

Promoting a Multi-Stakeholder Approach to Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism

*Summary report of roundtable discussions on the National Strategy
for Countering Violent Extremism in the Republic of North Macedonia*



Published by the Monitoring Unit of the OSCE Mission to Skopje

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OSCE Mission to Skopje
Bulevar 8-mi Septemvri No. 16, MK-1000 Skopje
osce.org/skopje
ISBN 978-608-4788-48-5

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*Summary report of roundtable discussions on the National Strategy
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Design and printing:

Polyesterday

Print run:

100 copies

CIP - Каталогизација во публикација

Национална и универзитетска библиотека «Св. Климент Охридски», Скопје

316.647.7(497.7-21)(062)(047)

316.647.7:352(497.7)(062)(047)

МКЛЕЛАН, Марина

Promoting a multi-stakeholder approach to preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism : summary report of roundtable discussions on the National strategy for countering violent extremism in the Republic of North Macedonia / [Марина Мклелан и Алуш Дода]. - Skopje : OSCE, 2020. - 84 стр. ; 25 см

ISBN 978-608-4788-48-5

1. Дода, Алуш [автор]

а) Насилен екстремизам - Спречување - Локална заедница - Македонија - Собри - Извештаи б) Насилен екстремизам - Спречување - Локална самоуправа - Македонија - Собри - Извештаи

COBISS.MK-ID 51407621

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Acknowledgments

The OSCE Mission to Skopje would like to thank Mission Members Alush Doda and Marina Mclellan for jointly developing and drafting the contents of this publication and designing, developing and implementing the activities that led to its compilation.

The OSCE Mission to Skopje would also like to thank our partners, Borche Petrevski, National Coordinator for Countering Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism; Xheladin Ajvazi, Deputy National Coordinator for Countering Violent Extremism; Zlatko Apostoloski, Deputy National Coordinator for Countering Terrorism; Marija Mihajloska Jankulovska, National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Counter Terrorism; our implementing partner Center for Research and Policy Making, in particular Marija Risteska, Ivan Stefanovski and Aleksandar Cekov; and Petar Arsovski.

We would like to express our gratitude to the roundtable participants for their contributions and collaboration, and extend a special acknowledgment to the Monitoring Unit of the OSCE Mission to Skopje for their support.

Abbreviations

CICR	Committee for Inter-Community Relations
CRPM	Center for Research and Policy Making
CSO	Civil society organization
CT	Counter-terrorism
CVE	Countering violent extremism
FTF	Foreign terrorist fighter
ICT	Information and communication technology
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IRC	Islamic Religious Community
LPC	Local Prevention Council
MOC	Macedonian Orthodox Church
NCCVECT	National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Counter-terrorism
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
P/CVERLT	Preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VERLT	Violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism

Glossary

This glossary serves to clarify key terms used in this report. The definitions are for this report only and are not official OSCE definitions.¹

Community - women, men, social groups and institutions that are based in the same area and/or have shared interests.

Civil society – a diverse body of civil actors, communities, and formal or informal associations with a wide range of roles who engage in public life, seeking to advance shared values and objectives.

Civil society actors – key representatives of the community including women, youth, community and religious leaders who are well positioned to provide impactful and long-lasting contributions to the well-being of society.

Community policing – a philosophy and organizational strategy that promote partnerships between the police force and the public to increase the effective and efficient identification, prevention and resolution of problems of crime, and address concerns about physical safety and security, social disorder and neighbourhood decay in order to improve the quality of life for everyone.

Countering violent extremism – proactive actions to counter efforts by violent extremists to radicalize, recruit and mobilize followers to engage in violent acts and to address specific factors that facilitate and enable violent extremist recruitment and radicalization to violence.

Counter-terrorism – policies, laws and strategies developed by state actors and implemented primarily by law enforcement, intelligence agencies, and sometimes the military, aimed at thwarting terrorist plots and dismantling terrorist organizations.

“Foreign terrorist fighters” – commonly used to refer to individuals who have travelled from their home states to other states to participate in or support

¹ For more on P/CVERLT terminology please see the OSCE guidebook “Understanding referral mechanisms in preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism: Navigating Challenges and Protecting Human Rights: A Guidebook for South-Eastern Europe”, accessed at: <https://www.osce.org/secretarariat/418274?download=true>

terrorist acts, including in the context of armed conflict, especially in Iraq and Syria, as outlined in UN Security Council Resolution 2178 (2014). The term is contested because of its breadth, vagueness, and associated human rights issues.

Former violent extremists or “formers” – individuals who have disengaged from a path to violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism and who can have a useful role in raising awareness and communicating credible counter-narratives.

Gender perspective – awareness and consideration of differential needs, experiences, and status of women and men based on socio-cultural context.

Intervention programming – programmes that target “at-risk” audiences and seek to intervene in a person’s pathway to terrorist radicalization before the line of criminal activity is crossed. The type of programmes that fall under this category are sometimes referred to as “off ramps” or “exit programmes”. The programmes are voluntary and include referral mechanisms, psychosocial support, mentoring, theological/doctrinal debate, education and employment training and support, etc.

Prevention programming – programmes that seek to reduce the appeal of violent extremism and build resilience to its influence and spread. The types of programmes that may fall under this category are: awareness raising on the threat of violent extremism in schools, public information campaigns and community debates, inter-faith and intra-faith dialogues, capacity building for teachers and community leaders in identifying and supporting those vulnerable to radicalization, media messaging and counter-/alternative narrative campaigns, and community trust building with law enforcement, etc.

Protective factors – positive characteristics or conditions that can moderate the negative effects of risk factors and foster healthier individuals, families, and communities, thereby increasing personal and/or community safety and well-being. These factors can include expectation management, positive family or social networks, religious knowledge, education that teaches tolerance and respect for others, and a fairer job market.

Radicalization that leads to terrorism – the dynamic process whereby an individual comes to accept terrorist violence as a possible, perhaps even legitimate, course of action. This may eventually, but not necessarily, lead this person to advocate, act in support of, or to engage in, terrorism.

Rehabilitation programming – programmes that target individuals radicalized to violence and possibly their families at different stages of radicalization. The types

of programmes include both prison-based de-radicalization/disengagement and post-criminal aftercare programmes focusing on the rehabilitation and reintegration of terrorist offenders and returning foreign fighters, and their reentry into society. Some programmes offer educational and vocational training, counselling, employment opportunities and ideological re-education, etc.

Referrals – include individuals who are referred to multiagency or other multi-stakeholder programmes and who display observable behaviours indicating they might be at risk of or vulnerable to engagement in VERLT or already on the path to VERLT. Referrals also include individuals whom a program refers to an agency, institution, organization, or professionals for an intervention or other support following a professional assessment of the individual's risks, vulnerabilities, and protective factors.

Referral mechanism – a formal or informal mechanism involving practitioners and professionals from different disciplines and/or agencies and organizations that aims to identify, assess, assist, and treat those individuals showing signs of being at risk of or vulnerable to engagement in VERLT or already on the path to VERLT.

Resilience – the ability to withstand, respond to and recover from a wide range of harmful and adverse events.

Risk assessment – the process involving the systematic gathering and interpretation of information pertaining to an individual to provide data for properly trained professionals to make decisions relevant to the likelihood that a specific individual will engage in harmful action and to assess the nature and severity of the harm.

Risk assessment tool – a framework for collecting data to assist with decision-making that provides a non-discriminatory method for examining in a structured way an individual's propensity to cause harm and the nature and severity of that risk, based on available information from multiple sources.

Risk factor – any attribute such as belief, appearance, experience, or environment that increases the likelihood of the outcome being measured (e.g., that an individual will engage in VERLT) occurring.

Whole-of-society approach – an approach to preventing and countering violent extremism advocated by policymakers and practitioners that envisions a role for multiple sectors and civil society actors in prevention, intervention, and deradicalization/disengagement rehabilitation programmes.



1. INTRODUCTION

The spread of violent extremism continues to pose a serious global challenge that the OSCE is committed to preventing and countering through its comprehensive approach to security while ensuring that human rights and the rule of law are respected. The rapid rise of Daesh/ISIS in Iraq and Syria resulted in hundreds of foreign terrorist fighters leaving the Western Balkans to support their cause, including an estimated 110 citizens from the Republic of North Macedonia that may be higher given that no recent official data exist.² The dismantling of many Daesh safe havens since 2017 has also created a new set of challenges due to the flow of returning foreign terrorist fighters to the region.

At the same time, the threat of violent extremism continues to evolve, with new forms emerging – such as far-right movements and extreme nationalism – which further polarize societies and may also lead to community-based violence. The OSCE Ministerial Council Declaration 4/15 affirms that terrorism and violent extremism cannot be linked to any race, ethnicity, nationality or religion.

It is widely acknowledged that violent extremism and radicalization that leads to terrorism (VERLT) is a complex problem with transnational dimensions, yet its drivers and solutions are closely tied to the context in which it exists. In addition to national governments playing a vital role in coordinating and supporting early prevention activities, the OSCE also recognizes the need to place local stakeholders at the forefront of prevention efforts.³

The importance of a multi-stakeholder approach to preventing and countering VERLT

In line with established best practice in the OSCE, P/CVERLT requires a holistic approach with the engagement of diverse institutions and civil society together with local communities. In particular, a public health approach to prevention programming offers opportunities for practitioners to use lessons learned from the field of disease prevention through multi-stakeholder initiatives to identify

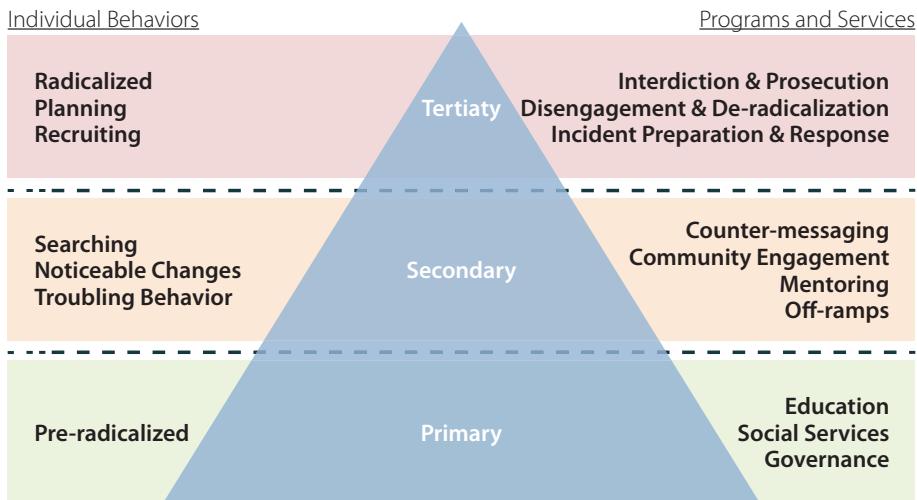
² The Republic of North Macedonia's National Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism quotes information gathered in 2016 that puts the number of foreign terrorist fighters to have left the country at 110. See page 16 of the National Strategy for CVE, accessible here: https://vlada.mk/sites/default/files/dokumenti/cve_national_strategy_eng_translation_sbu.pdf

³ OSCE, The Role of Civil Society in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: A Focus on South-Eastern Europe, August 2018, accessed at: <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/400241?download=true>.

risk and protective factors, build community resilience and promote healthy behaviours through community engagement.

These multi-stakeholder practices, when combined with community-led efforts to prevent violent extremism, have the advantage of broadly including social workers, mental health workers, psychologists and other health workers who are increasingly becoming involved in efforts to reduce violence in communities.⁴

Figure 1. Public Health Model for P/CVERLT



Source: Jonathan Challgren et al., Countering Violent Extremism: Applying the Public Health Model, 1st ed. (Georgetown University, Center for Security Studies, National Security Critical Issues Task Force, 2016), <http://georgetownsecuritystudiesreview.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/NSCITF-Report-on-Countering-Violent-Extremism.pdf>. The terminology used in the figure does not necessarily correspond with that of the OSCE.

Using a whole-of-society approach recognizes the social roots of the phenomenon of violent extremism and allows for early interventions and non-coercive solutions when individuals or communities are at risk by addressing the factors conducive to VERLT.⁵ The identification of sustainable solutions for building resilience to VERLT also necessitates a shift from past security-led approaches towards a greater emphasis on community-based prevention. P/CVERLT efforts therefore seek to mobilize and empower stakeholders not traditionally associated with national security.⁶

⁴ Understanding Referral Mechanisms in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization That Lead to Terrorism: Navigating Challenges and Protecting Human Rights: A Guidebook for South-Eastern Europe, April 2019, accessed at: <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/418274>.

⁵ OSCE, Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalisation that Lead to Terrorism: Ideas, Recommendations, and Good Practices from the OSCE Region, Peter Neumann, 28 September 2017, accessed at: <https://www.osce.org/chairmanship/346841?download=true>.

⁶ OSCE, The Role of Civil Society in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: A Focus on South-Eastern Europe, August 2018, accessed at: <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/400241?download=true>.

In contrast to countering terrorism, which uses a repressive approach in dealing with the criminal space, P/CVERLT is non-coercive in nature and focuses on preventing and countering processes of radicalization that may lead to terrorism. As P/CVERLT efforts are undertaken in the pre-criminal space, they do not involve prosecutions, arrests, or other repressive measures.⁷ The aim of P/CVERLT is accordingly not to reach individuals who have already crossed into the criminal realm, i.e. planning or undertaking terrorist activity, but rather to build resilience among communities seen as potentially vulnerable to the appeal of violent extremism and to assist individuals willing to disengage from violent extremism and reintegrate into their communities.

P/CVERLT focuses on addressing and reducing grievances and structural social, economic, and political conditions that may be conducive to violent extremism. Violent extremists often work towards inciting individual and collective hatred, promoting intolerance towards diversity, and creating societal divisions. Therefore, supporting the development of resilient and socially cohesive communities can be the best defense against violent extremism from taking root. In working together, communities can counter the corrosive appeal of violent extremism by promoting tolerance, mutual respect, pluralism, inclusion, and cohesion. Ultimately, P/CVERLT efforts should center on the wellbeing and safety of communities and individuals.

P/CVERLT efforts entail a broad range of programming that can include, for example, awareness raising, capacity building, counter and alternative narrative messaging, targeted programs for schools, extracurricular activities (e.g., youth and sports clubs), mentoring by religious and community leaders, and individually tailored interventions organized by local public institutions and psycho-social service providers. These activities can be categorized according to whether they pertain to prevention, intervention, or rehabilitation and reintegration.⁸

Rationale behind local-level roundtables

In February 2018, the OSCE Mission to Skopje, in partnership with the British Embassy, facilitated two public consultation roundtables with local stakeholders to inform the drafting of the Government's revised Strategies and Action Plans for Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) and Counterterrorism (CT), under the

⁷ Understanding Referral Mechanisms in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization That Lead to Terrorism: Navigating Challenges and Protecting Human Rights: A Guidebook for South-East Europe, Accessed at: <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/418274>.

