Economics of Security Working Paper Series

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January 2012

Economics of Security Working Paper 60

This publication is an output of EUSECON, a research project supported by the European Commission's Seventh Framework Programme.

European Security Economics
EUSECON
www.economics-of-security.eu

Economics of Security is an initiative managed by DIW Berlin

Economics of Security Working Paper Series

Correct citation: Bossong, R. (2012). “Assessing the EU’s Added Value in the Area of Terrorism Prevention and Violent Radicalisation”. Economics of Security Working Paper 60, Berlin: Economics of Security.

First published in 2012

ISSN: 1868-0488

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Assessing the EU's added value in the area of terrorism prevention and violent radicalisation

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This paper questions the effectiveness and the prospects of EU efforts to prevent terrorism and violent radicalisation. After the terrorist of attacks of Madrid and London,, member states agreed on a comprehensive strategy to prevent radicalisation and recruitment into terrorism, but simultaneously underlined the limits of EU competences. The European Commission therefore focused on indirect measures, such as research support. Over time, however, both flexible cooperation among a subset of member states and new EU initiatives generated few or biased policy outputs. The second part of the paper questions the resulting proposal to create a network of local or sub-national actors for best practice exchange. It is argued that preventive counter-terrorism relies on contentious scientific evidence and that authoritative evaluations remain tied to national policy-making. Finally, the EU Commission cannot mobilise sufficient resources to ensure that 'frontline' organisations, such as police services, implement new practices. The conclusions raise further research questions on the use of knowledge and complex governance patterns in EU internal security.

1. Introduction

9/11 demonstrated that a handful of determined individuals could inflict mass casualties. In response, the US sought to 'pre-empt' terrorism and related security risks around the globe. However, this aggressive strategy has proven excessively costly and increasingly ineffective (Mueller 2010). Even though the threat posed by Al Quaeda seems to have declined, the increasingly loose or virtual nature of transnational terrorist networks (Sageman 2008) has complicated the task of identifying and disrupting terrorist plots.

Therefore, the early prevention of terrorism has become increasingly attractive. Preventive counter-terrorism measures are likely to be more sustainable than defensive approaches that may only displace terrorist attacks from one location to another (Enders and Sandler 2006). Addressing structural problems that could be related to the occurrence of terrorism may also have inherent benefits, such improved social and economic integration. However, there is no consensus which set of political, social or psychological factors are related to terrorist violence, while the link between extremist thought and violence is highly context-specific or simply spurious (Githens-Mazer and Lambert 2010). Preventive counterterrorism policies may, therefore, miss their intended objective and rather lead to a problematic criminalization of radical ideas, stigmatise communities, or taint social policy with questionable security objectives (Pantazis and Pemberton 2010, Richards 2011).

In this context, the EU's ambition to contribute to the prevention of terrorism (Council 2005a) also needs to be scrutinized. The EU has very limited competences over national integration or

education policies that could influence ‘conditions conducive to the emergence of terrorism' (Coolsaet 2011). These limited competences are aggravated by the fact that many member states do not consider terrorism as a salient threat at the national level (Meyer 2009). Nevertheless, initiatives for preventive counter-terrorism have been prominently mentioned in both The Hague as well as Stockholm Program for the development of the European Area of Freedom Security and Justice (AFSJ). In particular, the EU claims to improve national policy by research support and the exchange of 'best practices'.[1]

These empirical developments generate two research puzzles. Firstly, if the legal limitations to common EU action on terrorism prevention are readily evident, how and why did the EU become involved in the first run? Secondly, is the increasing emphasis on best practice exchange a promising and effective strategy to improve national counterterrorism policies? This paper addresses these questions in turn. The first part traces the historical development of EU policies to prevent terrorism and 'violent radicalisation' within its borders. It is shown how the political impact of terrorist attacks and plots, but also the advocacy of a few member states during their respective term as EU presidency, gradually entrenched the objective to prevent violent radicalisation and terrorism at the EU level. The European Commission supported this expansion of the EU’s antiterrorism agenda by a series of communications and research projects. But despite considerable experimentation with different cooperation formats among EU member states, transnational preventive counterterrorism measures turned out to be biased towards repression or ran into high implementation obstacles. Most recently, the Stockholm programme proposed to address these deficits by emphasising early prevention and evaluation of counterterrorism policies, and by supporting lower-level exchanges among operational security actors and local authorities in Europe. The second part critically evaluates the related and most recent EU proposal for a network of local or sub-national actors for best practice exchange in terrorism prevention. It is argued that preventive counter-terrorism measures policies rely on contentious scientific evidence and that authoritative evaluations remain dependent on national policy-making structures. Furthermore, the EU Commission cannot mobilise sufficient resources to ensure that ‘frontline’ organisations, such as police services, utilise new knowledge and practices. Taken together, this limits the potential for a depoliticised knowledge and practice exchange for terrorism prevention in Europe. The conclusions raise further research questions on related complex governance patterns in EU internal security.

