working with 13 Member States (including Sweden, Finland, Netherlands, Austria and Germany) my role focused on (i) working with Ministers and senior civil servants within Ministries of Interior, Foreign Affairs, Social Affairs and Justice to map the national CVE context, identify priorities and opportunities for campaigning and outline practical steps for implementation and measuring effectiveness, (ii) developing detailed reports with recommendations for campaigning, and (iii) using workshop sessions to develop ideas into full campaign plans.’¹¹⁴ Lawrence-Archer is also director of a PR firm called Raedan Associates created in October 2016. The only other director is SSCAT colleague Louis Brooke.¹¹⁵ Its accounts show a turnover of £60,488 in the year to 31 October 2017 and zero in the following year.¹¹⁶
9. **Jamie Harbour** was a Consultant with the European Strategic Communications Network (Jan 2015 – Oct 2016); Previously worked for the UK Foreign Office in the office of UKRep to the EU in Brussels (Mar 2013 – Jan 2015) and prior to that as an intern for an MEP.¹¹⁷
10. **Clement Coltellaro** Coordination Unit for the Threat Analysis (CUTA) Belgium. Promoted to the rank of Attache Class A1 by Royal Decree of 22 October 2017 at the Directorate General Security and Prevention of the Federal Public Service of the Interior, as from 1 August 2017.¹¹⁸ Listed as affiliated with the ESCN¹¹⁹
11. **An Michiels**, circa November 2016.¹²⁰ Michiels is an official with the intelligence agency the Coordination Unit for the Threat Assessment (CUTA) and sits on the External Advisory Board of an EU funded project titled Trivalent.¹²¹
12. **Giulia Giacomelli**, has no apparent past with RICU or Breakthrough/Zinc. Her affiliation with the ESCN appears on a Powerpoint presentation given with an ESCN colleague in Rome in June 2019.¹²² On her linkedin page she states coyly that she has worked at a ‘Research&Analysis Programme’, an ‘EU project’ since Nov 2017.¹²³ On her ‘protected’ Twitter profile she states that her job is ‘C-PVE Strategic Communications Advisor’¹²⁴
13. **Djamila Khibazieva**, Belgian Ministry of the Interior. LinkedIn says only that she is ‘Working on an EU project’ as an Attache since September 2017.¹²⁵ Her affiliation to ESCN is given via her email address.¹²⁶

We can see from open source data on the relevant staff that of the thirteen staff identified here, four had no obvious history or connection to RICU, all of those being Belgian ministry of the interior officials. At least

two of those four are employees of CUTA, the Coordination Unit for the Threat Analysis an intelligence assessment grouping set up by the Belgian government in 2006.¹²⁷

What is CUTA?

CUTA is the Coordination Unit for Threat Assessment, 'operational since 1 December 2006... draws up specific or strategic evaluations of terrorist and extremist threats in and to Belgium.' It 'largely' proceeds on the basis of intelligence obtained from the supporting services, including

- State Security
- The General Intelligence and Security Service
- The federal and local police¹²⁸

Partners represented in CUTA



State Security (Sûreté de l'Etat)

Military Intelligence Service (SGRS)

Integrated Police Service

Federal Public Service of Home Affairs

Federal Public Service of Foreign Affairs

Federal Public Service of Mobility and Transportation

Federal Public Service of Finance (Customs Office)

Figure 5.4 CUTA 'partners'¹²⁹

In addition to CUTA the ESCN is staffed by a number of individuals almost all of whom have a recent or ongoing relationship with two organisations, either RICU the covert propaganda unit of the UK Home Office or the Zinc Network (formerly Breakthrough Media) the PR agency contracted by RICU.

The five most senior (Creative Director, Head of Advisory Team, Head of Network, Director, Team Leader) each have significant history with RICU, or its PR firm Breakthrough, including with the 'Network Hub' a project developed by RICU discussed below. But the brief is evidently to keep this secret unless among putative friends. Thus a Powerpoint authored by Giacomelli for a presentation on ESCN in Rome in June 2019 includes the following 'suggested speaking notes' on ESCN staffing:

- Who are our members? Mainly MoI
- CUTA – BE fusion center
- RICU – UK HO¹³⁰

The Network Hub

Among the operations that RICU have developed with Breakthrough Media is the idea of a 'hub', that is an office that produces PR campaigns for civil society organisations but which appears to have no connection with RICU or indeed Breakthrough. This is despite it being staffed by up to six Breakthrough staff together with space to allow 'up to 2 RICU team members' to work there (covertly) as well.¹³¹

Internal documents reveal that the Hub was proposed to run as if it was not connected with RICU or indeed Breakthrough.

In light of the sensitive nature of RICU's objectives and involvement and the need for Hub content to be attributable to partner organisations rather than Breakthrough, the Hub or RICU, Breakthrough recommends a sensitive/confidential approach to its and RICU's involvement in operating the Hub. This is the basis on which Breakthrough's existing relationship operates and would mean that media, data, physical access and documentation would be managed so as to keep RICU's involvement in the production of Hub content and the nature of RICU and Breakthrough's collaboration in operating the hub strictly confidential.¹³²

Later internal documents from Zinc Network give a retrospective account of the creation and operation of the Hub:

In 2012 ZINC pioneered a network management model for the Home Office's Research Information and Communications Unit (RICU), bringing together over 60 organisations to increase their ability to credibly campaign against extremism... ZINC has since adapted this model based on lessons learned and has developed network hubs in Bangladesh, Somalia, and Pakistan supporting a total of 50 organisations to engage over 10 million people.¹³³

It would appear that the same model was then proposed and adopted for the ESCN since staff involved in the SSCAT/ESCN have revolved between RICU and Breakthrough on the one hand and ESCN/Network Hub on the other. This is no doubt to encourage the fictitious perception that the network hub is somehow separate from RICU/Breakthrough/Zinc and indeed the ESCN.

Staff

Simon Theis Jensen was Creative Director of The Network Hub from creation in Oct 2017 – April 2019. Jensen states: 'I helped initiate, build and run The Network Hub as the first ever government funded communication service to provide bespoke communication support to European civil society organisations. The agency was set up with the aim to build EU collaboration and to sustainably create positive social change in local communities across Europe.'¹³⁴ Prior to the creation of the hub Jensen was Creative Director of the ESCN in Brussels (Jan 2016-September 2017). He joined ESCN after a year-long spell (Oct 2014-Dec 2015) as Head of Art at Breakthrough Media in London.¹³⁵

Tony McMahon worked at Breakthrough from 2013 to March 2019 where he was involved in developing the original hub. According to him: 'From 2013 I was involved in developing a network of civil society organisations (community groups) engaged in countering violent extremism and building community cohesion in the UK. This involved working closely with the Home Office and a range of organisations in the faith, women and youth sectors.'¹³⁶ McMahon also discloses he was Head of Networks at The Network Hub (Nov 2017 – Mar 2019). It can be noted that these dates fully overlap the role at Breakthrough and suggest, therefore, that the hub is operated by Breakthrough. At the Network Hub McMahon 'built a network of European civil society groups engaged in intervening against violent extremism - from Daesh, Al Qaeda and the extreme Right. This involved working with groups in France, Germany, the Benelux, Nordic region and southern Europe to develop communications strategies for reaching audiences vulnerable to radicalisation. I also liaised with officials from government departments across EU member states including Interior and Justice ministries.'¹³⁷ In other words McMahon worked with the ESCN project.

A third staffer at the Network Hub was Luke Havill. He was Development Director The Network Hub Mar 2018 – Mar 2019, London; Prior to that he was Communications Adviser Europe with RICU-I (Aug 2017 – Mar 2018); and Head Of Consultancy Syria Strategic Communications Advisory Team, Jan 2016 – Aug 2017, Brussels/ London. After his spell at the Hub he returned to the ESCN where he was Head of Advisory Team European Strategic Communications Network Apr 2019 – Present, Brussels.

The URL thenetworkhub.org was registered on 13 October 2017¹³⁸ and expired on 13 October 2019 (See Figure 5.5). The website was shortly thereafter resurrected (on the 25 October 2019).¹³⁹ The URL hosts a two page website with nothing visible on it except a short text noting that it 'builds the communications capacity of civil society organisations across Europe from its base in London.'¹⁴⁰ (See Figure 5.6.)



Welcome to thenetworkhub.org
This Web page is parked for FREE, courtesy of GoDaddy.com.

Figure 5.5 The expiration of the domain name registration circa October 2019



Figure 5.6 The Network Hub's static webpage

Exporting campaigns across Europe

There is evidence to suggest that these campaigns became models for similar work in other European countries. Various sources say that work has occurred across the EU. ESCN staffers, for example have reported the following:

Working with 13 Member States (including Sweden, Finland, Netherlands, Austria and Germany) my role focused on (i) working with Ministers and senior civil servants within Ministries of Interior, Foreign Affairs, Social Affairs and Justice to map the national CVE context, identify priorities and opportunities for campaigning and outline practical steps for implementation and measuring effectiveness, (ii) developing detailed reports with recommendations for campaigning, and (iii) using workshop sessions to develop ideas into full campaign plans.’¹⁴¹

At the Network Hub Tony McMahon claims that he ‘built a network of European civil society groups engaged in intervening against violent extremism ... This involved working with groups in France, Germany, the Benelux, Nordic region and southern Europe to develop communications strategies for reaching audiences vulnerable to radicalisation. I also liaised with officials from government departments across EU member states including Interior and Justice ministries.’¹⁴² Louis Brooke, stated that he:

Established a team within EU DG Home to build the capacity of member states to undertake strategic communications campaigns around Counter-terrorism and Counter Violent Extremism issues. Led a team of 6, established network of senior communications and counter terrorism officials from 24 member states within the EU which met on monthly basis of knowledge sharing and training sessions, led 10 consultancy visits to different EU member states which involved on the ground research with senior politicians and officials from the police Ministry of Interior and intelligence as well as representatives from communities and media. ... Resulted in 3 member states establishing dedicated units within Ministries and 6 Member states launching campaigns, within the year.’¹⁴³

One internal document from SSCAT, designed with the RICU logo, outlines a strategy for Swedish civil society engagement.¹⁴⁴ It is plausible that the ‘team’ trip to Sweden to research this report on the 27-8 April 2015¹⁴⁵ included Lawrence-Archer, given that he mentions working on Sweden in his LinkedIn page.¹⁴⁶ The report states that it aims to :

Develop an incubator for civil society organisations (CSOs) working on the issue of extremism in order to increase number of organisations delivering high impact and scalable

CVE projects; build and nurture the network of CSOs willing to work with Government on CVE including by challenging extremist narratives.

