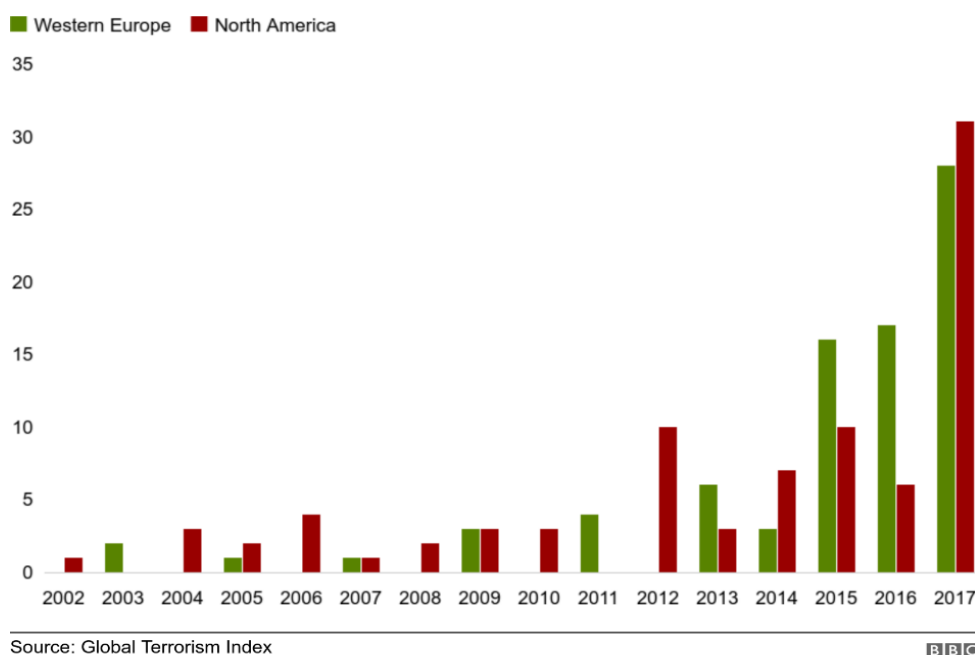


## INTRODUCTION

We live in a world where radical right extremist violence is on the rise.<sup>1</sup> As recent terrorist attacks in the US, Europe and New Zealand have shown, ideas and messages propagated by radical right actors can inspire violent (and oftentimes deadly) political action.<sup>2</sup> The pertinent question therefore becomes: how can governments, policy practitioners and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) respond to this?

### Far-right extremism incidents



**FIGURE 1:** Frequency of Radical Right Terror Attacks, 2002-2017.  
(Source: BBC, Global Terrorism Index)<sup>3</sup>

One weapon in the array of softer, upstream counter terror (CT) interventions are counter narratives, or narratives that aim to '[demystify] deconstruct or delegitimise extremist

<sup>1</sup> Here 'radical right extremism' is used to describe a broad plethora of cognate paramilitary groups, groupuscules and lone-actor terrorists that could be considered as harbouring violent nativist, authoritarian and (sometimes) populist policy ideas (Mudde 2007). These include individuals and groups who actively 'espouse violence' and 'seek the overthrow of liberal democracy' entirely (Eatwell 2003: 14) rather than simply 'a critique of the constitutional order without any anti-democratic behaviour or intention' (Carter 2005: 22). These are often referred to as the extreme right rather than the radical right, and range from lone-actor terrorists through to non-violent anti-Islam groups and finally to a range of formally constituted neo-fascist and neo-Nazi political parties that inspire terrorist action.

<sup>2</sup> Recent notable examples of radical right terror attacks at the time of writing from these countries include: the El Paso Mall Shooting (August 2019), the Halle Synagogue attack (October 2019), and Christchurch Mosque attacks (March 2019).

<sup>3</sup> Butcher, B. & Luxen, M (19th March 2019) 'How prevalent is far-right extremism?' Hyperlink: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-47626859>. Date Accessed: 31/10/2019.

narratives'.<sup>4</sup> Tracing its policy origins in the UK back to the development of the Home Office's CONTEST counter terror strategy,<sup>5</sup> such a policy intervention has more commonly been used against extreme Islamist groups.<sup>6</sup> The CARR-Hedayah Radical Right Counter Narratives toolkit is therefore attempting to foster best practice when using this methodology specifically in relation to violent forms of radical right extremism.

In order to conduct a thorough and effective consultation, an expert workshop was held on 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> of September 2019 led by CARR and Hedayah. 38 policy practitioners, academic experts and NGO practitioners came together at the King's Manor Campus of the University of York to exchange ideas on radical right narratives, counter narratives and counter narrative campaign best practice.<sup>7</sup>

Presentations were heard from specialists in the US, UK, Canada, Scandinavia, Poland, the Baltics, Ukraine, Italy, Greece, the Balkans and New Zealand – spelling out the opportunities and challenges for implementing such a soft, upstream counter terrorism approach in their own geographical contexts; both online and offline. This was broken up by a red-teaming exercise<sup>8</sup> and interactive workshop<sup>9</sup> led by representatives from the UK Home Office's Central Insight and Analysis Unit as well as the global marketing company, M&C Saatchi.

