

Law Enforcement Responses to Violent Extremism in Greece

Matthew Phelps
Dominic Kudlacek

Criminological Research Institute of Lower Saxony, Germany



Triantafyllos Karatrantos
Vasileios Theofilopoulos

Center For Security Studies, Greece



Abstract

In order to generate a European perspective of counter-radicalisation, it is important to understand the individual strategies of Member States. Illuminating the best practices of countries can provide the best stimulus to initiate policy reform and changes to multi-agency prevention. In this article, the experiences and needs of practitioners from law enforcement agencies in Greece are captured to provide a deeper understanding of prevention work. Results are presented from focus groups with law enforcement practitioners that were held at a counter-radicalisation workshop in Athens where over 120 practitioners assembled to discuss violent extremism and vulnerable groups in Greece. Approximately two-thirds of the participants reported having contact to extremists in

a professional capacity. These practitioners most commonly worked in smaller teams (1-10) and collaborated with a diverse range of national stakeholders. Although left-wing extremism was the most commonly reported form of extremism, participants were most concerned about Islamist extremism. Only a small number voiced concerns about right-wing extremism. Participants emphasised the need for further training in recognising the signs of violent extremist behaviour and international information sharing. Results indicate a growing need for more technological formats that can host counter-radicalisation tools, such as app-based risk assessments and training modules.

Keywords: *Extremism, radicalisation, prevention, Greece*

The refugee crisis and its challenges for Greece

In a time of budgetary pressures and demographic shifts, Greece, as with other European member states, is faced with the challenge of allocating limited resources to achieve effective democratic governance. As Greece has been one of the most affected countries by the migration crisis, strong demands have been generated for the improvement of social welfare and political stability. Mass migration presents a further challenge to law enforcement agencies in providing security by reason of the perceived correlations between migration and increased rates of violent crime, and perceived threats of terrorism. The millions of refugees that arrive in Europe often have to use routes that pass through Greece in which numerous departure points exist, both legal and illegal. Greece itself has seen a steady rise in the number of asylum seekers between 2013 and 2017, though comparatively few to countries like Germany, Italy and France (Eurostat, 2018). With the transiting of refugees in huge and unrelenting waves, Greece has seemingly reached its resource and logistical capacity in providing humanitarian assistance, resettlement and housing supplies. Europe's aim to improve overall border management and ensure shelter and assistance for refugees has led to its support of Greece in the establishment of hotspots and a relocation scheme to transfer persons in need of international protection to other EU Member States.

The EU-Turkey statement was an important game changer in EU efforts to decrease migration flows via Greece. The core principle of the EU-Turkey Agreement was the provision that all new irregular migrants or asylum seekers crossing from Turkey to the Greek islands will be returned to Turkey, after an individual assessment of their asylum claims in line with EU and international law. For every Syrian being returned to Turkey, another Syrian would be resettled in the EU from Turkey (1:1 mechanism) (European Commission, 2017). Since the EU-Turkey agreement took effect in 2016, statistics from the national au-

thorities in Greece¹ have revealed a significant drop in known illegal migration levels (see table 1).

Table 1 Number of arrests of known illegal immigrants between 2016 and 2017

Year	Illegal immigrant arrests
2016	204,820
2017	68,112

For migrants who are not denied entry, both short-term and long-term shelters are available in concentrated areas of Greece, such as those on Lesbos Island. The critical situation of these centres has received due attention in media reports on account of the poor living conditions refugees are subjected to, such as overcrowding, restricted access to health care services, and lack of sanitation. In a study investigating the physical health of refugees across 29 locations in Greece, Mellou et al. (2017) had noted a significant risk of communicable diseases in refugee camps. Further studies have shown high levels of psychiatric disorders in refugee populations given their highly heterogeneous experiences of traumatic events and other stressors (Farhat et al., 2018; Hermans et al., 2017). An elevated risk has been shown in refugee groups for anxiety disorders (Javanbakht et al., 2018), post-traumatic stress disorders (Li et al., 2016), and depressive symptoms (Alduraiddi & Waters, 2018).

