

High-Level Commission Expert Group on Radicalisation

Interim Report (Preliminary Findings and Recommendations)

December 2017

I. Introduction

As concluded in the **Commission's comprehensive assessment on security policies**¹, the EU policy countering radicalisation must be strengthened to match the scale and pace of the radicalisation phenomenon. Building on existing structures, initiatives and achievements, more needs to be done to enhance coordination and cooperation among all relevant stakeholders, promote the transfer of good practices, identify lessons learned, build capacity and exchange information throughout the EU and align with needs and shared policy priorities at EU and MS level.

Against this background, the Commission established a **High-level Commission Expert Group on Radicalisation**² (HLCEG-R) tasked to offer advice on 1/ how to **improve cooperation and collaboration** among the different stakeholders and in particular Member States; 2/ the **further development of EU prevent policies**, including by elaborating a set of principles and **recommendations for the implementation of targeted and effective measures** to prevent and counter radicalisation at both EU and national level; and 3/ **future more structured cooperation mechanisms at Union level**.

The **HLCEG-R brings together representatives** from EU Member States, the European Commission and relevant EU services, institutions and agencies (Europol, Eurojust, the Fundamental Rights Agency "FRA", CEPOL), the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) Centre of Excellence as well as the EEAS and the EU Counter Terrorism Coordinator. The Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee, the European Judicial Training Network "EJTN", Research Executive Agency, the Council Secretariat, LIBE and TERR Secretariats were invited as observers. The European Strategic Communications Network "ESCN" has participated as external expert.

II. State of discussions

A. General remarks

In **the inaugurating meeting** of the HLCEG-R, Members of the group were invited to identify gaps and propose practical steps to enhance the EU response, and encouraged to present ambitious and creative recommendations for short terms actions as well as longer term approaches.

Following the **high level kick off meeting of 11 September 2017**, two **subgroup meetings at expert level were held on 28 September and 9 November 2017**.

Discussions were held in a particularly **constructive atmosphere** reflecting the **commitment by all participants** to move forward in a concerted way at EU level with a **high level of ambition and clear focus on practical deliverables**.

¹ See Commission Communication COM(2017) 407 final and Commission SWD (2017) 278.

² Commission Decision of 27 July 2017 setting-up the High-Level Commission Expert Group on radicalisation, JO C 252/3, 3.8.2017.

Members of the group expressed **appreciation for the work done under existing initiatives and actions** (such as RAN, ESCN). Achievements so far were considered a solid basis for further work while stressing the **need for more synergies** and more **systematic exchanges between Member States, practitioners and researchers**. There was a **shared understanding** that more needed to be done to **enhance research and analytical capabilities** and to **map, develop and evaluate existing practices, approaches and practical guidance** in a number of priority areas to equip both practitioners and policy makers with the skills and knowledge to develop more impactful responses.

This interim report sets out the preliminary findings and first recommendations resulting from discussions in the HLCEG-R. These recommendations fully respect the existing division of competences between Member States and the EU and more specifically the provision of Article 4 (2) of the TFEU recognising that "*national security remains the sole responsibility of each Member State*".

The scope of the recommendations is limited to preventing and countering radicalisation and does not extend to areas such as intelligence sharing or information exchange on individuals suspected of terrorism. The recommendations seek to maximise the added value of EU cooperation in the area of radicalisation and avoid duplication with existing mandates and roles of other groups, such as the Terrorism Working Party in the Council.

Unless specifically mentioned, the recommendations cover all forms of radicalisation and are not limited to one particular form of extremism. It is nevertheless understood that the scale and pace of radicalisation grounded in violent Islamist ideology presents a particular challenge in Europe, as demonstrated by recent terrorist attacks and is a priority for the HLCEG-R.

B. Content and focus of discussions

Radicalisation leading to violent extremism and terrorism³ is not a new but a **complex and fast evolving phenomenon**. The **HLCEG-R identified a number of priority concerns and areas for further action** including the need to tackle radicalisation in the prison and probation setting and more broadly support rehabilitation and reintegration efforts, challenges in countering extremist and terrorist propaganda in particular but not exclusively online, the need to support first line practitioners at local level in a multi-agency setting as well as challenges in terms of information exchange among the relevant actors. The group looked into issues of ideology and polarisation, challenges posed by specific groups of people who are potentially vulnerable to radicalisation, the broader context of education and social inclusion policies as well as the external dimension.

In all these areas there was broad agreement about the scope for **further action** in terms of **enhanced exchanges of practices and experiences** (including increasingly among Member

³ Any reference in this text to "radicalisation" is to be understood as "radicalisation leading to violent extremism and terrorism" in line with Commission policy documents.