In particular the focus was on addressing the fact that there was:

a strong reluctance amongst some Muslim communities (the notable exception being the Somali community) to admit that violent extremism is a problem among “their” young people. There is perhaps a sense that to do so would be to lend weight to or become complicit in the demonization of Islam by some sections of the far-right or populist press. Government representatives spoke of engagement with civil society in which it had been difficult to open up a dialogue on combating radicalisation, with community representatives preferring to speak only about Islamophobia.

The civil society targets outlined in the document reflect similar focus of RICU/Breakthrough media collaboration, emphasising the attempt to elevate specific religious voices and target and recruit families to the task of countering extremism. With respects to these aims, both FAST and Imams.Online.com are used as case study examples for the activity being proposed in Sweden.

Sisters Against Violent Extremism (SAVE) is listed in the SSCAT Sweden document as a key partner to deliver work on families. SAVE is a project of Women without Borders, set up by Edit Schlaffer in 2001 and focuses on Female Leadership, Capacity Building, Gender Based Violence, Intercultural Dialogue, and Preventing Violent Extremism. The organisation runs Countering Violent Extremism internationally through video campaigns and ‘mother schools’. Its inclusion implies that it is involved in work with RICU and/or ESCN

5.3 NORDIC IMAMS – AMPLIFYING THE VOICES OF HOME-GROWN

As in other European countries, homegrown religious voices often lack strong public profiles in Sweden and have limited influence among young Swedish Muslims. This means (i) space is left for informal Mosques and online preachers, who tend to promote more extreme views and in some cases encourage travel to Syria, and (ii) ordinary Swedes tend only to hear about Islam in the context of extreme and violent interpretations.

NCAVE and other representatives expressed an interest in amplifying the voices of Swedish Islamic scholars and Imams but were concerned that there is not a critical mass of suitable individuals to make a viable project. In response to this challenge SSCAT proposes developing a pan-Nordic platform for Imams and scholarly voices from across the region.

Case Study Imams Online UK

Imams Online is a UK-based project that brings together a unified, non-sectarian group of scholarly Islamic voices (largely but not exclusively Imams) and gives them access to a range of communications support. This particularly focuses on a website that serves as both a forum for debate and a hub to promote events and activities: a platform from which they can advocate against extremism. It also includes the maintenance of social media feeds, the development of video content to drive traffic to them and the website, and intensive PR support to maximise the visibility of the participating Imams in mainstream and community-focused print media, television and radio. Imams Online have also recently launched an online magazine *Hadiqah* (the Reality), which seeks to directly counter ISIL's messaging through its quarterly magazine, *Dabiq*.

Figure 5.7 SSCAT advice to the Swedish government draws on RICU campaign for Faith Associates - Imams Online

The Civil Society Empowerment Programme

The Civil Society Empowerment Programme is a key development coming out of the RAN and the EU Internet Forum. In 2017 the RAN CoE created a Joint Activity Plan for its ‘Civil Society Empowerment Programme’ with the ESCN, which was said to be able to provide significant support for the CSEP:

The support of the Advisory Team of the ESCN will include the following:

- An ESCN Team member(s) will take part in the Support and Coordination group meetings.
- Representatives from the ESCN contribute to the kick-off event in the preparation for this workshop at a strategic as well as operational level. The ESCN Advisory Team member(s) might be amongst the involved experts to facilitate the kick-off workshop and/or present, etc.

- Representatives from the ESCN are invited to provide contributions to the development (and possibly provision) of trainings.
- The expertise of the representatives of the ESCN may be foreseen in the preparation of the dissemination activities (social media campaigns, newsletters, videos).
- Furthermore, the ESCN is invited to share information on the CSEP and potential participants for the CSEP network.
- Should experts who work for the ESCN be subcontracted for contributions in their professional capacity, they will not represent ESCN but their own organisation or work as independent experts.¹⁴⁷

This passage shows a very strong role for the ESCN in shaping the CSEP. The last paragraph also indicates the institutionalisation of a structural conflict of interest, where ‘experts’ advise communications solutions which are then provided by the same experts wearing different ‘consultancy’ hats.

However, RICU representatives have also participated directly in other adjacent and supervisory bodies. RICU, then ESCN operative, Elliot Grainger claims to have been ‘an advisor to DG HOME... a[n] expert to the EU Internet Forum, ... member of the High-Level Expert Group on Radicalisation... supporting the EU’s Radicalization Awareness Network... sat on the Advisory Board to the EU’s Civil Society Empowerment Programme.’¹⁴⁸ No such board is advertised by the CSEP and any membership is not publicised, however.

His role at the High Level Group (which met seven times between September 2017 and May 2018) is not acknowledged on the documents of the group. Grainger states that he was Head of Operations and Lead Consultant for the ESCN during this period (Jan 2017 – Dec 2019). Though the names of attendees are not released the minutes do record that a representative of both RICU and CUTA, two representatives of the RAN and four from Unit D2 of DG Home (Counter terrorism)¹⁴⁹ attended the first meeting on 11 September 2017.¹⁵⁰ At the next two meetings a representative of the ESCN was present along with one from CUTA, one from the Home Office (presumably RICU), two from the RAN and five again from Unit D2.¹⁵¹ It seems likely that Grainger was the ESCN representative. At the next meeting the attendees were the same except for an extra ESCN and D2 rep and a rep from the UK government ‘Counter Terrorism and Extremism Network’ replaced the Home Office representative There were two representatives from the ESCN at every other meeting (28 February 2018,¹⁵² 18 April 2018¹⁵³ and 18 May¹⁵⁴).

The acerbic and irreverent RAN observer Harald Weilnböck discusses the high Level Group in the context of a ‘coup d’état’ of the RAN by the ministries of the member states. As evidence he noted ‘public hearsay, for instance in Q&A sections at international conferences one could sometimes hear emphatic and ominous sounding statements like: “No, this is not a coup d’état”’.¹⁵⁵ As we have shown in this chapter matters are a lot more serious than that.

Concluding comments

The role of British intelligence via the covert UK Home Office strategic communications unit RICU (and its contractor Breakthrough/Zinc) in creating and running the ESCN (with collaboration from the Belgian intelligence agency CUTA) is a clear pointer that the objective of the CSEP is not empowerment of a vibrant civil society, but rather the disempowerment of genuine and organic civil society groups, most notably Muslim civil society. It suggests that rather than encouraging empowerment, what it is encouraging is the penetration of civil society groups by intelligence linked groups in order that they can carry state propaganda messages in to hard to reach communities. However, the problems, with the CSEP as with the RAN, do not end there. Further examination of the activities of the CSEP and the RAN indicate the important role of another external force, that is the penetration of the RAN and CSEP by hawkish neoconservative movement organisations. It is to an examination of them that we now turn.

6 Neoconservative and counter extremism think tanks role in the RAN

The Neoconservative movement originated in the United States and is still best known for its role in driving the invasion of Iraq, accomplished in part by a massive campaign of disinformation on WMD, on the supposed 'links' between 9/11 and Iraq and myriad other deceptions.¹⁵⁶¹⁵⁷ But the Neocons have a history parts of which are largely agreed between the Neocons themselves,¹⁵⁸ realist critics¹⁵⁹ and the left.¹⁶⁰ This is that the movement originated on the left and travelled right in conflict with other strands of the left, particularly the New Left of the 1960s.¹⁶¹ It is a movement that has a specific hawkish component, is pro-Israel and embodies US imperial power. But it can operate outside the US and in fact does so. The Neocons have a transnational movement which has spread to many countries and has been influential in the field of counter terrorism and 'radicalisation'. Dubbed the Eurocons they share their U.S. counterparts' devotion to military might and interventionist foreign policies. The unilateralism of U.S. neocons is tempered in Europe by a greater emphasis on the role of certain international alliances. However, the underlying vision is fundamentally the same. Eurocons see multinational institutions like NATO as vehicles for pushing the agenda of the United States and its European allies, and as instruments of global power, regime change, nation-building, and 'democratization.' But they regard as illegitimate any attempt to check or curb Western power via the United Nations.¹⁶²

This worldview is evident in declarations such as the Prague Charter signed at the 2007 Democracy and Security International Conference.¹⁶³ This key event, dubbed the 'Neocon International' by Washington neocon observer Jim Lobe met in Prague in 2007.¹⁶⁴ The worldview is also evidence in the Statement of Principles of the Henry Jackson Society, and of the Euston Manifesto – both based in the UK.

Representative Eurocons include politicians such as Conservative education spokesman Michael Gove and former Labour Foreign Office Minister Denis McShane in Britain; former Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar and foreign minister Ana Palacio; former defence minister Antonio Martino in Italy; and foreign minister Karel Schwarzenberg in the Czech Republic.

As a result a dense network of neoconservative think tanks and policy groups has built up across the EU in order to exploit this policy landscape and to push it further and further in the direction of illiberal and mistaken counter terrorism policies. The neoconservatives have had considerable success in pushing for the adoption of counter terrorism policies to 'prevent' terrorism, extremism and radicalisation. The adoption of such policies in a large number of EU states (for example the UK, Netherlands, France and Spain) is testament to their power. The first EU member state to take this path was the UK, which adopted 'Prevent' policies in 2003. The EU followed in 2005. The adoption of 'prevent' policies meant that the counterterrorism apparatus moved from tackling terrorism to tackling ideas about terrorism deemed inimical to US (and Western) interests.¹⁶⁵

In the case of the RAN, we have identified that two key Neocon think tanks (the Institute for Strategic Dialogue and the European Foundation for Democracy) have lodged themselves in the heart of the organisational structure of the RAN. They portray themselves simply as having policy and practitioner expertise as opposed to a specific political agenda. We outline below how each of these groups is active in the RAN as well as their background, politics and proximate networks.

The Institute for Strategic Dialogue was involved in the RAN from the beginning. It is referred to in the first 'RAN update' published on 28 June 2012.¹⁶⁶ This notes that the Working Group on 'Internet and social media (RAN @) is led by Rachel Briggs (UK), Institute for Strategic Dialogue'. All Working Group leaders, together with the Commission and the RAN secretariat form the steering group, so ISD had a key role from the beginning. A Google search in November 2020 of the term "Institute for Strategic Dialogue" in the URL string "ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network" returned 110 separate pages, indicating a central role in the network.