Research has considered how traumatic events compounded with other stress factors could expose an individual to a stronger risk of sympathising with extremist behaviours and organised violence (Campelo et al., 2018). Greece stands currently under pressure of dealing with incoming migrant populations who suffer from traumatic stress. As mentioned before, the economic situation is limiting the availability of support and care that can be given to vulnerable groups. However, local governments have shown a tremendous willingness to support through social assistance, public health polices, and programmes that foster multiculturalism. Nevertheless, one might see that the combination of economic tension and huge demographic change may set a matrix for the development of decreased solidarity and devaluation of individuals with migrant backgrounds, and violent interactions between far-right and far-left groups. This also brings a fundamental change to the role of law enforcement agencies and the way vulnerable groups, such as migrants and asylum seekers, are policed in terms of preventing crime. More specifically, increasing migration levels raise the challenge of how law enforcement can transform security and prevention strategies to police an increasingly plural Greece.

¹ Data taken from the Hellenic Police. Retrieved from http://www.astynomia.gr/index.php?option=ozo_content&lang=%27.%27&perform=view&id=70776&Itemid=1240&lang=, data of access: 18.11.2018.

Hate crime and political violence in Greece

Evidence of the tensions between certain societal groups in Greece and arriving immigrants can be discernible by the prevalence of hate crime offences. In this article, we maintain the definition of hate crime as being the victimisation of an individual on the basis of their perceived race, colour, religion, disability, sexual orientation or national origin (Sun, 2006). A review of the data from the Hellenic Police showed an increase in the number of recorded hate crime offences, like in most European countries (FRA, 2018). Although the numbers have seen a steep increase between 2016 and 2017, the total amount remains comparatively low. In 2017, the number of acts grew to 184 incidents representing a 119% increase to the previous year (84 offences). The figures also revealed that the large majority of hate crimes in 2017 were of a xenophobic and racist nature (133 offences), for example incidents based on race and ethnicity. Not only is Greece used as a transit country for thousands of asylum seekers to continue onto other countries like Germany, France and Sweden, but it also remains the main destination for thousands more. This high border activity of migrants entering and exiting the country has fuelled populism and far-right extremism, which has led to increasing acts of discrimination and signs of a growing intolerance towards refugees.

Violent mobilisations of political extremist groups present a form of criminal deviance that is motivated, among other reasons, by hate, racism, xenophobia and a devaluation of otherness. This has resulted in numerous violent clashes between various societal groups including migrants. In this regard, fears have spawned over the potential escalation of political violence to terrorism, which has now become a significant threat in Greece. According to the Global Terrorism Index (GTI), Greece is ranked in 46th place (out of 130 countries) for the number of terrorist attacks it has incurred. This is listed higher than countries like Ireland, Canada and Switzerland but lower than, for example, United States, United Kingdom and Germany (Global Terrorism Index, 2017). As regards to official acts of terrorism in Greece, none has been officially tied to the activities of right-wing extremists who have instead been arrested for violent attacks against far-left groups and migrants.

Terrorism linked to left-wing extremism and anarchism, however, presents arguably the greater threat in Greece to date. Of the European member states, Greece, alongside Italy and Spain, were the only countries to have experienced terrorist attacks related to left-wing militancy within the last years (Europol, 2018). A series of eight attacks and twelve arrests were attributed to left-wing terrorism in 2017 alone, in comparison to no completed terrorist offences being officially reported for jihadist extremism and right-wing extremism (Europol, 2018). Specifically, the Greek anarchist group 'Conspiracy of Fire Cells'

have claimed responsibility for multiple fire bombings, explosions and most recently the mailing of parcel bombs to EU officials including the German Finance Minister².

