

VORTEX¹

¹ This presentation is a condensed version on the application submitted in November 2021. Since the text is condensed, most parts of the application has been cut out, making the text somewhat inconsistent.

Excellence

1.1 Quality and pertinence of the project's research and innovation objectives

1.1.1 Introduction, objectives, and overview of the research programme

Radicalisation into extremism and terrorism continues to be a threat to open democratic societies – and “a real and present danger”² for the European Union. The proposed doctoral network “VORTEX – Coping with Varieties of Radicalisation into Terrorism and Extremism” will lay the groundwork for Europe to confront this threat in a much more informed and sustainable manner by establishing a more integrated and a more relevant study of radicalisation and political violence. VORTEX will establish a strong academic network across disciplinary boundaries and focus on three key research areas: the internal dynamics of radical groups and individuals, the social context of these radicalization processes, and the access points for measures of preventing and countering violent extremism. This comprehensive research programme is urgently needed due to the complexity of the political and social challenges and the fragmented state of radicalisation studies that have not done justice to the intricacies of radicalisation pathways and the complex (and still little understood) effects of intervening in them.

Radicalisation occurs on both cognitive and behavioural levels in a complex dynamic, it is buttressed by offline and online support communities, and it tends to impact individuals and groups with pronounced psychological need for significance.³ Radicalisation is also an interactive process. There are plenty of co-escalation dynamics with other radicalised groups, as well as with those who aim to intervene in radicalisation processes. About the former, for instance, right-wing extremists have frequently exploited fears of perceived Islamisation and alleged loss of national identity. Islamists, likewise, have exploited fear among European Muslims of corrupting European societies.⁴ Moreover, radicalisation processes within Europe are also intimately affected by external processes, such as the activities of the American alt-right, Russia, and Islamist groups like ISIS. Lastly, radicalisation tends to grow in socially disadvantaged areas and areas of limited statehood. Radicalisation takes both religious and secular forms, and manifests on national, transnational, and international levels.

Equally pertinent is the political, legal, and social response to these developments. Policies against terrorism has seen the adoption of sometimes draconic anti-terror laws undermining human rights (particularly but not only outside Europe) and giving extraordinary surveillance rights to intelligence agencies. At the same time, countering terrorism also generated a plurality of innovative prevention measures by civil society organisations, state entities or both. There is a fine line between effective countermeasures and the infringement of human rights and rule of law. These various and interlinked processes threaten to undermine normative milestone achievements, arrangements, and agreements of the EU, the international community, and global society. Understanding and explaining them is thus an important task, which requires multidisciplinary research and collaboration between basic research and practice.

Over the years, a range of research centres, governmental agencies, academic journals, and departments devoted to the research on terrorism and radicalisation have been established. In particular, since 9/11, radicalisation has received increasing attention. Regrettably, in research, as well as in public debate, radicalisation has still most commonly been presumed to be a unidirectional process, leading individuals, after being ideologically convinced, to endorse and employ violence. Moreover, research on radicalisation is currently trapped between securitisation approaches, and socio-cultural, cognitive, and contextual explanations. Thus, radicalisation is seen as either 1) a security challenge caused by individuals or risk groups (with the aim to find short-term solutions primarily in the form of symptomatic treatment, or punitive action); or 2) a process conditioned by deeper social, economic, and cultural structures that are

² European Commission. 2020. A Counter-Terrorism Agenda for the EU: Anticipate, Prevent, Protect, Respond (COM 795 final).

³ Kruglanski, A.W., Bélanger, J. J. & Gunaratna, R. (2019). *Three Pillars of Radicalisation, Needs, Narratives, and Networks*. Oxford U.P., p. 42.

⁴ Europol. (2021). European Union Terrorist Situation and Trend Report, p. 37.

far more complex to address, since they relate to the long-term impacts of failed integration and lack of social cohesion. Moreover, until recently, the lion's share of policies and studies – and certainly public discourse – has focused on Islamist terror attacks and much research has employed the concept of radicalisation primarily to explain the habits and actions of predominantly young male second or third generation Muslims in Europe.⁵ This came at the expense of other secular and religious extremisms, of which radicalisation into right-wing extremism poses probably the greatest threat to democracies.

