demokratie

GEGEN MENSCHENFEINDLICHKEIT

Polarisation, radicalisation and discrimination

FOCUS ON CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

Champions – Action Model to stop Polarisation

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Table of contents

Introduction Issue 1/2021: Polarisation, radicalisation and discrimination with focus on Central and Eastern Europe
(translated from the German original into English by Ariane Olek)

The polarisation of society has now become a buzzword that is omnipresent in any political analysis. Whether discussing Trump, Brexit, migration — and the mobility from the South to Europe, which has almost been pushed into the background again — as well as globalisation, climate change, and the corona pandemic, which has been going on for a year now ... all these diverse topics have found within them fundamental polarisations of positioning, a positioning which overshadows intermediate shades. It is remarkable how clearly the positioning on these topics overlap — those individuals who are against immigration and advocate against accepting refugees are also more likely to be in favour of national unilateral action as well as also more likely to question the reality of climate change. The positioning on these specific issues then also depends on the fundamental attitude towards the following question: What kind of world do we want to live in — an open, liberal, diverse one or a nationally-oriented one that is at least supposedly homogeneous and authoritarian? This brings into focus the critical question of equality, a concept fundamental to democracy, and closely linked to the question of pluralism, not only of interests, but also of population groups that differ in their characteristics, affiliations, and identities.

The answer to this question is reflected in basic democratic or anti-democratic attitudes, in ideas on engaging or not with minorities, and in preferences for political parties. In everyday life, it manifests itself in the devaluation and exclusion of all those who are perceived as somehow different, abnormal, foreign or unequal — perhaps because they immigrated from another country; are Jewish, Muslim, or black; are same-sex lovers or female; or have these characteristics attributed to them by others. Right-wing populism is responsive to this and therefore unerringly caters to inequality; serves dormant resentments; drives feelings of threat; and links these issues to its stance "against the system" and "against the elites" — meaning here the liberal and plural constitutionality.

Right-wing populism also addresses all those 'between the poles' of polarisation who are not quite sure what they want to say about all these issues, who sometimes share the old, outdated resentments against "others" and perhaps ask themselves whether we have not gone too far on the way to an open society. Meanwhile, other groups demonstrate for diversity and equality under the motto of "Black lives matter", cultivate a post-colonial perspective critical of racism and apply a high standard to the right terminology and language, but without necessarily critically examining their own resentments in the same way, which may also include anti-Semitism.

The polarisation along these issues divides Western-oriented societies across national borders and continents. But it also divides Europe according to majority opinion and governments. In particular, some of the young democracies and members of the European Union in Eastern Europe, countries of the former Eastern Bloc, are conspicuous for their loudly-expressed claim to national hegemony — whereby with Covid19, which in its capacity as a pandemic in effect requires coordinated action across national borders — old nationalisms are also re-emerging elsewhere, with governments or political parties that present the EU as a purely economic community rather than also as a community of values and oppose the idea of a liberal democracy and diverse society.

The Visegrád Group (Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia) are united in their opposition to binding quotas for the distribution of asylum seekers in Europe and also reject the UN migration pact. In all four countries, conservative-right populist parties or figures are in government. Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orbán publicly propagates the preservation of an "ethnic homogeneity"; in Poland the ruling national conservative PiS under its leader Jarosław Kaczyński fights for a "Polish and Christian" identity and refuses to accept Muslims. Poland and Hungary advocate a "Europe of fatherlands" and wish to push back the influence of the EU, actions which are clearly demonstrated by their manipulation of democracy. The EU Commission has initiated infringement proceedings against both countries due to the developments against the rule of law. In these countries, civil society organisations that advocate for an open society are also under pressure.

Media that are too "liberal" have their broadcasting licences revoked (as in Hungary); cultural offerings that are not "national" enough and are too self-critical have their funding cut (in Poland, among others); campaigns against LGBTQ* rights are conducted and gay pride demonstrations (including parades on Christopher Street Day and demonstrations for equal rights and against discrimination) are banned or even result in violence led by right-wing extremist groups with the connivance of the police. The same is true for right-wing extremist groups who threaten to withdraw from the international convention for the protection of women against domestic violence and cut state support for women's shelters (also in Poland), and refuse to accept refugees altogether.

All this is underpinned, supported and legitimised by the mood in the population, which is sometimes more, sometimes less polarised between those who want to continue on the path towards open and liberal societies linked to a European Union that promotes these values, and those who demand a national to nationalist-folkish return or are already in the process of turning back the achievements of a liberal democracy. In Germany, too, the old dividing line between East and West is becoming apparent in the general mood and the elections. In East Germany, more people can be identified as right-wing populists, and more often represent an illiberal idea of democracy and more often vote for a far-right party such as the Alternative for Germany (AfD) party, previously also the National

Democratic Party of Germany (NPD) at the municipal level. From a West German perspective, however, it also seems a little bit unjust to denounce the anti-democratic conditions in the East. For in West Germany, too, there has and continues to be a hesitancy to acknowledge National Socialism within institutions and in one's own family, and the smouldering resentment against various discriminated groups are not always named and addressed with the necessary clarity.

This polarisation challenges the practice of prevention work; moreover, the "big issues" sometimes obscure the view of everyday work on-the-ground, which is active "for democracy and against enmity" entirely in the sense of this journal. Beyond the crisis mode, prevention work is a constant task, even if it is not always understood in this way as much takes place in the form of time- and area- bounded projects. This makes it all the more urgent to better position individuals active in practice who cannot always fall back on established infrastructure and experience, even if this is important and desirable. This applies to many projects as well as individual actors in both the West and East. Communicating and passing on knowledge about possibilities for prevent action through online tools is becoming increasingly important in this context and also offers the opportunity for networking.

The challenges in the Eastern European countries (and also in East Germany) are once again disproportionately higher than in the West. The countries have only just experienced stretches of functioning democracy; have gone through profound transformations after the dissolution of the Eastern Bloc; and presently as well as as a result of Covid19, the economic situation has significantly deteriorated. Many people struggle with the challenges of everyday life that this brings. At the same time, a young, very modern and cosmopolitan civil society has developed in recent years, especially in some Eastern European countries, which upholds the ideas and aspirations of an open society and liberal democracy and pursues them with much energy and courage. In doing so, this group faces significantly higher barriers and personal threats than in the established democracies and at least in comparison to West Germany. What is mainstream in the West — at least as far as official pronouncements and Sunday speeches are concerned, but also in terms of broader popular support — can be considered provocation in many Eastern European countries. Thus, a small band of committed people continues to battle against the mood of the majority, has to defend itself against accusations of a lack of national pride and accusations of 'Westernisation' even from the government side, and faces more and more restrictions.

In addition to the challenges of transformation, the problematic reappraisal of post-1989 (and post-1945) history also explains this mood, as Helmut Fehr describes for the countries of the former Eastern Bloc in Central and Eastern Europe in his volume "Vergeltende Gerechtigkeit - Populismus und Vergangenheitspolitik nach 1989" (retributive justice - populism and politics of the past after 1989, published by Barbara Budrich Verlag in 2016). According to his analysis, the historical reappraisal "from

above" prevented self-reflection and open debates and national grand narratives were not abandoned, but rather instrumentalised to denounce opponents from the communist era and to reinforce the current power holders as the only legitimate ones.

Against this background, the European Union continuously promotes efforts to further develop and secure fundamental democratic values. With the 1997 Amsterdam Declaration for Equal Opportunities and Against Discrimination, it committed itself to the goal of reducing inequality along the classic dimensions of difference: gender, sexual orientation/identity, ethnic origin/identity, religion or belief, disability and age. This also includes promoting the professionalization of actors in the local space and beyond (municipalities, non-governmental organisations, etc.) through the exchange of information, best practices, and the creation of European networks for prevention and intervention against discrimination and radicalisation. While European prevent groups have made significant strides, it is bitter to note that right-wing extremists are much better networked throughout Europe, and sometimes also worldwide, as evidenced by the right-wing terrorist bomber of Christchurch's links to the Identitarian movement in Austria.

The current issue of the *Zeitschrift für Demokratie gegen Menschenfeindlichkeit 1/2021* on "Polarisation, Radicalisation and Discrimination in Europe" — coordinated and edited by Beate Küpper, Luca Váradi, and Catherine Lourdes Dy — focuses on all those who fight "on-the-ground" in practice for an open, liberal and diverse society in their countries and in the EU. The issue's focus on polarisation, radicalisation, and discrimination in Europe unpacks the situation in Central and Eastern Europe and looks at the practice of prevention and intervention in the field of democracy education, group-focused enmity, and right-wing extremism. Contributors to this issue include those who have been working on-the-ground in the countries, as members of civil society organisations with a sharp and trained eye; those who work in municipalities, schools and extracurricular education as "fighters on the front line" (first-line practitioners, FLPs for short, e.g. teachers, social workers, NGOs, police) on a daily basis in regular structures, in training courses, and workshops as well as in counselling; and have in-depth insights and experience of the challenges, barriers and attempts at solutions.

The contributions (with the exception of the one by Verena Schäfer-Nerlich) were written within the framework of an EU project that is currently running until mid-2021 [project CHAMPIONS - Cooperative Harmonized Action Model to stop Polarisation in Our Nations (3/1/2019 – 6/30/2021), funded within the framework of the EU Directorate General for Migration and Home Affairs — Internal Security Fund - Police; thematic field preventing and countering violent radicalization; reference 823705, ISFP-2017-AG-RAD. Partner institutions from a total of five countries (Germany, Austria, Poland, Hungary, and Romania) are involved under the coordination of PATRIR [Peace Action, Training & Research Institute of Romania]; most of the authors of the priority area were involved in the project. The aim of the

CHAMPIONS project is to support on-site and online networking of the above-mentioned FLPs in the different municipalities with the goal of sparking joint-action initiatives. To support this, CHAMPIONs provides support for this networking (e.g. handouts on how to initiate and organise round tables in the local area on this topic) as well as training material to help FLPs in particular who have had little to do with the topic before or have not yet dealt with it intensively. This includes, for example, the teacher who is confronted with racist incidents in the classroom or the social worker who wants to initiate a project against racism for the first time. The compilation of already existing or newly developed material can also be used, for example, for standalone workshops [freely available online at https://www.firstlinepractitioners.com/]. Networking within Europe can and should also contribute to exchanging approaches, possible solutions to various obstacles, and novel approaches to prevention.

Especially for the FLPs engaged in Eastern Europe, such networking can be a valuable reinforcement of their work, for which they unfortunately do not always find the necessary support locally. For this reason, this issue will be fully open-access in English online, and the German edition will also be available in print.

Personally, the above-mentioned project and this focus on Central and Eastern Europe is very important to us. The joint work across national borders in a mixed team has repeatedly opened our own eyes to what is going well and what is going badly in our countries, and has given us ideas about what could be improved. From a Western European point of view, we have learned above all to have respect and humility for the work of our colleagues who have to live and work under much worse conditions. From an Eastern European perspective, the work was also accompanied by a certain amount of shame, sadness, and sometimes despair. As a lecturer at the Central European University, Luca Váradi had to directly experience last year how a highly renowned institution was forced to move from Budapest to Vienna because, as a representative of a liberal and cosmopolitan value system, it could no longer withstand the fire of right-wing populists, and Váradi was banned from teaching. She emphasises: "As a researcher of prejudice, I never thought that I would experience political agitation and the creation of hate images first-hand in the centre of Europe. Even though the university had to leave the country, our work for an open society doesn't stop there."

The contributions in this issue's focus on "Polarisation, Radicalisation and Discrimination in Europe" begin with a brief introduction by Beate Küpper and Luca Váradi, that contains a classification of the phenomena and terminology surrounding the focal points of the issue as well as an overview of the mood in the population of the European Union in this regard. They do this on the basis of empirical findings on the voting preference of far-right parties and on (anti-)democratic attitudes with recourse to current opinion polls. The article is supplemented by short country profiles on the situation in

Germany, Hungary, Poland and Romania, summarised by authors who are all involved as partners in the aforementioned CHAMPIONS project.

Verena Schäfer-Nerlich will then give an overview of the party landscape in Europe with a special focus on EU-critical voices in the context of the 2019 European elections.

Catherine Lourdes Dy has extensive experience as a migration researcher and as coordinator of the CHAMPIONs project, with close links to the EU context. Together with Max Mühlhäuser and Andrea Tundis, she focuses on the perspectives of those who, as members of minorities, are directly affected by devaluation and discrimination both on-the-ground and in the online sphere. For readers from Germany, the particularly difficult and endangered situation in which Roma in Romania find themselves, for example, is impressive here. The two co-authors are working on an online platform for networking FLPs as part of the project.

Luca Váradi invited partners from the CHAMPIONS project to an expert discussion on the situation of prevention work in their countries. Several of them work in civil society institutions in their countries that are under pressure because of their work for an open society; some are also affected as individuals. The interviews offer an in-depth insight into the challenges associated with the commitment to democracy and enmity in the respective countries, as well as strategies for dealing with them.

Kata Bálint, Dominik Istrate, and Bulcsú Hunyadi, researchers at the well-known Hungarian think tank Political Capital, add to this with a report on a qualitative and quantitative study conducted within the CHAMPIONS project in four of the participating countries. FLPs were asked about their experiences in practice "on the ground" and about their needs for prevention work.

Gyorgy Tatar, a career diplomat and chair of the Budapest-based Foundation for International Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities presents a policy brief of the Central and Eastern European Cities for Preventing Radicalisation International Policy-makers Roundtable, a flagship event of the CHAMPIONs project. This online roundtable, held in autumn 2020, brought together first line practitioners and policy makers towards an exchange of views on the CHAMPIONs collaboration model and the possibilities for further network creation.

Andrea Tundis is a Senior Researcher and his areas of expertise are infrastructure protection, Internet organized crime and human safety. Together with Catherine Lourdes Dy, Max Mühlhäuser, and Ariane Olek, he presents an innovative digital platform developed within the context of the CHAMPIONs Project. Explained in detail in the article, the online platform elements 'Alert', 'Arena', and 'Training Yard', hosted on firstlinepractitioners.com provides tools to improve local level multi-agency

collaboration and improved information sharing for the detection and improved response at grass-roots levels to polarization and radicalization.

Our gratitude goes to Ariane Olek, who, as a member of the CHAMPIONS project staff, has organized the work in the project and the focus of this issue with a constantly alert eye and has done the important editorial work in preparation for the submission of the manuscript to the publisher.

From the editorial team responsible for the special Issue on polarisation in Europe,

Beate Küpper, Luca Váradi, and Catherine Lourdes Dy.

Polarization in Europe: Positioning for and against an open and diverse society

Beate Küpper/Luca Váradi

(translated from the German original into English by Nora Schafhausen)

Europe has democratized in many respects in recent years. This applies to the countries of Eastern Europe as young democracies, for which accession to the European Union meant a process of democratization, but also to middle-aged democracies such as Germany, which have become more democratic step by step. This can be seen, among other things, in the strengthening of rights for minorities (e.g. the granting of the right of marriage to same-sex couples); efforts to reduce discrimination, which the member states of the European Union agreed on in the Amsterdam Declaration of 1997; and in many opinion polls which, overall and over the past decades, testify to greater approval of democracy, more openness and tolerance toward various minorities among the populations in many European countries.

More recently, however, a countervailing trend toward weaker democracy has also been observed in many European countries, as well as outside Europe (e.g., Foa/Mounk 2016; Norris 2017: 14). The rise of far-right parties goes hand in hand with open agitation on the Internet, and in many European countries a loud everyday racism can be felt within the population. Hate and agitation are currently being carried out primarily in connection with the issues of migration, refugees, and Muslims, but are also directed against the equality of all people, including LGBTQ* persons and women. Anti-Semitism, which has remained dormant, is also openly erupting in violent attacks against Jews in quite a few countries, and anti-Semitic conspiracy myths frame various other issues (e.g., Krekó 2018), and this is currently also true for the Corona pandemic.

At the beginning of the Covid19 crisis, there were severe outbreaks of the old stereotypes against individuals of Asian descent, ranging from suspicious looks, physical distancing in public, to violent attacks (see also the article by Dy et al. in this issue). In some countries — especially in Germany and Austria — demonstrations took place that were not only directed against the measures taken to contain the pandemic, but also questioning the pandemic as a whole. These demonstrations were seen as provocations against the so-called "system" (used as a cipher for an open society, even if democracy is ostensibly claimed for itself at the demonstrations), infiltrated or even initiated by actors from the conspiracy scene and from the far right. The attack on the German Reichstag in fall 2020 and on the Capitol in Washington in January 2020 are preliminary highlights of the demonstration of power against liberal democracy.

Polarization: more democracy or its abolition

These developments in Europe and the world are commonly described by the term 'polarization'. This terminology is not without problems in that it may be (conditionally) accurate purely at the level of describing moods, but this is without any evaluation of democratic quality. It is easy to derive from this the assumption that polarization in itself is something negative because it endangers social cohesion, and that it is therefore primarily necessary to work against polarization and for cohesion. What is central, however, is the democratic quality of social cohesion, which includes not only the rule of law and the separation of powers but also the equal participation of social minorities. What is at stake, then, is the character of polarization —- democratic on the one hand, anti-democratic on the other. We use the term polarization in this booklet and article with this understanding.

This article provides a brief overview of phenomena that, summarized under the term "polarization", outline political developments in Europe (and beyond) and run counter to the European Union's shared self-image of a pluralistic democracy.

"Right-wing" Phenomenon area

Anti-democratic polarization and right-wing radicalization encompass a broad spectrum of interrelated phenomena ranging from everyday racism to right-wing populism, to right-wing extremism or even right-wing terrorism. They are manifested in attitudes and everyday actions among the population and through laws; are recognizable through explicit or implicit regulations in institutions; and extend to visible electoral successes of right-wing extremist parties, the actions of extremist groups, and the occurrence of hate crimes or even right-wing terrorist attacks. In our understanding, they can be identified as anti-democratic "right-wing" because they question or even reject the essential fundamental idea of democracy — the dignity and equality of all, regardless of their origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation or identity, etc. (and not because those parties or individuals who share this position necessarily locate themselves on the right-wing political spectrum).

The boundaries between the various phenomena are fluid. Thus, everyday racism can become political action when it is enacted by political parties and provides the basis or legitimation for acts of violence. The interaction can be understood as an escalation spiral, as Gordon Allport (1954) already described it for prejudice: it starts with small remarks that may even seem funny at first glance, continues with insults, via social distance — moving away and keeping away — to discrimination, and in the worst case ends in violence against individuals or even in genocide, the annihilation of entire ethnic groups and peoples. In addition, entire groups of people and their needs are ignored, simply overlooked, not consulted, and not included in decisions.

In all of this, it is important to include the divergence of perspectives of those directly affected, those not actively involved (bystanders), and actively acting perpetrators: those who hear derogatory remarks on a daily basis and are themselves affected by discriminatory experiences, see and evaluate the problem completely differently than those who are not directly addressed and who then often do not see problems of devaluation and discrimination or do not consider them to be as serious.

Gradually, social norms can shift in the process, which then make even violent behaviour seem legitimate. They are fed by the social context, which suggests what is "good, right, and normal", i.e., by the media, explicit and implicit regulations in institutions, as well as by the (perceived) attitudes and actions of close reference persons, e.g., the circle of relatives and acquaintances, the neighbourhood, but also role models from politics and the media. The importance of the local context also becomes apparent here, including the mood in the neighbourhood or community, the actions of relevant, influential persons (mayor, priest, police director, school director etc.) and the presence of local authorities. Additional factors include the existence of structures in the local area that make everyday discrimination more difficult or favour it (this includes, for example, "fear spaces" such as squares or street corners where people are mobbed, Nazi graffiti that has not been removed, and the like).

Here, a process of radicalization can take place. According to prominent radicalization models (summarized by Bodum 2011), this process begins with complaints about the individual and/or societal condition, continues as an experience of unfair treatment and blaming a target person or group for all these problems, and finally ends in distancing oneself from others and the "system" while simultaneously discrediting them. With each progressive step, extreme action becomes more likely. The process of radicalization is driven by propaganda, mobilization, and recruitment strategies of extremist groups. According to Zick (2017), this works best when they initially create a sense of "emptiness" in individuals interested in extremist messages, which is then filled with the extremist "meaning". The increasing interconnectedness of the online and offline worlds plays a key role in radicalization.

The relationship between the various manifestations in the "right-wing" phenomenon area can be depicted as an iceberg model (Figure 1). While manifestations of hard right-wing extremism and hate crime are usually clearly recognizable as right-wing extremist and may attract attention as such, the gray area of right-wing populism is fuzzy, blurred and difficult to grasp. Anti-democratic and misanthropic attitudes as well as racist and discriminatory everyday behaviour among the population are only addressed to a limited extent and are often discussed separately from other phenomena in the "right-wing" sphere.
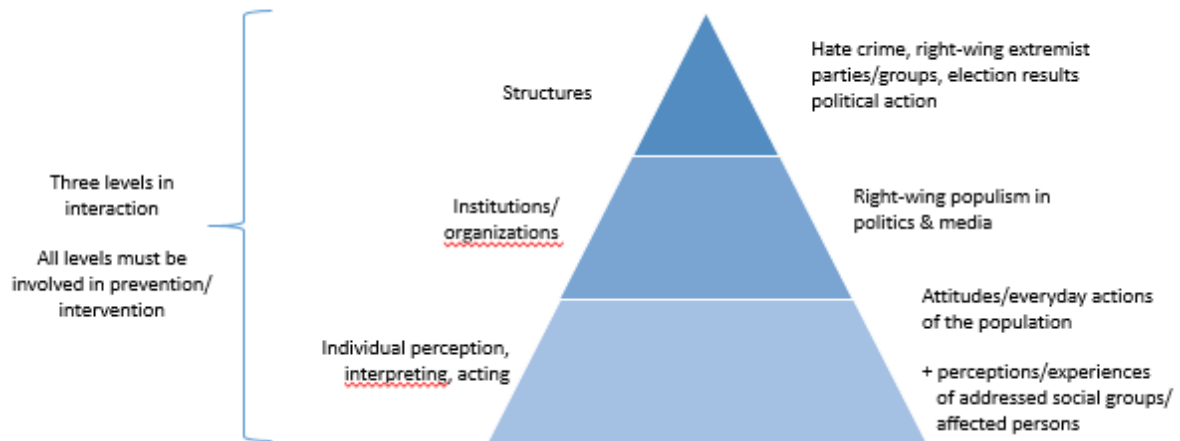
Figure 1 Iceberg model of the phenomenon area "Right" (Küpper, own development)

At the actor-level, intelligence services observe cooperation and mingling of right-wing extremist groups, motorcycle gangs, and the martial arts scene with organized crime. At the level of parties and groups, right-wing populist and far-right parties and movements of the so-called New Right, such as the "Identitarian Movement", exchange actors, ideologies, and strategies. At the level of ideology, in addition to the advocacy of a right-wing dictatorship, the trivialization of National Socialism and nationalism, the emphasis on inequality between social groups is also central, as expressed in xenophobia, racism or Social Darwinism and anti-Semitism, but also in sexism, homophobia and hostility toward socially weak and disabled persons (for a definition of right-wing extremism, see, among others, Stöss 2010). These can be summarized in a syndrome of group-focused enmity (GFE)[1] (for an overview, see, among others, Zick/Küpper/Heitmeyer 2009; Küpper 2018). This ideology is then also reflected sometimes more, sometimes less consciously, openly and consistently in the attitudes of the population.

In between lies (right-wing) populism, which picks up people's resentments toward minority groups, incites them, positions the "homogeneous and morally pure people" against "the corrupt elites", and transfers them to right-wing extremism. It works with simplification, personalization, and emotionalization; advocates a friend-or-foe mindset; relies on scandals and taboo-breaking; rejects mediation by entities such as representative representation and public media in favour of a leader who senses and implements the "will of the people"; and spreads the narrative of the people betrayed by the elites (for a definition, see, among others, Diehl 2018). Conversely, right-wing extremism seeps

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[1] GFE describes the devaluation, exclusion and systematic discrimination of people solely on the basis of their assignment to a social group on the basis of categorization characteristics such as gender, ethnic or cultural origin or because they are black, religious affiliation, sexual orientation and identity, a disability, age, unemployment or homelessness; these can be mapped in an interrelated syndrome (cf. Heitmeyer 2002-2011).

into the population via right-wing populism, which appears harmless and is easier to connect with. Here, media — analogue as well as the Internet and social media — play a special mediating role.

