



CHAMPIONS

Cooperative Harmonised
Action Model
to Stop Polarisation
in Our Nations

Activity Brief #9

The European Conference on Preventing Polarization and
Violent Radicalization 2021

#EUPrevent

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Introduction

Between the 26th to the 29th of April 2021, the **European Conference on Preventing Polarization and Violent Radicalization 2021 – How to Strengthen Resilience** brought together six ISF-P European Commission funded projects, namely [Rhizome against Polarization](#), [CHAMPIONS](#), [YoungRes](#), [WayOut](#), [ARMOUR](#) and [BRIDGE](#). Envisioned as a joint closing conference of EU funded projects the main aims were to present the project outputs to diverse audience (practitioners, policy-makers, researchers and the interested general public), to share lessons learned among the members of the consortia and to build new networks of practitioners and researchers in the field of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE).

The CHAMPIONS consortium (notably Cultures Interactive, SYNYO and PATRIR) was a key organizer of the event and was thus given the platform to present the CHAMPIONS project outputs. The project members presented local engagement practices with youth in Germany and Romania, introduced tech developments (such as ALERT/ARENA) in prevention work, highlighted city-based approaches as a means for area-based prevention, and showcased participatory approaches to monitoring and evaluation. Key lessons learned from the CHAMPIONS project were presented on the last day of the conference, during which the project was presented to a large and diverse audience.

April 26th-29th

European Conference on Preventing Polarization & Violent Radicalization:
**Strengthening Resilience,
Fostering Innovation,
Consolidating Lessons
& Pioneering New Frontiers**

#EUPrevent

15 EUROPEAN COUNTRIES



These projects were funded by the European Union's Internal Security Fund — Police



#EUPrevent was implemented as an online event, spanning over 4 days. It featured 6 panel discussions and 11 workshops, which were attended by over 250 participants. The conference organizers and speakers came from diverse professional and geographic backgrounds, including members and representatives of over 30 universities, institutions, organizations and agencies from 15 different EU countries. In addition to the registered participants, the panel discussions and special sessions were also broadcasted live on YouTube, resulting in more than 300 additional views.

The panel discussions and special sessions were recorded and are now available for public viewing on YouTube under the following [link](#).

The four days of #EUPrevent

The main aims of the conference were to facilitate knowledge exchange on trends of various forms of radicalization and polarization in Europe, to share best practices in tackling polarization and extremism, and to encourage participants to develop strategies for action against polarization and radicalization. To achieve these ambitious goals the conference was structured in the following way:

Day 1 served as an introduction to the current status and the contemporary context of radicalization and polarization and prevention work. Day 2 and Day 3 featured specialized workshops where interventions, methods and approaches were presented in-depth to facilitate exchange among experts. Following the workshops, the practitioners' fora offered a space for expert engagement, small-group consultations and networking. Both days ended with special sessions approaching radicalization, extremism and polarization from a historical perspective. Day 4 provided an opportunity for all the project teams to come together to share the lessons learned from the projects and as a result of the inter-disciplinary exchange during the conference. The following section provides a more detailed overview on the program and activities of each day.

Day 1 - Preventing Polarization and Radicalization in Europe Today: Opportunities, Challenges & the Road Ahead

After a general welcome by Inmaculada Marrero (FUNDEA), Sylvia Bottarin (DG Home) shared the vision of the European Commission on the topic of preventing radicalization and polarization. She emphasized the importance of collaboration across sectors, interaction between policymakers and researchers as well as collaboration at local, regional and national levels. Ms Bottarin discussed new challenges such as the radical behaviour of so called „lone wolves“ and new forms of extremism and political tensions since the start of the Covid-19 pandemic. She defined the countering of extremist ideologies online as a key priority and emphasized the importance of resilience building at the community level, which includes early exit work in prisons and the reintegration of former terrorist fighters and their families into society. One of the limitations in a joint EU response to these challenges was identified: the diverging priorities of EU member states and local governments.