The proposed doctoral network, VORTEX, will provide a more integrated and thus meaningful research programme not only but primarily for doctoral candidates to pursue their research in a fruitful and meaningful dialogue among relevant disciplines and in a dense web of supervision, training and interaction to jump start both successful and relevant careers. Moreover, VORTEX's network of supervisors, doctoral candidates, associated partners and practitioners will provide programmatic and empirical basis for a more holistic multidisciplinary study of radicalisation phenomena. And lastly, VORTEX will provide stakeholders with refined, policy-relevant, and evidence-based insights and assist in the design and evaluation of appropriate countermeasures programmes. VORTEX will implement this programme in ten research work packages (WPs) structured in three research areas (introduced above): (A) Pathways of Radicalisation; (B) Social and Political Contexts of Radicalisation; and (C) Countering Radicalisation.

1.1.2 *Pertinence and innovative aspects of the research programme*

Existing research on (de-)radicalisation, as discussed above, suffers from a few important gaps:

1. It does not provide enough knowledge about (transnational) mobilisation, recruitment, and the role of social media at the intersection of online-offline diffusion of radicalising messages.
2. Meaning-making at all political and societal levels, in regard to radicalisation, remains understudied.
3. It lacks a focus on comparative research across a variety of extremisms, let alone of multidisciplinary research programs.
4. Empirical evidence is often anecdotal, since data collection is not only challenging but often, particularly at the crucial interplay between qualitative and quantitative methods, *ad hoc* and unsystematic.
5. It does not give equal weight to, nor sufficiently integrate, hard and soft measures of prevention.
6. It does not provide stakeholders with sufficiently refined and policy-relevant insights. Thorough discussions about evaluation and quality management have only recently gained more attention.

In view of all of this, VORTEX has developed a research programme that has as a primary objective to lay the groundwork for a more integrated, more relevant and more multidisciplinary study of radicalisation and political violence. Its research areas tackle the three key research themes in this field and brings them into a hitherto lacking dialogue. While VORTEX is at the core a doctoral network, it builds on strong commitments from the supervisors to be engaged in the research themselves and the willingness of all of them to improve radicalisation research by integrating relevant disciplines and by creating meaningful knowledge hubs of methodological, conceptual, and empirical exchanges. VORTEX will be integrated into well-established PhD programmes at the participating institutions. Moreover, it provides the doctoral candidates with high-quality supervision, support, training, and research resources in clear structure of co-supervisions, secondments, and interaction. It does so at a degree that allows doctoral candidates to thrive in their own discipline, to be successful in their respective PhD programmes, and to truly benefit from the involvement of VORTEX.

VORTEX will cover different transnational, national, and local spaces, where radicalisation into terrorism and extremism unfolds. VORTEX will analyse the whole range of religious and secular extremist phenomena. It studies radicalisation through shifts in political culture such as populism and conspiracism. It includes all countermeasures, hard and soft, that are taken to prevent and counter radicalisation

⁵ Schmid, A.P. 2013. *Radicalisation, De-Radicalisation, Counter-Radicalisation: A Conceptual Discussion and Literature Review*, ICCT Research Paper, p. 4.

phenomena. It pays particular attention to the role of gender and other diversity aspects for the emergence and for the prevention of political violence. VORTEX therefore

1. systematically collects primary data, both qualitative and quantitative, online and offline and analyses them along various state-of-the-art methodological approaches;
2. brings various disciplines of humanities and social sciences into fruitful dialogues;
3. provides transnational and interdisciplinary settings for research and training, transcending geographical, socio-political, and scientific boundaries, and encouraging professional mobility and knowledge exchange; and
4. includes, in all stages of the research process, dialogues with decision-makers at European, national, and local levels as well the expertise of increasingly professional civil society organisations engaged in prevention work.

VORTEX will thus provide stakeholders with refined, policy-relevant, and evidence-based insights and assist in the design of appropriate countermeasures programmes. Doctoral candidates will be not only exposed to these relationships between civil society, (inter)governmental agencies, enterprises and academia, but actively integrated in shaping them). Most importantly, the doctoral candidates will benefit from a dense web of supervision and training within and beyond academia, in a strong network of researchers and practitioners in and beyond Europe, that enables them to jump-start their professional careers within and beyond academia.

To that end, VORTEX has developed ten relevant research work packages that structure their work in three research areas that cover radicalisation processes, their contexts, and measures against radicalisation. These research areas will function as subgroups within the consortium, with its own formats of exchange, supervision, training, and coordination. Research Area C will substantiate the impact strategy of VORTEX from a research perspective.