### **SCOPE OF THE EXPERT WORKSHOP**

The workshop was framed as the start of an expert conversation about the effectiveness of different radical right counter narratives, counter narrative messengers, counter narrative audiences and forms of counter narrative campaign. The below report is aimed at distilling some of the over-arching themes, key insights and modes of practice discussed over the two-day workshop in order to convey current trends and best practice in the area of radical right extremist counter narratives. After the discussions at the workshop, there was a palpable sense of the importance and complexities of using such a methodology due to the societal impact that

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<sup>4</sup> Tuck, H. & Silverman, H. (2016) 'The Counter Narrative Handbook'. London: ISD. P.65.

<sup>5</sup> The first recorded articulation (c.2005) in the UK context was the CONTEST strategy's architect, Sir David Omand, who suggested in 2005 that we "badly need a counter-narrative that will help groups exposed to the terrorist message make sense of what they are seeing around them".

<sup>6</sup> As one participant noted, this has had mixed and sometimes counterproductive effects on the target population that need to be taken into account when transferring it to radical right extremism.

<sup>7</sup> These practitioners, research analysts and academic researchers included: Professor Matthew Feldman, Dr William Allchorn, Dr David Tucker, Dr John Richardson, Dr Vassilis Petsinis, Dr Valerio Bruno, Dr Mette Wiggen, Dr Benjamin Lee, Dr Paul Stocker, Dr Daniel Jones, Shaida Bibi, David Page, Jonathan Paris, Adam Balcer, Dr Vasiliki Tsagkroni, Farangiz Atamuradova, Murat Uzunparmak, Katherine Watson, Thomas Latham, Cristina Ariza, Jared Shurin, Chamila Liyanage, William Baldet, Rory Yeomans, Isabel Marler, Amjid Khazir, Lucy Williams, Rochelle McKenzie-Spooner, Alessio Scopelliti, Vinicius Bivar, Katie Reid, Dr Nasser Kurdy, Catriona Scholes, Brad Galloway, Lorand Bodo, Milos Vukanovic, Lorand Bodo, Michael Colbourne, and Una Hadjari.

<sup>8</sup> Red-teaming is an analytical technique which involves adopting the mindset of the protagonist and thinking about how they would act in a specific situation as opposed to thinking as a member of your own organisation.

<sup>9</sup> This involved the discussion of marketing techniques and how they could be transferred to a strategic communications context.

has been incurred at this time due to acts of violent radical right extremism as well as the broad-based and (often) mainstreamed nature of radical right ideology.<sup>10</sup>

## TYPES OF RADICAL RIGHT NARRATIVE

After opening comments and an introduction to Hedayah's online counter narrative library, delegates to the workshop were split into five teams to consider key types of radical right narratives that they have witnessed or experienced, identifying common and differing characteristics of these. The groups were also asked to consider a hypothetical scenario in order to further test and develop thoughts about the flexibility of such narratives, known as a 'red-teaming exercise'. Delegates were then asked to rank how impactful and prevalent such narratives were in their contexts as well as performing a SWOT<sup>11</sup> analysis of the audience, messengers and media presentations of a hypothetical scenario involving activism by a radical right extremist group.<sup>12</sup> The following narrative headings reflect common narrative archetypes drawn from this exercise and presentations given by participants:

### 1. Cultural Threat Conspiracy Theory Narrative

*Example: 'Cultural identities are under threat, elites are complicit in this, and this will end in either a clash of civilisations and/or a 'great replacement' of indigenous European culture.'*

One of the most common radical right narratives identified by participants was related to a cultural threat conspiracy theory – especially to the 'Christian West' from Islam and 'Islamisation'. Participants noted that this connected to demographic-based conspiracy theories circulated by identitarian groups, such as Generation Identity, and centres around a 'Great Replacement' or 'Eurabia' whereby elites (often dubbed as 'cultural Marxists') are complicit in the replacement of Christian culture by an 'Islamic Other'. This, participants noted, is connected with anxieties around sudden change or loss of culture and/or national identity.

Specific issues noted by participants that connected with this grander narrative included more micro-level narratives and issues around the subjugation of women, the imposition of sharia law, the building of Mosques, halal food and concerns around child sexual exploitation (referred to as 'Muslim Grooming Gangs' in the UK context). Moreover, participants located this within a wider conspiracy theory around elite facilitation of the 'Islamisation' process. On the more violent end of the spectrum, such narratives were said to escalate to the idea of the need for a modern day 'crusade' by the West in the East – adding an imminence and accelerationism, which has been used to provide justification for radical right terrorism.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> For more information about mainstreaming and normalisation as part of the current wave of radical right extremism, see Mudde, C. (2019) *The Far Right Today*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

<sup>11</sup> A SWOT analysis is used to assess strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

<sup>12</sup> This was in order to 'stress test' narratives to get into the perspective of a radical right extremist group.

<sup>13</sup> Key examples here including the likes of Anders Breivik and Brenton Tarrant who dubbed themselves as crusaders and Christian martyrs – hoping to bring about a violent 'Christian resistance' against the Muslim 'Other'.

