

# RAN P&P

## Ex post paper

14<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> December, Riga (LV)



### Introduction

The 2016 plenary meeting of the RAN Prison and Probation Working Group took place in Riga (LV). The meeting of one day and a half was organised in close cooperation with the Latvian Prison and Probation systems under the Ministry of Justice.

The aim of the meeting was to:

- a) Bring together practitioners working in prison and probation systems in larger number than regular meetings to increase the opportunities for interactive exchanges;
- b) Reflect on lessons learned from previous meetings held throughout 2016;
- c) Identify possible future challenges and trends;
- d) Collect practitioners' feedback on the revised version of the P&P Practitioners Working Paper, which will be published by the end of January 2017.

This ex-post paper reflects the discussions which took place during the plenary meeting and especially during the smaller group discussions which were organised to foster interaction between participants. Feedback on the Working Paper will feed into a renewed version of the paper which will be made available by the end of January 2017.

### Connecting to research: the 'Devoted Actor Perspective'

The key-note speech of this meeting was given by Dr Angel Gomez (Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia, UNED, Madrid and member of ARTIS research). It gave the possibility for practitioners to connect with research on the topic. He presented primary findings of his research on the so-called 'devoted actor perspective and the spiritual dimension of human conflicts', particularly useful when adapted to the context of foreign terrorist fighters and the potential role of prison and probation in dealing with these offenders.

The first assumption of this model is that psychological processes driving radicalisation are very similar among radicalised persons, whatever the ideology. In this process, identity plays a key role, both personal identity as well as group identity. Some persons can experience a process called 'identity fusion', which leads to visceral feeling of oneness between the personal identity and the group identity. People strongly fused with a group behave differently from people weakly fused.

The level of identity fusion can predict:

- Willingness to fight and die for the group;
- Self-sacrifice in intergroup and intragroup versions of the classic trolley dilemma;
- Refusing to leave the group even when they are rejected and excluded;
- Readiness to deny group wrongdoings;

- In-group donations;
- Speediness on tasks relevant for the group.

Consequently, identity fusion helps predict extreme behaviours, in the way it enables the following explanations for extreme behaviour:

- 1) Mediators (why identity fusion is related to the effects of the visceral commitment with the group):
  - a. Perception of feeling of agency (strongly fused individuals perceive they can bring a change in the group);
  - b. Perception of invulnerability;
  - c. Family ties most important (perception of members of the group as the family).
- 2) Moderators (factors that amplify or reduce the effects of identity fusion):
  - a. activating personal/social identity;
  - b. increasing arousal (adrenaline from extreme acting);
  - c. priming shared characteristics (members of the group have the same feelings).
- 3) Sacred Values: an alternative to a visceral connection to a group is an extraordinary commitment with a value what then has transcendental significance; impeding comparisons or trade-offs; infinite commitment.
- 4) Predictions: more willing to make costly sacrifices to protect their values and less flexible to social influence.

In particular, according to an experiment undertaken by the research team with sympathizers of an affiliated group of Al-Qaeda, neural mechanisms underlying willingness to fight and die (WFD) for sacred values (SVs) are different from those which activate when the same extremist persons are asked to carry out a task unrelated to SVs. Indeed, in the first case, researchers have found an under-activation of brain areas typically associated with reasoning and cognitive control.

Consequently, the Devoted Actor Hypothesis states that 'devoted actors' experience both identity fusion and sharing a sacred value that motivated them to WFD for the group and the sacred values themselves. Another experiment on the frontline battle, has found that indeed fighters on the field have typically both (identity fusion and SVs), while extremist persons online often need to choose between group and values. In this context, those who prefer values are typically the most extremist. Combined with an experiment on physical and spiritual formidability (both populations were asked to choose between the two types of formidability, which combined the perceived size and strength of a group), researchers have found out that spiritual formidability predicts higher willingness to costly sacrifices for both populations (on the frontline and online) compared to physical formidability. For example, American troops were perceived by fighters in the field as physically stronger but spiritually weaker, for the groups in question (especially Peshmerga) it was the other way around.

How is this helpful in view of a de-radicalisation intervention in prison and probation? Researchers have asked different extremist groups what would be the reason for their de-fusion or reduced fusion. Results indicate that different groups give different priorities to reasons for de-fusion and de-sacralisation of SVs. Therefore, it is important to fully understand each person's priorities before starting any attempt of de-fusion.

In conclusion, at least four recommendations for prison and probation practitioners could be identified:

- 1) It is very important to correctly identify the roots of radicalisation, i.e. the level of identity fusion with the group; and if individuals share some sacred value;
- 2) The role of family (genetic and non-genetic) and close friends is paramount in the identity fusion: in the same way, it could be essential also in the reversed process of de-fusion;
- 3) The possibility to modify extreme behaviours as opposed to de-radicalise (which is not possible) should be the guiding principle for interventions in prison and probation settings;
- 4) The link between research and prison and probation practitioners should be a constant as research can help and contribute for a more successful work in these environments.