1.2 Soundness of the proposed methodology

1.2.1 Overall methodology

VORTEX aims to be epistemologically and ontologically open and inherently multi-methodological and multidisciplinary, for only this can do justice to understanding and explaining (de-)radicalisation as a social and highly complex phenomenon. This openness can only be implemented by providing both spaces for specialisation and for exchange. VORTEX's research structures aim at precisely this, as it creates research areas that integrate work packages in terms of conceptual development, methodological toolboxes, empirical advances as well as impact and transfer. VORTEX's pluralism also concerns its terminology. While VORTEX provides a broad methodological and ontological umbrella, it leaves room for more specific definitions in individual research plans and in the lead disciplines of the work packages.

VORTEX builds on broad understandings of radical and radicalisation. Radical is always relative to the socio-political mainstream of a given society and context.⁶ To be radical, moreover, could be an entirely cognitive/intellectual position. Insofar as it translates into action, it can include both violent and non-violent activities. As a framework definition, VORTEX views radicalisation as a process where the legitimacy of a normative order is increasingly challenged and/or where the radicalised demonstrates an increasing willingness to fight the institutional structure of this order.⁷ Radicalisation is thus not per se problematic. Radical behaviour becomes a problem when measures, acts or actions not only go beyond what is considered as the norm or what is generally accepted as being normal, but also constitute a threat to a political or social order.⁸

⁶ Önnersfors, A. & Steiner, K. 2018. Introduction. In *Expressions of Radicalization, Global Politics, Processes and Practices*. London: Palgrave-Macmillan, p. 12.

⁷ Abay Gaspar, H., Daase, C., Deitelhoff, N., Junk, J. & Sold, M. (2020). Radicalisation and Political Violence – Challenges of Conceptualizing and Researching Origins, Processes and Politics of Illiberal Beliefs. *International Journal of Conflict and Violence* 14(2), p. 1-18.

⁸ Ogonnaya, U.M. 2013. Globalization, Religious Extremism and Security Challenges in the Twenty-First Century, *Journal of Sustainable Society* 2(2), p. 60.

Because of its heterogeneous nature, devising one-size-fits-all strategies to counter radicalisation is problematic. In some work packages, VORTEX analyses the ambivalent nature of countering radicalisation, but it primarily zooms into the truly problematic radicalisation processes, namely those into terrorism and extremism – here radicalisation can become a threat as can wrongly designed countering measures. Unlike radicalisation, extremism and terrorism both describe a condition, not a process. Extremism refers to any ideology or act perceived or claimed to violate common moral and procedural standards⁹ and constitutes in the European context activities that aim to eliminate the fundamental values of liberal democracy. Terrorism is a specific means of action (violence against civilians), aimed at causing an immediate effect (to spread fear). Terrorism is but one possible outcome of radicalisation.¹⁰

The pathways of radicalisation into and within political violence are not linear. This broader understanding emphasizes process over outcome and offers a conceptual framework suitable for the pluralism of analytical approaches included in VORTEX. This doctoral network thus takes the character of the process and the complexities of radicalisation into terrorism and extremism seriously and investigates its ambivalences and intricacies at various analytical levels and intersections of political and social phenomena. VORTEX's expanded understanding of radicalisation thus provides leeway for differentiated normative-political assessments of various activities of radicalisation and of countering radicalisation.

VORTEX covers a wide range of disciplines relevant for radicalisation research. Those include political science, sociology, (social) psychology, criminology, semiotics, digital humanities, communication studies, religious studies, educational sciences, and peace and conflict studies. As all beneficiaries are inherently multi- or interdisciplinary, there will be more disciplinary perspectives included into VORTEX – like law and history. Along with this pluralism in disciplines, a whole range of methods will be applied for data collecting and analysis, ranging from qualitative to quantitative methods. However, there will be a focus on some qualitative methods, for comparative case studies designs that resort to textual analyses and to (semi-structured) interviews are the most commonly applied methods in many research areas. The first six months of VORTEX will be devoted not only for setting up all formal processes of VORTEX and implementing the recruitment strategy, but as well discussing the modes of communication within and across research areas and disciplines.

1.2.2 Gender dimension and other diversity aspects

Gender dimensions are notoriously understudied in radicalisation research. VORTEX addresses gender and diversity aspects systematically on various levels and recognizes that “cultural construction of femininity and masculinity, cannot be avoided in any research activity.”¹¹ In VORTEX, gender is not only used as a noun, but also as a verb, how gender in radicalizing contexts is constructed (to gender). Ergo, in VORTEX, the task is to reveal how “gender is presented and represented, performed”.¹² We suppose that anti-feminism is a common characteristic in most extremisms. Thus, the role it plays in radicalisation and mobilisation will be an important research topic. This means that VORTEX will make gender a cross-cutting topic in all research areas. Furthermore, the gender dimension will be addressed in career development plans and Individual Research Projects (IRP).