2. The evolution of EU policies to address 'violent radicalization'

2.1 The emergence of the EU strategy to combat radicalisation and recruitment into terrorism

The events of 9-11 led to a massive expansion of counter-terrorism policies at domestic and international levels. In the US terrorists actors were categorically labelled as 'evil' (Jackson 2005), which blocked more thorough investigations into the causes of the attacks. In Europe, the initial reflex was point to the Palestinian conflict, repression in the Middle East and underdevelopment in other parts of the world (Council 2002). Yet the US War on Terror and resulting intra-European divisions quickly put an end to hopes for a more robust common foreign policy in relation to these protracted conflicts.

Meanwhile, security agencies in Europe states became increasingly worried about new internal

[1] From a theoretical perspective, this can be understood as a strategy to develop better shot solutions (Bossong 2011), i.e. new policy measures that may be developed in a particular location, but that can and should be copied.

threats. In 2002 Dutch security authorities conducted a first systematic investigation into Islamic extremist recruitment after two nationals died in a failed attack in Kashmir, whereas the assassination of the nationalist populist politicians Pim Fortyn increased worries about internal political polarisation (den Boer 2007). Other member states faced similar terrorist threats by national citizens, as exemplified by the British 'shoebomber' Richard Reid. Nevertheless, the new concern with 'homegrown terrorism' did not directly lead to policy-making activity in Brussels. Although the EU had committed to an extensive programme for counterterrorism cooperation after 9/11 (den Boer and Monar 2002), it had made little headway into the highly sensitive area intelligence exchange, which, at the time, was seen as the most important aspect of terrorism prevention.

This situation changed with terrorist attacks on a Madrid train station in March 2004. The terrorist cell had chosen commuter trains as a 'soft target' and had hardly been noticed by security authorities prior to the attack. This underlined the fundamental dilemmas of counterterrorism (Sandler and Enders 2006), namely that terrorist can sidestep defensive measure by choosing alternative unprotected targets, and that security authorities are faced with a 'needle in a haystack' when trying to detect and disrupt plots by new members or supporters of a far-flung terrorist network, such as Al Quaeda. These considerations provide a compelling logic for more proactive counterterrorism policies, which also aim at the wider environment or structures that support terrorist organisations and campaigns, so that security authorities would be faced with a smaller pool of potential attackers. Thus, the European Council passed a declaration that reinforced the existing commitments for counter-terrorism cooperation, but also set out the new objective to "address[ing] the factors which contribute to support for, and recruitment into terrorism" (2004, 16).

This set a new political direction for EU counterterrorism policy. However, it was far from clear how to proceed in practice. A first round of expert discussions revolved around the question whether 'bottom-up' process of radicalization or 'top-down' recruitment by Al Quaeda best explained the Madrid attacks (Coelsaet 2010, 867). The incoming Dutch Presidency during the second half of 2004 would be critical to move from such general deliberations to more concrete policy proposals. Already at the beginning of the year, the Netherlands had indicated that it intended to discuss terrorism prevention (Council 2004a). This was supported by the European Commission, which published an ambitious communication on EU antiterrorism policy by autumn 2004 (Commission 2004). This communication listed a wide range of issue areas that could substantiate the new objective of terrorism prevention, such as need for increased cooperation with civil society, community policing, public private partnerships, and EU support for security research. Most importantly, it coined the term 'violent radicalisation', which would become central to EU discourse in this issue area. The qualifier of 'violent' radicalisation emphasised that radical thought would not be equated with terrorism, while it nevertheless justified a critical engagement with ideology.

