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VIOLENT RADICALISATION & FAR-RIGHT EXTREMISM IN EUROPE

Aristotle Kallis, Sara Zeiger, Bilgehan Öztürk



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& FAR-RIGHT EXTREMISM
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Edited by Aristotle Kallis, Sara Zeiger, and Bilgehan Öztürk



Hedayah
countering violent extremism



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Sara Zeiger is the Program Manager for the Department of Research and Analysis at Hedayah, the International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism. She has published on various topics, including on the role of women in P/CVE; the role of education in P/CVE; counter-narratives for P/CVE in the Middle East, North Africa and South-East Asia; and the role of the mining sector in P/CVE in Africa. Zeiger is currently a Non-Resident Fellow in International Relations and Counter-Terrorism for TRENDS Research & Advisory. Zeiger previously worked as a Research Assistant at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies at Harvard University. She also served as a Head Teaching Fellow for the Harvard Extension School, and was a Graduate Assistant at Boston University. She holds an MA in International Relations and Religion (concentrations: Security Studies and Islam) from Boston University, and graduated as valedictorian with a BA in Psychology and Religion from Ohio Northern University.

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FOREWORD

This volume has been made possible by the valuable collaboration between two esteemed organisations, namely SETA and He-dayah. Their collaboration was embodied in the form of a research project that aimed at shedding light on the burning issue of the violent radicalisation and extremism of individuals and groups that belong to - or at least are sympathetic to – the non-mainstream right currents in European countries. In this way, the current volume draws attention to the non-religious dimension of the phenomena of radicalisation and violent extremism and contributes to a relatively small body of works, as opposed to the dominant approach in the relevant literature which, for the most part, affiliates the phenomena with religious forces and elements. This approach is important since overemphasising one aspect of the phenomena runs the risk of blinding societies and policymakers to the other aspects and, therefore, making them less effective in terms of fending off the negative impacts of the phenomena. This work aims to be conducive to the due recognition of the overlooked aspects of these phenomena and hopefully serve as the first step towards tackling them.

The well-grounded organisation of the volume also adds to its novelty. In order to invigorate the book's analytical strength, the editors stroke a balance between a 'zoom-out' and a 'zoom-in' perspective in collecting the chapters. In this sense, the book is divided into two sections: the first consists of thematic reports, which delve into the transnational nature of the phenomena, while the second comprises country-specific reports that examine their idiosyncratic quality in local contexts. Furthermore, the selection of countries for country-specific reports is also pertinent, as it provides an opportunity to contrast very different, both historically and geographically,

contexts: a Western European country with a long history of democracy, on the one hand, and, on the other, an Eastern European country with a relatively short experience of democracy. Lastly, it goes without saying that each report was written by an expert on the topic and, where necessary, substantiated by fieldwork.

This volume is a timely contribution to the current corpus of remedies and prospective efforts to counter the phenomena of violent radicalisation and extremism in a period when the rise of right-wing populism is being witnessed across the European continent. The political atmosphere across Europe increasingly succumbs to right-wing discourse and policies, which originally manifested themselves as concerns over the rising number of Muslims and immigrants among far-right politicians. Protectionism, anti-immigrant sentiments, xenophobia and Islamophobia find appeal among considerable portions of electorates. The recent elections in Germany, the Netherlands and Austria established that either centre-right parties succumbed to extreme nationalist views or far-right movements became more and more popular. To be clear, both paths lead Europe to an increase in Islamophobia, xenophobia and radicalisation. Against this backdrop, the violent radicalisation and extremism of individuals and groups belonging to the non-mainstream right threaten to undermine and destabilise societies and democratic orders. At this juncture, the findings and policy recommendations of this work are crucial in paving the way for a contribution to the resilience of governments and societies in the face of the alarming rise of violent radicalisation and extremism in Europe.

I would like to thank the distinguished authors and editors of this timely and articulate work for their painstaking efforts throughout the writing process.

Prof. Burhanettin Duran
General Coordinator of SETA

ABOUT THIS REPORT

The report is the result of a research project organised by He-dayah and the Foundation for Political, Economic and Social Research (*Siyaset, Ekonomi ve Toplum Araştırmaları Vakfı*, SETA), born out of the need to understand both the generic and context-specific dynamics of the violent radicalisation of individuals and groups belonging to the far-right. The aim was to explore the causes, dynamics, multiple trajectories, and effects of violent radicalisation among the particular constituency of the far-right in Europe.

Such an exploration is timely in two significant ways. First, the world is witnessing an appreciable rise in violent rhetoric and terrorist action from the far-right in Europe. While the dynamics of this trend may differ from country to country and from region to region, more research is needed at the intersection of structural, historical, biographical, and anthropological approaches to radicalisation, violent extremism, and efforts to counter it.