In the first panel discussion, the experts Moussa al-Hassan (DERAD Europe), Prof Dr Beate Küpper (Hochschule Niederrhein) and Florian Huber (SYNYO) shared their insights on the scope and dynamics of radicalization and extremism in Europe. Mr al-Hassan pointed to the need for more communication, internally and externally, between departments and countries for prevention work to be successful. Furthermore, he emphasized the importance of using

different screening tools to identify terrorist threats and of paying attention to terrorist propaganda on social media and in popular culture.

Dr Beate Küpper emphasized the necessity to understand the phenomenon of network radicalization. She argued that even “lone wolves” perceive themselves to be part of a community, as they participate in online communities or are embedded into a family group that has been radicalized. Furthermore, she stressed that a clear understanding and use of terminology is important. We need to define who is an extremist or who is a radical. Finally, one of the challenges that she presented concerned prevention work in the context of minority groups which are said to be vulnerable to radicalization. She suggested that prevention work should consider everyone as a possible target or perpetrator, and to shift the focus from ethnicity to power and economic inequality.

A second panel addressed practical solutions to radicalization and polarizations, thereby focusing on the lessons from the past, highlighting current opportunities to intervene and charting the road ahead. The panel included speakers from practice, such as Kai Brand Jacobsen (PATRIR), Luca Gervasoni Vila (NOVACT) and Núria Millán Iniesta (NOVACT).

Luca Gervasoni argued that due to an increase in far-right extremism the focus of prevention work should shift from religious violence to political violence. Kai Brand Jacobsen emphasized the challenges of silo-based approaches in preventing and countering extremism. He criticized the focus on security and law-enforcement and highlighted the lack of an integrated approach that addresses education, gender and mental health issues. He argued that the complexity of the multi-dimensional problem of extremism cannot be solved by the prevention systems that are currently in place.

Day 2 and Day 3 – Workshops, Policy Fora and Special Sessions

Days 2 and 3 featured 11 parallel workshops, in which participants could discuss topics of polarization and radicalization in a smaller setting, thereby allowing participants to interact with the speakers and presenters in a direct and personal manner. Attendance varied between 20 and 40 participants per workshop.

Day 2 focused on *Lessons from the Field* and included five workshops on the following topics: youth engagement (where experts from CULTURES Interactive discussed game-based learning and prevention work on social equality) and education (where the ARMOUR project presented tools for building individual resilience against polarization and violent extremism). Several tools for youth workers were presented and will be available on the platforms firstlinepractitioners.com and traininghermes.eu. The tools follow a cognitive-behavioural training model. For example, one tool for parents and coaches encourages users to reflect on the importance of social role models, on the challenges of youth today and on how social role models can support young people to overcome those challenges. Another tool designed for

youth encourages critical thinking in order to counterbalance binary thinking (us-them/good-bad).

In the city-based approaches workshop, practitioners looked at how cities can address extremism and emphasized the importance of collaboration across sectors. Representatives from EFUS, Nordic Safe Cities, the CHAMPIONS project and EU Cities Against Radicalisation shared their experiences, highlighted good practices, challenges and lessons learned, and shared recommendations on how to improve coordination, city-based approaches, and prevention to meet the challenge of extremism, radicalisation and hate in Europe's cities.

In the gender session, Ola Saleh and Christian Mogensen (Center for Digital Youth Care) discussed the role that gender plays in extremist narratives. Special attention was given to lessons learned and recommendations for how the interrelation of gender and extremism can be addressed by governments, civil society organisations and the European Union.

In the tech session, Francesco Perconti of TechSoup and George Bara of ZettaCloud presented technological solutions to polarization, such as game-based activism and plug-ins to identify fake news. This approach was complemented by Prof. David Camacho from UPM presenting games against polarization developed during the YoungRes project. In this sessions, CHAMPIONS' own Alert/Arena platform was showcased as a tech collaboration tool for first-line practitioners.