⁸ OSCE, The Role of Civil Society in Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: A Focus on South-Eastern Europe, August 2018, accessed at: <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/400241?download=true>.

National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Counter-terrorism (NCCVECT). This effort for a consultative drafting process was the first in the region of the Western Balkans and one of few such examples globally.

Following the adoption of the National Strategy, the Mission organized a series of roundtables with key local stakeholders in fall 2018 as part of a strategic communications campaign in support of the NCCVECT to disseminate the Strategy. With the participation of the National Coordinator's Office, the roundtables served to enhance transparency and ensure consistency in strategy messaging at the local level. The roundtables were organized in ten geographically dispersed municipalities: Chair (Skopje), Gostivar, Kichevo, Kumanovo, Prilep, Shtip, Struga, Strumica, Tetovo, and Veles.

In order to promote a multi-stakeholder, community-based approach to the implementation of the National Strategy and Action Plan, the roundtables sought to include the participation of representatives from the municipal administration, civil society, local institutions, educators, psycho-social care providers, youth, religious leaders and other influential members of the local community.

Objectives of the roundtables

In addition to raising awareness of local stakeholders of the risks of VERLT, the primary aim of the roundtables was to foster ownership and buy-in from local institutions, civil society and communities for implementing the National Strategy and Action Plan for CVE. The roundtables also provided a crucial opportunity to assess the needs and priorities in each Municipality for adopting a multi-stakeholder approach to implementing the National Strategy and Action Plan in the local context.

With consideration given to the sensitivities surrounding P/CVERLT, the Mission's whole-of-society approach aimed to achieve a number of outcomes from the roundtables, including:

- Promoting a holistic understanding of violent extremism that addresses the phenomenon in all forms (e.g., right wing, exclusivist nationalist, political), thus reducing the stigma of ethnic and religious communities and allowing for broadened discussions on what forms of violent extremism exist in the country and in the local context;
- Supporting a shift from the traditional security-led approaches towards emphasizing a whole-of-society approach that serves to empower community stakeholders by treating them as key parts of the solution;
- Providing a safe space and platform for dialogue for participants to voice

their concerns openly and initiate confidence-building both between local communities and with government structures;

- Empowering stakeholders to establish channels for enhanced communication and co-operation;
- Identifying potential challenges and opportunities for a multi-stakeholder approach to the implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan;
- Clarifying roles and responsibilities between the central and local government, and between government and civil society;
- Collaboratively identifying findings and recommendations to serve as a preliminary basis for the future development of local action plans.

This report provides a summary overview of the local stakeholder-led discussions in the ten municipal roundtables. The next section provides a description of the methodology of the roundtables, followed by the key findings and conclusions. The final section elaborates recommended best practices drawn from the findings for implementing P/CVERLT programming. An annex provides a detailed overview into the proceedings of the roundtables in Chair, Gostivar, Kumanovo, Struga, and Tetovo in the form of reports developed by the OSCE Mission to Skopje's implementing partner, the Center for Research and Policy Making (CRPM).

As one of its main objectives, the report seeks to highlight the importance of promoting a multi-stakeholder approach to implementing the National Strategy for CVE with an understanding of a shared responsibility for security. The roundtable findings also serve to demonstrate the benefit of ensuring an inclusive process in the conceptualization and design of policies and strategies on P/CVERLT, both at the national and local level.

The report is written for a broad audience, including policymakers and practitioners who are working to develop and implement P/CVERLT policies, strategies, action plans, and programmes. It is also specifically written for local stakeholders – including municipal authorities and other local institutions, and local practitioners and professionals, as well as members of civil society — who might be involved in the design and implementation of P/CVERLT programmes. Finally, the report is also intended to raise awareness of the importance of trust-based collaboration between policymakers and practitioners when developing and realizing these programmes.



2. METHODOLOGY OF THE ROUNDTABLES WITH LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS

The Mission based the methodology of the roundtables on the same whole-of-society approach it applied in designing and carrying out the public consultations for the drafting of the National Strategy for CVE in early 2018. In pioneering an ambitious and inclusive approach to promoting multi-stakeholder engagement in P/CVERLT, the roundtable methodology provides a valuable example of best practices for policymakers and practitioners involved in designing similar public outreach processes for other national strategies.

The following section provides an overview of the methodological approach used in selecting the municipalities and participants for the roundtables, as well as designing the structure of the guided discussions. This section also discusses the harm reduction strategies and confidence-building measures used by the Mission when conducting outreach to local stakeholders.

Selection of municipalities and participants for the roundtables

The Mission, in coordination with the NCCVECT, selected the ten municipalities based on a list of criteria that ensured geographical diversity and avoided stigmatizing certain minority ethnic communities that could create the public perception that only these communities struggle with the challenge of VERLT. Furthermore, allowing for broad coverage of the country in organizing the roundtables also shifted focus away from areas where ongoing and planned P/CVERLT activities were already highly concentrated and reinforced the message that all forms of VERLT would be addressed.

In identifying participants for the roundtables, the Mission relied on its field presence to conduct outreach to an extensive network of stakeholders among local self-government institutions, civil society, educators, youth, religious and

local community leaders, all of which play an important role in the community based-approach that is the basis of P/CVERLT. In many cases, the roundtables represented the first time when all the relevant local stakeholders were brought together in the same room as part of a dialogue. Intensive groundwork was carried out through numerous preparatory meetings with stakeholders to identify appropriate participants and to address any concerns, including risks of stigmatization. In acknowledging the general lack of public awareness and sensitivity around P/CVERLT, the Mission focused on identifying individuals who had prior experience with the subject matter or whose work was in a closely related field.

In identifying participants, the Mission took great care to ensure diverse representation of all ethnic and religious communities present in each municipal context. Particular emphasis was placed on ensuring that the needs and perspectives of the smaller minority communities were reflected in the roundtable discussions. Participants were also invited from local women's and youth groups to further enrich the discussion and empower these groups in building coalitions within civil society and to increase co-operation with local institutions.

The design of the roundtables had to contend with P/CVERLT's legacy of predominantly focusing on religiously-inspired forms of VERLT, which has resulted in the stigmatization of certain religious communities and strained relations between these communities on the one hand and institutions and law enforcement on the other. Another result of this legacy is that religious leaders often perceive that they are expected to have all the solutions to preventing and countering VERLT, even when they lack the appropriate capacities, resources, and necessary support from other stakeholders. A whole-of-society approach to P/CVERLT avoids defining VERLT as a theological issue and thus placing the burden of responsibility solely on religious leaders, and instead recognizes VERLT as a social phenomenon that situates religious leaders among a collective of stakeholders committed to building community resilience. In preparation for the roundtables, religious leaders were encouraged to use the open forum to express both their ideas and concerns while engaging in dialogue with the other stakeholders present. Additionally, in order to support trust-building, the Mission conducted on-the-ground outreach to local representatives of religious communities to clearly explain the purpose of the roundtables and address their grievances, particularly regarding stigmatization. The preparatory meetings provided the opportunity to emphasize a holistic understanding of P/CVERLT, which encompasses all forms of violent extremism and refrains from targeting any particular ethnic or religious group, in addition to promoting a whole-of-society approach.

The Mission also sought to include teachers and other educational support staff (e.g., school psychologists, pedagogues) in the roundtables, given their important role in directly influencing the worldviews and values of youth during a critical period in their lives for their cognitive development and identity formation. Teachers are also well placed to intervene and support a young person who may be struggling with or vulnerable to negative social phenomena. At the same time, P/CVERLT efforts in the region tend to focus on building the capacities of educators to recognize signs of radicalization, with the risk of doing harm in the absence of proper training, instead of empowering them with the right tools to build the resilience of youth to VERLT (e.g., by reforming teaching methodologies and placing greater emphasis in the curriculum on fostering critical thinking, respect for diversity, and the promotion of non-violent behaviors). With this in mind, the Mission also invited representatives of the regional units of the Bureau for Development of Education that work on developing school curricula, in addition to local education officers from the religious institutions who also play an important role in youth development.

Drawing from best practice in the domain of public health prevention efforts, the Mission also invited psycho-social care providers to participate in the roundtables. Professionals in the fields of social welfare and mental health have extensive experience from initiatives supporting vulnerable individuals at risk of engaging in other types of negative social behaviors, such as youth delinquency. Additionally, psycho-social care providers are bound by a professional code of ethics that governs the client-provider relationship through principles such as trust and emphasis on supporting the individual's wellbeing. Whereas an over-securitized approach toward P/CVERLT with significant involvement of law enforcement can result in displacing and alienating psycho-social care providers, a public health approach creates the space for their engagement. The purpose of including psycho-social care providers was thus to raise their awareness of VERLT and the important contribution they can make in bolstering protective factors.

Central to a do-no-harm approach in relation to VERLT is a nuanced understanding of community dynamics and sensitivities. Given the sensitive nature of P/CVERLT, the Mission took into consideration the existing mistrust expressed by communities – especially minority ethnic communities -- towards institutions and law enforcement. Often in engagement efforts between police and the public, there is a perception that the security-driven agendas of law enforcement tend to displace other important local community concerns and grievances, especially when the interaction is one-way in nature. Given the existing taboos around VERLT and the associated fears of negative repercussions from discussing the issue in the presence of law enforcement, the Mission prioritized the roundtables as a safe space for all participants to share their

views on local problems and grievances. Consequently, representatives of the police were not invited to the roundtables in order to ensure an open forum for discussion and to strengthen an understanding of P/CVERLT as a community-based, multi-stakeholder effort carried out in a pre-criminal space. This approach aimed to allow the community to feel engaged for their own benefit and that they too have an important stake in contributing to the security and wellbeing of their community.

Structure of the roundtables

Recognizing the taboos around VERLT and the general lack of public awareness in this area as of fall 2018, the Mission opted to structure the roundtables as full-day events to allow enough time for discussion to develop in sufficient depth. Each roundtable accordingly began with an overview of key concepts and terminology to ensure that participants had a common understanding for the subsequent discussion sessions. This conceptual session was then followed by a presentation of the National Strategy for CVE, led by the National Coordinator or his Deputy for CVE. The active participation of the NCCVECT throughout the roundtables resulted in dynamic interaction between the central and local level by directly answering the queries of participants, as well as hearing first-hand their perspectives, grievances, and ideas for solutions.

The discussion sessions were organized around key intersectional areas and facilitated by an experienced moderator with the support of guiding questions prepared in advance of the roundtables. Each of the thematic sessions allowed participants from all backgrounds to contribute to identifying local challenges and opportunities related to the implementation of the Strategy and Action Plan in the local context. Participants were informed that the “Chatham House Rule” would be applied in order to protect their identity and allow for an open discussion. The roundtable sessions were organized around the following themes:

1. Violent extremism in the local context
2. Empowering civil society and sharing best practices
3. Engagement between the municipality and community
4. Building trust between communities and law enforcement
5. The role of communities in the prevention of violent extremism
6. Education and supporting at-risk youth
7. The importance of social welfare and mental health

Taking into account the sensitivity of discussing violent extremism with local communities, the Mission placed considerable emphasis on selecting moderators and rapporteurs with appropriate skills and abilities. An additional consideration in identifying moderators and rapporteurs was building civil society capacity in the field of P/CVERLT to continue working on long-term policy change. Consequently, the Mission identified CRPM, a leading policy think tank that was carrying out research, together with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), in municipalities overlapping with those selected for the roundtables to assess local institutional capacities to implement the National Strategy. By promoting synergies among initiatives, the Mission aimed to ensure that the research and roundtable discussions built upon each other for assisting the government, the local institutions and the civil society to create the best possible multi-stakeholder approach to P/CVERLT.



3. FINDINGS

This section provides an overview of the findings of the roundtables. Organized according to the structure of the sessions in most of the roundtables, the findings in each thematic area are complemented with attention to local specifics of particular interest.

3.1. Violent extremism in the local context

Taken together, the roundtables suggested that awareness of VERLT is generally low, and most roundtable participants took the position that violent extremism is not widespread in their municipality, though the issue of local citizens going to fight in Syria was raised in several roundtables. Additionally, there was generally a high level of awareness that while violent extremism may start small, it can also grow quickly in the presence of visible examples/role models. It was also noted that discussion of VERLT is treated as a taboo, with the stifling effect on such discussion counterproductive from the standpoint of preventing violent extremism. Participants also noted that violent extremism is most often associated with religious manifestations, resulting in the stigmatization of some communities, and identified right wing and nationalist extremism as also being prevalent in the country.

Notwithstanding the position of most roundtable participants that violent extremism is not widespread, the roundtables yielded evidence of the recognition of a fairly wide range of manifestations of the phenomenon. On one end of the spectrum, roundtable participants mentioned graffiti expressing insults and violent intentions and/or ideas as a low-intensity form of violent extremism, with participants at the roundtable in Prilep noting also that the failure to remove such graffiti contributes to the normalization of such messages. The roots of intolerance and hate first also manifest as verbal confrontations before escalating to physical violence, including most notably fights on inter-ethnic basis among secondary school students at schools and on public transportation. Where hate speech and physical violence by sports (usually football) fan groups are concerned, the roundtables revealed widespread recognition of such activity as a form of violent extremism with participants in Chair noting alleged influence from political parties. In Prilep, participants identified the burning of the Charshi Mosque and the effective expulsion of ethnic Albanian families in 2001 as an extreme manifestation of VERLT.

Discussion of the factors potentially conducive of VERLT pointed to the prominence of family-related concerns. Common among roundtable participants was the view that the internal cohesion of families is not as strong as it once was, leading youth to seek identity and belonging in other kinds of groups, such as ethnic communities, political parties, religious communities, and sports fan groups. In some roundtables, participants referred also to the absence of parents, often as a result of labor migration stemming from high unemployment. At the roundtable in Chair, participants related the absence of a parent to increased vulnerability to extremist preachers. Various issues of gender also received mention, including domestic violence, lack of respect for women in general, and, in Veles, conservative values preventing mothers from attending meetings in school.

In addition to family dynamics, roundtable participants identified a range of other causes of VERLT. As mentioned above in relation to labor migration, economic conditions were frequently cited as a condition conducive to violent extremism. As one participant in the roundtable in Veles put it, „We wouldn't be discussing these problems if [the living standard] were higher.“ Sometimes mentioned by roundtable participants in combination with poverty and unemployment was marginalization on ethnic and/or religious grounds. Ethnic and religious marginalization was explained as a factor potentially influencing an individual's search for identity and belonging in such a way as to make violent extremist groups more attractive. Additionally, it was noted that some marginalized segments of society may seek support from alternative religious groups outside of official religious institutions out of a perception that these groups are closer to the people and their needs.

Another type of cause identified in the roundtables relates to access to information. As noted by roundtable participants, media often play a destructive role by spreading hate speech and playing up interethnic tensions in the way they cover incidents where the perpetrator is a member of a minority group. Youth's often unregulated access to mobile phones received frequent mention, and the hate speech common in media and social media was identified as a push factor toward violent extremism.

