



REPORT

EURODIACONIA EVENT ON THE ROLE OF SOCIAL INCLUSION IN PREVENTING RADICALISATION

On **5th December 2017**, Eurodiaconia held an event in the European Parliament, on '*The Role of Social Inclusion in Preventing Radicalisation*', hosted by MEP Sabine Verheyen of the European People's Party (EPP). The aim of the event was to showcase projects from within the Eurodiaconia network working on the topic of radicalisation prevention, and to gather responses from representatives from the European Parliament and European Commission on initiatives and instruments at institutional level to tackle discrimination and intolerance.

The event began with a welcome from host **MEP Sabine Verheyen** (EPP), who emphasized the importance of working to improve education, training and work with youth to tackle polarisation in our societies. She felt that increased action is needed to combat radicalisation concerning the potential of the internet as an echo-chamber for the spreading of views or opinions that propagate violent, extreme or radical sentiments.



To follow, Eurodiaconia Secretary General **Heather Roy** gave an opening statement where she highlighted how the stretching of the social fabric in the face of populist rhetoric and far right extremism continues to threaten social cohesion in our communities. On the same note, she emphasized the increasing existence of 'othering', whereby an individual or group is cast into the role of the 'other', or given the status of 'not one of us', splitting our community with a 'us' and 'them' mentality that breeds conflict instead of cohesion and respect. This process of 'othering', she continued, is spurred by fear, abandonment and hopelessness, and as such

the role of social protection systems have an additional role in safeguarding a healthy and engaged society to tackle this phenomenon of 'othering' and improve the narrative and discourse that accompanies our diverse societies to avoid radicalisation. She underlined how diaconal organisations are ready to work on the topic of combatting radicalisation and to contribute to exchange, discussion and further debate on this important issue.





The first presentation from Eurodiaconia members was given by Ms **Katja Van Damaros** from Diakonie Deutschland (Diaconia Germany). She gave an overview of our member in Germany's work on political advocacy, and their recognition that as a protestant organisation they have a responsibility to uphold the Christian values of their organisation and to tackle racism and exclusion. She gave an introduction to the rise of radicalisation in the German country context, citing the rise of the far-right political party Alternative for Germany (AfD), gaining ground not just in the margins but also from a more mainstream support base. She shared examples of several past or current projects undertaken by Diakonie Deutschland, including the project 'Facing right wing extremism', operational between 2015 and 2017, which works to train staff and volunteers at Diakonie Deutschland on anti-discrimination and to ensure that the organisation's employees adopt attitudes to care and work that reflect the values of the organisation, and that discrimination or hate in the work place is taken seriously. Ms Von Damaros also shared a best practice from Diakonie Deutschland in promoting living together in a diverse society to combat radicalisation. The project initiative, 'Shaping Diversity – Resisting Exclusion' adopts a three-pronged approach to ensure social inclusion, through education and training, through developing democratic networks, and through a travelling art exhibition across Germany called 'Art against exclusion.' She finished her presentation by reiterating that exclusion is no solution, and diaconial organisations have a unique strength in providing a counterweight to the danger that radicalisation and discrimination causes to democracy and cohesion.

Next, **Petter Karlsson** from Eurodiaconia member Svenska Kyrkan, Diocese of Västerås (Church of Sweden) provided examples of projects being undertaken in Sweden to combat marginalisation and radicalisation. He began by setting the scene in Sweden regarding the existence of neo-Nazi and other extreme groups in communities such as Borlänge. He expanded on the 'St Michael project' being carried out in the Mora diocese for community development, to bring people together through sport and other activities. The project represents a local attempt to facilitate and organize different partners for social inclusion and to counter violent extremism and anti-democratic movements. The sport initiative uses hockey as a way to get young people, many of whom might be new to Sweden, to join community activities, and as a gateway to further participation in educational or extra-curricular activities developed on the sports pitch. As a second step, the project also brings hockey players to meet the project leaders for two hours before training twice a month, so that the group can have a safe space to listen and talk to one another. This initiative of bringing people together is one way that Svenska Kyrkan are offering alternatives to young people who might find themselves susceptible to radicalization or extreme movements. Although one example among many activities conducted by our member in Sweden, this project upholds the aims of Svenska Kyrkan's community and social work, to develop a targeted and preventive model for long term investment in communities, to promote dialogue on the risks and factors relating to radicalisation and exclusion, to create safe spaces and trust for young people, and to keep youth at the center of their work.