In November 2004 the murder of Dutch filmmaker Theo van Gogh underlined the threat posed by extremists individuals and related social milieus (Peters 2011). This tragic event ensured that the objective to combat 'violent radicalisation' would become inscribed into the next long-term programme for the EU's Area of Freedom, Security and Justice, which was also under discussion at the time. The Hague program argued that the "prevention and suppression of terrorism" will be a "key element in the near future" and that, "a long-term strategy to address the factors which contribute to radicalisation and recruitment for terrorist activities" should be developed in the course of a year (European Council 2005, 8-9).

Discussions and preparations for this strategy coincided with a new serious terrorist attack in July 2005. As the attacks on the London public transport system were perpetrated by UK nationals, most

efforts of the UK government focused on increasing domestic security measures. Nevertheless, the government also used its incumbent EU presidency to upload of the existing UK national counter-terrorism strategy, which listed prevention as one of four fundamental objectives, to the EU level (Council 2005a). This re-framing of the EU's fight against terrorism did not immediately lead to new policy proposals, but provided an important reinforcement for ongoing negations over the strategy to combat radicalisation and recruitment into terrorism. In addition, the European Commission maintained its political support and published a second communication on radicalisation, which sought to set out a compromise to reconcile EU cooperation with national prerogatives in sensitive security areas. On the one hand, the Commission deferred to the leadership of member states and acknowledged that terrorism prevention is "a very complex question with no simple answers and which requires a cautious, modest and well-thought approach" (2005, 2). On the other hand, the Commission argued that "the EU with its span of policies in various areas that could be used to address violent radicalisation, is well placed to gather and spread... the relevant expertise that is being acquired by the Member States" (ibid, 3). Thus, existing EU programs for academic exchanges or labour market integration could be cited as a contribution to terrorism prevention, while the Commission committed an additional € 7 million for synthesising research on different aspects of radicalisation.

In sum, a string of successful as well as failed terrorist plots between 2002 and 2005 propelled policy-makers to focus on terrorism prevention. The timely advocacy of the Netherlands and UK during their respective EU presidencies, as well as the supportive and mediating role of the European Commission, furthermore helped to entrench the issue in the formal policy-making processes. As a result, the strategy against radicalisation and recruitment thus passed without much controversy by the end of 2005 (Council 2005b).

The prolonged discussion and negotiation process also reflected in the contents of the strategy, which touched on a wide range of factors and perspectives. In particular, the strategy both endorsed the established focus on disrupting recruitment by Al Qaeda and called for new initiatives to address more dispersed patterns of violent radicalisation. Similarly, the document stressed the need to counter misleading extremist messages as well as underlined the EU's ambition to address structural grievances of injustice and lack of opportunities. Finally, it aimed for a 'non-emotive lexicon' to discuss terrorism and elaborated on the distinction between radical ideas and the willingness to perpetrate violent acts.

However, this very breadth also resulted in a lack of priorities and realistic objectives. Although the strategy touched on a wide range of possible causes and drivers of terrorism, it did not directly engage with critical question, namely which kind of ideological, structural or social factors would be most relevant or amenable to policy intervention. This created a large gap between the rhetorical objectives for comprehensive action and capacities for effective action. Towards the end of the very same strategy, member states stepped back from vague and ambitious objectives for comprehensive terrorism prevention, and rather underlined their sovereignty concerns:

> "The challenge of combating radicalisation and terrorist recruitment lies primarily with the Member States, at a national, regional and local level. They set the social, education and economic policies that can foster…inclusion within mainstream society. It is they who determine foreign, defence and security polices, and the manner in which these are publicly communicated. The challenge of radicalism and means to counter it vary greatly in each Member states" (ibid, 6)[2]

[2] This passage was almost identical to formulations in an earlier policy document by the EUK presidency that emerged in the immediate aftermath of the London bombings (Council 2005c, par.17). So despite the renewed shock of a