Counter-radicalisation in Greece

Counter-radicalisation legislation

Counter-terrorism laws have evolved in the Greek legal system and is addressed by different articles of the Greek Criminal Code (articles 185, 185 and 187A). The national legal framework exists mainly as a punitive measure that seeks to punish various terrorist actions and to facilitate the investigation and disruption of terrorist offending. Greece has incorporated further laws from the European Union, such as the framework decision 2002/475/JHA, which also comes under the heading of combatting terrorism. Yet, there appears to be no specific laws in Greek legislation that reflect a need to prevent those extremist behaviours leading to terrorism. The dangers of radicalisation, however, are clearly recognised by regional partners and governmental departments, which is evidenced through policies to improve training for law enforcement agencies in responding to violent extremism. Furthermore, these actions are perhaps covered, in a broad sense, by overreaching counterterrorism laws.

The provision of legislation could prove useful, if anything, in providing a clear distinction between counterterrorism and counter-radicalisation, the boundaries of which are currently blurred in the Greek legal framework. Laws are required that encourage prevention efforts that deal with the complex social and behavioural behaviour conducive to terrorism and not just the preparatory acts of terrorism itself. In this light, duties could be placed on certain societal stakeholders to raise awareness of radicalisation and to challenge extremist behaviours. Combining such measures with laws would create a legal stability to support the development of long-term prevention efforts. A European example promoting this concept is the Counter-Terrorism and Security Act 2015 of the United Kingdom. This act of parliament places a duty on selected authorities to prevent vulnerable people from pathways to violent extremism. A certain caution, however, is needed because although empowering civil society partners to participate in counter-radicalisation seems ideal, it might also bring with it certain consequences that could undermine its very aim. Practically speaking, placing additional security functions on societal actors, who might not possess the necessary training or knowledge in identifying signs of radicalisation, generates a risk of discriminatory and alienating practices if not correctly applied. Another more passive option of legislating prevention activities could be in the area of

² Dearden, Lizzie. "Greek police find eight more parcel bombs intended for EU officials as anarchist terror campaign continues". The Independent, March 21, 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/greek-police-eight-parcel-bombs-letter-eu-officials-imf-paris-office-germany-finance-ministry-a7641241.html>, data of access: 18.11.2018.

education where educators are given a duty to promote values, inclusion and diversity. Irrespective of what these measures entail, revisions to the Greek legal framework are needed to legally recognise the importance of tackling the root causes of terrorism and violent extremism.

Research and innovation

In response to the threat of violent extremism and terrorism, Greece has seen an increased cohesion and interoperability of organisations in order to promote preventive activities. The Center for Security Studies (Κέντρο Μελετών Ασφαλείας, KEMEA), established as part of the Ministry of Public Order and Citizen Protection, has been a significant contributor to the research of violent radicalisation. Key activities of KEMEA include the development of national collaborations between local authorities, such as the State Security Division of the Hellenic Police and Athens Municipal Police, and the implementation of awareness programmes for first line practitioners in recognising and responding to extremist behaviours. Related exercises include the provision of intercultural trainings and lectures, which bring together the experiences of academics from international universities, representatives of Europol and Interpol, and EU counter-radicalisation projects.

The involvement of Greece as a participating country in EU research funding has also evolved within the last decade as scientific and technological organisations join and coordinate projects. KEMEA exchanges best practices on an international level with the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) Centre of Excellence (CoE) and is actively involved in the implementation of research and training actions financed by different EU mechanisms (ISF Police, ISEC, Horizon 2020, and Erasmus+). In particular, KEMEA is participating in the implementation of six programmes (PRACTICIES, PERICLES, PROPHETS, TENSOR, INTEGRA and J-SAFE), which all focus on different forms and aspects of radicalisation that lead to violent extremism and terrorism. These programmes both aim at the creation of special tools and training programmes for first line practitioners that emphasise on the identification of real operational needs when responding to acts of violent extremism and terrorism.

Counter-radicalisation workshop in Athens, Greece

On the 21st and 22nd of February 2018, a counter-radicalisation workshop titled 'Actions for preventing radicalisation that leads to violent extremism in Greece' took place onsite the premises of the Hellenic Ministry of Interior in Athens, Greece. The purpose of this workshop was to identify the common challenges facing Greek practitioners in the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism. The workshop relayed the specific needs and challenges of over 120 Greek practitioners including the Hellenic Police, the Hellenic Coast Guard, the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Interior and the Independent Author-

ity for Public Revenue, Ministry for Migration Policy (Asylum Service, Reception and Identification Service), the Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs, the Ministry of Health (National Centre for Health Operations, Hellenic Centre for Disease Control & Prevention), and the Municipality of Athens.