States), the development of **more targeted and tested guidance and training**, the need for more **empirical research** and the **improved pooling and accessibility** of relevant research findings as well as a **more systematic evaluation of prevent policies and interventions** to strengthen the evidence base of EU and Member States actions. Joining resources at EU level will help offering hands-on support to Members where it is most needed while taking into account the specific and often different circumstances and legal framework conditions at Member State level. In addition to the need for adequate funding, the group stressed the usefulness of more transparency in funding opportunities available at EU Level.

1. Prison and probation, rehabilitation and reintegration

The HLCEG-R identified radicalisation in the prison and probation setting but more broadly disengagement, as well as increasingly rehabilitation and reintegration measures as remaining challenges. The group stressed the need for increased exchange of knowledge and good practices in a number of areas including in particular risk assessments, information exchange between law enforcement, judicial authorities and for instance social workers as well as the engagement with religious leaders or communities and relevant academics in preventing and countering radicalisation.

The Commission and EU agencies set out pending and envisaged instruments, such as support measures and initiatives including for instance availability of funds under the Internal Security Fund Police (ISF-Police), the Justice programme and the European Social Fund (ESF), the activities of training providers such as the European Judicial Training Network (EJTN) or the European network of Penitentiary Training Academies (EPTA), the planned conference of February 2018⁴ showcasing first results from EU supported projects looking into risk assessment tools/methodologies or deradicalisation/disengagement and rehabilitation programmes in prisons as well as the ongoing work of Eurojust on alternatives to prosecution and detention, highlighting in particular the need for further work as regards categories of persons requiring special attention or specific responses, such as women and children.

To enhance Member States' capacity to develop and implement effective programmes in this field, the group underlined in particular the usefulness of exchanging lessons learnt, mapping and evaluating the different interventions, prison regimes and training programmes. Member States were made aware of the work of existing bodies like EPTA and EJTN (which carried out EU-wide testing of training modules and identified training needs in Member States⁵).

⁴ The Commission will organise a stakeholder conference together with the Bulgarian Presidency, EuroPris and CEP on 27 February 2018 bringing together practitioners from different professional backgrounds in the justice area (judges, prosecutors, prison and probation staff). The objective of the Conference will be to take stock of the state of play of the projects funded by the Commission, including the 18 projects funded under the Justice Programme. The discussions will be focusing on the use of rehabilitation programmes, risk assessment tools and alternatives to detention, in particular for juvenile offenders.

⁵ See EJTN Project on Countering Terrorism and Radicalisation to Violent Extremism, 2015 - 2016, Outcome of Trainings & Professional Exchanges: Training Needs & Judicial Challenges: http://ec.europa.eu/justice/newsroom/criminal/files/ejtn_final_report_may_2016.pdf

Specific recommendations:

- ***Exchange of experiences and identification of good practices:***
 - *For the Commission – in close cooperation with Member States – to **map existing practices to prevent and counter radicalisation in the prison and probation context** (including exit programmes as well as risk assessment tools/methodologies) as well as more broadly **practices supporting rehabilitation and reintegration** of prisoners into society (taking into account age and gender sensitive mentoring programmes).*
 - *For Member States with support from the Commission (in particular through the RAN) to explore the organisation of **voluntary peer reviews of exit, rehabilitation and reintegration programmes** in Member States and to step up sharing of already evaluated/audited programmes.*
 - *For the Commission (in particular through the RAN) in close collaboration with Member States - to facilitate the **exchange of experiences on the provision of religious counselling** in prisons and to provide **guidelines on working with and training chaplains particularly imams**, for the prison and probation setting.*
 - *For the Commission (in particular through the RAN) to **increase relevant study visits** throughout the EU.*
- ***Research:*** *For the Commission – in close cooperation with Member States – to facilitate the sharing of existing and encourage further **research** (including evaluations) **into different prison regimes** and pathways into and out of radicalisation in prison.*
- ***Funding:*** *For Member States and relevant actors in the Member States to **use EU funds** in support of relevant actions, including in particular funds available under **ISF-Police** shared management funds for the development of exit programmes in the prison and probation setting as well as **ESF funds** for the development and implementation of programmes for the rehabilitation and job training of prisoners and reintegration of (young) offenders.*
- ***Training:***
 - *For Member States to **encourage the organisation of trainings on radicalisation for judges and prosecutors** at national level as a follow up to **EJTN** EU-wide testing of training modules.*
 - *For Member States to pay particular attention to **prison and probation staffing and their on-the-job training** in radicalisation (for instance via e-learning) and to take advantage of the **EU-level trainings** (e.g. through CEPOL).*

