



FRANCE'S CHALLENGES FOR WORKING OUT A COHERENT STRATEGY AGAINST VIOLENT RADICALIZATION AND TERRORISM. A BROAD (AND INCOMPLETE) OUTLINE.

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 Von gast

 Kommentieren

by Milena Uhlmann

Terrorism isn't new to the country; in its history, France has experienced a significant number of attacks. In 1995, the GIA-affiliated terrorist network of which Khaled Kelkal was part conducted several attacks, as did the Al Qaida-affiliated gang de Roubaix one year later; but until Mohammed

Merah's murders in 2012 in Toulouse and Montauban, terrorist attacks were treated as political violence in the context of anti-colonial struggles or connected to other kinds of violent conflicts abroad, such as the Bosnian War, rather than as religiously inspired or connected to social, societal and/or political issues within the country, or as some sort of atypical pathology. Terrorist perpetrators, their networks and milieus were met with repressive instruments – a wider angle of analysis which would have allowed to tackle the threat from a more holistic perspective had not been incorporated in a counter-terrorism policy design.



FIRST STEPS - THE "ACTION PLAN AGAINST TERRORIST NETWORKS AND VIOLENT RADICALIZATION" (2014) AND THE FIRST STRUCTURED EFFORT TO PROVIDE STATE ASSISTANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF RADICALIZATION.

With some vague kind of sense of urgency developing after an increasing number of young French men and some women started to leave for Syria to join jihadist groups there in 2012/13, the French government put together the "Plan de lutte contre les filières terroristes et la radicalisation violente" (Action Plan against Terrorist Networks and Violent Radicalization), comprised of 22 measures. This plan dating from April 2014 put priorities on impeding travel to Syria, preventing online jihadist propaganda, the hesitant start of diffusion of so called „counter narratives“, strengthening

judicial instruments against jihadist networks and implementing prevention and reintegration strategies.



In April the same year, the government created a national hotline (“numéro vert”) as part of a new structure called „Centre national d'assistance et de prévention de la radicalisation“ (National Assistance and Radicalization Prevention Center, CNAPR). Persons believed to be wanting to leave the region, or to have radicalized / be on the path to radicalization, can since be reported to the CNAPR. The calls are taken by police officers from the “Unité de coordination de la lutte antiterroriste” (Coordination Unit for the Fight Against Terrorism, UCLAT), who are assisted by a psychologist. It receives on average between 60 and 80 calls every day. From the end of April 2014 until end of September 2016, 12.265 alerts had been processed either by the CNAPR or the Security Staff in the prefectures (4.015 of them had been signaled until March 2015, 8.250 until January 2016). In total, 15.000 persons have been signaled through UCLAT, the prefectures or different intelligence services; 80 percent of them are adults, 70 percent of those are males, whilst females make up for the biggest part of the minors. 36 percent are converts. Seven percent of those signaled left to the SYRAQ region, and 20 per cent of them died there. Of the total number of persons, UCLAT is monitoring about 2.000 which are deemed potentially dangerous.

The information gathered and analyzed is forwarded to the prefecture responsible for the region the signaled person lives in as well as to the internal intelligence service (Direction Générale de la Sécurité Intérieure, DGSI). The prefect then notifies the relevant public prosecutor. If the reported case concerns a minor, the prosecutor can then strive for the implementation of educational assistance measures with regard to the family concerned. With the prosecutor's consent, the prefect also notifies the mayor of the municipality the person concerned lives in. In conjunction with the prosecutor, the prefect orders stings the relevant local follow-up unit into action, which each département (county) was ordered to create in February 2015. Critics argue that this system relies too heavily on state and security services, which is partially keeping people from calling the hotline and working together with the units.

These units consist of state institutions (such as the police, the justice sector and the employment agency), regional and local authorities (such as social services) and local associative networks. Through these different actors, the units are meant to aim at providing tailored measures to assist the families of the individual in question as well as the individual him/herself. A social worker is supposed to be assigned to each case to keep track of the process. Whilst the prefect initiates this action, the role of the mayor is to assure comprehensive and coherent action taking into account the individual situation of the individual in question. Local and

intercommunal councils on security and crime prevention (Conseils locaux et intercommunaux de sécurité et de prévention de la délinquance, CLISPD) should be implicated as well. Via the CLISPD, the prefect can entrust a deputy prefect with the mission to take up preventive measures and to create follow-up units in the counties.

