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Radicalisation in the Armed Forces

Time for a European Approach?

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This Food for Thought paper is a document that gives an initial reflection on the theme. The content is not reflecting the positions of the member states but consists of elements that can initiate and feed the discussions and analyses in the domain of the theme. All our studies are available on www.finabel.org

DIRECTOR'S EDITORIAL

The importance of cohesion and cooperation among European militaries is fundamental to the security of the continent, and every attempt to break this cooperation should be seriously confronted. However, a silent threat to European interoperability exists, which is difficult to trace and to be contrasted. This threat is radicalisation. Several European armies have experienced cases of radicalised troops within their ranks, highlighting the problems arising from this phenomenon. This Food for Thought will provide an in-depth analysis of radicalisation in the armed forces, exploring the causes and the features of radicalisation. However, the real focus of this paper is to identify successful national approaches to radicalisation employed by some European armies in order to subsequently attempt to formulate a legal basis capable of being applied to a broader European framework. Radicalisation can undermine cooperation and interoperability, but it can be contrasted. However, an integrated European approach is necessary to successfully deal with this problem.



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INTRODUCTION

The topic of radicalisation is strictly linked to terrorism since, usually, the former leads to the latter. However, they are not synonyms, and the processes behind each are very different and complex to analyse. The radicalisation topic dominated public opinion following the surge of terrorist attacks in Europe by ISIS militants starting in 2015. These events led national and local institutions to commission projects and programs to tackle radicalisation by raising awareness on the topic in civil society.

When the focus is shifted towards the militaries, radicalisation becomes an even more pressing issue. Statistics highlight how militaries are **overrepresented within extremist groups**, especially far-right groups (Van Dongen, Veilleux-Lepage, Leidig, Rigault, 2022). This paper aims to investigate radicalisation in European militaries to create a European framework in which armed forces and civil society can join to fight radicalisation processes related to armies. To do so, this analysis will focus on radicalisation processes within the military and amongst individuals who have left the armed forces.

The paper's structure follows a logical path

through which it is possible to comprehend the topic fully. The first paragraph explores the issue of radicalisation in the broader sense. Here, a definition of radicalisation is given, and it is consequently declined in a military environment. Moreover, different types of radicalisation and the causes that prompt these processes are identified. The first paragraph ends with an analysis of radicalisation in European armies and why it is particularly dangerous for European military cooperation and continental security. The second paragraph will address some examples of successful anti-radicalisation programs in European countries, namely Italy, the United Kingdom, France, Sweden, and Germany. The last paragraph investigates the possible legal and contextual aspects that could be favourable to an integrated framework to tackle radicalisation at a European level in the militaries. The methodology applied in this paper is constituted mainly by secondary sources, such as academic papers, articles and research made by academics, members of the armed forces and experts in radicalisation and the military sectors.

RADICALISATION IN THE MILITARY

Definition and types of radicalisation processes

First, to fully understand radicalisation, it is necessary to define it. However, several **definitions of radicalisation** have been formulated by different actors, shaping different trajectories. The most common source of disagreement concerning radicalisation is the extent to which it is better to focus on an individual's beliefs or behaviours. According to Peter Neumann, the division around this topic can be classified into "notions of radicalization that emphasise extremist beliefs ('cognitive radicalization') and those that focus on extremist behaviour ('behavioural radicalization')" (Neumann, 2013). Nonetheless, this paper needs to find a correct definition of radicalisation to build its discourse. The definition that this paper found most accurate is provided by the European Commission, which defines radicalisation as "a phased and complex process in which an individual or a group embraces a radical ideology or belief that accepts, uses or condones violence, including acts of terrorism, to reach a specific political or ideological purpose" (European Commission, accessed on September 9, 2022). Based on the European Commission's definition, it is possible to highlight the main feature of radicalisation. Indeed, radicalisation can be understood as a process made of incremental steps: "The process of internalizing extremist beliefs may be akin to a "staircase" where individuals become increasingly radicalized until they view terroristic acts as justified and

terrorist organizations as legitimate" (Simi, Bubolz, Hardman, 2013, p.65). The steps in the radicalisation "staircase" are not the same for every individual but are subject to the individual's conditions and motivations. Another clarification is needed around the notion of radicalisation in the military. Since this paper analyses radicalisation in the military, it is done in reference to the processes of radicalisation undertaken by military personnel in service and former members of the armed forces radicalised either whilst serving or following their departure. In all cases, the link with their military experience is fundamental to their radicalisation process.

It is possible to identify different types of radicalisation in Western countries and especially in Europe. The media and public opinion put a lot of emphasis on religious extremism following 9/11 and the ISIS attacks in Europe. However, religious extremism is only one of the multiple types of radicalisation and extremism. The Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence (CPRLV) identifies four types of radicalisation: right-wing extremism, politico-religious extremism, left-wing extremism, and single-issue extremism (Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence, accessed on September 8, 2022).

Right-wing extremism is one of the most common types of radicalisation, and it is, of course, the most widespread out of the four in Western military environments (Van Dongen, Veilleux-Lepage, Leidig, Rigault, 2022). It is defined as "a network of groups (some

formal and some informal) who espouse a combination of anti-government, racist, anti-Semitic, homophobic, anti-abortion, and anti-immigrant beliefs” (Simi, Bubolz, Hardman, 2013, p.655). This type often adopts neo-Nazi or Fascist symbols, anthems, and visual imagery. **Politico-religious extremism** is the second type of radicalisation associated with a radical view of religion. It pushes radicalised individuals to perceive reality according to a political view of their religion. All types of religions are susceptible to violent radicalisation. **Left-wing extremism** encompasses radicalisation directly opposite to the right-wing counterpart, based on Communist ideals, anti-capitalism, and anti-state beliefs. Marxism, Anarchism, Trotskyism, and Maoism are the most common ideologies. The last type of radicalisation identified by the CPRLV is **single-issue extremism**. This broad group comprehends all forms of extremism that focus on a single topic, such as radical environmentalism or animalism. As stated before, right-wing extremism is the most common type of radicalisation in a military context. However, politico-religious extremism is also widespread in radicalised militaries. However, in Western armed forces, left-wing or single-issue extremism is rare (Centre for the Prevention of Radicalization Leading to Violence, accessed on September 8, 2022).