In all of this, the affinity for violence plays an important role, whether in the form of the suggestion of accepting violence as a means of securing one's own supremacy, as a threat or actual physical attacks against people, institutions or symbols.

Times of crisis are generally regarded as accelerators of populism and right-wing extremism (on explanations for populism, see Mudde/Kaltenwasser 2017; Jörke/Selk, 2017). Crises bring to a head conditions that were already problematic before. In this case, this applies to challenges and problems at the micro-, meso-, and macro-levels, i.e., with regard to individuals and their perceptions and feelings, to groups and their positions within and toward each other, and to societal developments (cultural, political, and economic):

- socioeconomic conditions and developments, including those that focus on the developments of alienation triggered by neoliberalism
- socio-cultural developments, especially those subsumed under "modernization" (individualization, liberalization, pluralization, but also disorientation and isolation)
- developments of democracies, especially encrustation or lack of representation, against which protests arise, and the understanding of what "democracy" actually is or should be
- socialization (imprints); experiences (e.g., of the transformation of formerly socialist countries); world views, basic convictions, and overarching values (e.g., authoritarianism) as well as existing resentments; political education and empathy for others.

Populism picks up on problematic developments. These include, among other things, an individual and/or overall socially poor economic situation or a cultural development toward more liberality, which now also grants minorities a say or even just questions prior perceptions and thus the outdated status of the established and privileged. Populism heightens the view of this by emphasizing disadvantage and threat, points to the evil, corrupt elites who are responsible for this, and calls for "the people" to come into their own. Translated, this means safeguarding outdated privileges and accustomed or claimed status. Where appropriate, it opens the flank for right-wing extremism and allies itself with it, since the latter openly articulates its own supremacy. Populism is thus also a self-propelling phenomenon that can overheat and boil up. Violent outbreaks are a possible consequence. The main victims are all those who are regarded as "not belonging" or "not equal".

The transformation process in the countries of the former Eastern bloc encompasses all of these aspects once again in a special way and at all levels — the political constitution, economy, culture, modernization — all were subject to changes right down to the private sphere.

European Map of Polarization and Right-Wing Radicalization

The state of democracy has a major impact on the way people interact with each other, and also provides insight into the state of institutions and mechanisms that ensure equality and fairness. Some countries in Europe have become less democratic in recent years, including Hungary, Poland, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic (the so-called Visegrád countries), all of which have fallen back on the Democracy Index, while no such change is evident among the "old member states" of the EU.[2]

In the following, a brief overview of polarization and radicalization in Europe is given, based on parties of the far right (see also Schäfer-Nerlich's contribution in this issue, which differentiates between parties that are sceptical of and hostile to Europe and democracy) and attitudes in the population, as determined by opinion polls (on the perspective of those affected, see Dy et al. in this issue). Subsequently, the situation in four countries of Central and Eastern Europe is outlined again in more detail by way of example.

Parties and currents of the extreme right

Right-wing populist and far-right parties are by no means a new phenomenon in Europe. However, in the recent 2019[3] European Parliament elections, far-right parties collectively achieved greater success than ever before, garnering about a quarter of the votes cast. In France, Italy, Hungary, and Poland, right-wing parties even became the strongest party in percentage terms, even though they failed to garner a majority of all votes in each of these countries. Whereas in the past, right-wing extremist movements, groups, and parties were often ideologically distinct from one another and often acted independently, they are now increasingly converging in ideology, actors, and actions, or even joining together to form umbrella organizations that span organizations.

Antidemocratic attitudes among the population

There has been no regular, comprehensive, empirical monitoring of anti-democratic, inhuman attitudes and discrimination in the European population. However, several individual studies suggest that the vast majority of Europeans support democracy, but at the same time hold opinions that contradict the basic values of democracy. The EU-funded SIREN project (Socio-Economic Change, Individual Reactions and the Appeal of the Extreme Right; Flecker et al, 2004), which was conducted in 2004, already pointed to the widespread prevalence of right-wing populist attitudes among the

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[2]Democracy index from Freedom House: https://freedomhouse.org/countries/freedom-world/scores [21.1.2021]

[3] Results of the 2019 European elections: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/election-results-2019/en [25.1.2021]. See also "Rise of nationalism in Europe": https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36130006 [22.1.2021].

population (determined for Austria, Switzerland, Italy, Germany, France, Belgium, Denmark and Hungary). In particular, it confirmed the reinforcing influence of a sense of social injustice and of being cheated by the working population on right-wing populist attitudes. Feelings of political powerlessness, insecurity and fear of social decline also proved explanatory.

In the Visegrád countries, the population is comparatively unconvinced about the quality of democracy in their country (about 50 out of 100 points), compared with an average of over 60 points in the countries of Western Europe. Yet people across Europe are fairly unanimous about the importance of living in a country that is governed democratically (average score of over 75 in all participating countries on a 100-point scale) (European Values Survey 2017).[4] However, the percentage of young people aged 16-26 in Europe who are convinced "democracy is, all things considered, the best form of government" is shockingly low, with particularly low scores in France (38%), Italy and Poland (46%) to the highest scores in Germany, Sweden (66% each) and Denmark (65%) and 73% in Greece.[5]

Group-focused Enmity

In a representative study in eight European countries (Germany, France, Great Britain, Italy, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Hungary), eight elements of group-focused enmity (GFE) were surveyed for the first time in Europe in 2008 and empirically confirmed as components of a coherent GFE syndrome for almost all countries included in the study — these elements include xenophobia, ethnic racism, anti-Semitism, Muslimophobia, sexism, homophobia, and the devaluation of the disabled and homeless (Zick/Küpper/Hövermann 2011).

Here, as in subsequent studies, the pattern in Europe from West to South to East emerges: the population of Western Europe is generally more tolerant and open toward diverse minorities and more in favour of gender equality. To a somewhat lesser extent, this is also true in Southern Europe, and only after some delay in the young democracies of Eastern Europe, which in many respects were shaped by life behind the "Iron Curtain". Only with regard to Muslims and Muslim women are Europeans more or less united in their widespread rejection.

The proportion of those who do not want to have an immigrant or a person with a different ethnicity as a neighbour is much higher in the countries of the former socialist bloc than in Western Europe (European Values Study 2017, as well as all the following findings). For example, in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, and Bulgaria, nearly half or more of respondents rejected having an immigrant neighbour, while in France, Germany, and Switzerland, less than 10% gave this answer. In these countries, there was comparatively little personal experience with immigration. However, attitudes toward religious minorities (such as Jews and Muslims) and toward ethnic minorities (such as Roma)

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[4] https://europeanvaluesstudy.eu/ [20.1.2021]

[5] https://www.tui-stiftung.de/en/our-projects/junges-europa-die-jugendstudie-der-tui-stiftung/ [25.1.2021]

are also particularly negative in these countries. Rejection of Roma is particularly widespread throughout Europe. And a similar pattern emerges in the way women and their role in society are viewed. While in many older democracies of the West less than 20% agree with statements such as "The man's job is to earn money, the woman's job is to take care of the home and family", in the former socialist countries about half of the respondents agree with this statement. The same is true for attitudes toward LGBTQ* persons. Interestingly, the Czech Republic is closer to Western than to Eastern Europe in this respect. There (similar to Germany, Austria and Switzerland) almost half of the respondents are convinced that homosexual couples could be just as good parents as other couples. In Italy (similar to Hungary and Croatia), only between 20-30% think so, and the proportion is even lower in Poland (13%), Slovakia (17%), and Romania (12%).

In recent years, polarization in Europe has been ignited above all by the issue of migration and the treatment of refugees — one of the main topics for the parties of the far right. The results of the European Social Survey with data from 23 EU countries (including Heath/Richards 2019; Messing/Ságvári 2019), show on the one hand a generally more positive attitude toward migration, but on the other hand also a deep polarization regarding this issue in Europe. Especially in the Northern European countries (Sweden, Norway and Finland), immigration is widely accepted, to a medium extent in Western Europe, while large parts of the population in the Eastern European countries (including Hungary and the Czech Republic) are hostile to immigration. In this context, information about the actual number of immigrants can have a significant positive influence on opinions toward immigration. At the time of the first survey, many of these countries still had little experience with immigration, and at the same time many people from these countries were migrating to the West. However, after the so-called "refugee crisis" in 2015/16, opposition to generous refugee policies increased even in formerly welcoming countries such as Austria, Germany, Sweden, and again Hungary, where many refugees arrived and/or transited. Findings from Germany indicate that here it is not so much the actual immigration as the public discourse about it that has influenced attitudes toward the negative. In regions where particularly large numbers of refugees arrived during the peak of the "refugee crisis" in 2015/16, attitudes toward migrants and refugees tended to be more positive (Ifop study by the Jean JourÉS Foundation 2015). This once again shows the importance of contact and real experience with immigration, which help to reduce prejudices (meta-analysis by Pettigrew/Tropp 2006).

Although almost all European countries now have anti-discrimination policies, actual implementation and monitoring in practice varies widely. This makes a direct comparison of rates of discrimination and hate crimes across Europe impossible. There is still a lack of uniform recording and police statistics of several countries do not even indicate a possible hate motivation for criminal and violent acts, or they are not specified. Reports from affected groups are often not listed at all. The available studies on

experiences of discrimination, hate and violence by affected groups, commissioned by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency among others, indicate a considerable extent of everyday discrimination in various areas of life (authorities, work, housing, health, leisure and public space), as well as personally experienced insults, threats or even physical violence.

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Polarization in Central and Eastern Europe - a look at selected countries

What is the situation in Central and Eastern Europe? The following country profiles provide a brief overview of polarization in Germany, Poland, Hungary and Romania, using facts and figures as examples. In the interview with Luca Váradi (in this issue), they report on the situation from the perspective of experts in democracy work.

About the authors

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Luca Váradi, PhD, is a sociologist and social psychologist. She is a former Marie Sklodowska-Curie Research Fellow and Visiting Professor in the Nationalism Studies Program at CEU in Budapest and Vienna. Her research focuses on ethnic prejudice, particularly the formation of prejudice in adolescence. Luca Váradi also collaborates with teachers and NGOs to use research findings for school-based anti-bias intervention programs.

About the CHAMPIONs Project

The **CHAMPIONs** project is a 30-month initiative funded by the European Commission Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs' Internal Security Fund – Police line. CHAMPIONs' central action is to establish permanent offline working groups -— 'CHAMPIONs Roundtables' — bringing together first line practitioners (FLPs) of different disciplines, professions, institutions, and agencies, to jointly develop effective detection and response solutions to counter polarization, build resilience, and protect vulnerable groups in their local communities. The CHAMPIONs project supports these groups as well as other FLPs through the establishment of the CHAMPIONS online platform hosted on firstlinepractitioners.com.

Country Profile Germany. Group-focused enmity, right-wing populism and right-wing extremism - the situation in Germany

Beate Küpper

The functioning and quality of democracy and, at the other end of the spectrum, anti-democratic tendencies, especially those related to right-wing extremism, receive special attention both in and outside Germany due to the history of National Socialism. Accordingly, the uncovering of existing anti-democratic or even neo-Nazi/right-wing extremist tendencies in Germany, for example, is subject to a strange mix of bright excitement and horror, wilful ignorance and defensiveness, often accompanied by indignation in both directions: While some accuse politics, the judiciary, the police and the Bundeswehr (Federal Defence) of being "blind to the right" and demand a sharper look and more initiative against racism, anti-Semitism and right-wing extremism, others believe that the founding of the Federal Republic in 1949 or the end of the GDR in 1990 made the country democratic once and for all.

Germany's terrible historical legacy is cited as one reason for the rather delayed rise of right-wing populism in Germany compared to the rest of Europe. A culture of remembrance of the Holocaust is a matter of state policy, openly anti-Semitic statements are largely outlawed in public, blatant hate speech against ethnic-cultural minorities (incitement of the people) is prohibited by law. Conversely, many activities to promote democracy and against group-focused enmity etc. are supported by the state. Slowly, awareness is also growing in this country to also take into account the perspective of people who are directly affected by racism, anti-Semitism, group-focused enmity and right-wing extremism. At the same time, many observers see an increasing polarisation of society, as can be seen in the mood in opinion polls and not least in the electoral successes of the far-right party Alternative für Deutschland (AfD). This has been openly broken open with the refugee movement of 2015/16 - a rift is running through the country between those who want to continue on the path of an open, liberal and diverse society and those citizens who long for a return to nationalist-authoritarian conditions, whereby they like to claim the comforts of modernity and the achievements of democracy for themselves and, with the longing for homogeneity and hierarchy, are more likely to locate themselves on the side of the powerful. This rift is at odds with the divisions of rich and poor, East and West, even though both are clearly evident in Germany and are related to the political divide, albeit more complex than sometimes assumed. The political polarisation of Europe is revealed in an exemplary way in Germany with its common legacy of National Socialism, but the different ways in which it has been dealt with, the different lengths of time it has taken for democratisation and the different experiences of transformation.

During the Corona pandemic, trust in politics and especially in the ruling Christian Democratic Party (CDU/CSU) has clearly increased again. A large majority of Germans support the measures to contain the pandemic or even call for stricter measures.[6] At the same time, since the summer of 2020, people from what at first glance appear to be very different milieus (incidentally, from both East and West Germany) have come together under the slogan "thinking outside the box" (Querdenken) to protest against the restrictions on containment against the Covid19 pandemic and, moreover, quite fundamentally "against the system" (although it remains unclear what is actually meant by this in concrete terms). In addition to peace-movement alternatives with rainbow flags and esotericists, this demonstration increasingly includes right-wing extremist groups with imperial war flags, while speakers spread wild (including anti-Semitic) conspiracy myths in connection with Corona and beyond. The Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution observes a decreasing inhibition threshold for mob violence against media representatives and the police.[7] The polarisation that has already been observed seems to be continuing, with populist and even right-wing extremist tendencies, now linked to the issue of Corona. Unlike in most other countries, this is not only present on the internet in Germany, but also on the street. In a large survey conducted by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in the late summer of 2020 (Roose 2020), 14% of respondents believed that the Corona virus was "just a pretext to oppress people", and around a quarter were convinced that "the world is controlled by secret powers"; AfD voters were particularly likely to make these assumptions.

The following is a brief summary of the situation in Germany with regard to group-focused enmity, right-wing populism and right-wing extremism. This is intended to provide readers from abroad in particular with an overview of the current state of affairs.

Diverse population: The Federal Republic of Germany currently has about 83 million inhabitants, who are very diverse not only by gender, sexual orientation, and ability, as in any other country, but also by religion: about 29% belong to the Roman Catholic Church, 27% to the Protestant Church, 6% Muslim, 0.1% Jewish and other denominations; about one third have no denominational affiliation (most of them in former socialist East Germany). Even though the majority still belong to a denominational/faith community, only about half of Germans assign significance to religion in their everyday lives, and more do so in the West than in the East (Pickel 2013). Germany was and is a country of immigration: from time immemorial people have emigrated from and to Germany, even if this is not always present in the general consciousness. About a quarter of the population has a so-called "migration background"[8],

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[6] ARD Deutschlandtrend Extra of 12/17/2020, https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/deutschlandtrend, checked 01/11/2021.

[7] https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/querdenker-gewaltbereitschaft-steigt-101.html, checked 01/11/2021.

[8] The Federal Statistical Office (n.d.) defines this as follows: "A person has a migration background if he or she or at least one parent was not born with German citizenship."

and the diversity in terms of national and cultural origins is great, especially in the large cities in western Germany. About half of the people with a migration background have German citizenship, and of these, about half were already born in the country. Almost two thirds of the immigrants come from other European countries of the EU; the most common countries of origin are Turkey, Poland, and the countries of the former Soviet Union — a large proportion of the people who immigrated from countries of the former Eastern Bloc belonged to the former German minority in their countries and came to Germany with the status of late repatriates (Federal Statistical Office 2020). With the most recent large-scale flight movement from 2015/16 onwards, around 1.7 million people entered the country as asylum seekers, the vast majority from Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan from civil war-like conditions.

Realisation of democracy: In a global comparison, Germany ranks similarly to its Western European neighbours (but not quite as well as the Netherlands and the Scandinavian countries) in terms of realisation of political freedoms and quality of democracy. According to Freedom House, an NGO that measures political freedoms and the quality of democracies worldwide, Germany receives an overall score of 94 out of 100, with 0 for "least free" and 100 for "most free".[9] The scores cover free and fair elections, political pluralism and participation, governance and good government, freedom of the press, assembly and organisation, rule of law, and personal freedoms. According to the country report, Germany's representative democracy has a vibrant political culture and civil society, political rights and civil liberties are largely guaranteed, and the country's totalitarian past is constitutionally safeguarded against authoritarianism. At the same time, many people are confronted with group-focused enmity, which is not directed against them personally, but against them as an (assigned) member of a social group (because they are perceived as "different" or "foreign"), and which they can thus hardly escape. According to a representative survey commissioned by the Federal Anti-Discrimination Agency in 2016, about one third of the people surveyed had experienced discrimination in the last 24 months in accordance with the General Equal Treatment Act (Antidiscrimination Act), i.e. e.g. on the basis of age, gender, sexual orientation or ethnic-cultural allocation (Beigang et al. 2016); respondents with a migration background reported experiencing discrimination particularly frequently. In a European comparison, Germany tends to lag behind in the fight against discrimination at the legal level. It took a long time for Germany to transpose the European Union's Amsterdam Declaration for Equal Opportunities and Against Discrimination into national law with the General Equal Treatment Act in

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https://www.destatis.de/DE/Themen/Gesellschaft-Umwelt/Bevoelkerung/Migration-Integration/Glossar/migrationshintergrund.html, accessed 12/14/2020.

[9] https://freedomhouse.org/country/germany/freedom-world/2019, checked 01/11/2021.

2006, and Germany was one of the last countries in Western Europe to legalise same-sex marriages (in Germany since 2017, in Catholic Spain since 2005).

Political polarisation and extreme right-wing radicalisation: Openly anti-democratic and right-wing populist to extreme right-wing voices have also become louder in Germany in recent years, and a clear polarisation is emerging. The vast majority positions itself as liberal-democratic, in favour of diversity and equality of minorities, while a not entirely small, aggressive minority opposes this. At the same time, quite a few move in an ambivalent in-between field, in which they find democracy good and right on the surface, but at the same time devalue various ethnic-cultural, religious and social minorities underneath. This polarisation came to light in the course of the refugee movement in 2015/16. On the one hand, a "welcoming culture" was proclaimed and many people got involved (or still do) professionally or voluntarily in supporting refugees; in 2015/15, around 10% of the population did so, even three quarters declared their basic willingness to get involved (Ahrens 2017). On the other hand, hatred and agitation against refugees and their supporters was spread on the internet and social media, and was soon taken to the streets. In the so-called "walks" of Pegida — "Patriotic Europeans against an Islamisation of the Occident" (the populism is already revealed in the self-chosen name) — "normal citizens" demonstrated hand in hand with right-wing extremists recognisable to the layman, walked behind posters with gallows for politicians and suspected the "system" and the "lying press" of concealing and ignoring the "true will of the people" (or even the will of the true people). On the occasion of the "refugee crisis", the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution has identified a radicalisation process of the right-wing extremist scene into parts of the politically right-wing population beyond the extremist spectrum.[10] The mood provided the basis for a serious increase in hate crimes against refugee accommodation and refugees[11], some of which were committed by perpetrators who had not previously attracted attention. This also led to vicious insults and threats against people, including politicians, who were committed to refugees or to democracy in general. In smaller municipalities where political work is done on a voluntary basis, it has become difficult to find anyone willing to run for mayor. Some politicians have already been victims of violence, such as the Kassel district president Walter Lübcke, who was murdered in June 2019, because he had positioned himself in favour of an open society. In this context, it is also important to remember the right-wing terrorist murder series of the self-proclaimed National Socialist Underground (NSU) of nine migrant small business owners and a policewoman between 2000 and 2006, which was only recognised as such

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[10] https://www.verfassungsschutz.de/de/aktuelles/schlaglicht/schlaglicht-2015-12-radikalisierungstendenzen-anlaesslich-der-fluechtlingskrise, accessed 01/02/2021.
[11] see the situation reports of the Federal Criminal Police Office on crime in the context of immigration: https://www.bka.de/DE/AktuelleInformationen/StatistikenLagebilder/Lagebilder/KriminalitaetImKontextVonZuwanderung/KriminalitaetImKontextVonZuwanderung_node.html, checked 01/11/2021.

by chance in 2011, and about which there are still many unanswered questions. In Germany, the Halle attack, directed against Jews who had gathered in the synagogue for Yom Kippur in autumn 2019, received special attention in recent times; however, as the attacker was unsuccessful in trying to breach the door, he eventually shot two passers-by. This was followed shortly afterwards by the Hanau attack directed against Muslims, in which the perpetrator shot a total of ten people, including his sick mother. The assassins believed in the same conspiracy myths that can be found in heaps on the internet, but which — according to the publicly available findings — also circulated at the kitchen table. These acts are part of a worldwide series of hate crimes and right-wing terrorist attacks. In addition, there are the recently publicised cases of racist and right-wing extremist comments in chat groups of members of the police, as well as right-wing extremist structures in the Bundeswehr (Federal Defence) and in special task forces. Meanwhile, right-wing extremism is classified as the greatest current threat to democracy not only by left-wing NGOs, but also by the Ministry of the Interior and the new head of the Federal Intelligence Services. In autumn 2020, the cabinet committee "to combat right-wing extremism and racism" chaired by the Federal Chancellor decided on further measures.

Political polarisation through parties: Since the last federal parliament election in 2017, a party of the far right spectrum has been represented in it for the first time since the times of National Socialism: the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) party, founded in 2013 and oscillating between right-wing populist and far-right, was the third strongest force after the CDU/CSU (32.9%) and the SPD (20.5%) with 12.6%, ahead of the FDP (10.7%), the Left (9.2%) and the Greens (8.9%). The AfD was also successful in almost all state elections. In the meantime, support for the AfD has fallen again (to around 9% voter share; as of December 2020).[12] It is debated to what extent the elevation to "suspect" of its völkisch wing and its youth organisation Junge Alternative (JA), which is likely to scare off potentially more moderate voters, and/or the Corona pandemic, in which the AfD has positioned itself unclearly[13], are responsible for this. In addition, there are a number of smaller far-right parties - including, among others, the National Socialist Party of Germany (NPD), which was founded as early as the 1960s - that do not clear the 5% hurdle in federal elections in Germany, but have been able to achieve double-digit electoral success in several local parliaments and some state parliaments for decades. In recent years, the AfD has increasingly succeeded in winning votes from the NPD, but also in drawing from the reservoir of former non-voters, as well as winning over voters, especially from the conservatives, but also from almost all other parties. The party is not only elected by people from precarious milieus, but

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[12] ARD Deutschlandtrend 12/11/2020, Sunday Survey: https://www.tagesschau.de/inland/deutschlandtrend-2447.html, checked 01/11/2021.

[13] First the AfD demanded stricter measures to contain the pandemic, then leading heads of the party showed solidarity with the conspiracy-theory anti-Corona demonstrations and demonstratively refused to wear protective masks in the German Bundestag.

also by the middle classes, and achieves its strongest results above all in the eastern states of Germany. Its voters are conspicuous for their high approval rate of group-focused enmity and right-wing extremist attitudes (Zick/Küpper/Berghan 2019; Decker/Brähler 2020).

Right-wing groups: There are a large number of right-wing populist to radical and extremist groups, organisations and other actors. The spectrum has become very diverse and difficult to survey. Again and again (and more so recently) individual organisations are banned, which are then often re-established under a different name. The boundaries between right-wing parties, extreme right-wing groups, and movements of the New Right are becoming increasingly blurred. Among the best known are the violent groups of the Autonomous Nationalists and the Blood & Honour network, which is active throughout Europe (officially banned in Germany since 2000, but still active underground); another relatively new phenomenon is that of the so called "Reichsbürger", quite a few of whom also have an affinity for weapons. Some of these groups deny the legitimacy of the Federal Republic of Germany, refer to the German Reich within the borders of 1937 under the National Socialists and strive for a New World Order (NWO). For some years now, the Identitarian movement has also been active in Germany; in Germany, it is closely linked to the self-described "Institute for State Policy" in Schnellroda, which presents itself as an intellectual think tank of the so-called "New Right", and which repeatedly succeeds in obtaining a forum even in bourgeois circles.[14] Many right-wing extremist actors have close ties to parties of the far right, including the AfD. They are networked with each other at home and abroad and increasingly appear together at right-wing extremist actions (especially at xenophobic demonstrations such as the one in Chemnitz in autumn 2018).