- *For all Member States to **join the EPTA network** for it to become a forum where trainings for prison staff are shared, evaluated and further developed.*
- *For the Commission (in particular through the RAN in close collaboration with for instance EUROPRIS+CEP+EPTA+IMPACT⁶) to continue mapping and peer evaluation of trainings on radicalisation in the prison and probation sector.*
- ***Guidance:** For the Commission to facilitate the establishment of a **repository of handbooks** relevant to prevention of radicalisation in prison and probation and ensure its proper dissemination.*
- ***Further policy development:** For Member States to support the Eurojust work on monitoring and analysing terrorism related convictions, including the use of **alternatives to prosecution and detention** in particular by the **improved provision of information** and to explore ways of following up on findings.*

2. Communication and countering online propaganda

The HLCEG-R recognises that efforts to tackle online radicalisation need to be strengthened by cooperating with **all relevant actors** and by empowering civil society to develop counter or alternative positive narratives (including through the Civil Society Empowerment Programme). The EU Internet Forum, which has been spearheading global efforts against online radicalisation, should remain the central platform for further EU cooperation in this field. The group is also appreciative of the efforts of ESCN in particular the networking and consultancy services it offers, and recommends to engage further to develop this Network's activities.

The dissemination of terrorist propaganda on the Internet remains a primary concern. The group encourages Member States to continue the monitoring of extremist propaganda online to better establish evolving trends and design targeted counter measures within the context of the EU Internet Forum. Efforts to support the development of counter and alternative narratives need to be further pursued on the basis of evidence with a particular focus on evaluation, enhancing the understanding of the target audience and links to behaviour and interventions in the offline world. The group stressed the need to tackle all relevant aspects of radicalisation online including strengthening resilience, enhancing critical media consumption and the ability to address controversial issues.

While respecting and supporting the freedom of the media, the group considers it equally important to look also at traditional media (newspapers, satellite TVs) to help avoiding that traditional media outlets are (mis-)used to amplify the terrorist and extremist divisive narratives and to promote responsible media reporting. The dissemination of fake news and disinformation campaigns are regarded as a particular challenge. In this context, the group

⁶ Confederation of European Probation (CEP), European Organisation of Prison and Correctional Services (EuroPris), European network of Penitentiary Training Academies (EPTA), IMPACT Europe project.

took note of the setting up of a High Level expert group as well as the launch of a public consultation on fake news and online disinformation.⁷ The group considers that for instance the development of ethical/deontological codes or guidance for media and journalists drawing on relevant existing guidelines and toolkits could be further explored. Such work will be of interest both inside the EU and in certain priority third countries.

Specific Recommendations:

- *For the Commission and Member States to continue their efforts within the EU Internet Forum to reduce terrorist and extremist content online and to support the development of alternative and counter narratives.*
- *For the Commission (in particular through the RAN and ESCN) to strengthen **exchanges of experiences and good practices** in the development and dissemination of alternative **and counter narratives** including insights, experiences and identified difficulties regarding their **effectiveness and impact**.*
- *For Member States to make use of the **ESCN expertise and consultancy services** to build capacity in developing sustainable strategic communications responses to counter terrorist and extremist narratives, by developing partnerships between governments, civil society and industry, with a focus on tailored and hands-on support to Member States and – subject to budgetary constraints - certain third countries.*
- *For Member States – in line with their policy priorities - to make use of exchanges within the **ESCN network** to discuss and analyse developments in communication **strategies and tendencies of violent extremist groups** but also challenges in terms of **disinformation campaigns** and fake news and how they influence terrorist and extremist groups' ability to reach and impact audiences.*
- *For Member States with support from the Commission to explore further steps for **raising awareness** and facilitating, where appropriate, work by the media industry and journalists' federations for the development of **guidance for journalists** about their possible contribution to preventing the spread of extremist narratives and understanding polarisation dynamics.*
- *For Member States with support from the Commission and expertise from ESCN to explore the idea of hub(s) aiming at providing specialised communications support to alternative- and counter narrative campaigns.*
- *For Member States with support from the Commission to examine whether existing tools (including legislation) are sufficient to effectively prevent the spread of violent extremist propaganda via traditional media including satellite TV.*

⁷ See Press release IP 17/4481 of 13 November 2017.