Causes of radicalisation in the military

Radicalisation in the military is highly dangerous. First, members of the armed forces have military skills that can be dangerous if directed against the civilian population to further violent ideals. In addition, especially in a

European environment where armed forces of different countries have such a high level of integration, radicalisation can be transmitted among individuals as a virus, compromising the cooperation between countries and so the security of the continent. To create efficient programs to fight radicalisation in the military, it is vital to fully comprehend the causes behind it to address them effectively. This paper identifies three main causes for radicalisation in the military with different levels of support and percentages explained.

The first cause is **mental health illness**, which can be derived from traumatic experiences during deployment. Of particular relevance is Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), which can affect soldiers and veterans after a traumatic event. The US National Center for PTSD calculated that “about 11-20 out of every 100 Veterans (or between 11-20%) who served in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) or Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) have PTSD in a given year” (U.S. Department of Veteran Affairs, accessed on September 12, 2022). Consequently, mental illness and psychological syndromes derived from a military experience can lead to an individual’s radicalisation by increasing levels of aggression, encouraging a hostile perception of the world and a sense of dissatisfaction with life in general (VeryWellMind, 2021). All these causes can push individuals to resort to an extremist group or ideal to cope with their sense of inadequacy and weakness, as a solution to their mental problems.

The second cause of radicalisation in the military has almost the same effects as mental illness but is derived from social factors. **Grievances and ostracism** are other two

causes that can lead armed forces personnel to become radicalised. On the one hand, several academic studies have proven that ostracism and social exclusion lead to a sense of losing control, facilitating the shaping of an individual's terroristic mindset (Pfundmair, 2019). Moreover, there is consistent practical feedback that shows how ostracism can result in extreme behaviours and participation in extremist groups (Pfundmair, 2019). On the other hand, grievances can also create a sense of isolation and estrangement toward social life and social bonds. These feelings can increase the perception of reality as a hostile environment, to be dealt with through extremism and violence (Haugstvedt, Koehler, 2021). However, the armed forces are generally demonised by public opinion and identified as scapegoats for some political problems. This phenomenon puts significant pressure on military environments, resulting in servicemen being alone against public opinion and further fostering resentment and anger towards wider society.

Nonetheless, whilst these first two causes may appear plausible in theory, the data is not conclusive in affirming that they are a proven cause of radicalisation in the military. If on the one hand some researchers, like Jacob Davey, identify grievances as the main cause of military radicalisation (Davey, 2022), on the other hand, certain studies "found modest support for mental health, grievance and social exclusion driven radicalisation trajectories" (Haugstvedt, Koehler, 2021, p.11) as the main source for radicalisation.

Overall, there is a wider consensus for the source of radicalisation processes being attributable to the third cause analysed in this

paper. The last cause of radicalisation in the military is so-called **identity discrepancies**. As stated by Simi et al., "Identity discrepancies occur when individuals experience involuntary role exits from the military or when individuals perceive that personal achievements earned while enlisted are unrecognised or unappreciated" (Simi, Bubolz, Hardman, 2013, p.654). These identity discrepancies can trigger an individual's shift toward extreme beliefs and behaviours. One of the main motivations behind a serving soldier's identity discrepancy can also be an involuntary discharge, usually a dishonourable discharge, as well as a failure to access or complete a specific training course for a military unit (Simi, Bubolz, Hardman, 2013). An individual's reaction to these events generally manifests as feelings of inadequacy and shame, to which the individual reacts by projecting the responsibilities of such failures from himself onto other external factors. In such situations, the individual feels lost amid reality, resulting in a rise in anger towards the institutions that discharged him, often extending to wider society and the country they perceive as having caused the failures.

Moreover, in cases of discharge from the military, there is seldom any warning given to those involved, meaning such individuals experience an immediate and unexpected loss of social condition and dignity, hampering their readaptation into civil society and further exacerbating the radicalisation process. The second case of identity discrepancy occurs when an individual finds themselves incapable of behaving according to their or others' expectations. For example, a soldier who wants to join the special forces, or obtain a promotion, may consider themselves suitable for the

position they are pursuing. However, failure to achieve such objectives may cause the individual to feel trapped between their expectations and reality. The same outcome can occur when an individual fails to reach the expectations of those around them. A probable reaction to such events is shame, anger or even both, again resulting in the individual shifting their responsibilities onto society (Simi, Bubolz, Hardman, 2013).

Catalysts for radicalisation in the military

The three causes analysed in the previous section explaining the radicalisation in the military are the main factors that can push individuals towards extremist groups. Besides these three causes, several catalysts can accelerate or facilitate radicalisation.

Regarding the risks to wider society, **social networks** and especially Telegram, play a significant role in spreading extremist materials and ideals that can attract different people around the globe (Davey, 2022). Another risk factor for radicalisation in recent years is the attention that media and public opinion give to religious extremism and the terroristic attacks conducted by ISIS and other organisations such as Al-Shabab. The attention given by the media to such violence has a clear educational purpose. However, it can also be dangerous in two ways. Firstly, it allows for extremist imagery and beliefs to circulate in civil society, increasing individuals being exposed to such material and therefore increasing the potential number of sympathisers and even recruits for such groups, as the high numbers of foreign fighters and ISIS recruits in Europe

between 2015 and 2018 demonstrate. On the other hand, this attention can also foster the creation of extremism as opposed to the material, conflating such material with Islam as a whole and seeing it as a problem to society and culture (Ebner, 2017). This phenomenon resulted in an increased presence of far-right extremist groups in Europe and the US after 9/11 and the attacks in Europe in 2015 (Ebner, 2017).

