PREVENTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM:

VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN
SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS

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INTRODUCTION

Under-reporting of hate crimes based on racism and xenophobia continue to be a significant problem across the European Union. Following the 2015 Eurobarometer Survey (http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb83/eb83_en.htm), levels of social acceptance vary in relation to different groups at risk of discrimination. Respondents showed less tolerance towards Muslim people, Roma people and transgender and transsexual people. Most Europeans think, per the mentioned survey, that new measures need to be introduced to raise the level of protection for groups at risk of discrimination.

Hate speech and discrimination are the most visible part of several violent extremist movements. Violent extremism (VE) is a diverse phenomenon. The spread of violent extremism is currently done through social media network, where the immense accumulation of information requires the expertise on Big Data. On the European Commission Code of Conduct on Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online (2016) it was stated that "The spread of illegal hate speech online not only negatively affects the groups or individuals that it targets, it also negatively impacts those who speak out for freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination in our open societies and has a chilling effect on the democratic discourse on online platforms". At the same time, the Joint Statement issued by the extraordinary Justice and Home Affairs Council on the terrorist attacks in Brussels (2016) underlines that "the Commission will intensify work with IT companies, notably in the EU Internet Forum, to counter terrorist propaganda and to develop by June 2016 a code of conduct against hate speech online".

For that, there is the necessity to contribute in several key initiatives identified. The present document intends to present a desk review on the expression of violent extremism in social media network, but, more specifically, tries to give an specific answer on how to combat online hate speech in social media networks through a roadmap.

The major objective remains the necessity to give answer to most of the problematic found on the global analysis above mentioned. Potential actions need to benefit from the active participation in its design and tailoring of CSOs and regional networks and local, national and international institutions who have ensured a participatory design, a cross-fertilization and local-sensitivies adaptation.

The ideal roadmap that prevents hate speech demonstration can be done through a 4-stage process:

1) design and develop a monitoring tool that, through Big Data obtained from social media network, describes how violent extremism and hate speech narratives is expressed in social media networks. This will contribute on the research on the Violent Extremism area;

2) create an in-depth analysis of the violent extremism online narratives at a regional level in Europe, to contribute on giving a clear definition on what Violent Extremism is;

3) design an online campaign to create alternative narratives to prevent violent extremism, to prove that only counter-terrorism measures are not enough for the prevention of violent extremism;

4) organize a conference between civil society organizations and regional institutions on online alternative narratives to combat hate speech, to give a positive answer.

THE CHALLENGE

Under-reporting of hate crimes based on racism and xenophobia continue to be a significant problem across the European Union. Following the 2015 Eurobarometer Survey (http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb83/eb83_en.htm), levels of social acceptance vary in relation to different groups at risk of discrimination. Respondents showed less tolerance towards Muslim people, Roma people and transgender and transsexual people. Most Europeans think, per the mentioned survey, that new measures need to be introduced to raise the level of protection for groups at risk of discrimination.

To mitigate this problem, a first Annual Colloquium on Fundamental Rights on Joining forces against anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim hatred in the EU (http://ec.europa.eu/justice/events/colloquium-fundamental-rights-2015/files/fundamental_rights_colloquium_conclusions_en.pdf), was organized. It was also made clear in the discussion that both phenomena presented commonalities and were emblematic of other forms of hatred. It was also highlighted that "the response to antisemitism and islamophobia should deal with both common and separate factors." Focus was put on how to support concrete projects on the ground, exchange best practices, reinforce networks, and further promote policies and legislation designed to combat hate crime, hate speech, intolerance and discrimination. The importance of supporting young leaders and civil society to foster exchanges between different communities and promote grass-root projects was also underlined, as well as fighting hate speech by working with IT companies, civil society and the media.

Hate speech and discrimination are the most visible part of several violent extremist movements. Violent extremism (VE) is a diverse phenomenon.

Violent extremism is having a devastating impact on the lives and livelihoods of populations across the continent, particularly the most vulnerable, and including youth, women and children. The spread of all forms of violent extremism has further aggravated an already unprecedented economic, political, and humanitarian crisis, which surpasses the boundaries of any region. Violent extremism encompasses a wider category of manifestations. It is raising currently in Europe, where fanatic movements spreading racist, islamophobia, ultra-nationalistic and extreme-right ideologies are gaining momentum and institutional representation. The growth of violent extremism poses a risk on the collective efforts towards maintaining positive peace and human security, fostering sustainable development, protecting human rights, promoting the rule of law and taking humanitarian action in Europe.