Day 2 was complemented by a *special evening session* on the state of extremisms and populism. The session included presentations by Naureen Chowdhury Fink (The Soufan Center) on a human rights-based approach in prevention work and by Dr Lisa Schirch (Toda Peace Institute) who reflected on a multidimensional approach to peacebuilding and the prevention of extremism. Francesco Farinelli (European Foundation for Democracy) provided insights into the role of conspiracy theories in radicalization and Prof Kevin McDonald (Middlesex University London) highlighted the risks associated with the gamification of terrorist violence.

Day 3 zoomed in on improving response and prevention practices and the role of innovations and tools in this context. Six workshops addressed relevant topics of the field, with a strong focus on youth engagement. Elena Kundrat and Elisabeth Nagy from Südwind presented tools that put youth at the forefront of preventing radicalization, hate and extremism by nurturing critical thinking. Rositsa Dzhekova (Center for the Study of Democracy) presented her experience on engaging youth to counter extremist narratives. In a similar vein, OSCE's Orlaith King reflected on the Live Initiative, a capacity-building initiative tailored to address extremism and its impact on youth in the Western Balkans. Aleksandra Sawa from the Institute of Social Safety in Poland shared new insights into youth-led projects and alternative ways of engagement to social media.

In the monitoring, evaluation and learning session, experts discussed the importance of feedback loops to improve policy and practice, among them Marzena Kordaczuk-Wąs of the Polish Platform for Homeland Security (PPHS). In the session on city-based approaches, participants heard about the practices of municipalities to prevent and mitigate polarization described by representatives of the City of Rotterdam and the City of Leuven, among others.

In the [firstlinepractioners.com](https://www.firstlinepractioners.com) workshop, which was presented by Florian Huber (SYNYO), participants had the opportunity to test the functionalities of the [firstlinepractioners.com](https://www.firstlinepractioners.com) platform and to provide inputs for further developments and improvements. This feedback will be crucial for the optimization of the platform, which prioritizes the needs of the end-users. During the session, the participants made suggestions regarding the use of translation software and recommended to search for interfaces that allow for automated updates in order to enable quick and easy access to relevant information and services.

Cultures Interactive's Harald Weilnböck discussed inter-agency cooperation and good practices in deradicalization in a separate workshop. In the second education workshop led by the ARMOUR project, practical tools to encourage resilience among youth were presented. The workshop highlighted the difference between the conscious and subconscious parts of identity. While the conscious part of our identity is important in the construction of an identity narrative, radicalization is based on subconscious identities. De-radicalization work therefore needs to address subconscious identities rather than conscious identity narratives.

In a ***special evening session***, Roger Eatwell (University of Bath) shed a light on the causes and long-term conditions that triggered the (new) rise of national populism, such as distrust, destruction, deprivation & de-alignment. He challenged some of the established views on contestations of liberal democracy, based on his book, *National Populism: The Revolt Against Liberal Democracy* (2015), that he co-authored with his colleague Matthew Goodwin (University of Kent).

The workshops during Day 2 and 3 were followed by in-depth thematic discussions among attendees which were facilitated by PATRIR. Participants appreciated the opportunity to liaise with fellow professionals and to engage in dialogue with professionals from other disciplines.

Day 4 – Consolidated Lessons Learned and Recommendations

The last day of the conference brought together the consolidated lessons learned and recommendations for future projects and policy development. Speakers representing the 6-ISF-P funded projects highlighted the key take-aways from each project, while the participants of the conference had the opportunity to provide feedback on the conference and to share their personal highlights from the 4 days. The participants stressed that the conference had provided a vast amount of input and a lot of interesting material for reflection. One of the main concerns regarded the sustainability of the project outputs and the continued availability of the tools and material for practitioners in the field. In this context, the speakers provided some guidance on available online resources, such as the [firstlinepractioners.com](https://www.firstlinepractioners.com) website,

as well as references to national projects that establish a link between research, policy and practice in the field of preventing and countering violent extremism.

The conference was an important opportunity to showcase the outputs of the CHAMPIONS project and a good platform to pursue future collaboration based on shared interests and synergies. The joint conference also served as a learning opportunity for the organizers that gained valuable experience in organizing a multi-lingual and inter-disciplinary conference for effective European collaboration on preventing and countering radicalization and extremism.



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