The Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN): EU Operational Counterterrorism

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This article analyzes the operational expansion of European Union cooperation on counterterrorism through the prism of the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN). It focuses on RAN's collaboration model, its origins, and its overall contribution, and presents a new framework and multidisciplinary perspective for EU policy actors to tackle counterterrorism challenges. The core argument is that RAN has been successful in achieving its central aim of establishing an overarching and responsive pan-European network of practitioners and civil society actors. However, RAN has thus far not been able to augment its efficacy through rigorous academic review and evaluation of its practices.

Keywords: EU, counterterrorism, operational cooperation, RAN, radicalization

Introduction

This article analyzes the expansion of European Union cooperation on counterterrorism (Kaunert & Leonard, 2019) by examining a particular aspect of the EU's extension of its counterterrorism (CT) mandate in the 21st century, specifically the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN). The formation of RAN saw the addition of a supranational dimension to what was previously an inter-governmental system. However, the network has not been studied sufficiently in order to realize its full potential.

9/11 was a seminal event that thrust terrorism in the global spotlight, and sufficiently impacted the collective understanding of the security threat posed by terrorism. In turn, what was previously considered a national issue became a shared issue, encouraging a common policy framework. 9/11 was therefore used by EU actors to convince the EU member states that they all faced one collective terrorist threat, rather than each of them facing a distinctive threat.

The creation of the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) is one product of this approach. The case of RAN is both singular and innovative at many levels, because it demonstrated a willingness at the EU level to engage with civil society in areas of national security. It was created as a "network" specifically to bridge gaps in the understanding of CT policy and manifested the increasing supranational and crisis-driven approach. These factors can be seen as processes ushering in a tangible shift in CT approaches in the European context, from national security-centric and intelligence-led work to early detection and prevention efforts that require appropriately positioned social actors to play a significant role (Kaunert, McKenzie, & Leonard, 2022).

This article links to the broader literature on the EU's Area of Freedom, Security and

Justice (AFSJ). Most scholars have argued that EU policy developments have been mainly driven by security concerns (Monar et al., 2003; Baldaccini, Guild, & Toner, 2007; Balzacq & Carrera, 2006; Huysmans, 2006; Guild & Geyer, 2008; van Munster, 2009; Bigo et al., 2010). The literature on AFSJ in general has also been complemented by more specialized studies, such as on EU counterterrorism policy (Spence, 2007; Eckes, 2009; Brown, 2010), EU cooperation on criminal justice matters (Fletcher & Lööf, 2008; Eckes & Konstadinides, 2011), and EU police and judicial cooperation (Anderson & Apap, 2002; Occhipinti, 2003). However, institutional issues have received less attention overall, apart from some early works focusing on the legal intricacies of the then "third pillar" (e.g., Bieber & Monar, 1995), and works by Kaunert (2007, 2010a, 2010b, 2010c, 2010d, 2010e; Kaunert & Della Giovanna, 2010) on the role of the European Commission and the Secretariat of the Council in the AFSJ, as well as the studies on the European Parliament's role (Ripoll Servant, 2010).

Less is known about operational cooperation on European counterterrorism and frameworks such as RAN. This article thus focuses on RAN as an example of operational cooperation in EU counterterrorism, its collaboration model, its origins, and its overall contribution. It offers a new framework for EU policy actors to tackle counterterrorism challenges. The core argument is that RAN has been successful in achieving its central aim of establishing an overarching and responsive pan-European network of practitioners and civil society actors. However, thus far RAN has not being able to augment its efficacy through rigorous academic evaluation of its practices, and at present, is not able to engage the most at-risk communities in both its work and development in a truly bottom-up approach. The primary contentions will be backed by publications and statements by RAN and the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG Home) during its development, alongside up-to-date academic and practitioner

perspectives. After examining the historical evolution of RAN, the article analyzes RAN's structural and operational aspects from a process and protocol standpoint, in order to better understand its core areas of success and areas that require improvement. In the final section, these arguments are brought together as indicators of performance, outcome, and effect, to ascertain RAN's developing legacy and its place in EU counterterrorism from a practitioner viewpoint. The article posits that RAN has been a success story, but to date lacks the scholarly teeth and a global presence to be a clear intellectual pioneer for the EU in the counterterrorism arena.