2.2. The difficulties of translating concepts into practice

Although the action plan to implement the strategy on radicalisation and recruitment remains classified (Council 2005d), resulting difficulties soon became evident. For instance, in 2006 the EU Terrorism Working Groups and EU Situation Centre were asked to make further recommendations to flesh out the action plan (Council 2006a). The document proposed further measures to disrupt terrorist recruitment (e.g. focusing on travel patterns or 'hot spots', such as prisons), whereas the problem early or structural prevention remained open to question. In addition, the EU agreed on a media communication strategy (Council 2006b) that was advertised as a means to counter extremist messages. But instead of providing an impulse for proactive interventions (such as providing support to non-extremist Muslim media sources), the media communication strategy resulted in little more than an internal guideline for EU officials how to avoid contentious terminology (Council 2007a).

In the meantime, the European Commission worked on demonstrating the EU's potential contribution via research policies and knowledge exchange mechanisms. It set up a high-level expert group on radicalisation to generate policy advice and extended the budget line for crime prevention to terrorism prevention (Council 2007b). Academic research on radicalisation was also stimulated by a growing number of related calls in the multi-annual Framework Programs for European research funding.[3] Thus, the first review of the implementation of the Strategy on radicalisation and recruitment argued optimistically that the EU had "focused minds on how we can tackle the problem collectively" (Council 2006c, 2).

Barely a year later the newly appointed EU Counterterrorism Coordinator Gilles de Kerchove[4] admitted to the lack of concrete results and continued political ambiguity:

> "EU policy in the field of radicalisation and recruitment, particularly in the area of integration, is the result of a compromise between Member States whose traditions and policies sometimes divergence. In consequence, the wording of some of the recommendations in the Strategy and the classified Action Plan attached to it is vague and difficult to translate into operational action…fresh ideas ideas for implementation…need to be developed " (Council 2007c, 8)

Subsequent attempt to address these deficits branched out in two different directions: first, towards more fragmented operational cooperation among a subset of member states; and second, towards increased EU regulation to disrupt recruitment. To take them in order: backed with a new resolution by the Council of Ministers that was triggered by new terrorist plots (Council 2008a), the EU Counter-terrorism coordinator aimed to improve exchanges among national security actors (Council 2008b). A handful of member states were designated as 'lead countries' for different aspects of terrorism prevention, such as community policing, countering propaganda or relations with civil

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serious terrorist attack, the UK's Eurosceptic reflexes largely remained in place.

[3] Some ongoing projects under the sixth framework programme began to investigate the issue of radicalisation, while the following seventh round would include specific calls. See, for instance, the following projects, which can be retrieved at http://cordis.europa.eu/newsearch/: MICROCONFLICT, TTSRL, EUSECON, SAFIRE, ACCEPT PLURALISM, CARP, COUNTERRADICAL.

[4] Mr. de Kerchove had previously played a leading role in the formulation of the EU's counterterrorism policy from within the Council Secretariat

society. While this broadened the range of initiatives that were discussed at the EU level, these initiaitves mostly built on pre-established national programmes. Germany, for example, would lead on the question of internet monitoring, as it had already set up a related pilot program two years earlier ('check the web') (Council 2006c).

This pragmatic approach that de-emphasised the need for common EU action was underlined by the simultaneous formation of the so-called Policy Planners Network on countering Polarisation and Radicalisation.[5] Again, the UK and the Netherlands provided the initial impulse to set up a more informal group of eight member states that were particularly interested in this issue area.[6] While discussions of this policy network have not been made public, they clearly run in parallel to the EU's efforts. For instance, a UK think tank that provides support to the Policy Planners' Network also fed into EU conferences on radicalisation (Institute for Strategic Dialogue 2010) and attracted a grant from the European Commission for collecting related information sources.[7] Such connections demonstrate that interested national actors used the EU as a discussion platform and financial resource. But it could not be argued that their informal and horizontal cooperation was dependent on, or significantly driven by, inputs from the EU level.