Over the past decades, several governments have sought to address violent extremism within the context of security-based counter-terrorism measures. In the name of the battle against violent extremism, we have seen an extensive use of military power, that has been not only highly ineffective but it has also been responsible for dramatic human rights violations and increasing the global suffering. The anxiety to respond has also fueled overreactions in terms of Homeland Security, where fundamental freedoms and civil and political rights have been restricted, subjected to massive vigilance and the democratic and pluralistic values have been limited by a general state of emergency.

Counter terrorism measures have limited the perimeter of human fundamental rights and freedoms.

In front of the new emergence of violent extremist groups, security-based only measures will not be effective. There is a need to take a more comprehensive approach which encompasses not only ongoing measures, but also systematic preventive strategies which directly address the drivers of violent extremism. There is a necessity to focus on why individuals are attracted to violent extremist groups.

On that sense, the 15 January 2016 the United Nations Secretary-General presented his Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism to the UN General Assembly. In the Plan of Action, the Secretary-General calls for a comprehensive approach encompassing not only essential security-based counter-terrorism measures but also systematic preventive steps to address the underlying conditions that drive individuals to radicalize and join violent extremist groups. The Plan is an appeal for concerted action by the international community. This Plan of Action provides more than 70 recommendations to Member States and the United Nations System to prevent the further spread of violent extremism. You can read the UN Plan of Action here: http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/674.

At European level, the European Commission stated in a 2016 Communication that "the design and implementation of measures countering radicalization takes place mainly on the ground, at local but also regional or national level, and falls primarily within the competence of the Member States. Local actors are usually best placed to prevent and detect radicalization both in the short-term and the long-term. At the same time, the EU has a supporting role to play not least because the similar nature of the challenges faced by Member States, and the scale and interconnected nature of the problem, which mean that cooperation, networking, funding and exchange of good practices at EU level also have a role to play".

Violent radicalization is not a new phenomenon; however, its most recent manifestations, its scale, as well as the use of new communication tools present new challenges that call for an approach addressing both the immediate security implications of radicalization as well as the root causes, bringing together all relevant actors across society. Civil society organizations (CSO) have the potential to greatly contribute to face challenges such as the lack of integrated approaches to prevent radicalization. They can also address the conditions conducive to the VE spread and the absence of rigorous and updated operational research and analysis that informs policy development and response measures (in collaboration with the academia and think tanks). CSOs-capacity building component will ensure knowledge of legal and policy frameworks and awareness of the gaps and needs for reform.

The spread of violent extremism is currently done through social media network, where the immense accumulation of information requires the expertise on Big Data. On the European Commission Code of Conduct on Countering Illegal Hate Speech Online (2016) it was stated that "The spread of illegal hate speech online not only negatively affects the groups or individuals that it targets, it also negatively impacts those who speak out for freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination in our open societies and has

a chilling effect on the democratic discourse on online platforms". At the same time, the Joint Statement issued by the extraordinary Justice and Home Affairs Council on the terrorist attacks in Brussels (2016) underlines that "the Commission will intensify work with IT companies, notably in the EU Internet Forum, to counter terrorist propaganda and to develop by June 2016 a code of conduct against hate speech online".

A POSSIBLE ROADMAP SOLUTION

For all that, there is the necessity to contribute in several key initiatives identified by the European Commission in the Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the regions supporting the prevention of radicalization leading to violent extremism (2016. Read the document here: http://ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/repository/education/library/publications/2016/communication-preventing-radicalisation_en.pdf):

- Combat all forms of violent extremism (anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim hatred and intolerance, racism, xenophobia, homophobia and transphobia), as well as to prevent (counter-narratives), monitor and combat online hate speech.
- Mobilize, under the Horizon 2020, research on the complex root causes of violent radicalization, in order to deliver concrete tools to allow better informed policy interventions.

The major objective remains the necessity to give answer to most of the problematic found on the global analysis above mentioned. Potential actions needs to benefit from the active participation in its design and tailoring of CSOs and regional networks and local, national and international institutions who have ensured a participatory design, a cross-fertilization and local-sensitivities adaptation.