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The Origins and Creation of RAN: Radicalization and EU Counterterrorism

Although there has long been a scholarly interest in matters relating to "radicalization," only in the aftermath of 9/11 did this concept command significant attention among policymakers and researchers alike. When it comes to the EU, the idea of radicalization did not initially command a prominent place in its conceptualization of terrorism and its counterterrorism policy. The understanding of terrorism that underpinned the first phase of the development of the EU counterterrorism policy following 9/11 was that it was largely an external security threat. The European Security Strategy, which was adopted in 2003, depicted terrorism as a consequence of "regional conflicts" and "state failure." It also argued that "the most recent wave of terrorism is global in its scope and is linked to violent religious extremism," and presented terrorism primarily as a threat external to the EU

(European Council, 2003). A turning point came with the Madrid terrorist attacks in March 2004, in which 193 people were killed and nearly 2,000 were injured. Those came to be widely seen as a case of "homegrown terrorism," which led to a new emphasis in the EU's official discourse on addressing radicalization.

The EU's first strategic document on radicalization—"EU Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism"—did not explicitly define "radicalization." Published in November 2005, the document drew on work carried out since the adoption of the European Council's "Declaration on Combating Terrorism" of March 2004. The 2005 document appears to understand radicalization as the process through which "people are drawn into terrorism" (Council of the European Union, 2005a, p. 2). In contrast, the 2014 Revised Strategy was significantly different from its predecessors. Notably, it built on the Communication on Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism, which the European Commission published in January 2014 and which itself drew upon the work of RAN. Since then, although further documents relating to radicalization have been issued by EU institutions, such as a Communication of the European Commission (2016) on Supporting the Prevention of Radicalisation Leading to Violent Extremism, the EU Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism has not been revised further. Nevertheless, some discussions have been held within the Council to that effect. In 2017, it was noted that a "revision of the guidelines should duly reflect the changed threat picture and recent policy developments," including "the growing challenge of Europeans returning foreign terrorist fighters, including women and children, from Syria and Iraq" (Council of the European Union, 2017, p. 3).

What is RAN?

RAN is a network working with both those vulnerable to radicalization and those who have already been radicalized. It is led by frontline practitioners, including civil society representatives, social workers, youth workers, teachers, healthcare professionals, local authority representatives, police officers, and prison officers who are engaged in both preventing and countering violent extremism. Since it was founded, RAN has engaged over 6,000 practitioners, who collectively represent all EU member states (RAN, EU).

Created in 2011 and making its public appearance in 2012, RAN can be seen as a positive aspect of the EU's counterterrorism policy that aims to prevent radicalization leading to violent extremism. RAN hopes to achieve this through:

a. Networking and collaboration: RAN brings together a diverse group of actors, including practitioners, policymakers, and civil society organizations, to collaborate on preventing radicalization and violent extremism. This network provides a platform for sharing knowledge, exchanging best practices, and developing common strategies.

b. Community empowerment: RAN recognizes that local communities are crucial in preventing radicalization and violent extremism. Therefore, RAN promotes community empowerment by engaging with local actors, such as religious leaders, educators, and social workers, to help them identify and address the root causes of radicalization.

c. Evidence-based approach: RAN's approach is evidence-based, and it draws on research and analysis to identify risk factors and effective prevention strategies.

d. Inclusivity: RAN promotes inclusivity by recognizing the diversity of factors that can lead to radicalization and violent extremism.

e. Partnership with member states: RAN works closely with EU member states to support their efforts to prevent radicalization and violent extremism. RAN provides training, expertise, and support to member states, and helps to coordinate their efforts through

the development of common strategies and best practices.