3. Local and multi-agency approaches

First line responders are often best placed to detect and respond to signs of radicalisation. The HLCEG-R therefore stressed the importance of the multi-agency approach at local level with the involvement of all relevant actors, including civil society, law enforcement as well as the private and public sector (e.g. transport undertakings). Challenges include effective information sharing within a multi-agency setting in line with the relevant regulations, coherence between local, regional and national efforts as well as capacity constraints in terms of resources and expertise in particular in small cities. It could be further explored how the relevant legal frameworks (such as rules on data protection/confidentiality rules) could facilitate information exchanges and multi-agency cooperation at national level.

In light of the heterogeneity of the local circumstances and different legal frameworks in Member States, the group encourages comparative analyses of the different approaches while stressing the need for tailored support in line with local circumstances and national law. Building on guidance material and exchanges among local prevent coordinators within the RAN Centre of Excellence, the group sees a need for more targeted practical guidance and counselling services about for instance how to set up local strategies, action plans and multi-agency case management structures including information sharing protocols and how to select and vet civil society partners. Further action in this field should liaise closely with existing initiatives and networks, such as in particular the Strong Cities initiative.

The group stressed the need to provide local actors with the necessary resources (in particular, but not limited to, financial support). The group encourages (national) support to capacity building efforts and interventions at local level in line with a socio-geographic threat analysis. The group also encourages Member States to explore, where necessary, reinforced structures for effective prevent work in line with national circumstances, including for instance the establishment of prevent coordinators or other mechanisms ensuring coordination among the relevant ministries and government bodies, centres of excellence, networks or platforms for exchange among relevant stakeholders similar to the RAN, including relevant actors such as governmental/public actors, first line practitioners and other actors such as local community/religious organisations or private sector representatives.

Specific recommendations:

- ***Analysis and research:*** For Member States to assess the radicalisation risks (e.g. radicalisation “hotbeds”) and specific prevention needs as a starting point for targeted interventions where most needed and corresponding allocation of resources and capacity building efforts at national and local level. At EU level, such an assessment could be supported by pooling findings and drawing on the expertise of existing networks bringing together researchers, law enforcement and - where applicable - intelligence agencies (e.g. as represented in the European Expert Network on Terrorism Issues, EENeT).

- **Identification of good practices and development of guidance:**
 - *For the Commission – in close cooperation with Member States - to carry out **mapping and comparative analysis of existing multi agency approaches and structures in Member States**, including experiences of national prevent authorities with mobile expert teams.*
 - *For the Commission (in particular through the RAN) – in close cooperation with Member States - to facilitate the identification of **good practices and guidance for local cooperation** in the preventive work between local agencies and non-governmental organisations, including faith-communities.*
 - *For the Commission (in particular through the RAN) and in close cooperation with Member States to develop practical guidelines, including advice on establishing information sharing protocols (building on the RAN handbook and relevant Member State expertise) or the selection and vetting of civil society partners.*
 - *For Member States and the Commission within their respective powers to explore how to provide counselling services or peer reviews with experts from Member States, the RAN or other relevant experts.*
 - *For the Commission to **bring together the main European and international organisations and associations** active at the local level (Summit of Mayors of the Council of Europe, Strong Cities Network, Nordic Council/Nordic Safe Cities, EFUS) and relevant EU wide projects. The organisation of such a conference would help identify the need for further action and support of, for instance, local CVE coordinators or other relevant experts and mayors, including the possibility to set up a small group of more advanced cities complementary to the efforts of existing groups.*
- **Framework conditions and capacity building:**
 - *For Member States taking into account the specific circumstances in each Member State to explore the setting up of **coordination and cooperation structures at Member States level as appropriate** (structures that could include joint expertise of researchers, law enforcement, economists, as well as social-, mental- and health care organisations, education, child protection services, etc.).*
 - *For Member States to **support local and regional structures and interventions** to enhance **long term expertise and immediate and tailored support** where and when needed (e.g. through capacity building measures or deployment of mobile expert teams). At EU level this could be supported through the swift deployment of RAN experts (and ESCN experts where relevant).*

4. Sharing of knowledge about radicalised persons and radicalisation pathways

The HLCEG-R recognises the importance of information sharing on local, regional and national level, for instance on ex-convicts, or known radicalised individuals including returning foreign terrorist fighters and hate preachers also in a cross border context where applicable and within the applicable legal framework. Information sharing in a multi-agency setting on national level, e.g. between intelligence (where foreseen under national law), law enforcement authorities or the judiciary and health, social services and organisations engaged with exit (de-radicalisation or disengagement) work is crucial to ensure an appropriate treatment of these individuals, their assessment and monitoring, but remains a challenge.