Also receiving frequent mention in the roundtables was the politicization of life and institutions in North Macedonia, sometimes in the form of incitement to extremism by political parties in power and by parties' youth wings. The storming of parliament on 27 April 2017 was mentioned in several roundtables as an example of political party involvement in violent extremism. In Gostivar, participants pointed out that one extreme leads to another, especially where a culture of violence is normalized and politics is focused on hatred and/or revenge. High levels of political polarization

impede the functioning of institutions, leading in turn to a lack of public trust in those same institutions.

3.2. Empowering civil society and sharing best practices

Discussion of civil society in the roundtables pointed both to widespread recognition of civil society's potential role in identifying and taking preventive action against various forms of violent extremism. A wide range of variation across localities in civil society's strength and relations with local communities and institutions was also noted. While more capacity building on P/CVERLT is needed, participants also assessed that CSOs already have extensive experience in areas related to violence prevention and building social cohesion that could be better supported. At the same time, participants urged caution towards involving CSOs that lack the appropriate expertise on P/CVERLT and suggested that more effort should be made to facilitate the sharing of best practices. Participants also identified several areas in which CSOs can increase the focus of their activities in P/CVERLT, such as engaging parents in violence prevention, promoting human rights through non-formal education, and providing training to media organizations on conflict sensitivity in their reporting.

During the roundtable discussions, participants provided numerous examples of positive contributions by local CSOs to the prevention of violent extremism. In Gostivar CSOs have been implementing various projects to build resilience within the local community, with relevant projects including digital skills training for marginalized youth and the opening of a youth center, as well as other initiatives focused on bringing together youth from diverse backgrounds. As explained by roundtable participants, good relations between civil society and local government also led to the establishment in Gostivar of the country's first municipal youth council; however it was noted that the youth council faces challenges with insufficient funding for activities. Some CSOs in Kumanovo have not only taken a public stand against violent extremism, but also undertaken preventive work with youth susceptible to joining violent extremist groups abroad. Additionally, the roundtables in Prilep and Tetovo revealed civil society capacity built in providing assistance to vulnerable individuals that could potentially be applied in relation to preventing violent extremism. At the same time, participants at the roundtables in Kumanovo and Prilep noted that CSOs struggle to sustain long-term programming due to a lack of funds, with the discussion in Kumanovo identifying the need for donors to take local priorities and existing programming into account

in allocating their funding. Participants at the roundtable in Kumanovo also noted that while local civil society is relatively strong in its own right, co-operation between CSOs, schools, and municipal authorities needs strengthening. Moreover, even in Gostivar, where roundtable participants assessed the position and role of civil society positively, it was noted that civil society had suffered in the past from pressure exerted by the state through politically targeted audits and inspections.

While the roundtable discussions in several municipalities yielded insight into the strengths of local civil society to prevent violent extremism, the roundtables in Chair and Struga showed a less positive situation. In these municipalities, co-operation between civil society and local institutions is characterized as weak, with low levels of trust and awareness about local CSO programming on the part of local authorities. Participants in the roundtables in Chair and Struga also made note of negative public perceptions of CSOs in these municipalities as being influenced by personal, political, and/or criminal agendas that effectively undermine the idea of volunteerism and civic activism. Additional findings from the roundtable in Chair include low levels of awareness on the part of CSOs about the availability of municipal premises for their activities, as well as difficulties experienced by CSOs in obtaining funding from the municipality. Finally, participants at the roundtable in Chair pointed out that most locally active CSOs are humanitarian, with few organizations implementing cultural activities or activities designed to raise civic awareness and engagement. Concern was also raised by religious communities that some foreign funded humanitarian organizations were allegedly carrying out activities with political or religious undertones and non-transparent motivations.

3.3. Engagement between the municipality and community

The findings of the roundtables suggest that levels of engagement between municipality and community vary widely in much the same way as the strength and role of civil society at the local level, as discussed above. The provisions for coordination between municipality and community receiving most frequent mention at the roundtables were neighbourhood-level administrative units (mesni zaednici) and Local Prevention Councils (LPCs). With regard to the former, participants in the roundtables in Kumanovo and Tetovo lamented the loss of neighbourhood-level administrative units' status in 2002; as a result these units no longer have access to a bank account, official stamp or seal. They described the units as an important and often

effective mechanism for engagement between local authorities and local communities due to their overview of grassroots-level developments, but said the units encounter difficulties in resolving community issues because they function since 2002 on a voluntary basis. Participants therefore urged that a new law be passed to reinstate the status of the local neighborhood units.

Where LPCs are concerned, the roundtables made clear that these mechanisms have the potential to serve as a municipality-led tool for ensuring that all stakeholders are included in discussing issues of public safety. However, the absence of a legal requirement for all municipalities to establish LPCs, in addition to other challenges for multi-agency cooperation, has prevented the establishment and continued function of such a body in all of the municipalities in which the roundtables were held. In Kumanovo, an LPC exists, but was characterized by roundtable participants as hardly functional as a result of appointments made on the basis of political affiliation rather than expertise. Participants in other roundtables referred to the LPCs in their respective municipalities as inactive or never established, while participants in Prilep stated that were an LPC to be established in the future, it would be important to ensure broader focus than only VERLT. Furthermore, participants suggested that LPCs should ensure that individuals with the appropriate competencies and commitment be included as permanent members to ensure consistency and sustainability. In addition to different institutions, participants also proposed that representatives of CSOs and communities be included in the LPC configuration.

In the absence of a functioning LPC or other mechanisms that can be used for preventing violent extremism, the roundtables held in Gostivar and Kumanovo provided insight into existing and planned coordination bodies for addressing other types anti-social and violent phenomena. In Gostivar, where participants made note of relevant, but unfunded, mechanisms for coordination (e.g., a coordination body for the prevention of gender-based violence) and also called on the municipality to take violent extremism more seriously, they also welcomed the signing of a memorandum of understanding with the CSO Search for Common Ground to establish a Community Action Team that will work on a local action plan for CVE and will advise the Municipal Council on related matters. Community Action Teams have also been established in the municipalities of Chair and Kichevo. At the same time, participants in this roundtable noted that many of the problems faced by the municipality need to be addressed at the central level. In Kichevo, participants requested that representatives of smaller minority communities and from rural settlements be included in any coordinative body working on P/CVERLT to contribute towards identifying issues and solutions.

In Kumanovo, information on issues of public concern is shared among neighbourhood units, the Committee for Inter-Community Relations (CICR), and the security committee of the municipal council, with the sources protected. In both Kumanovo and Kichevo, participants noted that although a Committee for Inter-Community Relations has been established, its voluntary character has made it difficult to address issues in a preventive manner, in addition to organize the annual meeting for drafting a program to be implemented by the Municipality's cultural section. Additionally, while the Municipality in Kumanovo maintains good relations with local religious organizations, there is no inter-religious body and generally little co-operation between religious communities. More worrying, according to roundtable participants, is the lack of trust in institutions on the part of citizens, particularly among the more vulnerable segments of society, which often prevents them from receiving needed assistance.

Whereas the roundtables in Gostivar and Kumanovo yielded evidence of functional provisions for coordination between municipality and community in the prevention of violent extremism, discussion at the roundtables in Chair, Prilep, Tetovo, and Struga focused on the absence of such provisions. At the roundtable in Chair, participants noted a lack of dialogue and co-operation between local communities and the municipality while pointing to the potential for the municipality to initiate community engagement through joint activities in the sphere of culture. In Prilep, roundtable participants presented the now-defunct youth council for juvenile delinquency as an example of good practice for bringing together parents' councils, education representatives, and providers of psycho-social services. However, they also conveyed the perception that local authorities have avoided contact with the Islamic Religious Community (IRC) since the IRC requested the restoration of the Charshi Mosque. Participants at the roundtable in Struga characterized the non-functioning of the LPC as symptomatic of a broader lack of inter-sectoral co-operation in the Municipality, also pointing to challenges in accessing and addressing the needs of the rural communities surrounding the town of Struga. Finally, a barrier to engagement between municipality and community identified by participants of the roundtable in Tetovo was the municipality's financial difficulties, including most notably the blocking of its bank account for several years.

3.4. Building trust between communities and law enforcement

Overall, the roundtables made clear that trust between communities and law enforcement is lacking for a number of different reasons. In Struga and Tetovo,

for example, participants attributed low levels of trust in law enforcement to the ineffectiveness of police in enforcing the law when the perpetrators of crimes are believed to be politically connected. As explained by participants at the roundtable in Struga, the perceived inconsistent application of the law by police provides impunity for well-known local criminals, effectively promoting a life of crime as a viable option for youth. In Tetovo and Chair, citizens are also afraid to report their concerns directly to the police for fear of retaliation from the perpetrators, and would prefer anonymous reporting. The low representation of ethnic Albanians in various organs of the Ministry of Interior was also mentioned as a factor in the trust deficit, despite the existence of affirmative action for the equitable representation of ethnic communities in the police. The recruitment of law enforcement officials on the basis of political party affiliation was mentioned in Chair and Kumanovo as a cause of low levels of citizen trust in law enforcement.

Widespread lack of trust in police was evident also in roundtable participants' views expressed on the appropriate role of law enforcement in the prevention of violent extremism. Participants in Chair, Kumanovo, and Tetovo conveyed fears of stigmatization and of being implicated by police in unnecessary investigations, with participants in Chair warning that disproportionate repressive measures targeting the local community risk creating fertile ground for the spread of VERLT. Roundtable participants in Struga, on the other hand, expressed concerns about the capacity of police to deal with issues of prevention in addition to their existing caseload. Reflecting these concerns, roundtable participants explained that police should be engaged only as a last resort or if there is an imminent threat to public safety. Participants in Chair explained that community-based initiatives for preventing violent extremism in their municipality have made a point of not involving law enforcement officials for fear of doing harm, while participants in Gostivar emphasized that the strategic plan to be developed by the Community Action Team for prevention of violent extremism should avoid reliance on the police. At the same time, participants called for more trust-building between communities and the police through an open forum as a mechanism to share their community safety concerns; however, they noted that the police work from a highly centralized level which poses challenges to being able to address concerns raised in a timely manner.

Taking into account low levels of community trust in law enforcement, the roundtables also probed co-operation between law enforcement on the one hand and schools and centers for social work on the other. While such co-operation generally received low marks from roundtable participants and most took the view that cases of youth delinquency should first be handled internally by school-based psycho-social support staff rather than involving

police, roundtable participants in Strumica and Veles made note of good co-operation between police and schools. Finally, notwithstanding roundtable participants' predominantly negative views of the role of police in relation to preventing violent extremism, participants in some roundtables recalled previous community policing practices, such as patrolman (*pozornikar*⁹), in positive terms and pointed to their potential role in preventing violent extremism by maintaining contacts at grassroots level.

3.5. The role of communities in the prevention of violent extremism

Discussion of the role of communities in preventing violent extremism focused in large part on families and religious communities, with many roundtable participants voicing that the prevention of violent extremism begins at home and in early childhood development. In several roundtables, participants emphasized that the focus should be on strengthening the family unit given it is the source for developing values of inter-religious and inter-ethnic tolerance. Violence in the family should also be addressed to counter the normalization of violence in society more broadly. Statements like these were often followed by observations about the potential for school-based parent councils to take an active role in raising awareness of the risks associated with violent extremism. Moreover, parents should become more informed about their role in monitoring their child's activity on the internet and ensuring their protection from online risks, including from content related to VERLT. At the roundtable in Chair, participants spoke about the important role of women in preventing VERLT, noting that they can take the lead in their families to foster positive inter-religious and inter-ethnic relations, both proactively and in response to fights among youth at school and on public transport. In this regard, the project "Mothers Schools" of the CSO Women without Borders received recognition from roundtable participants in Chair for empowering women to lead their families and communities in building resilience against VERLT.

In terms of dialogue and co-operation between religious communities, participants highlighted that on a higher level, the heads of religious communities meet twice a year to discuss activities, but at the local level there is insufficient communication between the Islamic Religious Community (IRC) and the Macedonian Orthodox Church (MOC). Intensified co-operation is needed to foster tolerance, for example by engaging in joint activities of

⁹ A *pozornikar* is a police officer in charge of a particular area who knows the people and the terrain in that area; a district/neighbourhood police officer.

mutual interest (e.g. cleaning the litter in a park) at the local level. Participants at the roundtable in Kumanovo singled out as an example of good practice the forum for religious leaders organized after the violent incidents in May 2015 to discuss how best to prevent further escalation of the situation. Also common were calls from representatives of both the IRC and the MOC for the incorporation of ethics and religion classes in school curricula, taught by appropriately qualified teachers, to promote ethics and religious tolerance. The roundtable discussions also examined the relationship between the construction of religious spaces of worship and symbolic objects on the one hand and interethnic and inter-religious relations on the other. Whereas in most cases this relationship was described in terms of how the construction of religious buildings can provoke inter-communal tensions, the discussion in Struga also highlighted how religious leaders played a constructive role in preventing an escalation to violence in the village of Oktisi over the construction of a church without a permit. From a different perspective, participants explained that some religious communities have longstanding grievances that should be addressed. Mentioned in the roundtables in both Prilep and Gostivar, the failure of local authorities to restore the burned down Charshi Mosque in Prilep from the 2001 conflict has prevented true reconciliation between ethnic and religious communities. As a result, there remains considerable need for work on inter-religious dialogue in that municipality. At the roundtable in Gostivar, the low level of communication between religious communities and local institutions was explained in terms of the legacy of communism and its propagation of anti-religious views.

Beyond references to specific religious communities, participants in some roundtables called for greater transparency and regulation within religious institutions in general; as one participant in the roundtable in Veles put it, “We can’t know what the priest and the imam say. We need to see what they’re preaching.” In addition, MOC representatives participating in one of the roundtables pointed to cases in which individuals espousing extreme beliefs seek to manipulate national and religious identities, noting that some priests and members of the Church have an ideological approach and are difficult to keep under control.

Among the concerns raised at the roundtables in relation to Muslim communities in North Macedonia, the most common related to the challenges for IRC of addressing the misuse of religion in such a way as to prevent VERLT. At several roundtables, representatives of IRC spoke of foreign and/or “extremist” organizations that carry out religious activities outside the control of official religious bodies, sometimes under the guise of cultural and humanitarian activities. Participants at the roundtables in Gostivar and Struga also noted that their reports to police about such practices have not

led to action. In Gostivar, roundtable participants further made note of the circulation of large quantities of religious literature without IRC oversight, arguing that VERLT can be prevented by increasing religious literacy and promoting a strong grounding in the Hanafi tradition officially followed in the country. Similarly, participants at the roundtable in Gostivar suggested that religious leaders should raise their profile on online social media to reduce the influence of extremist preachers among youth and offer alternative narratives. Furthermore, participant in Kumanovo emphasized that religious leaders should consider how they can better engage youth to understand the modern challenges and realities that they face.