Rachel Briggs was at ISD from 2009 to 2015, before moving to the US. Prior to ISD she had a string of appointments to think tanks including the Foreign Policy Centre and Demos, both associated with Blairism and then with the Royal United Services Institute the hawkish think tank closely associated with the British military. According to Briggs own account of her time at the ISD

As Research Director, I oversaw all research, fundraising and research outputs, and was a member of the Institute's Senior Management Team. I managed a £3 million budget. During my tenure, ... our team worked in over 20 countries with both local, national and multi-national partners. We increased income five-fold within two years through securing major funding from organizations such as the European Commission, Google, the Open Society Foundations, and governments across Europe and North America. We established a programme to develop technology-led responses to terrorist and extremist use of the Internet, including strategic partnerships with Google, YouTube, Facebook and Twitter; a global network of survivors and former perpetrators of violent extremism; and advisory work for governments across Europe and North America¹⁶⁷.

As can be seen from this account the activities of the ISD are closely interconnected with governmental activities related to extremism and radicalisation, itself a strong indication of the orientation toward the neoconservative worldview.

The Institute for Strategic Dialogue was set up by the late Lord Weidenfeld, a veteran British Zionist.¹⁶⁸ In 1949 he was Political Advisor and Chef de Cabinet in Israel to Dr. Chaim Weizmann, and spent a year in this capacity before returning to Britain.¹⁶⁹ His publishing company Weidenfeld & Nicolson published Walter Laqueur, the work of the Islamophobe, Bernard Lewis, Claire Sterling's *The Terror Network*, a vehicle for CIA disinformation, Benjamin Netanyahu's *Terrorism: How the West Can Win* - the output from the second Jonathan Institute terrorism conference in 1984 - and more recently Michael Gove's neoconservative polemic, *Celsius 7/7*. Gove described Weidenfeld as the 'inspiration' and idea for the book, calling him a "man of great wisdom and humanity" who he is proud to call "a friend." According to one of his admirers, Stephen Pollard of the JC he is the 'ultimate insider - a peer of the realm, on first-name terms with most of the establishment in Europe and much of the US and Middle East'¹⁷⁰ Writing for the *New Statesmen* in 2002, Dennis Sewell claimed that Weidenfeld, 'a serious operator at the level of government, editors and media proprietors', often used his influence to try and prevent critical media coverage of Israel. His Zionism also seemed to include a strong dose of Islamophobia.

In an interview with *Welt Am Sonntag*, on IS in 2015 Weidenfeld stated: 'Obviously this great excess of violence is religiously motivated and has many sympathizers in Islamic communities. Even so-called moderate Muslims often have the declared aim of Islamizing Europe and, at most, distance themselves superficially from violent fundamentalism. You mustn't suppress that.'¹⁷¹ He went on to say that 'especially the moderates, Islam as a whole, the Islamic states - they must finally make it clear where they stand in relation to our civilization'

Perhaps more strikingly Weidenfeld also signed a petition circulated by the notoriously Islamophobic Gatestone Institute. Titled 'Stand For Israel, Stand For Reason' it claimed that 'Israeli land concessions, will never bring peace. Only a cultural revolution in the Arab world can achieve it.'¹⁷² The petition was written by the Italian Islamophobe Fiamma Nirenstein who – since 1998 – has lived in an illegal settlement in East Jerusalem.¹⁷³ Amongst the other signatories was a who's who of the Islamophobia network including the editor

in chief of the Gatestone Institute, Nina Rosenwald, as well as Emanuele Ottolenghi (Foundation for Defense of Democracies), Dore Gold (Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, former Ambassador of Israel to the UN), Norman Podhoretz (*Commentary Magazine*), Michael Ledeen (Foundation for Defense of Democracies), and Phyllis Chesler (Middle East Forum). In 2020 the ISD produced a report on *Bankrolling Bigotry: An Overview of the Online Funding Strategies of American Hate Groups*. It analysed a long list of such groups including six 'Anti-Muslim' groups. Coincidentally or not three groups that signed the letter above, the Middle East Forum the FDD and in particular the Gatestone Institute were not included in the list to be examined, despite being central to the US Islamophobia network.¹⁷⁴

Weidenfeld's attitude to the occupation/settlements can also be inferred from his involvement in the UK branch of the Jerusalem Foundation. He was a director of the organisation between 2008 and 2010 when his wife Annabelle replaced him.¹⁷⁵ The Jerusalem Foundation, according to multiple reports is engaged in developing settlement activity in occupied East Jerusalem in contravention of international law.¹⁷⁶

The ISD say they are 'dedicated to understanding and innovating real-world responses to the rising tide of polarisation, hate and extremism of all forms'. Using 'unique networks of community influencers, city and government officials and tech sector partnerships, we work to mount a soft power strategy, proportional in influence and impact to the ever-more sophisticated, cross-border polarisation and recruitment machineries of state and non-state actors promulgating hate, division and conflict.'¹⁷⁷

The mention of 'soft power' is a clear nod to the fact that this is a propaganda or influence operation

The ISD is overseen by a board and a team of advisors. The board is stuffed with figures from the financial sector. These include some who have other connections such as the former chief of staff of the British Army Charles Guthrie, who has also had advisory roles with neoconservative think tanks and Zionist groups such as the Jewish National fund. Guthrie also, is an advisor to the haute neocon lobby group United Against a Nuclear Iran.¹⁷⁸ The chair is Michael Lewis a British based business man who was previously the deputy Chairman of BICOM the leading pro Israel PR grouping in the UK. Richard Barrett is a former MI6 officer as is Pauline Neville-Jones, who is also a former British government minister. Ana Palacio a key Spanish figure in the neoconservative movement is also on the board. Lastly we can note the role of Magnus Ranstorp as an advisor to the ISD. Ranstorp, as we have noted earlier in this report, is one of the key 'terrorism 'experts' involved in directly running the RAN.

The involvement of known neocons, former intelligence operatives and others from the hawkish end of the conservative movement is a key indicator of the orientation of the ISD. But we can also see connections to counter extremism and state supported groups in the staff of the ISD. Several staff have traversed between the ISD and the counter extremism group the Quilliam Foundation such as Erin Saltman and Quilliam founder and former Henry Jackson Society employee Rashad Ali. Other notable connections of ISD staff include Zahed Amanullah who also works for Unitas Communications which numbers the State Department and the Saudi regime (via the Organisations for Islamic Cooperation, a Saudi run grouping¹⁷⁹) amongst its clients,¹⁸⁰ and Dilwar Hussein who we met in Chapter 1 In connection with the Change Institute. Hussein is also a director of New Horizons for British Islam which has been involved in covert propaganda activities with RICU and Breakthrough/Zinc.

A wide range of western government departments has funded the ISD including from Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Germany, Canada, Australia as well as the UK Home Office (parent of RICU) and Foreign Office, the US State Department and the EU itself. Also of note is the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation at Kings College. As we note elsewhere this is also significantly funded by foundations that are active in funding (illegal) settlement activity in Palestine.

We mention two foundations of note¹⁸¹ – Eranda, the family foundation of the UK branch of the Rothschild family, which has also funded the Quilliam Foundation, Neoconservative think tanks such as the Henry Jackson Society and the Jerusalem Foundation, which is engaged in illegal occupation activities in East Jerusalem.¹⁸² The second foundation is Gen Next. This is also of interest as it is connected to the Quilliam

Foundation and its opaque US fundraising operation which is based at Gen Next HQ, with Gen Next CEO Michael Davidson serving as its principal officer.¹⁸³ Quilliam ‘has received nearly a million dollars’ from Gen Next a group ‘with close links to the neoconservative wing of the Republican Party since 2011’.¹⁸⁴ In January 2011, Chad Sweet was appointed to the Quilliam Foundation’s US board of directors. In the same year

Sweet set up a nonprofit corporation in Texas, Ted Cruz for Senate, where he remains a director. In that capacity, Sweet played a lead role in the campaign that led Republican maverick Ted Cruz to win election to the Senate in 2012... Ted Cruz represents the very far-right of the Republican spectrum and is close to the most bigoted elements of the Tea Party movement.¹⁸⁵

It is this milieu from which the ISD undertakes its bewildering variety of policy influence campaigns.

Against Violent Extremism

Gen Next, Google Ideas, and ISD partnered together to create counter-extremism programs including Against Violent Extremism (AVE).¹⁸⁶ AVE is an attempt to institutionalise the role of ‘formers’ – that is former ‘extremists’ in countering ‘extremism’.

The Strong Cities Network

The Strong Cities Network was launched at the United Nations General Assembly in September 2015, but is actually a programme of the ISD. The network is ‘the first ever global network of mayors, policy-makers, and practitioners, united in building social cohesion and community resilience to counter violent extremism in all its forms, according to the ISD.’¹⁸⁷ In practice the network is used as a means to insert and promote countering violent extremism policies in countries at a local level potentially bypassing state or national decision making or bouncing state or national governments into implementing the policies. It appears to have played this role successfully in Spain and in the US. In the latter case it faced some pushback by a large group of civil society groups which have campaigned against CVE approaches in general and the SCN specifically. In 2015 over 21 civil rights and civil liberties organisations expressed their concerns regarding the Strong Cities Network, arguing that such CVE programmes end up ‘stigmatizing Muslim communities as suspicious’ and ‘threaten freedoms of speech, association, and religion.’¹⁸⁸

The Policy Planners Network

The Policy Planners Network, in contrast to the SCN, targets the government level of decision making. Set up in 2008 and ‘facilitated by ISD, the PPN works to upgrade and coordinate strategies of its members through sharing of information and best practice for designing and implementing policies in countering extremism.’

The Network ‘includes representation from 12 government agencies from the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Germany, Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Belgium, Spain, Finland, Norway and Victoria State (Australia). The network also cooperates with the European Commission and the Counter-terrorism Coordinator at the Council of the EU.’¹⁸⁹

All of the activities of the ISD, in collaboration with the corporate sector (especially social media companies) and with government and the counter terrorism apparatus are mechanisms for extending the authoritarian policies favoured by the neoconservatives. The pursuit of these policy goals is a matter of active lobbying and influence campaigning. But we should also be clear that role of the ISD (as with other similar groups) is to act in a kind of parastatal capacity to do things that the state finds difficult or inappropriate to do under its own name. This is expressed clearly by Gordillo and Ragazzi in their review of RAN policy recommendations in which

the state is no longer a visible actor, whereas communities are in turn expected to become active, responsive and responsible. Most importantly, key individuals function in such a way as to silence voices within the communities. The RAN policy recommendations thus promote a state that ‘rules at

a distance' through proxies but which nonetheless remains more in control of the situation within the communities by having people on the ground.