## 2. Ethnic Threat Conspiracy Theory Narrative

*Example: 'Ethnic identities are under threat, elites are complicit in 'white genocide', and this will end in holy racial war.'*

Another common radical right conspiracy theory narrative identified was around an ethnic threat – a more 'blood and soil' form of racism that tends to map onto ethno-nationalist parts of radical right extremist ideology. This, participants suggested, was further connected to both anti-semitic and white supremacist conspiracy theories circulated by openly neo-fascist and neo-Nazi groups, such as the Azov Battalion in the Ukraine and Combat 14/8 in Europe more generally, as well as (democratically elected) illiberal authoritarian regimes in Eastern and Central Europe that use anti-Soros conspiracy theories.<sup>14</sup> Specific issues connected with ethnic threat narrative included the politics of memory and nostalgia, attachment to a homeland and anxieties over 'degeneracy' connected with non-EU migration's 'erosion' of separation between different ethnic groups (i.e. idea of ethnopluralism). In relation to this form of xenophobia, it was noted that welfare state nationalism (or welfare chauvinism) was a "winning formula" of radical right political parties – fusing anti-immigration and economic nationalist sentiments.

On the more violent end of the spectrum, such narratives were said to escalate to the idea of the need for a 'racial holy war' (or RoHoWa), in which essentialised and mutually incompatible racial and ethnic groups come into conflict with each other. Variations between more mainstream notions of anti-semitism (e.g. global elite dictating the 'rules of the game') and xenophobia (e.g. 'migrants taking our X') were noted here in comparison to the more extreme narratives of fringe, extremist far-right subcultures (e.g. the idea of Zionist Occupied Governments in the West being controlled by 'the Jews'). In relation to anti-semitism and conspiracy theories in general, one participant noted that experience shows that these are weighted heavily in the radical right narratives and prove to be to be one of the most challenging areas of counter narrative work – deserving special preparation, sensitivity and attention when practitioners attempt to tackle these in the field.

## 3. Anti-Establishment Narrative

*Example: 'Governments, the EU, NATO, the UN & multinational companies have too much power over us, their role is to ostensibly to keep 'the people' down, we therefore need to rise up against them.'*

One key narrative - connected with both of the above by participants - was a sense of anti-establishment sentiments by radical right groups against certain policies and policy makers (i.e. elites) for letting down so-called 'ordinary people'. Connected with notions of economic deprivation and a sense of 'losing out to globalisation', this radical right narrative was said to have a so-called 'confirmation bias' among followers - tap into wide-ranging grievances to do with multiculturalism, political correctness, political corruption and the government not providing for 'ordinary' (white) citizens.

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<sup>14</sup> An example of this is Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orban's claim that global financier, George Soros, has a secret plot to flood Hungary with migrants and destroy their nation. For other examples, see: [bbc.co.uk/news/stories-49584157](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/stories-49584157).

Participants stated that specific instances of this being mobilised were: 1) as more dilute versions of anti-semitic tropes and conspiracy theories (i.e. a nefarious global banking elite), 2) the idea of a 'deep state' or 'hidden strong powers' advocating entrenched interests against the will of the people and 3) covert collaborations with Muslim or migrant communities against the 'will of the people'. On the more violent end of the spectrum, such narratives were said to escalate to the idea of the need for attacks against government institutions and officials (supposedly and symbolically) connected with resistance to policy programmes or positions deemed 'against' - or a 'threat' to - the 'people' - ambiguously (but often ethnically) defined.

#### 4. Misogynist Narrative

*Example: 'Societies are under threat because men cannot live 'according to their nature', feminists are considered traitors, we therefore must return back to a heteronormative past.'*

Another narrative that participants used to characterise radical right extremist narratives at the time of the workshop was around an endangered form of masculinity or patriarchal backlash - and attendant sentiments to do with sexism and misogyny. Participants connected this with nostalgia and traditionalism - harking back to times where culturally expected norms around the family, gender and sexuality were of a fixed and heteronormative variety, as well as being less contested and equal. More extreme manifestations of male supremacism were noted by participants - emanating from the alt-right involuntary celibate (i.e. 'incel') movement as well as online gaming subcultures (e.g. Gamergate) as part of a larger online eco-system of 'men's rights' activism.

While patriarchal ideology runs through all sections of the radical right, it was also noted that divisions exist between different sections. For example, it was noted that, while some sections of the extreme radical right are more firmly patriarchal and traditionalist, others actors give the appearance of being more progressive. This latter trend, it was noted, has been demonstrated in the leadership of gay (e.g. Pim Fortuyn) and female members (e.g. National Rally's Marine Le Pen and Brothers of Italy's Georgia Meloni), and/or advocating LGBT and women's rights issues. It was noted that this is often done, however, in order to counterpoise Western civilization against an essentialised and 'regressive' Muslim 'Other' - leading us back to the nativist core of radical right ideology.<sup>15</sup> Examples of where more extreme male supremacist ideas have played a role in recent acts of radical right extremist violence include the cases of Toronto Van Attacker Alek Minassian<sup>16</sup> and Florida Yoga Club Shooter Scott Beierle.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> See Chapter 1 of Mudde, C. (2007) *Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. PP. 11-31.

<sup>16</sup> Zaveri, M., Jacobs, J. and Mervosh, S. (3rd November 2018) 'Gunman in Yoga Studio Shooting Recorded Misogynistic Videos and Faced Battery Charges.' *NY Times*. Hyperlink: <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/03/us/yoga-studio-shooting-florida.html>. Date Accessed: 03/10/2019.

<sup>17</sup> BBC (25th April 2018) 'Alek Minassian Toronto van attack suspect praised 'incel' killer.' Hyperlink: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-43883052>. Date Accessed: 03/10/2019.