While much of the discussion on communities focused on religious communities, some roundtable participants attended also to broader macro-social phenomena, such as hooliganism among sports fans groups and incitement to violence by youth wings of political parties. Participants at the roundtable in Chair identified the culture of violence in some sports fan groups as springboards to political and religious extremism, on the one hand pointing to a special relationship between such groups and political parties, and on the other hand alleging that several known foreign terrorist fighters who left North Macedonia to fight in Syria and Ukraine had previously been part of sports fan groups. In Tetovo and Kumanovo, participants emphasized that working with football clubs and their fan groups should be a top priority to prevent the use of hate speech and nationalistic violent extremism. In the view of participants in Chair, a special body should be created to regulate sports fans groups and sanction them for misconduct. They also called on all types of community stakeholders to collectively condemn violence and hate perpetrated by sports fan groups. In this regard, participants in Chair shared that the MOC had attempted to establish contact out to a well-known sports fan group in Skopje, known for inciting violent incidents based on ethnic and religious intolerance, in order to promote positive moral values.

Participants in the majority of the roundtables expressed concern that political parties spread extremism and nationalist rhetoric that creates polarization in society. In regards to youth wings of political parties, participants in Prilep voiced that they can potentially play a constructive role in preventing their members from propagating negative narratives, hate speech and violence. Participants in both Struga and Kichevo noted incidents of violence had occurred in the past between youth in schools incited by political parties during election periods. Finally, participants at the roundtable in Kumanovo noted that the local community at large struggles to prevent hate speech in social media and to dispel fake news from having a detrimental impact on society.

3.6. Education and supporting at-risk youth

Roundtable participants identified various challenges faced by youth that contribute to their vulnerability to violent extremism. At several of the roundtables, participants referred to pessimism and demoralization resulting from not only from a lack of direct opportunities, but also from the absence of positive role models in a society in which success apparently comes from personal connections rather than from skills, experience, and integrity. In this situation, participants noted that youth may seek a sense of belonging by engaging in extreme outlets; therefore youth need opportunities for positive mentorship and to gain leadership skills to make meaningful contributions to society. In support of the thesis that youth need to feel understood and that they belong to their communities, participants at the roundtable in Kumanovo recalled the case of a girl who left for (and was eventually killed in) Syria because she felt deeply marginalized when she decided to express her religiosity openly. On a more positive note, participants at the roundtable in Gostivar spoke of the youth council and center established in that municipality as promising mechanisms for addressing some of the challenges faced by at-risk youth.

The roundtables revealed major shortcomings in the operation of the education system in North Macedonia which greatly reduce the system's ability to provide viable alternatives for at-risk youth. One of the prominent findings of the roundtables is that VERLT among youth in North Macedonia feeds on deep societal cleavages as reflected in the education system. In the first place, segregation by language of instruction limits contacts among pupils from different ethnic – and, in many cases, also religious – communities. Participants at the roundtable in Tetovo further attributed the current situation of segregation to the inability of relevant institutions to handle the renaming of schools in ways that would not create "winners and losers". Moreover, in most schools, little is done to promote multiculturalism among students, and some textbooks contain offensive and nationalist-oriented material that contributes to polarization and marginalization, particularly in relation to ethnic minorities. Finally, participants at the roundtables in Chair, Kumanovo, and Prilep expressed concerns about the effects on students of extremist views held by teachers, with participants in Chair citing a concrete case in which a member of teaching staff had incited violent extremism in the classroom. By way of contrast, a participant in the roundtable in Shtip cited the example of a local primary school in which good interethnic relations are cultivated actively and friendships across ethnic lines have proven effective in preventing VERLT.

In several roundtables, participants made reference to manifestations of political polarization in the school system. Some participants observed that

the tendency for teachers to be employed on the basis of political affiliation makes for considerable unevenness in the level of skills among teaching staff. This tendency places teachers in a difficult position to communicate to school management what is needed to increase the quality of education, compounding the overburdening of teachers that comes with large class sizes and which prevents individual work with students, especially at-risk youth. Perhaps more troubling are the cases reported by roundtable participants in which well-connected teachers and students brought weapons onto school premises and issued threats to teachers and/or students, contributing to normalization of a culture of violence.

Taking into account the phenomena described in the preceding paragraphs, there is perhaps nothing surprising in the finding of research cited by roundtable participants in Prilep that students lack trust in and are therefore tend to be unwilling to share their concerns with teachers and school support services. Nonetheless, participants at the roundtables in Chair and Kumanovo provided accounts of good practice in providing support to at-risk youth. In Chair, when a child displays deviant behavior, the child's teacher invites the parents to discuss together with a pedagogue and school psychologist. In Kumanovo, roundtable participants reported excellent co-operation between school professional services and local CSOs.

Roundtable participants highly agreed on the value of extracurricular activities for providing youth with access to constructive free-time activities. At the same time, however, participants noted that widespread overcrowding of schools that leads to operation in two or more shifts means that many schools lack the space in which to offer extracurricular activities, even if they are planned in the school program. It was also mentioned in the roundtables that the most vulnerable students are also most likely to be excluded from such activities, as priority is often given to better-performing students. In Gostivar and Tetovo, municipal authorities have taken steps to address this situation by allocating resources for extracurricular activities: the youth and community center in Gostivar brings together six youth organizations, while the municipality of Tetovo has provided space and logistical support to a recently created network of youth volunteers who serve as hosts for activities.

A topic arousing some debate among roundtable participants was the potential for local councils for prevention of juvenile delinquency to play a role in preventing violent extremism. Participants in Tetovo and Veles were generally positive about this, while a participant in Shtip took the position that such councils are not appropriate for addressing VERLT. It was also mentioned in the roundtables that the youth organizations of political parties need to be engaged in efforts to prevent violent extremism.

3.7. Social welfare and mental health

Given that potential drivers for VERLT include social marginalization and chronic unemployment, the roundtable discussions also explored measures taken by social welfare institutions to address these phenomena, in particular how they impact youth. Additionally, it was pointed out that measures for addressing unemployment tend to focus on persons with completed secondary or higher education, leaving out traditionally marginalized groups such as Roma.

A common observation of roundtable participants is that while centers for social work have extensive experience addressing different forms of anti-social behaviours, they lack specialized expertise on understanding violent extremism and its associated risks. Furthermore, social work centers lack the resources necessary to develop and deploy relevant capacity, with participants in Kumanovo noting that employees of the local center were already working on a voluntary basis to implement existing programming. One suggestion was for a centralized center with a pool of mobile experts to be established to advise practitioners at the local level.

The roundtables also highlighted the need for social work centers to work more closely with elementary and secondary schools to provide support to vulnerable youth. In light of the fact that most teachers lack the time and skills necessary to actively support students' social development, the role of school-based psycho-social support staff takes on particular importance. However, political polarization and overcrowding in schools generally affect this category of staff in much the same way that teaching staff are affected, with many school populations too large for the number of psycho-social support staff employed and some schools lacking a pedagogue and/or a psychologist. Even where such staff exist in sufficient number, they often lack training for understanding the phenomenon of radicalization to violent extremism and how it can be addressed.¹⁰ Participants noted that it is important for youth to feel listened to, to be able to express themselves, and to feel they can identify their problems and concerns to trusted adults; therefore, teachers, pedagogues, school psychologists and parents need to become more involved in better engaging youth. In addressing youth delinquency and violent behaviour, participants also urged that such cases first be handled internally by a school's pedagogues and psychologists instead of prematurely involving the police. Furthermore, it was proposed that specialized programs should be created for youth to deconstruct the normalized culture of violence and aid

¹⁰ One training of this type was conducted by OSCE together with NCCVECT and focused on identifying risks of radicalization

in processing global news and events that may be disturbing to the psyche of young people.

Participants also noted that social work centers should concentrate more on addressing family dysfunctionality, as family violence can further encourage violent and extremist behavior of young individuals. Such efforts would also support the work of psycho-social support staff in schools who under recent legislation have been prevented from accessing information on the family background of students despite substantial evidence that a large proportion of students requiring support come from socially disadvantaged and/or dysfunctional families. Some roundtable participants also observed that centers for social work are not always willing to assist school-based psycho-social support staff when contacted about a particular student.

Participants also identified that local social work centers should be engaged in implementing programs for rehabilitation and reintegration of referred individuals assessed as vulnerable to VERLT. The roundtable in Struga also pointed to the absence of knowledge on how individuals being released from the prison system can be properly resocialized and reintegrated into communities with adequate support to ensure that they do not become vulnerable to violent extremist groups. In some roundtables it was suggested that religious leaders can play a role in providing mentorship on a theological basis during rehabilitation and reintegration, although they often lack more specialized training in providing psychological support and counselling.

Finally, the roundtables highlighted that social and cultural taboos around mental health leads to stigmatization and additional barriers for individuals to access mental health support services in the community.



4. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This section provides conclusions, combined with a few recommendations, on issues that were identified as challenges during the discussions. They are synthesized from the findings in each thematic area and provide guidance on how to promote a multi-stakeholder approach to P/CVERLT.

4.1. Capacities for a whole-of-society approach to P/CVERLT (trained staff; infrastructure; finances)

4.1.1. Adequately trained staff

The whole-of-society approach to P/CVERLT was supported in all of the roundtables organized. However, one of the main challenges identified during the discussions was the lack of training to ensure understanding and awareness of principles and approaches promoted by the central government through national strategies and action plans. Stakeholders agreed this was a systemic deficiency appearing during coordination with their mother institutions, and noted that this deficiency is particularly apparent where no institution has been tasked with taking the lead in addressing crosscutting issues.

The participants raised concerns regarding the involvement of teachers in P/CVERLT. A general perception of the educators in all areas was that they consider themselves inadequate to engage in prevention unless they possess a certain level of expertise. Specialized training of educators was prioritized at almost every roundtable. The recommendation arising from these concerns was that special attention should be given to ensure that P/CVERLT interventions respect human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the rights of children.

In most roundtables, CSO representatives repeatedly brought to the attention of educators and others that existing skillsets can be applied to prevention

programming. These skills may include (but need not be limited to) mentorship and counselling, pedagogical support, active or strategic listening, communication skills, mediation, and critical thinking. As a result, participants in most roundtables displayed a change of perceptions regarding their abilities to engage in P/CVERLT after the initial discussions, as their awareness increased on existing skills that can be used. At the same time, if the training of teachers is not adequate and in line with human rights and a do-no-harm approach, there is a risk that it could result in oversimplification of key issues.

Social workers and psychologists requested respect for the autonomy of their professional fields. While expressing willingness to participate in prevention programming, participants in these categories emphasized the need to resist requests from law enforcement agencies to break the ethical codes that ensure trust from the beneficiaries of psychosocial support. In some municipalities, social workers and psychologists participating in the roundtables presented successful inter-institutional co-operation in preventing other anti-social behaviours, such as juvenile delinquency. In the opinion of these participants, capacities of professional staff need to be increased and a thorough understanding of P/CVERLT concepts provided through specialized training.

Representatives of municipalities and local institutions requested specialized training be provided by the central-level authorities and the National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Counter-terrorism (NCCVECT). More specifically, each of the ministries represented in the NCCVECT should provide training at the local level before attempting to create local implementation plans on P/CVERLT.

The high turnover of staff in some institutions hinders the sustainability of capacity building, as well as of preventive mechanisms that could be established on the local level. Participants also recommended that an assessment of compatibility should be conducted for anyone who wants to be involved in P/CVERLT interventions, as some professionals in their field may express views supportive of or conducive to VERLT.

4.1.2. Infrastructure

The latest global trends demonstrate that communities have a crucial role to play in the prevention of violent extremism, with community-based approaches to prevention proving beneficial in supplementing the law-enforcement approach to security. The biggest challenge identified by communities was the lack of infrastructure, whether physical or soft (i.e., institutions), for providing a space and forum for communities to contribute to prevention. Even though

all participants agreed that governments cannot prevent and counter violent extremism alone, communities requested that national strategies reflect the need to build physical and soft infrastructure for P/CVERLT.

Roundtable participants pointed to the limited extra-curricular funds of schools and a systemic lack of space. They also noted a shortage of psychologists despite repeated requests. On the other hand, some municipal authorities have informally designated places for work with youth or community outreach. There was broad agreement among roundtable participants that partnerships for preventing VERLT are best formed by communities themselves, with support from institutions and civil society organizations. However, there remains a need for central and local authorities to coordinate community efforts by creating an infrastructure to support the work of communities, local institutions and civil society organizations.

The local institutions acknowledged that there are ambiguities in defining the roles of stakeholders in prevention. One of the biggest concerns is the lack of recognition of prevention as a general competence, whether by municipalities that have competence over schools, or by social and healthcare facilities or other institutions. In order to promote a multi-sector approach, channels of communication and co-operation need to be established. Most local institutions are restricted in their interactions by their mother institutions at the central level and do not give legitimacy to requests from other institutions, resulting in action taken only when requested by the mother institution or other central authorities.

4.1.3. Finances

One of the main concerns expressed by stakeholders participating in the roundtables was that they lack finances to engage in P/CVERLT activities or interventions. The institutional stakeholders reported that they lack flexibility in their budgets that are pre-determined by their mother institutions. Community and religious leaders, on the other hand, lack resources and capacity to manage funds. For their part, municipal representatives noted that they could find modalities to fund P/CVERLT interventions, but the funds would be limited and would be taken from funds for other obligations of the municipality. On the other hand, the CSOs dealing with P/CVERLT or related issues stated that finances were not their biggest concern, pointing instead to the need for more institutional support and capacity building training.

Throughout the roundtables, the National Coordinator on CVE and CT and the two Deputy Coordinators reassured stakeholders that donors are interested

to fund local initiatives. At the same time, they specified that in order to get funds, a local implementation plan should be developed in accordance with the National Strategy on CVE. In several municipalities, requests were made that donors consult with communities on needs and priorities prior to planning interventions.

4.2. Inter-agency co-operation

The most difficult segment to address in promoting a multi-stakeholder approach is inter-agency co-operation. While such co-operation is difficult in any thematic area, in the case of P/CVERLT it is made more challenging by a legacy of securitization. Particularly in municipalities where no P/CVERLT initiatives had been implemented, local institutions were struggling to understand their role in addressing violent extremism when contacted during preparation of the roundtables. As a result, the roundtables served as an excellent forum for debate, raising awareness, breaking taboos about securitized topics, and promoting co-operation and community inclusiveness.

At the roundtables, good practices and lessons learned were shared in regards to multi-stakeholder bodies formed to address various issues. Generally, institutions did not have any criteria for delegating or appointing appropriate staff to such committees or bodies. Additionally, the inadequate expertise of members undermined the credibility and the functioning of such efforts. This situation was exacerbated by political polarization within relevant institutions, as experts in their field were not promoted to work in multi-stakeholder bodies because other individuals have been politically appointed.

The lack of a hierarchy and reporting lines for the work of the multi-stakeholder bodies resulted in no accountability for actions to be taken. Members of such bodies reported not receiving support from their managers, who failed to recognize the bodies' competence in prevention, as well as the legitimacy of the conclusions and decisions issued by such bodies.