Antidemocratic and right-wing extremist attitudes in the population: The vast majority in Germany positions itself democratically and supports democracy. For example, only 4% of respondents in a representative survey conducted by the Konrad Adenauer Foundation in 2019 reject democracy (New 2019; the Friedrich Ebert Foundation's Mitte Study 2018/19 also comes to a similar conclusion; Zick/Küpper/Berghan 2019). Overall, trust in democracy in Germany is mainly expressed on a general and abstract level; every second respondent shows trust in the functioning of democracy and its institutions, but less trust in federal politicians (ibid.). Pluralism, including the protection of minorities, is also supported by the vast majority. Thus 83% of respondents say: "I think it is good when people stand up against the agitation against minorities" (Zick/Küpper/Berghan 2019). At the same time, however, a not entirely small minority of around 20% hold attitudes that contradict liberal democracy and the dignity and equality of all people enshrined in the constitution, including attitudes that must

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[14] For example, a "citizens' dialogue" on "freedom of opinion" organised by the Dresden Capital of Culture Office in Dresden on 9 March 2018; https://www.zeit.de/kultur/literatur/2018-03/dresden-uwe-tellkamp-durs-gruenbein-afd-pegida/seite-2, accessed 01/02/2021.

clearly be described as right-wing extremist, as demonstrated at regular intervals in representative opinion polls, comprehensively in the Friedrich Ebert Foundation's Mitte Study (FES; most recently ibid.) and the Leipzig Authoritarianism Study (most recently Decker/Brähler 2020).[15] For example, one third of respondents to the 2018 FES Mitte Study agreed with the statement: "In the national interest, we cannot grant everyone the same rights". While only a small proportion in Germany openly hold a closed far-right worldview, some facets of right-wing ideology are more widespread. This is especially true of national chauvinism, which demands that Germany demonstrate more strength. Here, East and West Germany are increasingly diverging — while fewer and fewer people in the West have openly held far-right positions in recent years, the proportion in the East is increasing. For example, almost 29% of respondents in East Germany and 14% in West Germany held the view: "What Germany needs now is a single strong party that embodies the community of the Volk as a whole." (Decker/Brähler 2020). Softer right-wing populist attitudes are held by about one-fifth of the population. Negative attitudes towards immigrants, asylum seekers, Muslims as well as Roma, but also ethnic racism in connection with the demand for established privileges as well as the devaluation of homeless and long-term unemployed people are clearly more widespread or are now (again) openly and loudly expressed. Anti-Semitism, sexism, and homophobia (openly expressed sexism and homophobia have decreased significantly in Germany) are also somewhat less prevalent or are more quiet and subtle (Zick/Küpper/Berghan 2019; see also the 10-year long-term study on group-focused enmity, Heitmeyer 2002-2011). For example, around one in four respondents to the FES Centre Study 2918/19 demand pars pro toto — as is typical of prejudice — and say: "With the policies Israel is making, I can well understand why you have something against Jews." One in five respondents demand: "Muslims should be banned from immigrating to Germany," and one in ten believes: "Whites rightly lead the world." 38% of respondents call for privileges for the established, agreeing with the statement: "Those who have always lived here should have more rights than those who moved here later." Several other respondents agree at least partly with these and similar statements.

Opposition and resistance to right-wing radicalisation: In Germany, many activities for democracy and prevention/intervention against group-focused enmity and right-wing extremism (as well as against Islamism and, more recently, against left-wing extremism) are state-funded at the federal, state, and local levels. These include, above all, the Federal Centre and the State Centres for Political Education, which provide constantly updated texts and materials on various topics in the field of populism/radicalisation free of charge for a broad readership. In addition, there are remembrance and education centres at Holocaust memorial sites, which now almost always also convey the transfer to

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[15] Both studies provide a comprehensive picture of the mood in Germany and its development; the original publications contain many further findings, as well as information on the sample and survey method.

today. The federal government has also launched a number of programmes to promote democracy and social cohesion, in particular the federal programme "Demokratie leben!" with a funding volume of over 100 million euros in this legislative period and projects throughout Germany. Since 1981 there has been a Federal Government Commissioner for the Affairs of Persons with Disabilities, and since 2018 there has been a Commissioner for Anti-Semitism for the whole of Germany and in almost all of the federal states. However, there is currently no one with responsibility for the issues or with a special focus on the devaluation and discrimination of Roma or Muslims. In addition, there are mobile counselling centres against right-wing extremism nationwide and in many federal states/regions (although not nationwide) also counselling centres for victims of right-wing violence and furthermore anti-discrimination counselling centres, which are financed by public funds — however, often neither permanently nor sufficiently. In addition, a number of civil society organisations support both studies and projects for democracy and against misanthropy (e.g. the Amadeu Antonio Foundation, which is close to practice and is often one of the first to recognise new challenges and develop innovative approaches); this includes many offers from trade unions and churches, as well as party-related, business-related and other foundations and initiatives. Germany thus has a comparatively well-positioned infrastructure of political education and democracy promotion. However, many of these measures have so far been designed as projects, with a correspondingly limited duration and funding, and are not anchored in regular structures. The topic is surprisingly scarce in schools, vocational training and higher education. For example, the share of political education in the regular lessons that children and young people receive in the course of their schooling is less than five percent, and it is not uncommon for other subjects to be taught instead in the time designated in the timetable (Gökbudak/Hedtke, 2019). These issues are only marginally addressed, if at all, in the standard teacher training programme. At the same time, civil society resistance against racism and right-wing radicalism is lively and diverse. There are many initiatives and projects against group-focused enmity and right-wing extremism, often run on a voluntary basis by committed citizens, supported by professional forces. In addition to many small local activities, especially in schools (e.g. through the label "School without Racism - School with Courage", although this is always dependent on individual local activists), there are many adult education programmes and micro-projects that on the one hand raise awareness of everyday racism, and on the other hand see themselves as contact persons for those who are discriminated against. Marches by right-wing extremist groups are regularly accompanied by counter-events and demonstrations, albeit with regional differences[16]. Committed citizens, left-wing and middle-class parties, trade unions, welfare organisations, NGOs and anti-fascist groups are often

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[16] In the western part of Germany, the counter-demonstrations are usually much larger than the right-wing extremist marches, while in the east they are often opposed by only a small group of counter-demonstrators who are all the more courageous because of the personal threat.

united in loose alliances for democracy and against right-wing extremism at municipal and sometimes also at state level.

Despite this broad and diverse spectrum of engagement for democracy and against group-focused enmity and right-wing extremism, the situation in Germany is anything but rosy. There is a lack of bundling, structuring and sometimes professionalization of activities. In some places — especially where the mood in the population is by no means consistently democratic — they face growing obstacles or face threats from right-wing extremists. Moreover, the activities are not universally supported by politicians and even have to defend themselves against the suspicion of being "left-wing extremist" or "not politically neutral". What is needed here is a clear positioning and a clear self-understanding for an open, plural society, which is also reflected in action.

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Country Profile Poland
Przemysław Witkowski

Poland, for the first time after 1989, has seemed to be the top student in building liberal democracy. Thanks to the systemic change, from a people's state and a centrally-controlled economy, Poland has been gradually heading towards an exemplary Western-type democracy. The governments have been changing thanks to electoral victories, and the country has been free from terrorism or outright political violence. However, in the background, dangerous political tendencies have been developing and they have gradually become a clear part of the mainstream of Polish politics. Growing economic inequalities, the great influence of the Polish Catholic Church, and the densifying network of anti-democratic institutions and media have eventually led to the transformation of Poland into an illiberal democracy. Homophobic, right-radical, sexist and anti-democratic activities have also been increasingly tangible in the Polish political reality.

This decline was facilitated by the Polish legal system. The Polish anti-discrimination laws are largely fragmented: apart from the ratified and fairly general international treaties, the equality of citizens before the law, and the right to equal treatment by public authorities and the prohibition of discrimination on any grounds is ensured by the Polish Constitution, the Labor Code (non-discrimination in employment based on sex, age, disability, race, religion, nationality, political beliefs, trade union membership, ethnic origin, religion, sexual orientation), and the Criminal Code (which makes it illegal to proclaim a fascist system or any other system having the features of a totalitarian system).

At the same time, EU anti-discrimination regulations are, according to lawyers from the Polish Society of Anti-Discrimination Law, being implemented by the Polish state to an insufficient and partial degree, often preventing a real fight against discrimination. Furthermore, right-wing and far-right parties are strong in the Polish political system, and they strive to water down and soften these provisions and to introduce them in a diminished manner or even to remove them from the Polish legal system. In addition, Polish law enforcement agencies are extremely inactive in the prosecution of hate crimes, and the prosecutor's offices do not regularly recognise racist or politically motivated violence as actions of this nature. In the sphere of internet communication or social media, they practically do not seek to prosecute such cases ex officio. These, in turn, are full of racist, anti-Semitic, Islamophobic, homophobic and sexist statements, and in practice there is full consent to the use of such hateful language. At the same time, along with the takeover of power by the nationalist-clerical Law and Justice party (PiS), growing consent to the use of hate speech can be noticed in the public space, and

some media campaigns (against the LGBT community or Muslim refugees) have originated in government circles, politicians of the ruling party or the related media. This significantly hampers any anti-discrimination and de-radicalisation activity, be it at the level of non-governmental organizations or activist groups.

Moreover, in the last two decades, Poland has become one of the European centers of and one of the main meeting places for the European radical right. The key event for this part of the political spectrum was the demonstration organised on the Polish Independence Day — the Independence March on November 11, which at its peak was able to attract up to 100,000 participants to Warsaw. Apart from Poles, it was attended by delegations of extreme right-wing groups and parties from Germany, Sweden, Hungary, Slovakia, Ukraine, the Czech Republic, Italy, Spain, Bulgaria, Serbia, and the US. The demonstration itself was organised by the nationalist National Movement and the national-radical National Radical Camp, and to this day it has been the main platform for presenting xenophobic, racist, homophobic, and ultra-religious slogans in the Polish public space. At the same time, the nationalist-ordoliberal ultra-Catholic party Konfederacja (Confederation) is the main hub of conspiracy theories on the coronavirus pandemic in the media and political space and it aims to end the equality of women, to promote discrimination against LGBTQ*, and to transform Poland into a country based on the most conservative interpretation of Catholicism and religious law.

The result of this political atmosphere is increasing violence against ethnic and sexual minorities, the Left, and liberals. The assassination of the liberal president of Gdańsk Paweł Adamowicz by a radicalised ex-prisoner associated with organised crime was the most notorious act of this type. Before his death, Adamowicz was the target of a media campaign by the right-wing media and was repeatedly portrayed as a traitor, a thief serving German interests. However, this act can only be considered the tip of the iceberg as the Never Again Association, which monitors the extreme right and its activity, has listed several dozen murders and hate crimes with racist and xenophobic motives in the last thirty years. LGBT, Roma, Muslim and Black people, both from Poland and migrants, are particularly vulnerable to this violence. Individuals from these groups are regularly beaten and verbally assaulted. The previous year, there was also an attempted terrorist attack on the Pride march in Lublin, in eastern Poland, foiled by the police. At the same time, representatives of extreme right-wing organisations have penetrated the military, police and, above all, the National Guard (the Territorial Defense Forces). There are known cases of functionaries and soldiers belonging to the national-Bolshevik Falanga, the national-radical National-Radical Camp or the   National Movement. Furthermore, the PiS government encourages these circles, called good patriots, and attempts are made to use their representatives in current political games or to break down opposition demonstrations or women protesting against the tightening of the anti-abortion law.

At the same time, Polish society has substantially changed over the past ten years. Its secularisation is increasing significantly, and almost three million economic migrants have come to Poland, mainly from Ukraine, but also from Nepal, India, Bangladesh, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Vietnam, Georgia, and Armenia. However, according to the Freedom House, an NGO that measures the political freedoms and quality of democracies worldwide, Poland has been faring poorly in the ranking for the fourth year in a row. The scores include free and fair elections, political pluralism and participation, government action and good governance, freedom of the press, assembly and organisation, the rule of law and personal freedoms. The decline of political and media freedom in Poland is the result of the government's attacks on the independent judiciary, local governments and hateful campaigns against the LGBT community and judges in 2019. Poland has also fallen to the category of incomplete democracies and received the lowest score in the Freedom House democracy ranking 'Nations in Transit') since it was first assessed in 2011. Poland received 4.93 points out of possible 7 points. This year's confusion over the presidential election and the PiS provoking a conflict over the right to abortion may push Poland even lower into the category of 'plebiscite autocracy', in which voters confirm the legitimacy of a political party that openly and ostentatiously violates the Constitution, rejecting the values of a democratic state ruled by law.

The Polish political system is dominated by the right wing parties and is quite tilted to the right compared to the European average. There was not a single left-wing party represented in the previous parliament. Similarly, today, the Left would garner merely between seven and 10% of the vote in election polls. The ruling right-wing populist Law and Justice party (PiS) remains the strongest party in Poland, with the support of approximately 30%. The second is the conservative-liberal Civic Platform (with approximately 25% of the support) and the third place is occupied by the far-right Confederation (5-10%) and the conservative Polish People's Party (5-7%). The support for right-wing and far-right parties is more prevalent among the less educated voters, living outside large urban centers, sports fans and young men.

Social resistance to racism and right-wing radicalism is primarily grassroots and is based on the third sector and activist groups. They organise anti-fascist marches and counter-demonstrations against extreme-right demonstrations. Thanks to the cooperation of activists and NGOs with local governments, it is possible in some cases to ban or stop extreme-right marches. Nevertheless, this resistance is definitely insufficient as the right and the far right dominate the Polish political discourse, and civic activity is poorly organised. Furthermore, the Polish level of unionisation (about 9%) and the election result of the Left (approximately 10% of the vote) as well as the state's institutional support for right-wing radicals and their presence in public institutions are not conducive to stopping the growth of popularity of radical or extremist right-wing groups. There are practically no de-

radicalisation programmes implemented by the state in Poland and any measures taken in this area depend on the good will of local governments. Therefore, the main burden of carrying out such activities lies with non-governmental organizations such as the Institute of Social Safety or the Codex Foundation.

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Country Profile Hungary
Bulcsú Hunyadi, György Tatár

Since 2010, Hungary's government has placed an emphasis on getting support from the population by communicating populist messages and appealing to emotions, through highlighting the need for a homogenous Hungarian nation (Körtvélyesi 2012; Novak 2017). In doing so, it stigmatized many minorities and individuals (for example, members of the LGBTQ community, drug addicts, the Roma, the poor, and also members of small churches) as well as those who oppose or disagree with official governmental approaches and policies. The refugee crisis has also been used for fearmongering and incitement to hatred against migrants.

Attitudes towards diversity: Hungarians rate civil liberties as less important than national and economic security (Hunyadi/Molnár/Wessenauer 2019). Additionally, while civic and political engagement is generally very low in Hungary, younger respondents participate in public life even less than their older counterparts, except for their readiness to take part in public demonstrations. According to the report of the European Youth prepared in 2017 only 2% of Hungarian respondents aged 15-30 have been involved in an activity of a political organization or a political party. Diversity and, in general, increase of diversity receives very little support from Hungarians (National Democratic Institute 2018).

Party preferences: According to the poll conducted by Závecz Research in October 2020, the ruling, populist right-wing, Fidesz party has the support of 32% of the population eligible to vote, while the biggest opposition party is the leftist Democratic Coalition with 10% support; followed by the former extreme right, nationalist party, Jobbik with 7%; the progressive, centrist-liberal Momentum 6%; the socialist Party, MSZP 5%; and other left-wing and green opposition parties with 2% each. The right-wing extremist Mi Hazánk party also has the support of 2% of the adult population.

Opposition and resistance to right-wing radicalization in the political arena: Currently, opposition against radicalization in Hungary can be noted within the National Assembly on the side of both the traditionally leftist parties such as Hungarian Socialist Party and Democratic Coalition, and the "new", so called 21st century political parties such as Momentum. The voice of these parties, however, is concentrated mainly in the capital city, as their influence in the counties, particularly in small communities is rather weak.

Right-wing extremist groups: Under hate groups we include organizations that, based on hatred, perform verbal, symbolic, or physical aggression on behalf of any ideology. While neither significant far-left, nor religious extremist groups exist in Hungary, there are various far-right groups with

diverging followership and foci. Political Capital's study from 2017 is the latest one to provide an overview of the landscape of far-right organisations, also pointing to the relationships between individual groups as well as the international connections of the Hungarian far-right scene (Juhász 2017: 63-80).

Anti-democratic and right-wing attitudes among the population: The trends of radicalization, particularly the enmity against foreigners, refugees and migrants can be divided into several stages. There was a rapid increase in xenophobia in the first half of the 1990s, that after a short-lived wave, began to stabilize in the 2000s (Bernát 2010). The degree of rejection and alienation from a bird's eye view was fairly stable, meaning that larger swings were not detectable due to political or social changes. However, the data indicates a slow but continuous rearrangement has occurred under the surface (Messing/Ságvári 2016).

The Eurobarometer and World Values Survey (European Social Survey 2015) conducted in EU Member States looked into the anti-Roma and anti-Jewish databases in Hungary and drew the following conclusions: anti-Roma attitudes in all European countries under investigation are much stronger than anti-Semitism. The Hungarian attitude either to the Roma or to Jews is not outstanding within the EU. In the spring of 2015, according to the Eurobarometer survey, the majority of Hungarians asked about how comfortable they would feel if a colleague or child/ partner would belong to a "particular" group of people, and Roma and Muslims were found to cause the strongest discomfort. In case of 'workplace relationships' the three groups that are most likely to cause discomfort are transgender people, gays, and Muslims. The level of comfort is lower among the people in the center, while people on the right side of the political spectrum would feel most uncomfortable in these situations. People in middle positions show the highest level of comfort (Kende/Boglárka-Hadarics/Veszna-Hunyadi 2018: 6-7).

Majority of the Hungarian public have traditionally negative attitudes towards foreigners and certain ethnic groups. Prejudice is clearly the strongest against the Roma, and its prevalence has been remarkably stable in the past two decades. According to the latest extensive poll (Bernát/Krekó/Juhász et al. 2012) conducted in 2011, 82 percent of the Hungarian population thought that "the problems of the Roma would be solved if they started to work at last", 60 percent agreed with the statement that "the inclination to criminality is in the blood of Gypsies", and 42 percent considered that "it is just right that there are still pubs, clubs and discos where Gypsies are not let in".

Despite the low level of immigration (especially from culturally distant countries), xenophobia and anti-immigration sentiments are extremely strong in the Hungarian society. Social attitudes towards immigration are mainly shaped by the fear of the Unknown, the abstract image of the immigrants presented in the media, and the strong anti-immigrant political rhetoric (Hunyadi/Barna 2015: pp. 40).

According to the latest poll on anti-Semitism conducted by the Median Institute in 2018 (Endre/Daniel 2019) roughly one-third of the Hungarian population is characterized by anti-Semitism (33%), 20% of which can be considered to be strong anti-Semites and 13% moderate anti-Semites. After an increase of anti-Semitism between 2006 and 2011, anti-Jewish sentiments have slightly decreased since then but generally remained on a higher level than before 2006. According to the researchers, the main manifestation of anti-Semitism in Hungary are anti-Jewish conspiracy theories, with the ratio of people who believe in such ideas constantly increasing since 2013. This development is most likely closely connected to the fact that conspiracy theories with an anti-Semitic touch have become widespread in Hungary mainly due to mainstream political forces, especially the governing Fidesz party, and their media outlets openly disseminating them.

Situation of the media: Since coming to power in 2010, the ruling Fidesz party has established an increasingly anti-democratic political system, which is completely tailored to the party's interests and ensures its control over politics, a broad segment of the economy and the public discourse. Domination of the political agenda has been achieved by the systematic erosion of media pluralism. Hungary has gradually fallen back on the World Press Freedom Index of Reporters Without Borders (2019) from rank 56 in 2013 to rank 87 in 2019. Many international reports have identified substantial issues with media pluralism in Hungary. The Rule of Law Report on Hungary (European Commission 2020; Political Capital 2020), published in September 2020, draws a fair picture of the systemic problems, including the unipartisan composition of the Media Council, the government's indirect political influence over the media through the biased distribution of state advertising, the increasing limitation of accessing public interest data, and the obstruction of the work of independent media outlets and the intimidation of journalists. Moreover, the control over the media and, thus, the public discourse has mainly been established through the creation of a huge pro-government media network, which is centrally organized and echoes the party's political messages. The media landscape is dominated by the Central European Press and Media Foundation (abbreviated as KESMA in Hungarian), which was created in November 2018 and includes hundreds of pro-government media outlets, including 112 news media outlets (Bátorfy 2019).

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Country Profile Romania. Polarisation and Right-wing Extremism - the situation in Romania

Florina Neagu, Mihai Tatomir

In recent years, Romania has not witnessed any major reported violent incidents stemming from radical or extremist movements; however, social polarisation is present, as can be observed through attitudes and behaviours of discrimination and intolerance. There are numerous manifestations of anti-multicultural, anti-"minority", and anti-European or anti-"modernity" (taken to be an acceptance of 'western', 'liberal' values and ideas) narratives among different political actors, right-wing movements and mass-media outlets.

As in other European countries, Romania has in place instruments and measures to combat discriminatory and hate-based discourses, starting from the creation of the National Council for Combating Discriminationin 2000, and continuing with legal prohibition of all forms of discrimination (Law no nr. 48/2002). In addition, Law no. 217/2015 regarding "banning fascist, racist or xenophobic organizations and symbols and promoting the cult of individuals guilty of committing crimes against peace and humanity" was adopted. Nevertheless, the implementation of these laws and measures to combat discrimination faces challenges. Discrimination is still prominent and widespread. A factor contributing to this is the insufficient synchronization of efforts at the institutional level; insufficient efforts for both school-based and public education and awareness raising efforts to both combat discrimination and promote the values of respect and social inclusion; the absence of an effective monitoring system; the lack of enforcement of sanctions in this field; and the continued and active promotion of discriminatory values, messages and ideas by some actors across media, academia, political, religious and other spheres.

In 2013, more than half of Romanians identified discrimination as a common phenomenon, while only 11% of the population see it as rare or nonexistent (CNCD/IRES 2013). In the Special Eurobarometer 493 of the European Union in 2019, of the 1.041 Romanians interviewed, 61% of respondents identified discrimination against Roma as a problem in the country; 59% saw evidence of discrimination based on ethnic origin, skin colour (59%), and sexual orientation (53%) (European Commission 2019).

A diverse population: According to the last census from 2011 (Census 2011), out of 20,121,641 inhabitants, 88,9% declared themselves as ethnic Romanians. The rest of the population is made up of 6,5% Hungarians and 3,3% Roma as the second and third largest communities in the country, followed by Ukrainians (50,900), Germans (36,000), Turks (27,700), Russians-Lipovanians (23,500), Tartars (20,300), and Serbs, Slovaks, Bulgarians, Croats, Greeks, Italians, Jews, Czechs, Poles, Armenians, Csangos, Macedonians, accounting for at least 1,000 people each. In addition, through 2017-2018, a

total of 237.231 immigrants were registered on Romanian territory. Of these 10.357 were Syrians, according to data provided by the General Inspectorate for Immigration. The same census revealed that approximately 86.5% of the population belonged to the Romanian Orthodox Church, while 5% were Roman Catholics, followed by Greek Catholics, Protestants, Baptists, Jews, Muslims and other affiliations.

Based on a national opinion survey (Center for Insights in Survey Research 2018), 36% of respondents believe that the "Romanian identity" is under threat and mostly fear the loss of values, culture and traditions (10% of the 36%). While 60% agree that a democratic regime is good, 47% believe that non-governmental organizations have too much power in today's societies and need to be forced to respect the sovereignty of the nation. In this context, racist and intolerant hate speech continue to be a widespread problem in public discourse and on the internet (ECRI 2019). The main targeted groups are currently the Roma, the Hungarian minority, the LGBTQI+ community, and the Jewish population.