Apart from the fact that CLISPD are only created for municipalities with a population of more than 10.000 inhabitants and consequently this instrument cannot be used in certain rural areas, other structural problems persist: the division of tasks is not always clear, and the phenomenon of radicalization is complex. **There is thus some confusion about who can or should do what**, and those who find themselves confronted with the phenomenon all too often lack specific knowledge and expertise, **as has amongst others been pointed out to by the Association of the Mayors of France** (Association des maires de France, AMF).

Furthermore, it is proving difficult to find trained specialists who are capable of working with radicalized persons, and some families are not willing to cooperate with the follow-up unit designed for changing the path of one of their kin. This is stated by the Inter-ministerial Guide for Prevention of Radicalization dating from March 2016, provided by the Inter-ministerial Committee for Prevention of Crime and Radicalization (Comité interministériel de prévention de la délinquance et la radicalisation, CIPDR), **the institution in charge of the non-repressive pillar of the French prevention**

efforts which is also responsible for the monitoring and quality assurance of the work of the follow-up units. In its report to the parliament for the year 2015, the CIPDR is stating that the follow-up units are not being handled coherently, with confusion over the the roles of the different partners, affecting the efficiency of the work of the units.

This is aggravated by the large and steadily growing number of those being followed-up upon with the goal of disengaging them from violence, posing a problem to proper monitoring in general: by 13th October 2016, 2.240 persons had been directed into programs monitored by local units, as well as 972 families (1.600 persons / 800 families in May 2016). Furthermore, a large number of the individuals concerned are at the same time being followed-up upon by the police, implying a heightened level of radicalization of these individuals.

THE FIRST NON-STATE PARTNER OF THE GOVERNMENT IN THE FIGHT AGAINST RADICALIZATION - THE “CENTER FOR THE PREVENTION OF SECTARIAN ABERRATIONS LINKED TO ISLAM” (CPDSI)

The first actor that had been commissioned with the work of disengagement simultaneously to the creation of the national hotline in April 2014 was the Center for the Prevention of Sectarian Aberrations Linked to Islam (Centre de prévention

des dérives sectaires liées à l'Islam, CPDSI). In the meantime, it has been renamed into "Centre de Prévention, de Déradicalisation et de Suivi Individuel" after the CPDSI took the decision to discontinue its direct cooperation with the government starting from September 2016. The decision came after the latter's attempt to introduce a law that would make it possible to strip French citizens who travel to Syria or have been convicted of terror-related crimes of their French citizenship. The law didn't pass, but the CPDSI ended the collaboration nonetheless. Under the CIPDR's oversight and with a mandate issued by the Ministry of the Interior, it had served as a "mobile intervention team" for the prefectures **which could make use of the CPDSI's services when their follow-up units were in need of its specific expertise.**

The CPDSI was also responsible for training the police officers who are answering the calls to the numéro vert as well as state employees in all kinds of different institutions, such as youth protection and penitentiary services, in order to be able to identify possible signs of radicalization (a compilation of such signs as identified by the French government can be found **here**). The training was based on studies conducted by the head of the CPDSI on the attraction of jihadism on young French citizens. In the absence of structured programs prior to the hotline's creation, her publications led counsel-seeking parents to turn to her in their despair. In September, she went back to providing

advice through her private firm, and in January 2017 will open an “[online deradicalization school](#)”.



In the meantime, the CPDSI has repeatedly come under pressure – last in October when it teamed up with the former mentor of the Kouachi brothers, the perpetrators of the January 2015 Charlie Hebdo attacks in Paris, who said he no longer believes in the violent ideology of jihadism. With his help, the CIPDSI aims at working on more ‘hardened’ cases, [with which its approach had come to its limits](#). For some time now, [the organization has been criticized](#) for insufficient transparency and lacking evaluation of the results of its work, not least because it received 900.000 Euro funds from the government.