The workshop was also used as a platform to conduct focus group discussions as part of the EU project PERICLES (Policy recommendation and improved communication tools for law enforcement and security agencies preventing violent radicalisation)³. The aim was to capture the personal experiences of frontline practitioners in Greece who typically had a role in the prevention of radicalisation. Discussions with practitioners were divided into four topics: organisational structure of law enforcement agencies, forms of violent extremism typically encountered, risk factors present among extremists with whom the participant encountered, and counter-radicalisation activities performed by law enforcement agencies. Open-ended questions were used to acquire the views on different aspects of prevention work. Additionally, questions were asked about the frequency of certain risk factors related to radicalisation.

Overall, 30 practitioners participated in the group discussions. A core sample of five professional groups could be distinguished: counterterrorism police officers (11), prevention officers within intelligence agencies (7), community police officers (6), professionals working with the general prison population (4), and other professionals involved in the field of counter-radicalisation (2). No personal information was collected from the participants such as age, gender, nationality or educational background.

Results

Common themes that were identified from the group discussions presented information on the characteristics of law enforcement practitioners, working practices, and challenges with current prevention strategies of radicalisation and violent extremism.

Organisational structure of law enforcement agencies in Greece

Limited research has explored the structure of counter-radicalisation organisations and how this can impact on the implementation of prevention activities. We included under the meaning of organisational structure the level of professional training employees received, time employed in the organisation, and the type of employment contract (working on a full-time, part-time, or voluntary basis). The level of training and job position of staff within prevention programmes and projects can directly affect the quality and effectiveness of prevention activities. Therefore, examining the internal structure of prevention programmes and projects can provide a potentially important area for introducing improvements. The participants at our workshop worked within different sized

3 For more information on PERICLES, see Kudlacek et al. (2018).

teams the most common being small-sized groups (1-10 persons), followed by medium-sized groups (21-50), and large-sized groups (51-100). This pattern can be related to the prevention triangle where the top part represents those prevention interventions targeting a narrow group of individuals, i.e. those who are at the highest risk of radicalising or have already radicalised, and the bottom part of the triangle representing prevention interventions that target the largest group of individuals. As law enforcement agencies are usually involved when a case radicalisation has been brought to their attention, the level of prevention they provide is specific to the selected individual. This would require smaller teams to enable a more personal level of assistance and direct and manageable lines of communication.

Contact with radicalised individuals

When asked whether the participants had any contact to individuals who were radicalised or in the process of radicalising, approximately two-thirds said yes. One-third of the participants claimed not to have any contact with radicals. The high rate of law enforcement agencies in our group discussions who have had contact with radicals confirms them as an important stakeholder in the prevention of violent radicalisation. Law enforcement agencies are often seen as one of the main authorities involved in cases of radicalisation and with whom other stakeholders communicate for purposes of information sharing. Therefore, ongoing efforts to develop training and strategic materials for law enforcement agencies in order to enhance police effectiveness can be justified by their significance as a potential source of information and their direct exposure to radical individuals.

Multi-agency cooperation

Participants indicated a wide range of coordination efforts in the area of multi-agency working. On a regional level, the main actors included the Hellenic Police Intelligence Directorate (HPID), regional police, coast guard, prosecution service, fire service, customs and excise, counterterrorism division, Europol and Interpol. Collaborations with civil society and non-governmental organisations were also mentioned such as social workers, mental health organisations, tax authorities, and asylum agencies. The range of stakeholders reported by the participants indicate a broadened perspective on multi-agency cooperation, which includes stakeholders that are not typically involved or at least seldom mentioned. This shows an appreciation of a comprehensive response to counter-radicalisation and is only achieved through the inclusion of perspectives from different stakeholders. The value of exploring collaborations with stakeholders in different employment sectors comes from the complexity of radicalisation processes that lead to violent extremism and terrorism. As no single organisation possesses the required knowledge and experience to respond effectively to cases of radicalisation, a huge benefit can be seen from a more diversified collaboration as the solutions thereby developed would transcend beyond those of individual stakeholders.

