cultures interactive

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The CEE Prevent Net

How to do prevention of radicalisation and group hatred in Central and Eastern Europe? – And how to set up exit programs across Europe?

Intervention from the floor at the OSCE Counter-Terrorism Conference:

"Taking Stock of Efforts to Prevent and Counter Terrorism as well as Violent Extremism and Radicalization that lead to Terrorism in the OSCE Area"

in Bratislava 25.-26.3.2019.

--- by Harald Weilnböck

Preface: CI works to prevent intolerance, group hatred and radicalisation since 2005. CI currently engages in three NGO based initiatives in Central and Eastern Europe – one being coordinated by the Austrian ministry of Interior another being supported by the Visegrád Fund.

- *CEE Prevent Net*
- *Exit Europe*
- *CHAMPIONs*
  (full titles and webpages further below)

You find the intervention and materials on the Cultures Interactive's website:
http://cultures-interactive.de/de/praesentationen.html
and: http://cultures-interactive.de/en/ran-essay-en.html

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How to do prevention of radicalisation and group hatred in Central and Eastern Europe?   -- three points!

(1)

Firstly, we need to get our rhetoric right. Our language and terms need to be able to communicate prevent issues cross-partisan. Hence, we need to keep politics out of prevention discourses – which isn't easy, since PVE is a highly politicized and politically instrumentalized area.

I give you one example: The global "prevent policy paradox". It means that policy maker's prevent rhetoric actually works to support radicalisation instead of preventing it – especially but not only in Central and Eastern Europe.

How did this happen? The global and European rhetoric on radicalisation has a strong Islamism bias, which stresses issues of Jihadism, Salafism, Syrian foreign fighters and so forth – and thus tends to obfuscate and omit right-wing extremism and similar phenomena. But, whenever you single out only one form of radicalisation, you automatically polarize, and stigmatize – hence, you radicalize. So, you are part of the problem – not of the solution.

This is particularly harmful in Central and Eastern Europe. For, the EU's predominant Islamism rhetoric is routinely abused by political parties that effectively employ it to fuel Islamophobia and anti-refugee resentments. Hence, the EU's prevent rhetoric helps to equate refugees with Islamist terrorists – which in the end means supporting a right-wing extremist agenda. Plus, the risks of intolerance, group hatred and radicalization seem to increase steadily in CEE countries.

We have been knowing this for years – and yet, not even the RAN in Brussels has gotten it right. Please see our critical Essay about the RAN and related materials on Cultures Interactive's websites.

(2)

Now, which terms and issues should we focus on instead? – aside of following the rule to never unduly focus only on one form of radicalisation, but always take a cross-extremisms perspective.

We need to realize: Prevention is not about scanning our young people for potential terrorists. Preventing radicalisation simply means to safeguard young people, period! And we safeguard all of them – and regardless which kinds of risk are at stake, be it violence, (cyber-) mobbing, drugs, criminality, gangs, cults, dependencies, self-destructiveness; among these risks, of course, also hatred, meaning: group hatred – and intolerance. But we do all of them together.

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Hence, we <u>safeguard young people</u> and we support their development – nothing more, nothing less.

How do we do this? We build young peoples' skills – especially their <u>skills of dialogue and tolerance</u>. But we do this not as part of a Western political agenda. We do this because there is proof that skills of "dialogue and tolerance" are vital for young people in order to develop well, be creative, be happy, be healthy, and have a satisfying life. Plus, those who have these skills are much less likely to get into mobbing, violence, drugs, criminality, gangs, cults, dependencies, self-destructiveness – and group hatred.

Therefore, this all <u>needs to be a cross-partisan</u> issue. Whoever has a political agenda, should stay out of youth work! Because if we are political, then we are not different from being recruiters.

(3)

Therefore, what we need is youth workers. – In a sense, we all need to become youth workers at heart. Also, safeguarding young people always also means <u>safeguarding society</u> as such, meaning civil society. We all need to build trust and confidence, not only with young people, but also between state and NGO actors. <u>Independent civil society workers</u> are key – because they can gain young people's trust, if anyone at all. State actors need to understand and be confident about this – and put a bottom-up strategy in place, on eyes level with NGOs. This also means that the world of law enforcement and intelligence has to be clearly separated from the area of social interventions – and then protocols be defined, which facilitate inter-agency cooperation between the two. Here, the Visegrád Fund's support for our work is gladly acknowledged.

As Cultures Interactive currently engages in three NGO-based projects in CEE – I cordially invite state representatives from CEE countries in particular, to get in touch with us and with their NGOs at home, and contribute to what we call the CEE Prevent Net. --   Thank you!

<u>Projects</u>:

CEE Prevent Net – Central and Eastern European Network for the Prevention of Intolerance, Discrimination and Group Hatred (EU, Visegrád Fund)

Exit Europe – setting up community based, inter-agency exit programs (Austrian ministry of Interior)

CHAMPIONs - Cooperative Harmonized Action Model to stop Polarisation in Our Nations (DE, HU, PL, ROU)