

State of Polarisation and Radicalisation in Europe

The EU funded CHAMPIONS project has organised round-tables with stakeholders in several EU Member States. While the focus of the discussions was to provide feedback for the project, they also provided a useful overview of the state of polarisation and radicalisation in Europe.

The CHAMPIONS project, furthering its agenda, has held a first initial round of policy-maker roundtables. The aim of these round-tables was to inform policy maker and other experts about the CHAMPIONS project and receive feedback to increase the efficiency of its own envisioned “CHAMPIONS Roundtables”- permanent offline working groups between first-line-practitioners, the project has set out to establish. Nevertheless, while not the focus of the discussion the round tables also produced some interesting insights over the state of polarisation and radicalisation in Hungary, Poland, Germany and Romania.

State of Polarisation and radicalisation

The state of polarisation and radicalisation and contextual circumstances differ significantly in the implementation countries.

For instance, the round tables identified a relatively steady proportion of people who hold anti-democratic opinions in Germany. As such, the amount of hate crimes reported slightly rose from 7,913 criminal offences in 2017 to 8,113 criminal offences in 2018. 94.7% of those were xenophobic crimes, increasing by 19.7% compared to the previous year.

Also in the Eastern states, right-wing radicalisation is gaining ground, as the round tables confirmed. Especially since 2015 this trend has also an effect on a party-political level. In addition, various other strains of extremist movements can be found across the countries, such as Jihadist and Turkish nationalist, but sexist and homophobic movements are also existent, as reported by the round-table.

More specifically, it was observed that in Hungary, radicalisation has intensified over recent years. This trend is uniquely fuelled by the governing parties and the government. Radical ideas and values are being mainstreamed by the governing political forces, and hence, hate speech, stigmatisation and discrimination became widely accepted. Hence, the round-tables perceive radicalisation as spreading in a top-down manner, in this case.

Similarly, findings are reported by the round tables in Poland. There, it was observed that the present government plays a role in advancing radicalisation in the country and mainstreaming such ideas in the political discourse. This is done by not acknowledging radicalisation as a phenomenon to be addressed and by condoning the behaviour of far-



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right parties and movements. However, the round tables also point out the role of the media and the Church, as they are also perceived to play a significant role in spreading radical rhetoric.

The round tables in Romania, and especially in Cluj-Napoca, where the interviews took place, reported that the division of society on ethnic grounds is disappearing. However, there are still tensions between Romanian and Hungarian people in some parts of the city and the country. On the other hand, the most pressing issue, according to the round tables remains the exclusion of Roma people. Moreover, increasingly, divisions based on socioeconomic grounds are becoming discernible.

As such, the round-table discussions already produced a multi-dimensional overview of the state of polarisation and radicalisation in Europe, a useful “by-product” to their positive feedback over the CHAMPIONS project. Thus, while the CHAMPIONS round tables will to some extent differ from these policy-round tables, the approach and concept of them has already proven highly useful in producing advice and exchanging knowledge.