## 5. Victimhood Narrative

*Example: 'Governments favour ethnic and religious minorities over the majority white population, anti-Politically Correct (PC) comments lead to persecution, ordinary people are being silenced.'*

One, final narrative - largely connected with the above anti-establishment sentiments that was noted by participants - was a sense of victimhood, marginalisation or silencing in political affairs. This was mentioned in connection to a recent *cause célèbre* among radical right actors of free speech and the idea of certain unorthodox viewpoints being stifled by political correctness. Compared to more mainstream populist grievances, however, it was identified that this had a more ethnic and religious hue to it - blaming deprivations on elites (allegedly) listening to one sort of racial or ethnic community over another. As one participant point out, reinforcement of this narrative is seen in local myths or 'folklore' around priority housing, criminality, and lenient prison sentences for minority communities, while 'white' citizens are viewed by the elites (including media) as an underclass of 'bad people'. A particular UK-based example given of this victimhood narrative was around 'Free Tommy' protests initiated in the summer of 2018 at the trial of former EDL leader, Tommy Robinson (aka Stephen Yaxley Lennon), for contempt of court charges.<sup>18</sup> Other examples that come to mind are the 2011 and 2016 court trials against Geert Wilders<sup>19</sup> and the 2017 campus tours carried out by alt-right influence, Milo Yiannopoulos, whereby both radical right actors were able to frame opposition to their viewpoints in terms of denials of free speech.<sup>20</sup>

### TYPES OF RADICAL RIGHT COUNTER NARRATIVE

During the course of the workshop several presentations were given about radical right counter narratives in Europe, North America and Australasia. Of particular interest here was one presenter's work - using the ideas of Labov and Waletzky (1997)<sup>21</sup> - that broke down narratives into an orientation (i.e. who, what, where, how and when), action (i.e. evaluation) and resolution structure (i.e. prescribing a course of action).

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<sup>18</sup> Staff Reporter (9<sup>th</sup> June 2018) 'Far-right activists stage violent protest calling for Tommy Robinson to be freed.' *The Independent*. Hyperlink: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/crime/tommy-robinson-protest-london-far-right-police-arrest-geert-wilders-a8391596.html>. Date Accessed: 31/10/2019.

<sup>19</sup> See *BBC News* (4<sup>th</sup> October 2010) 'Dutch anti-Islam MP Geert Wilders goes on trial.' Hyperlink: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-11464025>. Date Accessed: 31/10/2019 & Boztas, S. (31<sup>st</sup> October 2016) 'Trial of anti-Islamic politician Geert Wilders begins in Netherlands over his 'fewer Moroccans' comment.' *The Telegraph*. Hyperlink: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/10/31/trial-of-anti-islamic-politician-geert-wilders-begins-in-netherl/>. Date Accessed: 31/10/2019.

<sup>20</sup> Svrluga, S. (23<sup>rd</sup> September 2017) 'UC-Berkeley says 'Free Speech Week' is cancelled. Milo Yiannopoulos says he's coming anyway.' *Washington Post*. Hyperlink: [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2017/09/23/uc-berkeley-says-free-speech-week-is-canceled-milo-yiannopoulos-says-hes-still-coming-to-campus/?utm\\_term=.2086d6df7ad7](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/grade-point/wp/2017/09/23/uc-berkeley-says-free-speech-week-is-canceled-milo-yiannopoulos-says-hes-still-coming-to-campus/?utm_term=.2086d6df7ad7). Date Accessed: 31/10/2019.

<sup>21</sup> Labov, W., & Waletzky, J. (1997). Narrative analysis: Oral versions of personal experience. *Journal of Narrative & Life History*, 7(1-4), 3-38. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1075/jnlh.7.02nar>



**FIGURE 2:** Narrative Structure (simplified from Labov and Waletzky (1997))

This was in a vein of countering those narratives by questioning the veracity of each component (especially the action and resolution component), agreeing with the orientation but not the resolution, and supplanting radical right narratives with a different story (i.e. an alternative narrative). This hypothesis when read with information from a post-workshop survey that solicited at least five generalised narratives from participants, built up a fine-grained and truly global assessment of recommended radical right counter narratives outlined below:

### 1. Factual & Historical Counter Narratives

*Example: 'Seeing society through a racialized lens breaks down bonds of togetherness which ultimately leads to a worse outcome for everyone. By seeing what unites us, we can move forward, stronger together.'*

One key category of counter narrative picked by participants were factual counter narratives that responded to the factual veracity of conspiracies, descriptions and communications distributed by radical right extremist groups. Examples of this included educational programmes designed to expose prejudicial attitudes around diversity, race and immigration through providing alternative interpretations and histories to that provided by radical right extremist messengers. Such campaigns were deemed as best targeted at general populations rather than extremist organisations or sympathisers themselves – representing an all-society approach to countering radical right violence.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> As one participant noted, by approaching the population who are being targeted by the extremists, the harmful rhetoric can be directly countered but only if the audience is willing to engage and consider this alternative point of view.