The lack of incentives such as financial compensation for regular participation in the bodies' work was also identified as detrimental for multi-stakeholder bodies. Justification for absence from work was also mentioned as an issue leading to problems in coordination for meetings.

Vertical and horizontal co-operation is lacking in various areas relating to P/CVERLT. Roundtable participants noted that local institutions generally work in isolated silos in the municipalities. As a result, representatives of

these institutions are often not aware of the activities of others and overlap in issues or work with the same stakeholders. In light of this situation, a multi-stakeholder approach can be expected to increase awareness and co operation.

To date, various multi-stakeholder bodies had been formed in the selected municipalities for prevention against specific categories of anti-social behaviours such as juvenile delinquency and alcohol- or drug-related harm. Local Prevention Councils and Citizen Advisory Groups, initially promoted by the OSCE Mission to Skopje, were mentioned as positive examples of existing preventive mechanisms in some municipalities. However, many challenges were raised in different municipalities for establishing fully functioning preventive mechanisms. Most importantly, the participants pointed to the need to assess unsustainable mechanisms and gather information on why such bodies ceased to function, as a basis for improving the design of preventive mechanisms for P/CVERLT that may be established.

4.3. Coordination between central and local authorities

The distribution of responsibilities and the mechanisms for interaction between local and central authorities are governed by principles laid down in the European Charter of Local Self-Government. The general competence clause specifies that allocation of powers and responsibilities by law goes together with the recognition of the power of local authorities to intervene in any matter of local interest. Consistent with this, roundtable participants took the position that the municipalities are best placed to support a multi-stakeholder local prevention mechanism and other P/CVERLT initiatives.

Municipal representatives stated that in order for such initiatives to function properly, the central government should establish co-operation and provide capacity building training. They identified discrepancies between national and local priorities of institutions and the difficulty of requesting changes in the budget as the biggest challenges in trying to focus their work in a new area such as P/CVERLT. There was a consensus from all local institutions in the selected municipalities that national top-down support needs to be established for all sensitive areas and especially for P/CVERLT. Local institutions also reported difficulties in allocating time and resources, and the inability to implement action plans when local-level issues are not reflected in the national action plans.

Skopje and Tetovo were the two municipalities that were most receptive to organizing the roundtables discussed in this report, after the OSCE Mission to Skopje had earlier in the year held public consultations on the National Strategy and Action Plan on Countering Violent Extremism. This demonstrated that the inclusion of all stakeholders in decision-making on a local level promotes buy-in and commitment to a national-level action plan, as it addresses local dynamics and community grievances.

For their part, central authorities acknowledge municipalities as the institutions that play a critical role in the interface with citizens. Roundtable participants recommended that the central government consider developing mechanisms for the integration of multiple stakeholders for the management of policies and regulations affecting municipalities, especially policies dealing with sensitive topics.

Lack of horizontal and vertical communication was mentioned as the cause for the passiveness of institutions and absence of activities in prevention of VERLT. Continuous inter-institutional communication is of utmost importance for a successful implementation of policies, as it favours a better understanding of policies and allows monitoring, assistance, advice and consultation regarding disputes. This being the case, regular briefings should be held by national institutions to inform relevant stakeholders on the national and local level on strategic actions taken in addressing VERLT.

Continuous training of professionals working in prevention of violent extremism was also proposed, as one-off trainings do not provide appropriate support and guidance in dealing with the phenomenon of violent extremism. This request was particularly common among educators and professional school staff, who pointed to the unmet need for ongoing professional development in the area of prevention of VERLT and other anti-social behaviours. While the municipalities have general competency over education, changes to curricular activities need the approval of the Bureau for Development of Education, providing further evidence of the need for a multi-stakeholder approach to P/CVERLT.

Researchers face difficulties in obtaining VERLT data and statistics, which are mostly classified. State institutions also need statistical data for proper planning of strategies and action plans. Ideally, the needed data could be obtained locally by researchers communicating with practitioners and local stakeholders, then shared with the national coordination bodies. Such efforts were mentioned by civil society representatives with experience in creating networks of practitioners working in the same area. However, local institutions, municipalities and central government actors pointed to

challenges in establishing a framework for co-operation, especially where both vertical and horizontal co operation are concerned.

Generally, the failure of local institutions to recognize their role in prevention has undermined institutional responses to addressing VERLT. The general perception of most local institutions was that once the problem appears, they will act in order to mitigate harm and address consequences. Only a few municipalities that had already seen good practices and results from a multi-stakeholder approach were receptive to addressing VERLT through similar coordinated, multi-stakeholder bodies. The general consensus was that more work needs to be done to enable institutions to support prevention initiatives at the local level, and that coordination between central and local activities is crucial in order to operationalize the strategies and action plans on CVE.



5. RECOMMENDED BEST PRACTICES FOR P/CVERLT PROGRAMMES

This section presents key recommendations for best practices that can be applied in designing and implementing P/CVERLT programmes. The recommended best practices are derived from the insights and lessons learned from the roundtable findings taken together as a whole.

- 1. Advocate for broad stakeholder co-operation using a whole-of-society approach.** Bring together relevant stakeholders from across civil society and different institutional sectors, specifically ensuring inclusion of practitioners with experience in the prevention of other forms of violence and risky social behaviours. This approach recognizes the social roots of VERLT and allows for early interventions and non-coercive solutions when individuals or communities are at risk by addressing the factors conducive to VERLT.
- 2. Tailor programmes to the local context by prioritizing demand-driven solutions.** Each municipality has its own particular context and challenges that preclude a one-size-fits-all approach to implementing the National Strategy and Action Plan. A local needs assessment should be conducted that includes an analysis of all forms of VERLT phenomena and the resources that can be leveraged in prevention. Efforts should be made to build upon existing capacities and programming of local civil society.
- 3. Give local stakeholders a direct stake in P/CVERLT programmes.** Promote genuine empowerment of local stakeholders through their consultation and participation in decision-making processes; facilitate the inclusion of marginalized and under represented groups, such as minority communities, youth and women, who may also bring different voices and needs to the table.

- 4. Apply a conflict-sensitive lens in planning and designing programmes.** Understand local dynamics and sensitivities around inter-ethnic, religious, and political divisions that cause tensions and mistrust, as well as the need for trust-building between citizens and institutions, such as law enforcement. Take steps to promote confidence-building and community dialogue on sensitive issues relating to VERLT. Where possible, seek to address the legacy of local and national conflicts and community grievances as factors conducive to VERLT.
- 5. Prioritize human rights considerations and the principle of do-no-harm.** Conducting a thorough risk assessment in project design is crucial for mitigating inadvertent stigmatization or infringement on human rights and fundamental freedoms, such as freedom of religion or belief. Ensure that P/CVERLT efforts do not disproportionately engage with a particular ethnic or religious community in order to avoid interpretation of such efforts as profiling or discrimination. Professional ethics and safeguards are also needed when working with children and adolescents that protect the specific rights and wellbeing of persons in these groups by preventing exposure to undue stigmatization.
- 6. Ensure that solutions to P/CVERLT are people-centred.** Efforts should focus on strengthening the protective factors for resilient communities and supporting the wellbeing of individuals. Overly securitized approaches risk undermining partnerships with communities and institutional stakeholders by focusing on threat detection instead of addressing the underlying factors of VERLT and providing the necessary support to vulnerable individuals. Care should also be taken to respect the independence, normative values and professional commitments of practitioners in civil society, education, religious institutions, mental health and social welfare.
- 7. Exercise caution around prematurely involving law enforcement.** Building police-community partnerships based on trust and collaboration requires cultivating sustained relationships over time, which should be in place first before engaging local communities on the highly sensitive issue of VERLT in order to avoid misunderstandings and stigmatization. In cases concerning vulnerable individuals, the involvement of the police in what is a non-criminal space when no credible threat is imminent, may lead to stigmatization and possibly push an individual further down the path of radicalization.

- 8. Coordinate efforts of the central and local government and the international donor community.** Oversaturation of activities and the attendant disproportionate level of attention to P/CVERLT in a particular community can result in displacement of other important issues. This situation can in turn lead to targeted stigmatization and overburdening of resources.
- 9. Incorporate gender considerations in the design of P/CVERLT initiatives.** Promote the meaningful empowerment of women in shaping efforts to prevent violence by creating genuine opportunities to play a transformative role in society. Avoid instrumentalizing the participation of women for the purpose of furthering a particular security agenda while displacing other concerns, such as advancing women's rights. Ensure that efforts to involve women in P/CVERLT do not reinforce traditional gender roles, stereotypes and inequalities, and do not put them at additional risk.
- 10. Ensure the sustainability of P/CVERLT initiatives.** Make use of existing preventive mechanisms where possible, and incorporate lessons learned and good practices in the creation of new mechanisms. Establish a framework for co-operation among stakeholders by delineating roles and channels of communication, also providing appropriate incentives and support to ensure continued engagement. Where possible, seek to engage stakeholders who demonstrate a clear interest and commitment to P/CVERLT.



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ANNEX: MUNICIPAL ROUNDTABLE REPORTS

The following annex provides a detailed overview of the proceedings of the roundtables in Chair, Gostivar, Kumanovo, Struga, and Tetovo in the form of reports developed by the OSCE Mission to Skopje's implementing partner.

MUNICIPAL ROUNDTABLE IN CHAIR (26 November 2018)

Before the conflict in 2001, but especially in the aftermath, inter-ethnic and religious cleavages in Chair were not managed successfully, creating fertile ground for religious and ethnic radicalization leading to violence. There was a clear consensus among the present discussants that a lot has to be done in order to make Chair a safe space resilient to radicalization. The fragile community relations have contributed towards religious intolerance between the two largest religious communities in the municipality – Muslims and Orthodox Christians. Furthermore, the animosity between local members of sports fan groups, which have a history of ethnic and religious hatred, makes Chair and the surrounding municipalities less safe and prone to inter-ethnic and inter-religious clashes. Lastly, segregation in schools is one of the driving factors that contribute towards radicalization leading to violent extremism.

Strengthening of civil society and sharing best practices

In regards to strengthening civil society and sharing best practices on the community level, CSO representatives noted the clear need for the creation of a statistical database of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) who have returned to North Macedonia. This database should be made available to researchers and professionals for research purposes. Representatives from local CSOs also stressed the need to increase co-operation with the international community to organize facilitated discussions with sports fan groups on the municipal level, considering that multiple nationalist and ethnically based crimes have been committed by members of these groups on the territory of Chair. Lastly, it was noted by local media representatives that CSOs should collaborate with local institutions and communities, as well as with international organizations in order to raise awareness about critical thinking, media literacy and promoting democratic culture.

Media (with emphasis on local media)

Local journalists continued emphasized the importance of both national and local media, noting that media have the responsibility to report carefully in a balanced and non-sensationalistic manner in order not to provoke violence and radicalization leading to violent extremism.

Trust-building between local community and law enforcement institutions in terms of prevention – institutional mechanisms

Local community leaders, as well as the NCCVECT representatives, highlighted the need for further efforts to be invested in trust-building between local communities and law enforcement agencies. In particular, it was noted that long-term and sustainable solutions are needed. Multiple stakeholders agreed that in the framework of the potential referral mechanism, the police should be engaged only as a last resort, mainly due to its repressive nature. Furthermore, careful consideration needs to be given to the role of law enforcement institutions in the creation of local prevention mechanisms.

Local self-government, local communities and other local stakeholders

Several discussants noted that all local stakeholders should invest efforts to prevent stigmatizing certain ethnic, religious, or political groups as being linked to radicalization and violent extremism. This is of utmost importance for ethnically and religiously mixed municipalities such as Chair. CSO representatives mentioned that the established LPC in Chair should intensify its activities and follow closely phenomena such as radicalization and violent extremism. A couple of youth activists pointed out that the Municipality of Chair should invest in opening the youth center and make it a youth engagement hub. The same discussants pointed out that the Municipality of Chair should build upon the positive experience of the Municipality of Tetovo in order to encourage youth volunteering and to provide space and funding for young people to engage socially in order to be more creative. Both civil society leaders and municipal representatives mentioned that political party youth organizations should be more engaged as P/CVERLT stakeholders on the local level. The same groups of discussants further noted that public and political officials should show enhanced sensitivity when using religious and ethnic symbols, taking into consideration the multiethnic character of Macedonian society, as well as the multi-ethnic and multi-confessional character of Chair. Lastly, there was a consensus that every type of nationalist outburst should be publicly denounced and sanctioned.

Local religious leaders

Multiple discussants from different professional backgrounds agreed that local religious leaders, who enjoy respect in their local communities, should actively influence citizens to avoid radical interpretation of religion. Representatives from the religious communities gave several examples of how local religious leaders have played a positive role in the prevention of religious radicalization in the country. A representative of the Macedonian Orthodox Church (MOC) referred to a positive example when the religious community reached out to a well-known sports fan group from Skopje. Although the meeting had not happened yet, the establishing of communication and willingness to discuss positive moral values between the church and this fan group, which is known for inciting violent incidents based on ethnic and religious intolerance, was largely supported by the roundtable discussants. Discussants agreed that based on previous positive examples, religious communities should put efforts to cooperate with sports fan groups in order to promote positive moral values. Discussing inter-religious dialogue on the local level, the representatives from both MOC and the Islamic Religious Community (IRC) agreed that although inter-religious community dialogue exists, it should be intensified, especially on the local level through joint actions. The representatives of both religious communities shared examples of unfortunate events on the territory of Chair when local preachers were verbally attacked by believers of the other religion, as well as isolated incidents when places of worship were vandalized on the territory of Chair. Lastly, a representative of the IRC shared a good practice that was implemented in his organization in the form of a system of internal quality control of the work of the imams and the administrative staff. It was widely commented that other religious groups should also adopt this good practice in order to prevent misinterpretation of religious teaching.

Education

The discussion of education focused in large part on the challenges emerging from the intertwining of religion and education. Teachers, school support staff, as well as municipal representatives agreed that there are outlier cases of frontline school workers inciting radical behavior and extremist reasoning, and that such cases should be sanctioned immediately. They agreed that civil society representatives, as well as local institutions, should work on advocating for the institutionalization of training and workshops for frontline school workers like those already introduced by the OSCE and CRPM. Representatives of the religious communities further suggested that based on the positive experiences with the course on Ethics in Religion, educational institutions should consider introducing this course in 7th, 8th and 9th grade

in elementary schools. The discussion later shifted to the working conditions and the security of the frontline school workers. All discussants agreed that the working conditions of frontline school workers should be immediately improved, while their security should be guaranteed continuously. Some of the teachers discussed the negative effects of ethnic segregation in schools in Chair. They suggested that integration measures should be applied, aiming towards multiethnic integration and trust-building under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Science. These activities should be sustainable and not dependent on time-limited internationally funded projects. Furthermore, the frontline school workers suggested that frequent meetings between parents and teachers could further strengthen the role of both actors. In their opinion, this exchange of ideas can prevent cases of radicalization leading to violent extremism. Members of the school support staff, as well as municipal representatives, commented that school expert services should closely follow asocial students, students with difficulties to follow the course materials, and students coming from dysfunctional families. These three groups of students can be more susceptible to radicalization and violent behavior. Many stakeholders agreed that the parents' councils should be empowered in order to continue playing the pivotal role of coordinating and informing parents about the development of their children. This recommendation was clearly in line with the suggestion that parents and frontline school workers should communicate and exchange information more frequently. Lastly, the frontline school workers noted that educational authorities should enter into a process of reforming curriculums in primary and secondary education in order to create more space for extracurricular activities.