The group recognised existing mechanisms and fora where the exchange of information in a cross border context was addressed. The group discussed whether further work should be done within the group with a view to developing a common understanding of categories of persons to be included (clarifying e.g. the qualification as radicalised person) as well as on indicators for radicalisation with a view to facilitating such cross border exchanges– in full respect of fundamental rights. The group highlighted differences for instance in risk assessment criteria and risk categories or terminology concerning radicalised persons. Furthermore, the group expressed interest in sharing experiences (including difficulties) and research findings with identification, monitoring and evaluation of the signs and risks of radicalisation, as well as analysis of the key factors for radicalisation in order to create a shared understanding of the radicalisation process, on the basis of which consistent and quality work across Europe can be commissioned, delivered and evaluated.

The group recommended further work to focus on identifying good practices and guidance for information sharing in a multi-agency setting on national level (see under the relevant chapter). The group acknowledged that the exchange of relevant studies as well as information for instance on the overall numbers of returnees, specific characteristics of this group such as the proportion of men and women within this group, number of children (per age group), pattern of returns etc. would provide useful insights facilitating the development of more tailored approaches for returnees.

Specific Recommendations:

- *For Member States with support from the Commission to **map and facilitate more empirical studies into radicalisation factors and pathways, trends etc.** (as they exist for instance on FTF returnees).*
- *For Member States with support from the Commission to explore usefulness and feasibility of developing a **shared understanding of concepts and radicalisation indicators.***
- *For the Commission in close cooperation with Member States to facilitate the sharing of experiences (including difficulties) and research findings with **identification, monitoring and evaluation of the signs and risks of***

radicalisation, as well as analysis of the key factors for radicalisation, making use of expertise of EU networks where appropriate.

- *For Member States with support from the Commission and other relevant EU bodies to explore **knowledge exchange** on for instance (radicalisation of returning) foreign terrorist fighters and home grown violent extremists.*

5. Ideology and polarisation

The HLCEG-R discussed whether and how the role of ideology in the process of radicalisation leading to violence and terrorism should be addressed with a focus on practical aspects. The group recognised ideology as one relevant aspect which would need to be addressed as part of a comprehensive approach on preventing and countering radicalisation while avoiding stigmatisation of specific communities and at the same time addressing the broader challenges of polarisation in society. The work carried out by RAN in this context was considered a good basis for further work⁸.

Members of the Group identified Islamist extremist ideology as priority areas for further action while also highlighting the need to pay particular attention to right wing extremism. The group encourages further exchanges of experiences and different approaches in Member States including for instance as regards working with communities, identifying credible and reliable partners for disengagement programmes as well as the funding and monitoring of religious institutions spreading Islamist extremist ideology. The evolution of different ideologies as well as better understanding the way they interact with and mutually feed each other would also deserve further analysis. More broadly, the need for further research and analysis to clearly identify the problem in relation to specific contexts and design targeted counter measures on an evidence base was stressed.

Specific Recommendations

- *For the Commission in close cooperation with Member States to facilitate further **exchanges of experiences and different approaches** in Member States including for instance as regards **working with communities**, setting up criteria for **identifying credible and reliable partners** for disengagement programmes as well as interventions tackling extremist ideologies.*
- *For Member States and Commission to establish a joint **overview of the different approaches and experiences** in Member States in the relations with religious leaders, communities and institutions, including the training of religious leaders, faith related dialogues, funding and monitoring of religious institutions spreading Islamist extremist ideology.*

⁸ See the RAN Polarisation Management Manual, available on https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-papers/docs/ran_polarisation_management_manual_amsterdam_06072017_en.pdf

- *For Member States and the Commission to **raise awareness** as regards extremist ideas and their dissemination on the internet and traditional media and to identify areas for **further research and analysis**.*

6. Identifying and addressing risk of radicalisation of individuals belonging to groups requiring particular attention

Acknowledging that the prevention and early detection of and response to radicalisation remains a major concern, in particular of young people, the HLCEG-R recognises that new challenges related to for instance certain individuals returning from conflict zones (and in particular women and children "returnees") or to the risk of exploiting vulnerabilities among certain individuals migrating to the EU territory (e.g. adult and children refugees, persons seeking international protection, unaccompanied children and asylum seekers) may require special attention and the development of tailored responses. These should be based on multidisciplinary and interagency approaches, drawing on experiences and building on existing mechanisms and tools in other relevant areas (such as trauma treatment, child protection systems, social and family support systems, health and education systems, integration processes, child-friendly justice systems (both for child offenders and for child victims and witnesses) as well as, where needed, general crime prevention. The development of tailored responses for children returnees needs to take into account that children are victims but may in individual cases potentially also pose a security risk. Such responses should include, where appropriate, work with role models, communities and family members and parents/families. Addressing specific challenges as regards children under the criminal justice regime should focus on early intervention including support to families and broader social inclusion measures, and, where applicable, alternatives to detention and prosecution, a strong focus on rehabilitation and reintegration, taking into account the different legal frameworks in Member States. More broadly, mental health issues would deserve further attention.