Radical ideologies and experiences with radicalised individuals

Participants were asked about the different forms of radicalisation of which they were most concerned. The large majority were mostly concerned about left-wing extremism (18), followed by Islamist extremism (16). Of the three included ideologies, only a small number were concerned with right-wing extremism (8). These concerns appear to match the current terrorist threat levels in Greece as left-wing terrorism has contributed to the most significant attacks so far. Participants were then asked which forms of extremism they most commonly confronted. Over half of the participants (19) identified left-wing extremism. Over one-third dealt with Islamist extremism (11) and only a small majority addressed right-wing extremism (4). It is quickly observable that a linear relationship exists between the ideologies that are of most concern and the ideologies that are actually confronted. Yet, we would caution that this correlation could be interpreted in several ways. Whether a certain ideology is viewed as a concern might come from a person's professional experiences, for example, how often a person has encountered a particular type of extremism. However, this might also occur because of objective reasons such as a strategic decision by a police force to police selected forms of violent extremism.

Recommendations for future counter-radicalisation measures

We identified three key themes from responses to the question: What tools could we develop that would be most useful to your work in recognising and preventing radicalisations?

The first recurring theme among participants was the apparent need for further training specifically in relation to the identification of radicalisation signs and indicators. Further professional training is desired as law enforcement agencies, particularly community police officers, encounter individuals where the immediate detection of potential violent extremists is potentially required. Opportunities to improve knowledge in these areas are therefore essential to provide a better assessment of a situation and to reduce the occurrence of misidentifications and other pre-emptive actions that may lead to the persecution of individuals. Although this is often one of the first outputs offered by programmes and initiatives supporting counter-radicalisation, it is essential that training curricula is kept updated with the latest research and results in the field.

"Frequent training, including workshops, manuals and practical psychological tips. It would be extremely useful to establish permanent working groups to include social workers and create support network and also international meetings in order to disseminate experience and best practices especially in the EU".

(Community police officer during the focus group)

When looking at the types of training offered, it is as equally important to place consideration in the way material is brought across to end users. For example, e-learning is

a particularly useful tool given that it is relatively inexpensive, permits accessibility from any place at any time, and lends itself to being updated more easily. In order to promote effective learning practices among end users, it is necessary that classical teaching methods understand how technological advancements can be used to better supply knowledge. Moreover, how this knowledge is conveyed should complement the abilities of the practitioner and their time and work-related constraints.

The second theme raised here is the need for improved national and international information sharing in counter-radicalisation and counterterrorism. Although current research and policy directives have inspired the development of a growing number of information platforms across European countries, for example the European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECCT) and Secure Information Exchange Network Application (SIENA), a continuing need for international information hubs were voiced during our discussions. This would indicate that discrepancies in information sharing are still prevalent.

"An information exchange tool that will provide fast secure and effective data and information exchange on a national and EU level between law enforcement agencies, public authorities, agencies and organisations. Educational and information programmes for students, parents and teachers."

(Prevention officer within intelligence agency during the focus group)

Information exchange platforms are a recent addition in the area of counterterrorism and counter-radicalisation, however, the issue of cross-boundary information sharing is not. These boundaries may come in the form of conflicting data protection regulations of different stakeholder groups, or because of concerns about sharing potentially sensitive information that could be misused or be made publicly available. Alternatively, structural issues with the information exchange platform itself might be present that limits how collaborations are facilitated. Limited resources, financing, or legislative support can all significantly affect a network's operational capacity. As this field remains largely unexplored, further research on counterterrorism and counter-radicalisation information platforms is required to pinpoint the variables that impact on how information and knowledge is shared among practitioners.