Once Upon a Time...We Lived Together (2014) - Factsheet



General information	
Name project	Once Upon a Time...We Lived Together
Publish date	2014
Association	EUROCLIO
Representative	Bojana Dujkovic-Blagojevic
Project structure and roles	Collaborative project of multiple history teachers associations from the countries of former Yugoslavia, also

FIGURE 3: EUROCLIO (2014) 'Once Upon a Time...We Lived Together' Resource<sup>23</sup>

In particular, factual counter narratives were deemed to work best in countering ethnic and cultural threat conspiracy theory narratives noted above. One example of this given in the UK context was to stress solidarity across race lines and how everyone affected by system-based disadvantages. In the Balkans, alternative historical narratives were deemed important for breaking down nationalist animosities built up between countries in the region (see one example above). In Canada, evidentiary facts about division and how it destroys the fabric of society were also given as an example. And, finally, in Poland, it was suggested that an inclusive grand narrative around Polish identity that looks at the country's diverse, migrant past and cultural diversity today would best deal with the barbs of radical right extremism as currently experienced through nationalist street movements and at the ballot box in the country.

## 2. Ideological Counter Narratives

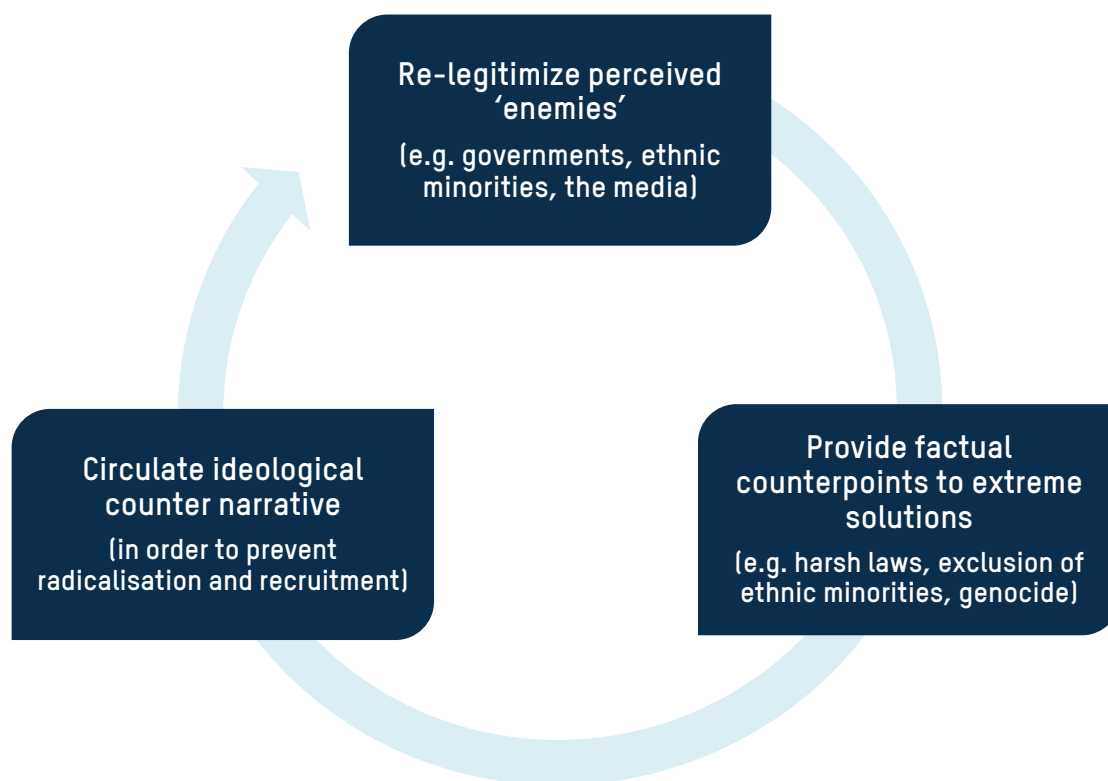
*Example: 'Social separation is what fosters misunderstandings and hatred between different people groups. Mixing fosters understanding and shows that shared social, economic and political resources work. Notions of superiority fail to recognise the good in other cultures and religions and the bad in our own.'*

Other key ideological counter narratives discussed at the workshop were surrounding conspiracy theories propagated by the radical right.<sup>24</sup> This included notions of Zionist

<sup>23</sup> For more information, see: EUROCLIO (2014) 'Once Upon a Time...We Lived Together' Project. Hyperlink: <https://euroclio.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/0F9WQ96-1.pdf>. Date Accessed: 31/10/2019.



Occupied Government's (ZOG), Eurabia, a Great Replacement of 'indigenous populations' by an unspecified group of 'foreigners' and the idea of ethnopluralism. As one speaker noted, such radical right conspiracy theories are used to (de)legitimize perceived radical right 'enemies', provide justification for extreme solutions as well as radicalise and recruit others. For that particular speaker (see below), factual counter narratives were the best way to counter conspiracy theory – picking holes in the orientation (or factual scenario) of the narrative as well as the solipsistic logic of such theories. A connected question arose of who were the best messengers to target those already 'red-pilled' - or convinced about the veracity of such statements. Notably, the answer was that they are best countered by former radical right extremists or influencers who have propagated such materials themselves in the first place and now realised the inaccuracy and harmful impact of this rhetoric on minorities and society in general.



**FIGURE 4:** Combatting Radical Right Conspiracy Theories<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> As one participant noted, conspiracies run through all variants of far-right extremism, reinforcing them and making them harder to undermine. In some senses, conspiracy theories were therefore identified as some of the hardest narratives to counter – particularly among inveterate radical right extremist actors.