Social welfare and mental health

The last topic discussed during the roundtable was the role of the social welfare and mental health institutions in the process of prevention of radicalization leading to violence. One of the discussants, a psychiatrist by training, commented that family violence could encourage violent and extremist behavior of young individuals. It was widely acknowledged that civil society should partner with state institutions such as the centers for social work in order to try and prevent such cases to the extent possible. The roundtable was concluded with discussions from schools support staff representatives who noted that social work centers should take full advantage of their legal competencies and work closely with elementary and high schools in order to prevent radicalization leading to violent extremism.

Conclusions and recommendations

- There is a clear need for the creation of a statistical database of FTFs, which will be available to researchers and professionals for research purposes;
- Civil society should partner with local institutions and communities, as well as with international organizations in order to raise awareness about critical thinking, media literacy and promoting democratic culture;
- Civil society and international community representatives should engage more in communicating and collaborating with sports fan groups;
- Media have the responsibility to report carefully in a balanced and non-sensationalistic manner in order not to provoke violence, radicalization and extremism;
- Further efforts have to be invested in trust-building between local communities and law enforcement agencies. Long-term and sustainable solutions are needed;
- In the framework of the potential referral mechanism, the police should be engaged only as a last resort, mainly due to its repressive nature. Furthermore, more attention needs to be paid to the creation of local prevention mechanisms;
- Local stakeholders should invest efforts to prevent stigmatizing certain ethnic, religious, or political groups as being linked to radicalization and violent extremism;
- The established LPC in Chair should intensify its activities and follow closely phenomena such as radicalization and violent extremism;
- The Municipality of Chair should invest in opening the youth center and make it a youth engagement hub;
- The Municipality of Chair should build on the positive experience of the Municipality of Tetovo in order to encourage youth volunteering and provide space and funding for young people to engage socially and be more creative;
- Political party youth organizations should be more engaged as P/CVERLT stakeholders on local level;

- Public and political officials should show enhanced sensitivity when using religious and ethnic symbols, taking into consideration the multiethnic character of Macedonian society;
- Every type of nationalist outburst should be publically denounced and sanctioned. The international community could facilitate the creation of a monitoring body that will be particularly active during election campaigns;
- Local religious leaders enjoying respect in local communities should actively influence citizens to avoid radical interpretation of religion;
- Based on previous positive examples, religious communities should put efforts to cooperate with sports fan groups in order to promote positive moral values;
- Although intra-religious community dialogue exists, it should be intensified, especially on the local level through joint actions;
- The IRC has already introduced a system of internal quality control of the work of the imams and the administrative staff. This good practice should be also adopted by other religious groups in order to prevent misinterpretation of religious teaching;
- Outlier cases of frontline school workers inciting radical behavior and extremist reasoning should be sanctioned. Civil society should work on advocating for the institutionalization of training and workshops for frontline school workers;
- Based on the positive experiences with the course on Ethics in Religion, educational institutions should consider introducing this course in 7th, 8th and 9th grade in elementary schools;
- Working conditions of frontline school workers should be immediately improved;
- Taking into consideration the ethnic segregation in the elementary and high schools, integration measures should be applied, aiming towards multiethnic integration and trust-building under the auspices of the Ministry of Education and Science. These activities should be sustainable, and non-dependent on time-limited internationally funded projects;
- More frequent meetings between parents and teachers can further strengthen the role of both actors;

- School services should closely follow asocial students, students with difficulties to follow the course materials, and students coming from dysfunctional families;
- The parents council should be further strengthened in order to continue playing the pivotal role of coordinating and informing the parents about the development of their children;
- Educational authorities should enter into a process of reforming curriculums in primary and secondary education in order to create more space for extracurricular activities;
- School expert services (psychologists, pedagogues, sociologists etc.) should be continuously engaged in work with more vulnerable students in order to prevent potential cases of radicalization leading to violent extremism;
- Family violence can encourage violent and extremist behavior of youth. Civil society should partner with state institutions such as the centers for social work in order to try and prevent such cases to the extent possible;
- Social work centers should take full advantage of their legal competencies and work closely with the schools in order to prevent radicalization leading to violent extremism.

MUNICIPAL ROUNDTABLE IN GOSTIVAR (21 November 2018)

The phenomenon of radicalization is not well known in Gostivar and roundtable participants noted that it should be discussed more often, especially since radicalization is a complex issue that can be present in many forms. The community representatives in Gostivar are aware that it is dangerous to categorize, generalize or link the phenomenon with one ethnic group or religion. Participants also identified the following factors as pertinent to the occurrence and the spread of the phenomenon in their municipality:

- The political situation and ongoing polarization should not be overlooked, as they can potentially provoke adoption of a more radical behavior;
- The census being implemented without identification of the ethnic belonging of the citizens is seen as problematic, especially among the Roma community;
- Failing to recognize the problem as significant, disregarding the problem or failing to recognize its various forms may also have an effect on spreading the phenomenon in an unnoticed manner.

Strengthening of the civil society organizations, co-operation on a society level and exchange of good practices

The participants agreed that a debate is needed in order to identify problems and the causes of violence. Only by knowing the roots of radicalization can preventive action be successfully planned and the phenomenon tackled. The role of religion in prevention from radicalization that can lead to violent extremism is very special to representatives of religious communities and the rest of the community recognizes the need for them to be involved on two levels: (i) working with families; and (ii) educating the youth and offering alternative interpretations to radical teaching. The theologians should approach the families first because some of the problems arise mainly from family relations and the religious leaders have to work with them. In terms of education, the imams continuously have an educational role and whenever a social problem occurs in mosques, they spend 10-15 minutes lecturing ethics and morality before the prayer. To this end, the participants discussed the possibility for the imams to use the Friday lectures specifically to preach about radicalization and violent extremism as a phenomenon.

Expanding religious education in madrassas to women was recognized as important. The role of mothers is paramount insofar as they can deconstruct radical interpretations of religion and/or embody values opposite to radical

ideas through conversation with children. In this way, women can act as powerful factors in prevention from radicalization. However, the work of women's organizations shows that gender violence is a problem in Gostivar and that the violence generally originates from the family. When it comes to violence, women are more interested in taking an active part in the prevention of it than are men. Therefore, it was concluded that for the religious communities it is necessary to work with men to be more active in the prevention of violence in their families, as well as in the community.

Because the state administration alone cannot cope with violent extremism, a whole-of-community approach is needed. This is operationalized through engaging different parts of the society in various institutional forms such as the Youth Council which is active in Gostivar but operates with limited finances. Considering that the Council's budget can cover for the implementation of 2-3 projects annually, its contribution to building resilient youth and preventing from violent extremism is assessed as insufficient. On the other hand, the composition of the Youth Council has all the prerequisites to become an important actor for tackling factors that contribute to radicalization, as it has good representation of all ethnic groups, fosters multicultural understanding through its activities, promotes co-operation in combating ethnic polarization and improves inter-ethnic relations. In Gostivar the local community takes pride in the fact that it nurtures a culture of respect for diversity resulting, among other things, in the ability of many to speak languages of other communities. Violence is almost absent in Gostivar, but the participants identified the prevalence of political violence. Hate speech is widespread and used both on an ethnic and religious basis, pointing to the need for raising awareness and building capacity for media literacy.

Youth organizations are fundamental with their activities for building resilience, tolerance and development of a multicultural atmosphere among young people. Youth organizations and CSOs that work with youth in Gostivar implement activities such as capacity building, non-formal education, financial education, familiarity with political management, leadership skills, and creative thinking. They organize seminars, meetings and events and offer many activities that can keep young people in the municipality active and included, thus providing viable alternatives to the adoption of radical ideas and turning to violent extremism.

Institutional mechanisms for resilience and strengthening of the public security

Due to the political situation in the council, the divisions and the problematic cohabitation between the majority in the council and the Mayor, the municipality fails to make important decisions that are relevant to building resilience and preventing radicalization. Participants in the roundtable discussion noted the absence of consensus to employ more psychologists and pedagogues, stating that this is damaging the ability of schools to identify and effectively prevent radicalization. While the municipal administration plans and proposes projects, the council decides in favor of a very small number of them and allocates few finances for their implementation.

In this difficult situation, the participants identified one institutional mechanism as relevant to the needs of the municipality for setting up a mechanism for building resilience and preventing of violent extremism. This is the coordinating body for domestic violence that has been established on voluntary basis and functions without a budget of its own. However, the responsibilities and the communication between the various institutions that have a role in the mechanism are defined with protocols. A good practice for the preventive mechanism for violent extremism on the local level is to involve a number of institutions bound by a protocol of co-operation which decide on a common strategic plan and resources. Participants further indicated that there is no need for institutionalization as the local-level mechanisms can function as ad-hoc groups, as long as they have a clear mission and scope of work, as well as expertise/knowledge related to prevention of violent extremism.

The Local Prevention Council (LPC) in Gostivar is not functional. The participants complained that this institutional mechanism for prevention did not have any specified activities, pointing to a lack of professionalization and of a clear mission, as well as of protocols for co-operation on prevention of violent extremism, awareness-raising, training and communication. The participants took the view that regardless of whether an existing body is tasked or a new body established for preventing violent extremism, the existing institutions should be included and their level of understanding of the phenomenon as well as co-operation among them increased.

Roundtable participants made note of some best practices that can be used for preventing violent extremism. For example, on the local level in Gostivar there are cross-sectoral teams working with children, women and other victims of domestic violence. In addition to being fully functional, these teams cooperate with schools, the police, social work centers and the health institutions. In similar fashion, a protocol for cross-sectoral co-operation in prevention

of radicalization that can lead to violent extremism needs to be designed. Beyond communication on the local level among relevant institutions, a local mechanism for prevention of violent extremism needs to be connected with the centralized body that will coordinate, educate and act as a resource and support to the local teams. The National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Counterterrorism can assume this function.

Setting up a community action team is planned in the Gostivar municipality with operational support from Search for Common Ground and financial support from the British Embassy. This team will have 3 representatives from various institutions (the municipality, police, etc.), 3 representatives from the community (the non-governmental sector) and a representative of the religious communities, as well as 7 deputy members. Tasks of the team will include preparation of a local action plan to implement the national strategy for countering violent extremism and monitoring the implementation of the local action plan.

Roundtable participants agreed on the central role of schools among local-level institutions. Considering that exclusion and marginalization are major factors along with the socioeconomic situation for a young person to accept radical ideas, and because the parent-student relationship is very underdeveloped, the participants in the roundtable discussion concluded that there is a need to work more intensively with teachers. Participants also noted that the relationship between the parents and the teacher is suffering, as demonstrated by the absence of parents at parent meetings. The teacher-student relationships must advance in order for students to acquire learner behavior and to transfer skills and knowledge for resilience.

Also important for a local-level institutional mechanism are the representatives of the religious communities. It is important for the religious teaching to offer counter-narratives to the radical narratives that spread and cause radical behavior, since there are groups and forums in Gostivar that are conducive to violent extremism with their interpretation of religion. The participants noted that the goal of these groups is to cause distrust in the IRC. On the other hand, the presence of these groups is democratically accepted by the IRC, even though it is perceived as a potential risk. Taking into account the proliferation of books promoting extremism, religious representatives also have a role to play in reviewing the books published, as well as in preventing or stopping circulation of books that promote extremism. To this end, the IRC should strengthen its peer review system. A related need is the institutionalization and accreditation of religious education programs, particularly insofar as the IRC lacks awareness of religious teachings outside its own institutions.

Youth and education

Teachers, pedagogues and psychologists need tools and support so they can work with students in prevention of violent extremism in accordance with the national strategy. There is a need to create opportunities for contact between students of different communities, considering that the education system, which is based on language of instruction, results in physical segregation – sometimes even in different school buildings. In the absence of extra-curricular activities in the schools, activities should be organized in which young people meet, identify common interests and socialize beyond ethnic barriers. Because of the lack of services outside the school to fill their free time, youth spend time on the internet, in casinos, and in cafes, where they are exposed to all kinds of content, hate speech and values that can easily lead them to the adoption of violent behavior. The biggest risk is that youth can lose the sense that they can contribute to this society, feeling excluded and marginalized. These are considered important factors creating a conducive environment for violent extremism in the long run.

The participants concluded that the Ministry of Education should strengthen its support for the vocational schools, as through them the students acquire applicable skills. The rationale of the participants was that students from vocational schools do not have time to devote themselves to deviant activities. Additionally, roundtable participants took the view that graduates of vocational schools have skills that can be applied in the economy, allowing them to earn a living. The Ministry of Education and Science should therefore rethink compulsory secondary education, introducing filters so that a transition is allowed to a secondary vocational school with an eye to reducing the trend of enrollment in a gymnasium/general high school.

Recommendations

- Organize cultural events and sports activities to strengthen resilience, allow for contact and co-operation and decrease trends of exclusion and marginalization;
- Remove politics from education, equip schools with support staff, training and tools to prevent radicalization leading to violent extremism;
- Build the youth's self-confidence so that they do not become violent, equip them with skills that will make them resilient to violent ideas, offer them services that will fill their free time with socially productive activities, and recognize their importance to society;

- Map community needs in Gostivar and develop a local action plan to implement the National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism encompassing activities that are based on these needs;
- Taking into account the importance of local economic development, create jobs to minimize the radicalization factors and improve social well-being;
- Ensure that activities for prevention of radicalization and violent extremism are closely developed and implemented in co-operation with the Municipality of Gostivar, which is committed to the co-financing of their implementation.

MUNICIPAL ROUNDTABLE IN KUMANOV (3 December 2018)

Unlike other municipalities in North Macedonia, co-operation between the local government and non-governmental organizations prevails in Kumanovo. After the 2001 armed conflict, relations between the communities were fragile and people were divided, but with the joint work of non-governmental organizations and the municipality, this polarization has been managed effectively. Even the Divo naselje case is widely perceived as a conflict of interest rather than terrorism. Knowledge of terrorism and violent extremism is partial and widely recognized in football fan groups, which encourage violence through their nationalist slogans. At the same time, local authorities and CSOs in Kumanovo lack the experience of dealing with sports fan groups and do not know what kind of approach to pursue.