Regarding radicalisation in the military, some elements increase the risk of radicalisation amongst people in the armed forces. The first one, directly connected with the three causes described above, is the social isolation that can affect veterans after discharge. In the US, the media and civil society give a lot of attention to issues concerning veterans, assisting them in their daily life, mostly to do with if they have mental health issues related to their experiences on the battlefield. However, in Europe, the network of organisations dedicated to veterans is not developed, leaving many alone upon returning to civilian life.

The second risk factor with military radicalisation is the attention and resources extremist groups place on recruiting military personnel. Militaries have valuable skills for extremist groups: they know how to use weapons, they know tactics, and they are highly trained. For these reasons, violent groups, especially far-right groups, put a lot of resources into trying to recruit these precious elements (Smith, 2008).

The third catalyst for radicalisation that this paper identified is the hyper-masculine attitude and violent behaviours present in extremist groups. Far-right groups, in particular, usually undergo a process of “martialization”,

in which they adopt a military hierarchy, symbols, and values such as honour, *esprit de corps*, sacrifice and national interest before all (Koehler, 2019). These elements can attract ex-soldiers who resonate with the military environment. Moreover, through the adoption of such behaviour, they can express their anger, shame, and resentment resulting from the mentioned causes of radicalisation (Koehler, 2019). An additional factor is the phenomenon of “heroic doubling”, in which a parallel between extremist groups and the military is created (Griffin, 2017). Here, the concept elaborated by Roger Griffin is useful for comprehending the psychological similarities that extremist groups create between themselves and the armed forces. Some military training, usually for the special forces, consists of the creation of a psychological mechanism of heroization for the individuals that pushes them to create a self-image of a sacred warrior that fights for high values and principles (Haugstvedt, Koehler, 2021). The same psychological mechanism can be applied to extremist groups, where people belonging to them are prone to use violence since violence in these groups is perceived to be the only way to create a better world (Griffin, 2017).

The last element that contributes to the over-representation of radicalisation in the military regards limitations and the controls to enrolment. As Matt Kennard argued in his book “Irregular Army”, the war periods and the consequent need of recruits lessen the standard and the controls of the military recruiting system (Kennard, 2012). Therefore, the risk is that with military campaigns that need a lot of soldiers and resources, militaries reduce the limitations and the controls to en-

rol recruits, leading to the possible infiltration of radicalised individuals in their ranks. Kennard’s study is based on the US experience of the War on Terror and the two wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, the risk he draws in his conclusions can also be applied to European armed forces due to their similarity with the American ally.

Radicalisation in European armed forces

As mentioned above, radicalisation is extremely dangerous in all fields since it can lead to terrorism. Nevertheless, radicalisation in the armed forces is even more dangerous, since militaries have the knowledge, experience, and skills to manage weapons. These elements can be very harmful in the event they are directed towards civil society. As far as European armed forces are concerned, the radicalisation topic is very relevant for several reasons.

The most important reason for the European government to tackle radicalisation within their armed forces is that European forces have a high level of cooperation and integration. This cooperation is extremely important in guaranteeing the security of the continent and its citizens, and the more European militaries are integrated, the more efficient they are. However, radicalisation can also start through contact with already radicalised individuals. Considering the European armed forces’ levels of cooperation, a radicalised military can not only radicalise other comrades of his country but also do it with foreign militaries around Europe.

Another problem related to radicalisation in European armed forces is that extremist individuals can compromise European efforts and

focus on human rights. Radicalised individuals in the military are more prone to commit war crimes motivated by extremist ideals such as racial hatred, causing violations of human rights in foreign countries (Van Dongen, Veilleux-Lepage, Leidig, Rigault, 2022). European armed forces cannot tolerate these acts, which jeopardise the credibility of the European democracies and their respect for the rule of law. In addition, European countries have pursued a campaign to promote equal and just workplaces for several years. These efforts include the military field, where minorities are usually underrepresented. However, the presence of extremists in European ranks can compromise this campaign, since minorities can become victims of radicalised individuals, discouraging their enlistment. This is particularly the case of female recruitment since European armed forces are pushing to increase the presence of women in their ranks. Nonetheless, sexual harassment in the European armed forces is still a huge problem. An article in Politico highlights how in 2017, the percentage of sexual harassment in the German military increased by 80% compared to the previous year (Briançon, 2018). The UK Centre for Military Justice conducted a study which concluded that “in 2022, 35% of servicewomen reported a particularly up-

setting experience in the previous 12 months” (Centre for Military Justice, 2022) and that “in 77% of ‘particularly upsetting behaviours’ the perpetrator was male” (Centre for Military Justice, 2022). Again, a study conducted by the Belgian Ministry of Defence concluded that “the prevalence of non-physical sexual harassment (SH) is 36.1% over the last 12 months and 64.4% over the course of a career” (Buyse, Goorts, Peeters, Dhondt, Portzky, 2021). This data shows how sexual harassment is spread among European armed forces. However, as shocking as the data is, not all sexual harassment cases are motivated by extremist beliefs. Ultimately the spread of sexual harassment can be read as a consequence of a spread of radicalisation, leading to a higher tolerance of violent, extremist and immoral actions.