The ideal roadmap that prevents hate speech demonstration can be done through a 4-stage process:

5) design and develop a monitoring tool that, through Big Data obtained from social media network, describes how violent extremism and hate speech narratives is expressed in social media networks. This will contribute on the research on the Violent Extremism area;
6) create an in-depth analysis of the violent extremism online narratives at a regional level in Europe, in order to contribute on giving a clear definition on what Violent Extremism is;
7) design an online campaign to create alternative narratives to prevent violent extremism, in order to prove that only counter-terrorism measures are not enough for the prevention of violent extremism;
8) organize a conference between civil society organizations and regional institutions on online alternative narratives to combat hate speech, to give a positive answer.

The main beneficiaries of this approach would be:

- Members of civil society organizations (NGOs/CSOs): engaged organizations on harnessing their positive agenda to prevent violent extremism.

- Young peacebuilders (young people, students): European young population who, for being the common users of social media network, can be the main transceiver and beneficiary of this project.
- Regional institutions (EU Policy makers, local authorities): essential to bridge the distance between civil society organizations and national and European authorities on the Violent extremism area.
- Vulnerable communities (Roma, LGBT): most direct victims of the dissemination of online violent extremism narratives.
- Institutions/public opinion (academia, social workers, women, general public): social media network transceivers and user needs to be aware on the alternative narratives to combat all forms of violent extremism.

This roadmap addresses several aspects of the call priority by a broad conceptualization of different forms of VE that can be radicalized through the hate speech: antisemitism, anti-Muslim hatred speech, homophobia and transphobia. The roadmap addresses the promotion of the development of tools and practices to prevent, monitor and combat online VE with the creation of an online monitoring tool, in combination with projects on preventing and combating homophobia and transphobia (as part of the in-depth analysis) and the grassroots projects on preventing and combating antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred and intolerance.

The mentioned summary and conference for the dissemination of online alternative narratives to combat all forms of violent extremism is one of the main project contribution in this area. The consolidated design and implementation of the online alternative narratives to combat violent extremism through a 3-stage process (online monitoring tool, in-depth analysis on online narratives and pilot project awareness campaigns to disseminate the alternative narratives) serves as a solid contribution, especially in the following aspects: mutual learning on tolerance; respect and non-discrimination; exchange of good practices and strengthened cooperation between key actors; development of monitoring and transparency tools on hate crime and hate speech; capacity building and training activities; and dissemination, awareness raising activities and campaigns.

Despite there is a research and analytical base on this project (necessary for a rigorous and comprehensive approach), the practical benefits and impacts for the target groups are in the core of the project. Due to different causes, as for example the flux of migration or the financial crisis, contributes to create a comprehensive description on the online narratives on VE.

For the basis of all this methodology, the design and development of an online monitoring tool is the most innovative aspect of this project. Despite there are several contributions on the use of social media to combat several forms of violent extremism, the analysis through the Big Data information is the main added value. Big data is a term that describes the large volume of data – both structured and unstructured – that inundates a business or subject on a day-to-day basis. Big data can be analyzed for insights that lead to better decisions and strategic business moves. Big Data works on changing

social behavior by enabling greater adaptive reflexivity, policy and conceptual understandings. This massive amount of data in everyday life is at the heart of Big Data: a way of accessing reality through bringing interactions and relationships to the surface and making them visible, readable and thereby governable, rather than seeking to understand hidden laws of causality.

For this project, it is necessary to replicate the efforts that are being made on the use of Big Data in other areas (Market surveys, political behavior, etc.) for the profit of the analysis of different forms of violent extremism. Big Data includes information from a multitude of sources, including social media, smart phones and mapping, visualizing and recording equipment and the number of data-sharing devices is growing exponentially. A good systematization of the information coming from all those sources implies the possibility to gather an immense number of information on how the main narratives on violent extremism are disseminated through social media network.