The same is true for other diversity aspects. There are two further perspectives on that in the VORTEX research programme, both are linked to the “us-vs.-them” dichotomy: first, extremist ideology often establishes clear boundaries between in- and outgroups. Particularly right-wing extremism and Salafism are inherently anti-pluralistic and therefore pose a threat to the open and liberal societies in Europe. The rejection of diversity thus becomes an important factor for inside-dynamics of radicalising groups but also a problematic dynamic in the interaction of radical groups with their environment. Second, groups at the risk of being radicalised often belong to minorities. Prevention strategies need to take this into account when designing their programs. VORTEX thus analyses diversity-related issues not only as a potentially

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Abay Gaspar et al. 2020.

¹¹ Järviluoma, H.; Moisala, P.; & Vilkkö, A. 2003. *Gender and qualitative methods*. London: Sage, p. 1.

¹² Ibid.

mobilizing factor in radicalisation processes but as well as a sensible field of action in measures to counter radicalisation.

Brief description of the ten doctoral positions

1. Radicalising rhetoric: understanding legitimating and mobilising discourse Malmö University

Objectives

This individual research project will analyse secular and religious radical rhetoric. The overarching objective is to contribute to an enhanced understanding of radical rhetoric: its discursive content, its legitimating and mobilising potential, its development and change, and its national and transnational proliferation. Concretely, the objective of the doctoral project is to develop

- methodologies to systematically allocate qualitative data with high validity and reliability (data triangulation, semi-structured interviews, data harvesting from social media),
- research designs of relevance for structuring the allocated data (case study method, theory triangulation, comparative designs: MSSD, MDSD, synchronic and diachronic comparisons),
- useful analytical frameworks to identify worldviews and discourses with a radicalising and mobilising (quantitative and qualitative content analysis, constructivist methodologies),
- insights regarding the legitimating and mobilising potential of radical discourse,
- insights regarding the development, change, and proliferation of radical discourse.

Expected Results

The doctoral student is expected to generate

- research-relevant integrated methodologies, designs, and analytical frameworks,
- new empirical and theoretical knowledge on how radical discourse develop, change, proliferate,
- new empirical and theoretical knowledge on the legitimating and mobilising potential of radical discourse
- conceptual and theoretical insights of direct relevance to the counteraction of radical rhetoric,
- four single- or co-authored peer-reviewed articles to be published in relevant English language peer-reviewed journals, such as *Journal of Strategic Security*, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, and *Terrorism and Political Violence*. These articles will constitute the core in the article-based PhD thesis.

Objectives

This doctoral candidate aims at understanding legitimating and mobilising discourses. It seeks to answer pertinent and policy relevant questions regarding the content of radical rhetoric, about its legitimating and mobilising potential, and its national and transnational proliferation. It will analyse radical rhetoric comparatively and study religious rhetoric (Islamist, but potentially also Christian) as well as secular (right-wing, left-wing, environmentalist) primarily in Scandinavia but also its (foreign) inspirational sources – it will give particular attention to rhetoric relating to anti-Semitism, anti-feminism, and vigilantism. This project will systematically allocate qualitative on-line data, as well as off-line data such as interviews with radicalised individuals in different contexts, their families.

2. The function of radical ideology for acceptance, status, and meaning

Malmö University

Objectives

This individual research project will analyse how radical ideology is used to demarcate acceptance into a group, relationships to outgroups, ingroup hierarchies, and a group's purpose. The overarching objective is to contribute to an enhanced understanding of radical ideology is used to define inclusion and exclusion, relationships to outgroups, ingroup hierarchies, and group purpose. Concretely, the objective of the doctoral project is to develop

- methodologies to systematically allocate qualitative data with high validity and reliability (data triangulation, semi-structured interviews, data harvesting from social media),
- research designs of relevance for structuring the allocated data (case study method, theory triangulation, comparative designs: MSSD, MDSD, synchronic and diachronic comparisons),
- useful analytical frameworks to identify worldviews and discourses with a radicalising and mobilising (quantitative and qualitative content analysis, constructivist methodologies),
- insights regarding the function of radical ideology on group dynamics.