It is fundamental for European armed forces to address the causes, the catalysts and the factors that boost radicalisation within their ranks and in broader society, to not compromise on cooperation and security on the continent. In the next paragraph, some cases of successful programs and examples of radicalisation in the European armed forces are analysed to better comprehend how they can address the problem.

SUCCESSFUL NATIONAL APPROACHES TO RADICALISATION

Having defined the meaning that radicalisation will represent in this research, the importance of searching for a common approach to tackle the issue within an institution such as the military is now clearer. This is not only for the effective threat that active military personnel or veterans can pose to common security of European state members, due to the tactical and strategic knowledge that their position provides to them, but also because the legitimacy of the military as an institution is at stake in this context. Whilst public opinion and society expect the military to be the defender of democratic values as a form of government, “insider threats” (Flade, 2021) within the military are outstripping the relationship between this institution and civil society, damaging the trust relationship between them and its credibility (Bartsch, 2020).

In this regard, the aim of the paper is that of helping the European military institutions to visualise a hypothetical model that could be followed to counter instances of radicalisation and extremism. To do so, the following section will evaluate the best practices and programmes from which a European-level approach to the radicalisation issue shall take inspiration, identifying the most successful measures adopted by some European countries.

The paper will present successful examples of countering radicalisation methods that are not directly aimed at the military for two simple reasons. Firstly, the paper aims to contribute to a major development of the counter-rad-

icalisation programmes within the military due to a lack of attention and understanding of the phenomenon inside the military system. Secondly, most of the data available come from the activities conducted by civil society organisations (CSOs) and private or public agencies outside the military sector. Although the phenomenon of radicalisation is infamous in Europe, most of the time, it is conceived as a threat coming from outside Western culture and linked to jihadist extremism, probably due to the prevalence of religious jihadist attacks which have affected European countries such as Spain, France, UK and Germany in these two last decades (Kundnani, 2012). Nevertheless, the more recent trends appear to place right-wing extremism as the predominant terrorist threat since 2010 in the U.S. (New America, 2020) and despite jihadism remaining the deadliest extremist force in Europe, the number of right-wing attacks has now outnumbered the jihadist ones (Auger, 2020). Indeed, individuals that adhere to far-right extremist ideology are, above all, European or American subjects who support racial nationalism, white supremacy and perceive violence as a legitimate tool against the so-called “racial enemy” (Auger, 2020).

It should not be surprising that far-right narratives have generated followers after witnessing the promotion of xenophobic and racist narratives by the main political parties of Western and Eastern Europe as a result of the immigration issue (Kundnani, 2012). In

this sense, the shift in focus from jihadist religious extremism to right-wing extremism can be probably seen as a direct response to the threat perceived by Westerners to their cultural and national integrity (Kundnani, 2012). Most white supremacists and far-right adherents embrace violent means to fight against the “ethnic enemy” whether that presents a different culture, religion, nationality or sexual orientation (Koehler, 2019). Some scholars are even suggesting that the fifth wave of global terrorism, foreseen by David. C. Rapoport could be a far-right wave, replacing the previous “religious” wave of terrorism that started with the establishment of an Islamic republic in 1979 (Auger, 2020).

As far as our research is concerned, this data is particularly relevant because individuals linked to the military seem more at risk of radicalisation by extreme far-right ideologies than any other type of extremism. Whilst there have been episodes of jihadist radicalisation within the ranks of the military in the past decades, far-left or single-issue extremism is less frequent due to its anti-hierarchic and anti-patriarchal nature (Dongen, Veilleux-Lepage, Leidig, Arkhis, 2022). Therefore, prioritising counter-radicalisation policies within European military institutions is of the utmost importance for the next decade. According to the 2019 report of the International Centre for Counter-Terrorism of the Hague, efficient policies shall be designed to follow a context-based pattern (Dongen, Veilleux-Lepage, Leidig, Arkhis, 2022). Therefore, the measures adopted to face extremism and radicalisation before entering the active military service, such as in the recruitment phase, should be distinct from the programmes tack-

ling radicalisation processes for active military personnel subjects. In doing so, actions to counter radicalisation after discharge - such as in the case of already radicalised individuals sentenced to prison or veterans who are easily lured into right-wing extremism – there should be a recognition that constitutes separate policy areas (Koehler, 2019; Mares, 2018). Finally, a marked distinction should be made between hard and soft measures endorsed by countries. Whereas the hard measures involve a militaristic approach, implying targeting subjects, removals and penalties, the softer measures seek to interrupt the radicalisation process by reintegrating the individual gradually into society, examining their initial motivations for radicalising, and separating them from their extreme beliefs (Hearne and Laiq, 2010).

Preventing radicalised individuals within the military

Luckily, some of the EU’s member states have already presented successful examples that could inspire a European model. Germany has by far been the nation to implement the most fortunate practices, with regard to both hard and soft measures when it comes to counter-radicalisation policies (Koehler, 2019). First of all, the German military has a specialised internal unit to counter extremism within the military personnel of the Bundeswehr. The body is called the Militärischer Abschirmdienst (MAD), and it can intervene at all stages of radicalisation due to the strong constitutional basis that supports its work (Koehler, 2019). After July 2018, the intelligence service can vet active military personnel

and recruits. This reform has helped in the recognition and consequent rejection of 13 right-wing radicalisation cases in 2017 (Koehler, 2019).

As far as vetting of recruits and access to a military career is concerned, another successful example is the UK. Following the arrest of Mikko Vehvilainen, a member of the Royal Anglian Regiment sentenced to eight years in prison for membership to the extreme right-wing terrorist group National Action, the British Armed Forces made the first steps towards including Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) in the military (Koehler, 2019). An internal guide and training module for officers was created to recognise potential right-wing radicalised subjects in 2017 (Koehler, 2019). The subsequent Prevent policy of 2019 reformed it, encouraging military members to complete mandatory online awareness training courses on the signs of potential radicalisation with guides for the detection of extremist ideology (Koehler, 2019). Another example of a hard deradicalisation approach is the French National Centre For Defence Clearances (CNHD) since it conducts a security investigation in the phase before recruitment, facilitating the identification of candidates that present signs of radicalisation, even the weakest, through a so-called “basic check” (Diard, Poulliat, 2019).