Second, understanding and addressing violent radicalisation of the far-right requires at least as much focus on the particularities of the radicalisation process as on the particular field of the so-called 'far-right'. Preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) policies in particular, and to some extent P/CVE programmes, have tended to treat the violent radicalisation of the far-right as a subset, however distinct, of a wider problem. Understandable though this approach may be, it runs the risk of confusing the similar outcome (violent extremism) with the potentially unique and very different causes and drivers of radicalisation in the particular domain of the far-right. While on the programme level there exist initiatives that focus on the far-right and exit strategies, they are not always reflected in policy and could become expanded.

The report contains four essays, two of which focus on a single country (United Kingdom and Hungary) and two more on important inter- and transnational themes (single/lone actors and online radicalisation of the far-right). In following this formula, the project seeks to explore the role of different factors at various stages of the process of radicalisation and against the backdrop of different political cultures and historical legacies. The essays were presented at an international workshop held in Ankara on 24-25 May, 2017, hosted by SETA, Hedayah, and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Turkey.

Each essay is structured in two discrete parts. The first part features a policy-based treatment of the subject, with emphasis on recommendations for future P/CVE action. The second part provides an extensive analytical treatment of the subject and case study, with a literature review, historical background, and analysis of particular facets backed by relevant evidence.

The project was funded by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Turkey.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This report seeks to investigate why and how far-right movements radicalize, to what extent the process of radicalisation is driven by national dynamics or transnational factors, and in what circumstances these factors lead to violent radicalisation of the far-right. Attempting to fill a gap in the literature on the subject, this report also looks at the consequences of this radicalisation on communities in contemporary Europe as well as how the governments and mainstream political parties have dealt with far-right radicalisation and violent extremism in their countries. The aim of this report is to facilitate an evidence-base for better counter-terrorism policies and programs, particularly for the spectrum of prevention known as preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE).

While this report does not comprehensively cover all the potential topics related to the radicalisation of far-right violent extremism in Europe, it provides a beginning step to enhance the available research on the subject and generate some specific examples and recommendations for policy and programme responses. Two thematic chapters are able to assess the overall picture of far-right violent extremism in Europe from a specific angle of focus. Two country chapters are able to illustrate aspects and trends that could be seen as specific to geopolitical contexts (e.g. Western/Central and Eastern Europe), political cultures, and regional/national historical journeys. Taken together, the contributions will extrapolate more general insights about far-right violent radicalisation from the experience of Britain and Hungary while at the same time noting that each country has a unique context.

In addition to the more specific recommendations outlined in the chapters by each of the authors, there are several broader recommendations that are useful for programming and policymaking, especially with relation to P/CVE.

Recommendation 1: As a starting point, there needs to be a recognition by all stakeholders that far-right violent extremism may be a significant threat to communities in Europe.

For example, as Feldman and Stocker point out in Chapter 3, the Channel programme in South Wales receives more referrals for far-right violent extremism than religion-based extremism and the recent attack on the Finsbury Park Mosque in London is evidence that the violence that can be carried out by those with far-right ideology is very real. Some governments recognise this threat more aggressively in their policies than others—for example, as Littler points out, the German government has established a specialist centre focused on far-right and far-left extremism, the *Gemeinsame Extremismus- und Terrorismusabwehrzentrum* (GETZ). In contrast, the Italian policies towards violent extremism have largely focused on religion-based extremism and tackling the migration crisis for individuals travelling from North Africa. However, even this growing recognition of the threat from far-right violent extremism is not without its political, social and cultural challenges. Despite some countries having established policies on far-right violent extremism, there is work to be done in convincing all stakeholders involved, including the general public, that far-right violent extremism can pose a significant threat to national security. At the same time, the threat should not be over-dramatised—individual governments should of course tailor their policies to match with the actual threat that far-right violent extremism poses to their country.

Recommendation 2: As with other forms of radicalisation to violent extremism, localised context is important when determining a potential profile of a far-right violent extremist. As the research has shown, the far-right ‘profile’ is generally one of young, white males—but other forms of identity may be at play, including religion, economic class, education or social status. Different country contexts seemed to result in different profiles and personas that depended heavily both on national and international political discourse, as well as localised in-group/out-group sentiments. At the very least, the manifestation of far-right violent extremism is very much dependent on the national political culture, but can also be influenced by more localised cultural fluctuations that influence symbology and narratives. In the Hungarian context, the core ideology of the far-right has morphed over time, drawing on a sense of nationalism and xenophobia to justify anti-Roma sentiments and actions that have now started to turn towards anti-immigration and Islamophobia in some cases.

Recommendation 3: Recognise that questions around a sense of identity are at the core of far-right radicalisation in Europe. The identity question is often in relation to key political issues that are playing out in the current political discourse in many European countries. While the nuances of these discussions vary from country to country, the overall questions that are being asked relate to what it means to be ‘European’, and who is included in that categorisation. At a national level, this means redefining what it means to be ‘Hungarian’ or ‘British’ or ‘French’ or ‘German’. Far-right violent extremists capitalise on this identity question by claiming to have the correct and most ‘pure’ interpretation of it, and justifying acts of violence or hate speech against anyone not fitting within that interpretation. This means that sometimes the

mainstream political discussions around, for example, immigration, can sometimes reinforce ideologies of the far-right.