Political polarisation by parties: The Romanian political spectrum is principally dominated by centre-right and liberal and/or conservative parties – at least according to their official programmes. The exception is Romania's purportedly 'leftist' Social Democrats (PSD) (Pranzl 2017) - though in practice their agenda often does not reflect that of a social democratic party. There are a very small number of parties officially belonging to the far right and left of the political spectrum, including radical or extremist groups. Usually these do not meet the requirements required for gaining seats in the Parliament, or are not part of the electoral competition. Also missing in the Romanian political context are formal right-wing populist parties (which have recently become successful in Europe and beyond). However, new groups — organised right-wing movements — embracing hate-based and extremist views have emerged in recent years. Intolerance towards different groups, including Roma, ethnic Hungarians and sexual minorities, is also increasing outside the political system (Cinpoeş 2012).

Right-wing groups: Romania does not at the moment appear to be facing the same scale of growth in extremist movements experienced in some other European countries, though the increased organisation and engagement of 'hate-based movements' in recent years is a concern. Despite the current lack of representation in Parliament, right-wing parties spousing extremist and demonising or hate messages are emerging together with a growing number of organisations and 'opinion generators' outside the formal political space (including bloggers, academics and analysts espousing racism, hate messaging and fake news to demonise or foster conspiracy ideas against different ethnic, identity or population groups).

In 2000, the Greater Romania Party (Partidul România Mare) was the largest party in the opposition. Its doctrine consisted of nationalist goals, an authoritarian organisational hierarchy and the

predisposition to use hate speech against ethnic and sexual minorities in its public discourse. The New Right Movement (Partidul Noua Dreaptă) is another ethnocentric extremist group which mainly targets different minorities on the internet, including the Hungarian and Roma communities, but also organises counter-marches against sexual minorities and LGBTQI+/PRIDE events (Cinpoeş 2012). Other parties espousing right-wing ideologies and promoting hate messages towards one or more identity groups include The United Romania Party (Partidul România Unită), constantly targeting the Hungarian and Roma communities, and The New Generation Party – Christian Democratic (Partidul Noua Generație-Creștin Democrat), which frequently uses legionary symbols and discriminatory statements against women, the Roma, and other ethnic minorities.

It is important to address the influence of the Romanian Orthodox Church on the evolution of the extreme right in Romania, especially through the Coalition for the Family (Coaliția pentru Familie) movement. In October 2018, they initiated a referendum for a constitutional amendment regarding Article 48 (1), which defines family as a freely consented marriage of the spouses, and sought to define family as a union between a man and a woman. The referendum was publicly supported by several political parties, including the Social Democratic Party, which had the majority in the Parliament, but also The Christian Democratic National Peasants' Party or The New Right. In addition to their initiative, which failed due to a massive national boycott campaign of the referendum and resulting low turnout which prevented the referendum from meeting the minimum number of voters required to be official, the Coalition for the Family constantly rails against the Romanian LGBTQI+ community and 'liberals', through the internet, counter-marches and mass-media.

Anti-democratic and right-wing extremist attitudes among the population: Overall, since the transition from the former regime in 1989 Romanians have maintained a high degree of lack of confidence and trust in political institutions (Hosu/Stoica 2017; Pranzl 2017), as protests and low political turnouts at elections indicate dissatisfaction of the Romanian population towards the political system and political parties, mainly due to a "crisis of representation", a rather closed political system, and perceptions of corruption (Pranzl 2017). A survey from 2016 by the Romanian Institute for Evaluation and Strategy (IRES) shows that 24% of the respondents identify themselves as "right-wing". and 17% as "left-wing" (IRES 2016). Another public opinion survey (Center for Insights in Survey Research 2018) revealed in 2018 that 26% of the Romanian respondents find more polarization in politics in Romania in recent years. Approximately 20% perceive this as a good thing, while 35% see it as negative.

To a large extent, intolerance towards diversity is significant in Romania (IRES/CNCD 2018). A recent opinion poll (IRES/ CNCD 2018) revealed high levels of intolerance towards the LGBTQI+ community, with 59% of respondents saying they would not accept an LGBTQI+ member in their family, and 52% would not want to be friends with them. The percentage for immigrants is 39% (not in the family), and

30% (wouldn't want to be friends). Intolerance was also observed towards ethnic minorities. 29% of respondents would not accept someone from the Roma community in their family. The percentage for the Hungarian community was 24%. Overall, the survey revealed that there is a fear of "the other", especially towards LGBTQI+ (74%), Roma (72%), immigrants (69%), Muslims (68%), other religions (58%), Hungarians (53%) and the Jewish community (46%) (IRES/CNCD 2018).

Opposition and resistance to discrimination and hate-based movements and ideologies: Romania has in place a normative system that prohibits a number of extremist acts including fascist, communist, racist or xenophobic activities, organisations and symbols as well as discrimination based on race, gender, disability, ethnicity, nationality, language, religion, social status, beliefs, sexual orientation, age and other categories (Cinpoeș 2012). The current normative instruments, however, have proven to be insufficient to overcome discrimination in at least core 'pockets' in society — sometimes very large pockets. Their implementation faces multiple challenges. At the same time, however, there is a vibrant and active engagement to combat radicalisation and xenophobia carried out by the civil society, often supported by national (from the national government, local authorities, and CSR funding from companies) and international (primarily from the European Commission) funding. The main political parties and public institutions, despite their commitment to creating an inclusive society and combat discrimination, often set a poor example in terms of tolerant views and the promotion of diversity. There are even cases of their using media outlets to spread hate speech in electoral competitions. Cooperation between public authorities and civil society in many parts of the country is limited, however this is beginning to change. In cities such as Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvar in Hungarian, Klausenburg in German) there is increasing cooperation across local government, law enforcement agencies, the school inspectorate and schools, and civil society, to promote inclusive education and challenge all forms of hate speech and discrimination. The coalition of actos working for a more inclusive identity and celebrating the diversity of Romanian citizens, is growing.

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EU-critical attitudes in the context of the 2019 European elections: EU-sceptical, anti-EU, democracy-sceptical or anti-democratic?

Verena Schäfer-Nerlich

(translated from the German original into English by Swantje Maaßen)

Introduction

Following the European elections in May 2019, members of right-wing populist and right-wing national parties have for the first time joined together in the European Parliament to form their own parliamentary group ("Identity and Democracy"), which, with 76 seats, is the fourth largest of the seven groups in Parliament.[17] On the occasion of the new formation of the European Parliament and the observation that representatives of these parties had previously campaigned during the election campaign with statements critical of the EU and the abolition of the European Parliament, a close look at the criticism of the EU and a systematic localization of the underlying attitudes seem to make sense.

As a first step, the central starting points for criticism of the democratic legitimacy of the EU are to be identified. Subsequently, the focus will be placed on the special framework conditions of the 2019 European elections and their political charge as a "directional decision" (Leggewie 2019, see Schäfer-Nerlich 2019). Finally, against this background, a proposal is presented for a differentiation of critical attitudes toward the EU, which should make it possible in practice to distinguish between EU-sceptical and anti-EU attitudes, and between generally democracy-sceptical and anti-democratic attitudes toward the European Union. In this paper, the concept of attitudes is applied to parties and thus to central actors in the political system. Attitudes, also in contrast to positions, are to be understood in this contribution as fundamental normative orientations on which election programs, party-political positions, and the political rhetoric of parties are oriented in practice.

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[17] Until Great Britain left the EU on 21.01.2020 and the associated redistribution of seats among the member states, this group was still the fifth largest.

The Democratization Process of the European Union

Fundamental political criticism of the European Union and its democratic foundations usually starts from the status quo and conveys the impression that the EU is a static political system without processes of self-reflection for democratic legitimation. In this contribution, the process of European integration is to be understood as an ongoing process of democratization, which can be recounted on the basis of democratic achievements, each of which is the result of the EU's examination of its democratic legitimacy (see inter alia Kielmansegg 2009). In view of the achievements of the EU democratization process, which is characterized above all by the continuous strengthening of the rights of the European Parliament in the legislative process, the shortcomings of the democratic legitimation of European governance can also be deduced, which at the same time represent open targets for relevant criticism of the European Union. Their starting point is the institutional architecture of the EU, which provides for a Council consisting of government representatives of the member states, in contrast with the European Parliament, which is directly elected by the citizens of the Union, as the central legislative body and which more closely models the representation within the majority of EU member states. In addition, there is the construction that in the EU, the European Commission has a monopoly on legislative initiative instead of the Parliament, and thus a supranational institution that does not represent the elected representation of the citizens of the Union can submit proposals for European legislation alone and thus plays an important role in governance in the EU multi-level system. This basic concept of the EU's institutional balance between Commission, Council, and Parliament was laid out by the governments of the member states in the founding treaties and has not been changed in its core during the democratization process. Against this backdrop, it is not surprising that the EU Parliament, which is also difficult to compare with parliaments at the national level, and the European Commission are often points of attack for criticism of the democratic legitimacy of the European Union's political action.

In the following chapter, we will first discuss the starting situation and the associated special relevance of the 2019 elections to the EU Parliament, so that we can then better understand the criticism of the EU and the attitudes underlying it.

The 2019 European Parliament elections as a decision on the direction to be taken

The elections to the European Parliament in May 2019 were already associated with a clear decision on the direction to be taken by European citizens. One explanation for the special political charge of the elections can be found in the numerous crises that shaped the 2014-2019 legislative period of the European Parliament (see Schäfer-Nerlich 2019), from which the parties standing for election drew

different conclusions for the future of the EU. In addition to the economic and social shocks triggered by the financial and debt crisis, which have accompanied the EU and its member states to this day, these crises include the so-called 'refugee crisis' and the rise of nationalism in individual member states, as well as Brexit. The European elections in 2019 can thus be placed in the context of a crisis within the EU, which was characterized by a lack of solidarity among the member states, an increase in nationalism, and the signs of disintegration.

Finally, the special political charge of the elections to the EU Parliament and their perception as directional elections can also be explained by the fact that the European party landscape had changed significantly compared to the last election in 2014 and that after the election, associated shifts in power in the European Parliament could be expected. Two developments are particularly significant in this regard (see Ondarza 2019): First, it can be noted that the major parties, SPD and CDU (at the EU level: "Party of European Socialists" and "European People's Party") had lost confidence and were therefore also expected to lose votes at the European level for the Group of the "Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament" (S&D) and the Group of the "European People's Party" (EPP) — a forecast that was confirmed after the election. During the 2014-2019 legislative period, these two centre-right and centre-left factions together made up well over half of the Members of the European Parliament (405 of a total of 751 seats). From this position of power, they have been able in the past to advance their programmatic goals and personnel ambitions in the sense of a de facto grand coalition at European level, without having to rely on the support of other factions (Leggewie 2019: 5). As became apparent after the elections, both the EPP, which is still the strongest group, and the S&D Group with the second highest number of seats, suffered significant losses in votes and together no longer have the majority of seats in the European Parliament. This loss of power of the hitherto dominant political groups became clear in the failed attempt to push through one of the two top candidates (Frans Timmermans for the S&D Group and Manfred Weber for the EPP) as a candidate for the office of President of the European Commission (see inter alia Nasshoven 2019).

Secondly, in May 2019 — also as a result of renationalization tendencies in some member states (national turn) — a broad spectrum of EU-sceptical right-wing populist and right-wing national parties stood for election. This was not a novelty, since right-wing parties were already represented in three or four of the nine political groups in the European Parliament between 2014 and 2019 (see Ahrens 2018: pp. 405)[18]. In view of the crises in the EU, the question that arose in the run-up to the 2019

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[18] In the last legislative period, these were the group of "European Conservatives and Reformers" (ECR), to which the Polish "Rights and Justice" (PiS), among others, had joined, the group "Europe of Freedom and Direct Democracy" (EFDD), to which the Italian "Lega Nord" belonged among others, and the group "Europe of Nations and Freedom" (ENF). The "European People's Party" (EPP), which was the largest political group in the

elections was not whether there would be right-wing parties running, but rather what shifts in power would occur in the European Parliament if these parties were to record significant gains in votes after the elections, and what significance this would have for the formation of political groups. In the run-up to the elections in April 2019, a group of national right-wing parties, including the Italian Lega Nord, the Austrian FPÖ, and the Alternative for Germany (AfD), had already declared their intention to form a Europe-wide right-national alliance and thus to establish a separate parliamentary group in the European Parliament in the future, which could influence EU decision-making with a common anti-European agenda. The election results have shown that right-wing parties have gained seats, also because they were elected by a majority of EU citizens in Italy, France, Poland and Hungary. Although members of right-wing populist and right-wing national parties in the 9th European Parliament have founded a new parliamentary group called "Identity and Democracy" (ID), the plan to merge into a Europe-wide parliamentary group has initially failed. Due to differences in content, which oppose a merger with the "European Conservatives and Reformers" (ECR) and make it clear that despite all EU criticism, the demands and ideas of national right-wing parties can be very different, right-wing parties are currently represented in two groups in the European Parliament. Despite the fact that these two groups, which together account for only 138 (ID: 76, FCR: 62) of the 705 seats in the European Parliament, are opposed by a clear majority of parties from the center-left spectrum, they could pool their votes to prevent majorities on controversial issues in the European Parliament (Schulz 2019) and thus influence European legislation.

Due to the outlined developments in the European party landscape and the expected shifts in power after the elections, these could also be read in the run-up to the elections as a "directional decision" (including Leggewie 2019, Schäfer-Nerlich 2019) for the future shape of the European Union between "more Europe" and "less Europe". This is all the truer as the parties have in part also explicitly positioned themselves between these two poles. Of particular interest with regard to the focus of this contribution is the election campaign of the right-wing parties and related statements, which can also be seen in the context of the democratization of the EU. Instead of analyzing individual election programs or European political campaign speeches, this contribution will present a categorization proposal that should make it possible to clearly distinguish between the EU-critical attitudes underlying these statements and, in particular, to better distinguish between EU-sceptical and anti-EU attitudes and between democracy-sceptical and anti-democratic attitudes towards the EU.

Parliament, was also included in this list because of the failure of an intra-fractional decision to continue the membership of Victor Orbán's right-wing Fidesz party.

EU-critical attitudes - a proposal for differentiation

Politically motivated statements that attack the European Union as an overall system or its sub-policies are often described in large parts of media reporting, but also in academic literature, as being fundamentally critical or skeptical of the EU. It can be observed that, especially in times of election campaigns at the EU level, the 'criticism' of the EU understood in this way is very acute and in some cases goes beyond the usual level of criticism or skepticism. "Skepticism" is a suitable collective term (see Klein 2019). However, in the literature, in addition to suggestions for internal differentiation in the form of "hard" and "soft" skepticism (Taggart/Szcerbiak 2001), there are also approaches for a conceptual sharpening, among other things by differentiating between attitudes to be rejected and hostile attitudes toward the EU (Miliopoulus 2017). In this contribution, the classification of "Euroscepticism" and "Europhobia" made by Yves Bertoncini and Nicole Koenig (2014) on the basis of their discriminatory power will be taken up and extended by subcategories of "democracy-sceptical" and "democracy-hostile" or "anti-democratic" attitudes towards the EU. In a study based on election manifestos, national manifestos, and websites of the parties running for the 2014 elections to the European Parliament, Bertoncini and Koenig (2014) have identified four main roots of Euroscepticism, developed a distinction between EU-sceptical and EU-phobic parties, and classified the parties represented in the European Parliament in the 2014-2019 legislative period according to this scheme. According to this, more than a quarter of the MEPs represented in the last European Parliament, which belong to parties that ran for election in 23 of the 28 member states, are skeptical or even opposed to the EU. For the current legislative period (2019-2024) a corresponding study has not yet been presented. However, it is to be expected that this percentage will increase due to the political framework of the elections in May 2019.

In particular, Bertoncini and Koenig have found that the common starting point for EU-sceptical and more far-reaching EU-phobic attitudes of parties is their criticism of the EU with respect to the four themes of democracy, national sovereignty, liberalization, and national identity (Bertoncini/Koenig 2014: pp. 5): The criticism of democracy at the European level is based on the fundamental questioning of the democratic legitimacy of the EU, assumes a far-reaching democratic deficit, also with reference to the construction of the EU's institutional architecture, and criticizes decision-making processes at the European level as untransparent and illegitimate. With regard to the EU institutions, the European Parliament and above all the European Commission are the focus of criticism, which is often associated with the attributes 'elitist', 'untransparent', 'opaque', 'technocratic', 'inflated' and 'costly'. A second area of criticism is the distribution of responsibilities between the EU and its member states, which is closely linked to the question of democracy and which concerns the question of national sovereignty. The lamentation of the loss of national sovereignty is just as plausible as the criticism of an alleged

overregulation and control from 'Brussels'. The third root of the EU criticism, which has clearly gained in relevance since 2008 and during the national debt and euro crisis, relates to the economy and liberalization. In particular, it focuses on the euro, financial transfers to crisis-ridden member states and the EU's strict austerity plans and their effects on national welfare states. Finally, criticism of the EU refers fourthly to national identity. Here, the principle of the EU's freedom of movement is often criticized very emotionally and blamed for the increase in migration within the EU or within individual member states. The political message is that national identity is threatened by the immigration of various ethnic and religious groups.

EU-sceptical attitudes vs anti-EU attitudes - Democratic-sceptical vs anti-democratic attitudes

Bertoncini and Koenig distinguished between the sceptical and phobic or anti-EU or anti-EU attitudes of the parties by drawing conclusions from their criticism. While EU skeptics call for reforms of the EU consequently, the anti-EU stance becomes apparent as an exit strategy, i.e., through demands to leave the EU, the euro and/or the Schengen area (Bertoncini/Koenig 2014: pp. 7). The announcement of the right-wing populist party "Rassemblement National" (RN) of Marine Le Pen in its campaign program for the French presidential election campaign in 2017 that it would hold a referendum on France's withdrawal from the EU after a victory and push for a "FREXIT" can therefore be attributed to an anti-EU stance. Nevertheless, it must be noted that the RN, like Matteo Salvini's Italian right-wing populist party "Lega Nord", has held back with concrete demands for withdrawal in the 2019 European election campaign, and that these demands had not previously been included in their election programs. However, this should not suggest that these two right-wing parties have undergone a change of heart and are no longer taking an anti-EU stance. Rather, it can be assumed that the eleven European right-wing national parties, which had already joined together in the run-up to the European elections to form the alliance "European Alliance of Peoples and Nations"[19], have agreed on their positioning in the election campaign and that a fundamental change in strategy has been undertaken here, which envisages fundamentally reshaping the European Union from within through coordinated action by the right-wing national parties in a joint group in the European Parliament (Bechter 2019: 10). This hidden agenda is also made clear in the AfD's European election program, in which "DEXIT", i.e., the withdrawal of the Federal Republic of Germany from the European Union, is described as the "last

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[19] Besides Lega Nord (Italy) and Rassemblement National (France), these include the AfD, the FPÖ, the Finnish Party (Finland), the Conservative People's Party (Estonia), Danks Folkeparti (Denmark), Sme Rodina (Slovakia), Freiheitsparteo (Netherlands) and Vlaams Belang (Belgium).

option" that should only be chosen if the reform of the existing EU system cannot be realized within a reasonable period of time (AfD 2019b: 12).

In order to make this demarcation of borders more tangible and practicable and to offer further assistance in recognizing an anti-EU stance, these considerations are to be continued. For example, questioning political decisions and the political orientation of common policies at the European level, such as European migration and asylum policy, can be classified as an EU-sceptical attitude. One example is the demand formulated in the AfD's European election program for an amendment to the Schengen Agreement and the tightening of external border controls (AfD 2019b: 49).

In order to make this demarcation of borders more tangible and practicable and to offer further assistance in recognizing an anti-EU stance, these considerations should be continued. For example, questioning political decisions and the political orientation of common policies at the European level, such as European migration and asylum policy, can be classified as an EU-sceptical attitude. One example is the demand formulated in the AfD's European election program for an amendment to the Schengen Agreement and the tightening of external border controls (AfD 2019b: 49).

The political demand for a retransfer of supranational responsibilities to the national level — understood as a withdrawal from individual policy areas and an associated effort to dismantle or reduce the EU system in its current state of development — corresponds, in contrast, to an anti-EU stance. In the case of the AfD, the election manifesto shows that reforms in favor of the sovereignty of nation states are planned in a variety of policy areas in which the member states make joint decisions at the European level and which form the basic framework of the EU as we know it today. This applies to the internal market, economic and financial policy and the euro as well as foreign and security policy, justice and home affairs, migration and asylum policy and the area of the common values of the EU member states (AfD 2019b). The goal pursued through reforms of individual policy areas, but also through the reorganization of the EU's institutional architecture and the associated curtailment of the powers of the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Court of Justice of the European Union, is the creation of a "European community of sovereign states" (AfD 2019b: 7), which in fact describes the dismantling of the European Union into an intergovernmental meeting place on the basis of a basic contractual consensus between sovereign states without any binding commitment to common values (see Schäfer-Nerlich/Wessels 2019). Accordingly, party political demands on individual policy areas must be interpreted in the overall context of election programs and programmatic statements on the EU's objectives in order to ultimately expose them as hostile to the EU. The national right-wing parties, which have already clearly formulated their objectives for the future development of the EU in the run-up to the 2019 European elections with the perspective of forming a joint parliamentary group after the elections, have formed the "European

Alliance of Peoples and Nations". Starting from an anti-EU stance, these extreme right-wing parties are striving to dismantle the EU into a functional alliance of sovereign nation-states, which is reflected above all in the fundamental opposition to the transfer of further competences to supranational institutions, their demands for a transfer of competences back to the member states, and a related nationalistically motivated overemphasis on the principle of subsidiarity in the election manifestos and in the programmatic statements on the EU (see Bechter 2019).

Basic assumption	Continuation of the EU	Dismantling or dissolution of the EU
Alignment of criticism	directed against individual political decisions and the orientation of EU policies and/or against the design of its democratic constitution	directed against the EU as an overall system, its subsystems and/or its democratic liberal constitution
	constructive	destructive
Differentiation of criticism with regard to the attitude towards the EU	EU-sceptical	anti-EU
Differentiation of criticism with regard to the attitude toward the democratic constitution of the EU	democracy-sceptical	Anti-democratic

Table 1 Differentiation of EU criticism

This distinction according to Bertoncini and Koenig can also be used as a basis for further considerations of anti-democratic attitudes. Finally, with respect to the criticism that parties have levelled at democracy in the European Union, a red line can be drawn between EU-sceptical and anti-EU attitudes. Since the focus here is on attitudes toward the understanding of democracy anchored in the EU as a form of rule and life, the terms "democracy-skeptical" and "anti-democratic" will be used here (see Figure 1). Criticism of the political and democratic legitimacy of the EU cannot therefore necessarily be attributed to an anti-democratic and thus anti-democratic attitude. As long as politically motivated criticism and the associated demands for reforms of the EU's institutional architecture are still in harmony with the democratic principles of the EU anchored in Part II of the EU Treaty (Art. 9-12 TEU), which stipulates, among other things, that the functioning of the Union is based on

representative democracy (Art. 10, para. 1 TEU) and that all citizens have the right to participate in the democratic life of the Union (Art. 10, para. 3 TEU)[20], this still corresponds to a skeptical attitude toward democracy. However, there are borderline cases. For example, the demand of the AfD in its election manifesto for the 2019 European elections to abolish the European Parliament and return legislative competence to the institutions of the member states (AfD 2019b: 12) is to be understood as an attack on the democratically constituted EU and its understanding of democracy laid down in Article 10 TEU and can therefore be attributed to an anti-democratic attitude towards the EU. In contrast, the demand formulated in the AfD's previous key motion on the European election program for 2019 to transform the European Parliament into a European Assembly of a maximum of 100 delegates appointed from the member states, who are to be elected by the national parliaments in proportion to the strength of their parliamentary groups (AfD 2019a: 8), can at first glance still be classified as "sceptical of democracy". Thus, it can be argued that the principle of representative democracy, which constitutes the democratic constitution of the EU, can still be assessed as upheld even if Europe-wide elections are abolished and elected parliamentarians from the member states are sent in their place. As a convincing counter-argument, however, the EU's understanding of democracy can be cited in Article 10(2) TEU, since citizens are directly represented in the European Parliament at the Union level. Direct elections to the European Parliament are thus a central element of the democratic constitution of the EU and cannot be abolished in the course of institutional reform.