## Main outcomes of break-out sessions

### Multi-agency approach

An optimal multi-agency structure relies on several elements. First and foremost, the possibility of sharing information. Participants agreed that a legal framework to facilitate proportional and timely information sharing is needed, but often missing in several MS. In the absence of a proper legal framework, a few MS have organised themselves in other structures: centralising shared information has the advantage of ensuring quality, while de-centralising the gathering of information ensures a timely exchange. Ideally, both ways should be ensured and consent should be the preferred option in the exchange.

This requires the existence of a second fundamental element for multi-agency approach: trust. Trust is needed to ensure management and operational work, work with communities workers and ensure consent in exchange of information. A few suggestions on this point have been put forward, such as employ prison and probation liaison officers within central police authorities and raise awareness of the distinction between sharing and using information. The third necessary element of an optimal multi-agency structure is the involvement of the community and in particular of those working on the ground in relevant areas.

### Prison context risk assessment

A few elements need to be taken into account when risk assessment is concerned. In particular, participants agreed on level of resources available, size of population, capabilities of staff, individual circumstances and context. Protective factors should also be included.

An ongoing debate in the field is around the need of standardisation of risk assessment indicators. It is certain that standardisation is practical and useful especially with increasing numbers of VEOs, standardisation helps speed up processes and screenings; however, there is no clear consensus on whether it is actually a viable option. In particular, standardisation opens up a cascade of follow-up questions: should it be general for a first superficial screening or also tailored for a specific group? Should all staff be trained on risk assessment or only staff with several years of experience? Standardisation facilitates automatism in staff, which ultimately lead them to apply the indicators passively without active thinking: is this a real risk?

### Prison context regimes

Risk assessment should be leading the placement of inmates to specific units/regimes. In general, practitioners have identified good practices such as:

- The separation of leaders and followers;
- The inclusion of an assessment unit;
- Normalisation as driving principle;
- Possibility to appeal to a judge
- The provision of exit criteria.

Another good practice which emerged is the transfer of inmates with concerning behaviours in smaller units, but with the same regime – in order to allow better monitoring without increasing security constraints on the inmate.

### Probation context – differences with other offenders

Risk and needs assessments are key to design effective reintegration programmes in probation, too. Practitioners also confirmed the need to start cooperation on assessment since the very final stage of the prisons sentence: in particular, probation officers should be given guidance on how to shape the reintegration process once risk and needs assessments are done. Especially when release conditions are strict, probation officers need to be prepared to optimally work in these conditions. An interesting point is in the effect that managing VEOs in probation has on probation officer as well, because of political scrutiny and societal sensitivities around the cases.

Probation officers should be individually matched with extremist offenders: for example, having a similar cultural or religious background might help building trust and better empower officers. Ideally, the matching process should be a tailored one. Finally, specialised probation officers should be trained to assess the ideological element in the extremist offenders (whether it is a driving factor or only a superficial way of legitimisation).

### Prison context training

Trainings should always involve agreements with universities and academics and should be developed on two levels: a basic training for all staff and a more advanced training for specialised staff directly working with extremist inmates, specialists like educators, psychologist and chaplain,s and those in charge of risk management and top managers. Good practices to be kept in mind in terms of trainings are:

- A practical module within the training schedule for those managing directly VEOs;
- Periodic updates;
- E-learning platforms and online modules;
- Modules on specificities of different religions, ideologies and doctrines;

Finally, a centralised national unit should be in charge of updating the training course in all prisons of the country, connect with other similar units in other MS and provide support for the management of prisons.

### Prison context interventions

Participants identified as ideal intervention, an already-existing programme with specific adds-on for specialised interventions. These should be in the format of one-to-one 'counselling' rather than 'teaching'. A sound management transition for the post-prison phase is also key: indeed, continuity is paramount for the success of the intervention, as leaving the prison does not often correspond to the end of the intervention programme.

Elements that distinguish specialised interventions for this group of offenders are the format (1:1) and the content, e.g. geopolitical situation, history, Islamic theology, civil education. Individual counselling formats are important because when in groups, participants tend to be less honest regarding their situation and views; on the other side, individual interventions are harder to finance.

### Probation context interventions

A good balance between security and reintegration programmes should be the leading principle of interventions in probation. When offenders are in probation because of a community-based sentence, they are normally dealt with in the same way as other offenders. However, probation officers working with them should always have a certain attention to early warning signs. In this sense, one of the recommendations made to RAN is the development of an inventory of early warning signs that probation officers can apply in their daily work. In addition, possible structures for the follow-up of such concerns could be also suggested.

However, when offenders are released and they enter probation as a consequence of the end of the prison sentence, the approach suggested is threefold: identity work, creation of a positive community network and rehabilitation. In addition, two contingencies must be fulfilled to succeed in this 'normalisation' process: a sound transition management and a structured information sharing. Common trainings and multi-disciplinary teams are two practical options to put these recommendations into practice.

### Future challenges and issues to be addressed

Several future challenges for prison and probation practitioners have been identified. Among others, the need to develop more evidence-based approaches. Also the difficulties in decision making with limited resources; is it better to invest in the general prison environment or specialised interventions? Growing societal and political pressures makes reintegration of this group more difficult, especially should more incidents happen also vis-à-vis prison and probation officers.