<sup>25</sup> This diagram is inspired by the talk given by the above workshop participant on 'Online Counter-Narratives and Conspiracy Theories'.

### 3. Economic Counter Narratives

*Example: 'Being subject to impersonal economic forces is trying for all citizens, we are all negatively affected by economic disadvantage equally, the solution is working together to make sure that globalisation and the economic system works for all.'*

One key counter narrative - highlighted in the Italian context - was the need for responses to radical right narratives of economic deprivation (either absolute or relative) that - as demonstrated above - give rise to race-based grievances exploited by radical right extremist groups. In particular, grievances around taxation, social housing, welfare and unemployment were touched upon as key in exploiting chauvinistic attitudes around race, religion and ethnicity. In Italy, economic precarity among lower and middle classes in Italy was given as an example for 'war among the poor' narrative of the Lega Nord. In terms of counter narratives, then, it was proposed that a more factual based discussion of the present situation was needed in order to breakdown hegemonic anti-immigrant blaming and scapegoating about the situation (i.e. 'the immigrants are taking our jobs'); an alternative narrative being the Lega Nord's poor economic performance in office (see example below). In the UK, it was noted by one participant that the anti-immigration narrative - that is aimed both at economic migrants and refugees - is often fuelled by perceived unfairness in treatment of those who "choose" to come to the country by those on benefits and who are unemployed. This has been countered previously with myth-busting campaigns where each of the most prevalent rumours is contested with fact and figures through highly visible communication strategies.



FIGURE 5: Pagella Politica Fact-Checker's Analysis of Matteo Salvini's Statements<sup>26</sup>

#### 4. Political Counter Narratives

*Example: 'There are problems and deficits within all democracies. Governments and elected officials provide a directly accountable individual for each citizen. By standing for office or voting in elections, you will be able to change the system from the insider'*

Another key set of counter narratives provided by participants were around the notions of anti-elitism and anti-establishment theories attached to more mainstream radical right narratives that contain a broad and popular appeal in some contexts. The broad gist of such counter narratives was seen through the lens of stressing the positive values, virtues and characteristics of mainstream institutions, parties and movements as an alternative to radical right activism. Positive stories humanising political figures was seen as one possible counter narrative strategy in this vein or acknowledging the legitimacy of frustrations caused that underpin such narratives.<sup>27</sup> Ultimately, these political counter narratives need to be filtered in to all the others – given the connections that radical right extremist groups

<sup>26</sup> For more analysis, see: <https://pagellapolitica.it/politici/sfoggio/65/matteo-salvini>.

<sup>27</sup> A flip-side of this - envisaged by one participant - was how by showing such weaknesses or vulnerabilities such figures might go from being 'role models' to 'figures of ridicule' by a cruel small group of the news press and public – further compounding resentment and indignation within the wider population.

draw between elite conspiracies and the (perceived) cultural and ethnic threat they see from migrants. Finally, and more troublingly, one participant pointed out the importance of delegitimising violence against the establishment as being important when thinking about the extreme radical right – especially strategic communications that are able to de-escalate violence in the face of terrorist atrocities. An example of this can be found in New Zealand’s Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern’s, response to the March 2019 New Zealand terror attack – breaking down barriers by interacting directly with the public and victimised members of the local community.<sup>28</sup>



**FIGURE 6:** New Zealand Prime Minister, Jacinda Ardern, talking to grieving relatives of Christchurch victims<sup>29</sup>

## 5. Humorous Counter Narratives

*Example: ‘Before they targeted the Southern Italians, now they target the foreigners, who will they choose to exclude and scapegoat next?!’*

<sup>28</sup> As one workshop participant noted, this was also deliberately designed to take the emphasis off the ideology and attack and onto prioritising the victims.

<sup>29</sup> Picture Source: <https://newsie.co.nz/news/144157-christchurch-attack-the-pms-role-bringing-message-of-love-and-support-and-grief.html>



**FIGURE 7:** Cibo (2008 - Present) 'Street-Art, Street-Food!' Campaign

Another set of counter narratives discussed at the workshop tended to be at the more humorous or satirical end of the spectrum – knowingly making fun of elements of radical right ideology, activist and propaganda campaigns. Examples of this included the (above) Italian 'Street-Art, Street-Food! Campaign' where an independent graffiti artist would paint over racist, Nazi or anti-semitic messages with food – embracing a unifying theme of Italian civic life and culture. Another noted campaign in Germany was the August 2011 Exit Deutschland 'Trojan Horse T-Shirt' campaign (below) where radical right rock concert attendees were given T-shirts that once washed revealed the message: 'if your t-shirt can do it, so can you - we can help you to get free of right-wing extremism. EXIT-Germany'.<sup>30</sup> In the UK, a viral video of an EDL protestor talking in an interview about 'Muslamic Ray Guns' (as opposed to 'Muslim Rape Gangs') was widely cited as an example of satire (again see screengrab below).<sup>31</sup> Such campaigns – whilst perhaps less effective at changing the minds of ideological adherents – help create a humorous side story to the one propagated by radical right extremists and draw attention away from their media campaigns.

<sup>30</sup> More details about this campaign can be found here: [https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/node/7493\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/node/7493_en).

<sup>31</sup> Alex Ross (22<sup>nd</sup> March 2011) 'Muslamic Ray Guns - The EDL Anthem.' *YouTube*. Hyperlink: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AIPD8qHhtVU>. Date Accessed: 31/10/2019.