The above-mentioned examples constitute hard approaches to counter radicalisation processes which, even if successful, shall not be considered the only solution to the problem. On the contrary, many studies claim that softer or preventive strategies are more effective to address violent extremism compared to military ones and less likely to inspire fu-

ture violent extremists (International Peace Institute, 2010). Indeed, it is fundamental to analyse measures adopted by non-military programmes which could be potentially applied in the military. A virtuous case of such a strategy is the Terrorism and Radicalisation (TerRA) initiative by the European Commission, that aims to engage victims of terrorist attacks and former terrorists in prevention campaigns with specific target groups (Butt and Tuck, 2014). It also produced manuals with guidelines for a large group of front-line professionals to spot victims and signs of radicalisation, counselling for journalists and policymakers, and learning activities for schools (Butt and Tuck, 2014).

Dealing with radicalised subjects within the military personnel

A different context exists for practices used to counter radicalisation amongst active duty soldiers. Even in this case, MAD implements the most effective approach from which useful suggestions should be learned. This organ has the task of detecting radicalised soldiers and, if proven, removing them from active service. It is considered the most efficient model since it is backed by a precise and severe legal framework that perceives extremist practices (such as specific acts of speech, codes, and emblems) as unlawful and has the authority to press criminal charges (Koehler, 2019). It stresses the unnatural character of an extremist soldier, who theoretically is called to protect and defend constitutional values, not oppose them. That mentality supports MAD’s investigations, removals and the permanence of an investigative body which is extremely

necessary due to the imprecise information around these subjects. Indeed, statistics show that suspected cases are eight times higher than actual confirmed cases (Koehler, 2019). The German approach has focused mainly on right-wing extremists as targets. In contrast, the Army has created a chain of Personnel Protection Officers (OPP) that aims to identify potential Islamic-type radicalisation in France. This body is constituted of executives in the regiments that are in charge of gathering information on potential radicalisation that can manifest in changes in physical appearance, speech or diet (Diard, Poulliat, 2019). The OPP are in constant contact with the internal security forces and with the *Direction du renseignement et de la sécurité de la Défense* (DRSD). The army can also implement the SILT mechanism (*Loi sur Sécurité Intérieure et la Lutte contre le Terrorisme*) provided by the new article L. 4139-15-1 to the Defence Code, which stipulates that if an administrative investigation reveals that a soldier's conduct has become incompatible with the performance of their duties, it is followed by an adversarial procedure that results in either their removal from the executive branch or the termination of their contract (Diard, Poulliat, 2019).

The radicalisation of former military personnel

As it can be understood from the policies analysed in the military so far, the issue of radicalised individuals entering the military personnel or on active duty is faced mostly through hard measures that result in the rejection or dismissal of the individual in

question. Therefore, what happens following the dismissal is often neglected since it is perceived as a problem outside the military's responsibility (Koehler, 2019). The problem is that former military personnel are by far a more dangerous threat than other fanatic subjects. Whatever ideologies ex-servicemen ascribe to, the expertise and knowledge with which they are trained always make them more lethal than ordinary civilians. That said, it appears fundamental to improve follow-up measures to monitor the individuals expelled from the forces. The DSRD adopts a similar method in France, which perceives radicalisation as an *a posteriori* phenomenon; so that is out of the reach of the military responsibility. Following a detailed investigation to confirm the suspects' culpability, the DRSD can then propose 'impediment measures' in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior, which involves issuing a denial of authorisation for certain positions and jobs, the non-renewal of the contract, a complete separation of the subject from the army (Diard, Poulliat, 2019). However, according to the Radicalisation Awareness Network report of 2019, the most successful models of deradicalisation programmes through follow-up activities are not state agencies but Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) which are by far more active and more effective (RAN, 2022). The German case study is the most obvious one; EXIT Germany is a CSO that helps people leave extreme right-wing/neo-Nazi groups through online and offline activities. The most famous initiative was that of 2011, described as "the most successful online outreach strategies designed to engage right-wing audiences" (RAN, 2022). It consisted of the "Trojan

T-Shirt" campaign, giving away 250 white power t-shirts at a neo-Nazi music event. After washing, the t-shirts' logo changed to read "What your T-shirt can do, so can you - we'll help you break with right-wing extremism," along with the Exit brand (RAN, 2022). The campaign's impact resulted in an increase in self-referrals to EXIT's disengagement programme and raised the organisation's profile among right-wingers as a whole (RAN, 2022). With a lower profile but extremely efficient in its impact, the German CSO **Violence Prevention Network (VPN)** provides exit services both to right-wing extremists and detained criminals with terrorist backgrounds, such as Islamist radicalised individuals. This CSO represents a model of efficiency to follow due to its thorough organisation: individuals participate voluntarily in the work with others in a 23-week training programme in small groups of about 8 people. During the programme, they explore a number of topics helping people separate their feelings of anger and hatred from their political worldview, address the issues fuelling their rage, and re-educate them about democratic society's norms. Sessions involve role-playing, social work, and debates and then counsellors prepare each individual for the release and follow them for at least one year after it. Monthly meetings with their mentor are provided with constant access to their mentor's name, address, and phone number.

