

Presentation at JHA Council, 25 January 2016, Amsterdam
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Mr Chairman, thank you for inviting me. And Commissioner, thank you for introducing me to this assembly of ministers responsible for the fight against terrorism.

Safeguarding your civilians and societies against the atrocities of terror is indeed one of the most substantial responsibilities for ministers in this day and age. This morning, you discussed disruptive measures. Keeping in mind the terrorist attacks in Paris and elsewhere, there is indeed a distinct need to disrupt and pursue.

However, disruption alone will not provide safety and security, if it is not accompanied by prevention. Last year I had the privilege of being invited to a White House session by US President Obama, who urged for – as he put it – the removal of the soil out of which terrorism grows. Prevent and pursue need *not* conflict with one another – we need a great deal of both.

Within RAN, prevent efforts are collected, improved and exchanged. This is done by those best placed to detect radicalisation in a very early phase, namely first-line practitioners, such as teachers, community police officers and health workers. At a time when the radicalisation period is shortening, we must be quicker and more effective in how we intervene.

More than 1,500 practitioners from all 28 MSs, who work with individuals at risk of radicalisation each and every day, peer review such effective interventions in our following 9 RAN WGs.

In this local authorities WG, the municipality of Vilvoorde in Belgium shared its prevent approach. By early 2014, no less

than 29 of its inhabitants had joined Daesh. Relative to the size of this small town, this is a higher number than for anywhere else in the EU. Vilvoorde started to liaise with parents, and coordinated practitioners detecting early radicalisation. Since then, now two years ago, not a single Vilvoorde inhabitant has travelled to the so-called caliphate. It is hard to scientifically prove that prevention actually works. However, in this case, the added value is clear, certain and convincing. Within RAN, this Vilvoorde approach was explored, and other municipalities were equipped to adopt and adapt parts of it.

This education WG included a Greek teacher, Alexandra, who had witnessed a member of a far right extremist group stabbing a migrant student. Plans to respond to this crime with violence circulated around the school. Alexandra, however, included democratic values, debate and negotiation in her lessons, which provided her students with alternatives to violent problem-solving. And VE has not returned to this school. Her approach was peer reviewed within RAN, and now other teachers also use debate and negotiation to prevent radicalisation and promote democracy.

These WGs are chaired by practitioners themselves, such as the governor of a prison, or a family worker at a social care centre. Together, they form our steering committee, chaired by the European Commission, which guides the RAN Centre of Excellence.

RAN is a trusted long-term network of practitioners. However, we do serve other stakeholders, such as policy makers, the academic world and the public.

The RAN Centre of Excellent has a permanent staff, which I head. We produce no fewer than 2 deliverables per week, varying from organising peer reviews by practitioners, to

drafting issue papers and providing consultancy services for the MSs.

Experienced practitioners feed RAN's policy recommendations. So, when we state that community key figures are among the most credible voices to challenge terrorist propaganda, we do not share this wisdom after just exploring it as a theory. We recommend it because Internet companies within RAN find proof of this. And because we learn this from communities whose youngsters are vulnerable to radicalisation, and deliver such positive messaging.

The RAN Centre of Excellence delivers direct support to MSs and priority third countries. This is funded by the Commission, and MSs applying for such support are invited to steer delivery, so that it matches national needs. We deliver radicalisation awareness courses to national trainers, equipping them to include it in their curriculum.

We also organise workshops for national policy makers. Last month, German, French, Austrian and Dutch helplines for families of potential extremists were presented to authorities from other MSs, giving them a basis to draft policies for such helplines in their own countries.

Finally, we offer teams of RAN experts to provide counselling to MSs, to help them advance their national strategies. Over the last 2 years, we have supported 19 MSs. The Commission has budgeted an additional 20 support deliveries for 2016. And 2 MSs already applied for this last week.

Let me conclude by highlighting that countering terrorism can only be successful if we detect radicalisation as early as possible. Only then can we plant seeds of doubt in the minds of

rebellious teenagers, thrill seekers, siblings of FTFs, those Googling their own Islam and others who are not even close to being a terrorist yet, but who are at risk of becoming so.

Youth workers, teachers and other practitioners are best placed to prevent them from actually radicalising and embracing VE. I advise you, the top-level policy makers responsible for countering terrorism, to supplement disruptive policies with prevent strategies. And in drafting these, please take stock of the lessons learned by practitioners within RAN.

Thank you very much for your attention.