The third theme identified from the group discussions was the need for new methods and technologies to be developed that aid law enforcement agencies in counter-radicalisation, such as information exchange platforms, risk assessment tools and cyber-space detection tools. Yet, the format in which these methods are made available (paper, electronic, or other) and whether stakeholders have direct access can influence whether or not they are utilised. How technological solutions and information are delivered to practitioners is generally achieved by training sessions, briefings and, increasingly of late, e-learning platforms.

"A creation of an app for mobile smartphone, tablets etc. both for Android and iOS would be great."

(Community police officer during the focus group)

As ICT and technologies advance, law enforcement agencies have shown an increasing acceptance of technological equipment for its power in helping to respond to crimes. The strategic use of multimedia apps demonstrates a useful exploitation strategy for counter-radicalisation programmes and initiatives. The conversion of counter-radicalisation tools into an app format, whether an app-based risk assessment or guidance on identifying signs of radicalisation, could lead to a more effective response by practitioners, such as those police officers on patrol who may not have direct access to paper-based tools.

Conclusion

This article provides an insight into the needs of law enforcement agencies in Greece and suggests several important areas that require further research. One of the most relevant aspects for practitioners in the field of counter-radicalisation is the need for more multi-agency collaborations to take place that goes beyond the stakeholders who are typically involved i.e. law enforcement agencies, educators and NGOs. In order to push for a whole society approach in the prevention of radicalising factors, new ways should be considered in how different stakeholders can be integrated and what insights they may bring for a more comprehensive model of prevention.

In Greece, law enforcement agencies have shown evidence of multi-agency working by starting collaborations with organisations that are not usually on the forefront. Positive relationships with local fire services were reported, which is one stakeholder group whose role has absorbed prevention responsibilities in recent years due to the number of violent incidents they encounter. Another stakeholder group mentioned was the involvement of asylum agencies given their exclusive position to implement preventive actions among potentially vulnerable populations. Prevention measures offered in refugee camps does not necessarily imply an increase in internal security and policing of refugee areas, although this could lessen the risk of external influences from political or militant groups, but could involve efforts to raise the awareness of radicalisation and extremism among staff members and educators working within refugee encampments. Working relations were also reported with tax agencies, which has received very little focus in research. Among other forms of criminality, fraudulent documents and tax violations provide further areas where radicalisation can occur (as seen in the case of Timothy McVeigh⁴).

⁴ Timothy McVeigh was an American domestic terrorist convicted of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing and was also involved in tax evasion and tax fraud due to his extreme anti-government beliefs.

The research also draws attention to the absence of legislation in Greece that specifically encourages public and private institutions to adopt working environments that are mindful of the signs and threats of radicalisation and extremism. The provision of a legal framework that prohibits actions related to terrorism and violent extremism have a different aim than those legal provisions that promote stakeholder responsibility. Although developing legislation to promote resilience and cohesiveness in specific areas may eliminate certain radicalisation risk factors, a trade-off might occur between enforcing legislation and professionalism. For example, involving different stakeholders to help identify and regulate behaviour, who might not possess the necessary knowledge or training, might cause the reverse effects if selection bias and misidentification occur.

In line with current research, more training and prevention tools were stated as ways in which counter-radicalisation measures could be advanced. We recognised that this came hand in hand with a need for technologies that provide this information in a practical and timely manner. In contrast to trainings and tools that are only available in paper form, online and application-based platforms present perhaps a more effective way of presenting material. An interrelated challenge is the apparent gap in information sharing between international and national stakeholders. What has become visible in Member States is that those practitioners on a local level are not implementing the scientific outputs of counter-radicalisation projects and related initiatives, whether because of political or financial reasons, or distrust of its use due to a lack of scientific evaluations. This development calls for a greater focus to be applied on utilising and enhancing those technologies already available as opposed to developing entirely new counter-radicalisation tools.

The evolution of radicalisation has given rise to several issues with preventive strategies in Europe. A distinct feature of Greece's strategy has been the prevention efforts developed both on a national and international level. However, in order to maintain a relevant strategy more effective international cooperation and information sharing practices should be expanded upon. Only as international multi-cooperation's advance can the individual operational capacities of stakeholders truly exploit the possibilities at their disposal.

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