In response to the projects displayed from Eurodiaconia members, **MEP Dennis de Jong** from the Confederal Group of the European United Left - Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) gave a statement by outlining the different types of radicalisation we see in our societies, of the political, religious and economic nature. He stressed the idea that in a society with increasing loneliness, poverty and insecurity, then belonging to a group, even radical, violent or extreme in its identity or view, can give a sense of belonging and security. He



cited national statistics from the Netherlands, where the percentage of people who feel lonely is as high as 20%, and where youth poverty is also on the rise. According to him, this national, but also global problem of insecurity that runs the risk of causing polarisation leads many to experience fear; fear of losing a job, of being excluded, of living in poverty. In turn, this causes individuals to turn to radical or extreme groups to gain a sense of security and belonging to combat loneliness. As such, he underlined the paramount importance of governments together with civil society organisations to find ways making people feel secure in a precarious world, and to win back people's trust in solid and sustainable institutions they can rely on without joining radical groups offering easy answers for complex problems.



To follow, host **MEP Sabine Verheyen** (EPP) began her statement speaking about the existence of enormous separation in our society that has exacerbated radicalisation in different forms, stemming from different root causes that are political, social and religious in nature. She again emphasized how the internet in general and video-sharing platforms in particular create ways for radical, hate-fueled or discriminatory content to reach those who would normally not be reachable, and provides a platform for this content to be diffused

widely and much faster than other media. She sees online interaction as a potential echo-chamber for extreme views to be exchanged, and that this exchange is then taken as a substitute for a community of social interaction. Again, touching on the topic of belonging, she further sees the internet is increasingly becoming an environment where violence is acceptable, and where online material can fuel radicalization and reach vulnerable groups of young people at the risk of exclusion searching for a sense of community. In a society where the European average of school dropout rate is 11.1%, she emphasized that schools need to work with parents, and with role models from civil society organisations to prevent young people drifting to the margins.

In a policy context, she sees that programmes and initiatives to tackle radicalization need to adapt to the country context in question to create suitable and purpose-built paths to counter exclusion. She felt that this could be further strengthened by stronger multi-agency actions, more exchange of best practice drawing from national contexts across Europe, to give impetus to research mapping initiatives that chart the state of play across Europe and beyond. She proposed enhancing the social aspect of EU funding programmes such as Horizon2020 to give a broader scope to this sort of research mapping on important social issues including radicalisation. Ms Verheyen gave further targeted recommendations such as a critical attitude towards the online content sharing platforms and their potential to spread and encourage violent online interaction. In addition, she encouraged facilitating a network of schools, prisons and civil society organisations to exchange and dialogue on the topic of radicalisation and also to foster intercultural dialogue. She further proposed focusing on non-formal education as an alternative for social inclusion and the importance of positive role models for people who feel lost and excluded. EU programmes such as Erasmus+ can develop innovative ways to include issues on radicalization into existing activities and objectives.

Next, the event participants heard from Ms **Raquel Cortes-Herrera** from the European Commission, Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL). She began her intervention by stating that discriminatory or violent ideologies give people a purpose that avoids them having to take



responsibility, as the responsibility is pinned upon the 'other', or the group or individual that the violence or prejudice is direct against. She also underlined the way that institutions such as prisons are a facilitating factor for violent ideologies and provide fertile ground for the seeds of radical movements to grow. She next spoke about instruments in employment and social policy that are available at EU level. She acknowledged that such instruments are well equipped and formulated to reach individuals or groups that, although not existing in the mainstream, are not too far from it. On the other hand, reaching individuals further from the mainstream and living on the margins of our society, she felt these instruments show their limitations, and should therefore be better equipped to serve their intended purpose but with a bigger remit. To follow, she outlined the difficulty in highlighting the target group of radicalisation prevention measures, stating that we can no longer presume that second-generation migrants or youth living in the suburbs of European cities are the main target groups regarding potential radicalisation. Rather, she emphasizes the growing phenomenon of radicalisation among more affluent families, and that policy initiatives and instruments, as well as civil society activities, need to take this shift into account and act on it efficiently.