RAN's working groups address different types of extremism, including far right, far left, and jihadist extremism, recognizing the need to address social, economic, and political factors that can contribute to radicalization. As of 2019, the working groups include: Communication and Narratives (RAN C&N); Education (RAN EDU); Rehabilitation (in the sense of rehabilitating people away from violence) (RAN EXIT); Youth, Families and Communities (RAN YF&C); Local Authorities (RAN LOCAL); Prison and Probation (RAN P&P); Police and Law Enforcement (RAN POL); Remembrance of Victims of Terrorism (RAN RVT); and Health and Social Care (RAN H&SC).

Within each working group, participants exchange knowledge, experiences, and practices relevant to the specific dimension of radicalization. As a result, a large number of guidelines, handbooks, recommendations, and reports on best practices have been produced over the years, such as a manual on "Responses to Returnees," aiming to support member states in addressing the challenges posed by returning foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs), which was presented in June 2017 (European Commission, 2017c, p. 8). There are ongoing debates as to the future inclusion of more categories of practitioners (European Commission, 2017, p. 15). All working group leaders sit on the RAN Steering Committee, which is chaired by the European Commission. Also represented on the Steering Committee is the RAN Centre of Excellence (CoE), which the European Commission has described as "the main policy tool in countering and preventing radicalisation" (European Commission, 2017, p. 15). It has developed state-of-the-art knowledge about radicalization and has supported both the European Commission and the member states in their efforts to counter and prevent radicalization. Nevertheless, it has its limitations, as it is a virtual entity that provides its services under a five-year procurement

contract (2014-2019) (European Commission, 2017, p. 17). RAN's origins and its reliance on DG Home for funding suggest it was created to bring civil society closer to the EU in the image of the supranational look and feel that was evident during the last ten to fifteen years of work at this level, and thereby offer at least a window for CT policy and strategy to have some dissemination route and two-way feedback loop in place.

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In order for these aims and related practices to be considered viable and successful, consider the "network effect" proposition. The network effect is a phenomenon in which the value of a product or service is proportional to the number of individuals who utilize it and grows with an increased number of users. This effect is frequently observed in technological products and services, including social media platforms and online marketplaces. Robert Metcalfe, the inventor of Ethernet, introduced the concept of the network effect in the 1980s. According to Metcalfe's law, the value of a network is proportional to the number of consumers squared (Metcalfe, 2013). For the RAN context, it remains unclear whether the network was created to serve the most at-risk communities, and thus be measured on community responses, acceptance, and amplification (substitute for "squared") of the networks core aims, or if the network was created to bring together and expand a professional cadre of people, who in essence, share similar ideas and therefore reinforce prevailing norms around the subject area. This perspective would imply that RAN is something of an "echo chamber."

RAN's presence and publications suggests there is an active and long-term aim to better

safeguard communities from the threat of terrorism and those driving it. While the RAN initiative can clearly attempt to leverage the network effect to increase the value of the network, echo chambers might potentially form within such an environment. An echo chamber would be a situation in which people are surrounded by others who share their beliefs and opinions, reinforcing their existing views and preventing them from being exposed to diverse perspectives. In the context of the EU RAN, echo chambers could develop if practitioners, policymakers, and researchers are only exposed to like-minded individuals and ideas (Sunstein, 2017). It is within such contexts that claims of tokenism and preaching to the converted can emerge. A definite aim of RAN's future development must be to endeavor to engage the very communities it seeks to protect in a holistic process of engagement, design, delivery, review, and learning. This would negate notions of an echo chamber and forge pathways to amplify the network's core value, and in doing so create a positive network effect.

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Part of the fabric of a networked entity like RAN is the emphasis on engagement and partnership with civil society actors. This effort forms part of the essential elements of how RAN's work filters through the EU policy rubric to the grassroots levels of member states. RAN is ostensibly a network of practitioners and policymakers, merged with a number of technology and commercial sector actors. Its publications point to the network's ability to leverage and engage localized knowledge with best practices, in order to facilitate knowledge exchange and innovation.

