



CHAMPIONS

Cooperative Harmonised
Action Model
to Stop Polarisation
in Our Nations

Activity Brief #3

The CHAMPIONS Roundtables

National Roundtable in Hungary

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Introduction

CHAMPIONS' central action is to establish permanent offline working groups – 'CHAMPIONS-Roundtables' – bringing together FLPs (first-line-practitioners) of different disciplines, professions and institutions or to which jointly detect risks and challenges and elaborate feasible responses to counter polarisation, and to build resilience and protect vulnerable groups in their local communities. During the course of the Roundtables, FLPs will be trained to enable them to design solutions and programmes which address the drivers of polarisation and collaborate in breaking down institutional barriers.

In the medium term, their actions will impact both vulnerable individuals who will be engaged in awareness-raising events and their community – as well as local and national policy-makers. In order to facilitate these processes of offline nature an online platform will also be developed.

In the long-term, the project will be used as a pilot model and transferred to other communities. To that end, synergies with related EU-funded projects, platforms and networks will be harnessed throughout the project and after its implementation period.

Find the full roundtable report in different languages on <https://www.championsproject.eu/media/>

National Roundtable in Hungary

The participants of the first CHAMPIONS-Roundtable in Budapest, which took place on 31.01.2020, represented a wide array of professions ranging from the local municipality and police to education, church and civil sector. The event resulted in an exploration of the main challenges in the district and laying the ground for building teams which will elaborate action plans during the forthcoming rounds.

Political Capital is an independent, non-partisan policy research institute, committed to the basic values of liberal democracy, human rights, and market economy. Its main activities are research, awareness-raising, empowering and advocacy. One of the core topical areas is radicalisation with a special focus on right-wing extremism. It participates in the Radicalisation Awareness Network. The activities include the followings: monitoring the activities and policies of the Hungarian far-right, conducting research on anti-Semitism and anti-Roma sentiments, analysing online hate speech in Hungary, developing alternative and counter-narratives against extremist speech, and developing educational resources to prevent radicalisation.

The Foundation for the International Prevention of Genocide and Mass Atrocities including its operational body the Budapest Centre for Prevention of Mass Atrocities is a non-governmental international entity acting in the fields of conflict prevention, human rights, international and humanitarian law. It closely works together with international experts, researchers, international lawyers and diplomats. It acts globally as an impartial partner of Governments, the United Nations, regional organisations, the European Union and other international actors. It focuses on improving the international capacities and capabilities through awareness raising, risk assessments, studies and trainings. For the last few years, it has dedicated attention to the radicalisation trends in Europe. It has been implementing projects building up the capabilities of youth to resist on-line and off-line hatred and bullying.

The hosts decided that the CHAMPION'S-Roundtables series will take place in a vivid and colorful part of Budapest, the 8th district, which is well known for its challenging atmosphere regarding radicalisation and polarisation. The 'Training of CHAMPIONS' (I) Roundtable aimed to both provide participants with theoretical information on radicalisation and polarisation and identify relevant and existing problems relating to these phenomena in the district. Accordingly, the hosts made presentations of the issues of polarisation and radicalisation in the first part of the programme and based on that, the participants gradually turned to concrete issues of the district (Józsefváros) during the afternoon sessions.

Our aim is to collect relevant issues and problems affecting the everyday life of the district's inhabitants, which are related to marginalisation, polarisation, homelessness and housing problems, exclusion of Roma people and other vulnerable groups, the lack of communication between the inhabitants and the local municipality and other governmental institutions. Participants agreed that both radicalisation and polarisation root in conflicts of identities and could be interpreted as an extreme answer to the extant problems of the everyday life of inhabitants. Media plays a highly important role in countering trends of polarisation and radicalisation as they can spread extreme opinions and contribute to the "we" vs "us" set up. At the same time, education and dissemination of knowledge about radicalisation and polarization could contribute to countering the adverse trends and halting the process of escalation. The role of representatives of minority groups, especially those of

the Roma minority is essential, and efforts should be continued to engage them together with those of homeless and other vulnerable groups in the series of Roundtables. It is also important to involve in the series of events those actors e.g. Church and media who can contribute to community building in the district. Both individuals and communities, to a different extent though, have responsibility for finding solutions of the challenges, and elaboration of structured plans of action is necessary on both levels. Vulnerable groups are not homogenous, therefore, the actions should be tailored to the diverse needs.

The participants exchanged views on the problems in small teams and collected the following issues affecting the public climate:

- The municipality does not consult with the inhabitants before decisions: e.g. benches in parks were removed because homeless people used them;
- People living under marginalised conditions have very few choices to represent their interests;
- Policymakers aim to “build a district for the middle-class”;
- Prejudice and already existing negative narratives on the district impede progress and solutions of the problems;
- Shortfalls in community services (benches in parks, public toilets, dog excrement, parking troubles, lack of public lights, education, social care including psychological services and law enforcement) affect have a negative effect on public climate and community-building.00

Priority should be given to the following problems:

- the responsibility of/relationship between individuals and the community,
- lack of communication and dialogue between communal Institutions and population,
- polarising narratives (e.g., negative narratives on the district, discriminatory narratives of minority groups, impact of the divisive national political discourse),
- lack of information, problems of information flow,
- “us” and “them” reflection; prejudice, identity issues,
- shortfalls of infrastructure relating to minorities and vulnerables,
- problems of asserting individual or community-based interests.

Participants found that the event provided a helpful insight into the phenomena of radicalisation and polarisation. Information obtained during the event is useful for their daily work and future cooperation. The next steps of the Roundtable series were presented by the hosts in a coherent and clear way. Most of the participants will make efforts to invite further colleagues and organisations to join the project. Furthermore, participants suggested broadening the circle of the roundtable by marginalised people and NGOs.



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