Provided that democracy is understood not only as a formal principle of collective decision-making but also as a way of life, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which came into force together with the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007, can be used as a further contractual starting point for drawing a line between sceptical democratic and anti-democratic attitudes toward the EU.[21] According to this, anti-democratic attitudes also contradict basic principles such as freedom, equality, (ambiguity) tolerance and pluralism, which characterize democratic societies. According to this understanding of democracy, pluralism is particularly important as a structural element of the free and legal order (Fraenkel 1964) and as a resource for legitimacy. Pluralism thus becomes the normative reference point for freedom and diversity of individual opinions, interests and life plans (de Nève 2015: 46). In this respect, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which contains more than 50

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[20] In addition to respect for human dignity, freedom, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, Article 2 TEU also lists democracy as one of the values "common to all Member States in a society characterised by pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between men and women" (Article 2(2) TEU).

[21] In contrast to the Treaty of Lisbon, the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which has equal status under the Treaty, was not signed by the two member states Great Britain and Poland, which can also be interpreted as a sign of the rejection of a more far-reaching common basis of values.

articles, lists in particular freedom of the media and their plurality (Art. 11(2)) and the diversity of cultures, religions and languages (Art. 11) as fundamental rights of the EU, which are to be respected by all member states in accordance with common values. One example of political demands that can be seen as direct attacks on the EU's understanding of plurality and must therefore be weighted as anti-democratic is the "abolition of gender mainstreaming" called for in the AfD's European election program (AfD 2019b: pp. 73). With the Treaty of Amsterdam (1997/1999), the EU had made gender mainstreaming, and thus also the recognition of gender equality, a binding directive to be implemented at national level for all member states. With the associated goal of establishing gender justice in all member states, the EU has acted firmly to ensure its democracy is established as a way of life.

At this point, a distinction can be made as to whether these are party-political statements that, as in the case described above, are directly directed against the constitutional EU's understanding of plurality or whether programmatic statements and government decisions by right-wing national parties in the member states can be observed here that constitute an attack on the member states' common values defined within the framework of the EU. It is difficult to draw a clear line, because if the Hungarian ruling party "Fidesz" propagates the traditional family image at the national level and in various contexts serves homophobic, anti-Semitic or racist resentments[22], this also affects the common basis of values on which the member states of the EU have jointly agreed. In the case of Hungary, moreover, systematic interventions by Victor Orbán's government in the freedom of the press, freedom of research and teaching, the protection of minorities, and the independence of the judiciary can be observed, which, since they impose restrictions on Hungary's constitutional and living democracy, can be classified as antidemocratic or anti-democratic. Finally, the fact that attacks on the consensus of values and thus also on the underlying understanding of plurality in the EU multi-level system cannot be considered on levels that are detached from one another is shown by the proceedings against Hungary and Poland, which were initiated by the European Commission on the basis of corresponding national government decisions and are still ongoing, against the rule of law, which are directed against the encroachment of these member states on fundamental rights and against the systematic violation of the values laid down in Article 2 TEU, such as democracy and the rule of law, but also respect for human dignity and the freedom and equality of all people.

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[22] See for example the reactions to a cola advertisement with same-sex couples:
https://www.deutschlandfunk.de/getraenkewerbung-in-ungarn-an-cola-kampagne-entzuendet-sich.1773.de.html?dram:article_id=456010 (last access: 09/21/2020).

Conclusion

In the 2019 European elections, a wide spectrum of national right-wing parties stood for election, whose representatives had advertised with statements critical of the EU, such as the abolition of the European Parliament. Based on the observation that such party-political positions are largely undifferentiatedly recorded in media coverage as "EU-critical" or "EU-skeptical", this contribution developed a categorization proposal that should make it possible to distinguish in practice and also regardless of European elections, between EU-skeptical and anti-EU attitudes and between democracy-sceptical and anti-democratic attitudes towards the European Union. This seems necessary because, due to the rise of nationalism in some member states, it can be assumed that criticism of the EU will continue to be an important component of national election campaigns and will continue to be the point of reference for right-wing populist governments in the member states to justify domestic political action that runs counter to the common values of the European Union. The classification presented here offers the following added value: On the one hand, it makes it possible to expose anti-EU and anti-democratic attitudes of parties explicitly as such and to avoid being trivialized by the collective term 'EU criticism'. On the other hand, this demarcation makes it clear that criticism of the democratic legitimacy of the EU cannot automatically be traced back to an anti-democratic attitude and therefore cannot be stigmatized as anti-EU. The debate on the democratic constitution of the European Union must continue to be conducted publicly and diversely. This is especially true since the democratization of the EU is a process that is lived and developed by the citizens of the Union both through their political participation in the EU multi-level system and through their involvement in the debate on the future of Europe.

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Experiencing Everyday Prejudice and Discrimination in Central and Eastern Europe: the target's perspective on-the-ground and in the online sphere

Catherine Lourdes Dy, Max Mühlhäuser, Andrea Tundis

Abstract

The European Union has long been active in the fight against discrimination and in promoting equal opportunities, and with the Amsterdam Treaty in 1997 came new, far-reaching powers to take action to combat discrimination based on sex, ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation. However, while establishing a set of laws against discrimination is an essential step, it is well known that laws themselves are not enough, normative change needs to occur to eliminate such actions. The COVID-19 epidemic has dealt a heavy blow to populations and health systems across the world. At the same time, it has also highlighted continued cases of prejudice and discrimination across Europe, even for groups not normally targets of discrimination such as citizens and migrants of Asian descent. Indeed, prejudice and discrimination are common themes even to this day. This paper looks at prejudice and discrimination on-the-ground in Central and Eastern Europe and online, and especially highlights the target's perspective — taken from in-depth interviews conducted between April and December 2020 — to further inform practice and policy.

Introduction

"I was on the tram, on my way home. I'm a mechanical engineer and my work is great here, Prague is great. But that time [February 2020], there was an elderly person who wanted to sit. There was a free seat beside me, but he did not want to sit beside me. He made me stand up and called me "Chinese" and "virus". No one helped me, in fact, a group of teenagers came closer to us and I was afraid they would push me out of the tram. I just left on the next stop." (Manuel, 38, Filipino mechanical engineer in Prague)

In January 2020, during the period of growing awareness of the public health emergency COVID-19, a wave of anti-Asian racism made itself felt in Europe and globally. With no differentiating between Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Thai, Koreans, Filipinos or others of Asian physical appearance, reports started pouring in of incidences of xenophobia and physical violence, including individuals being barred from entering groceries or pushed out of public transportation (Chuang 2020; Geisser 2020); online violence (Ziems et al. 2020); as well as blanket institutional violence, such as the case of Rome's Santa Cecilia Conservatory suspending all "oriental students"; as well as hotels across the continent closing their doors to nationals from East and Southeast Asia, again, no matter the actual nationality or

exposure to COVID-19.[23] During this time, anti-Asian racism, anti-immigrant hate, and xenophobia went hand in hand.

In the online sphere, the hashtag #JeNeSuisPasUnVirus ["I am not a virus"] was coined by the French Asian community on Twitter in response to a spate of racially motivated attacks in the country. This online campaign was quickly adopted by communities in the UK, Germany, Italy, and in Spain, and appeared across various platforms including Twitter, but also Instagram, Facebook, and others. In parallel to this, anti-Semitic conspiracy myths regarding COVID-19 flooded the internet. Those, who were already previous targets of hate, had to face even more instances of everyday prejudice and discrimination — new iterations of an old hatred.

While COVID-19 shined a spotlight on these events, unfortunately incidences of "group-focused enmity" or GFE (Zick/Küpper/Heitmeyer 2010) have been occurring continuously since before 2020. Spanning elements of xenophobia, ethnic racism, anti-Semitism, Muslim hostility, sexism, homophobia, as well as the devaluation of disabled and homeless persons (Ibid.), GFE is a particularly useful framework for examining prejudice and discrimination. Even prior to the emergence of COVID-related xenophobia, prejudice and discrimination against vulnerable groups, in-person or online, as well as institutionally have been insidiously present in all societies and continue to cause damage, both to individuals and to communities.

This article looks at the phenomenon of prejudice and discrimination in Europe, focusing on the online sphere and on-the-ground incidents from the target's perspective in Central and Eastern Europe: Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

> The article unpacks direct discrimination (i.e. discrimination that was directly addressed at individuals due to their ethnic origin, nationality, gender identity, disability, socio-economic status, or other); institutional discrimination (i.e. inability to open a bank account due to nationality, limited access to housing, or similar); as well as cases of harassment (i.e. unwanted behavior which is offensive or which intimidates or humiliates) tantamount to violence. This is presented through a review of current research on the phenomenon supported by in-depth interviews with self-identified targets of discrimination.

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[23] See for example journalistic coverage from the Washington Post on the Santa Cecilia incident which was widely condemned by the music community https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2020/01/31/top-european-music-school-suspended-students-east-asia-over-coronavirus-concerns-amid-rising-discrimination/, checked 01/13/2021.

Specific note on terminology: in the literature, "victim", "survivor", and "target" are used. All have long histories and frameworks attached to them, and the for the sake of this this article the target perspective is used mainly in alignment with stressing the source of the actions as well as the agency of the respondents. That said, during the data gathering phase, it was important to ask the interviewee if they had a preference. For some, "victim" may be applicable particularly when referring to cases of harassment or assault, whereas "survivor" may be more appropriate after a period of healing. Ultimately, it is down to an individual preference and we did not oblige any respondent to identify with a specific term.

Overview of prejudice and discrimination in the EU and in CEE

Prominently highlighted on the EUROPA website, "the European Union is based on a strong commitment to promoting and protecting human rights, democracy, and the rule of law" [24]. Having human rights at the core of a multicultural Europe, "united in diversity", is not only essential for the protection of vulnerable groups but forms the cornerstone of a healthy democratic union. However, even though it has been seventy years since the European Convention on Human Rights was signed in Rome, challenges continue to appear, and particularly rear their heads during times of crisis.

Europe has historically been diverse, and this diversity has only grown with the advent of open borders, ease of travel, and indeed, though recognition of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender social movements. Whereas a welcome development for many, for others such as populist and extremist groups, such changes are in direct opposition to their fundamental beliefs of cultural purity and traditional gender norms.

At this point, it is useful to refer to the concept of "group-focused enmity" (Zick/Küpper/Heitmeyer 2010), which encompasses stereotypes and disparaging attitudes towards those who are supposedly 'different'. This includes xenophobic, racist, anti-Semitic, Islamophobic, sexist, homophobic and transphobic attitudes as well as the devaluation and exclusion of other social groups such as homeless, long-term unemployed and disabled people.

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[24] https://europa.eu/european-union/topics/human-rights_en, checked 01/10/2021.

Within the context of the European Union, the *Community Action Programme against Discrimination* is a useful framework to see how the EU encouraged concrete measures in the field of equal treatment and equal opportunities across all grounds of discrimination.[25]

The Community Action Programme was implemented between 2001 and 2006 and focused on specific grounds of discrimination: namely, based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, and sexual orientation.[26] Discrimination based on nationality has always been prohibited. The European Commission protects citizen and resident rights through the various directives as below:

Directive 2000/43/EC against discrimination on the grounds of racial and ethnic origin (Directive 2000/43/EC), in the workplace on the grounds of religion or belief, disability, age or sexual orientation (2000/78/EC), on the grounds of age, disability, sexual orientation and religion or belief outside the workplace (COM(2008)462), and equal treatment of men and women in matters of employment and occupation (2006/54/EC) or in the access to and supply of goods and services (2004/113/EC).

This European Commission's 2019 Eurobarometer opinion survey shows that European majorities are only somehow aware of on-going discrimination towards several target groups in their country, and that sensitivity to discrimination also varies from country to country. Across Europe, the majority are aware of discrimination against Roma (61%) and on the basis of ethnic origin and skin color (59%). At the same time, the individual readiness to discriminate against specific target groups has decreased in recent years. Nowadays, more people would accept for their child to have a romantic relationship with a black person, Roma, Muslim, or with someone of the same sex.

Across Europe, research shows that attitudes on some topics reflect a sharp East-West divide. On issues like sexual orientation and the role of women in society, opinions differ sharply between West and East, with Western Europeans expressing much more accepting attitudes (Pew Research Center Spring 2019 Global Attitudes Survey, Question 31; for a short overview see also Küpper/Váradi in this issue).

Perhaps surveys are not needed: many clearly recall the divisive October 2018 referendum in Romania regarding the definition of the family in the Romanian Constitution and Poland's recent anti-abortion law. The Romanian referendum was launched by the *Coaliția pentru Familie* (the Coalition for Family) after gathering three million signatures in 2015 — substantially more than the 500,000 required. The referendum failed as the turnout was only 21.1% but it was close to the required 30% (see for example,

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[25] Council Decision 2000/750/EC of 27 November 2000 establishing a Community Action Programme to combat discrimination (2001 to 2006).
[26] The Community Action Programme against Discrimination was replaced by the PROGRESS Community Programme from January 2007.

Gherasim-Proca 2018; Margarit 2019). In October of 2020, the new Polish Constitutional Tribunal, decided to ban abortion even in cases of fetal defects. Already having some of the strictest abortion laws in Europe, this development in Poland triggered mass protests even with the on-going pandemic (for more on the history of abortion legislation in Poland, see Szelewa 2016; Chełstowska 2011).

On-the-ground and online incidences in Central and Eastern Europe: the target's perspective

Statistical reports are rich in information and therefore not only valuable to see trends over the years, as in the Eurobarometer case, but are also essential to understand the overall trends and narratives in terms of prejudice and discrimination in Europe as a whole and in Central and Eastern Europe in particular. However, because the experiences of targets of discrimination are so personal and so varied, these are not easily translatable from quantitative data. It is therefore important for researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to take into account lived experiences and to as much as possible empower individuals to speak for themselves, in support of other data gathered such as surveys and other statistical reports. Indeed, involving vulnerable groups is essential to make national- and European-level and local policies and practices more effective and better tailored to needs on the ground.

Qualitative data-gathering with vulnerable groups presents a unique challenge. Trust-building is key when discussing sensitive topics such as discrimination because of nationality or ethnic origin, or violence due to sexual orientation. Indeed, care is required not only in making sure that interviewee identities are protected but that interviews abide by the 'do no harm' principle. It is known that interviews — by journalists, activists, or even researchers — can stigmatize, shame, and be psychologically harmful if done poorly. Therefore, all measures were taken to ensure the protection of interviewees, with full informed consent and respect for their boundaries.[27]

Interviews started in April 2020, mainly looking at cases within Romania and Hungary, and were expanded to include the wider CEE region between September and December 2020. Considering the variety of possible responses and the sensitivity of the topics at hand, an interview kit with open-ended questions was utilized, which allowed interviewees to use their own terms and direct their response at their convenience.

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[27] Ethical standards and research integrity were made key priorities in the design of this research. Dr. Dy has extensive field experience in ethnographic research involving victims of sexual trafficking (on-going), vulnerable migrants including irregular migrants in France and the BENELUX region (Dy 2020), and women who have experienced unintended pregnancy and unsafe abortion in the Philippines (Dy 2019).

passport nationalities[28]	countries of residence	length of residency	age	gender[29]	disability
1 American 1 Burundian 3 Chinese 1 French 1 Hungarian 1 Korean 1 Malay 1 Polish 4 Romanian 5 Philippine 1 Vietnamese	Bulgaria Czech Republic Estonia Hungary Poland Romania Slovenia United Kingdom and Portugal[30]	The length of residency varied between respondents, some are CEE citizens and others are foreign-born with residency periods between a few months (i.e. students) to a few years.	Majority of the inter_viewees were between the ages of 18 and 59, with the exception of two who were 60+	12 cisgender 1 non-binary 2 transgender 1 transsexual 4 no response	None of those interviewed identified as having a disability

Table 1 Targets of discrimination interviewed between April and December 2020

Due to COVID-19, all interviews were done by phone or video conference and lasted between 60 and 120 minutes long. Except for the Romanian case, interviewees were selected through chain-referral sampling.

Gathering qualitative data on prejudice and discrimination is a time- and labor-intensive task, and it was not possible within the scope of this research to comprehensively cover all possible accounts. However, the goal of this paper was not regarding quantity but rather to hear the voices of actual

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[28] It is important to remember that passport nationality does not necessarily reflect ethnic origin, residency status in the EU, or length of stay (indicated in a separate column); however, as an empirical base point, it was useful to collect this data as a means of identification. The possibility of dual nationality was taken into consideration, however none of the respondents of the study fit into this category.

[29] As self-identified by the interviewees.

[30] One respondent was already resident in Portugal at the time of the interview but referred to incidents in Slovenia for the discussion. Another respondent was in a similar situation, having relocated to the United Kingdom in 2018 but referring to events that transpired in Romania.

individuals from or living in the CEE region and juxtapose their lived experiences with available research on on-site and online incidents and Eurobarometer data.

How targeted persons experience everyday prejudice and discrimination on the ground

Discrimination due to ethnic origin is the most prevalent across the EU and within this field, *discrimination against Roma* is considered the most widespread as indicated by 61% of respondents of the latest Eurobarometer survey (European Commission 2019).[31] Indeed, from the literature it is clear that Roma are one of the most persecuted ethnic minority groups in Europe today. Although Roma everywhere in Europe face continuing difficulties, their current situation in Central and Eastern Europe is an especially precarious one (Project on Ethnic Relations 1997). In terms of numbers, "researchers and international organizations have compiled widely divergent figures, even for countries where a good amount of research on Roma has been done" (Druker, 1997: 22). As Margaret Brearley writes, European Roma have endured "forced evictions from homes; expulsions from villages and towns (often with the support of local Mayors); physical assault and murder by skinheads, policemen, neighbors; exclusion from public places; widespread legal discrimination; unduly harsh prison sentences and extortionate fines for petty offences; and endemic racial abuse." (1996: 3).

It is important to remember that anti-Roma sentiment is not only limited to the realm of extremists but affects everyday encounters, as Vano, a Roma construction worker in Cluj-Napoca (Romania) narrates:

"I came with a friend to work in Cluj-Napoca. We had rented an apartment — everything was done by phone, so it was alright. By phone no one can see who you are! But when we arrived, the landlord would not let us in. They saw our faces and our skin: we were Roma. It did not matter that we came to the city to work, or that they had agreed to rent the apartment to us. Because we were Roma, we were unwanted. We had nowhere to stay and we asked for help. We are lucky to have found people in Cluj that helped us."

Upon asking whether they would file a case against the discriminatory landlord:

"No, even the police would laugh at us if they even let us in. The problem is everywhere, even with the police."

(Vano and Loni, Roma construction workers, Romania)

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[31] There can be no comparison to the 2015 survey for this category as 'skin color', 'age', and 'being intersex' were new categories added to the 2019 iteration.

It is difficult to imagine what else Vano and Loni could have done to be integrated into society. Skilled, employed, fluent in Romanian, trusting that a modern, university city like Cluj-Napoca would offer a welcome difficult to find elsewhere in Eastern Europe — but it was not the case. Assisted by a church group and an NGO in Cluj, they found alternative permanent accommodation and did not file any case against the discriminatory practice they encountered.

The death of George Floyd in the United States, who suffocated under the knee of a police officer in June 2020 — not the first such case of excessive violence against members of the black American community — triggered massive response globally. Anti-discrimination rallies were held in Warsaw and other cities, in solidarity with the American movement and also to highlight problem of racism and police brutality in their own countries.

With regard to Anti-Semitism, in the latest FRA Report on Jewish peoples' experiences presents staggering statistics (EU FRA 2018): over one third of all respondents reported experiencing some form of harassment in the five years before the survey, and similar to many other vulnerable groups, 79% of the respondents who reported experiencing antisemitic harassment did not report the incident to the police or to any other organization.

Discrimination due to gender is also prevalent in Europe, and as mentioned earlier in the article, is of particular concern in Central and Eastern Europe (Verloo 2007; Takács 2015; Paternotte/Kuhar 2018). Violence and hate crimes targeting the LGBTQI+ community[32] are especially prevalent in Eastern Europe and there have been several attacks on community members during Eastern European Gay Pride events (Kuhar/Paternotte 2017). In recent years, regression has been seen within several countries, for example in Bulgaria, where the legal instruments allowing trans people to change their name and gender on legal documents has been revoked (European Court of Human Rights 2017).

There are very few statistics on *hate crimes experienced by trans people*. The 2009 report "Transphobic Hate Crime in the European Union" by the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association (ILGA) Europe and Press for Change was the first quantitative report, stating that 79% of respondents had experienced some form of harassment in public ranging from transphobic comments to physical or sexual abuse. The report also stated that trans people are three times more likely to experience a transphobic hate incident or hate crime than lesbians or gay men (Turner/Whittle/Combs 2009: 1).

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[32] Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex (LGBTQI) and other identities, including two spirited, questioning, pansexual/omnisexual, asexual, ally, are included.

"I grew up transgender in Poland. Maybe this already says enough… when I was young, kids didn't play with me, I was a freak. I was sent to boarding school, the best school in Poland, because [my family] wanted me to go to medicine, but even there I was a freak. Even my parents did not accept me. My mother wanted a daughter, but I am a boy… I jumped out the window when I was 17 and broke my spine. It was then that my mother realized that it was me or nothing… my grandparents helped, and my uncle, they told my parents: accept him or lose him."

A difficult conversation, Alex narrated his struggles growing up transgender in a small town in Poland. The most difficult aspect was that his parents did not accept him, and throughout his life tried to change him "back into a girl" — with no success. These attempts eventually resulted in a turning point, where Alex attempted suicide and nearly succeeded. Notably, while his parents were averse to accepting him, his grandmother, uncles, and aunts were supportive, and eventually generated acceptance.

"I started the transition process, sponsored by my uncle. I always carry all my certificates — doctor's, psychologist's, sexologist's, all of them — but still it is not enough. When there is a ticket inspection on the bus for example, they see my card and they see my name [which in Poland, indicates male or female] and even with all my documents they give me a ticket. I must go all the way to the main office to explain that it is my card, and that I should not have to pay for a ticket. It happens maybe once a month." (Alex, nurse, Poland)

According to a OSCE-led survey on Violence Against Women in South Eastern Europe and Eastern Europe more than two thirds (70%) of women have experienced some form of violence addressed to them as women (sexual harassment, stalking, intimate partner violence or non-partner violence including psychological, physical or sexual violence) since the age of 15 (OSCE 2019). Nearly every other woman (45%) has experienced sexual harassment offline or via the internet. Due to societal norms and lack of trust in the police, women do not report most incidents to the police and they rarely seek support from other institutions. Migrant women and other vulnerable groups including Roma and members of ethnic minorities are far less likely to report cases of harassment or violence (Freedman 2016; Lazaridis 2001; see also Fresnoza-Flot/Ricordeau 2017).

"He would strangle me and slap me. He would take away my phone so I could not take photos. He told me he is friends with the police so they would not believe me. Without photos they will certainly not believe me. He threatened to divorce me, and if he divorces me, he will take our son. I am unemployed, I have no home, I don't speak [the local language] … The embassy will not help me. I'm scared. I want to leave but I cannot leave, I

don't know where to go. Please help me." (Anna, wife and mother, age, nationality, and location concealed for protection[33])

Children — even children who are EU citizens by birth — are targets and such discrimination received at a young age can have lasting effects on social integration, and identification as European citizens (Analitis et al. 2009). Marites, a Filipina married to a Romanian citizen narrates her experience in the early days of COVID:

"It was my child who was bullied… he is half-Romanian and half-Filipino. He's quite fair-skinned but does look strongly Filipino. He's being bullied in school. They call him China, Jackie Chan, coronavirus… at the playground they don't play with him, neither at the spinning ride nor at the slide. Sometimes he is violently pushed away. I feel so bad for him; he isn't even Chinese!" (Marites, wife and mother, resident in Bucharest, Romania)

As a further consequence of COVID-19, we have also observed that migrants have been targeted by discriminatory practices across the CEE. Similar stories have emerged from Romania, Hungary, and Bulgaria of illegal firing practices such as the one narrated below:

"It was a few months into this year, and we were asked to sign an addition to our contracts. We thought it was just regarding additional safety measures we had to take for COVID, but we discovered we signed our own resignation letters. It was in [national language] so we did not know — we trusted. More than ten of us were out of a job, but not the [local staff] only us migrants." (Nestor, HORECA worker, age, nationality, and location concealed for protection)

The group of migrants had 'legally' resigned, the paperwork had been filed correctly by their employer, and therefore had no legal recourse. The attention of organizations such as the International Organization for Migration was drawn to such unethical practices, but limited action was possible after the fact. Instead, it was fellow migrant groups who mobilized to raise funds to provide support in the form of weekly food deliveries to those who were out of employment and stuck in the country due to COVID flight restrictions. As of writing this article, no long-term solution has yet been found.

