



## Report

### PES Democracy Network Meeting 5<sup>th</sup> March - CoR

This report has been produced following the PES Democracy Network Meeting on “*After Paris: strategies to fight radicalisation. Preventive measures and protecting the rule of law*” hosted in Brussels on the 5<sup>th</sup> March 2015 by the PES Group at the Committee of the Region and with the support of the S&D Group, FEPS and Solidar.

The aim of the meeting was to exchange best practices and lessons learned among local and regional authorities, politicians, academics and civil society organisations. The conference offered the possibility to understand the ways in which countries are dealing with issues such as radicalisation leading to violent extremism, the travels of European citizens in war zones and the adequate measures to be adopted with returnees.

This report focuses on **concrete measures to prevent** radicalisation of young Europeans but it also aims at contributing to the definition of a **common progressive strategy** to counter this phenomenon by **tackling the root causes of radicalisation** and fostering a **new narrative** which has to lead the discussion when dealing with this topic.

#### a) Tackling the root causes of radicalisation by youth empowering

To succeed in our battle, **tackling the root causes of radicalisation is** the first step to be taken.

**Factors that can contribute to radicalisation** or that can make the extremist narrative very appealing can include inequality, marginalisation, social exclusion, poor living conditions, personal or social crisis, frustration, intolerance, isolation, a difficult access to quality education, and violations of human rights. Poverty or low level of education cannot to be considered the sole factors pushing young people to join “radical groups”. Young men and women can be attracted for other reasons as well, such as: boredom, intergenerational tensions, the search for greater meaning in life, perceived adventure for men and sexual problems and romantic dreams of “real men” who are fighting for something; idea to give humanitarian help for women. **Linking religion (ISLAM) and radicalisation is too simplistic.**

It is fundamental to work with and on young people, to foster their voices in all democratic processes, in the decisions that will affect their lives no matter their racial, sexual and religious background. Recent analysis have shown that the average age-range of young people traveling from Western countries to conflict areas is 18 to 29.

The **empowerment and education of young generations** is the main key and PES’ main aim. **Fostering a sense of belonging** based on a confident inclusion of all and not the fearful exclusion of some is crucial for the progressive family.



## b) Preventive measures - Developing concrete solutions

**Prevention measures can succeed** only if there is a **multi-level shared approach**, requiring a joint effort at local, regional, national, European and international level. Governments cannot work alone.

Main conclusions of the meeting were the following:

1. **Promotion of integration policies**, increasing social cohesion and inclusiveness to avoid ghettoisation and stigmatisation of any communities.
2. **Strengthening education**. Civil societies, schools and universities are required to play an essential role in delivering this objective. It is fundamental to combat inequalities and discrimination through the **promotion of inter-cultural dialogue, tolerance, democratic values**.
3. **Empowerment of young people**, in order to give them a role in our societies.
4. **Training of practitioners and first line workers** is essential for the success of any preventive and de-radicalisation measures, because being at grassroots level, if well-prepared they may be able to identify signs of radicalisation at an early stage. The **involvement of families** can be also essential. **Promotion of hotlines** can help collecting concerns.
5. **Focusing on prisons** where the risk for radicalization is high.
6. **Exit programmes, Re-integration** in the society **and rehab** of radicals and foreign fighters through a community-based approach. (see annex)
7. **Raise awareness** through Public information campaign and Involvement of communities' and religious leaders.
8. **Involvement of internet giants** to monitor radical propaganda and take down terrorist websites. It is important to spread the counter-narrative using internet as well.
9. **Counter-narratives can play a central role in** convincing those already engaged in violent extremism to abandon it, and dissuading those sympathetic to terrorist narratives from becoming actively involved in them. It is important to amplify counter-narratives emanating from those with local influence, including community leaders.
10. **Strengthen EU actions outside Europe** to promote good governance, rule of law, democracy and the respect of fundamental rights.

## c) Protecting democracy by respecting the rule of law and fundamental rights

**The rule of law** is a backbone of modern democratic, pluralist societies and constitutional democracies and one of the main values on which the European Union is founded. There can be no democracy and respect for fundamental rights without respect for the rule of law and vice versa. Governments need to **comply with the rule of law and fundamental rights** when discussing and approving counter-radicalisation and counter-terrorism measures. There is a high risk to weaken our democratic framework in the name of higher security. Security measures have to go hand in the hand with the fulfilment of our civil liberties, fundamental rights and democratic principles.

