

# VORTEX NEWSLETTER

*Greetings and welcome to our second edition of our newsletter in 2025! The year started with great momentum, highlighted by an inspiring consortium meeting in Turin. Our doctoral researchers are deeply engaged in their projects and gaining valuable insights during their secondments.*

*This May, PRIF is pleased to host four VORTEX doctoral candidates, who are taking a moment to reflect on their work and share early findings, while being in the midst of intensive research.*

*In this edition, we're excited to share that many new blog posts have been published in the past three months, offering fresh insights into our ongoing research and current issues. We also reintroduce our VORTEX doctoral researchers, provide updates on their projects, and report on our recent meeting in Turin.*

*We look forward to continuing our work together and sharing more progress in the future.*

*Your editorial team*

*Anna, Laura, Lena and Lotta*

## VORTEX News



### **VORTEX Network Meeting in Turin (March 25 to 28, 2025)**

From March 25 to 28, 2025, the VORTEX research network met at the University of Turin to discuss research progress and key methodological questions. Doctoral researchers shared their latest findings and received valuable feedback. The program also included an exchange on data management and on ethical challenges in research guided by Marco Krüger. Our guest Gabriele Marino also presented on science communication strategies. The meeting offered new inspiration for ongoing work and strengthened collaboration within the network. The next meeting will take place in spring 2026 in Cluj-Napoca.

## The VORTEX Blog Series

VORTEX has its own blog series where our doctoral candidates regularly publish short pieces related to their work. Check it out at: <https://vortex.uni-mau.se/blog/>. The following blog posts have been published since the last VORTEX newsletter:

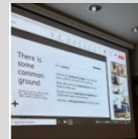
### [The Overton Window: How Ideas Shift from Radical to Mainstream](#)

by Violette Mens



### [HEPP5 Conference Presentation - Does the Mainstream Right Radicalize?](#)

by Javid Ibad



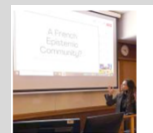
### [HEPP5 Conference Presentation - The Anti-Establishment Feelings of Conspiracy Theories in the Process of Radicalization](#)

by Heidi Campana Piva



### [HEPP5 Conference Presentation - Debating the existence of a French epistemic community on the topic of radicalization.](#)

by Violette Mens



### [Hay'at Tahrir al-Sham: From Jihadism to Syrian Islamism](#)

by Orwa Ajjoub



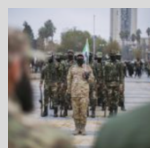
### [AfD in Power? Three Doomsday Scenarios for the German P/CVE Landscape](#)

by Lotta Rahlf



### [The Last Faction Standing: How Did HTS Survive the Conflict and Make It to Damascus?](#)

by Orwa Ajjoub



### [A Case for Stable Funding Structures for 'Live Democracy!' and Similar State Programmes](#)

by Lotta Rahlf



### [Democracy under Threat: What to Do Against Attacks Against Politicians in Germany?](#)

by Lotta Rahlf



### [“Everything was Great” - Making the Most out of Feedback Methods in Universal/Selective Prevention Contexts for Monitoring](#)

by Laura Stritzke



## Presentation of the VORTEX Doctoral Candidates



**Camilla Winde Gissel** is a PhD fellow at the Center for Research on Extremism (C-Rex) at the University of Oslo. Her research examines how national approaches to intervention for (former) violent extremists shape practices of deradicalization, disengagement, and re-integration. She holds degrees in Cultural Criminology (Lund University), Cross-Cultural Studies (Copenhagen University), and a BA from Aarhus University. In her previous work, she analyzed how female foreign fighters are portrayed in Danish political and media narratives.



**Heidi Campana Piva** is based at the University of Turin in Italy, where she is studying disinformation and conspiracy theories on social media in the fields of religion and medicine. As a semiotician, Heidi is using computational linguistics to search for language patterns, signs, and codes that help to understand the discursive mechanisms and structure of radical conspiracy theories on Telegram.



**Javid Ibad** is a PhD fellow and research assistant at the Faculty of European Studies at Babeş-Bolyai University. In his dissertation, he explores how center-right parties shift their political positioning under the influence of radical-right actors, focusing on coalitions, competition, and indirect effects. As part of VORTEX, he contributes expertise on European party politics and radicalization. He also co-hosts the Europe Elects podcast and holds degrees from Baku State University and Leiden University.



**Joshua Farrell-Molloy** is pursuing his PhD within the VORTEX project at the Department of Global Political Studies, Malmö University. In his research, he investigates the role of digital subcultures in processes of radicalization and extremism. He completed his MA in Security, Intelligence, and Strategic Studies at the University of Glasgow and holds a BA in International Relations from Dublin City University. Prior to starting his PhD, Joshua gained experience through internships at the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism and the Institute for Strategic Dialogue. His academic interests include the radical right, online extremism, and the phenomenon of foreign fighters.