Strengthening of the civil society and sharing the best practices

Participants in the discussion confirmed in varying degrees that the process of radicalization has begun in the municipality. The main problem is that the youth is not recognized as an important factor in societal developments, even though they are at the highest risk of accepting radical ideologies that can lead to violent extremism. In similar fashion, youth are not seen as a group that can play a significant role in radicalization activities, which can also lead to violent extremism. Therefore, it is necessary to include non-formal educational activities and link them to the formal education, to facilitate a permanent offer of activities that will fill their time, and to enable self-realization in order to make them feel as important community contributors. Educational institutions cannot implement this approach alone. Co-operation among local authorities, schools and non-governmental organizations is crucial. The approach should consist of formal educational content, services (e.g., sports, youth clubs, thematic sections, competitions) as well as informal educational activities that will contribute to the strengthening of the community by building resilience among young people that will later result in the prevention of violent extremism.

The second factor discussed was the marginalization of certain groups on ethnic, socio-economic and religious basis. Such marginalization creates conditions in which some individuals cannot fit in, facilitating radicalization among persons who are misunderstood in their environment and require support. Otherwise stated, the conditions of the availability of radical ideologies or groups can inspire marginalized people to radicalize and this can lead to violent extremism. Considering the fact that the mentality of the people in the municipality is to hide those who have been radicalized and

to avoid speaking publicly about these problems (such as social exclusion), the same problems also foster other trends, such as emigration. For example, the case of Divo naselje was never discussed, causing the non-Albanian population to emigrate from this part of the city. The reasons were unknown and this led to additional segregation within the city. The need for confidence building through public discussions about the various forms of extremism is evident since participants agree on the existence of extremist views that are hidden.

Since the 2001 armed conflict, there has been a process of building community resilience and cohesion in co-operation with non-governmental organizations. Still, there remains a need of connectivity and collaboration, as well as the capacity to deal with the radicalization by building resilience to extremist ideologies. The main focus should be placed on schools, through co-operation with professional trainers and CSOs specialized in these issues. Since the issue is trending, and there is a great interest in it, more coordination with the donors is needed so that overlapping can be prevented. In addition to schools, it is necessary to strengthen the capacities of non-governmental organizations for human rights education.

In order to maintain sustainability, parent capacity building is necessary. The main source of hate comes from within the family and the adults are those who direct and conceive radical ideas in the youth. Raising awareness is important because young people learn about extremist ideologies at an early age. Parents should be educated and aware of the radicalization process so that they can guide their children. One relevant good practice that has been developed in Kumanovo in dealing with radicalization is volunteering. However, this is in decline, primarily due to economic reasons. The essence of volunteer work is human association and respecting each other by offering opportunities for self-realization so that youth volunteers can feel like they belong to a society that cares for all. The deployment of youth volunteers in local communities as active factors in the processes of prevention of radical extremism is not used enough. High school students in particular could be more engaged in the existing CSOs.

Building trust between the community and the law enforcement agencies, the role of communities in prevention - Institutional mechanisms

The participants in the discussion were of the opinion that there is hidden extremism in Kumanovo, and that the municipality should develop strategies on a local level for each institution to deal with radicalization that can lead to violence. Since the schools are a key tool against such

radicalization, school-based strategies are needed, but also necessary are strategies at the level of other institutions (e.g., hospitals, theaters). These strategies should describe relevant procedures and suggest how to behave when radicalization shows signs of moving toward violent extremism. They should be developed together and aligned with the government's strategy in order to provide guidance.

These strategies should have a holistic approach and should be interconnected with other policies. For example, one of the factors that cause radicalization is marginalization, and one of the reasons behind marginalization is chronic unemployment. The policies and the strategies for dealing with violent extremism need to address the causes created by the factors of radicalization and should be developed and implemented to meet needs on a local level. For example, the employment plan), which measures the number of unemployed people with secondary education, should include employment methods for people with primary or incomplete primary/secondary education, because these people can be easily manipulated and indoctrinated into radical ideologies that can lead to violent extremism.

In dealing with this phenomenon, skills for preventing hate speech are instrumental, as are skills for dealing with post-traumatic stress, non-violent communication, and conflict management. There are several organizations in Kumanovo working on these issues for years, such as CSO Trust, the Center for Intercultural Dialogue, KHAM and the Women's Association of Kumanovo.

It was concluded that the media, religious communities and police can play an important role in preventing radicalization. The media do not have adequate knowledge of the phenomenon and fail to inform about and prevent violent extremism. On the other hand, religious communities fail to raise awareness of the value of mutual respect. They are not active in creating counter-narratives of the radical interpretations of religion with the exception of the Islamic Youth Forum. There is no co-operation amongst religious communities, despite the fact that mobilization is important for prevention. They do not recognize their role in hindering the phenomenon and do not direct their power towards this process. The introduction of extra-curricular activities to encourage inter-ethnic and religious co-operation in secondary schools should be considered an opportunity. The role of the police is reflected in their work with the families in halting radicalization. In order to achieve this effectively, the community must not stigmatize those who cooperate with the police. The Prevention Department should strengthen their communication with the students in order to improve the trust between them. A good practice of confidence-building is the work of the police on traffic

safety. This model should be replicated for the prevention of radicalization and violent extremism.

On a local level, there are already several models of institutional cross-sectoral co-operation on various issues, such as the Local Prevention Council (LPC), a local body for preventing social risks. The UNICEF School Violence Program and the OSCE Safe Schools Project have also been identified as significant in tackling violence. It is necessary to appoint professional and motivated representatives in LPC so that they can effectively contribute in the managing of violent extremism. It is also very important that the rule of law and justice should apply to all equally and not selectively. The municipality has neither an action plan to implement the national strategy for the prevention of violent extremism, nor a reintegration program for the people who took part in ISIS as foreign fighters, and only one-time financial assistance is available. The new law on social protection should enable integrated casework that can be a response to the needs. According to the participants in the discussion, the prevention and reintegration measures depend on the local neighborhood units, since they can be the best at responding to people's needs. With the new law on local self-government, however, these units do not have legal subjectivity, such that amendments to the law are needed.

Education

The biggest challenge identified in the education system by the participants is the language segregation that encourages polarization in the municipality. Current segregation could be addressed via the construction of new schools where children would study together, but for now this solution is expensive and impossible to apply. At the same time, it was emphasized that the advocacy and activism of the non-governmental organizations successfully prevented an additional marginalization by ending the segregation of Roma children in Kumanovo schools. The local municipal institutions are advised to promote the status of Roma children by fostering understanding between the larger ethnic communities and Roma community. In addition, given the vulnerable economic situation of most of the Roma families, expenses for education are a major burden on family budgets, such that local officials should find appropriate funds, if possible.

The solutions to segregation introduced to date are not systemic, with integration generally not pursued as a civic value and mainly supported by the projects funded by international organizations for managing conflict situations. By way of contrast, systemic solutions for the implementation of joint teaching will lead to familiarization and exchange with the "other".

Building on good practices on the national level by OSCE, the local officials should support CSOs from the region in implementation of confidence-building projects. Moreover, introducing topics and pedagogical methods in the teaching process will further develop critical thinking, tolerance and co-operation.

The participants in the discussion concluded that the format developed by the OSCE through the Safe Schools Project for co-operation at school level and between the schools and the municipality is relevant for establishing a model for prevention of radicalization through the involvement of several entities. This being the case, the experience of the mediation club should be used and exchanged with the other schools. Special emphasis should be placed on building capacity and awareness of the phenomenon of radicalization that can lead to violent extremism among teachers in order to shape their statements, behaviors and the messages they send. The pedagogical and psychological services need to be strengthened in the monitoring of the teachers to check whether they show signs of radicalization and whether they can respond to radical behavior with appropriate support. Building such capacities was not perceived as a difficult task, especially since the teachers have already undergone training linked on the phenomenon and can use the newly acquired new skills in preventing violent extremism. The teachers should develop measures, methods and activities for inclusion in their annual work programs, while the municipalities should monitor the implementation of relevant measures.

It is important to use the extracurricular content in education to prevent radicalization. It is noted in the teacher's job descriptions that they should conduct after-school activities, clubs, thematic sections, competitions, and other activities beyond standard classroom instruction. However, it is necessary to stimulate teachers to implement these, with roundtable participants proposing inclusion of these activities in teachers' performance evaluations. Additionally, municipalities have a role to help schools organize free activities by linking them with non-governmental organizations. The already excellent co-operation between the professional service and non-governmental organizations is a very good basis for this. Such co-operation should be directed towards activities through which values such as sympathy, co-operation, mutual respect and empathy will be cultivated.

The schools are in need of guidance on how to behave in the event of radicalization and must be connected to a broader system for prevention. Working with the parents is crucial, but there is a trend for parents not to come to parent's meetings, resulting in less co-operation.

Social protection and mental health

Collaboration between the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Center for Social Work is very limited, pointing to the need for co-operation and training that will suit the needs of the citizens. It is necessary to appoint a focal point in the schools to coordinate with the social services while preserving confidentiality. Roundtable participants also noted that the municipal council together with representatives of the parents' councils and the Ministry of Internal Affairs have a practice that can be used for the prevention of juvenile delinquency during on-site verification.

Recommendations

- We can improve the trends through quality education. We have educated teaching staff with extensive experience, but there is a lot of work to be done in training the rest of the population. This is usually done through or in co-operation with the non-governmental and international organizations.
- It is necessary to make amendments in the educational process for the annual work programs through the schools and the municipal councils and through the Bureau for the Development of Education and the Ministry of Education and Science for the curriculum.
- Religious studies must be taught so that we can get to know and respect each other and to reduce space for radical deviation and interpretation.
- There is a clear need to focus on the development of social cohesion and multiculturalism.
- The national strategic documents should be consulted at local level as part of a bottom-up approach to implementation.
- There is a need for systematic data collection on what kind of extremist groups are present and what networks they have as a basis for countering them.
- The municipal council should encourage the educational sector to include activities to prevent violent extremism in schools' annual programs. Critical thinking and decision-making must be strengthened as a skill acquired through the educational process.

- It is crucial to make a good selection of the persons who would be included in the mechanism for preventing violent extremism in order to avoid repeating the mistakes made during the selection of members of the committees for relations with communities. VERLT is bigger than a political issue and the quality of life of the people involved must be placed above everything else.
- There is a need for improving co-operation among the authorities that have a role and competence in the prevention of violent extremism, as well as between the citizens and CSOs.

MUNICIPAL ROUNDTABLE IN STRUGA (5 December 2018)

Struga is one of the municipalities in North Macedonia that is considered as the cradle of religious and inter-ethnic cohesion. However, sporadic outbursts of religious and nationalist radicalization and violence are present on the territory of the municipality. These phenomena were most visible around the armed conflict in 2001 and its immediate aftermath, but also shortly before and after the new territorial division of municipalities in 2004. The main driver of these sporadic tensions is organized crime, mostly manifested through unsolved murders of more visible citizens with serious criminal records, drug trafficking, human trafficking, smuggling, extortion and land concessions. All these issues have seriously shaken citizens' trust in central and local institutions, especially trust in law enforcement and judicial institutions. There was a clear consensus among the present discussants that a lot has to be done in order to make Struga a safe space resilient to radicalization leading to violent extremism. Lack of infrastructure was also pointed out as one of the main problems to be addressed in order to make Struga a strong city. In general, the discussion during the roundtable was not very vivid and lively, and there was a sense of fear among the participants to speak openly about some of the issues, mainly due to the presence of high officials from the local self-government.

Media (with emphasis on local media)

The representatives of civil society, who wanted to stress the role of local and national media, opened the discussion. It was widely accepted that taking into consideration the specifics of the municipality of Struga and the past events (mainly referring to the inter-ethnic incidents following the conflict in 2001 and the territorial municipal division in 2004), the media have a responsibility to report carefully, in a balanced and non-sensational manner, in order not to incite manifestations of violent behavior, radicalism or extremist views.

Trust-building between local community and law enforcement institutions in terms of prevention – institutional mechanisms

The discussion later shifted to questions regarding trust building between local communities and law enforcement, especially in terms of developing institutional prevention mechanisms. In order to disseminate its contents and to facilitate the implementation of the National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism, constant and constructive communication between the Committee on the central level, and the local government should be carried

out. This was highlighted by representatives of the penitentiary institution in Struga, as well as by representatives of the NCCVECT. The same interlocutors also agreed that the rule of law is the key pillar for implementation of any national strategy on local level. Therefore, this pointed to the necessity of a systematic approach in strengthening the institutions, respecting the laws and preventing selectivity in the process. Only a “whole-of-society-approach” can result in long-term success. Representatives of civil society, as well as social welfare representatives, stressed that additional police activities are necessary in order to suppress criminal activities, which serve as a bad example for the youth. Criminal activities on the local level contribute to the process of radicalization leading to violent extremism. These stakeholders insisted on highlighting a series of unsolved murders on the local level. The felonies under discussion are closely related to organized crime: drug dealing, prostitution, human trafficking and local land concessions. These phenomena had resulted in a shattered trust of the citizens in local and central institutions. This refers primarily to the police who enjoy a record low trust among the local citizens in Struga. It was reaffirmed several times that restoring citizens’ faith in local and central institutions will be the crucial pillar on which prevention of radicalization leading to violent extremism should be built. In a similar vein, several discussants also circled the discussion with a conclusion that transparency and accountability of the local self-government need to be improved in order to regain the trust of its citizens.

Local self-government, local communities and other local stakeholders

The roundtable discussion continued with topics related to the competencies of the local self-government, the context in which local communities operate, as well as the role of other relevant local stakeholders. Local civil society representatives agreed that additional efforts should be made to prevent the labeling and stigmatization of specific individuals/religious/political groups and presenting them as pivotal reason for the existence of radicalization leading to violent extremism. A more cohesive societal approach is needed. Social workers, frontline school workers and local religious leaders emphasized the importance of the family in the process of creating moral and ethical values among young people. They called for deeper engagement of all local stakeholders in order to preserve and develop family values. The representatives of the local self-government highlighted that it is necessary to investigate and highlight the disadvantages of the decentralization process, which could be an obstacle to an effective implementation of efforts in preventing radicalization leading to violent extremism. On the other hand, it was noted that the right-wing extremism propelled by the “black blocks” of sports fan is not present in Struga, and local authorities should continue

to invest efforts to preserve this stability. Frontline school workers and social welfare representatives also highlighted that sports activities are of crucial importance in the aspiration to prevent violent extremism. Municipal investments in sports infrastructure are the best tool to create fertile ground for more sports activities in which local youth will be engaged. Therefore, it is necessary to allocate more funds for a sports hall, a swimming pool and other similar sports venues.