However, reintegration work should also build on the existing opportunities, such as:

- Invest in day-to-day interactions and dynamic security;
- Work towards prisons resembling life outside prison to maximise chances of rehabilitation;
- Balances between security and progressive interventions;
- Communication support for management on how to deal with (social) media and press;
- Exploit internal intelligence services for more informed decisions on interventions and placements;
- Specialised tools for this group to empower practitioners.

## Annex 1: Prison and probation focus radicalisation Latvian context

A common habit of RAN P&P meetings is to give the floor to the local participants to present the situation in their country in relation to radicalisation in prison and probation. Local participants included a representative of the Latvian probation system and a Lieutenant from the prison system.

Latvia has limited experience with radicalisation: among others, three main cases of radicalisation were presented at the meeting, among whom one is in prison. Despite the low number of cases, Latvia is active in the field of prevention of radicalisation in prison and probation in view of a possible change of the threat level in the future. Indeed, also the fact that the country borders with Russia has an impact on the overall picture of radicalisation, given the frozen conflict in Ukraine: a few persons are believed to have left to support fighting in Crimea. A case of religiously inspired radicalisation is the previous leader of the Latvian Islamic Cultural Centre which is believed to have left to Syria or Iraq and incited fellows to joint terrorist organisations. Another case is represented by a young boy who radicalised online, left Latvia for Syria and was arrested two years later in Turkey. He is now in prison. Geopolitical situation fosters as in other MS polarisation of societies thus increasing the negative attitude towards refugees: in the public opinion radicalisation is mostly still linked to Islam. There is also a commitment from Latvian authorities to try and change this wrong perception.

Terrorism and terrorism-related activities are criminalised in the Latvian Criminal Code with sanctions that can include fine, community service, probation supervision and life imprisonment and/or deprivation of liberty (up to 10 years). In particular:

- Paragraph Nr.78 Triggering of National, Ethnical and Racial Hate
- Paragraph Nr. 88 Terrorism
- Paragraph Nr.150 Incitement of Religious Hate.

The actor mainly involved in the fight and prevention of radicalisation is the Security Police (SP), who is responsible for pre-emptive identification of terrorism threats. The State Probation Service (SPS) is also active alongside the Security Police. The SP implements preventive measures and coordinates the activities of governmental and municipal institutions in the field of counterterrorism. Examples of preventive measures are: the screening of the immigrants coming from 'at risk' countries; regular inspections of critical infrastructure; preparation of recommendations to improve the physical security of these critical infrastructures as well as the briefings of their employees.

Under the umbrella of the Ministry of Justice, Prison Administration (PA) and SPS started a fruitful collaboration, in order to gather information in compliance with the law. The PA and SPS collaborate with SP and transfer data on radicalised or vulnerable to radicalisation inmates to them.

The SPS was founded in 2003 under the Ministry of Justice. It implements at least 70% of criminal penalties, has 28 offices and more than 17,000 clients. In 2015, the number of staff was 376.

Among others, SPS tasks include:

- To provide assessment reports;
- To develop probation programs and to ensure the delivery of licensed probation programs;

- To organize the implementation of criminal penalty – community service;
- To organize the implementation of educational measures for juveniles - community service;
- To carry out victim – offender mediation in criminal proceedings;
- To supervise persons who have been conditionally released from criminal liability;
- To supervise persons upon whom a suspended sentence has been imposed and who have been conditionally released from prison before the term (From 1<sup>st</sup> July, 2015 SPS supervise persons who have been conditionally released from prison before the term with electronic monitoring);
- To ensure implementation of additional punishment – probation supervision.

Up to today no one of those in probation are convicted for terrorism-related offences: three persons are convicted for hate speech. The State Probation Service collects information about its clients and has prepared a list of signs, which can point out that a person could be radicalised. At the moment they have identified for approximately 10 persons.

The SPS is active in the field of prevention of radicalisation: since 2011, it actively participate to regular events on prevention of radicalisation and has organised between 2015 and 2016 the first multi-agency conferences on the importance of raising awareness among institutions on radicalisation. In 2016 collaboration with RAN in Latvia was held train the trainer trainings for SP, PA, State police and State Boarder guard trainers (together for 18 persons). Among activities planned in the field for the coming year, Latvia has started training its prison and probation staff and aims at creating a multi-agency network.

The Prison System (PS) counts 10 prisons, one correctional facility for juvenile and one hospital prison. Among those, one is dedicated to only women. Some numbers of the PS:

- 4,409 inmates – 1,389 arrested (under investigation), 3,020 sentenced
- 42 juveniles – 22 arrested (under investigation), 20 sentenced
- 355 women – 92 arrested (under investigation), 263 sentenced.

Latvian prisons are of several types: open regime, semi-closed prisons, close regime and an investigation prison. New challenges for the Latvian prison system in the coming years will be the deployment of a dynamic security approach and the development of a database which can be used by several authorities (prison administration, security police and state probation service).