Expected Results

The doctoral student is expected to generate

- research-relevant integrated methodologies, designs, and analytical frameworks,
- new empirical and theoretical knowledge on the function of radical ideology on group dynamics
- four single- or co-authored peer-reviewed articles to be published in relevant English language peer-reviewed journals, such as *Journal of Strategic Security*, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, and *Terrorism and Political Violence*. These articles will constitute the core in the article-based PhD thesis.

Objectives

This research focuses on how radical ideology is used to define acceptance into a group or excluded, define attitudes to and the social position of out-groups, define who is regarded as high- or low-status members within the group, and to formulate the purpose of the group.

Concretely, using social psychology, this research will firstly analyse how radical groups exploit individuals' need for acceptance/belonging, and the fear of rejection, to make group members obedient to the in-group as a way to secure group membership.

Secondly, this research will study social comparison processes and in-group favouritism. This means that the doctoral candidate will study how radical groups depict themselves and their status, what other groups they regard as high-status groups, and what groups that are used as low-status points of reference.

Thirdly, this research will study how radical groups indicate what behaviour (martyrdom for instance) that improves (or jeopardizes) the individuals' status and glory within the group.

Lastly, this research will analyse how radical groups define an ultimate meaning, a cause beyond the self and one's concerns, and how its members are supposed to take part in such a cause.

3. The primary and secondary prevention conundrum: the ambivalences of the intersection between universal and selective prevention

Peace Research Institute in Frankfurt

Objectives

Primary and universal prevention is the cornerstone of any long-term prevention strategy. It includes many facets like civic education, social work, and democracy promotion and is being implemented in many spaces from schools to the digital world. Yet with more and more programmes to fund project in this field and more and more comprehensive political strategies to tackle extremism, measures of primary prevention and measures of secondary prevention have increasingly – both intentional and unintentional – overlaps putting considerably pressure and ambivalence to the self-understanding and role clarity of those implementing these measures. This PhD project traces these pressures and ambivalences and asks which shape these various intersections between primary and secondary prevention, which the underlying mechanisms are and which consequences for prevention practice and for political strategies arise from that. It investigates pressures that might push primary prevention to include more and more secondary prevention elements; and secondly, the informational, disciplinary and access needs that might push secondary prevention more into the direction of primary prevention.

Expected Results

A PhD thesis in monographical format and two journal articles that will be based on empirical research with the following design and data sources:

- (1) narrative and reflective workshops with practitioners involved in these prevention measures;
- (2) in-depth comparative case studies with one case study looking, first, into secondary prevention measures that have been implemented in primary prevention environment (clearing entities in schools); secondly, into measures that conceptually combine the two like in formats that mix civic education with cultural education; third, civic education measures in a secondary/tertiary prevention environment like in penal institutions / prisons. The third phase of the project will include transfer workshops to discuss the empirical findings and policy recommendations.

The doctoral candidate will work closely via Violence Prevention Network with the German competence centres on Islamist extremism and on right-wing extremism, being umbrella institutions for the various civil society actors involved in prevention work. The PhD project will be implemented, jointly with FUAS, an associated partner, who will be involved in the supervision of the doctoral candidate.

Objectives

This research looks at how activities of primary prevention and measures of secondary prevention are increasingly – both intentional and unintentional – overlapping, putting considerably pressure and ambivalence to the self-understanding and role clarity of those implementing these measures.

The research will analyse these intersections from two directions: first, the conceptual, legitimating, reputational, and financial dependencies and pressures that might push primary prevention to include more and more secondary prevention elements; and secondly, the informational and disciplinary need as well as the necessity of access that might push secondary prevention more into the direction of primary prevention. The analysis will be based on narrative and reflective workshops with practitioners involved in these prevention measures and in depth comparative case studies with one case study looking into secondary prevention measures that have been implemented in primary prevention environment (clearing entities in schools, for instance); secondly, into measures that conceptually combine the two like in formats that mix civic education with cultural education; third, civic education measures in a secondary/tertiary prevention environment like in penal institutions/prisons.

4. Comparing Structures of Evaluation and Knowledge Management in across Europe

Peace Research Institute in Frankfurt

Objectives

With more and more attention and funding to measures aimed at preventing pathways into extremism, there are increasingly demands for evaluation and for improved quality management – with the aim of improving existing programmes, of understanding their impacts and of ensuring accountability towards the grant givers. Across Europe, we see not only very differently structures prevention landscapes, with varying degrees of reliance on state and civil society organisation, funding levels and plurality of approaches, but as well very different structures and discourses linked to evaluation, quality management and knowledge transfer. The European Union intends to create new European and national knowledge hubs in this area. There are, however, no systematic and detailed comparative studies on the various structures of evaluation and knowledge management across Europe that could substantiate this debate and pave the way for further cross-national knowledge transfer in this field. This PhD project will contribute to fill this lacuna.