An alternative view is presented by Melhuish and Heath-Kelly, who assert that RAN's civil society approach suffers from a top-down pattern of engagement and as a result fails to account for the diverse perspectives and experiences of local communities. This point indeed has merit, but could benefit from a better explanation of the relationship between security needs, community cohesion issues, and the role of engagement as an arbiter for trust building, transparency, and greater accountability. The presence of these elements, it is argued, would increase RAN engagement dynamics between its policy needs and community development focus. The authors make a similar point regarding RAN's "simplistic" and "homogenizing" understanding of radicalization (Melhuish & Health-Kelly, 2022). While this too is a valid analysis, radicalization as a concept does not attract universal consensus, and therefore is subject to ongoing critical scrutiny, development, and nuance.

An example of this would be Paul Hedges's research into the use of the term "socialization" rather than radicalization, as the former offers process-driven understanding of normative, social process dynamics that can account for pre-radicalization, the actual process of taking on extremist beliefs, and the factors that can lead to rejection or use of violence in a behavior or action context. It is important for RAN's future development to be mindful of these nuances and the contested nature of radicalization as a theory and paradigm (Hedges, 2017). As a network-based entity that seeks to envision the EU's overarching policy directive of tackling extremism and terrorism, RAN should consider problematic issues within this sphere, as well as solutions. RAN's work suggests this is part of the network's intention, and further external evaluation and more nuanced civil society representation would facilitate this process.

RAN was designed to be a touchpoint for a civil society, practitioner, and local government "ideas exchange" platform. As such, its operational processes were devolved

to external organizations from within a loose cadre of public sector and commercial interest actors. This RAN look and feel still has a close resemblance to the supranational development of EU workings, in that the network cuts across national boundaries when it brings practitioners and officials together.

The suggestion here is that the RAN operates outside of the political influence of EU institutions, but it is questionable whether the same can be said for RAN's strategic aims and (a)political origins. Indeed, whenever there is funding involved, it stands to reason that the awarding body has some level of sway and influence over the operations and outputs of the receiving agent, in this case RAN.

The idea behind the creation of RAN in 2011 by the European Commission was clearly to distance politics from the process of countering radicalization and terrorism. This was achieved through outsourcing the management and administration function to a Dutch company, RadarEurope, which would become responsible for building and maintaining RAN's network element (Foret & Markoviti, 2019). In terms of structure and makeup, RAN was intended to have different working groups that could enhance understanding and best-practices of counterextremism through specific areas of sectorial work such as policing, health, and education.

This was launched with a small number of working groups in 2012, one of which was the "counter-narratives" working group (later renamed "communications and narratives"). The basis of RAN's operations was the idea that by engaging with civil society actors, local government practitioners, tech sector companies, and selected experts, a holistic picture of "what works" and "how it works" would emerge and form the basis of a best practice approach. This model would then serve the enhancement and development of the EU's overall understanding and response to terrorism, as well as civil society's capacity to lead the fight per se.

The presence of a diverse set of actors within a working group structure is actually a highly effective way of leveraging different levels of understanding and perspective with the overall aim of building good practice. The RAN model was successful in bringing these different actors together and in many ways, brainstorming toward ideas, approaches, and considerations for future use.

Overall, by the time the RAN Prevent working group was established in 2012, only the UK Contest strategy had a clear articulation of the prevention approach as applied to the threat from al-Qaeda at the time. There were, of course, other national CT strategies in existence, but the prevention angle was firmly and most substantively stacked in the UK context. At the time, this was considered a trailblazing approach to addressing radicalization and provided much by way of narrative and discourse for the RAN environment (Baker-Beall & Health-Kelly, 2015). With the new model of the EU Counter-Terrorism Agenda's 2020 Prevent pillar, a strong emphasis on "finding best practises in community policing and engagement to develop trust with communities" became an established method for the EU (RAN JCES, 2022).