This also reflected in the fact that the next Commissioner for Justice and Home Affairs downplayed the emphasis on academic research. The concluding report from the Commission-sponsored expert group on radicalisation was not published (Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation 2008), as it eschewed detailed policy advice and rather cast doubt over the concept of radicalisation. Instead, the Commission aimed to demonstrate the EU's added value by a means of a tangible legislative contribution. It proposed to amend the existing EU framework decision on combating terrorism[8] to the effect that 'preparatory' acts of terrorism could be criminalised in all EU member states. This concerned travel to training camps and material support to terrorist groups as well as public statements that could be construed as 'incitement' to terrorism. This paper cannot delve deeper into the debates that surround the criminalisation of preparatory acts of terrorism (Mellinger 2010, Ronen 2010). Suffice to state here that the expansion of repressive legal instruments for the disruption of recruitment and propaganda was not balanced by new initiatives for early prevention, i.e. measures that could reduce the likelihood that certain groups or individuals would turn to radical propaganda.

2.3. Further attempts to buttress the EU's 'added value'

Over the following months it became increasingly evident that the lead country approach generated only limited results that could be applied across several EU member states. Germany, Austria, France jointly drafted and disseminated a handbook on radicalisation processes in prisons, while Spain and France produced guidance on the public training of Imams (Council 2009a). Since these handbooks remain classified, their substantive impact or usefulness remains speculative. Officials[9] argued that their use remains entirely voluntary and that the peculiarities of each national security or education systems limit further cooperation or standardisation. Other national lead projects, such as on community relations, remained at an even lower level of formalisation or could not attract collaboration from more than one member state. This corresponds with the assessment of academic

[5] http://www.strategicdialogue.org/islam-diversity-social-cohesion/ppn/

[6] http://www.strategicdialogue.org/policy-planners-network/

[7] https://www.counterextremism.org/resources

[8] In 2002, this EU framework decision had provided a common definition of terrorism and required member states to approximate the related criminal law provisions.

[9] Interviews in national interior ministries, November 2010.

analysts that discern little formal convergence in national preventive policies (Vidino 2009, Coolsaet 2010, Pisoiu 2012). Only the German lead project on monitoring extremist websites constituted a significant exception. In this case the technological possibilities of transnational information- and burden-sharing were easy to define, which resonated with EUROPOL's improving capacities for collecting open source intelligence on Islamist terrorism.[10]

These limited outcomes were also critically reviewed in Brussels, which led to a revision of the EU's action plan to combat radicalisation and recruitment into terrorism (Council 2009b). As the incumbent Swedish Presidency failed with its proposal to make this document public, one cannot make more precise statements about the scope of these revisions. But it is clear that the main impulse for a new direction in EU preventive counter-terrorism came from a different direction. The next multi-annual programme for the EU's Area of Freedom, Security and Justice, which was concluded during the Swedish Presidency, reinstated the ambition for an effective and wide-ranging prevention policy. Specifically, the Stockholm programme called for more efforts to combat discrimination, achieve early detection of radicalization, and to evaluate existing policy instruments at both the European and national level (European Council 2010, 52).

Following EU presidencies took up the call, but could not achieve a breakthrough. In the first half of 2010, Spain proposed a standardised format for exchanging information on 'radicalisation episodes'. This proposal was regarded as overly complicated or formalistic by other member states,[11] and was only adopted as a non-binding recommendation (Council 2010a). The subsequent Belgian presidency promoted the involvement of civil society to counter radicalisation at an early stage. But due to highly divergent state-society relations in Europe, this initiative equally did not move beyond another Council recommendation of largely symbolic value (Council 2010b). A related Belgian pilot project of 'community policing' generated a small handbook that patrolling officers could use to recognise symbols of radical ideologies. A participating police manager explained[12], however, that the project was initiated for political reasons to produce a tangible output on terrorism prevention during the Belgian EU presidency. This political motive and short for project development explains the simplistic focus on visible symbols of radical ideologies, which was bound to strike little interest among counter-terrorism experts.

Meanwhile, the European Commission reverted to knowledge generation and exchange activities, which correspond to the emphasis on evaluation and best practice exchange in the Stockholm programme. It reinstated the expert group on radicalisation as a more permanent expert network on radicalisation. To ensure greater visibility beyond expert seminars, the network now features a website that aims to provide authoritative definitions for terrorist-related concepts.[13] In the future it should also include a restricted exchange platform for academics and practitioners. While the impact of these initiatives remains to be seen, it clearly reflects a learning process about the limited use of pure academic research for policy-making purposes.