Expected Results

A PhD thesis in monographical format and two journal articles that will include: comparative case studies across the European Union mixing qualitative comparative analysis across all EU member states with four in-depth comparative case studies. Data generation will be based on semi-structured expert interviews and online expert surveys and a series of reflective and transfer workshops. The doctoral candidate will work closely with the international division of the Berlin based Violence Prevention Network, with its various involvements in European structures.

Objectives

This research compares structures of evaluation and knowledge management across Europe: Across Europe, we see not only very differently structures prevention landscapes, with varying degrees of reliance on state and civil society organisation, funding levels and plurality of approaches, but as well very different structures and discourses linked to evaluation, quality management and knowledge transfer. The EU intends to create new European and national knowledge hubs in this area. There are, however, no systematic and detailed comparative studies on the various structures of evaluation and knowledge management across Europe that could substantiate this debate and pave the way for further cross-national knowledge transfer in this field. This work package will tackle this lacuna by a comparative study across European states. It will be based on semi-structured expert interviews and online expert surveys, and a series of reflective and transfer workshops.

5. Dynamics of knowledge production: Understanding the dominance and diffusion of security cultures around radicalisation

The University of Marburg

Objectives

The PhD project investigates how the concept of radicalisation emerged in science, in particular in psychology, social sciences and criminology and how it was translated into the political discourse as well as into specific policies aimed at preventing or responding to radicalisation. It combines a historical perspective with an analysis of the authority of science for the development of policy programmes and policies in national and transnational contexts. The project is based on the assumption, that the concept has both various roots and is translated differently into politics and that both depends largely on the security culture within which the concept of radicalisation was developed. Therefore, it will compare the emergence and the translation of radicalisation by different actors (experts) and through different practices and mechanisms in at least two different national security cultures in Europe, e.g. Italy and Germany, in order to examine the impact national security cultures have on how radicalisation is understood and how it is applied in politics and policies.

The main objectives of the PhD project are twofold. First, a historical and societal contextualisation of the concept of radicalisation. In this regard the project aims at a deeper understanding of radicalisation as a scientific construct that is designed for explaining specific security threats. Thus, from a historically informed perspective, differences in processes of securitisation in selected study countries could be explained, but also possible convergences in knowledge production through transnationalisation could be identified. Second, the PhD project contributes to an analysis of how and which academic knowledge is transferred – or occasionally not transferred – into deradicalisation policies.

The PhD student will develop interdisciplinary research skills by combining historical perspectives with perspectives from the sociology of knowledge. Furthermore, s/he will become an expert for at least two national discourses on radicalisation as well as institutional policies of deradicalisation. The consortium will provide the PhD students with the relevant disciplinary expertise, but also with access to relevant institutions for collecting data.

Expected Results

Empirically, the PhD project will deliver insights into the role of historically situated security cultures for the emergence and transformation of the concept of radicalisation. In this regard it will uncover differences and similarities of understandings and policies of (de)radicalisation within Europe. Furthermore, it will contribute to the theoretical discussion within VORTEX through a constructivist perspective on the historical and socio-political contexts of deradicalisation policies. The project will also shed light on how deradicalisation policies are shaped by academic knowledge production and in particular on the mechanisms knowledge is translated into policies.

Objectives

This research focuses on practices of the production of knowledge about (de-)radicalisation and how this knowledge is translated into deradicalisation policies. It will provide deradicalisation policies with the potential to reflect on their embeddedness in broader societal and cultural understanding about security and threats. It also aims to improve the collaboration of policy actors and research institutions regarding how academic knowledge can inform deradicalisation policies. With a comparative analysis of different national and transnational security cultures as formative contexts of the production and translation of knowledge about (de-)radicalisation the work package aims to investigate the emergence of epistemic communities, the epistemic practices and the mechanisms of translating knowledge into policies – this includes securitisation aspects as well as the gender dimension in these knowledge production dynamics.

6. Counterterrorism policies and their consequences in Europe

University of Helsinki

Objectives

The objective of this individual research project is to conduct a comparative study of political contestation around counterterrorism policies in selected European states during the 21st century. The expansion and broadening of counterterrorism has not gone without political contestation, neither in the EU nor in domestic politics. Neither has the counterterrorism policy development been entirely uniform across the EU. National counterterrorism policies have taken different turns, depending e.g. on the local threat level and security cultures.