Additionally, their mentor assists them in finding housing and jobs. Also, four meetings with family members of the individual are arranged to prepare them for the individual's release. Multi-agency case conferences are organised by VPN both inside and out-

side of prisons, together with local agencies (RAN, 2022). All specialists handling a case are present at the conferences to track the performance and assess security risks, assisting with the rehabilitation and reintegration of the client, who participates in the preparation of the conference (Z. Papp, Örell, Meredith, Papatheodorou, Tadbjakhsh, Brecht, 2019). The last virtuous example that cannot be omitted is the Swedish CSO **Exit Sweden**. This is a non-governmental organisation founded by the centre Fryshuset funded primarily by governmental grants. Exit Sweden supports people to leave radical environments such as white supremacy groups, offering various types of assistance according to the individuals' needs. Generally, the programmes last 6 or 9 months but can even last years. The distinctive characteristic of this CSO lies in the triangular system of assistance: the team is constituted by a professional (be it a social worker, psychologist or social educator) and a trained former extremist working together with the client (Butt and Tuck, 2014). In this way, the multidisciplinary approach brings both professional expertise and biographical experience giving more credibility to the programme and creating a non-judgemental atmosphere (Butt and Tuck, 2014).

Other efficient CSOs programmes deserve attention, but this is not where they can all be explained in detail. To summarise, another worthy programme is the French PAIRS programme, a centre for the rehabilitation of Islamist extremists through social, psychological and ideological/religious counselling (Butt and Tuck, 2014). The Dutch Terrorism Extremism Radicalization (TER) programme reintegrates extremist criminals and assists their

families (Butt and Tuck, 2014). The Belgian “Back on Track” and the Austrian NEUSTART instead targets prisoners detained for terrorist crimes (Z. Papp, Örell, Meredith, Papatheodorou, Tadjbakhsh, Brecht, 2019).

Lessons Learnt for a European Model

In conclusion, it can be affirmed that the phenomenon of radicalisation within the army should be prioritised by the European military institutions since there are few examples of structured permanent organisations dedicated to this specific issue. Concretely, the German and British militaries are the most prepared national armies to tackle this issue. At the same time, most other European countries like France and Belgium, despite having implemented programmes to counter radicalisation, have not designed it exclusively for the military personnel. Therefore, the first proposal is to bring into focus the relevance of the danger that these individuals pose to society and the necessity of tailored policies to counter it. Furthermore, having analysed the present initiatives of the European forces to fight extremism within the army, it is clear that most of the countries have succeeded in developing “hard” measures to remove the problem from the military institution but have not designed “soft” measures that aim at providing psychological or religious/ideological support, nor have they developed proper follow-up programmes to check on these individuals. In this sense, CSOs have proved more efficient than military institutions. The second proposal is to fill the gap by establish-

ing stable cooperation between civil society organisations and the military. CSOs have proved outstanding performances in cases of counter-radicalisation of individuals, providing intangible services to address extremist ideologies according to the type of ideology in question. Indeed, they have accumulated knowledge, expertise and skills in working with violent extremist individuals and concerned individuals, gaining their credibility working outside of governmental reach. They have a strong relationship with the criminal justice system. Thanks to their reduced organisational structure, CSOs show operational flexibility allowing for continuous long-term assistance and one-on-one counselling. Building a closer relationship between CSOs and the military would improve the sharing of valuable information and would allow both agencies to keep track of rejected recruits, removed soldiers or released detainees (Z. Papp, Örell, Meredith, Papatheodorou, Tadjbakhsh, Brecht, 2019).

The final goal is to learn from the positive examples brought to the attention of this research to cooperate towards a mutually beneficial relationship wherein the European military institutions acquire the skills they currently lack, complementing the hard military measures with the CSOs’ “soft” approach. Indeed, a European-level approach to radicalisation, including both types of measures, could represent a potential normative framework for each European armed force implementing counter radicalisation programmes within the military.

A EUROPEAN-LEVEL APPROACH TO RADICALISATION

After providing a conceptual framework for military radicalisation, the last chapter analyses the possible prospects for a European-level approach to radicalisation within armed forces. With its competencies and experience, the EU could serve as the appropriate framework to embed such an approach.

However, it is necessary to bear in mind that the practical ways this phenomenon can manifest vary considerably depending on each country's historical and social circumstances. Moreover, extremism can be displayed in multiple forms and even within the same national forces. Therefore, a European approach to the issue should refrain from attempting to discipline the substance of the problem. Still, it should instead provide a forum for European countries to discuss cases, practices, and solutions as well as encourage Member States to be more proactive, coordinated, and receptive to implementing best practices when it comes to countering radicalisation.

To explore the possibilities for an EU approach, three key questions must be answered: a) the necessity for such an approach; b) its legal feasibility, according to the current European legislation; c) the forms in which a possible EU intervention would materialise.

Necessity

This paragraph will examine the circumstances that would define why a European-based approach would be needed. It would be diffi-

cult to justify EU involvement both practically and legally. Why an unnecessary intervention would not be desirable from a practical point of view does not require much explanation. From a legal perspective, the subsidiarity principle that binds the EU institution requires that the Union shall not take any action (except in the areas falling within its exclusive competences, which is not the case¹) unless it is more effective than action taken at national, regional, or local level (Treaty on the European Union, Article 5, para. 3). The necessity for a European approach to radicalisation within armed forces can be addressed from different angles.

Military cooperation goes back centuries. Wartime planning and operational conduct have often been based on cooperation with foreign forces. Nowadays, European armies cooperate for many reasons, ranging from sheer necessity to gaining comparative advantages and plugging capability gaps to benefitting from a force multiplier effect. For example, country A possesses a capability that country B lacks and vice versa. Through cooperation, both countries can access capabilities they otherwise would not have. The same goes for the shared acquisition or the pooling of resources to lower procurement and maintenance costs and use resources more efficiently. Since the Falkland War in the 1980s, EU Member States have rarely been involved in unilateral war operations (the last one to

1. Article 3 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) provides that the Union has exclusive competences with regard to customs union, the establishment of competition rules with regard to the Internal Market, the conservation of marine biological resources under the common fisheries policy, and the Common Commercial Policy.

date being France's *Opération Barkhane* in 2014 which, although starting as a unilateral French initiative, eventually received support from other EU countries).