To finish, she addressed the capacity of EU funding instruments to tackle social exclusion, and other initiatives such as the Youth Guarantee to raise employability. She mentioned the European Social Fund (ESF) that provides financial support to interventions in the first years for example to tackle child poverty and to work in prisons. Adding an interesting insight, she expressed that there is a need for money in relatively speaking 'richer' cities such as Paris or London, who nevertheless experience extensive social issues, polarisation and marginalisation in their suburbs. As the ESF is taken in relation to the country's GDP, these spaces are often exempt from funds despite widespread inequality within the wider city area. To end, she addressed civil society organisations directly, asking for their continued impetus and expertise from the local context to enhance understanding and knowledge at a policy making level. She acknowledged how CSOs remain much better equipped to reach people at the margins of our societies and at the risk of exclusion and subsequent radicalization, and as such their role to play in supporting inclusion through projects and programmes is crucial.

Mr Andor Urmos from European Commission, Directorate General for Regional and Urban Policy (DG REGIO) followed to further broach the topic of EU funds, policy and instruments. For him, EU funds need to be used better and more efficiently, and funds for counter-terrorism need to be more adequately developed. Not denying the challenges in directing EU Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) towards the issue of countering radicalisation and terrorism, he recommended that EU cohesion policy and ESIF need to better align with the current trends and needs, for example demographic change or territorial inequalities. He also recommended that a bigger emphasis is put on community care as an integrated means for prevention. He called for more dialogue to exist between the EU funds, and the Country Specific Recommendations (CSRs) which are the recommendations provided from EU level to give policy guidance tailored to each EU country on how to boost jobs and economic growth. Clearer links between the CSRs and EU funds, he felt, would enable closer monitoring of the implementation of EU funds to assess the progress made in inclusion. To finish, Mr Urmos gave an overview of the EU Urban Agenda, a 2-year-old initiative to develop knowledge to create a policy framework to work with cities and authorities to develop better funding, better legislation and better knowledge to shape work done in urban areas across Europe on the theme of radicalisation prevention.

During the following discussion with participants, questions came on the users of EU funding or social mobility programme. Ms **Katharina Wegner** from the EU office of Diakonie Deutschland pointed out that international experiences such as the European Solidarity Corps and European Voluntary Service, despite their aims to democratize international mobility, are generally undertaken by people from an already relatively privileged social or educational background. She emphasized that further work needs to be done to accompany young people on the margins of society to assist them to participate in mobility programmes.



To finish, **Heather Roy** drew conclusions from the main points raised during the meeting. She reflected on new definitions of social security, not just as a social protection system, but also as a feeling of social protection that can be given through belonging to a group. She felt that this framework would be an interesting definition to pursue on the topic of preventing radicalisation and understanding its root causes. She also picked up on the example given by Ms Von Damaros from Diakonie Deutschland on the need to train staff on anti-discrimination measures so that the core of our organisations

are protective and provide security, and that any discrimination be stamped out. She also concluded that more focus should be put on evidence based work; equipping organisations working at national level to expand on the knowledge that already exists. The growing existence of exclusion and radicalisation not just as the result of shortcomings in social protection system but also as a sentiment of loneliness, has added to the cumulative effect of pockets of discrimination that have now become normal and mainstream. To counter this, she emphasized how more effort needs to be made to expand the circle of social inclusion, and to work with local authorities to bridge the gap between civil society and institutional initiatives. She finished by emphasizing how radicalisation and social exclusion are cross-policy issues with lots of intersecting topics, with many possibilities to follow up and continue working on in the future. She emphasized the willingness of Eurodiaconia, representing diaconial organisations operating at national and EU level, to work as a partner to the European Commission and not just as a recipient, and to be recognized as a key actor in tackling the propagation of extreme and violent ideologies.