The project sets to conduct comparative case studies on political contestations around counterterrorism in four European states in which counterterrorism policies and laws have developed differently. By comparing the political debates in these countries, the project provides new information about how European states have sought to strike balance between principles of liberal democracy, maintaining societal resilience and developing effective counterterrorism policies. It also analyses how considerations of potential negative unintended consequences have affected policy decisions and what kind of efforts have been suggested or made to avoid or mitigate them.

Expected Results

The project provides important new information about the efforts to maintain societal resilience to terrorism in European states. It will highlight potential gaps in understanding of potential negative consequences of counterterrorism policies and ways to improve counterterrorism policymaking. It sheds new light into what kind of challenges domestic policymakers and politicians face when building support for new policies and thereby provides information that can help in building consensus in the EU level and improve implementation of EU-level policy recommendations in the domestic level.

The project also makes a major contribution to scientific study of counterterrorism policies in the domestic level within the EU. National counterterrorist policies have rarely been subject of academic research and especially comparative study. It will also develop analytical and methodological framework that can be used in further studies on domestic counterterrorism policy debates.

Objectives

The research analyses the significant paradigm shift of counterterrorism policy in the post 9/11 Europe. Measures against terrorism have not only intensified, but also broadened, especially through the adoption of pre-emptive security practices aiming at early prevention. This research will focus on contestation and negotiation around counterterrorism to find out how European states have sought to solve the tensions between counterterrorism needs and safeguarding liberal democratic principles. It will also look at how the possibility of negative unintended consequences has featured in these debates – how such considerations have affected policy decisions and what kind of efforts have been suggested or made to avoid or mitigate them.

7. Fake and Conspiracy: Disinformation dynamics and radicalisation

The University of Turin

Objectives

Developing advanced skills in cultural, visual, and digital semiotics; in digital humanities; in the philosophy of communication; in the application of hybrid quantitative-qualitative methods; in the analysis of radicalisations, extremisms, and fundamentalisms in the fields of religion and medicine; in coping with the fake and conspiracy theories; development of doctoral soft skills.

Expected Results

Advances in the knowledge of how the digital fake stimulates extremism and radicalisation, especially in the fields of religion and medicine; policy suggestions for stakeholders; preparation of a white paper on the digital fake and extremism

Objectives

The research dives deep into the nexus between disinformation dynamics and radicalisation. Fake news encourages citizens to vote according to a distorted and radicalised understanding of societies.

This research will apply semiotic methods to a series of case studies in which the digital propagation of 'the fake' is supposed to play a central role in the construction and diffusion of conspiracy theories and in the spurring of extremism, radicalism, and fundamentalism. The fields of religion and medicine will be particularly focused upon, as well as the blurring of fiction and non-fiction. This qualitative approach will be combined with a quantitative approach based on the automatic or semi-automatic analysis of big data through neural networks and artificial intelligence.

8. Extremist identity creation and meaning-making at the nexus between online and offline environments

The Université libre de Bruxelles

Objectives

The Internet has long been identified as a powerful political instrument, which has been increasingly used by terrorists and radical groups to forward their goals. Al-Qaida was certainly one of the first radical jihadi organisations to understand the power and utility of online information technologies to spread its message and recruit. The power of the web has been further deepened by ISIS. However, the Internet's potential is also fully invested by radical right movements. Consequently, the goal of the doctoral candidate will be to 1. draw the role of narratives and imageries in the creation of specific identities in online radical groups; 2. make an empirical comparison between ideologically different groups; 3. contribute to the online observation of radical groups; 4. contribute to joint research seminars and final conference and publications; 5. contribute to organising different academic events (seminars, conferences).

Expected Results

- 1: empirical insights of online radical groups communication and mobilisation;
- 2: at least 3 peer-reviewed articles that will be published in relevant English language peer-reviewed journals, such as *Journal of Strategic Security*, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, and *Terrorism and Political Violence*;
- 3: an enhanced collaboration between researchers and practitioners/stakeholders;
- 4: methodological outputs of online radical groups ethnographic fieldwork.

Objectives

This research sets the focus on the online-offline nexus in extremist identity creation and meaning-making. It has four main goals:

The first one is to draw on and update the analysis framework of "Internet Politics" Resnick (1998)¹³ linked to "Politics Within the Net" and "Political Uses of the Net". The idea here is, using extensive online ethnography of Islamists' and extreme-right social network pages, to uncover group belonging and emotional communities online radical groups intend to constitute.