In a similar vein, the counter-narrative working group hosted corporate heavyweights Google, Facebook, and Twitter during its development, alongside emerging think-do tanks such as the Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD). At a surface level, the assembly of such illustrious and innovative actors was an ideal foundation for emerging knowledge, tech, and creativity to flourish with the aim of making a counter-radicalization response fit for purpose and effective. This paradigm quickly expanded beyond the semantics of an EU mandate, incorporating a larger global perspective on radicalization and extremism challenges through an anticipatory lens that in essence was a mirror of a problem set clearly not constrained by geography.

Assessing RAN's Achievements

To assess the extent to which the objectives have been achieved, it is important to delve deeper into the broader area of terrorism studies and counter-radicalization. Counterterrorism approaches could be criticized for pouring money into an underdeveloped problem set without clearly measurable objectives in place. It can be argued that simply throwing together a network with anyone who accepts the invitation is a similar approach. The aim here is to identify areas of good practice and areas that require further work and development at the EU/RAN level.

In many ways, RAN was created at an ideal time, given that after the onset of the so-called Arab Spring, ISIS was poised to be unleashed (Fishman, 2016). The visceral rise of ISIS and the organization's global offer to disgruntled, disaffected, or disorientated Muslims living in the West was the perfect time for the EU and the RAN to flex their respective muscles (Weilnbock, 2019; Grinin et al., 2019; Braddock, 2020). One of the main stumbling blocks was the confusion around defining the problem set. Much of the time spent within RAN working group events and meetings were convoluted debates regarding what terrorism is, what extremism looks like, and who is the actual adversary, in often semantic discussions and conjectures based on localized understandings (Weilnbock, 2019). The lack of a decisive will at the EU level to frame the problem adequately gave rise to ongoing speculation and conjecture about both the causes and potential solutions to extremism and radicalization. The national efforts to counterterrorism provided a major resource for information, interconnected factors, and response strategies. There was, however, a fundamental flaw in how this national effort would translate into an EU wide outlook.

The key to effective counterterrorism is a well-connected mix of insight, intelligence, risk-benefit modeling, communication, and legislation, as well as inter-agency partnership (European Commission, 2020; Horgan, 2008). At the EU level, this suggests that the supranational intention requires intricate and delicate juxtaposiitions to be applied successfully to counterterrorism efforts. At the member state level, law enforcement agencies, intelligence agencies, and local government officials are technically able to coalesce around emerging, current, and future threats with relative efficiency. This model and approach simply cannot translate any further sharing of basic details of successful pursuits, prosecutions, and anecdotal risk analysis at a cross-agency and inter-nation working group levels.

In the prevention context, this becomes a non-starter due to safeguarding, privacy laws, and national security protocols. RAN's approach of publishing its various working groups outputs means that sensitive data cannot be included toward potential breaches of data, operational processes, and intelligence efforts. Case studies were heavily redacted and management of information was the domain of each respective representative's institutional affiliation.

The RAN Police and Law Enforcement Working Group (RAN POL) facilitated best practice exchanges alongside operational considerations for its various participants and their day-to-day experiences of working within domestic counterterrorism contexts. A similar approach applied to the Prisons Working Group, as one of the primary ways in which civil society actors were invited to RAN through informal means and often through these actors seeking access to RAN themselves. The network seeks to share good practices about what works, but without formal vetting and security processes or empirical evaluation built in, anomalies such as restricted information sharing will exist (Mattson et al., 2016; Foret & Markoviti, 2019).

The working groups were often used for process-orientated discussion and consideration how these compared in different countries. Ultimately, this means that some RAN working groups were unable to build the level of knowledge and collaboration needed due to the national security "paywall" in place (Mattson

et al., 2016). Experiences of RAN practitioners who participated at both the working group level and the steering group level paint a picture of surface level information sharing being one of the key weaknesses in RAN's approach (Weilnbock, 2019; Fitzgerald, 2016). That essentially precludes certain sensitive information from civil society participants, and places such a context in the RAN POL working group and RAN Prison and Probation working groups instead (Alia, 2019). This suggests a more rapid-response need was the primary function of RAN's work, with empirical validity a clear secondary afterthought.