In addition the civil society groups (including in this instance ISD) are

able to be flexible and responsive in their approach whereas larger, more bureaucratic organisations may face greater challenges due to the 'broader' nature of their function/role.

So groups like the ISD are both lobbyists pushing the state in more authoritarian direction and agents of the state licensed to undertake such work.

European Foundation for Democracy

By contrast with the ISD, a similar Google search on the phrase "European Foundation for Democracy" returned 13 items. It is worth briefly noting these in order to demonstrate the interaction of the EFD with the RAN. The first is a paper published by the RAN in October 2019 associated with the RAN EDU working group. The paper was authored by Francesco Farinelli European Foundation for Democracy (EFD).¹⁹⁰ The second is a report on counter narratives work based on interviews conducted by EFD in 2016. The third is a reading list:

EDITORIAL BOARD – FRANCESCO FARINELLI'S MUST-READS

Francesco Farinelli is programme director at the European Foundation for Democracy. His work focusses on the role of ideology, propaganda and fake news in media narratives and examines the relationship between history and fiction.¹⁹¹

As this states Farinelli is on the editorial board of the RAN. But the Google search underplays the role of the EFD, since some of its activities are in effect disguised. A key example is that the EFD had a representative on the steering group of the RAN for five years. Alexander Ritzmann co-chair of the Counter Narratives working group (2015-20). Though Ritzmann stated on the RAN website that his affiliation was the Brandenburg Institute for Society and Security and location as Germany,¹⁹² he was a long-time member and then executive director of one of the most hawkish Neocon thinktanks in Europe based in Brussels, the European Foundation for Democracy.¹⁹³ In all the accounts of Ritzmann's activities on the RAN website (around 26 pages) it appears that his affiliation with the EFD was never mentioned.

His role as co-chair of the Communication and Narratives Working Group was one of the key leadership roles, with a crucial importance for the development of the Civil Society Empowerment Programme. The other co-chair, appointed in February 2017 was Jonathan Russell head of Policy at the Quilliam Foundation. At Quilliam Russell had co-ordinated the State Department funded Families Against Terrorism and Extremism programme and project managed 'the #NotAnotherBrother counter-narrative video campaign'.¹⁹⁴ The latter had been produced by the London based PR firm Verbalisation¹⁹⁵ headed by the former British Army psyops reservist Sven Hughes.¹⁹⁶

Later, in August that year, Russell would move to Breakthrough Media, the RICU contractor discussed in the previous chapter.¹⁹⁷ Given the close relationship between the two and the key role played by RICU/ ESCN in the RAN it would seem likely that the British intelligence services would have welcomed this new appointment.

EFD Training materials for civil society ‘empowerment’

In 2017, RAN organised 27 training sessions around Europe for civil society organisations as part of its Civil Society Empowerment Programme. Each session covered the skills and knowledge needed to develop online counter and alternative narrative campaigns. The training material is available in 20 EU languages.¹⁹⁸ The RAN produced four outputs from this, the first – a powerpoint presentation - produced by the RAN itself. The other three were documents produced by and branded with the logo of the EFD.

The first two documents on which campaign is right for you¹⁹⁹ and on Lessons Learned.²⁰⁰ both give advice on effective campaign and messaging strategy. The third document on how to target your audience, recommends that civil society groups get in touch with a range of groups including the following named groups: ‘you could reach out to the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), join Hedayah’s narrative library, approach the Quilliam Foundation, the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, the European Foundation for Democracy, Ufuq, EXIT Sweden or EXIT Germany’²⁰¹ Hedayah is a front for the UAE government which has made a significant priority of promoting anti Muslim prejudice in Europe and the US, where it works closely with the parent body of the EFD the Foundation for Defense of Democracies in Washington DC. Quilliam is a counter extremism think tank formerly funded by the UK government. When the UK government withdrew funding Quilliam began to receive significant sums for anti Muslim foundations in the US

It is worth noting that amongst the seven resources listed at the end of the third document four are produced by the ISD, one by the Australian government, one by the RAND corporation and the final one by the Media Diversty Institute. It is a partner in the Open Information Partnership a UK Foreign Office propaganda project which is led by Zinc the contractor closely linked to RICU in the UK Home Office (See chapter 5).²⁰² The milieu of the of the RAN is very much that of the neoconservative movement, but with a high level of penetration by British intelligence operatives and their assets.

A profile of the European Foundation for Democracy

The European Foundation for Democracy (EFD), was launched in November 2005 registered as an ‘Association sans but lucratif’ on 28 May 2006. EFD is a think tank closely associated with a transatlantic network of neoconservative and Islamophobic activists.²⁰³ It focuses on ‘raising awareness about the threat of terrorist ideologies in Europe’, while promoting ‘universal human rights’, ‘individual liberty’ and ‘liberal Islam’.

Its videos start in 2016 and are largely focused on radicalisation though with an emerging strand of work on disinformation and counter narratives including in relation to Covid 19.²⁰⁴ Publications go back to 2013 and are overwhelmingly focused on racialisation though with one on Iran, once of their early focuses.²⁰⁵ It currently has four ongoing projects on its site all dealing with radicalisation, propaganda and counter narratives.²⁰⁶

One of its founders is Nicola Dell’Arciprete,²⁰⁷ who previously worked as an assistant to Fiorello Provera, an MEP with the far right Italian party Lega Nord (Northern League). In that capacity, Dell’Arciprete undertook a tour of occupied East Jerusalem hosted by Ateret Cohanin, an organisation affiliated with Israeli settlers.²⁰⁸ Dell’Arciprete is also a founder of the multilingual magazine Café Babel; in 2006, he published a blog post suggesting that the only people at risk from Israel’s attacks against Lebanon were ‘supporters of terrorism’.²⁰⁹ According to an investigation by Human Rights Watch, the vast majority of the 1,109 Lebanese killed in Israel’s 2006 war were non-combatants.²¹⁰

The EFD has adopted a number of political campaigns that echo policies advocated by the Israeli establishment.²¹¹ Its experts have, for example, proposed a ban on television channels linked to Hamas and Hizbullah²¹² and argued that the EU should place both the political and military wings of Hizbullah on its list of terrorist organisations²¹³ EFD has also hosted events to mobilise for tougher action against Iran over its alleged quest for nuclear weapons.²¹⁴ In addition, EFD participated in the now defunct Coalition against Terrorist Media, founded by the Foundation for Defense of Democracies (FDD), a conservative think tank in Washington.

Eli Clifton of Salon has described FDD as ‘Washington’s premiere hawkish think tank,’ reporting that is heavily funded by Republican donors including Paul E. Singer and Sheldon Adelson.²¹⁵ Its stated mission on tax documents is ‘to conduct research and provide education on international terrorism and related issues’. While active, the coalition focused mostly on banning Hizbullah’s al-Manar television channel and al-Aqsa, affiliated with Hamas.²¹⁶

The EFD is heavily reliant on US funding and has received substantial contributions from the US government. Some €70,000 of the foundation’s declared €520,000 budget between January and September 2012 came from a US State Department grant.²¹⁷ The EFD also receives tax-exempt funds from the Washington-based Friends of the European Foundation for Democracy (Friends of EFD). The charity raised \$1,002,500 in 2011, \$703,000 in 2012 and \$983,000 in 2013. In 2016 it raised \$950,501 and \$150,000 in 2017, though its income collapsed to \$32,000 in 2018. In 2011-13 the Friends paid more than \$481,028 to an American-registered consulting firm run by Roberta Bonazzi for her firm’s management services. In the period 2016-8 some \$459,214 was paid to Roberta Bonazzi.²¹⁸

The relationship between the FDD and the EFD

Roberta Bonazzi, the EFD’s current president, serves as Friends of the EFD’s executive director, but several other members of its staff have direct links with the Israel lobby in Washington. Its president is Talton Gibson, formerly director of The Israel Project, a lobby group that tries to place articles favourable to Israel in the mainstream press.²¹⁹ In addition, Toby Dershowitz, Friends of the EFD’s treasurer, worked as a spokesperson and media relations director with AIPAC for 14 years.²²⁰ She is now vice president of FDD. Bonazzi has provided a contradictory explanation about her ties to FDD. At first, in 2014 she stated that her foundation and FDD were ‘two completely separate organisations, financially and legally separate’. However, when asked why documents transmitted to the US authorities indicate that there is a financial relationship between the two foundations, she replied: ‘That is because most of our fundraising is done in the US. [The FDD was] our contact. Grants were sent to them and then to us.’²²¹ Research also shows that in 2009, FDD provided a direct grant of \$478,829 to EFD. Bonazzi herself was paid by FDD for ‘networking and research’ activities. In a 2007 declaration to the US Treasury, she was named as FDD’s highest paid ‘independent contractor for professional services’, receiving \$168,000.²²²

FDD and Friends of the EFD and also share two significant American funders. The first is Paul E. Singer, another board member of the Republican Jewish Coalition. According to Eli Clifton, Singer contributed \$3.6 million to FDD between 2008-2011.²²³ In addition, his affiliated foundations donated \$1 million to Friends of the EFD in 2011. Singer’s foundation has also supported Birthright Israel, Friends of the Israel Defense Forces and Israel Independence Fund. The latter is headed by New York venture capitalist Kenneth Abramowitz, who serves as the national chairperson of American Friends of Likud. According to Haaretz, in 2007 Abramowitz appeared on Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s ‘list of millionaires’ – i.e., potential donors.²²⁴ The Israel Independence Fund’s website lists a number of projects in the settlements and occupied east Jerusalem.²²⁵ The second major funder of both groups is The Marcus Foundation Inc., based in Atlanta, Georgia. Founded by American billionaire pharmacist, retail entrepreneur and philanthropist Bernard Marcus, who also sits on the board of directors of the Republican Jewish Coalition, the foundation granted a total of \$800,000 to Friends of the EFD and \$10,830,000 to FDD between 2009-2013. It has also funded the Birthright Israel, Friends of the IDF, the Jewish National Fund and Christians United for Israel. Singer and Marcus fund the Middle East Media Research Institute, co-founded in 1998 by Yigal Carmon, a former Israeli military intelligence officer, and Meyrav Wurmser, an Israeli-born American political scientist, to provide free English language translations of Arabic, Persian, Urdu, Pashto and Turkish media reports. The Center for American Progress has called MEMRI ‘the Islamophobia network’s go-to place for selective translations of Islamist rhetoric abroad.’²²⁶