In her dissertation project [Laura Stritzke](#) explores how practitioners in extremism prevention—such as teachers and social workers—balance support and control. While often seen as supportive, their roles also involve social control, like risk assessment. By examining how these practitioners navigate this tension, the project sheds light on the practical implementation of extremism prevention. To better understand this dynamic, the project introduces a framework for analyzing the intersection of support and control in “soft” extremism prevention, especially when different types of prevention overlap. For instance, programs that promote skills and awareness may also identify individuals at risk, blending support and control. Using a comparative case study approach, Laura examines prevention programs in schools (associated with support) and prisons (linked to discipline). Through diverse methodologies, she explores the experiences of practitioners in these settings. This project provides insights into the realities of prevention practice and how support and control can be balanced across different institutional contexts.



[Lotta Rahlf](#), Vortex doctoral candidate at the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt, systematically compares the development of P/CVE policies and programmes with a special view to the institutionalisation of evaluation and quality management among political decision-makers across 12 European countries. In individual country chapters, she first traces the development of P/CVE policies and national action plans and funding programmes in each country and examines in particular the extent to which this development is linked to quality assurance and improvement. Using an analytical framework, she systematically compares the 12 countries in terms of how institutionalised evaluation and other forms of quality management are with regard to P/CVE policies or national action plans and funding programmes. She subsequently examines possible contextual factors that explain why some countries are more institutionalised than others by applying a Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA). Lotta has already spent a first secondment at the Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX) at the University of Oslo since she is, next to Julian Junk at PRIF, co-supervised by Tore Bjørgo. In June and July 2025, she is hosted by the Violence Prevention Network (VPN) in Berlin for a second secondment, where she will gain insights into evaluation research and practice.





**Marzena Oliveira Ribas** is a PhD candidate at the Université Libre de Bruxelles. She holds a Master's degree in Psychology with a specialization in Clinical Psychology from the University of Gdańsk and a Bachelor's degree in Biomedical Engineering with a specialization in Informatics in Medicine from Gdańsk University of Technology. In her thesis, she investigates how far-right and Islamist online groups use gendered narratives to construct communities. Grounded in uncertainty-identity theory (UIT), her research examines how these narratives help reduce gender-related uncertainty and strengthen group cohesion. Through a comparative analysis of six English-speaking Telegram groups—comprising Islamist and far-right communities that are male-oriented, female-oriented, or mixed—she explores how gendered narratives differ across ideological lines (Islamist vs. far-right), target audiences (men vs. women), and sources of authority (religious vs. non-religious). Marzena has completed her first secondment at the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF) and will soon begin her second at the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism (ICCT) in The Hague.



**Orwa Ajjoub** is a PhD candidate in Global Politics at Malmö University, where he investigates radical religious rhetoric and its role in legitimizing intra-jihadi violence. His project builds on a Master's degree in Middle Eastern Studies from Lund University. Alongside his doctoral research, Orwa works as a research analyst specializing in jihadism and the Syrian conflict. He has authored policy papers on radicalization in Lebanon and Syria, including in al-Hol camp. His work has been featured in outlets such as Syria Deeply, the Middle East Institute, The Atlantic Council, and Jihadica.



**Rohan Stevenson** is a PhD candidate at the University of Helsinki. His research examines how 'extreme right-wing terrorism' is problematised in European counterterrorism policy, drawing on a Foucauldian analytical approach. His academic interests lie broadly in the study of the far and extreme right, with previous work focusing on eco-fascist Telegram groups. Originally from London, Rohan holds an MA (Hons) in Geography from the University of Edinburgh and an MA in Sociology from Goldsmiths, University of London.



**Violette Mens** investigates how knowledge is produced by researchers and how it is then translated into political action. Her PhD project is supervised by Prof. Thorsten Bonacker (Centre for Conflict Studies - Marburg) and Prof. Leena Malkki (Centre for European Studies - Helsinki). Violette is particularly interested in looking at the formation of the state's political position in contact with ideas from academia. The goal is to make clear the formation of diverse epistemic communities between the "groups" (researcher, political actor and practitioner) and how they exchange. On a practical level, she finished a bibliometric analysis of the field of radicalization, on which she is currently writing her first article. In parallel, she is doing an in-depth analysis of the French scene using both expert interviews and written discussions in the political scene. Added to this, she started conducting interviews with professionals from the UK and plans to do the same with Germany and Norway before the end of the year. The end goal will be to compare them with the French case.

