

The 'Art' of Prevention: Strategic partnership between Law enforcement and Civil society engagement to enhance public safety

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1. An Introducing premise

Trivalent is a three years project: officially started in May 2017, its activities will end up in April 2020. So we are about half a way. A lot of activities have already been done, but a lot more have yet to be accomplished.

To give however an overall idea of **Trivalent rationale**, in terms of its **main goals** and **vision**, it is possible here to briefly touch upon some general points, about which our project will have certainly to take stance, with the hope to bring about some useful contribution in a field becoming overcrowded of analysis and literature of any sort, yet remaining wide open for discussion and different interpretations, and somewhat contrasting views. In the sense that just as there is no single way in which people can be attracted by violent extremism, there is not even one way to contrast and prevent this phenomenon from happening and spreading in our complex, connected and increasingly conflictual societies.

Let's start, first, by saying something about us.

2. Trivalent Consortium

One thing I have to say at the outset, is about **Trivalent partnership** (Consortium). Trivalent is a **large 'family'** of 21 members, with a rather mix composition. There are professional, academic and expert partners.

The majority are Law enforcement agencies: 11 police bodies (Italian, Albanian, Polish and Latvian police; Italian and Portuguese penitentiary police; Italian, Polish, Spanish and Belgian local polices). This is an important and qualifying feature.

In addition, we have 6 academic partners: 5 from 4 EU countries (Belgium, Italy, Spain, UK), and 1 from non EU country (IDC/ICT,

Herzliya). Plus 4 more expert partners. with a multidisciplinary expertise in the field of security and ICT, from 3 EU countries (France, Italy, Spain).

3. *What's the core business of Trivalent?*

In the context of EU countries, facing the challenge of home-grown terrorism, Trivalent aims to offer an in-depth analysis of radicalization leading to violent extremism, in view of its prevention.

Briefly speaking, Trivalent focus on prevention can be summarised in a **trilogy**, where:

- the first goal is on testing the feasibility of IT early detection tools;
- the second one is on developing communication strategies focused on narrative formats, targeted for specific contexts and publics; and,
- last but not least, the third one is on designing community-oriented policing based on partnership, trust building and problem solving, to be implemented through new skills guidelines and training-the-trainers programmes for LEAs and other front-line operators, as well as civil society and communities actors.

Looking a bit closer at these goals, one may observe that each one of them carries some caveats.

Indeed, when considering early detection IT tools, one should be also aware of the methodological and conceptual difficulty to distinguish between radicalisation and violent radicalisation, and moreover to identify so-called “markers” of extremism, due to potential encroachments on free speech, and the fact that there is no consensus as to how to predict a person's path to violent extremism.

Again, when considering communication strategies and (social) media formats to frame and manage polarisation issues potentially highly conflictual, which frequently characterise radicalisation process, one should be aware of the risk that so-called counter-alternative narratives may be conducive to overemphasizing the danger in particular of Islamic extremism.

Lastly, when considering community-oriented policing based on community partnership, trust building and problem solving, one should be also aware of clarifying roles and responsibilities between LEAs (& public authorities in general), civil society, and private sector organisations, in order to achieve improved cross-sector coordination and implementation.

All in all, however, and in a most synthetic way, **Trivalent rationale** focuses on an idea of prevention based on **balancing securitarian with communitarian approach**.

Here comes the question: “What does it mean communitarian approach to prevention?”

4. Community-oriented approach to prevention

Of course, this brings about the question of how to understand a community oriented approach to prevention.

I cannot enter here into details. It suffices, however, to recall three main assumptions.

I. Basically and briefly speaking, the reasoning underlying communitarian approach to prevention makes it a turning point in prevention policies, strategies and tools.

II. From the viewpoint of the responses to the issues posed by violent extremism (VE), regardless of its definition, what matters is the **way in which such issues are and should be looked at**.

III. As regards prevention, VE is to be understood, rather than only a **security issue**, also a **social issue**.

To sum up, and saying it otherwise: given the slippery nature and uncertain meaning of expressions such as “radicalisation,” “violent extremism” and even “terrorism,” not by chance evidenced by the lack of consensus on an official definition at international level, a securitarian approach closely connected with law enforcement, while it works for detecting and sanctioning crimes committed or attempted, becomes more problematic when applied to prevent crimes, or the possibility of them occurring, if only because the law enforcement mechanisms need, to get

in motion, of crimes already committed or attempted. Moreover, an authentic approach to prevention should take into account a variety of factors and conditions, including the social nature of the issues related to the spreading of the radicalisation phenomenon, especially in certain environs and in relation to so-called vulnerable people.

