

RAN Update 12

February, 2014

This is an update on the progress of the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN). You have participated in a RAN working group activity, or you have registered your interest in the network. Therefore you receive this e-mail, as do some 800 other people. If you do not want to receive such e-mails, please let us know. Feel free to distribute this RAN Update and suggest others to subscribe.

Cities Conference on Foreign Fighters to Syria

On 30 January 2014, the **Cities Conference on Foreign Fighters to Syria** took place in **The Hague**. 120 local practitioners from 23 affected cities in the United Kingdom, Sweden, Denmark, Spain, Germany, Belgium and The Netherlands were present, as well as 50 representatives from the national authorities from most EU Member States and RAN working group leaders. The aim of the conference was to share experiences and knowledge on how to deal with citizens leaving to and returning from Syria between practitioners and authorities from different countries and from different sectors (local government, legal and law enforcement, youth work, education, health and NGO's).

Important outcomes were presented at the end of the conference day. The outcomes showed that it is important not just to invest in aftercare, but also to prevent people from travelling by safeguarding vulnerable individuals. However, if travel cannot be prevented it is important to invest in communities and families during travel. In short, dealing with the foreign fighter phenomenon requires actions by Member States and local practitioners **before, during and after travel**.

Local practitioners can make a difference as they know their citizens and communities best and thus have the opportunity to see worrying signs and act upon them. Practitioners from (local) statutory bodies and NGO's who work with vulnerable individuals need to be aware of the risk of people leaving. It is only when professionals recognise warning signals and are in close contact with other practitioners and the community these individuals come from, that it is possible to safeguard them. In short, a multi-agency approach in which practitioners work in close cooperation with each other, is key.

On a **community engagement** level, the following elements are important to take into account:

- Finding and empowering credible voices as essential for successful community engagement;
- Aiming for long-term engagement, not just engagement on an ad-hoc or a crisis basis. Sustainability is key;
- Reciprocal and moreover transparent relationships between communities and statutory bodies;
- Helping communities to deal with press, by offering media training by local government communication officials is a form of very practical help.

Supporting families should enable practitioners to act upon early warning signals and prevent travel of other family members. In this regard:

- The type of family support should be tailor-made to the needs of families and their (local) context;
- Support should not end with the return of the foreign fighter;
- All forms of family support that were discussed were on a voluntarily basis, but ranging from very pro-active (making house visits) to leaving the initiative for support completely to the families (families phoning a special centre for support).

As the returnees come back for different reasons and in a different state of mind, it is important to assess if people are in need of a **de-radicalisation or disengagement** programme or are better off with some small help for re-socialisation or whether they should be prosecuted. In this regard:

- Voluntary programmes are likely to have more effect than compulsory ones;
- Creating an entry point and establishing a trust-based relationship is vital;
- Looking at other areas is just as important, such as involving families and offering psychological after-care.

Working Group activities since the last RAN Update

- On **29 January** in **The Hague** **RAN @** had a small-scale expert meeting to discuss the dissemination of a counter narrative video. **RAN @** is supporting a pilot online video campaign, created by a RAN practitioner, to promote critical thinking about issues at the heart of extremist narratives. **RAN @** will examine, and record, the details of the production, dissemination and measurement of the online videos, with the goal to document and share broadly with the practitioner network.
- The **RAN Steering Committee** came together on **12 February** in **Brussels** to discuss the activities for the third year of RAN, which starts at the end of March. Based on the recently launched Communication, it was discussed that the RAN will have a stronger focus on supporting individual MSs by employing RAN expertise. The main activities of the RAN remain expanding the skills of practitioners and collecting promising practices. Besides that, RAN will work towards delivering concrete outputs, such as conducting a RAN train-the-trainer module, to be tailored in MSs, exit strategies workshops and online counter-narrative videos. With regard to the RAN Collection of Practices, the SC will review all practices in the Collection and new, updated editions of the Collection will be placed online around four times a year. An announcement of this will be made in the RAN Update.
- On **13-14 February** in **Prague**, **RAN PREVENT** organised a meeting on hate crime, violent groups and prevention of violent extremism on a local level titled 'From hate to violence'. There was a special focus on developments in the Central-Eastern Europe. Important insights from the meeting were the apparent lack of data on hate speech and hate crime (especially on the perpetrator side) in Europe and its evidence-based link to violent extremism. Also, throughout Europe, it can be observed that the extreme is becoming the mainstream through the use and 'silent' acceptance of hate speech and hate crime. Recognizing and countering hate speech and hate crime as well as enhancing the development of critical thinking and democratic values are key elements in preventing violent extremism.
- Following the three **RAN Health** sub-group meetings held over the Summer and Autumn of 2013, the RAN Health Working Group organised its next meeting on **20-21 February 2014** in **Budapest**. The three subjects from the sub-group meetings were discussed; 1) information sharing and confidentiality, 2) policies and procedures for

the health services, 3) products and awareness raising. Furthermore this meeting addressed the situation and progress made by different Member States. The RAN Health working group will organise 4 regional meetings, to focus on and support the regional situation and progress.

Activities coming up

- The **RAN POL** working group will hold a one-day preparatory meeting **27 February** in **Bucharest (Romania)**. RAN POL will prepare the regional meeting in May/June 2014 for the following Member States: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia and discuss the regional challenges, needs and promising practices.
- **RAN P&P** will have a meeting with its core member on the **4th of March** in **Amsterdam** to prepare for the plenary meeting in Bucharest on 23-24 April. The plenary will focus on the subject of training and multi-agency approaches in a prison and probation setting. Together with the core members, RAN P&P will work on bringing together the findings and lessons from the meetings so far.
- A **RAN Plenary** will take place on **16 June** in **Brussels**. Each of the eight working groups will select a delegation of some 20 members, who will meet during half a day. On **17 June** a **High-Level Conference** will be organized in **Brussels**, where the above mentioned RAN practitioners will mix with high level national and EU policy makers. Foreseen topics are the training of practitioners, exit strategies and online counter-narratives.

Dr. Louis Kariolou

During the RAN Health meeting on 20-21 February 2014 in Budapest, the working group received extremely upsetting news that Dr. Louis Kariolou had passed away whilst en route to the RAN meeting from Cyprus. The Commission, the RAN Secretariat and the RAN Health working group were both shocked and saddened to hear the news, as Dr. Kariolou was a very appreciated and respected member of the working group from the very beginning in 2012. After making the announcement during the meeting, a time of silence was held for individuals to remember Dr. Kariolou. Our thoughts are very much with the wife of Dr. Kariolou and the family in their sudden loss.

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