As part of the work the CPDSI conducted for the government, it had also produced a “shock video” for the latter's “stop-djihadisme” counter-messaging campaign, which launched three weeks after the terrorist attacks in Paris in January 2015 on stop-djihadisme.gouv.fr. The campaign initially consisted of extractions of jihadist propaganda videos. To several of the narratives presented by the so-called Islamic State (IS), a counter-narrative was presented to juxtapose the IS’ narrative to the brutal reality (e.g. “your ‘brothers’ at IS say you will live together in solidarity – instead you will die alone”). The shock campaign was largely designed to create public awareness for the national hotline, but was also meant as an attempt to disengage radicalized individuals from violence – well intended, but according to

experts very much limited in impact, as such persons are unlikely to care about what the government has to say regarding the IS' 'conduct'. Recently, the material provided through the campaign's Twitter account (@stopdihadisme) has been diversified, but the general problem of reaching the group initially targeted – those radicalized or radicalizing – persists.

The government's new campaign “**always a choice**” which launched in November takes a more personal approach. Using a first-person, interactive video format in which the viewer is put in the 'skin' of either a teenage middle class girl or a teenage boy from the suburbs, it aims at emotionally and cognitively engaging the young target group to show that “it sometimes takes little to give live a dramatic turn”. The video is divided in sequences after each of which the viewer has to make a decision – either to succumb to curiosity regarding the narratives presented by a skillfully acting recruiter respectively falling for their interpretations of world politics, society and Islam, or to come to a realization of what is going on or confide to family or friends and walk away. The stories thus unfold in different ways – either into or out of extremism. Whenever a story finds its end, the bottom line is presented: “Radicalization destroys one's family, one's life, and those of others. It's never too late. You always have a choice.”

FIRST DIFFERENTIATIONS OF THE GOVERNMENT'S APPROACH AFTER A

YEAR OF VIOLENCE - THE "ACTION PLAN AGAINST RADICALISATION AND TERRORISM" (2016) AND THE STRENGTHENED ROLE OF THE "INTER-MINISTERIAL COMMITTEE FOR PREVENTION OF CRIME AND RADICALIZATION" (CIPDR)



In May 2016, the French prime minister introduced the successor to the 2014 Action Plan, the "Action Plan against Radicalisation and Terrorism" (Plan d'action contre la radicalisation et le terrorisme, PART). PART is detailing 80 measures – 30 of them already existent at that time and 50 of them new – in an effort to design a "global strategy" against radicalization and terrorism. The measures are grouped around seven axes: 1. detection of radicalization and terrorist networks; 2. monitoring and neutralizing such networks; 3. fighting terrorist networks internationally; 4. increasing the span of prevention efforts; 5. furthering research on „counter discourse“ and implicate Muslims and Islamic institutions in counter radicalization efforts; 6. enhancing protection of vulnerable infrastructure; 7. enabling apt reaction to terrorist attacks and fostering resilience.

The plan includes an increase of funds issued through the Inter-ministerial Fund for the Prevention of Crime (Fonds Interministériel de Prévention de la Délinquance, FIPD) which provides 100 million Euro in total for measures to prevent crime and radicalization for the time frame 2015 until 2017. FIDE is governed by the CPIDR, which's role has also been

strengthened by PART, as is reflected by the extension of its name (previously CIPD, not explicitly pointing towards radicalization).



Amongst other things, the CIPDR has been tasked with creating a national coordination and assistance unit for prefects, counties, communities and associations from civil society, also to address the aforementioned shortcomings pointed out to by the Association of the Mayors of France (AMF). Implementing one of the measures PART had laid out, **the CIPDR hosted a day-long conference in October** to bring together municipal representatives selected by the AMF to “disseminate” best practices and “mobilize” these actors via presentations and round table discussions; an event that introduced facts and figures on the phenomenon of radicalization in France as well as some of the main instruments the French government has put in place so far, but left little room for their in-depth discussion.

Just a few days prior to this conference, a hearing with the new general secretary of the CIPDR who heads the committee since August 2016 in front of members of the Senate – the second chamber of the French parliament which represents the counties – revealed profound, persistent discontent with the situation: local actors are the ones who have to deal with the phenomenon on a daily basis, but they feel overburdened and not properly supported. Given that the fight against radicalization has been defined as a priority, they feel under a lot of pressure to act, but lack the