Second, the Commission committed € 5 million per year to support a horizontal network among sub-national authorities that should exchange best practices in the area of terrorism prevention. This proposal had already been highlighted in the Stockholm programme (European Council 2010, 52) and could be seen as a fitting answer to the reservations set out in the EU strategy on combating violent radicalisation, namely that member states remained highly divergent in their threat

[10] The European Commission also aimed to facilitate the cooperation between internet service providers and security authorities in this issue area.

[11] Interview with counter-terrorism official, April 2011

[12] Personal conversation with the author at conference workshop

13 http://www.ec-ener.eu/home

perceptions and counter-terrorism approaches. Horizontal and voluntary exchanges among lower-level actors may bypass these divergent preferences and focus on concrete projects that may deserve international attention. Already in 2001 the EU created a professional network on crime prevention, which was given a new political basis during the negotiation period on the Stockholm programme (Council 2009c). In addition, between 2005 and 2007 the Commission funded a pilot project on counter-terrorism cooperation between cities, which built on a existing Council of Europe Forum for Urban Security.[14] So it does not come as a surprise that the Commission underlined this approach in a high-level communication on the new EU Internal Security Strategy (Commission 2010b, 7). At the time of writing, however, the implementation of this network has yet to take shape. The second part of this contribution thus discusses the likely prospects of this proposal.

3. The prospects of EU best practice exchange on counter-terrorism prevention

One can sum up the above historical account as follows. EU counter-radicalisation policy started with an 'upload' of national concepts from the Netherlands and the UK, while subsequent policy diffusion from the EU level to other member states would be highly limited. Competing political interests – be they due to different threat profiles or different preferences over the desirable extent of political integration – partly explain this trajectory, so that one could tell a familiar story to students of EU counterterrorism policy (Bossong 2008, Kaunert 2007): Driven by short-term considerations and terrorist shocks, member states symbolically agree to face the pressing security issue together. But when it comes to substantive cooperation, divergent national interest frustrate progress. This tendency is only counteracted by EU institutions who act as policy entrepreneurs in order to increase their standing in a new area of European integration. Occasionally they succeed when favourable political circumstances and timing, such as a pro-European presidency and the scheduled adoption of a long-term policy program, work in their favour. By and large, however, member states are careful to maintain their national sovereignty, which results in endemic gaps between 'comprehensive' EU strategies or action plans and national implementation (or gaps between informal cooperation among a few interested member states and collective EU policy).

However, the remainder of this paper seeks to develop another perspective. The previous section showed that both EU member states and EU institutions sponsored research and experimented with different cooperation formats to minimise such political conflicts over the limits of EU integration. Was this only a second best strategy, or could the EU's efforts for knowledge generation and best practice exchange eventually generate substantial results? The most recent proposal to create network of local and regional authorities provides a useful focus to address this question. In the following, three related critical issues are briefly reviewed: First, the inherent complexity and uncertainty of the issue of terrorism prevention; second, the political context of evaluating counter-terrorism measures; and third, the challenges of implementing new knowledge in 'frontline' organisations.

3.1. The problem of authoritative or credible knowledge about preventive policies

The case of the Commission-sponsored 'expert group on radicalisation' illustrates that epistemic communities and scientific knowledge are subject to strong political constraints in contentious

[14] http://www.efus.eu/

policy areas (Boswell 2008, Monaghan 2010).[15] The group's findings could largely be ignored, as it did not achieve external visibility and sufficient independence from its sponsor (the European Commission). Moreover, the group could not claim to present an authoritative consensus. In a recent review of the academic literature, Daalgard-Nielsen (2010) argues that radicalisation research remains divided into three different schools, which accentuate social and political modernisation, internal group dynamics or individual dislocating experiences. Furthermore, there is a continuing debate on whether terrorism should be regarded as individually or socially rational activities not (van Um 2009, Wilner and Dubouloz 2011). This is not to say that research is not progressing. The growing body of economic research on terrorism has provided support for the usefulness of counter-terrorism approaches that work with both positive and negative incentive (Frey and Luechinger 2003, Brzoska et al. 2011) – i.e. early prevention by means of positive incentives, such as labour market opportunities, should work alongside 'traditional' deterrent approaches. One can also point to increasingly integrated models that attempt to specify which set of structural conditions rationality assumptions and group processes are most relevant in relation to different terrorist organisations or individual perpetrators (McCauley and Moslakeno 2008, Ganor 2011, King and Taylor 2011).[16] At the time of writing, however, this research either remains at an overly high level of abstraction or are simply too recent to provide authoritative guidance on concrete policies for terrorism prevention.