## News from VORTEX doctoral candidates



**Orwa Ajjoub** is currently completing his second secondment at the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF), where he will remain until the end of May. Although he had originally planned to conduct this phase of his research in Amman, logistical challenges prompted a change of plans—ultimately leading him to PRIF. During his stay in Frankfurt, Orwa is working on his second dissertation article, which explores how Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) - the group that assumed power in parts of Syria following the collapse of the Assad regime - constructs in-group and out-group identities. Drawing on Social Identity Theory, his research analyzes the group's discursive strategies and identity-building processes. Currently, he is focused on collecting online data to support his analysis and is looking forward to engaging with PRIF's research community on topics related to identity, extremism, and conflict narratives.



As part of her doctoral training, [Marzena Oliveira Ribas](#) completed a secondment at the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF) in February and March 2025. During this period, she focused on advancing her individual research project while also connecting with scholars working on related topics. One particularly enriching exchange took place with a researcher exploring identity from a philosophical perspective, offering a complementary angle to her own work. The secondment provided her with the opportunity to establish new academic connections and gain deeper insights into ongoing radicalization research at PRIF.



Over the past few months, [Violette Mens](#) has actively engaged in several academic events. She attended the HEPP5 Conference in Helsinki, where she presented initial findings from her work on the French epistemic community surrounding the concept of radicalization. She spoke as part of a panel alongside her colleagues Heidi Campana Piva and Javid Ibad, receiving valuable feedback that helped refine her research questions. A blog post about her presentation is already available on the VORTEX website. Following this, she participated in a one-day workshop in Liverpool organized by Dr. Gilbert McLaughlin and Dr. Antoinette Huber, where she exchanged insights with both academics and practitioners from the UK working on radicalization. This event allowed her to strengthen her knowledge of the field while forging new links with both researchers and grassroots PCVE actors. Later this April, Violette will spend a week at St Andrews University, where she plans to present her findings, conduct interviews, and attend a class on knowledge production in the field of extremism research.



At the 5th Helsinki Conference on Emotions, Populism, and Polarisation (HEPP), [Javid Ibad](#), Violette Mens, and Heidi Campana Piva co-organized a panel titled “Radicalization as a Challenge to the Liberal Democratic Social Contract.” In this session, Javid presented his paper “Does the Mainstream Right Radicalize?”, Violette discussed “A French Epistemic Community? Analysing Academic Positions Regarding the Field of Radicalization,” and Heidi contributed with a presentation on “The Anti-Establishment Feelings of Conspiracy Theories in the Process of Radicalization.” Javid Ibad is preparing to begin his second secondment at the Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX) at the University of Oslo in late April.



**Camilla Winde Gissel** is currently on her secondment with SaLTo at Oslo Municipality, where she is observing their multifaceted work supporting young people navigating pathways out of political violence and broader social challenges. SaLTo brings together a wide network of practitioners—from police and security services to social workers, mentors, and academics. Their approach relies on close cooperation among these diverse actors. While political violence is often viewed through a security lens, SaLTo adopts a holistic perspective: here, security is just one piece of a larger puzzle, alongside mental health, education, employment, housing, and daily life challenges. In Oslo, the table is round.



**Heidi Campana Piva** has recently begun her second se-  
condment at the Peace Research Institute Frankfurt (PRIF) under the supervision of Prof. Dr. Julian Junk. During her two-month stay, she plans to co-present at the Center Colloquium at Marburg University with Vio-  
lette Mens on April 28, and participate in the upcoming VORTEX workshop at PRIF on May 12. The workshop will feature contributions from several doctoral research-  
ers, including Orwa Ajjoub, Marzena Oliveira Ribas and Violette Mens.



**Joshua Farrell-Molloy** spent two months at the start of the year on secondment with VORTEX partner C-REX (Center for Research on Extremism) at the University of Oslo, where he continued to develop his dissertation and presented his research in a seminar, receiving constructive feedback. His time in Oslo also allowed him to advance his thinking for his next article and refine the scope of his overall thesis, which examines physical culture within far-right digital subcultures.

## Research Output

There is nothing to report here since the last newsletter, but that does not mean that nothing is happening at VORTEX! We are working on exciting projects, so stay tuned.

## VORTEX at Conferences

- Helsinki Conference on Emotions, Populism and Polarised Politics (5-7 March)  
In early March, Violette Mens, Heidi Campana Piva, and Javid Ibad attended the 5th Helsinki Conference on Emotions, Populism and Polarised Politics (HEPP5).



## Other News



Check out new episodes of the **Europe Elects** podcast with Javid Ibad as co-host.

Link: <https://europeelects.eu/podcast/>

Stay updated on our social media channels!



Project: 101073440 - VORTEX - HORIZON-MSCA-2021-DN-01  
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**Funded by  
the European Union**