In several instances, the need for cooperation resulted in structural, peacetime integration. Examples of these are the almost complete integration of the Dutch land forces into the German land forces, the Franco-German Brigade, Belgian-Dutch naval cooperation (BENESAM) and the German-Polish Tank Brigade. The level of integration between German and Dutch land forces has reached such an extent that their ability to operate separately can be questioned.

Cooperation and integration rely on a shared sense that cooperation is preferable over its alternatives. Their effectiveness hinge on trust, mutual support, similarity, and public, political and military support. Allied forces would not have been victorious in World War II without these factors. The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan would not have been possible if the relatively small national contingents were unwilling to support each other and place their forces under a foreign commander.

Therefore, mutual benefits, trust, similarity and support are preconditions that enable successful cooperation and integration. These preconditions precede military effectiveness. Military radicalisation risks the erosion of these preconditions. As a result, successful military cooperation and integration can be compromised. The recent case of right-wing radicalisation in a German special forces

unit could make other Member States less inclined to work together with these special forces (Spiegel, December 2019). In the same vein, the Azov Regiment has publicly been refused the same training and arms support by the United States and Canada that other Ukrainian units received because of right-wing extremism allegations (Northumberland News, June 2015). In this way, military radicalisation limits the military effectiveness that cooperation could have yielded.

Consequently, in acknowledging the nexus between radicalisation and racism, xenophobia, and hate crimes (Van Dongen, Veilleux-Lepage, Leidig, & Rigualt Arkhis, 2022), as well as considering the diversity within European armies (e.g. the multi-ethnic composition of the French Armed Forces and multi-national composition of its Foreign Legion) (Boene & Weber, 2006) and the level of European military cooperation and integration, radicalisation within one army has the potential to negatively impact its cooperation and integration with other armies. In doing so, the shared sense that underpins cooperation and integration and their requirements might not come into effect. This would ultimately affect the security of Member States and the European Union as a whole.

Available data show that one of the key problem areas of military radicalisation concerns military personnel engaging in extremist activities, including violence and terroristic actions, or in facilitating perpetration of such actions by external individuals or organisations. This unequivocally represents a risk to European security. As countering terrorism and crime falls within the scope of action of the Union, adopting a European approach to

the radicalisation of armed forces would represent a step forward in pursuing these objectives.

In addition, the Treaty on the European Union (TEU) establishes that the Union is founded on the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights,² and calls on Member States to respect these values.³ Moreover, the TEU ensures that the Union's citizens shall be provided for in the area of freedom, security, and justice.⁴ Radicalisation within the ranks might result in an attempt to undermine civilian control of the military, and in the worst-case scenario, planning to overthrow a country's democratic order.⁵ Moreover, there appears to be a connection between extremism in the military and ultra-nationalistic ideologies, which might ultimately hamper cooperation with other Member States and thus undermine the European integration process.

Legal Framework

Before illustrating possible European-based solutions, it is necessary to determine the legal basis to justify an EU intervention. As far as primary EU law is concerned, possible sources might be identified in the TEU and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). The 'Necessity' criteria outlined in the previous paragraph determined the possible sources.

A first legal justification might be grounded in Title V of the TFEU concerning the Area of Freedom, Security and Justice, in particular,

Article 67 (3), which states as follows:

"The Union shall endeavour to ensure a high level of security through measures to prevent and combat crime, racism and xenophobia, and through measures for coordination and cooperation between police and judicial authorities and other competent authorities..."]

Therefore, the EU's actions might be justified because countering armed forces radicalisation is one of the means to pursue the objectives set in Article 67 (3), since this phenomenon, as showed in the previous chapters, is often characterised by racist and xenophobic ideologies. In this article, "Other competent authorities" might entail cooperation between armed forces and/or defence ministries. However, it is necessary to underline that no European Court of Justice (ECJ) case law defines the extent of the notion of "Other competent authorities". Therefore, if such a notion entails cooperation between armed forces or ministries of defence, its practical implementation would be determined by the EU institutions and the dynamics between the former and the Member States.

Another possible legal source that could underpin a European-level approach is Chapter V of the TFEU on Police Cooperation, in particular Article 87 and 88 TFEU, respectively establishing police cooperation and the Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) mission:

Article 87

"The Union shall establish police cooperation involving all the Member States' competent au-

2. Article 2.

3. Article 7.

4. Article 3, para.2.

5. The ICCT Report "Right-wing Extremism in the Military" provides a series of examples of these activities, involving countries such as France, Spain, and the Netherlands.

authorities, including police, customs and other specialised law enforcement services in relation to the prevention, detection and investigation of criminal offences.”

Article 88

“Europol’s mission shall be to support and strengthen action by the Member States’ police authorities and other law enforcement services and their cooperation in preventing and combatting serious crime affecting two or more Member States, terrorism and forms of crime which affect a common interest covered by a Union policy.”

As seen above, cooperation between law enforcement authorities within Europol’s framework should be carried out based on a “common interest covered by a Union policy”, which in this case would be identified in the EU’s objectives established by Article 67 (3) TFEU, and Articles 2 and 3 TEU (Freedom, justice, security, democracy) and by Article 42 TEU establishing the Common Security and Defence Policy. However, it would be difficult to frame armed forces as law enforcement authorities, as, except for some cases,⁶ law enforcement is not a task usually undertaken by the military (Dale, 2010). Again, there is no case law on this specific matter, but the text of the Article does not seem to suggest this possibility. Nevertheless, this would not prejudice EU from relying on Articles 87 and 88 to address radicalisation of armed forces, as it would be left to each national law enforcement authority to collaborate with their military counterparts and cooperate with other law enforcement agencies under Article 88.