The FDD itself says that it was founded ‘to promote pluralism, defend democratic values, and fight the ideologies that drive terrorism,’ but, it emerged from an organization ‘committed to burnishing Israel’s reputation in the United States’ called Emet (Hebrew for “truth”).²²⁷ After 9/11 its mission was expanded and its name changed to the Foundation for Defense of Democracies. But its hardline defence of right wing Israeli governments has never faltered. As Judis notes ‘in several important ways, the Foundation for Defense of Democracies seems to have remained an organization dedicated intellectually and politically to the defense of one particular democracy.’²²⁸

In their writings, FDD experts have endorsed a view of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that is in accord with, or sometimes even to the right of, the views of Netanyahu and the Likud party. In November 2007, FDD Senior Fellow Andrew McCarthy wrote in *National Review* that the Bush administration, in trying to forge a two-state solution, was “hellbent on granting statehood to savages who worship ‘martyrdom.’”²²⁹

The founder of FDD, Clifford May ‘consistently puts quotes around the adjective *occupied* for the Palestinian territories that Israel has under military rule. When I asked May why, he replied, “The West Bank, seized from Jordan after Jordan attacked Israel in 1967, should more accurately be called *disputed territories*.” As James Carden puts it:

What is clear is that FDD, awash in funding by stalwart advocates of Israel, has adopted policy positions that rarely—if ever—deviate from the preferred policies of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s right-wing Likud party. As one longtime Iran policy hand quipped to me recently, “They really should be called the Foundation for the Defense of Likud.”²³⁰

Conclusions

The strong involvement of the ISD and the EFD in the RAN is an indication of the politics of the network. It is not just that they turn up to meetings along with the other practitioners, it is that they are involved in directing the RAN and in providing training as part of its programme of activities. Both the ISD and EFD as our evidence shows are firstly, strongly pro-Israel, meaning also that they are supportive of illegal settlements; secondly, there is abundant evidence of Islamophobia in both groups. How are we to understand this in relation to their work with the RAN, which is couched in terms of radicalisation and extremism and ‘counter narratives’? The key to understanding this is that there is no disjunction between the politics of one and the politics of the other. We turn to examining the practical politics of radicalisation and extremism in relation to the EU’s own ‘fundamental rights’ next.

7

Evidence base and evaluation

This chapter examines the concept of radicalisation and how it came to be the dominant term in counter terrorism policy in Europe. It then reviews a variety of evaluations of the RAN. It looks first at academic and policy related evaluations and commentary. We then look at the only official evaluation of the RAN to date, by the EU Court of Auditors. After this we examine some shortcomings of the RAN approach, looking in particular at the conceptualisation of the problem of radicalisation as an issue of ideas and beliefs which can, therefore, be addressed via counternarratives. This leads on to a consideration of the extent to which, conceptually and practically, the concept of radicalisation is Islamophobic.

The Radicalisation chimera

Radicalisation and extremism do not emerge from long traditions of social scientific enterprise. Baker-Beall et al, remark that 'since 2004, "radicalisation" has burst onto our screens and political agendas, seemingly from nowhere' to dominate 'the discursive apparatus of academic, media and the state'.²³¹ Certainly, as we have seen, the growth in the use of the term 'radicalisation' over the last decade or so is striking. But the concept did not emerge 'from nowhere'. The Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation notes that it originated in EU policy circles after the Madrid bombing of 2004, at which stage, they note, it was not 'widely used in social science'.²³² Similarly, Schmid, a member of that Expert Group, writes that the term was 'brought into the academic discussion' by policy makers in the aftermath of the bombings in Madrid and London in 2004 and 2005 respectively, and that state (and EU level) funding 'has steered much academic research'.²³³ Similarly, Neumann and Kleinmann note that 'radicalization research is funded to a much greater degree than other fields of study not by research councils, foundations, and other, more traditional sources of finance for academic research but by governments and government agencies', and suggest that this 'may have (inadvertently) undermined scholarly standards'.²³⁴

Radicalisation is a concept that emerged from the counter terrorism apparatus in the years after 9/11. The phenomenon of 'radicalisation' is then taken and worked on by academics, policy experts and practitioners. The UK was the first country to develop ideas associated with 'radicalisation'. The UK government strategy was first put in place in 2003.

The strategy 'known as CONTEST', was, according to a later Parliamentary report 'initially a slender document'²³⁵ and was kept confidential until 2016, when a redacted version was released. This was dated 1 April 2004 and lists the four main strands of the strategy Pursue, Prevent, Protect and Prepare. Under the 'Prevent' strand is the unmistakable aim: 'Prevent the radicalisation of Muslim Youth in the UK'.²³⁶ The extent to which theories of 'radicalisation' were developed in response to state agendas is well illustrated by Magnus Ranstorp, who would go on to be a member of the EU Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation as well as its successor the European Network of Experts on Radicalisation. Ranstorp by his own account: 'helped the process of establishing RAN in September 2011 and has been an instrumental operational part of it since then'.²³⁷ He recalls that in 2003 he 'happened to share a unique speaking platform with Sir David Omand, Tony Blair's Cabinet Intelligence and Security Coordinator, at the British Defence Academy in Shrivenham'.²³⁸ Omand that day unveiled the UK's new counter-terrorism strategy, which would later influence policy on 'terrorism' and 'radicalisation' elsewhere in Europe and North America. 'For Sir David, myself and others present at the Defence Academy that day,' Ranstorp writes, 'it was clear that preventing violent radicalization had to be an overarching priority to complement the tactical intelligence, law enforcement and military firefighting efforts occurring across different theatres around the world'.²³⁹ Following its introduction in the UK similar policies were introduced by the EU (in 2005) and over the next decade have spread to many other European countries.

The concept of 'radicalisation', then, appears to have originated with the ideas and practices of state institutions most responsible for prosecuting the 'war on terror' in Europe and North America, and to have been developed by experts, many of whom closely identify with the interests and perspectives of those institutions. The development of radicalisation theory, therefore, is an example of what Burnett and Whyte term 'embedded expertise', in action. Whilst, as we have seen, the establishment of 'radicalisation' as a social scientific concept has been hampered by an apparently irresolvable intellectual ambiguity, as Schmid notes, it 'has become a political shibboleth despite its lack of precision.'²⁴⁰ Its emergence and growth, which Schmid concedes is out of all proportion to its analytical rigour, has been driven by the desire of European and North American states to develop knowledge about Muslims which could inform counter-terrorism practices, and as suggested above, has been subsequently shaped by 'integrationist' political agendas. Schmid writes: 'we have to admit that in the final analysis, "radicalisation" is not just a socio-psychological scientific concept but also a political construct, introduced into the public and academic debate mainly by national security establishments'.²⁴¹ We would go further than this. In the end, 'radicalisation', like 'terrorism', is a pseudo-social-scientific concept, and its adoption from the 'national security establishments' has led to analytical confusion and to forms of knowledge that are politically and intellectually compromised.

The research centres that use and develop these concepts are all strongly connected by means of their funding and ideological affinities to the counterterrorism apparatus of Western states as well as to the neoconservative and Zionist movements. The ICSR was created as a result of attempts by pro-Israel figures to combat Boycott Divestment and Sanctions in relation to Israel/Palestine and is financially supported by foundations that also fund pro-Israel, indeed pro settler activities²⁴²; the ICCT in the Hague receives a 'core subsidy' from the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs²⁴³ The Swedish Defence University, where Ranstorp is based, is, as its name suggests, part of the military establishment in Sweden. Other 'terrorism experts' have positions in universities but are also affiliated with neoconservative think tanks in Spain, Italy, Belgium, France, the UK and other countries.

Even those who work with the concept – such as orthodox 'terrorism experts' are sceptical about it. Nevertheless they, in the last analysis, go along with it. The reason for this is not social scientific, but political. Dispassionate evaluation is undermined by the structural and endemic conflict of interest in the project and the insistence of political decision makers that this is the policy in play.

Academic critique

Scholarly treatments of the RAN are sparse and vary in terms of topic, attention, sample and approach. But some points recur. For example the RAN claims that radicalisation is a concept that fits all kinds of 'extremism'. According to Maarten van de Donk of the RAN:

There are a lot of people who believe that 'jihadist radicalisation' is very different from 'right-wing radicalisation'. We are opposed to that perspective; we argue that a lot of risk factors are the same, and that a lot of the radicalisation processes are quite similar, as are the safeguards required to protect people from these processes.²⁴⁴

Other researchers have concluded similarly that the 'underlying assumption [is] that 'one size fits all' and that what is valid in a given context can be transposed elsewhere.'²⁴⁵ The academic literature does not support such simplistic claims, but they run all the way through RAN pronouncements and activities.