This state of affairs paradoxically increases the appeal of the proposed network for radicalisation awareness. Instead of disseminating authoritative research findings among to the member states, the network should stimulate more open-ended and horizontal exchanges. A "community of practice" of counterterrorism officials, but also other security as well as social service providers, could diffuse more embedded, and less formalised forms of knowledge (Freeman 2007). In particular, a practice-centred approach could generate common professional norms (e.g. what is appropriate behaviour when dealing with 'radical' groups). However, due to its very informality and openness, a community of practice cannot reliably address the question which policy intervention or program deserve to be labelled as 'good' or 'best' practice.

In the case of preventive counter-terrorism policy these problems are especially acute. The successful execution of an attack does not necessarily say much about the failure of a particular preventive policy, as it may still decrease the overall number of attack or may only work in concert with a wide set of contextual factors (van Dongen 2009). And if no attacks take place, it is even more difficult to establish causal effects. Such counter-factual arguments remain inherently contentious, as the absence of, or decrease in, terrorist attacks could be attributed to a multitude of factors other than deliberate political intervention (Cronin 2009). This explains why studies that focus on the effectiveness of counter-terrorism policies are limited in number and have yet to generate a coherent framework for evaluation (Pisoiu and van Um 2011).[17]

Last but not least, one needs to consider organisational constraints. The EU's own evaluation of the European Crime Prevention Network determined that the network lacked administrative support structures to collect and disseminate good practices (Council 2009c). Eckblom and Bullock (2010)

[15] For a contrasting argument that defends the epistemic community approach in European security policy, see Cross (2011).

[16] For instance, attacks by "lone-wolf" are more likely to be related to specific "dislocating" experiences, whereas terrorist campaigns are more determined by endogenous group dynamics.

[17] This is not to say that scientific progress in evaluating preventive security policies is impossible. In the area of crime prevention scholars have used complex statistical methods and quasi-experiments to isolate the impact of particular interventions on crime rates and patterns (Guerette and Bowers 2009). Even though the situation cannot be directly compared to terrorism, where the scope for quasi-experiments is strongly limited, terrorism experts should further delve into extensive criminological literature (La Free 2008).

argue that problems run deeper. While the network actually produced a database of preventive crime programmes in various European member states, this information has rarely been used systematically improve existing policies. The EU needs to develop a more coherent system for quality control, reporting and benchmarking, so as to move from anecdotal evidence about ‘what works’ in a particular setting to more extensive preventive policy programmes in different locations. This analytical work is time-consuming and requires more than financial investments in administrative support and knowledge management infrastructures (websites).

3.2. Political pressures on counter-terrorism policy

The coming network on radicalisation awareness may start out with considerable resources that could facilitate data collection and storage. However, it remains unclear how to assess counterterrorism projects across European countries and across different level of government. At the time of writing, significant and effective evaluations in counter-terrorism remain dependent on national policy-making structures. So far the UK has been the only EU member state that subjected its preventive counter-terrorism measures to an authoritative review (Lord Carlile of Berriew 2011). This review made no references to the European level, and rather problematised domestic relations between security actors and various social or ethnic groups. It also should be noted that the review could sidestep many of the contentious scientific or empirical questions outlined above by drawing on the political and legal authority of the House of Lords. As a result, some controversial aspects in UK counterterrorism policy, such as financial support for former radicals and linkages between social integration policies and counter-terrorism, were cut back.

This example contrasts with the proposed EU network on radicalisation awareness. As set out in countless studies on multi-level governance, horizontal networks can serve as a channel to bypass or influence national governments in processes of EU integration. Yet even if EU cooperation on internal security has long passed the stage of 'high' or intergovernmental politics, there are limits to such a more horizontal and depoliticised approach. The sensitivity of preventive counter-terrorism programs requires authoritative and accountable political decisions that cannot be taken by lower level authorities or operational security actors in isolation. This is most readily evident with regard to the question whether public authorities should engage with non-violent radicals to prevent terrorism, which divides security experts both within and across European member states (Vidino 2009).