The group recognised the need for mapping and evaluating existing practices and approaches in dealing with these groups and for carrying out further research into for instance detecting and assessing specific risks of radicalisation and understanding factors of resilience.

The group acknowledged in particular the relevance to have an overview and a comparative analysis of the existing approaches in Member States in particular as regards risk and needs assessments for children, being mindful of child's best interests and well-being and in full respect of the rights of the child when identifying and addressing security concerns.

The group also considered it useful to increase awareness and skills among first line responders as regards child returnees but also, more generally, as regards the risk of radicalisation and recruitment among individuals migrating from third countries to the EU territory. More broadly, issues of social inclusion and integration, strengthening a sense of belonging, work with young role models were regarded as relevant and important while stressing that work in these areas should build on and make use of existing systems,

mechanisms and fora and that the HLCEG-R would need to establish clear priorities and remain focused on more targeted support interventions.

Specific Recommendations

- ***Identification of good practices and guidance:***
 - *For the Commission in close cooperation with Member States to establish an **overview and comparative analysis of existing approaches in particular as regards risks and needs assessment and tailored responses for children (returnees or more broadly children raised in a radicalised environment) drawing on existing tools.***
 - *For the Commission in close cooperation with Member States, and on the basis of evidence, to establish an **overview and comparative analysis of existing good practices/toolkits for school teachers, social workers, child protection actors, judicial actors, practitioners working with migrants, etc., which are child-rights based and draw on expertise and experience gathered in preventing and responding to other forms of violence against children, with a view to develop new good practices/toolkits if needed or encouraging the implementation and further dissemination of the existing good practices/toolkits.***
- ***Capacity building and framework conditions:***
 - *For Member States to facilitate **effective coordination among existing actors, structures and processes** in key areas such as child protection, justice, social and youth care, health, education systems, to enable appropriate integrated interventions in full respect of the different actors' roles and responsibilities within the existing legal framework.*
 - *For the Commission in close cooperation with Member States to support **training for practitioners** dealing with children at risk of radicalisation:
 - a) **Basic awareness training/webinar for practitioners** in contact with children at risk of radicalisation to raise their awareness regarding detection of possible risks and trauma in children, child protection parameters, reporting protocols and referral mechanisms to request additional support.
 - b) **In-depth specialist workshops** and shared learning sessions for practitioners directly involved in cases of children who are radicalised or at risk of radicalisation.*

- *For Member States to increase awareness and skills among first line responders and staff in asylum and refugee reception/integration facilities regarding early detection of possible radicalisation risks, including inter alia the development of training modules.*
- **Research:** *For the Commission and Member States to encourage and support further research into **detecting and assessing current risks of radicalisation and related facilitating factors** among those vulnerable to indoctrination or radicalisation.*

7. Education and social inclusion

The HLCEG-R recognised the important role of education and youth policies in tackling radicalisation in a broader context. Teachers, educators and youth workers play a crucial role in promoting common democratic values, enhancing critical thinking, digital awareness and media literacy and managing also controversial issues with open discussions in safe classrooms. Furthermore, promoting social inclusion and active promotion of European values contributes to mitigate the risk of radicalisation through practical measures to address violent extremist ideologies, poverty, discrimination and marginalisation, including the prevention of early school leaving and school exclusions, enhancing equity, social cohesion and encouraging active citizenship. The development of these transversal skills reinforce other actions to tackle radicalisation including discussions on controversial issues, addressing conspiracy theories or developing counter or alternative narratives.

The group took note of the existing and envisaged initiatives and measures in this field, including the follow up work on the Paris Declaration on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education, the toolkit for youth workers⁹ and ongoing work with positive role models as well as the envisaged proposal for Council recommendations on promoting common values through education, training and non-formal learning.

The group recognised the importance to increase awareness of the education community of their vital role as regards youngsters at risk of radicalisation and to equip them with the competences, skills and confidence to identify potential vulnerability factors as well as early signs of radicalisation of youngsters and to actively address them but also to strengthen resilience factors. They stressed the need to further develop tools to strengthen critical thinking which could include targeted communications campaigns.

⁹ The contribution of youth work to preventing marginalisation and violent radicalisation. A practical toolbox for youth workers & recommendations for policy makers (October 2017).