The roadmap has been designed on a 4-stage process (one per Workstream) in order to maximize its impact and economic efficiency. In general terms, the basis to create online alternative narratives will come from the analysis of the existing ones. The roadmap estimated that, due to the large amount of information, this first-step analysis would only be possible through:

Development of an online monitoring tool
The most technical and technological part of the project will require a complex process in order to; 1) determine how to analyzeze the online narratives; and 2) design the way for doing it. For the first step, a technical meeting between all project partners will determinate the methodology to monitor violent extremism narratives on social media network: keywords, monitor indicators and timeline. For the second, there will be the design and implementation of different items that will determine the necessary tool:

- Data monitoring tool, to get as much social data and in relation to different semantic forms of violent extremism related to different keywords and indicators identified in the technical meeting.
- Data analysis module, with the objective to deliver and algorithm for language analysis that will identify the key terms associated with different perspectives on violent extremism.
- Graphical interface, for (a) configuring keywords for 2 and (b) the navigating methodology used to find the results of the analysis.

The final output will be an online monitoring tool in order to obtain the main characteristics on hate speech narrative and gives an overview of all the characteristics in a given time frame, language and perspective. The social media networks chosen for this project proposal Twitter, conceived as the social network who most goes viral. More concretely, 1% of the tweets, who will have been externally stored in external drivers, will be the basis for the analysis.

Due to the challenge to digest the online monitoring tool, a training on data gathering configuration and on results, as well as on results navigation through the created online

monitoring tool, will be delivered. To consolidate its understanding, a technical meeting about the monitoring tool results and ways of improvement through feedback will be the final activity.

<u>In-depth analysis on violent extremism online narratives</u>
The in-depth analysis will be done under the basis of the information obtained at regional level, and supervised by the Coordination Committee. The output of this activity will be 3 reports (one per region) describing the online narrative speech on violent extremism. Those documents will consist on three main parts: an introduction of the online narrative speech on violent extremism, an ethnographic analysis (perpetrators, messages, target groups), and the conclusions and recommendations on how to create alternative narratives that will serve as first indications. Despite each region will have their own specificities, the visual support through graphic interfaces will be a requisite on the way to present the report.

To elaborate the regional report, main output of this Workstream, a seminar will establish the basis for the type of information necessary to develop it: 1) identification of the methodology of analysis and monitoring of the information obtained from the online monitoring tool created; and 2) design the methodology to elaborate the in-depth analysis report at regional level (structure, timeline, indicators, graphic interfaces, monitoring). A virtual mid-term meeting and a final evaluation seminar will also be conducted in order to analyze the results obtained, the challenges faced, as well as start designing the online alternative narratives at regional level.

Mechanisms for information exchange between the implementing actors will be set up, to help their future collaboration in methodology and reporting and making visible online narratives on violent extremisms. The participation of partners' representatives in joint training sessions and seminars facilitates the organization of those mechanisms.

<u>Awareness campaigns on the dissemination of online alternative narratives to combat violent extremism</u>

The design of the online alternative narratives pilot project campaigns will start with a seminar that, from the information obtained, will try to elaborate the most suitable strategy (message, channels, frequency, etc.) adapted to each region. A training handbook will be the main output on this activity.

The main process will continue with a training of campaign agents (regional coordinators) on online awareness campaigns. Those training sessions will serve to make more homogenous their knowledge on creation of online alternative narratives to combat violent extremism, as well as fueling the mutual understanding and collaboration in campaigns methodology design and implementation. Mechanisms for information exchange will also be ensured.

The core of this activity will be the pilot project awareness campaigns that will be implemented by young peacebuilders (youth collectives targeted with the following criteria: 1) gender equity; 2) age between 20 and 27 years-old; 3) unemployed; 4) living

in the concerned regions; and 5) 20% of them faced with social exclusion. Those youth peacebuilders will be trained in order to design the awareness campaign with the specificities at regional level.

Mid-term virtual meetings and final evaluation from both trainings will be essential for the improvement on the design of the awareness campaigns. Those awareness campaigns will last 3 months in each region and will use the most appropriate strategies and means (videos, graphic interfaces, podcasts, etc.) to disseminate the messages designed at regional level. A final evaluation of its impact will also be conducted.

The pilot project awareness campaigns will last 3 months and will produce different materials (video, podcast, graphic material) that will sustain the defined messages for each region and that will be disseminated through social media networks. A Press Communicate will complement the dissemination strategy.

The pilot project awareness campaigns (on and off line) will make possible:
-   To maximize the visibility of the project;
-   To raise the awareness on violent extremism in social networks and within the European youth population.