Tackling Radicalisation within Armed Forces: Proposal for a European-based Approach

Radicalisation and extremism are intrinsically broad phenomena. Their manifestation is deeply entrenched in specific territorial and historical circumstances, and a universal approach to radicalisation would be unrealistic. Still, having established that several European countries have witnessed radicalisation within their armies, and acknowledging that this inhibits military cooperation and integration, exchanging information might be a key to developing successful approaches. After all, different methodologies could potentially be complementary. Nonetheless, there are two elements that a European solution should consider: a) the need for a preventive approach to radicalisation within the armed forces, as data shows that the problem is addressed mainly through ex-post action; b) precious input by civil society (NGO’s, research institutes, etc.) should not be ignored. Although extremism in the military has its characteristics, subjects that deal with radicalisation in other contexts might provide valuable insights.

But how could EU-level approach take form? How can this cooperation be effective, given the means that the EU framework would realistically be able to provide? For example, Member States could not be eager to share information as military affairs are often considered an area of national sovereignty. Partially relinquishing this to tackle radicalisation could set a precedent and impact other areas. When it comes to radicalisation, it is reasonable to assume that Member States might not want to disclose extremism cases in their

⁶. One instance is that of Italy, where the *Carabinieri* performs regular law enforcement activities even if they are part of the armed forces and respond to the Ministry of Defence.

armies to avoid exposing potential weaknesses to allies and adversaries. Thus, an EU-based approach should be pursued cautiously and acknowledge Member States' sovereignty concerns.

Considering the previously examined legal framework, one possible solution might be adopting a directive under Chapter V of the TFEU. As law enforcement structures can be differently organised across the EU and bearing in mind the previous considerations on the diversity of the radicalisation phenomenon, the flexibility ensured by a directive makes it a suitable instrument for an EU approach to radicalisation. It must be observed that under Article 87 (3) TFEU, the establishment of any operational forms of cooperation between the authorities referred to by Article 87 (1) must be established by the Council in accordance with a special legislative procedure, which involves the Council acting unanimously after consulting the European Parliament.

The content of the proposed directive should be double-folded. Firstly, it should establish a permanent framework (such as an agency or a committee) for counter-radicalisation within armed forces and law enforcement agencies. The nature of this framework should be flexible in that Member States may be able to join it voluntarily. The objective of this optional framework would be exchanging information, best practices, and successful approaches, as well as developing studies, guidelines, and recommendations, which Member States might spontaneously take into account when drafting their national policies. In addition to participating Member States, this body should be staffed with permanent personnel

consisting of experts.

The directive should also set the procedure and the conditions for participation of third parties in the framework's activities. The possible existing actors that could participate in this process might be the following:

The European Organisation of Military Associations and Trade Unions (EUROMIL): Euromil is the international association representing military personnel at European level. Part of its mission is to promote European soldiers' fundamental rights and freedoms. As the organisation is a forum of discussion involving active military personnel, veterans and other experts, their contribution might be extremely valuable for developing successful approaches. Countering extremism within the military is one of Euromil's areas of interest, as shown by their activities.⁷

The Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN Practitioners): founded in 2011, the RAN is a network of practitioners working with subjects vulnerable to radicalisation and those who have already been radicalised. These practitioners operate in many areas of civil society, as they can be found among social workers, youth workers, teachers, healthcare professionals, local authority representatives, police officers and prison officers, and are engaged in both preventing and countering violent extremism in all its forms and rehabilitating and reintegrating violent extremists. Other EU institutional actors could be involved as well. The EU Commission Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation stands out among these.

As far as funding is concerned, this framework might be financed by the Internal Se-

7. The Panel discussion on "Tackling Extremism in the Armed Forces" held on April 23, 2021, is among the most recent notable initiatives.

curity Fund (ISF). The objectives that the ISF 2021-2027 will pursue include increasing information exchanges among and within EU law enforcement and other competent authorities, intensifying cross-border cooperation, and supporting efforts to strengthen capabilities to combat and prevent crime, terrorism, and radicalisation.⁸

The second part of the proposed directive should establish the obligation for Member States to adopt public-accessible deradicalisation programmes with respect to their armed forces and law enforcement agencies. The content and structure of these programmes, as well as the modalities for their implementation, should be left to the discretion of the

Member States. Therefore, the nature of the obligation is limited to establishing a deradicalisation policy, whose existence is made known to the public. As the information about these programmes might be extremely sensitive, the proposed directive should specify that Member States would not be obliged to disclose information about actual radicalisation cases or the identity of radicalised subjects, as well as the unit in which they are or have been employed. The obligation's purpose would be to reveal what Member State approaches to the phenomenon, how they try to prevent it and the different measures for rehabilitating radicalised subjects.

8. Internal Security Fund (2021-2027) (europa.eu)

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- Contributing to a common European understanding of land defence issues. Finabel focuses on doctrines, trainings, and the joint environment.

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Finabel contributes to reinforce interoperability among its member states in the framework of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the EU, and *ad hoc* coalition; Finabel neither competes nor duplicates NATO or EU military structures but contributes to these organisations in its unique way. Initially focused on cooperation in armament's programmes, Finabel quickly shifted to the harmonisation of land doctrines. Consequently, before hoping to reach a shared capability approach and common equipment, a shared vision of force-engagement on the terrain should be obtained.

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