**FIGURE 8:** EXIT Germany Trojan Horse T-Shirt Campaign



**FIGURE 9:** Screengrab of 'Muslimic Ray Guns' Video

## 6. Alternative and Positive Narratives

*Example: 'X is a Muslim but engages in the same everyday activity as you and I. They are engaged in social action and do not take preferences or sides. Negative racial and religious stereotypes hinder them in their contribution to society.'*

*'X is a former radical right extremist. They realised the effects on others and risks of being involved in violent extremism. Come and be part of the solution rather than the problem.'*

One key locus of conversation at the workshop was around the use of alternative or positive narratives on issues of race, religion and ethnicity. These were deemed important in unpicking the underlying prejudicial attitudes at the heart of radical right extremist cultural and ethnic threat narratives but in a way that proactively (instead of reactively) shapes the conversation on these issues. One example of an alternative narrative presented at the workshop was the story of Imran Naeem, a Muslim athlete and boxer from Middlesbrough. Called 'Combinations', the video breaks down religious and racial stereotypes about the connections between 'Muslimness' and radicalisation (see below).<sup>32</sup> Another instance of an alternative narrative was around creating positive and inclusive local identities that stress shared culture, experiences and opinions. One key example of this was a counter-campaign around Newcastle's welcoming 'Geordie' identity in the face of increased radical right extremist protest and attention. Added to this, participants also noted the importance of alternative narratives in de-radicalisation campaigns online – letting radical right extremists know that if they want to disengage that there would be help for them finding a job, making new friends and reintegrating back into mainstream society.<sup>33</sup>

<sup>32</sup> *Media Cultured* (2012) 'Combinations' Teaser Trailer. Hyperlink: <https://vimeo.com/48519016>. Date Accessed: 31/10/2019.

<sup>33</sup> As one participant noted, "I think this last point is key – give someone a way out and they will probably take it, no one likes to feel cornered or hope-less in the face of challenge and opposition to what they have considered to be core to their very thoughts and way of life."



FIGURE 10: Screenshot of 'Combinations' Film



## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Effective Radical Right Counter Narratives & Counter Narrative Campaigns

Moving on to the notion of radical right counter narratives and counter narrative campaigns in general, participants noted that effective radical right counter narratives need to be emotive, simple, impactful and experiential. This was said to be important in changing not just an individual's values but also their behaviour, core beliefs and convictions. One presenter noted the importance of knowing exactly what you want from your audience before starting a counter narrative campaign and using a simple model of 'getting someone, to do something, by saying something', which is pertinent to the audience that you need to reach. Added to this (and as noted above) was a real sense that counter narratives need be proactive and not reactive – helping frame an alternative message, not simply a rejoinder to extremist narratives and allowing them to set the agenda. As one speaker noted, this – as well as real life experience of the 'other' – might be more effective in changing people's convictions and beliefs compared to an argument-based approach that simply helps to further entrench strongly-held beliefs.

Some caveats were spelt out about the effectiveness of counter narratives themselves being a silver bullet or golden egg in countering violent extremism (CVE). The first was that in countries where there was little censure of extreme radical right views in elite and media debates – or where radical right actors were members of the government – reframing of debates around issues to do with race, ethnicity and religion were very difficult, if not downright impossible. This suggests the importance of identifying what some social scientists call an open or closed discursive opportunity structure (i.e. questioning whether there is room for contradictory or heretical viewpoints and how these subjects can be broached in difficult-to-reach environments).<sup>34</sup> Another issue discussed was the importance of thinking beyond counter narratives themselves to the intangible factors – beyond their age, gender, ethnicity and online activity – that might lead an individual to support a radical right extremist movement. Here, it was suggested that getting a more granular sense of who people are, where they are, what surrounds them and who they listen to is vital in broader-based CVE efforts. A third note of caution was around the use of formal (i.e. big companies or governments) organisations versus informal actors (i.e. NGO's and grassroots campaigners) when organising and conducting radical right counter narrative campaigns. As anti-globalist elite conspiracies mentioned at the workshop showed, any sense of elite backing could de-legitimise and potentially jeopardise a counter narrative campaign in the eyes of the receiver and extremist group.

#### Credible Messengers

Linked to this, therefore, participants suggested that non-government actors were the most credible messengers in delivering radical right counter narratives to those sympathetic of these viewpoints. Messengers of radical right counter narratives therefore need to be perceived as 'everyday' individuals, i.e. not governments or elites, who have a lived/practical experience to

<sup>34</sup> McCammon, H. (2013) 'Discursive Opportunity Structure.' Wiley Online Library. Hyperlink: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/9780470674871.wbespm073>. Date Accessed: 03/10/2019.



share that is of an emotional quality and that can be respected by the recipient. As one participant noted, this connection between the message and deliverer is key when formulating effective radical right counter narrative campaigns. Some examples suggested by participants included testimonies of former radical right extremists and/or victims of radical right extremism that are able to share the societal harms of violent extremism. Such alternative narratives are key examples of a strong and effective narrative – one that provides a coherent story from start to finish and has enough human and emotional resonance to be impactful for a broad range of individuals.<sup>35</sup> Such broader comments mapped onto specific comments by one speaker – based on Aristotelean philosophy – that stresses a messenger needs *phronesis* (i.e. practical wisdom), *arete* (i.e. virtuous personal qualities) and *eunoia* (i.e. the good will generated between the messenger and his or her audience).