Other critics have charged that 'studies have shown that in the areas of economic or environmental policies epistemic communities need a coherent narrative to influence policymakers, findings suggest that in the domain of counter-radicalization this cohesiveness is less important. This is likely due to ...the high political importance of counter radicalization programs.'²⁴⁶ The RAN is, in other words, protected by its proximity to power. Nevertheless 'it appears that the RAN has an authoritative claim on knowledge in the area of counter-radicalization in Europe, but that the effectiveness of their proposed approaches is not as certain as high-level politicians and bureaucrats would like them to be.'²⁴⁷

The lack of coherence of the work of the RAN is taken up in a further study on a collection of RAN education publications.²⁴⁸

Throughout the text, radicalization is used as a self evident term or is taken for granted... The lack of definition makes the concept floating and ambiguous, resulting in the question: what are we actually going to prevent, and how? All together, we have a very vague text in terms of explicit content.²⁴⁹

The vagueness seems not to be an impediment to a practice of ignoring established traditions of engagement in education:

The practitioner's work is presented without any references to general ideas or traditions of education, attempts to talk about the role of the educational system or ethics within the teaching profession. As a result, the practitioner's work is framed without any consideration of how it may or may not interfere with other duties or the ethics of these professions.²⁵⁰

The educational approach 'becomes very individualized' where 'it seems to be more important to control pupils rather than include their experiences and equip them with the intellectual skills necessary to interpret complex conflicts.'²⁵¹As one observer put it:

What looks at first glance like a well-meaning social policy approach to tackle problems of social injustice, xenophobia and inequality turns out to be a Trojan Horse spreading surveillance and threat-based screening practices across the community, since the underlying rationale assumes a linear pathway from radical attitudes to violent criminal acts of terrorism.²⁵²

European court of Auditors report

The incoherence and problematic nature of the activities of the RAN have not been subject to any formal enquiry or examination. The only official investigation to date has been the report of the European Court of Auditors. This examined the limited questions of whether

- a. The Commission provides Member States with relevant support;
- b. the actions financed by the different EU funds are coordinated to make the most of any synergies;
- c. the Commission has put in place a framework to assess the effectiveness and value for money of its support.²⁵³

Overall, the auditors 'found that the Commission addressed the needs of Member States, but there were some shortfalls in coordination and evaluation.'²⁵⁴ We will examine the shortfalls in a moment but first let's note the successful element of the work according to the auditors:

The Commission promoted cooperation between Member States through relevant initiatives such as the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), the EU Internet Forum and the European Strategic Communications Network.²⁵⁵

This judgement highlights the narrow nature of the questions asked by the auditors. As we have seen earlier in this report – the RAN has suffered from some very significant flaws in its conceptual approach and as a result also in its activities. In addition the fact that the ESCN was a front for a British intelligence operation both practically compromises the whole endeavour and illustrates the covert top down manipulation institutionalised in the RAN. No hint of any such problems come from the auditors report.

On the problematic elements highlighted by the report the most relevant is on evaluation, where the Commission is said not to have:

- broken down the overall objectives of its counter-radicalisation policy into more specific and measurable objectives;
- established appropriate indicators and targets for EU funds used, in order to measure performance in addressing radicalisation;
- provided a comprehensive overview of EU-financed counter-radicalisation actions;...
- fully set out the cost of addressing radicalisation....
- some actions are not costed, notably the EU IRU, the EU Internet Forum, the Civil Society Empowerment Programme and the European Strategic Communications Network;²⁵⁶

The report is notably critical of the failure of the commission to properly account for its activities:

DG Migration and Home Affairs sets detailed quantified targets for the RAN in the annual activity plan, and reviews progress in quarterly and annual progress reports. However, these plans and reports only list activities... (e.g. the number of meetings held or documents produced) rather than effectiveness (e.g. the knowledge acquired by RAN participants, how they applied it, and its impact on their job)... Consequently... the Commission cannot demonstrate how effective EU-funded counter-radicalisation actions actually are.²⁵⁷

Furthermore:

projects often lack effectiveness indicators. For example, out of the five successful project proposals in response to the 2014 call for proposals on radicalisation... the Commission considered that three of these had scarce, vague or basic evaluation and monitoring strategies, and lacked indicators for measuring how effective projects actually were.²⁵⁸

The Commission had not asked the RAN Centre of Excellence

for information to monitor its effectiveness, e.g. participant satisfaction, the knowledge and contacts acquired, how these were used and disseminated within Member States, and their impact on the job or on the organisation's results (e.g. whether training actually helped the police to recognise radicalised individuals and mitigate the risk they posed). On its own initiative, the RAN Centre of Excellence has, however, carried out surveys which provide some indication of how useful its products are. For example, one survey in August 2016 found that nearly 90 % of participants at RAN events felt that their attendance would have a positive impact on their daily work.²⁵⁹

The auditors report provides strong backing for the observation of Harald Weilnböck one of the RAN participants, though he is more sceptical of the value of the internal RAN evaluation:

throughout my engagement in the RAN there was no evaluation. While we local field practitioners have to do an evaluation for every 20K Euro project, the European Commission (EC) spends over 30 million in eight years without any; and there was certainly no lack of grievances among the 'actual first-line practitioners' as I had come to call them... RAN practitioners had asked for evaluation and proposed to furnish a feed-back function, a mechanism of RAN (self)research, a kind of RAN-Info-House, to provide a channel for observations, grievances and recommendations from the field. But this proposal did not even enter the minutes of the pertaining steering committee meeting (SC). In year seven there was a 'customer satisfaction survey' of some workshops, done by the RAN secretariat (RadarGroup, Inc.) producing flattering results.²⁶⁰

Of course, more evaluation, if it reproduced the operating assumptions about ‘radicalisation’ and was not empowered to question them, would be inadequate. It might, however, begin a process of questioning that would otherwise not occur.

Perceived grievances, racism and the need for communications

All the way through the RAN, then there is the idea that the issue to be faced in radicalisation is at bottom ideas, identities and propaganda, there are no root causes except for these. As Mattsson and colleagues put it in their study of RAN education materials

The view that radicalization is a societal detached, individual and psychological phenomenon is highly predominant, even presenting a biological/medical view according to which brain structures may contribute to confrontation. There are several examples of methods that do bring up racism, Islamophobia and discrimination, but they do not include individual experiences of these phenomena in the teaching process. Nor could we find, within the ... material, examples of how the War on terror itself – through, for example, stigmatization... – may contribute to radicalization.²⁶¹

They go on to state: ‘the expression “perceived grievances” in one passage ‘indicates an assumption that structural injustices are not considered a root cause of extremism, but a perceived one. At the same time... importance [is emphasised] of: “Educating young people on stereotypes, discrimination, extremism, democratic order, norms and values, cultural diversity and racism”’ But the RAN publications do ‘not refer to students’ lived experiences of discrimination.’²⁶²

Gordillo and Ragazzi concur that in RAN materials ‘Evidence and “historical issues” are downplayed.’²⁶³ They show how RAN materials

stress that the grievances considered to be root causes of radicalisation are not necessarily factual but only perceived or felt by communities. This framing is crucial, because felt or perceived grievances can be managed by communities, whereas factual grievances require at the very least some action from the state. The policy recommendations thus propose strategies that avoid privileging factual or cognitive engagement.²⁶⁴

They conclude:

RAN policy recommendations exemplify the blueprint of counter-radicalisation as a societal discourse, which locates communities at the centre, develops tailor-made strategies, reframes grievances as perceived and non-factual, and engages co-opted key individuals and front-line practitioners to relay the state-sanctioned narrative about radicalisation, with the concomitant exclusion of alternative voices.²⁶⁵

Counter narratives

It is in the context of the ‘perceived’ injustices that counternarratives play their role. As Figure 7.1 shows the push from the ESCN, (which, as we showed above, is a British intelligence operation) is entirely consistent with this approach. There are no real injustices, military interventions, torture, occupation or Islamophobia, there is only a perception and perceptions can be managed.

In this work counter narratives are defined in opposition to ‘propaganda’. Thus Alexander Ritzmann of the neoconservative European Foundation for Democracy, who co-chaired the Communication and Narratives Working Group for five years writes of ‘propaganda as a tool of extremist ideologies and how to counter it’.²⁶⁶ The enemy engages in propaganda and we engage in counter narratives. Counter narratives are, in other words propaganda. Once we cut through the terminology we see that all of the ‘counter narrative’ activity of the RAN and the CSEP is a matter of propaganda. This should not be surprising given the role of a British intelligence agency propaganda unit in running the operation. But in policy circles there is a polite credulity

towards all this. On the margins though some are sceptical such as the RAN participant Harald Weilnböck who pours scorn on the counter narrative approach:

"The radicalisation problem is a communication problem. It is all about perceptions, and shifting them to reality through communication."
(Hugo McPherson, ESCN)

Figure 7.1 Hugo McPherson of the ESCN giving the view of British intelligence on the 'reality' of misperception.

Counter narratives and counter messages have no impact on these young people! These media products don't even reach them in the internet (which is empirically proven...). And if we were to make them see these videos and messages, they would tend to make things worse rather than better. For, in all experience, these young people would look at this, smirk and then say:

"Are they stupid or what? Do they really think they can brainwash me with such made-up stuff!"²⁶⁷

As we have seen the question of whether it works or not – in its own terms – has conspicuously not been examined through evaluation by the Commission.

Radicalisation as Islamophobia

The concept of radicalisation contains within it a propensity to anti Muslim bias. In practice, according to most reviews of the RAN, this propensity is fully manifest. Pille for example states that:

The expert knowledge produced through the RAN, on the one hand argues for targeted interventions, but on the other hand refers to the need to tackle broader social issues. By making these broader social issues part of counter-radicalization aims communities suffering from socio-economic or integration issues are potentially stigmatized as being dangerous... Taking into account that the analyzed expert views and documents often imply a focus on individuals in minority and Muslim communities, the proposed approaches and practices by the RAN potentially problematize these communities.²⁶⁸

Pille goes on to point to the 'absence of knowledge about when vulnerable individuals turn into violent extremists' and as a result, 'targeted interventions in fact aim at a broad range of individuals ... in particular from minority and Muslim communities, [which] require "targeted interventions" and [are] framed as potentially dangerous.'²⁶⁹

Mattsson and colleagues agree, pointing to a tendency in their data in 'which the newer the practice is, the more likely it is to focus on how to prevent radicalization, and in which the more focus there is on violence in the name of Islam, the more talk there is about preventing radicalization. Hence, radicalization seems to be framed especially in relation to discourses on Islamism.'²⁷⁰

RAN participant Harald Weilnböck, refers to the 'Islamism bias' as a form of 'It-briefs-wellism', which, he claims, says:

Talk about Islamism mostly and not so much about right-wing extremism! Because the latter (right-wing extremism) usually does not brief well with important interlocutors, while the former (Islamism)

briefs excellently with all sorts of PVE audiences and superiors. Yet, any such bias or overly one-sided focus on only one of the various sorts of violent extremism and group hatred is damaging.²⁷¹

Weilnböck states that this raises particular issues in some parts of Eastern Europe:

An Islamism bias such as this is most unfortunate when it is picked up by the EU commission and the RAN –and then, on top of that, is also transferred to Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). For, the populist governments and xenophobic movements in these countries routinely abuse any such Islamism rhetoric in order to support their defamatory anti-refugee rhetoric and Islamophobia –and at the same time obfuscate domestic hate crime and right-wing violent extremism issues (i.e. neo-Nazi hate groups, militias etc. in CEE).