In general terms, this continuous approach represents a cost-effective solution because:
-   The training sessions will be implemented with the partners' representatives, prioritizing the organization of joint sessions for those actors. This approach will increase the numbers of trained participant, maximizing the project economic efficiency.
-   Three main products (online monitoring tool, in-depth analysis reports and awareness campaigns) will be designed on a collaborative way and on the basis of the same research process, taking in account the evaluation from the previous activity.

Best practices Conference on online narrative strategies to combat violent extremism

The organization of a best practices European Conference on online alternative narratives to combat violent extremism will be the opportunity to make visible best practices that area, as well as aims/activities/expected results of this project at European level.

A Scientific Committee, led by the Institutional Track Coordinator will be created and will: 1) identify best practices on online alternative narratives to combat hate speech; 2) design the contents and methodology of the process, as well as its follow-up and evaluation mechanisms; 3) identify the potential speakers and participants; 4) evaluate the impact of the conference and potential way forward.

Part of the best practices will be the awareness campaigns developed. As a complement, a summary report on good practices on online alternative narratives will be elaborated.

The report will compile both institutional and civil society initiatives (including the ones developed) and will be structured in 3 parts: identification of the problem at European level; compilation of good practices; and recommendations and the way forward. This report will be presented in the good practices conference.

This one-day Conference ill be an exchange platform for the different initiatives presented, as well as the possible way forward. The conference will be the platform to present the evaluation results of the pilot project awareness campaigns implemented in WS3. European Commission representatives and regional institution authorities will be invited. The outcomes of the conference will be publicly shared through a Conference report and a Press Communicate.

The outcomes of the roadmap are related to each group of its beneficiaries. The project will increase the beneficiaries' capacity in monitoring online narratives on violent extremism in social media networks and the capacity to create alternative narratives to combat them.

The project will support standardization and dissemination of knowledge on monitoring online hate speech among potential stakeholders that marks a first step towards:

- Improving the exchange of information between civil society organizations and regional institutions on good practices to combat online hate speech;
- Implementing joint strategies on the dissemination of online alternative narratives to combat hate speech at European level.

Organizations from different Member States will have access to the same knowledge, methodologies and tools to make visible online hate speech narratives among European societies. Moreover, the project will support networking among organizations at European level. After its implementation and assessment, the good practices of the project will be able to be replicated.

However, we are aware that this approach presents some risks:

- The implementation of the in-depth analysis and awareness campaigns process may be difficult for some civil society organizations. The implementation of monitoring mechanisms with local organizations will be set to follow up the implementation of the training contents in their daily activities (as regard violent extremism forms identification, reporting, use of online monitoring tool etc.).

- Low effectivity of the dissemination of the online alternative narratives to combat hate speech and violent extremisms. A permanent internal analysis through the online monitoring tool will serve to update the potential weaknesses of the project.

Despite the users of social media networks (especially the youth population) can be perceived as the main target group and, at the same time, multipliers of the outcomes of the project, different actors at regional level (civil society organizations, institutions, population, etc.) are also a target group. For that, an on/off-line strategy remains essential.

<u>On line dissemination tools/actions:</u>

- The Observatory for the Prevention of Violent Extremism will have a specific area for this project and will be updated constantly. All the projects outputs (Concept Notes, online monitoring tool reports, in-depth analysis reports, awareness campaigns materials, etc.) will be accessible attainable and downloadable from the mentioned website.
- Project Facebook and Twitter profiles will be created and updated constantly, to make visible the information, actions, and results of the project. In this respect, a strategy for on line dissemination of the project results among specific target groups (especially civil society organizations, youth peacebuilders and regional institutions) will be designed and implemented.
- 3 Press Communicate will disseminate the outcomes of the in-depth analysis of online narratives at a regional level, the pilot project awareness campaigns and the good practices conference.

<u>Off line dissemination tools/actions:</u>

- 3 presentations of awareness campaigns at regional level on the spread of online alternative narratives to combat hate speech and violent extremism: process, methodology, materials, reports, etc.
- The European Conference "Good practices on online alternative narratives against violent extremism" will be organized:
    1) To make visible among public institutions and society the problem of hate speech on social media network;
    2) To facilitate the exchange of information and good practices on hate speech narratives and alternative narratives to combat them at European level;
    3) To summarize the good practices on this subject at European level. IT will be the opportunity to disseminate the methodologies/tools/actions (monitoring tool,