### Target Audiences

Moving on to have a look at the subject of audience more closely, participant noted that counter narratives and counter narrative campaigns need to be carefully tailored for different populations based on their demographic and economic background but also their level of engagement with radical right extremist materials and ideology. One speaker mentioned that Harris-Hogan et al's (2016) application of a public health model to CVE was quite helpful in tailoring messages to different audiences require.<sup>36</sup> This model is a pyramid, which places extremists at the top, extremist sympathisers in the middle and the general population of a country at the bottom. By breaking down extremist audiences in this way, we can suggest that 1) ideological and alternative counter narratives are best targeted at those active in violent extremist milieu's; that 2) factual or economic counter narratives are best targeted at those sympathetic to violent radical right extremist ideas and that 3) political and humorous narratives are best targeted a larger group of citizenry who might tip into being a sympathetic 'home constituency' for more general radical right sentiment, but are nowhere near the top of the pyramid in terms of radicalisation.

### Best Media

In general, the consensus amongst participants was in favour of high impact online campaigns. Whilst many acknowledged the importance of offline and face-to-face interventions, the ability to target and version different messages directly to the audience in mind – in both a cost and time efficient manner – was seen as a key advantage of using social media and online technology platforms. Some reservations were expressed at using online media exclusively, however. For example, several participants pointed out that – whilst online media might be best in reaching younger cohorts – traditional media (i.e. newspaper, TV or billboard advertising campaigns) might have a greater reach among older cohorts. Moreover, and transcending age divisions, one participant also noted the merits of an online-offline media hybrid – using online media to extend the reach of an offline campaign and online forms of counter narrative contact

<sup>35</sup> See Fisher, W.R. (1987). *Human communication as a narration: Toward a philosophy of reason, value, and action*. Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press.

<sup>36</sup> Shandon Harris-Hogan, Kate Barrelle, and Andrew Zammit, "What is Countering Violent Extremism? Exploring CVE Policy and Practice in Australia," *Behavioural Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression* 8, no. 1 (2016), 6–24.

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being used to foster offline interactions. Careful research and analysis was therefore advised before conducting a radical right counter narrative campaign in order to know the best ways to reach your target audience and amplify its impact. In this vein, other suggested modes of communication included interactive games, face-to-face discussions, video broadcasts, and community events or projects designed to deliver a message in an iterative fashion over time to a target audience.

### Campaign Evaluation

Interesting contributions by participants – gleaned from a post-workshop survey – found varying methodologies to ascertain the success and effectiveness of radical right counter narratives and counter narrative campaigns. In the online space, active monitoring of social media metrics through Retweets, Likes, Shares, Followers, Views and so on were considered as a baseline form of evaluation – acting as a first step to assessing the reach of a particular campaigns effects. Other methodologies to measure effectiveness of online campaigns further also included post-campaign surveys and/or a post-campaign research exercise looking at attitudinal and value change gleaned from posting behaviour by a particular online community before and after a campaign.

Turning to the offline world, it was deemed important that secondary data could be useful in detecting an appreciable, behavioural effect. For example, one participant envisaged a scenario where a counter narrative initiative by targeting a specific neighbourhood, policymakers might be able to track closely how many people join this initiative and whether the rates of hate crime go down. Such pilots would therefore give an idea of the success of such a treatment and whether it might be effective to roll out the same initiative in other areas of similar risk profiles across a particular country. Feasibly, this methodology could also be used to bridge the online-offline divide – monitoring online interactions, engagements and posting behaviour after an offline initiative has been conducted and vice versa.

### CONCLUSION

To conclude, the September 2019 workshop gave the collaboration a solid and thorough grounding for the project going forwards where key findings for current circumstances have been examined. Key radical right narratives were identified from across the world with possible counter narratives suggested with recommendations for considerations of who, how, what and to whom they should be delivered. More work needs to be done on the exact methodology of evaluation of efficacy of such messages within the target audience but this is something that will be developed in due course for the two evaluative frameworks to be delivered as part of the project. Counter narratives will be brought forward and discussed in more detail within the country reports, and insights arising from this will be included in the 'how-to' guides also.

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Moving forwards then, the following key findings can be taken away from the workshop:

Radical right counter narrative campaigns need to be proactive and not necessarily reactive – helping frame an alternative message, not simply a rejoinder to extremist narratives.<sup>37</sup>

Radical right counter narratives need to be simple, emotive, impactful and experiential – affecting people’s convictions and beliefs, and using real experiences in order to motivate sustained value change.

Caveat: Factual counter narratives may be used but only to unpick and undermine the internal ‘logics’ of anti-semitic and Islamophobic conspiracy theories.

Messengers of radical right counter narratives need to be (ideally locally situated) ‘everyday’ individuals, i.e. not governments or elites, who have a lived experience to share (i.e. former extremists or victims of extremism).

Finally, knowing your audience and being clear about ‘what you want from them’ is key – due to the increasingly (and oftentimes) broad and mainstream nature of societal and political radical right narratives.

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<sup>37</sup> As one participant noted, a practitioner conducting a radical right counter narrative campaign needs also know when to stop or halt the campaign in the rare case that the messaging fails.