Weilnböck goes on to give a specific example involving the UK based ‘counter extremism’ group Quilliam:

For instance, a London-based PVE expert with a Muslim background from the Quilliam Foundation was invited to a 2014 Prague PVE congress by the European Values Foundation which was connected to the centre-conservative parties’ block in the EU parliament. This expert proceeded to communicate a strong sense of threat to the Czech audience. The Czech Republic should be very careful about their Muslim population, he implied, because “it can happen anytime” that an individual from this community radicalises and commits a terrorist attack. ... At the same time, other attendants of the congress who courageously asked why there is no talk about foreign fighters from the Ukraine and Russia who sometimes form right-wing militias in the country upon their return, did not receive much attention. There was no input planned on right-wing extremism at this event.

Concluding comments

In the documentation about the RAN produced by the European Commission there is much talk of evidence and evidence base, but in the end it seems clear that the relationship between the policy and the evidence is the reverse of what it should be. This is the collection of evidence to justify an existing policy as opposed to evidence to inform policy.

Indeed as is shown by a number of the academic critiques cited above of the RAN there is a refusal to engage with empirical evidence of grievances or of racism – meaning especially Islamophobia – and instead to pitch everything at the level of ‘perception’ which can and should be ameliorated by role models or counter narratives.

The active refusal to engage in the analysis of grievance, conflict and racism, or indeed of the concrete impacts of counter radicalisation, is an indication of the analytical shortcomings of the notion of radicalisation and helps to explain the both lack of evidence base for the policy and its woeful track record of as a key cause of Islamophobia.

8

Fundamental Rights, discrimination and racism

This chapter examines the issue of fundamental rights and how they might be harmed by the RAN. An overview of such possible harms is provided by Hayes and Kundnani who discuss how the EU has imported ‘policies from member state level’ and disseminated them ‘through the RAN network.’ Hayes and Kundnani highlight the importation by the UK of its ‘counter-narrative programme’ through the RAN C&N group, which we discussed in Chapter 4 and go on to state that ‘this process of policy development... runs the inherent risk of harmonizing the coercive and problematic elements of CVE ... while ignoring the questions of fundamental rights, due process and accountability that are festering in many member states.’²⁷²

Such potential problems are acknowledged by the RAN in its Charter which states that:

A key guiding principle for the work of the RAN CoE, its members and participants in the pursuit of the objectives and tasks laid out in this Charter is the respect of fundamental rights and the rule of law.²⁷³

The penalty for breaching these principles is set out in Article 5 of the RAN Rules of Procedure, which state that membership can be ended by:

- a. resignation by the member;
- b. exclusion of a member by the decision taken by the Steering Committee if it is found that it has breached EU principles, financial regulation and fundamental rights or have not respected their commitments towards the RAN or for other justified reasons.²⁷⁴

The EU Charter of Fundamental Rights sets out, among others, the following rights of potential relevance to the work of the RAN:

- Everyone has the right to respect for his or her physical and mental integrity.
- Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers.
- The freedom and pluralism of the media shall be respected.
- The arts and scientific research shall be free of constraint. Academic freedom shall be respected.
- Any discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation shall be prohibited.
- Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right includes freedom to change religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or in private, to manifest religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.²⁷⁵

This chapter examines whether these rights have been infringed by the activities of the RAN. It is assumed that no member of the RAN has, to date, been excluded as a result of lack of respect for fundamental rights. However, it seems plausible that the whole enterprise, in the way it has developed, is in effect an assault on a number of fundamental rights.

This kind of argument has been part of the policy conversation in Brussels for nearly two decades as we now show. In the process leading to the setting up the RAN, a 2005 Commission report noted that

The Commission has consulted the Network of Independent Experts on Fundamental Rights and has received feedback in the form of a study about the link between violent radicalisation and fundamental rights within the legal framework of Member States. The Commission will utilise the expertise of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) in areas such as migrants' experiences, racist violence and Islamophobia.²⁷⁶

There are two points to engage with here which we will take in turn, Firstly the Network of Independent Experts, secondly the EUMC and its successor the Fundamental Rights Agency.

Network of Independent Experts on Fundamental Rights

The Network was 'set up by the Commission at the request of the European Parliament in 2002.' This may well give a clue to the disdain with which it appears to have been treated by the Commission. The opinions of the network are no longer available on the Commission website, though the University of Louvain holds an archive of its outputs.²⁷⁶ The network continued to function until 2006 when it was discontinued.

Its reports contained significant material critical of EU counter terrorist activities. In its 2005 report for example it poured scorn on the Commission call for mutual learning in relation to radicalisation noting:

Mutual learning and the sharing of experiences should concern not only how best to tackle to phenomenon of terrorism, but also how best to improve the protection of fundamental rights in that strategy, in order to avoid an imbalance according to which, while the national authorities would be encouraged to make progress in combating the terrorist threat by the most effective means possible, they would not be equally incentivized to ensure that fundamental rights are protected under that strategy.²⁷⁸

Also in 2005 the Network issued one of its 'opinion' documents specifically on the question of radicalisation. It includes devastating commentary on the strategy of the Commission. It is no exaggeration to say that had the Commission taken these criticisms seriously, they would have been unable to support the creation and development of the RAN.

The network highlighted that the 'risk of discrimination on the basis of visible indications... is considerable here.'²⁷⁹ Moreover, the report noted it would 'be particularly inappropriate to define "violent radicalisation", ... by targeting a specific category of the population, in particular Muslims. This could have the effect of fuelling a sense of Islamophobia.'²⁸⁰ The report also noted that 'in some cases, the fight against terrorism ha[s] also led to an increase in the level of racist prejudice and racial discrimination among individuals and organisations'.²⁸¹

Among the recommendations made by the network was the review of legislation and regulations adopted in the context of the fight against terrorism to 'ensure that they do not discriminate directly or indirectly against persons or groups of persons, including on grounds of 'race', colour, language, religion, nationality or national or ethnic origin, and to repeal any such discriminatory legislation'.²⁸²

In addition the network asked that authorities refrain 'from adopting, in the context of the fight against terrorism, new legislation and regulations which discriminate directly or indirectly against persons or groups of persons, in particular on the grounds of "race", colour, language, religion, nationality or national or

ethnic origin'.²⁸³

The network went on to address the problem of a lack of clear definition of radicalisation.

In its request for an opinion, the Commission uses as a working definition of violent radicalisation the phenomenon of people embracing opinions, views and ideas which could lead to acts of terrorism or other acts of violence against others within society. This definition includes a conditional ("opinions which could lead to..."), and refers, rather than to acts carried out by the agent, to a state of mind which animates him. This makes it legally invalid.²⁸⁴

The Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism, the report notes, 'provides for the criminalisation of certain precisely defined acts, and does not cover the process, as such, of "violent radicalisation"... It may be pointed out that the work which inspired the drafters of this text included a comparative study of the legislation of the Council of Europe member states which concluded that the glorification of terrorism was very unevenly punished in the member states.'²⁸⁵

Remarkably the network made a spirited defence of the idea it was not appropriate for counter terrorism to target radicalisation:

the prevention of terrorism should target specific behaviours, such as public provocation to commit terrorist offences, recruitment or training for terrorism, while radicalisation as such of certain individuals or groups was not the appropriate angle of approach. Examination of the use made in the Member States of the concept of "violent radicalisation" confirms that that concept cannot be given any legal meaning.²⁸⁶

Given this coruscating demolition of Commissions policy on radicalisation it is perhaps not surprising that the network was shut down a year after this opinion was published.

The EUMC and Islamophobia

At that stage, however, the network believed it would go on to have a role in the new Fundamental Rights Agency:

Once the Fundamental Rights Agency becomes operational which is expected to happen as of 2007, the EU Network of Independent Experts on Fundamental Rights would become one of the networks used by the Agency to gather data, expertise and information on the situation concerning fundamental rights in the Union.²⁸⁷

Amongst this work was envisaged to be research on Islamophobia. Indeed the network reported: 'The EUMC is currently preparing two reports on this issue.' These two reports, published in December 2006 would appear to be among the last reports that the EUMC/FRA ever published on Islamophobia and there are none more recent featuring the term 'anti-Muslim'. What then happened was that the network of experts was disbanded and between 2006 and the present the FRA produced no further reports on Islamophobia. By way of comparison a search for 'Islamophobia'²⁸⁸ and 'antisemitism'²⁸⁹ on the FRA website on 10 November 2020 brings up two and fourteen pages of results (with ten items per page) a total of 17 and 135 items respectively. Of the seventeen items there are five (including three publications) between 2002 and 2006 and 15 (including no publications) between 2015 and 2020. These extraordinary facts, suggests that the RAN is not the only place in the EU institutions where there is a palpable anti Muslim bias.

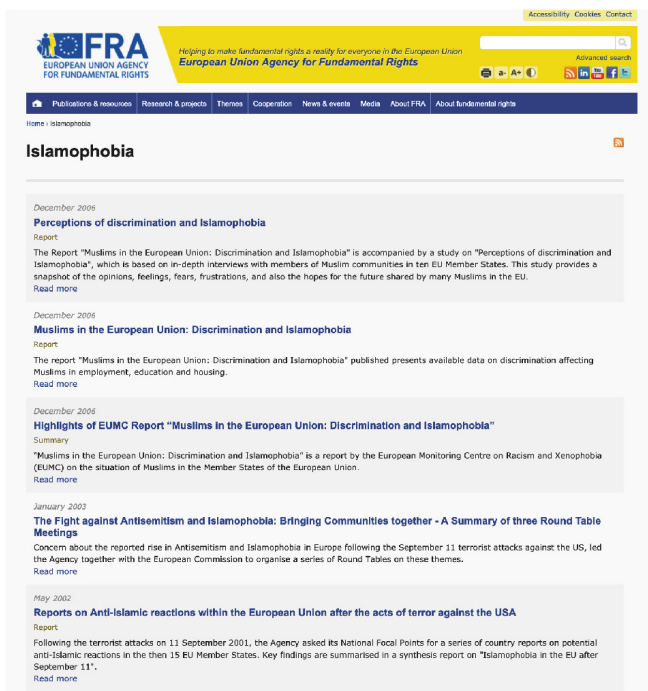


Figure 8.1 Reports on Islamophobia on the FRA website showing the most recent is December 2006, Screenshot taken 24 January 2020.

The RAN and fundamental rights

The activities of the RAN are clearly inimical to fundamental rights in a variety of ways.

- Everyone has the right to respect for his or her physical and mental integrity.