<https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/0ad09926-a8b1-11e7-837e-01aa75ed71a1/language-en>

Specific Recommendations

- *For Member States to **raise awareness among the education community**, and in particular aspiring teachers and teachers in schools to help them to prevent radicalisation through information campaigns or other channels as well as trainings.*
- *For the Commission to **map and improve access of first line responders** dealing with those young people who may be potentially vulnerable to becoming radicalised, to existing **EU practices or results of EU funded projects** in the area of education and social inclusion.*
- *For the Commission and Member States to promote the use of opportunities offered by existing platforms (such as **eTwinning**) to promote fundamental values, democracy and citizenship and help develop critical thinking, as well as to develop the awareness of teachers and their ability to work in the best possible way within the school if there are signs of radicalisation.*
- *For Member States to increase awareness and skills among youth workers and other professionals working with children and young people and involved in non-formal learning activities.*
- *For the Commission and the Member States to encourage initiatives in the field of culture to strengthen resilience against or help countering radicalisation.*

8. External dimension

The HLCEG-R underlined the increased nexus between internal and external security. The group took note of the interest and demand of third countries in benefiting from EU expertise in preventing and countering radicalisation. The group recognised the importance of robust external engagement in particular in neighbouring regions, where the security situation and instability directly impacts on the EU's international security situation (in line with the Council Conclusions on EU External Action on Counterterrorism of 19 June 2017). The Group also highlighted that the EU could equally benefit from good practices and experiences in third countries (e.g. regarding engagement with religious leaders or the development of theological counter narratives).

Internal security instruments such as the RAN or ESCN should be used increasingly to support priority third countries or relevant EU funded projects in priority regions for instance in areas such as FTF returnees (measures to counter radicalisation), exit programmes in prisons or strategic communications. The need for additional financial resources was highlighted. Mainstreaming P/CVE into EU funds and policies should be enhanced further.

The establishment of sustainable structures for *prevent* work in third countries based on national action plans or the establishment of cooperation structures and mechanisms should be

supported as well as local research. RAN and ESCN could provide useful insights and expertise in setting standards for such work. Counter terrorism experts in EU delegations should enhance competence in *prevent* matters.

The group recognised the challenge and importance of coordinating and targeting support by both the EU and Member States individually for third countries recognising the respective competences, the relevance of specific actors such as the EEAS and the EU CTC as well as work undertaken in for instance the relevant Council Working groups. The effectiveness and coherence of cooperation with third countries could be improved through a clearer overview of EU and national *prevent* relevant initiatives (the Commission already compiled a list of external actions in 2017). The group also highlighted the importance of sharing information not only about good practices but also on the performance of implementing partners to ensure that (only) credible partners are supported and *prevent* projects abroad are delivered effectively while also considering the usefulness of establishing a pool of Member States experts for deployment to third countries.

The group also pointed to the opportunity for the EU together with Member States to proactively shape international *prevent* policies and advance the UN agenda on preventing violent extremism, by working more closely with the UN and GCTF (Global Counter Terrorism Forum) in a coordinated manner but also by creating closer links between the RAN an international organisations and bodies, including the Hedayah Centre.

Areas that the group could further explore include inter alia the foreign funding of religious institutions in Europe spreading Islamist extremist ideology.

While recognising the importance of enhanced external engagement, the group considered that the focus of its work should be on internal aspects. Further external engagement will be part of the discussion on the future more permanent cooperation structures and mechanisms at EU level.

Specific recommendations

- ***Guidance and support:***

- *For the Commission in cooperation with Member States, EEAS and EU CTC to establish a list of EU experts in different fields and backgrounds who are acquainted with the specific circumstances in priority third countries for external deployment.*
- *For the Commission, in cooperation with EEAS and EU CTC, to support the development and implementation of guiding principles in developing prevent strategies and cooperation mechanisms and structures in partner countries, inspired by successful initiatives within EU such as the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) and the European Strategic Communications Network (ESCN) in particular through the participation in “standard setting bodies” such as GCTF or Hedayah.*

- **Coordination mechanisms:** Discuss possible inclusion of an external dimension in a future more permanent cooperation mechanism for prevent work at EU Level including:
 - For Member States and the Commission, in cooperation with EEAS and EU CTC, to map national prevent initiatives, projects and expertise complementing overviews of EU actions, to facilitate coordination and synergies in priority countries; to share information on implementing partners and identifying credible partners being able to effectively implement prevent projects abroad.
 - For the EU to further strengthen **expertise and role of CT experts** posted in EU delegations with a special focus on prevention.
 - For the Commission, in cooperation with EEAS, and EU CTC to increase support to partner countries and regions in enhancing **prevent related research** capacities in order to develop the knowledge of the drivers for violent extremism in the specific context.