knowledge on what exactly to do, and the means and instruments to do it. Meetings between different concerned local state actors are taking place, but they are not efficient because the expertise needed to deal properly with the problem at hand is lacking. The CIPDR has so far offered two-day training respectively sensibilisation sessions to 16.000 employees of different state institutions as well as of different associations; which, given the short time and the complexity of the issue, have to remain rather superficial. Furthermore, as the senators emphasize, three problems persist: Firstly, the phenomenon of radicalization has become such a rampant problem that this does not suffice. Secondly, working with radicalized persons requires in-depth, special knowledge, which cannot be “improvised“. Thirdly, the problem goes much deeper than what can be dealt with by creating and sustaining follow-up units for radicalized persons and their families: the segregation of parts of the population. The senators express a difficulty to narrow down the problem in order to be able to define measures to be taken. This is aggravated by the fact that unlike for example in Germany, where different platforms for exchange between state agencies, such as the Joint Counter-Terrorism Centre (Gemeinsames Terrorismusabwehrzentrum, GTAZ) with its “**Working Group on deradicalisation**”, between state agencies and NGOs, such as the Advice Centre on Radicalisation (Beratungsstelle Radikalisierung) at the **Federal Office for Migration and Refugees**, and among NGOs, such as a newly founded **Federal Consortium comprising 25 associations active in countering Islamist and jihadist extremism**, do not

exist in France. Structured exchange including all the different stakeholders is not taking place in the country.



In-depth exchange is also lacking on the international level. French representatives are very much underrepresented in international scientific as well as practitioners' and public servants' expert networks tackling radicalization and the terrorist threat. This is depriving France of persistent international expert exchange regarding best practices and lessons learnt in other countries and of the chance to adapt promising approaches to the French context as well as to learn from other countries' mistakes – a first structured effort of which had been undertaken in **a study dating from early 2015 which looked at prevention and deradicalization initiatives in Germany, Great Britain and Denmark**. Though commissioned by the CIPDR, the committee had not distributed it among state institutions after its release, despite great interest among these parties. Likewise, plans for a two-day intensive international colloquium with expert scholars and practitioners from around the world that had been designed for the purpose of tailoring promising approaches to France's needs and specificities and to take initiative to foster France's international network had, under the former secretary general, not been put into action, reportedly due to a lack of resources. **A much smaller event was held much later in 2016.**

With the heightened emphasis of the role of the CIPDR in prevention in the PART, promising also more posts within the

committee, this idea as well as other projects could now be taken up. Indeed, the CIPDR's strengthened role is phrased as a "new stage" in the fight against terrorism and radicalization by the prime minister (PART). The committee as such and the new general secretary of the CIPDR in particular seem to be aiming to tackle radicalization more rigorously compared to before.

Recent statements lead one to assume that a more important role is also going to be given to civil society actors. By the end of 2015, almost 80 associations had been included in prevention and disengagement efforts within the prefectural follow-up units. Some more have been partnered up with within the contexts of prison and probation. At the same time, experts have warned of the emergence of a "prevention and deradicalization industry" of self-proclaimed 'experts' in the country, a problem a government-internal paper has also highlighted. According to this paper, the majority of those proposing disengagement projects are motivated by the large amount of money that can be applied for, whilst not possessing the expertise needed to conduct solid work based on a proper methodology. There are even associations which have been reproached for attempts to deceive the public – such is the case for the association which replaced the CPDSI as "mobile intervention unit". Adding to the difficult situation is that the associations are not cross-linked among each other and thus not working together, for two reasons: there is no platform for exchange and coordination existent in France – and there are also associations which do not want

to work together because they perceive each other as rivals. Yet, strengthening civil society to combat radicalization and to work towards inclusive, peaceful and democratic conflict resolution approaches is crucial, especially in a polarized society shattered by repeated acts of terrorism and which increasingly produces populist and/or extremist discourses. France will also have to find an answer to that.



Milena Uhlmann is Associate Fellow at the **International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation and Political Violence (ICSR)** in London and **the author of various publications on conversion to Islam in Western Europe, radicalization processes and deradicalization approaches.** (Latest publication: “Radicalisation et déradicalisation”, co-authored chapter with Asiem El Difraoui in his recent book “**Le djihadisme**”, Presses Universitaires de France, 2016) Since the Charlie Hebdo and Hyper Cacher attacks until after the Paris attacks of November 13, 2015, **she has mainly worked in France on issues related to these phenomena.** The views expressed are solely those of the author.

Tags: Counterterrorism deradicalisation Deradikalisierung France islamism jihad
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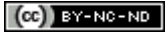
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