It is important to note that incidents do not have to be particularly violent or cause physical harm to result in injury: "I had never experienced racism before," narrates Camille, a young student from Korea

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[33] Anna (not her real name) was put in contact with representatives from the International Organization for Migration (IOM) who would be able to assist her further. The IOM offered to assist Anna's repatriation; however, her infant child would have to remain. Under European legislation, where parental authority is exercised jointly by both parents, the other parent's consent is required in order to remove a child to another Member State or abroad. Even in the case of divorce, the parents have joint parental authority, unless otherwise decided by the court, a situation where many women find themselves 'trapped' post-dissolution of marriage but with minor children. Anna has decided to remain in Europe and is being assisted by the IOM to learn the local language, access childcare services, and find employment and alternative housing.

who was studying on exchange in Slovenia, "then one evening in February I was walking home to my dormitory and two teenage guys were in front of me and shouted *Ching Chong Ching* — you know, like Chinese — and I was so affected. I had to tell all my friends, my boyfriend, I couldn't leave the whole day next day. And after that incident I was hyperaware of the difference between me and the majority in Slovenia."

Camille narrated how she is petite, even for Korean standards, with dark hair, whereas the majority in Slovenia are tall and blonde — indeed, statistically some of the tallest people in the world. It had never been something she noticed 'negatively' until that nighttime incident. Following it however, she developed anxiety on public transportation and enclosed spaces and left Slovenia as soon as her semester was over.

It may be easy to overlook such incidents as of less importance; but the effect on an individual's life is palpable. It is not for outsiders to decide the 'impact' on targets of prejudice or discrimination but acknowledge that each individual is impacted in different ways and to different degrees. It is also important to remember that whereas 'in-person' incidents are jarring, there is also a rising case of online violence and the targets remain largely the same.

How targeted persons experience Hate Speech on the Internet

The popularity of social media has continued to grow across Europe and globally, and platforms like Twitter, Facebook and Instagram draw a lot of interest across people from different backgrounds and cultures (Statista 2020), but also in the enterprise sectors (Eurostat 2020). Such online platforms offer individuals the opportunity to share thoughts, feelings, and opinions with others on the platform and open a space for discussions. While the diversity of different backgrounds in a borderless online world provides a great opportunity to get to know various cultures and points of view, a significant number of individuals tend to use aggressive language against others who do not share their beliefs. Eighty percent of the respondents of the FRA survey on Anti-Semitism reported coming across such statements online (EU FRA 2018).

'Hate speech' is defined as any form of communication that ridicules or insults either an individual or a group based on race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, political orientation, or other categories (Council of Europe 1997). For some people hate speech casts a pall over their lived experience of the Internet: the bits of cyberspace they inhabit, the posts they see and the messages they receive. For these Internet users, even if it is a minority of people, it would not be an exaggeration to speak of the current Internet epoch—following the Internet of Content, the Internet of Services, the Internet of People and the Internet of Things—as being the Internet of Hate. (Brown 2020: 6)

A difficulty with hate speech, unlike in-person discrimination, is that there is a certain difficulty to gauge the tone of the situation. Due to the variety of languages and constantly evolving slang, it is often difficult to obtain an accurate identification of such content. The online communication on social media platforms is, indeed, more complex with the usage of memes, emojis, and abbreviations; and it is difficult to control and filter all the content on such platforms due to the enormous number of messages, posts, and comments. In addition, the power of anonymity may lead to the lack of respect and tolerance which in turn leads to problematic behavior and statements online.

"I work with the Roma community in [city in Romania] and my dream is for the next generation to know that they are treasured by God. As a Roma myself, I want us to live without shame or guilt and even be proud that we are Roma. It is not an easy task. I work with the youth a few hours a week, but you know, they are online the rest of the time. This means that any work that I do must compete with traditional media — which only tells the story of the problems in Roma communities, never the positive initiatives — or social media where there is so much hatred against people like me." (Roxana, Roma advocate and NGO worker, Romania)

Roxana and her NGO have continuously worked promoting the rights of Roma, including educational programs and anti-violence and violence prevention programs with great success; however, acknowledge that while technology has greatly benefited them, the challenges of online hate speech are serious ones. She shares that sometimes progress from weeks of leadership training can be set back by a confrontation online, and that it is difficult to protect youth in the online sphere.

Direct communication platforms such as Twitter are particularly fertile ground for hate speech as they allow unfettered open interchange but also the power of anonymity. Responding to this, in July 2019, Twitter expanded their rules against hateful conduct to include "language that dehumanizes others on the basis of religion or caste"; in March 2020, to include "language that dehumanizes on the basis of age, disability, or disease"; and in December 2020, to "prohibit language that dehumanizes people on the basis of race, ethnicity, or national origin".

These steps to limiting hate speech are imperative as the HateLab study revealed that an increase in hate speech on social media leads to more crimes against minorities in the physical world (Cardiff University, 2019). The research revealed that the number of antagonistic tweets regarding race, ethnicity, or religion made from one location increased, so did the number of hate crimes, including harassment, violence, and criminal damage.

However, studies on online hate are limited largely because reporting a hate crime committed virtually is often considered 'less than' one committed directly, and in addition few people are aware of the avenues that can be taken to report such incidents. Indeed, in a large-scale quantitative study following

the #MeToo movement[34], Khatua, Cambria, and Khatua (2018) highlighted the lack of statistics of crimes committed online, therefore constraining the possibility of data-driven policy.

Conclusion

As it emerges from this study, discrimination and harassment are felt both on-the-ground and online, triggered by crises such as COVID-19 but in actuality are present all throughout. Vulnerable groups — individuals with differing ethnic origins, religion or belief, disability, age, or sexual orientation — experience different levels of harassment and discrimination, sometimes affecting their livelihoods or their lives.

Within Central and Eastern Europe, statistics show that Roma and members of the LGBTQI+ community are particularly victimized; however, it is important to underscore that all vulnerable groups are potential targets, and even so-called small incidents of discrimination can cause lasting psychological effects. Targets often have little recourse to official mechanisms and it is clear from the témoinages gathered during this research that in addition to this, even with the presence of anti-discrimination laws, societal norms are an additional barrier to seeking assistance.

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[34] The #MeToo movement was an online social movement that went viral in 2017, and highlighted rampant sexual and gender-based violence globally. One of the achievements of the movement was visibly demonstrating the sheer number of women and girls who have survived sexual harassment and violence, especially in the workplace. For more information, see: https://metoomvmt.org/

Acknowledgment

Literature

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"We will be the happiest if there is nothing left for us to do."
How Experts in Five Countries of Central and Eastern Europe Assess the State of Prevention of Polarisation and Radicalisation among the Youth

Luca Váradi

Anti-democratic tendencies are on the rise in many countries across Europe, along with growing levels of polarisation and radicalisation in our societies.[35] While the European Union supports various incentives aiming at the prevention of and intervention against racism and related phenomena, the political contexts in the Member States are very different (for an overview see the paper by Verena Schäfer-Nerlich in this journal issue). This not only affects the level and targets of group-focused enmity and right-wing extremism but also the way in which these problems can be addressed on the ground.

Across Central and Eastern Europe teachers, youth workers, social workers, and many other practitioners encounter different challenges as they contest anti-democratic tendencies, polarisation and radicalisation, in particular among the youth. One important source of support they receive comes from specialist organisations who offer them trainings, workshops, and counselling. Experts at these organisations, thus, have a special meta-perspective of the field. In the present paper, we look at how, through their first-hand experiences, experts at supporting NGOs assess the challenges, needs, structural problems, and the future of the work tackling anti-democratic tendencies, polarisation and radicalisation among the youth in five Central and Eastern European countries: Austria, Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Romania. The aim of this paper is to map out the plurality of opinions and experiences across these contexts.

Based on a series of interviews with experts, we explore how NGOs can find their ways to institutions and practitioners, examine the similarities and differences regarding the targets of prejudice, discuss the most typical problems and challenges the NGOs need to provide support for, and look at their visions of the future pointing to the need of closer collaboration and mutual support across Europe. By taking a European perspective and, thus moving beyond the focus on single countries, we can better understand how local contexts shape the possibilities of prevention and intervention. At the same time, this view can also shed light on the similar challenges that organisations face, and for which common, coordinated responses could be possible. Finally, learning from each other across contexts has true benefits and being aware of difficulties in one country can help its early detection and prevention in another.

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[35] Our definitions of polarisation and radicalisation are described in detail in the introduction of this journal issue.

Organisations were selected for the interviews based on their expertise and the interviewees were asked to share their own opinion, experiences and knowledge. All of them are distinctively active in their field and recognised in their local contexts.[36] Nevertheless, it needs to be underlined that findings are not generalizable, as they only represent the observations and experiences of the selected experts. Interviews were conducted September and October of 2020.

The specific country contexts of Hungary, Germany, Poland, and Romania regarding the situation of polarisation, radicalisation, right-wing extremism, and public opinion are described in the country profiles in this journal issue. Information about all the participating organisations can be found below.

Germany

CULTURES INTERACTIVE E.V.

Year of foundation: 2005

Place of work: Berlin, Brandenburg, Saxony, Thuringia, Lower Saxony, international level: Ukraine, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, etc.

Main focus and topic of workshops: resilience building, narrative group work in schools and youth facilities, democracy pedagogy, youth-cultural workshops at schools, distancing/exit work, in-depth civic education, youth prison intervention

Number of workshops per year: 8 schools and 40 teachers reached per year in around 30 workshops

Further activities: framework partner of the national prevention program "Live Democracy!", framework partner of the Federal Agency of Civic Education, qualitative intervention research, numerous EU model projects

Website: cultures-interactive.de/en

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[36] Except for the Austrian organisation, all others participated in the EU-funded CHAMPIONS project Cooperative Harmonized Action Model to stop Polarisation in Our Nations, GA Number: 823705. For more information see: www.championsproject.eu.

Austria

EXTREMISM INFORMATION CENTRE

Year of foundation: 2014

Place of work: Vienna

Main focus and topic of workshops: extremism, youth and radicalization, diversity

Number of workshops per year: about 50, reaching around 700 teachers and students

Further activities: helpline and face to face counselling in relation to extremism, long-term support and counselling for organisations such as youth centres, schools, counselling centres etc., workshops for labour market institutions, police, judicial institutions, authorities etc., research in national and international projects

Hungary

POLITICAL CAPITAL RESEARCH INSTITUTE

Year of foundation: 2001

Place of work: Budapest

Main focus and topic of workshops: fake news and disinformation, radicalisation and extremism

Number of workshops per year: 15-20 workshops, in 5 schools, with 50 teachers

Further activities: research, awareness raising, public advocacy, developing public awareness-raising and education materials

Website: politicalcapital.hu

Budapest Centre for Mass Atrocities Prevention

Year of foundation: 2011

Place of work: Budapest and globally

Main focus: conflict prevention, human rights, international and humanitarian law to implement the UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and the principle of the Responsibility to Protect.

Further activities: addressing the trends of polarization and radicalization in Central and Eastern

Poland

INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SAFETY

Year of foundation: 2015

Place of work: across Poland, headquarters in Warsaw

Main focus and topic of workshops: radicalization and de-radicalisation, prevention and countering of extremism, safety and security, antiterrorist education

Number of workshops per year: 50 workshops, outreach to approximately 30 schools, and 120 teachers

Further activities: police trainings, building local expert groups on prevention and countering of radicalisation, expert reports on specific topics linked with radicalisation, national expert team on radicalisation, expert court opinions, advising to local authorities, safety trainings, publications, media activities, two blogs about radicalisation and social safety, etc.

Website: fundacjaibs.pl/information-in-english/

Romania

PATRIR – PEACE ACTION, TRAINING AND RESEARCH INSTITUTE OF ROMANIA

Year of foundation: 2001

Place of work: Cluj-Napoca

Main focus and topic of workshops: Teachers: peace education; nonviolent communication; inclusive education; safe schools; child and youth wellbeing and anti-bullying. Youth workers: youth mobilisation and empowerment; community engagement; gender trainings (incl. gender empowerment and stopping gender-based violence); addressing bullying; youth wellbeing – dealing with stress, anxiety, inner peace; peace education; understanding radicalisation; identifying and resisting fake news.

Number of workshops per year: 10 or more workshops, outreach to 6 – 10 schools, 5000+ students, 20 teachers.

Further activities: Community campaigns with youth, engaging youth in the community to address issues – such as campaigning to overcome bullying, address gender-based violence or promote inclusion; youth policy advocacy with local authorities; youth participation in regional and international events (conferences, seminars and trainings)

Website: PATRIR.ro

Findings from the interviews with experts

In the following chapters we present the findings from the interviews, and discuss the similarities and differences between the countries related to various topics.

While organisational representatives in all five countries agree that practitioners working with the youth are very much in need of professional training and support, it is not always easy to get in touch with them. Therefore, the question of how and with how much success organisations can reach out to practitioners directly affects the potential impact they and their trainings might have.

The *Polish* organisation, Institute for Social Safety, needs to work very hard to be able to get into schools, as diversity and the prevention of racism are not topics typically welcome in Polish schools. At the same time, the question of *safety and security* is always of high interest. Therefore, the Polish organisation, Institute for Social Safety, developed a special workshop, cooperating with a security expert who has a military background. This way, they are able to bring the topic of equality and diversity to school staff hand in hand with the question of safety and security. As Jacek Purski, the founder of Institute for Social Safety put it:

> *"When we go to a school and start talking about safety and security, they think we are going to train them to deal with terrorists, but our activists show them racist stickers photographed in front of the school, and tell them: "You have a different type of safety and security problem here." This is a good place to start a conversation on prevention and intervention. And we start talking to the teachers. We tell them: you are the experts. We just want to give you some special skills that might be useful."*

It makes the Polish organisation's work even more difficult that in most cases, it is not the school principals who decide about letting the organisation enter the school, but it is decided by the local authorities. That is why the Institute for Social Safety is now taking a new approach by building local networks involving multiple parties, to have support for their work. But even if they are allowed to enter a school, they still need to face serious challenges:

> *"Approximately ten per cent of the school staff is already against us before we open our mouth and at the training we provide in school. They are the ones who can potentially do the extreme right-wing propaganda in the school…"*

In *Hungary*, the interviewed organisations narrate challenges similar to those faced in Poland. As the whole sphere is highly politicised, schools and teachers are reluctant to openly address topics related

to polarisation and radicalisation, or even related to the broader concept of human rights. Teachers often feel insecure, even when they need to touch upon the topic of migration or the question of ethnic minorities while teaching history or geography, as these are often discussed by members of the government – with great animosity. As explained by Bulcsú Hunyadi from Political Capital, this kind of highly restricted arena of topics directly leads to self-selection bias among teachers:

"We have a very limited, special group of teachers at our workshops: those who are committed to what we do and who are willing to engage with these topics. We work very hard to find new audiences, but it is nearly impossible to get to teachers from outside this circle."

Dávid Ferenczy-Nyúl from Political Capital adds:

"If a teacher decides to address any of these topics, they need to be prepared to be labelled. All of what we try to discuss is owned by politics in Hungary today, and therefore, by discussing these, you are immediately seen to be taking a side. If a teacher talks about tolerance, to some, this will mean liberal propaganda from the West."

The organisation PATRIR, in Cluj, *Romania,* has a different experience. They are welcome in local schools and have broad support from local authorities According to Kai Brand Jacobsen, president of PATRIR, this is thanks to Cluj's special standing, where many in the city are proud of its multi-ethnic identity, and to the Institute's long-standing good relationship with the local authorities. Cluj-Napoca (in German Klausenburg, in Hungarian Kolozsvár), in the North-West of Romania is the unofficial capital of the historic region of Transylvania (in German Siebensbürgen, in Hungarian Erdély), a medium sized university town with a multi-ethnic population, including a significant Hungarian and Roma minority, and a long history of cohabitation of various ethnic and religious groups.

PATRIR has a well-established strategy for finding participants for their workshops offered to teachers and school staff. They regularly organise community forums on topics that are in the centre of interest, for example about gender-based violence, or diversity. These are events open to the public, and participating teachers may get in touch with the organisation and invite them to their schools to give workshops afterwards, according to Kai Brand Jacobsen.

Neither the Extremism Information Centre in *Austria*, nor Cultures Interactive in *Germany* have difficulties with recruitment comparable to those in Hungary and Poland. The Extremism Information Centre runs a helpline in Vienna related to all kinds of extremisms. Through this, they are visible among teachers and youth workers. Verena Fabris, the Extremism Information Centre's director, explains a typical scenario:

"A teacher calls our helpline and says that there is a WhatsApp group among his students and they call themselves 'the Nazi-class'. He asks us what he should do. On the basis of a first analysis of the situation with the caller we offer a workshop and work with the teachers in order to develop pedagogical strategies. If reasonable we also go on to work with the students afterwards."

The Extremism Information Centre and their work are also actively present in the media and have support from local authorities and political figures in Austria.

Cultures Interactive in *Germany,* also has a good collaboration with schools and youth organisations. They do not feel that finding participants for their workshops is particularly challenging. Some professionals participate in their free time, while others use the opportunity as part of their obligatory professional development training. What is important for Cultures is that

"everyone should participate based on their free will, and that goals for each workshop are set together with the participants".

Based on the experiences of the experts, it is clear that while in Germany and Austria the NGOs do not have difficulties getting in touch with practitioners (teachers, youth workers), this is a central challenge for organisations in Hungary and Poland, where they are often met with animosity and politically motivated suspicion. This can seriously affect the impact the organisations' work can have, as they might not be able to enter the field in places where their work would be needed the most.

Topics and targets

The question of what topics teachers and youth workers want to discuss and would like to have support for clearly indicate the current state of societies and their challenges. While all six organisations in the five selected countries need to work on issues related to group-focused enmity, the specific cases and examples that teachers and youth workers present significant differences.

Dávid Ferenczy-Nyúl from Political Capital in Hungary, recounts the topics that teachers bring to the workshops:

"We talk about Roma-related issues, from factual questions to racist remarks, about migration, about anti-Semitic utterances, about sexism. Basically, anything that kids hear about on the news and bring it to schools. Teachers have the feeling that they have to deal with these somehow, but often don't yet know how. That is where our job starts."

In Vienna, *Austria*, Dieter Gremel from the Extremism Information Centre explains what topics teachers bring to them through the helpline:

> *"Looking back at the previous years, we see a clear trend. In the beginning, when we talked about radicalisation, we received many questions about Jihadism. Very often it turned out that it was rather a question of culture or religion or prejudice of the callers. You can project everything on Jihadism from the outside. Nowadays, the focus has shifted to some extent and there are more cases of right-wing extremism. As a consequence of the COVID-19 pandemic conspiracy theories are on the rise."*

Talking about the most typical targets of prejudice, Dieter Gremel continues, and explains that:

> *"We have to deal with antisemitism, prejudice against immigrants, sexism and prejudice against sexual minorities. We need to tackle the conspiracy theories, especially in relation to antisemitism and we also need to deal with hidden antisemitic attitudes."*

In *Germany*, the topics that first-line practitioners ask to discuss with Cultures Interactive are on a wide spectrum, as Sylvia Weiss explains:

> *"Right-wing extremism is a growing problem, we see lots of radicalisation in the online sphere and hate speech, also prominently online. There is also a broad range of groups against whom young people have negative views, there is homophobia, sexism, islamophobia, and antisemitism, often linked with conspiracy theories. Nowadays many teachers also report that racism is becoming more and more prevalent among the youth in rural areas and that is where our help is needed the most."*

Similarly, in *Poland*, teachers that the Institute for Social Safety works with bring many topics and problems that can be addressed during the workshop:

> *"When we work with teachers, we have to deal with hate speech in general, and specifically with homophobic and anti-refugee hate speech. Anti-Semitism is also quite prevalent: you get it with the mother's milk here. Current politics are more responsible for homophobic hate speech. This also results in violence against LGBTQ people. By the way, I just saw a guy walking down the street in front of my house in Warsaw with a T-shirt that said: "I am a homophobe". And there is football related extremism: this is what teachers, youth workers, police officers see, but they don't know how to name it and how to react to it – but they see it."*

In Romania, the problems that PATRIR supports teachers with are similar to those in the other countries:

"There is hate speech. There is discrimination of Roma. The LGBTQI+ community is also a target, especially of hate speech. One teacher said that she would be afraid to declare her LGBTQI+ belonging in school fearing the reactions from students and parents and colleagues. We also see some incidents against Asian migrants since COVID – mostly in a latent form, not so much violent extremism. The problem here is that too few people know the history. There are many prejudices which have never been addressed. Like co-existence with Roma people or the Romanian-Hungarian dynamic. This has been never openly addressed."

Altogether, it can be seen that teachers and youth workers the expert organisations come into contact with, need to deal with similar topics in the field of polarisation and radicalisation. Hate speech (predominantly online) is present across the region and there is substantial overlap regarding the target groups of enmity: immigrants, members of ethnic and religious minority groups (as Roma, Jews, Muslims), and the members of the LGBTQ community, together with the problems of misogyny and sexism.

Bridging theory and practice – a common point of departure

So where do organisations start when they work with teachers and youth workers? Looking at the point of departure for organisations, it became clear that regardless of the context, there is a similar pattern: practitioners often struggle with bringing together theory and practice – and this is where the expert organisation supporting them can make a real difference.

Dieter Gremel, who works for the Extremism Information Centre in *Austria*, describes the typical scenario, resembling accounts from the other countries:

"What happens is that they [teachers and youth workers] are confronted with a subject they think they don't know: radicalisation. If they see that this is happening to a young person, they become helpless. We help them to gain back the expertise for their daily work – the expertise they actually already have. It is good for them to have someone to talk to and see what the next steps can be. The ideology is not the main focus anymore, but actually it should be the person and their situation."

At Cultures Interactive in *Germany*, Sylvia Weiss says that they also see helplessness among teachers and this is what they try to turn around:

"They [teachers] don't really know where to start when they see these problems [right-wing radicalisation, extremism]. There are many projects but it is hard to know where to turn regarding a specific case. What we can do with them is empowerment, exchange with others with similar experiences. We give them knowledge, how to prevent it, how to deal with it. They get exercises. All very practical."

In Poland, Romania, and Hungary, experts also talked about similar experiences and similar strategies of bridging theory and practice. In *Poland*, the Institute for Social Safety has the "guided tour" approach, helping school teachers identify signs of radicalisation:

"We introduce them [school staff] to the path of radicalisation. We explain that there are different components and no single approach can help with solving radicalisation."

In *Hungary*, both organisations see the same gap between theory and practice. As György Tatár, from the *Hungarian* organisation, Budapest Centre for Mass Atrocities Prevention explained, these phenomena are not what teachers can relate to.

"When we say the words polarisation and radicalisation, teachers, most probably, would respond that they have heard about these. Many of them will say that they know the theory. At the same time, when they face such incidents, as for example online bullying or racist remarks in the classroom, they can hardly make the link to the theories."

Bulcsú Hunyadi, from Political Capitals adds:

"Our first task is always to break down these abstract, theoretical concepts into everyday events. Things that teachers know very well from their everyday work. Together, we look at specific examples, at their own challenges, and see how these are actually parts of larger concepts. This way, we can find common ground, and start working on solutions. When it comes to polarisation, it is a bit different. In this case, we also see a lack of conceptual knowledge, but teachers have a strong sense for the problem itself. For example, they clearly see that basically all public discussions are polarised, that there are always two opposing sides which clearly correspond to political frontiers. You simply cannot discuss these questions without making a clear political stand. And it is also true for the students. This makes teachers reluctant to talk about and to deal with all of this."