Local religious leaders

The next topic in the discussion was the important role of local religious leaders. A straightforward consensus was reached that religious communities in the municipality must actively engage in the prevention process by promoting positive values in accordance with the established religious teaching. The representatives of the largest two religious communities jointly underpinned that it is of utmost importance and necessity to rebuild the positive example from the past, when the Macedonian Orthodox Church (MOC) and the Islamic Religious Community (IRC) had been actively involved in the roles of mediators among the local population through promoting values in the spirit of cohesion. They commented on the examples from several years ago when a potential religious conflict in the village of Oktisi was prevented through a joint intervention by the local religious leaders. Furthermore, several stakeholders embraced and supported the efforts of the IRC, which constantly communicates with its membership in order to prevent violent extremism and radicalization. Also presented in a positive light was the consistency with which the IRC distances itself from individuals and groups preaching outside of the institutions and the mosques, noting that the IRC cannot be aware if such individuals or groups promote violent extremism. At the same time, concerns were raised about the Ministry of Interior's lack of activity and investigation following reports for radical behavior submitted by the IRC. Both religious leaders and other interlocutors involved in the discussion commented that better co-operation between the police and the religious communities is needed.

Education

Lastly, the discussion shifted from the role of the religious community to the role of education in preventing radicalization and violent extremism, being bridged through discussing the effects of studying religious concepts in school curricula. The local religious leaders were vocal in highlighting that History of Religions and Ethics in Religions courses are of exceptional importance in the early guidance and building a climate of coexistence, as well as

understanding among young generations. That is why these courses should be taught by theologians, who have the needed experience and knowledge to correctly transfer the moral teaching of religions. Frontline school workers commented that primary education institutions are not engaged enough in promoting inclusive and multicultural environments for their students. They raised their concerns that this creates a spillover effect resulting with a tense atmosphere in high schools later on in the course of education of youth. It was consensually agreed that the role of education is crucial in the process of prevention of radicalization leading to violent extremism. An important precondition is securing a constant increase of the level of knowledge among both students and teachers. Reforms of the teaching curricula, as well as the reorganization of extracurricular activities, were mentioned by civil society representatives as some of the ways to achieve these goals. Lastly, the positive example of Iceland was highlighted for the combined patrols comprised of parents and police officers for monitoring the behavior of adolescents. Furthermore, it was stressed that the announced reintroduction of the “local neighborhood police officers” will play an important role in building a peaceful and cohesive local community.

Conclusions and recommendations

- Taking into consideration the specifics of the municipality of Struga and the past events, the media have the responsibility to report carefully, and in a balanced and non-sensational manner in order not to incite manifestations of violent behavior, radicalism or extremist views;
- Implementation of the National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism should be carried out through constant and constructive communication between the Committee on the central level, and the local government;
- The rule of law is the key pillar for the implementation of any national strategy on the local level. This points to the necessity of a systematic approach in strengthening the institutions and promoting consistent implementation of legislation;
- Additional police activities are necessary in order to suppress criminal activities, which serve as a bad example for the youth. Criminal activities on the local level contribute to the process of radicalization leading to violent extremism;
- The trust of citizens in the institutions is shattered. This refers primarily to the police who enjoy a record low trust among the local citizens in Struga.

The transparency and accountability of the local self-government needs to be improved in order to regain the trust of its citizens;

- Additional efforts should be made to prevent the labeling and stigmatization of specific individuals/religious/political groups and presenting them as a pivotal reason for the existence of radicalization leading to violent extremism;
- Taking into account the importance of the family in the process of creating moral and ethical values among young people, deeper engagement of all local stakeholders is needed;
- It is necessary to investigate and highlight the disadvantages of the decentralization process, which could be an obstacle to effective implementation of efforts in preventing radicalization leading to violent extremism;
- The deviant phenomenon of right-wing extremism propelled by the “black blocks” of sports fan groups is not present in Struga;
- Sports activities are of crucial importance in the aspiration to prevent violent extremism. Municipal investments in sports infrastructure are the best tool to create fertile ground for more sports activities in which local youth will be engaged. Therefore, it is necessary to allocate more funds for a sports hall, a swimming pool and other similar sports venues;
- The religious communities in the municipality must actively engage in the prevention process by promoting positive values in accordance with the established religious teaching;
- It is of utmost importance and necessity to rebuild the positive example from the past when the Macedonian Orthodox Church (MOC) and IRC had been actively involved in the roles of mediators among the local population through promoting values in the spirit of cohesion;
- The stakeholders embraced and supported the efforts of the Islamic Religious Community (IRC), which constantly communicates with its membership to prevent violent extremism and radicalization. At the same time, concerns were raised about the Ministry of Interior’s lack of activity and investigation following reports for radical behavior submitted by the IRC;
- The History of Religions and Ethics in Religions courses are of exceptional importance in the early guidance and building a climate of coexistence, as

well as understanding among young generations. That is why these courses should be taught by theologians, who have the needed experience and knowledge to correctly transfer the moral teaching of religions;

- Primary education institutions are not engaged enough in promoting inclusive and multicultural environments for their students. Furthermore, this creates a spillover effect resulting in tense atmosphere in high schools;
- The role of education is crucial in the process of prevention of radicalization leading to violent extremism. An important precondition is securing a constant increase of the level of knowledge among both students and teachers;
- The positive example of Iceland was highlighted for the combined patrols comprised of parents and police officers. Furthermore, it was stressed that the announced reintroduction of the “local neighborhood police officers” will play an important role in building a peaceful and cohesive local community.

MUNICIPAL ROUNDTABLE IN TETOVO (19 November 2018)

According to workshop participants, the lack of success in managing interethnic conflicts in Tetovo has increased the risk of violent extremism, such that the adoption of the measures for countering violent extremism in Tetovo comes late. Additionally, community relations are assessed as fragile. The main factors identified in the discussion as influencing an environment in which radical ideas can be adopted and can lead to violent extremism are:

- Religious intolerance for people belonging to another religion. The discussion exposed a need for the people in Tetovo to love and treasure their own religion, but also to learn how to respect the religious freedoms and religious choices of others.
- Segregation in schools. This situation contributes to the divisions between the communities and the lack of contact deprives us of the opportunity to meet and get to know the other. The practice of inter-community dialogue is missing, except when it is encouraged by foreign-funded projects.
- Inner-community divisions. Example of this recurrent trend discussed in the workshop were the divisions in the prisons between groups that practice Islam or similarly between fan clubs of local football teams.

Institutional mechanisms for community co-operation:

The Local Prevention Council (LPC) in Tetovo was assessed to be non-functional, mainly due to the fact that the involved institutions are afraid to engage as they will overlap LPC council and the establishment of protocols for communication would be helpful to increase functionality, whereas the effectiveness will depend on the continuity and turnover of the council members with the change of government. To this end, it is important for the municipality to take over coordination of LPC for the purpose of countering and preventing violent extremism or to replace the LPC with a local council for countering violent extremism which will constitute a decentralized body of the national council.

Workshop participants also discussed other possible mechanisms that can be useful for preventing and countering violent extremism. For example, the youth council that has not been operationalized yet and the local council for prevention of juvenile delinquency that is being formed now. For the purpose of prevention and building resilient youth in pre-school and primary education, the participants proposed forming at least two teams comprised of psychologists, sociologists and pedagogues, who would implement a training

program using games, roleplays, and increasing skills for dialogue and co-operation.

The practice of the municipality to finance multicultural youth activities needs to be continued and increased support should be provided. To this end, the civil society organizations that work with youth need to approach the municipality and initiate activities that will develop inter-community co-operation and dialogue. The municipality should consider financing extra-curricular activities of the schools that facilitate inter-community interaction (such as debates, competitions, sports activities) as well as activities that stimulate the acquisition of skills such as critical thinking and conflict resolution, as well as a culture of dialogue.

Civil society and exchange of best practices

The most important conclusion from the discussion was that the institutions should not transfer the responsibilities for prevention and countering violent extremism from one to another. The whole of society approach should be applied where responsibilities need to be shared among all stakeholders in the community.

Civil society and media have a pivotal role in managing hate speech, conflicts, and hostility, as well as in preventing adoption of radical ideas that might lead to violent extremism. To this end, one should consider working with the media and/or financing activities that will result in production of materials and content that will inform citizens about radicalization. Training is also needed so that the media do not become factors for instigating violent extremism.

Civil society organizations are dependent on the finances of international organizations, as the municipality does not provide enough funding for their activities. More importantly, because funding for P/CVERLT work is not widely available as of yet, the Government on central level and through the local self-government units needs to secure funding for prevention from radicalization. Working with the football clubs and their fan clubs should be considered a priority. To this end, one should use the authority of the club managers to prevent use of hate speech towards other ethnic groups, taking into account that because the teams are ethnically mixed, cheering on ethnic basis may affect the team members' performance. These efforts can lead towards prevention of polarization and segregation of communities.

For the purpose of prevention from radicalization, the workshop participants noted that it is crucial for the municipality to activate the neighborhood

communities. Through them, the community can be engaged in early prevention from radicalization. However, the neighborhood communities need to be supported by recommended approaches and a methodology in order to mobilize the community. In partnership with civil society, institutions and international organizations, neighborhood communities need to engage actively in raising awareness for critical thinking, media literacy and an overall promotion of democratic culture.

Enhancing trust between the local communities and the police

The representatives of the different institutions participating in the workshop attested that they are working closely and cooperating with the police. However, they concluded that the police is not very effective in its work. Namely, because police can only detain but not imprison or keep the criminals off the streets), citizens' trust in the work of the police is low. The effectiveness of the police can be enhanced if certain changes or re-organization of procedures are implemented, such as introduction of anonymous registration and strengthening the internal control mechanisms. The trust in police work will be improved if the police conducts more educational and preventive activities, as is the case with the traffic safety.

Workshop participants observed that the police do not have capacity or procedures on how to implement public education/awareness raising for radicalization and violent extremism. Currently lacking is a platform on community level that the police can join. More importantly, the police need to become more active on the community level, to get to know and respond to the needs of the citizens, making the local communities safer. Community policing is seen as contributing to building trust, but only if it is effective in making the neighborhoods safer.

Co-operation with religious communities, parents and women's organizations

Religious communities should be involved with community-based activities, as well as in prisons and schools, because they are important for re-socialization. Working with families is crucial in order to develop a culture of understanding and inter-ethnic co-operation, and should play an active role in creating narratives that are offering a moderate interpretation of the religion that would prevent the spread of a radical ideology. The religious officials with their expertise and reputation have a pivotal role and can have an important influence on the population to avoid the alternative religious

interpretations and follow the tolerant religious teaching in the churches, mosques and other places of worship.

The representatives of the major religious communities agreed on the proposal to allow priests and imams to enter prisons and detention facilities in order to perform the religious services properly. They proposed a more liberal approach to the secularism of the state where the religious leaders can work more actively with the families and children, especially with students in schools in order to offer much-needed support, and to provide answers and explanations as a response to radicalization. To this end, it was also requested that the political leaders and other officials show sensitivity to the public usage of religious symbols, especially due to the multicultural and the multi-confessional character of the Macedonian society.

Parental councils are not very active and work with them needs to be intensified, especially because neither the communities nor the families are aware of the prevalence of the problem/phenomenon of radicalization that can lead to violent extremism. Only through recognizing the important role families play in early warning and prevention and stimulating citizen's organizations to work closely with parents on this problem can the implementation of the prevention mission of the national committee be achieved.

Women's organizations in Tetovo act as mediators between institutions and the victims as well as the members of the community at large. This has been proven in the field of domestic violence where CSOs, in coordination with organizations networked in the gender platform, advocate for the rights of the victims before the institutions. Because lessons relevant preventing violent extremism can be learned from such experiences, the available capacities in civil society, especially the ones providing services to victims of (gender) violence, should be tapped as a resource.

The role of education

Education has a central role in the system of prevention of violent extremism, providing skills for resilience and thus serving as an instrument for prevention of radicalization. In Tetovo, some activities already implemented in schools are relevant and compatible with prevention from radicalization that can lead to violent extremism. These are the OSCE Safe Schools Project; the Nansen Inter-ethnic Cooperation Project, the OSCE Building Bridges Project and the new project that will enable the co-operation with parents. Such activities should be interlinked so that the teachers are aware that the skills acquired through different projects are relevant and useful for prevention of radicalization.

Radicalization is prevented by applying tools against discrimination and exclusion of youth, considering that youth are most at risk to adopt radical ideas. Therefore, the municipality plans to include youth in decision making in the schools and at community level, with an eye to making youth feel included in the society. To this end, training is being organized for decision-making in schools, students elect their representatives in the student associations and their initiatives are being implemented (such as leisure activities, organization of sports events, etc.). The Youth Council of the municipality is still not operational, but once it is activated youth should be included in important decision making at the municipal level. The municipality needs to put additional efforts to ensure representatives in the school student bodies and in the municipal youth council, as well as disseminate the decisions to the youth they are representing.

For this target group- the youth- the participants in the round table thought that the Internet still remains a challenge. The schools have been blocking online pages but are lacking an online security program or e-safety policy that will advise how children should critically assess internet-based content and build resistance. Additionally, raising awareness among and working together with parents to monitor their children's online activity have not yet started in Tetovo. Overall, participants concluded that there is a paramount need to work with families in improving their children's critical thinking.

In principle, critical thinking is developed in a classroom through the education content using different pedagogical methods. In addition, the participants identified extra-curricular activities as an entry point for more critical thinking activities to be applied. However, due to being overburdened by the curricular activities, almost none of the schools realize extra-curricular activities. Possibilities for the municipality to stimulate realization of extra-curricular activities should be explored. Possible options for this include providing funding for activities and overall reform of the system that encompasses extra-curricular activities.

Finally, the participants discussed the role that pedagogical and psychological services have on school children. This expert service is seen as an important link in the prevention system from radicalization, as they can work on a daily basis with the students at high risk of acquiring radical ideas by regularly talking to them individually or working through group therapy programs. It is essential that the front-line workers continuously work with asocial students, those that have been problematic during classes and those coming from dysfunctional families. Setting up a system that will monitor and report on their progress regularly is a prerequisite for the new prevention system on the municipal level. While it was recognized that their role is very important

during the school hours, the participants also noted that the overall impact of the pedagogical and psychological services in schools is limited because of lack of such support services after classes. This is especially the case in Tetovo because therapeutic communities and other types of psycho-social support groups are lacking in the municipality.

Recommendations

1. The municipality needs to determine the source of inter-ethnic hatred and the incitement to violence and to plan and implement activities that prevent spread of inter-ethnic hatred and incitement to violence;
2. Local prevention councils are a legal obligation and Tetovo municipality needs to revive them, but, there are no finances available for activating the LPC. Overcoming problems with overlapping responsibilities and funding should be resolved in co-operation with the central Government;
3. In view of the already existing segregation, encouraging socialization, co-operation and exchange without ethnic barriers starting from kindergartens through primary and secondary schools should be the number one priority of the municipality, in order to enable contact with the ‘others’ in the community;
4. Continuous monitoring and mapping of risky behavior in schools must be established, with awareness raising and training of teachers, psychologists and pedagogues on how to notice and prevent radicalization a prerequisite for this;
5. The municipality needs a system to respond to violent extremism. To make the response more effective, this system should consist of a coordinating body with representatives of all institutions at local level, as well as a communication model between such institutions;
6. Religious leaders have a leading role in promoting integration, co-operation and nonviolence in Tetovo. Therefore, they need to be actively involved in prevention of radicalization that can lead to violent extremism.



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