Recommendation 4: Interventions should begin with identifying ‘trigger’ points for far-right violent extremists. While the radicalisation to violence of the far-right is a complex process that often relies on a number of factors, several authors pointed out that especially with lone actors, there are several trigger factors that could help with detection and intervention of far-right violent extremists. Such trigger factors are mental illness, loss of employment, or changes in family or social status. While these factors alone do not lead to violent extremism, a mapping of these factors onto the potential exposure of individuals to far-right ideology may help to reveal localities of possible intervention before violence takes place.

Recommendation 5: Utilise the online far-right networks to facilitate offline interventions. There are a number of opportunities for preventing and countering far-right radicalisation both in the online and offline spaces. Online, there are opportunities for intervention to counter the narratives of far-right groups, particularly through hate speech and exclusionary rhetoric. However, the influence of online propaganda should not be overestimated; far-right groups also often have a disproportionate presence online (as opposed to actual membership), and a heavy focus of online counter-messaging may not effectively reach the target audiences for prevention. Despite the heavy focus of counter-terrorism and counter-extremism policies and programmes aimed at the internet, there was also evidence that emerged of offline interactions - between peers in particular - can provide platforms for engagement. This means utilising the online presence to identify the ideology and networks, and designing interventions that work offline to counter those messages received in the online space.

Recommendation 6: Work with the private sector to prevent the spread of violent ideology online. Even though far-right violent extremists are not necessarily as widespread and present as they may appear online, the broader political climate in Europe may reinforce certain ideological values that are the core of far-right justifications to violence. As previously mentioned, this includes discourses on immigration or Islamophobia, which can sometimes lead to hate speech or hate crimes. In order to tackle the spread of violent far-right ideology, the private sector companies whose platforms are utilised to share ideas (Facebook, Google, Twitter) should assess and reassess their internal policies for both hate speech and terrorism. Notably, these private sector companies have made great strides in the past several years to better identify and take down content for religion-based extremism, but have not had similar results for far-right and far-left violent extremism.

THE AUTHORS

Paul Jackson is Senior Lecturer in twentieth-century and contemporary history at the University of Northampton, UK. His main research interests focus on the dynamics of neo-Nazi, and other extreme-right ideologies in Britain and Europe in the post-war period. He is a co-editor of the Wiley-Blackwell journal *Religion Compass: Modern Ideologies and Faith*, and editor of the Bloomsbury book series *A Modern History of Politics and Violence*.

Mark Littler is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology and Policing at the University of Huddersfield. His research interests include political violence, policing, trust, hate crime, and extremism online. He has over a decade of research experience, including working on projects funded by the Open Society Foundation, Bill Hill Trust and the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. He has also advised the UK government's Department for Communities and Local Government, Home Office, and Cabinet Office on questions around far-right extremism.

Matthew Feldman is Professor of the History of Modern Ideas at Teesside University, UK, where he also co-directs the Centre for Fascist, Anti-fascist and Post-fascist Studies. A frequent reviewer for Times Higher Education, his current work focusses upon historical trajectories of the far-right, in both publications and lectures, including for policing and governmental agencies, criminal prosecutors and third sector practitioners; recently, he delivered a keynote lecture to the Council of Europe's 'Democracy and Security' series. Other undertakings include hate crime analysis, prevention, and prosecution – subjects in which he testified for the Home Affairs Select Committee earlier this year – as well as extreme right-wing political violence and terrorism.

Paul Stocker is a Research Associate at Teesside University's Centre for Fascist, Anti-Fascist and Post-Fascist Studies. His research interests include British far-right history and anti-immigration politics. He has recently published the book *English Uprising: Brexit and the Mainstreaming of the Far Right* (Melville House) and another monograph titled *Lost Imperium: Far Right Visions of the British Empire, c.1920-1980* will be published by Routledge in 2019. In addition, he has published articles on British fascism for *Religion Compass and Contemporary British History*, as well as book reviews for *Patterns of Prejudice and Politics, Religion and Ideology*.

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Emerging trends in the European political context, including the rise of nativist nationalism and the emergence of hostile public discourses on immigration, have brought ideas traditionally attributed to the far-right into mainstream discussion, in the process popularising and in some cases 'normalising' them in the eyes of particular audiences.

Especially since the turn of the new millennium, the discussion on the dynamics of, and threats from, violent radicalisation has received considerable fresh attention since a series of recent terrorist attacks testified to its highly disruptive and destructive potential. Taken together with the appreciable rise in instances of hate speech and in violent incidents against vulnerable groups (Muslim, Jewish, Roma communities; immigrants and refugees, etc.), it is now feared that we may be witnessing a much broader and profound 'reverse wave' towards more intolerance, exclusion, and normalisation of violent extremism in contemporary societies.



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