The argument can be made that the EU and its supranational leanings needed to be seen as doing something significant in the counterterrorism domain from a joint/cooperative standpoint, and that ideas of robustness or reliability of outcomes were not the major concern (Lindekilde, 2015). Many national counterextremism strategies ended up basing much of their respective rationales around values debates, which seemed to irk many migrant diasporas (end-users) even further.

A key example of this approach is found in extensive literature on the UK government's preventive agenda and its public perception among British Muslims, who questioned the logic and controversial idea of promoting British values as both a signpost and evidence of resistance to "extremism." This created a layer of confusion and juxtaposition within the RAN framework that seemed to pit different approaches against each other, rather than efforts to garner areas of commonality in approach.

What is clear is that the issue of engaging the knowledge base of "formers," i.e., those who have experienced first-hand the process of radicalization and extremism, divides not only the practitioner context, but also the academic and policy contexts (Lindekilde, 2015). Based purely on the issue of trust in these individuals, the issue creates apprehension and doubt

for an agenda that is already grappling with several interwoven narratives that are at best uncomfortable, and at worst, those that lay elements of blame for some "push" factors of terrorism at the feet of nation states and foreign policy (Dawson, 2019).

Although less of this applied directly in the EU context, the legacy of 9/11 and the war on terror created much by way of layered levels of mistrust when it came to the potential role of "formers" in counterterrorism and countering violent extremism (CVE). The idea of sharing sensitive information with former extremists has been too much of a risk for many EU member states, except for the UK (a former member state). This issue is one that goes to the heart of counterterrorism discourse for more than just this reason. The idea of using "formers" is similar in rationale to the use and engagement of former gang members and drug users, to reach out and divert vulnerable individuals from potential harm.

This logic uses the idea of credibility and personal experience as key tools in engaging, building trust, and ultimately disarming extremist thinking in individuals. Within the UK's Prevent strategy, there was a developing stance about engaging "formers" to deliver one-to-one interventions for at-risk individuals through the Channel process (Hassan, 2012). As this process was designed to be a multi-agency creation with a safeguarding approach, the "former" or specialist would be in essence, the "tip of the spear" in the intervention context. This is important to note, because in the wider EU context, no such practices were commonplace within the CT arena, and this leads to natural questions about who and what was being used to deliver counter-radicalization within EU member states.

A key weakness in the global counterterrorism approach has always been one of a tangible lack of credibility and a failure to communicate effectively with the diasporas most in need of direct engagement. This weakness has continually cast a negative eye over lines of effort

and campaigns aimed at tackling radicalization and extremism. Given that there was very little initial mention of right wing extremism with the EU or RAN setup, the onus was very much on the Islamist threat. Too often this translated into some very curious understandings of the issue and causes of Islamist extremism. Within mainland Europe, Muslim diasporas were very much based on specific migration patterns. Research by Professor Ted Cantle's Community Cohesion Unit at Coventry University (post Oldham riots 2001) points to these patterns being relatively stable regarding migration patterns over the past four decades (*Community Cohesion*, 2001).

In the mainland EU context, this changes to North African, Arab, Somali, Turkish, and some other pockets of smaller groups (Kaufmann, 2017), partly as a result of regional dynamics associated with EU formation (development) and member state affiliations in the post-colonialism era (Lyons, 2014; Jurgens). The most obvious examples are the Guest Arbeiter initiative in Germany and the French government's colonial history with Algeria and subsequent migration patterns (Pew Forum Research, 2017; Kaufmann, 2017).

This is relevant because each diaspora brings certain doctrinal and Ideological nuances with it, which are important signposts for the manner in which these communities must be understood. It is also relevant because there were and are distinct differences in understanding within the EU context as to the meanings of terms like integration, assimilation, and engagement. Approaches at the policy level to the manner in which migrant communities were managed and engaged had too much of a range to ever be genuinely seen in a holistic and unified approach.