C. Cooperation mechanisms and structures

Building on the HLCER-R scoping paper, a German-French proposal as well as a Commission background paper outlining the general features and envisaged further steps, the Group agreed on a number of **core objectives and guiding principles** for enhanced cooperation mechanisms. The Group endorses the need to **enhance coordination between different initiatives** (such as in particular the RAN and ESCN) **and stakeholders** (including enhanced Member State involvement as well as closer interaction with researchers) at EU level, to create **stronger capabilities at EU level** offering support to Member States (including for analysis, research, training, guidance, capacity building and external outreach), as well as **greater visibility, accessibility and pooling of resources at EU level**. A strengthening of capabilities at EU level should maintain or where appropriate improve the **flexibility, transparency and accountability** of existing initiatives recognising that responses need to **take account of the different national and local dynamics and circumstances** and affirming the value of a **bottom up approach** based on the exchange of good practices, networking and empowerment of first line practitioners.

Radicalisation leading to terrorism and violent extremism raises significant and evolving challenges which must be addressed, primarily by the Member States, but also, in order to be effective, with a coordinated support at European level in accordance with the Treaties. Member States stressed the need to be better involved so that EU instruments effectively address strategic priorities and needs identified at national level and that actions at national level and EU level are complementary and reinforcing.

The Group recognises the need to adopt a **gradual approach**, including 1/ a **significant strengthening of existing networks** facilitating exchanges among policy makers,

practitioners and researchers, but also the private sector. 2/ **enhanced coordination at EU level** of existing networks and initiatives and 3/ a **steering body** making sure that EU actions in this field are geared towards needs and policy priorities within Member States and offering Member States the opportunity to be more closely involved in strategic decisions.

Specific Recommendations

- *For the Commission, as a first step, to urgently set up a **reinforced support and coordination structure within the Commission.***
- *For the HLCEG-R to continue the discussion on the cooperation and coordination mechanisms and structures and especially the steering mechanisms.*
- *For the Commission, to set up a **steering body for EU prevent work**; the HLCEG-R should - in a first phase - act as a steering body tasked to advise the Commission on strategic decisions of prevent work, including giving steer on planned activities **under relevant initiatives.***
- ***For Member States to explore the feasibility of supporting the Commission through the deployment of national experts.***

As regards the strengthening of existing initiatives, the group should also explore further how to **enhance the involvement of researchers**, for example the EENeT, and whether, in addition to the envisaged exchanges within the HLCEG-R subgroups, the **network of national prevent policy makers** should resume its work also exploring the possibility of establishing smaller working groups with a limited number of Member States affected by or interested in specific topics.

The Group agreed to **examine in 2018 concrete options for the possible further development of these structures into an EU Centre for the prevention of radicalisation**, including future tasks and functions. The scope and nature of any further endeavour should be determined taking into account progress but also potential constraints in achieving the declared objectives, and needs to fully respect the respective competences of the EU and Member States.

The group recognised the importance of EU support to Member States in preventing radicalisation. To ensure the full effectiveness of the work under EU initiatives and to complement actions at EU level, reinforced structures at national level were considered expedient. Such structures could, taking into account the specific circumstances in each Member States and if appropriate, include for instance networks or platforms of practitioners or prevent coordinators.

III. Next Steps

The preliminary findings and recommendations in the priority areas identify a number of **actions that should be implemented as a matter of priority** while other topics will need to be **further explored in the course of 2018**.

The **Commission will explore how best to implement the recommendations** addressed to it **and report back** to the group. It will in particular take the recommendations into account when establishing the 2018 work programme of the RAN Centre of Excellence. Other proposed actions may/will require **further discussions** with Member States or more broadly the members of this group.

The **tentative workplan for 2018** foresees two High-Level meetings (Q2 and Q4) and four Subgroup meetings at expert level. The meeting in Q2 should serve as stocktaking of achievements under the first set of recommendations as a basis for further steer.

Selected priority topics to be further discussed in 2018 could include those which, on the basis of discussions of the group so far, appear to require more in-depth analysis and discussion, including for instance ideology, communication and online propaganda, external dimension, and vulnerable groups requiring particular attention such as children, taking into account cross-cutting issues such as evaluation of strategies and approaches or the organisation of peer reviews with the objective to formulate more specific recommendations. The group expressed interest in discussing cooperation and governance mechanisms and structures as a matter of priority next year.

In addition, the group agreed to take stock of the progress made and to appraise constraints and remaining shortcomings in relation to the implementation of recommended actions, in order to discuss and determine the nature of and the scope for future cooperation mechanisms.