In Cluj, *Romania,* experts at PATRIR said that teachers and youth workers have specific questions to them and clearly ask for practical guidance. For example, there was demand to find ways to prevent sexual violence or to deal with delinquency among the youth. PATRIR, together with first-line

practitioners at partner organisations in Cluj, work out the best ways to tackle these issues. For certain issues it is important to have this multi-agency collaboration with local institutions. In others, teachers ask the organisation to also do workshops with pupils.

Bridging theory and practice and supporting practitioners in relying on their existing skills is common among all the NGOs. All of these examples the NGOs gave, show that the support they provide is very much on the practical level, and it is an important component that while offering hands-on solutions, first-line practitioners themselves are involved in the process and thus, empowered.

Empowering practitioners in diverse institutional contexts

Having mapped the topics that need to be addressed in the field, and the ways in which expert organisations approach them, it is important to map the systems in which first-line practitioners and the organisations supporting them need to do their work. Responses from the expert organisations show a very strong demand among first-line practitioners for empowerment, psychological support, and professional supervision, things that are not provided in any of the countries though the institutional contexts show great variation.

In *Poland*, Jacek Purski from Institute for Social Safety explains:

"*Teachers are under so much psychological pressure that they need support, they need empowerment.*"

Dieter Gremel and Verena Fabris from the Extremism Information Centre in *Austria* continue:

"*Psychological support is something they [teachers and youth workers] need very much. Neither teachers, nor youth workers have formal professional supervision. Sometimes, our workshops resemble group therapy sessions. They need this to gain back their confidence. Sometimes, due to the loss of confidence in the face of radicalisation, teachers forget about their skills. We need to help them to realise that they are actually able to handle this.*"

Just as in *Germany*, as Sylvia Weiss from Cultures Interactive explains:

"*Teachers feel that they are left alone with a huge problem. They see how much young people radicalise and are suddenly completely insecure: "will I know to do the right thing?" It is similar for youth workers. They ask us: "If a student starts to say radical things in the youth club, should I intervene and risk losing that student or should I keep him/her in the group risking that the whole group will get radicalised?" There is no easy answer to*

this, but we can help practitioners by empowering them to employ what we call the no-and-yes approach, i.e. reconfirm the rules of the club and then show interest in the experiences and stories that offending young people can share and which are behind their provocations. The group dynamic is also very important. Being among people who face the same problems and feel the same way – it helps tremendously."

This phenomenon, that practitioners can gain strength and mutual support from each other was a prominent experience of all organisations. In *Hungary, Poland, and Romania,* where practitioners rarely get institutional support and in Hungary and Poland the political climate also makes their work difficult, these "islands of community" play a very strong role. Political Capital's experience in Hungary is that:

"Simply to meet like-minded practitioners who face similar challenges and have a similar moral drive to tackle these can have a transformative effect."

Similarly, experts at PATRIR in Romania also see that:

"First-line practitioners are motivated to work together for common goals, want to see themselves as a community working for shared values. This is something we can help them with, simply by bringing them together. If they see that there are others out there who work for the same goals, they feel empowered and have new ideas for collaboration."

Having seen that this type of work puts a great psychological burden on first-line practitioners across the region, it is important to map the contexts in which they need to do their jobs. Contrary to the previous question, here the experiences of the organisations in the five countries were more varied. While there are many similarities among the feelings and reactions of first-line practitioners who work with youths at the risk of radicalisation and polarisation, when it comes to the question of how and to what extent institutions support this type of work, it is clear that the differences between the countries are substantial.

Members of the two organisations in Germany and Austria had a very clear response to this question: in their experience, institutions in which first-line practitioners work (schools, youth centres, etc.) mostly support prevention and intervention against polarisation, radicalisation, and prejudice, in general. Expert organisations, as Cultures Interactive and the Extremism Information Centre are also usually welcome in these institutions. Based on their work with teachers and youth workers, members

of the two organisations made it clear that first-line practitioners rarely come to them because they lack institutional support. It is more for expert knowledge and practical advice.

Talking to organisations from the former socialist countries *Poland and Hungary,* the picture is very different: there, teachers who come into contact with the expert organisations are often threatened by their colleagues and the school principles. They are cautious about inviting prevention programs and workshops offered by the organisations to their schools as they might risk being ostracised for their "liberal, cosmopolitan, anti-nationalist" values, and even risk losing their jobs. In *Hungary*, Political Capital heard of accounts of reprimand after a teacher's Facebook post that was critical towards the government's actions. Bulcsú Hunyadi and Dávid Ferenczy-Nyúl (Hungary) explained how this kind of atomisation can be a reason for the very high fluctuation and drop-out rate among teachers.

"We often see that teachers sense a clear risk in inviting us to their schools and recount their frustration over the fact that oftentimes they lack the support of their colleagues and of the school leadership. It is often discussed in our workshops how teachers feel completely alone in a hostile environment and ask us and themselves if the work they try to do can make any difference if there is nobody else."

György Tatár, from the Budapest Centre for Mass Atrocities Prevention adds:

"That is why community development and building a network of like-minded and committed practitioners is of great importance."

The need for psychological support and empowerment for first-line practitioners working with youth at risk of radicalisation and polarisation is something that experts in all five countries identified to be of great importance. It is also clear that the outcome of the work and its effect on the individual practitioners can be very different based on the level of institutional support they receive. This is especially problematic in Hungary and Poland, where the supporting organisations are often met with hostility both from national and local authorities and from the institutions (schools) themselves. This systematic antagonism can have a severe impact on the quality of work of the practitioners and can also hinder support from expert organisations in areas and communities where this would be needed the most.

Broadening the perspective: a shared, European future

Organisations supporting first-line practitioners who work with youths at the risk of radicalisation and polarisation across Europe all showed a mix of concern and optimism when asked about what the future holds for them. Members of all five organisations made it clear that financial sustainability lies at the core of their concerns. All experts, in a very similar manner, explained, how the project-based financing only allows a short-term timespan when it comes to planning. Sylvia Weiss, from the *German* organisation, Cultures Interactive, described a problem that was common among all the organisations:

"In the projects that we can get funding for, we are often asked to do the same thing all over again and again and again. To come up with a new project all the time. Even though there are great things that already work – if the funding runs out, we need to shut them down and start something new. But this way, we can hardly get ahead, we can hardly think in terms of mid- or long-term goals. This is counter-productive for the whole field and also a waste of money. "

The experts also contemplated their organisations' role in society and, interestingly, what they said had the same message in its core. In Verena Fabris's words from the Extremism Information Centre in *Austria*:

"We need people out there to acknowledge that right-wing radicalisation is not a problem on the margins, it's there in the very centre of our society – thus, it is our common problem, a problem for each and every one of us."

When it comes to what experts would wish for the future of their organisations, Jacek Purski from *Poland* makes it very clear:

"I wish that we were not directly attacked by extremists, that we could do our job in peace."

Bulcsú Hunyadi from Political Capital in *Hungary* adds a further layer to the discussion about the future:

"To be able to work effectively, it is vital to have state support, to have a consensus regarding our values as a society. Otherwise our work can hardly have a lasting impact."

All organisations are aware of and greatly respect the work of other organisations across Europe and many also collaborate and are involved in various European networks. Still, it was unequivocally stated in the interviews that more cooperation across the borders would be welcome and beneficial. As Rodica Rusu, from PATRIR in *Romania* expressed:

"There is just so much to learn from each other."

Sylvia Weiss, from *Germany*, also acknowledged the challenges others need to face, especially colleagues in countries of the former socialist block:

"I am in great awe of all colleagues out there who need to work in countries where they receive much less support than we do in Germany. I want them to know: there are so many stones laid in your way, and you just turn them and always take a step forward. I have great respect for all that you do."

György Tatár, from the Budapest Centre for Mass Atrocities Prevention also widened the perspective:

"The work we do here, in different EU countries, can also serve as inspiration for others, for others, who are in a more difficult situation. For example, colleagues in Belorussia. That is why networking and seeking contacts in all possible places is of utmost importance."

But, as Bianca Rusu, from PATRIR in *Romania* concluded with a pinch of irony:

"We will be the happiest if there is nothing left for us to do."

Based on the interviews, it is clear that financial sustainability is a serious issue for organisations in all five countries. The other commonality is the wish for more cooperation, stronger networking among organisations across Europe. The future each organisation wishes for is strongly influenced by the challenges of the present, all shaped by the current economic and political context.

About the Author

Luca Váradi, PhD is a sociologist and social psychologist. She is a former Marie Sklodowska-Curie research fellow and visiting professor in CEU's Nationalism Studies Program in Budapest and Vienna. Her research focuses on ethnic prejudices and especially on the formation of prejudice in adolescence. Luca Váradi also works together with teachers and NGO-s to utilise research results for school-based intervention programs against prejudice.

First-line practitioners at the forefront of radicalisation prevention and intervention: experiences, difficulties, and needs

Kata Bálint, Dominik Istrate, Bulcsú Hunyadi

Abstract

Through a survey completed by 238 participants supplemented by in-depth interviews, this research paper presents our examination of first-line practitioners'[37] perception of polarisation and right-wing radicalisation, their experience, difficulties, and needs regarding intervention and prevention efforts, and their experiences, difficulties, and needs with regards to online and on-site tools, training materials and resources in Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Romania.

Introduction

Over the past decade, Europe has been witness to a worryingly high level of societal polarisation and right-wing radicalisation which is particularly felt across the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. This increase among those who identify with radical and polarising beliefs and ideas affects all walks of life: it does not only have an impact on how politics in a given country are perceived, but its effects are even being felt by groups within society that are not associated with politics in general. Preventing, detecting, and challenging radicalisation within different layers of society heavily depends on the work of professionals who directly engage with individuals and groups vulnerable to radicalisation – teachers, youth workers, community police officers, child protection workers, social and (mental) healthcare workers, as well as community leaders, among other groups. These so-called first-line practitioners – further referred to as FLPs – can play a leading role in various radicalisation prevention efforts, given their direct engagement. However, thorough and substantial research is needed to understand their experiences, difficulties, and most importantly, their needs to enable us to be at the forefront of challenging these issues. This paper is intended to gain an extensive insight into the world of FLPs – from their understanding of radicalisation in a broader context within their respective communities, to their experience in efforts to intervene in or prevent polarisation, as well as to their own belief in successfully moving forward.

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[37] First-line practitioners as a term refers to professionals working directly with individuals and groups vulnerable to radicalisation, such as teachers, youth workers, community police officers, child protection workers, social and (mental) health care workers, community leaders and others professionals working directly with individuals and groups.

This research feeds into the aims of the CHAMPIONs project[38], which is implemented in Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Romania. The research was carried out in these four Central and Eastern European countries, with the collaboration of the project partners from the respective countries.

Methodology

For research purposes, pre-survey interviews were conducted with FLPs in each country in order to get an overview of the general understanding and perceptions of these issues and to receive suggestions on how to approach the research. Following these suggestions, a quantitative survey and qualitative post-survey interviews were conducted. The focus of the survey as well as the post-survey interviews was on the main issues and challenges, faced by FLPs regarding political polarisation and right-wing radicalisation; suggestions for improvement of interventions and prevention; support needed for their work; experiences with collaboration; and with online platforms and tools.

Interviewees were recruited based on the criteria that they are directly involved in prevention and intervention programmes within the scope of political polarisation and right-wing radicalisation or have substantial expertise in the field. Each national partner sought out potential participants using their existing professional networks in their respective countries. Altogether 58 interviews were conducted in the four project countries, which includes 14 German, 14 Hungarian, 15 Polish and 15 Romanian pre- and post-survey interviews. Fourteen of these interviews were pre-survey interviews, which were conducted in May 2019. The 44 post-survey interviews with a different batch of interviewees were held in the months of July and August 2019. In terms of profession, a broad range of FLPs are represented, as seen below:

	Germany	Hungary	Poland	Romania
Child rights advocate	-	1	-	-
Communication advisor/spokesperson	1	-	1	-
Community organizer	-	2	-	-
Environmental activist	-	-	-	1

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[38] The main objective of the CHAMPIONs project is to develop offline collaboration models to establish working groups between first-line practitioners. The offline approach is complemented and supported by a centrally developed platform tool and service package. This project was funded by the European Union's Internal Security Fund - Police, Grant Agreement #823705. You can learn more about CHAMPIONs through the website: https://www.championsproject.eu/.

Former Internal Security Agent	-	-	2	-
Freelancer in the field of media education	1	-	-	-
Journalist	-	-	1	-
NGO staff/NGO leader	5	5		3
Police officer	1	-	-	-
Politician	-	-	-	1
Psychologist	-	-	1	1
Public servant	2	1	2	3
Researcher/academic	2	-	5	3
Social project manager	-	-	1	-
Social worker	1	2	-	-
Teacher	1	3	2	1
Women's rights activists	-	-	-	2
Overall	14	14	15	15

Table 1 Distribution of interviewees per profession

The research included a number of questions divided into different sections about:

- the FLPs' general perception of political polarisation and right-wing radicalisation;
- (2) their stance on preventing and avoiding radicalisation;
- (3) their collaboration efforts to prevent and react to polarisation;
- (4) potential suggestions in a general context; and,
- (5) their demographic background.

In addition, during the summer of 2019, survey data was collected from 238 respondents across the four project countries, which includes 77 Hungarian, 70 German, 53 Polish, and 38 Romanian respondents. Due to the low number of responses from Romania, findings from this country should be applied with extra caution. It must also be noted that the research is not in any way representative and cannot be generalized to the larger population of FLPs.

Demographic characteristics of survey respondents

While the composition of survey respondents in terms of gender was almost balanced, the age group of 26-45 was overrepresented in most countries.[39] In terms of geographical distribution, the regions of the capital cities of Poland and Hungary are overrepresented, however, in the German sample, while there is still a prevalence of South-Western states, there was data collected of participants from fifteen out of sixteen states. In terms of profession and occupation, Germany is also an outlier since in all other countries' data was collected mostly from NGO workers, experts, researchers, academics, and teachers, while the main professional category of German respondents was the public sector on a municipal, state, and federal level. Correspondingly, in relation to organisational affiliation, most participants from Romania, Poland, and Hungary work in the NGO sector, in academia, in research institutions, or in schools.

Key findings

According to the results, polarisation is deeply felt in all the four countries participating in the research.

The interview and survey research conducted provided an insight into the way in which political polarisation and right-wing radicalisation is perceived by first-line practitioners. In all four countries, political polarisation[40] is perceived to be significantly more widespread than right-wing radicalisation[41]. When it comes to the perception based on personal proximity, both phenomena were rated to be the most widespread country-wise and nearly as widespread in the participants' locality. However, in their more intimate contexts, such as their workplace and personal environments, both issues were significantly less widespread. It is also worth noting that political polarisation and right-wing radicalisation in all four contexts are perceived to be most widespread in Hungary and in nearly all contexts, the least widespread in Germany.

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[39] In the Polish and Romanian samples women were slightly overrepresented, while in Hungary the age group of 46-65 was most prominent.

[40] Political polarisation is the process of societies drifting apart politically and ideologically, "based on assumptions of 'us' and 'them' identities." According to the definition of Bart Brandsma, adopted by the Radicalisation Awareness Network (2010: 3), polarisation is a thought construct, in the process of which "the dominant and active narrative is about the perceived (and often exaggerated) differences and simplistic narratives about the others. (…) Polarisation therefore shows itself in negative thoughts and attitudes towards other groups, which could result in growing hostility and segregation."

[41] Radicalisation is defined by the European Union as "a phased and complex process in which an individual or a group embraces a radical ideology or belief that accepts, uses or condones violence (…) to reach a specific political or ideological purpose." Right-wing radicalisation differs from other forms of radicalisation in that its ideology is based on nationalism, racism and xenophobia.

Political polarisation is widespread in Germany, Poland, Hungary, and Romania

When it comes to the signs of political polarisation, a large majority from all countries

(from 73% to 97%) come across them often or very often in each country. 79% of Hungarians and 69% of Poles, while nearly half (47%) of Romanians and 39% in Germany perceive it often or very often in their localities. In contrast, approximately half of Hungarians and a slight majority in Romania and Poland (from 46% to 58%) do not come across political polarisation at all or only rarely at their workplace. This is also true for a large majority (71%) of Germans. In a similar manner, political polarisation is less prevalent in the close, personal environment of respondents, as approximately half of Polish, Hungarian, and Romanian nearly two-thirds of German respondents (from 45% to 64%) never or rarely meet the signs of polarisation in this context.

These trends can also be observed in the case of right-wing radicalisation. Country-wise, this phenomenon is observed most in Hungary and Poland (by 90% and 80%, respectively), followed by Romania (66%) and Germany (63%). More than half (with 58% and 55%, respectively) of Hungarians and Poles also observe it often or very often in their locality, however, 45% of Germans and 42% of Romanians come across it only sometimes. On the other hand, right-wing radicalisation does not seem to be widespread in the workplace and personal environments, with above 70% of Romanian, Polish and Hungarian respondents and above 90% of German participants never or rarely encountering signs of it.

Comparable associations with the phenomena and local differences

The associations made in relation to the two phenomena were comparable. In this way, political polarisation and right-wing radicalisation are interpreted in a similar manner. In all four countries, prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination, and group-focused enmity were most often associated with what polarisation and radicalisation are believed to be about. However, there are differences in which social groups' intolerance, exclusion, and demonization are perceived. In Hungary and Germany, anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant and anti-refugee sentiments and racism were prevalent, while in Poland and Romania hatred towards the LGBTQ+ community was a more pressing issue. Sexism is a concern in Germany, Poland, and Romania, while Hungary can be rather described by anti-Roma and anti-Semitic attitudes. In addition, the following factors have contributed to increasing political polarisation and right-wing radicalisation:

- the decline in quality of public discourse, which is largely due to the spread of hateful speech;
- the lack of meaningful social dialogue and the role of the media in this regard;

- the spread of fake news and disinformation;
- social inequality;
- the information bubble;
- freedom of press issues and propaganda; and,
- the insufficient role of politics, governments, political parties and people in power in mainstreaming such ideas.

In Romania and Poland, the role of the Church in strengthening polarising tendencies was also highlighted, while Hungarian respondents rather brought up the declining state of democracy. What is more, according to interviewees, the issues of polarisation and radicalisation are highly politicised, especially in Hungary and Poland, at the same time as there appears to be a lack of awareness of the issue by the general population according to the insights of the FLPs. In the case of Germany, findings show that, according to FLPs, right-wing extremist attitudes, discourses and actions and incidents of right-wing violence are trivialised and everyday racism is becoming common. In Hungary, three central issues were highlighted by FLPs: government propaganda fuelling hatred, the lack of independent media, and the politicization of education. In Poland, the amplification between progressive and traditional values by political actors, the media, and the Church is often cited as a major issue, in particular referring to LGBTQ+ rights, gender politics, and multiculturalism. In Romania, topics of polarisation and radicalization are rarely discussed in the media or through education and these phenomena are mostly perceived as linked to Islamic extremism and terrorist attacks.

FLPs have a strong sense of responsibility

When it comes to reacting to political polarisation at their workplace, the majority of FLPs believe it is their duty to do so — the leader is Germany with 86%, followed by Romania, Poland, and Hungary with over 60% of respondents believing this to be their responsibility. In relation to right-wing radicalisation, this sense of responsibility appears to be stronger, with nearly all (97%) German participants, the large majority of Poles and Hungarians (88% and 86%, respectively) and the majority (71%) of Romanians considering it their duty to refute right-wing radicalisation. The respondents observed a number of different manifestations of political polarisation and right-wing radicalisation in their work environments, including prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination, and group-focused enmity, as well as ideological differences with a range of severity in their ways of expression. This leads to the inability to have productive discussions or even to verbal aggression and provocation. Lastly, threats of violence were also recounted by a number of participants in all countries.

FLPs have also proven to be well-equipped on the information front: the majority of participants from all four countries indicated that they have enough information on these phenomena to identify them. However, there are significant differences across the countries: while the vast majority of Hungarians and Germans (89% and 87%, respectively) agree with this statement; in Poland it is only 79% and in Romania 63%. At the same time, significantly fewer respondents (but still the majority) in all four countries said they rather or very much 'have the skills and knowledge to respond to these phenomena' (from 57% to 75%). On the other hand, when it comes to having the tools and measures to take concrete action and to having enough time for that, answers were rather divided. German respondents agreed the most with having the tools and measures with a slight majority (57%), followed by 41% of Romanians and less than a third of Hungarians and Poles (28% and 27%, respectively). Between one-third and one-fifth of respondents agreed that they have enough time to react in all four countries, with the majority indicating that they only partly have or do not have enough time at all.

When it comes to collegial support to deal with these issues and to take action, respondents have a more positive outlook. Most receive some sort of support from their employers and an even greater proportion of them can rely on their colleagues at the workplace for help and assistance. Majority of respondents (from 57% to 75%) in Romania, Poland and Germany believe that they get support from their employer. In Hungary, 48% believed it to be the case, while a third (35%) rather does not receive support or does not receive it at all. In the case of collegial support, the proportion of those who say they do get much or some support is somewhat higher, with 58% of Poles and Hungarians, 61% of Romanians and 76% of Germans indicating they get much or some support.

However, when it comes to receiving general support and counselling at the workplace in relation to responding to right-wing radicalisation, it is apparent that Hungarian and Romanian FLPs receive significantly less support than their Polish and German counterparts. More than half (53%) of Hungarians and 42% of Romanians do not receive any or receive only a little support or counselling, while 41% of Polish and 61% of German respondents receive much or very much support or counselling.

When asked to describe the sort of support received at work, various forms were described by the respondents and a key highlight is that informal means were apparently more prominent than concrete and formal measures. Dialogue, exchange of opinions, sharing information among colleagues in an informal setting, as well as moral support and reinforcement of views and values were predominantly mentioned by Polish, Hungarian and German participants. In terms of concrete and formal support received, trainings, counselling, professional and support groups, information on best practices, case discussions and other educational activities were outlined. Internal procedures to prevent discrimination (f.e. a Diversity Charter and an ombudsman/commissions where employees can turn to

in case of discrimination), support of trade unions and an action plan in case of a far-right attack on their workplace were also mentioned by the participants.

It is evident that the large majority (from 76% to 87%) of FLPs of all four countries never or rarely had bad experiences when responding to these phenomena at their workplace. However, those respondents, who have had bad experiences, described instances of prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination at the workplace and hostility when they spoke up against it. Verbal aggression, online and offline hate speech, threats of physical violence were also recounted, while some have experienced direct attacks on their workplace, such as disruptions of events by far-right activists, institutional control and control exercised by people in power. Other difficulties faced by FLPs were that they believe they do not have the necessary tools and measures to take concrete action as well as they lack the time to react to these challenges.

FLPs wish for more support from their governments

Participants of the survey as well as the interviewees identified a number of possible suggestions and needs that would help their work in countering polarisation and radicalisation. One of the key needs that came up stems from the experience that projects aiming at countering polarisation and radicalisation are often designed only on a short-term basis (i.e. from a few months to two years). Follow-up and continuation are especially important to achieve real impact, and hence, a long-term perspective is paramount. Furthermore, including FLPs in the project design and implementation is also necessary to achieve best results, therefore, a bottom-up approach was suggested. The framing of the project goals is also critical in establishing a common understanding of the issues raised as well as the aims and likely outcomes. The importance of early detection coupled with the need of identifying the main target audience of such interventions being those who are threatened by radicalisation, instead of those who are already radicalised, were also voiced by the respondents. More emphasis should be put on individual family backgrounds, as low socio-economic status and unemployment could be an important factor as to why more and more young people are drawn to radical ideologies. Furthermore, all four countries' interviewees agreed that psychological factors behind radicalization should be researched to a greater extent and the current information about this should be made available to FLPs.

The scarcity of funding as a challenge was also mentioned, therefore, additional financial resources shall be made available for such projects. Change in legislation may also be needed in order for legal action to be taken against those individuals who actively engage in spreading hatred, as the respondents suggested that current laws do not stop the dissemination of exclusionary rhetoric.