Some elements of the narratives put forward by practitioners in RAN working groups suggested that neo-orientalist ideas were still prevalent when it came to understanding Islam and Muslims. The idea of the "RAN expert" soon became synonymous with Europeans who had

Arabic language degrees or had some official job title indicating they had contacts in the suburbs of Antwerp and more, giving them "access" to at-risk groups (Foret & Markoviti, 2019).

The central issue was that credibility in this context arose from the ability to break down Islamist ideology, break down the motivational, intellectual, and social reality of the individual, and reset it through a non-violent, rational framework that offered a positive religious identity as opposed to one warped in ideological undertones. This is a crucial point for a few reasons. The first is that critics of RAN point to the documentation and rhetoric, suggesting that radicalization is something that can be addressed at an individual level, by focusing on personal factors and offering positive alternative pathways.

Such critics have not only done RAN a disservice, but also fundamentally misunderstood the hallmarks of extremist ideology. Any extremist narrative must penetrate the personal, public, and ideological space of the individual. Specialist interventions in this context are designed to engage each level differently, but must start with the personal before moving along the scale. Such efforts also accept that radical ideas are not a problem, so long as they do not create the propensity for violence. Therefore, it is essential to disprove theologically and intellectually justifications for violence at the personal level before tackling an individual's social understanding and worldview.

Too many examples of good practice shared by RAN working groups offered mainstream diversionary activities as evidence of successful counter-radicalization efforts (Mattson et al., 2016). When ISIS came on the scene, with a simple and effective message that layered the three levels mentioned shortly before into a basic lifestyle proposition, the mainstream approach was left wanting (Foret & Markoviti, 2019).

The presence of global tech giants within RAN had two main effects on its operations. The first was to offer these companies a chance to

disseminate their respective efforts of corporate moral social responsibly (CMSR) to a willing and somewhat star-struck audience (Home Affairs Select Committee Report, 2016). This allowed said companies to be seen to be doing something to tackle online radicalization alongside "experts" and policy officials. The central rationale applied here was that much of the fog around radicalization and the ease with which terrorist networks could access audiences had something to do with the lack of regulation and censorship online.

The second outcome was that slowly but surely, the RAN set-up and its regular participants seemed to be moving further and further away from efforts to be genuine pioneers of representational credibility of at-risk communities and their needs, and more toward a closed shop of self-appointed gatekeepers who were as far away from the actual issues as anyone could be (Weilnbock, 2019).

Conclusion

Without painting a somewhat quick-win or self-serving picture of RAN and its emergence, there are several areas in which RAN can develop its activity further to become a more effective actor in the global CVE space. RAN's network capability allows for ideas to be generated, shared, and disseminated. This feature can be further enhanced by the network becoming more representative of the communities it seeks to protect.

Although efforts at including youth have occurred, more can be done to engage more alienated groups and bring their genuine and credible voices to the table. The same logic applies to the models, toolkits, and good practice guides produced by the network. These efforts must be independently assessed and given some form of empirical foundation for growth. This is where the notions of Measure of Performance (MOP) and Measure of Effect (MOE) come in. In terms of what it appears RAN was set up to do, it has performed well.

RAN's and its reliance on DG Home for funding suggest it was created to bring civil society closer to the EU in the image of the supranational look and feel that was evident during the last ten to fifteen years of work at this level, and thereby offer at least a window for CT policy and strategy to have a dissemination route and two-way feedback loop in place. The loop offers both a window and a magnifying glass vis-à-vis efforts others are making and seem to be working. There is now an EU-wide network that is connected and speaks similar languages, albeit with the need for greater convergence on the issue of the role of religion in counter-radicalization. This can be harnessed further through bridging gaps in understanding on a practitioner and policy level. In terms of MOE, RAN can begin the process of undertaking some form of external review with an academic and empirical basis for delineating which areas of good practice can be taken into new environments to encourage innovation and collaboration at the heart of the RAN mission statement and moving CVE issues forward. The argument for a RAN-type entity at a supranational EU level is about an ability to get ahead of the curve through effective conceptualizing, research-led studies, and robust evaluations of good practices, claimed or proven.

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