Physical and mental integrity are not respected. To the extent that specifically Muslim religious views and observance are a part of the mental integrity of observant Muslims, the radicalisation advocates are in a daily attack on the mental integrity of Muslims everywhere.

- Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers.

The very idea of radicalisation presupposes that part of the problem it seeks to name is the holding of opinions and the imparting of information without interference by public authority. The activities of the participants in the RAN are a serious threat to freedom of expression since they regard perfectly legitimate, democratic views and politics as signs of radicalisation and extremism and act to close them down.

- The freedom and pluralism of the media shall be respected.

The freedom and pluralism of the media is not respected by those in the radicalisation world since fundamentally they are interested in shaping what information and ideas are conveyed in public including in the mass media. The systematic attempt to manipulate civil society documented in Chapter 4 on RICU/ESCN shows a thoroughgoing disrespect of freedom and pluralism in the media, not least by the deceptive approach to counternarratives and the manipulation of civil society.

- The arts and scientific research shall be free of constraint. Academic freedom shall be respected.

Radicalisation, the concept, has significant deleterious consequences for the democratic life of the University; for the ability to undertake basic social scientific research and sponsors significant incursions into social science to pursue the concept of radicalisation, distorting science and polluting the evidence base.

- Any discrimination based on any ground such as sex, race, colour, ethnic or social origin, genetic features, language, religion or belief, political or any other opinion, membership of a national minority, property, birth, disability, age or sexual orientation shall be prohibited.

The most obvious way in which advocates of the radicalisation thesis have breached fundamental rights is in the wholly unwarranted targeting of Muslims, Muslim community organisations and Muslim faith institutions.

- Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This right includes freedom to change religion or belief and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or in private, to manifest religion or belief, in worship, teaching, practice and observance.

The specific right to be Muslim has been practically challenged by advocates of the radicalisation thesis. There is refusal to allow the possibility that citizens including especially ethnic minority citizens have real grievances and are faced with real forms of oppression and repression. This comes not least from the counter terrorism apparatus of which the radicalisation policy actors are a part.

Concluding comments

This chapter has shown that the practical activities of the RAN have markedly contributed to breaches of fundamental rights in the EU. We noted six specific fundamental right that have arguably been breached by the RAN. Overall, the most obvious way to describe this is to say that the concept of radicalization adopted by the RAN and the working practices that flow from that are profoundly inimical to the fundamental rights of Muslims throughout the EU.

9

Conclusions and Recommendations

This report has shown that there are very significant problems with the Radicalisation Awareness Network. At their most basic the idea of radicalisation has no agreed meaning or basis in social science. It is a kind of sorcery, which simply asserts that the magic is real. It is not quite akin to a Flat Earth Awareness Network, but the phrase tells us something about the collective delusion that the term entails.

The future of the RAN

At present the RAN is at the beginning of its third phase. From its first phase it has been heavily influenced by neoconservative ideas. These are evident, in the overall orientation of EU policy on terrorism and specifically in the policy adopted in 2005 which included a 'prevent' element and was premised on ideas about extremism and radicalisation which are political and have no sound social scientific evidence base underlying them. Secondly, from the beginning there was practical neoconservative influence in the form of think tanks such as the Institute for Strategic Dialogue. This Neocon influence has only increased in the second phase of the contract with the very strong influence of the European Foundation for Democracy. A new influence in the second phase was the penetration of aspects of the RAN's work by British intelligence via the direct role of RICU and its PR firm in the ESCN. The approach here ties together 'communication and narratives' with strategic communication and civil society. This is said to 'empower' civil society but it is really about disempowering Muslim led civil society groups and indeed wider civil society activity on civil liberties, war, Islamophobia and racism and, of course, on Israel/Palestine. The aim is to replace organic civil society with state-supported organisations and front groups, which – so the thinking goes – will be able to access 'hard to reach' audiences and to leverage the credibility of the left and of civil society more generally in seeming not to be talking with the voice of government. This approach depends on secrecy and deception: secrecy, in that the intelligence linked operatives have to pretend that they are not intelligence linked and that they are simply advisers of one sort or another and deception in the sense that all of the campaigns that they produce are deceptive in pretending that they are being run by civil society groups and not by their true authors, the denizens of the national security state and the counter terrorism apparatus. Some of the campaigns may also be deceptive in the more traditional sense of including material that is false, but they need not always be false. We can see that this approach to civil society and 'strategic communication' has become more and more important in the RAN, via the ESCN and the launch of the CSEP - which we can note also has help and support from the EU Internet Forum a body in which leading tech companies collaborate with the state security apparatus to delegitimise civil society and defend the incorrect idea that it is small campaigning groups with few resources that are the major purveyors of disinformation.

We can also see this in the innovation in the 2019 RAN tender documents which included posts required to be filled with persons with 'EU Secret' security clearance. This suggests that the role of intelligence agents will only become more central to the activities of the RAN and it will become more and more a covert propaganda agency.

Recommendations

Several important questions are left unanswered such as which RAN experts are influential regarding the production of output and how approaches are actually derived from the various working group meetings. These questions seem especially relevant due to the observed contested nature of large parts of the analysed RAN approaches. In addition, this research due to its limited scope and time frame did not elaborate on important issues regarding the undemocratic position of the RAN within the European framework. The

authoritative claim on knowledge of the RAN and their attributed importance regarding policies in the area of counter-radicalization, seems to give the RAN an influential role regarding policies to govern radicalization. Future research could further explore issues regarding the transparency and democratic legitimacy of this influence of the RAN.

Specific findings of the report

- The RAN emerges from EU Counter-Terrorism policy and the early efforts to tap into expertise.
- Both the expert committee on Fundamental Rights and the early terrorism expert committee expressed doubts about the concept for radicalisation and how it was being used.
- Over time, RAN has evolved towards a focus on civil society and 'strategic communication'.
- There are problematic elements such as inbuilt conflict of interests.
- An analysis of RAN participants demonstrates that the UK appears to have been a leading player throughout. The largest working groups appear to be community engagement and counter narratives, consistent with the evolution of RAN. The CSEP, largely made up of civil society actors overwhelmingly has expertise in children and young adults
- The juggernaut of radicalisation was anointed and became the main approach in the EU policy world.
- This is despite the almost non-existent evidence base to support the ideas of extremism and radicalisation as a basis for policy.
- This was fundamentally because it was in the interest of the social forces leading EU societies and especially those associated with the UK.
- This helps to explain the otherwise seemingly bizarre nature of the penetration of the RAN by neoconservative ideologues and indeed with pro-Israel groups whose activities encourage Islamophobia as well as by a covert British intelligence operation
- The neoconservative movement is a transnational movement, even if it has elements that are predominantly 'national', such as think tanks. Its funding base is though transnational and often US linked. As it happens, both of the key neoconservative groups we highlight in this report are themselves transnational.
- The ISD, has been strongly involved in the RAN from the beginning, both directly and through some of its many counter radicalisation efforts such as the PPN and the Strong Cities Network, both of which are strongly transnational.
- The EFD is the Brussels branch of the FDD in Washington – one of the most hawkish think tanks in that city.
- The role of RICU the British Home Office intelligence grouping, discloses a covert push towards deceptive propaganda under the guise of civil society 'empowerment' and helps to explain the divorce between evidence and 'prevention' in the correct sense and the actual practice in the RAN.
- The practical operationalisation of 'radicalisation' as being concerned with 'perceived' grievances diverts attention from the concrete problems facing EU societies and encourages racism and authoritarian state responses.
- An examination of the activities of RAN against the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights shows six specific breaches of fundamental rights.

- The drive to valorise the notion of radicalisation and its underpinning by covert ops and neoconservative funding networks, has rather unattractive results in relation to fundamental rights. Most obviously this relates to the epidemic of Islamophobia sweeping across the continent.

New directions for tackling political violence in the EU

Prevention of political violence should be redirected from repression of Muslims and movements for democratic change and toward resolving the conditions that create political violence. These are:

- Western militarism – including direct military interventions overseas, most obviously in this context in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen.
- Western support for political violence overseas including the use of proxy forces to pursue Western interest, - obvious examples include Libya 2011 and Syria, 2011-present, Yemen. These have encouraged attacks within the EU.
- Western covert operations, which in their lack of accountability or oversight end up encouraging, supporting, training or otherwise facilitating the activities of armed groups and individuals that subsequently engage in political violence in the EU.
- Western support for dictators and human rights abusers such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Israel.

This kind of ‘prevention’ is not only likely to be much more effective, but also would honour the charter of fundamental rights in that it would significantly improve the human rights record of EU member states and also encourage democratisation which has itself underlain the crisis of legitimacy of the EU in recent years. The European Parliament can and should have a major role here in pressuring the Commission to change course in its fundamentally misguided approach to the prevention of political violence. The European Parliament should press for a European wide audit of security needs. The aim and focus should be two fold:

- Democracy – to move away from security policy making as a simple a top-down communication process from policy elites and the security establishment to the wider European public.²⁹⁰
- A broader definition of security. Instead of uncritically adopting the security state’s assumptions about the national interest, European policy making on security should instead focus on the security needs of ordinary people. Security should not simply be defined not merely as the absence of risk, but as the presence of healthy social and ecological relationships.²⁹¹

Should political violence continue to be a threat, the answer will always be to understand the underlying dynamic and to set about resolving that, whilst also protecting EU citizens from the risk of violence as part of their fundamental rights to life and liberty. A culture of human rights and democratic accountability as opposed to one of repression, racism and autocracy are the only ways to win this battle.

- The EU institutions – particularly DG Home should take a long look at how they are themselves undermining fundamental rights.
- The abolition of the Expert Committee on Fundamental Rights in 2006 should be reversed. It should be given a budget at least as large as the RAN since the threats faced by EU citizens to their fundamental rights - including from the RAN is enormous
- The existing EU policies on conflict of interest and fundamental rights should be enforced. As a result ‘terrorism experts’ with multiple conflicts of interest should be removed and think tanks and similar groups with a record for Islamophobia and support for human rights abuses abroad should be prohibited for involvement in line with existing rules and policies.

- Intelligence agencies should not be allowed to engage with nominally overt community based activities
- Deceptive propaganda campaigns should be outlawed and open and honest communications instituted. The latter is the only way to undermine distrust and democratic deficits.
- The European institutions dalliance with the discredited concept of radicalisation should come to an end and a reorientation towards fundamental rights should be implemented as this would be a more effective way to deal with the threat of political violence.

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