Although such laws already exist in Germany and Hungary, interviewees in Germany found that the area is not regulated enough, while participants from Hungary believe legislation is too restrictive in terms of defining hate speech, and so perpetrators can get away with their actions easily. In the case of Romania, such laws do not exist at all. Furthermore, the role politicians, representatives of mainstream media, religious leaders and other influential actors play in the advancement of polarisation and radicalisation shall not be downplayed and such actors should be made aware of their responsibilities in this regard. In the case of Poland, this should be expanded to the representatives of the Church as well.

Concrete suggestions, which would help the FLPs' work, were also mentioned, showing a clear signal about country-specific deficiencies. These suggestions include awareness-raising activities tailored to national contexts and circumstances with regards to neo-Nazism in Germany, anti-Roma sentiments in Romania and Hungary, and the hatred directed at LGBTQ+ people in Poland for various target audiences, for instance, for children. Amongst much else, a larger focus on education and the development of analytical skills; more dialogue opportunities on culture and diversity; better sharing of best practices; enhanced media literacy and civic education; as well as the creation of a core expert team were also mentioned. Similarly, practical guidance such as handbooks, videos, as well as other training materials should be made available in national languages as well in addition to the standard English.

The role of teachers and specific help provided to them as important actors in prevention, detection, and intervention were also mentioned, which include outside supervision and support from professionals, specific educational materials and help with the quick implementation of prevention activities in schools. Teachers should be provided education on how not to engage with current political discourses while teaching as well as how not to spread their own political beliefs. Financial help may also be needed, as schools are often understaffed and teachers are overworked.

FLPs' experiences, difficulties, and needs with regard to using online / digital capacity-building tools & learning materials

Our research suggests that FLPs generally did not use online/digital platforms for their work; however, this might have changed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, the interest in the potential for digital collaboration was high in all four countries. Germany recorded the highest level and Hungarian respondents signalled the lowest level of interest. At the same time, the interviewees voiced their concerns about such digital platforms. Their main difficulty was that the existing platforms are overabundant and most FLPs found them troublesome to navigate. For this reason, some

expressed concerns over a new platform being produced, as it may not be able to garner enough attention among all other competing websites.

The most preferred type of digital platform, with between 75% and 80% of respondents indicating their preference, was a website with information on polarisation and radicalisation; training materials; collection of best practices; case descriptions, etc. in all four countries. Digital platforms, individually developed for the current initiative and accessible only to selected participants, came in second with between 21% and 40% of participants of the different countries preferring this platform. Looking at the average scores of the different options, approximately one-fourth of respondents would also be interested in a smartphone application and a closed, national social media group. In this regard, the most helpful functions are a collection of best practices; a collection of tools and measures that can directly be applied in their work; education materials and information on polarisation and radicalisation; with the average score of these functions being above 50%. In addition, approximately 40% of respondents of the four countries choose organising joint actions against polarisation and radicalisation, communication with other users (practitioners and other stakeholders) and discussing real cases with other users as preferred functions. The least preferred function (with close to 30%) was alerting other users to emerging cases of polarisation and/or radicalisation.

Lastly, in the in-depth interviews, there was a need expressed for counselling services and a list of trainers, experts and possible donors, as well as the promotion and focus on media literacy and critical thinking, especially in relation to fake news.

Summary and conclusion

Political polarisation is perceived by FLPs to be significantly more widespread than radicalisation, and both challenges are deemed to be most widespread on the country level in Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Romania. The two issues are interpreted in a similar manner, as prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination and group-focused enmity in all four countries. When it comes to hatred towards different groups, Hungary and Germany appear to be going hand-in-hand, while Poland and Romania also proved to be on the same path. In Hungary and Germany, anti-Muslim, anti-immigrant and anti-refugee sentiments and racism was prevalent, while in Poland and Romania hatred towards the LGBTQ+ community was a more pressing issue. Sexism is a concern in Germany, Poland, and Romania, while anti-Roma and anti-Semitic attitudes are more prominent in Hungary. Furthermore, the decline in the quality of public discourse and the role of media and the role of politics, to name a few, were also associated with the worsening state of political polarisation and right-wing radicalisation.

When it comes to reacting to political polarisation at their workplace, the majority of FLPs showed a clear sense of responsibility. The proportion of those who consider it their duty to refute right-wing radicalisation appears to be somewhat greater. Most FLPs believe they possess the necessary information, skills and knowledge to respond to polarisation and radicalisation, but lack the tools, measures, and the time. What is more, most receive some sort of support from their employers and an even greater proportion can rely on their colleagues. However, informal support was more prominent, than specific measures. Most FLPs did not have a bad experience, when reacting to these phenomena at their workplace.

In terms of what could and should be done, a number of suggestions were mentioned that would support FLPs' work in prevention and intervention. In general, a long-term perspective and focus on sustainability; additional financial resources; a bottom-up approach; the importance of early detection; as well as change in legislation were mentioned, to name a few. Practical measures were also outlined, such as awareness raising events; the development of analytical skills; debate culture; media literacy and civic education; in-depth information; and making best practices and materials available to FLPs.

In terms of online and digital capacity-building tools and learning materials, FLPs reported having only limited experience in using such platforms. The main difficulty was the overabundance of already existing platforms, which is troublesome to navigate for FLPs. Interest in collaboration with other practitioners and other stakeholders via digital platforms was generally high in all four countries, which points towards the high potential for collaboration within and beyond national borders. The most preferred type of digital platform was in the form of a website, and the most helpful functions were a collection of best practices, a collection of tools and measures that can directly be applied in their work, educational materials, and information on polarisation and radicalisation.

FLPs clearly highlighted the need for country-specific programs with the ability to address neo-Nazism in Germany, anti-Roma sentiments in Hungary and Romania, as well as anti-LGBTQ+ stances in Poland. For society in general, developing a better and more meaningful debate on culture and enhancing media literacy would be highly beneficial, similarly to strengthening the landscape of practical training materials, with younger age groups being the key targets of radicalisation prevention practices. Last but not least, special attention needs to be paid to teachers as they should be the ones best-equipped with the aforementioned materials in preventing a radical turn in the life of young people.

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New models for countering polarization and Group-Focused Enmity
György Tatár

In the course of their everyday work, first-line practitioners (FLPs) all over Europe have recognized a rise in group hatred and enmity, as well as radicalization, often resulting in physical violence. They often find themselves helpless in facing these negative trends, feeling, to a growing extent, the need for tools, models and effective responses to address both this specific challenge and its long-term effects.

The FLPs dealing with the prevention of radicalization in Europe have also observed during their daily activities that Central and Eastern European countries, unlike the states in Western Europe, face a higher level of populism, accompanied by a rise of extremism, while the institutional framework to react to radicalization and polarization is mostly lacking in this region. This justifies the concerns over whether FLPs in this region need additional empowerment for addressing these challenges.

Accordingly, the CHAMPIONs project, funded by the European Commission and launched in 2019, seeks to provide support for FLPs by offering tools and knowledge to counter the growing risks and facilitate interactions between professionals across sectors in Germany, Hungary, Poland, and Romania. The desk research carried out in the first couple of months of the project's lifetime looked into the current trends of radicalization, polarization and group-focused enmity. The results confirmed that although identity-motivated enmity and hatred is on the rise in all countries, professionals working with people vulnerable to radicalization, lack the necessary capacities. This greatly lessens the chances of a successful intervention.

As a flagship event of the project, the CHAMPIONs consortium recently convened decision-makers and first-line practitioners from the project's implementing countries, as well as Slovakia, the Czech Republic and Austria. The **Central and Eastern European Cities for Preventing Radicalisation International Policy-makers Roundtable** offered an opportunity to city and institutional participants to exchange views in a virtual meeting on the CHAMPIONs' project's contribution to their daily work and the possibilities for further enhancing interactions with new partners.

When it comes to questions concerning the radicalization of youth and the polarization of societies, the participants' experiences seemed to be very similar in all countries. FLPs agreed that despite the differing nature and extent of threats, the conditions for countering the threats are similar in many terms: they often face a shortage of capacities, tools and networks to effectively react to the risks. Many of them claimed that the institution they work with does not provide any support and, on

numerous occasions, they cannot even turn to their colleagues for help as they seem to share the same extreme or exclusionary views. Another remarkably similar feature in all countries was the near-complete lack of both horizontal and vertical connections and collaboration. The participants also expressed concerns over the lack of trust between institutions and the shortfall of initiatives aimed at the coordination of multi-agency collaborations.

Cooperation, as practiced in CHAMPIONs, improves the daily work of the FLPs

Compared to their daily experience, the participants of the series of roundtables organized at the community level as an organic part of the project, particularly appreciated the benefits of the initiative. It was underlined that the roundtables offered a forum and safe space for discussions; promoted the set-up of multi-agency networks; and helped create trust and a mid and long-term vision necessary for prevention. During the international roundtable, the FLPs stressed the need to ensure regularity and sufficient time for completing the build-up of networks, creating institutional buy-in capacities and shaping the forms of collaboration. According to the experience of some experts, such efforts may lead to tangible results after two years at least.

On top of this, the CHAMPIONs consortium used the international event for presenting some new tools developed by the members during the project and called the attention to models of cooperation of cities, which may better meet the needs and expectations expressed by the participants.

Three new online tools (ARENA, ALERT and TRAINING YARD) were presented. The ALERT system enables professionals to remain vigilant to key issues to be raised within their local community. That allows all users to inform other professionals about crimes committed that involve racist ideologies, discrimination against minorities, bullying, and other hate-fueled incidents. The reporting user will be provided with the necessary material and local contact points to empower them for handling the problem. The ARENA is designed as a communication and cooperation mechanism that enables direct communication and instantaneous exchange of information either privately, between collaborating professionals, or publicly through sharing best practices, as well as highlighting strengths and weaknesses of certain actions. The TRAINING YARD constitutes a capacity-building resource center, which FLPs can use either individually or as a group. Here, they can find learning materials, video-tutorials, good practice guidelines or handbooks and case study simulation exercises developed throughout the project's activities. All three pillars of the system will be open to the public soon and available initially in English, German, Hungarian, Polish, and Romanian.

In the course of the meeting, the networks "European Forum for Urban Security" and the "Nordic Safe Cities" were presented as models for cooperation at a city level, which help create synergies at a regional level to counter the alarming phenomena and trends toward radicalization.

Greater networking at all levels is desirable for the future

Based on the presentations and ensuing discussions during the international roundtable, the participants of the meeting found it useful to sustain the activities beyond the lifetime of the project, disseminate the tools developed during CHAMPIONs, and transform the expertise gained at the community level to the level of cities. It would also be useful to develop a safe network for cities in Central and Eastern Europe and launch cooperation between the existing networks of Western and Northern European cities and the Central and Eastern City Group.

Both FLPs and decision-makers participating in the event were convinced that multi-agency and multilateral initiatives need a strong coordinating and driving force and financial resources to design and implement capacity-building, training, and collaboration efforts for preventing and countering radicalization and polarization.

The members of the CHAMPIONs consortium agreed on the objective to make efforts to disengage extremists and radicals and help their exit from structures generating and fueling radical and extremist ideas in Central and Eastern Europe. They found it necessary to create a conducive environment and safe space for the exchange of views and develop a dialogue aimed to explore the core concerns of populations, including the young generation, which fuel discrimination and intolerance. On top of this, it was deemed vital to find solutions and enhance the rule of law in that context.

The methodology of narrative dialogue in education, particularly in high schools, was mentioned as a tool for exploring the core and background of divergence, enhancing tolerance and mutual respect and preventing engagement with radicals and extremists. It was stressed that capacity building of teachers in this field is key.

The author of this article expresses the hope that the ideas and new tools mentioned above would merit further discussions and joint reflections by those dedicated to the prevention of divisions and extremism in Europe.

About the Author

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Supporting FLPs in the Online Sphere: Towards the Prevention of Polarization and Radicalization through Cyber-solutions

Andrea Tundis, Catherine Lourdes Dy, Max Mühlhäuser, Ariane Olek

Abstract

The increasing rate of polarization and radicalization has been a growing concern across Europe, both on-the-ground and more recently in the online sphere. Within Central and Eastern Europe in particular, first-line practitioners (FLPs) face an additional set of challenges, including working in a region with an unstable democracy, significant minority groups who continue to be oppressed, including Roma and Travelers, or a surge in right-wing populist parties. In recent years, ideological groups including right-wing, anti-Semitic, and xenophobic groups have taken full advantage of the internet and social media, broadening their reach and their impact as never before. FLPs are often alone, receive little support, and do not have established networks to be able to seek advice from. Indeed, there is a wealth of information available online, but scattered across different websites and requires significant time and effort to sift through. It is clear that working toward prevention requires not only (i) a multi-faceted approach, not only taking traditional securitized P/CVE (Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism) tactics but specifically developing innovative strategies that address the specific issues of the region as well as joint, cross-institutional action by all stakeholders involved. This paper presents a newly-developed online platform developed specifically for FLPs, based on their needs. It is divided into three specific sections which work in an independent but complementary manner, and together provide FLPs with different tools as well as a collaboration platform to support them in their day to day work.[42]

Introduction

Growing ideological, economic, and religious divisions within Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) have become increasingly clear. In the past decade, extremist incidents and populist rhetoric have increased, resulting in political wins such as Viktor Orban securing of a third term in office with a landslide victory in the 2018 Hungarian parliamentary elections; the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) entering German federal parliament for the first time in 2017 and later on in October 2019

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coming ahead of Angela Merkel's Christian Democrats (CDU) in the eastern state of Thuringia; also in 2019, the re-election of Andrzej Duda from the Law and Justice (PiS) party to the Polish presidency. It is clear that ideological divisions have developed into major sources of conflict, intensified by the European financial crisis in 2008 which did not spare Central and Eastern Europe (Dutkiewicz/Gorzelak 2013). This was followed shortly by the so-called "Migration Crisis" in 2015, which for the region of Central and Eastern Europe — where nationhood is rooted in ethnic and cultural homogeneity — was a particular point of contention (Rupnik 2016). Taken together, these crises have created ideal political conditions for far-right and populist rhetoric to appeal to voters — only underscored by the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 which has aggravated xenophobic and anti-migrant sentiment across the board (Reny/Baretto 2020; Chuang 2020).

At the same time, society has rapidly settled into the digital era. As internet access becomes increasingly accessible and as more and more people embrace new technologies, opportunities for ideological groups and for those wishing to use it for radicalization and the dissemination of extreme viewpoints, have grown. Through websites and social media, the online sphere has become a playground for those who are able to exploit it for their own purposes — whether it be for communication, spreading of disinformation — including state-sponsored disinformation, or recruitment. The benefit, however of the internet is the fact that it is a level playing field and can also be maximized for the benefit of FLPs' working in the P/CVE field.

Within the CHAMPIONs Project, the core output is an innovative, tailored digital platform developed specifically as a result of in-depth consultation with FLPs in Romania, Hungary, Poland, and Germany that provides tools to improve local level multi-agency collaboration and improved information sharing for the detection and improved response at grass-roots levels to polarization and radicalization. The platform is divided into three distinct segments, which will be presented in more detail later:

- **ALERT**, an online system which provides FLPs with specific tools and resources for a reported problem;
- **ARENA**, an online discussion platform for complex cases reported within ALERT; and,
- **TRAINING YARD**, a customized collection of training tools, resources and courses.

All three work in an independent but complementary manner, and together provide FLPs with different tools as well as a collaboration platform.

How digital solutions can help in the everyday work of FLPs

To follow up on the previous discussion, there are diverse problems linked to the emergence of situations of polarization and radicalization, and they all originate in or are influenced by the social context in which individuals live but also their online presence and community. Digital space thus becomes an important field in the fight against polarisation and radicalisation. This, in turn, leads to a need for innovative tools based on the use of information technologies are of fundamental importance for FLPs to support prevention and combat the spread of polarisation and radicalisation (Tundis/Böck/Stanilescu, a.o. 2020; Tundis/Mukherjee/Mühlhäuser 2020).

Indeed, the advantages of developing digital solutions for FLPs, with special consideration for how online tools can be helpful for FLPs working in the field of prevention of radicalization and polarization, rely on:

- *Content availability:* it is well-known that a variety of tools linked to the mentioned phenomena already exist in one form or another. However, for a practitioner, it is not easy to identify the best materials for each problem and find it, as materials are spread across different websites and platforms. Therefore, having a tool capable of supporting their collection in a structured way and therefore the grouping of such contents by meaningful categories, in order to support the FLPs in their identification or to even allow their automatic search, would simplify their usage.
- *FLPs' interaction*: on the ground, there are diverse FLPs working in the P/CVE field, each of them an expert in a particular domain of interest, with their own skills and experiences. A tool that allows not only to make best use of such qualities, but that allows less experienced FLPs to get in touch with them directly, establishing discussion groups on a certain topic with users with complementary skills in order to solve a problem, would help to strengthen their inter-institutional interaction and cooperation.
- *Online training*: it is imperative for FLPs to continually grow their knowledge base and improve their skills to become more effective in the field, thus, the possibility of learning by participating in online courses, guided lessons and interactive examples, which are accessible anywhere and at any time, represent a further strength of the digital era.
- *Easier communication*: in general, digital technology simplifies communication and information sharing, by reducing or even breaking down the physical constraints related to time and space, so as to enable a real-time engagement from anywhere in the world.

Firstlinepractitioners.com - the central platform for knowledge and collegial exchange

The elements of the CHAMPIONs project – ALERT, ARENA and TRAINING YARD – have been integrated into the existing website http://www.firstlinepractitioners.com, thus contributing to the continuous development of this central, collaborative and cross-project platform.

This platform aims to establish a European hub aiming to create a network of contacts, cooperation and synergies among researchers, professionals, security experts, and law enforcement agencies, with different skills on various social-cultural aspects related to the phenomena of radicalization, violent extremism, organized crime, terrorist networks and so on. The platform offers FLPs different services: on the one hand, knowledge about the above-mentioned phenomena and assistance in how to deal with them. In addition, one can get in contact with other FLPs and experts, and last but not least, search for digital solutions.

As language plays an important role in the user-friendliness of the site and its contents, such as practical guides or exchange with each other, the platform takes the approach of offering materials in several languages and on various topics.

A closer look at ALERT, ARENA and TRAINING YARD

As explained above, the ALERT, ARENA and TRAINING YARD have been defined and proposed to support FLPs in the online sphere within the fields of polarization and radicalization. They work hand in hand (see Figure 1), although their functions can also be performed independently.
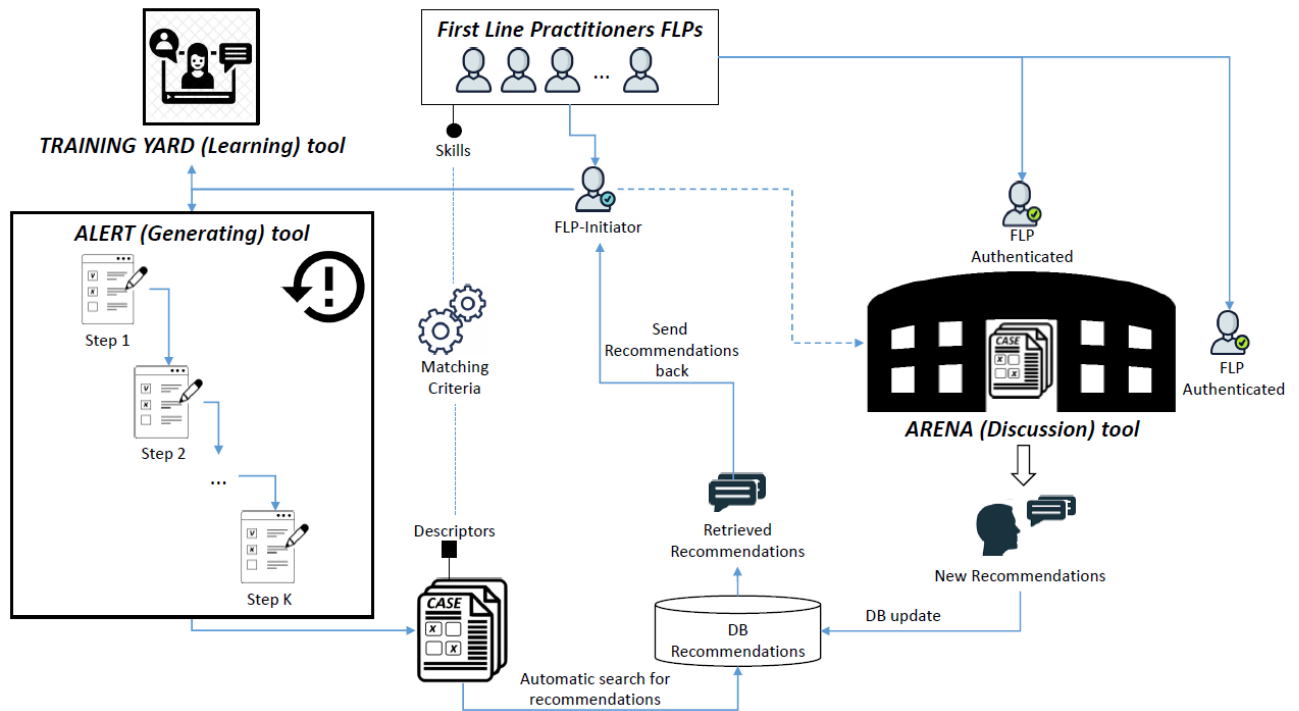

Figure 1 Conceptual model of ALERT, ARENA and TRAINING YARD

ALERT: Case-specific query of supporting materials and tools in the database

The ALERT module aims to support FLPs in generating ad-hoc and structured requests related to specific topics of interest in the context of polarization and radicalization. A questionnaire-based approach has been adopted for its implementation, where the user is asked to answer a set of predefined questions as well as to provide free text in order to produce a semi-structured report. By compiling a case, at the end of the process, a list of recommendations (if available) is automatically retrieved to the FLP-user, on the basis of previous cases related to similar topics. These can be links to websites, video tutorials, handbooks, simulations and other resources. If the resulting recommendations do not fully satisfy the user's needs, then a further option is possible by requesting a more in-depth study of the case which in turn triggers the involvement of other FLPs and experts. This will launch the ARENA segment, as described below.

ARENA: Case advice from colleagues and experts

The ARENA module is a software tool which enables the management of the communication and cooperation among FLPs and experts by facilitating their collaboration, the sharing of recommendations, as well as the joint decision-making related to more complex polarization and radicalization cases. It allows the creation of (virtual) discussion groups, by exploiting an automatic selection mechanism of the participants based, for example, on their expertise, their language skills, the place where the event happened, and so on. As its usage is subordinated to a registration, the FLP's identity needs to be checked and validated from a control authority before granting him/her access to the platform.

TRAINING YARD

While ARENA and ALERT represent tools to support the identification of specific solutions in order to actively respond to specific existing problems, the TRAINING YARD plays a preventive role and therefore provides functions aimed at learning within a certain domain of interest. Furthermore, the TRAINING YARD is to be understood as a wide-ranging collection of teaching material for FLPs on various facets of combating and preventing polarisation and radicalisation. This includes, for example, materials on victim support after racist attacks, hate speech on the Internet, simulations of typical work cases, e.g. in the school and youth work environment, as well as guidelines for dealing with events and activities of extremist groups.

In order to make the Training Yard user-friendly and more attractive to the FLPs, additional facilities have been considered. First of all, it is multilingual. Further diversifications are provided by distinguishing and structuring the content and its search for specific targets, national and regional peculiarities, thematic diversity (including the distinction between victim/offender focus, and prevention/intervention) and desired media type.

The TRAINING YARD can be used by any FLP without registration and is conceived as a digital learning portal for FLPs from various disciplines which can be used both among FLPs for roundtables, workshops and offline trainings, as well as for self-training without offline meetings.

Conclusion

The strategies employed by extremist and other radical groups are rapidly evolving and first line practitioners must keep up. With the advent of a digitized world, cyber solutions are a necessary next step. This article focused on how, in Central and Eastern Europe Internet Communication and Technology (ICT) has spread, by highlighting the advantages of a cyber-solution to support P/CVE. From this, the paper presented a set of concrete digital tools — ALERT, ARENA, and TRAINING YARD

— to support the online sphere of FLPs, in order to prevent polarization and radicalization through cyber technology. Each of the software modules was outlined with its functions. It is clear that the online sphere is one that gives many opportunities — to extremist groups, but also to FLPs who are actively working to address polarization and radicalization. It is up to us to develop novel technologies and continually expand our scope for collaboration, both on-site and in cyberspace.

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