The second goal is to explore the narratives and imaginaries used by radical online communities in order to frame and embody the identity of the group they intend to represent – this includes the hitherto neglected gender dimension in these narrative framing processes.

The third goal is, using qualitative semi-structured interviews with members of radical online groups, to analyse what kind of consequences those narratives and imaginaries have in their social life.

The last goal of this research will be to explore the legal and ethical constraints surrounding academic research on online radicalisation.

¹³ Resnick D. 1999. Politics on the Internet: The Normalization of Cyberspace, in C. Toulouse & T.W. Luke (Eds), *The Politics of Cyberspace*. New York & London: Routledge.

**9. Secondary/Tertiary Prevention: Deradicalisation, Disengagement and Reintegration:
Approaches of security agencies, social service agencies and civil society
University of Oslo**

Objectives

This PhD project will study different approaches to reintegration of former extremists in the Nordic countries, as carried out by programmes run primarily by security-oriented services, municipal agencies, and civil society organisations, with varying degrees of interagency collaboration. This study will analyse the pros and cons of these different approaches.

Expected Results

By identifying strengths and weaknesses of different approaches to reintegrate former extremist, finding may inform and improve ongoing and future exit and reintegration programmes.

Objectives

The research investigates into policies, programmes and projects for promoting “deradicalisation”, “exit” or “rehabilitation” of (former) violent extremists and terrorists. Those activities have often suffered from simplistic understandings of the complex processes involved, unclear goals regarding what the desired outcomes should be, and contradictory methods to achieve desirable outcomes.

The research will study different approaches to the reintegration of former extremists in the Nordic countries, as carried out by programmes run primarily by security-oriented services, municipal agencies, and civil society organisations, with varying degrees of interagency collaboration.

One case of the first variety is the Danish Exit programme for inmates convicted of terrorist offences, run by prison authorities, police and municipalities in collaboration.

A case of the second variety is the mentoring programmes for radicalised individuals in Norway, organised by municipalities but using a mix of mentors from civil society and professionals. The third variety is represented by the Finnish Exit 2020 programme for former extremists, run by an NGO and using formers as mentors. This study will analyse the pros and cons of these different approaches.

10. Radicalisation and the politics and social dynamics of populism and protest

Babeş-Bolyai University

Objectives

- To identify the main political varieties of current populism and to connect them to the developments of the contemporary geographical, cultural and sociological divides
- To analyse the proliferation of contemporary protest movements and to produce relevant arguments in order to weigh if this is a pan-European phenomenon or if it rather reflects a series of heterogeneous trends that are specific to some national and/or regional processes of radicalisation
- To identify and analyse the main markers of radicalisation of populism and protest movements in contemporary Europe
- To select based on a motivated process three case studies in Europe to study in-depth the developments in populism and protest.
- To analyse if the radicalisation of populism and protest movements leads to a further dilution of the boundaries between the two or on a contrary to their progressive intertwining
- To strongly consolidate the capacity of the PhD student to analyse populist and protest movements
- To reinforce the research capacity of the “European Paradigm” Doctoral School of Babes-Bolyai University and of the Vortex Consortium

Expected Results

- 1 PhD thesis on the given topic (Populism and protest movements: Convergence or collusion? Evidence from three European cases)
- 1 scientific article published in a prominent international journal including the comparative presentation of the three case studies
- 1 book chapter on the conceptualisation of the relation between populism and social movements

Objectives

The research seeks to answer a series of questions about the nature, triggers, and areas of overlapping and collusion between populism, protest, and radicalisation.

First, what are the main political varieties of current populism and to what extent do these variations correspond to the developments of the contemporary geographical, cultural, and sociological divides? The research will contribute to mapping populism from a comparative perspective and to highlight its contemporary dynamics.

Second, is the proliferation of contemporary protest movements a pan-European phenomenon, or does it rather reflect a series of heterogeneous trends that are specific to some national and/or regional processes? This second research question is meant to allow for a consistent assessment of the similarities and differences of the new wave of protest movements across Europe.

Third, to what extent do we deal with a process of radicalisation of populism and protest, and what are the main markers of this process in contemporary Europe? The research investigates whether radicalisation is a process that characterizes these two political phenomena and if this leads to a further dilution of the boundaries between the two or, on a contrary, to their progressive intertwining.