3.3. Knowledge use in implementing organisations

This leads to a final political challenge that arises from the gap between international knowledge diffusion and operational practice of street-level institutions. For instance, the ideal of ‘evidence based policing’ contrasts with entrenched organisational routines, prejudices and political interests of police authorities (Lum et al. 2011). This equally applies to other institutions with extensive operational responsibility and experience, such as educational establishments or social service providers. Such implementation obstacles are a critical argument for supporting horizontal and low-level networks, which provide room for bottom-up experience and should increase voluntary participation (Freeman 2007). Nevertheless, significant organisational learning and reform require more than open experience exchange, namely political leadership and resources for knowledge codification, dissemination and training (Benner and Rotmann 2008, Contandriopoulos 2010).

The European Commission pledge to support the proposed radicalisation awareness network with € 5 million per year should be sufficient for a permanent secretariat and basic structures for information management (websites, databases, conference reports). Yet it is clearly insufficient to ensure a timely and wide-spread dissemination of 'best practices' to actors that do not take an active interest already.[18] So unless the EU Commission changes funding priorities from research on radicalisation to training, and/or significantly boosts overall investment levels,[19] the proposed network is therefore more likely to deepen pioneering subgroups, such as the Policy Planners' Network on Radicalisation, whereas most member states and local authorities in Europe will remain indifferent. This outcome could be viewed as economically efficient, in so far as terrorist threat levels remain highly divergent and as 'best practices' – or 'best shot solutions' – require a concentration of resources and expertise. However, it can also be viewed as a suboptimal outcome as policy improvements are less likely to be adopted by non-leading actors, and as terrorist organisations could tactically relocate to areas where they face little countervailing pressures from preventive policies. Recent research on the growth of transnational municipal networks in other areas of European integration (Kern and Bulkeley 2009), which highlights the trade-off between network inclusiveness and scope of network outputs, could be used to test this prediction in a more systematic manner.

3. Conclusions.

This contribution analysed the evolution and 'added value' of the EU's preventive counter-terrorism policy, which has become linked to the wider development of the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice. The repeated shock of terrorist attacks by EU nationals, and the advocacy of rotating EU presidencies and the European Commission, led to a dynamic expansion of the EU's counterterrorism agenda. However, the EU's strategy to combat radicalisation and recruitment into terrorism also underlined the limits to further integration. As a result, policy-makers experimented with flexible integration, while the Commission emphasised research support and knowledge exchange. As this generated limited results that accentuated repression over early prevention, the Stockholm programme emphasised lower levels of government and support for the horizontal exchange of experiences.

The second part of this paper explored the prospects of the proposed network for radicalisation awareness. Three main obstacles were discussed. First, the scientific and methodological challenges to define 'good' or 'best' preventive counter-terrorism practices; second, political pressures that either work against more evidence-based counter-terrorism policy or that favour authoritative political decisions at the national level; and third, the resource requirements for transmitting new knowledge and practice to inert or resistant street-level organisations. Therefore, the proposed network of local and professional actors could make a step forward, but should not be expected to provide a breakthrough for EU cooperation counter-terrorism prevention. A few interested actors are likely to utilise the additional opportunities and resources of the network, while extensive and

[18] In a different context the European Commission supported a UK institute that focuses on the relation between counter-terrorism prevention and training of local staff (www.recora.eu/). This exception illustrates what kind of investments might be needed across European member states.

[19] The current planning for the entire programme for "terrorism prevention consequence management and other related security risks has grown from € 15 to € 20 m between 2008 and 2010 (http://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/funding/cips/funding_cips_en.htm). However, this considerable increase remains split in a wide range of activities and is very limited for decentralised activities in twenty-seven member states.

meaningful awareness raising across lower levels of government in Europe should not be expected. Further studies could draw on research on European transnational networks in other issue area to specify and systematically test such hypotheses, which could also be compared to the case of the European crime prevention network.

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