Furthermore, the importance of detecting and countering early signals of violent extremism, though it will serve to avoid at least the worst, for a while, yet it is not enough to prevent other possible occurrences. To this end a deeper and durable bottom-up action is needed that goes through the engagement of communities, i.e. through a community partnership built on mutual respect, trust building and problem solving attitudes and skills.

Therefore, a greater attention to the fact that radicalisation and extremism also **reflect social issues**, beyond posing security issues, is at the basis of what could be called the **paradigm shift** from a **more conventional securitarian** approach towards a **more suitable communitarian** approach to prevention, **involving communities and civil society actors/stakeholders**.

5. A few examples pointing at communitarian approach to prevention

At this point, some indications are worthy of mention in support of community oriented approach to prevention. Needless to say, the literature (both scientific and grey one) on the topic is becoming overwhelming, and it would be quite difficult, if not almost impossible, to go all through such a massive documentary body. Therefore I have selected just a few examples which clearly put forward and make clear the paradigm shift characterising and qualifying such approach.

The first two examples are taken from two reports co-authored by researchers in the US. They prove to be critical towards “Countering Violent Extremism” (CVE), not because of its potential range of innovative policies and practices, but because of its use as a label seen or perceived, at least in the US context (where the CVE concept took originally shape),

like something which has become biased, and implemented for the purpose of stigmatising specific communities (minorities), and in particular the Muslim one.

One is a report (by David Schanzer, Charles Kurzman, Jessica Toliver, Elizabeth Miller, *The Challenge and Promise of Using Community Policing to Prevent Violent Extremism*, January 2016) issued by Triangle Center on Terrorism and Homeland Security at Duke University. It emphasises **the crucial role of communities by proposing to change terminology: from CVE to a more explicit and community oriented expression**, termed with the acronym *COMPLETE Public Safety: Community Partnership with Law Enforcement to Enhance Public Safety*.

A second one is a report (by Abbas Barzegar, Shawn Powers and Nagham El Karhili, *Civic Approaches to Confronting Violent Extremism*, September 2016), concerning the role of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) in countering violent extremism in the EU and US. The report, produced with the financial support of the European Union, is the result of a study “based on discussions and interviews with leading CSOs and private sector companies operating within the CVE, prevention, and resilience spaces”, and was developed in collaboration between British Council, Georgia State University and the Institute for Strategic Dialogue.

The report main key findings can be thus summarised.

- **A holistic and bottom-up approach aimed to increase civil society role.**
- **Building resilience** in affected communities/groups, so as to strengthen **social cohesion** through **social support programming** in **various fields** (including education, health care, job training).
- **Religion should not be seen as part of the problem, but of its solution.**

Two other more recent reports are from within the European Union.

One has been issued in 2018 by the European Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), *Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism. Community Engagement and Empowerment*. It clearly states that: “**Communities play a central role** in the prevention of extremism and radicalisation and **their engagement and empowerment needs to be reinforced and supported as a matter of priority.**”

One more indication, supporting communitarian approach to prevention, comes out of the final report issued by the High-Level Commission Expert Group on Radicalisation, in May 2018, where it is stated: “the **need for local multiagency approaches** involving **all relevant actors**, including local authorities*, civil society organisations, social and youth workers, law enforcement and community police officers, (mental) health care practitioners and others.”

6. *Final remarks*

I come to conclude. As I told right at the beginning of this presentation, Trivalent project activities are still in progress, and no conclusive position has been taken yet, as to **how and where** to strike the **balance between securitarian and communitarian** approach, in terms of designing a **model of cooperation** between law-enforcement agencies and civil society actors/stakeholders, by and large.

However, I would like to make here a prospective conclusion, by recalling that **the need for an innovative policy approach** in the field of preventing/countering violent extremism (P/CVE), as an approach understood to mean **preventative measures** which seek to **address drivers and root causes of radicalisation**, posits the question whether, in today’s world, a counter-terrorism approach entrusted only or predominantly to officials and professionals in security (and intelligence alike) needs to be supported and completed with policies, strategies and measures empowering the role also of civil society and communities.

In other words, security, strictly understood as the sole prerogative of professionals in law enforcement, needs to be supported and completed with a lot more of people committed and skilled to work in the ‘art’ of prevention, based on early detection/predictive tools, suitable narratives, and community partnership, aimed to trust building and problem solving at grass-root level.

Indeed, radicalisation leading to violent extremism, however complex be the phenomenon in its multifarious causes and drivers at micro-meso-

macro level, presents behavioural signals and symptoms (languages, postures, views) of socially recognisable relevance, with respect to which if (and to the extent to which) it is possible to resort to detection (predictive) tools and risk-reduction measures finalised to counter such phenomenon, by the way also of suitable narratives of communication and dialogue with and between law enforcement agencies and communities, it should be also possible, nay, necessary to provide support for problem solving, through civil society engagement, on the side of all the actors involved.