

## #SwissBreakfast "Toolbox against radicalisation": How to involve the education sector to prevent violent extremism in Switzerland and the EU?

13th of March 2018, Mission of Switzerland to the EU

The wave of terrorist attacks in Europe starting in 2015 in France recalled that **violent extremism is not only an external threat**. The perpetrators tend to be European nationals radicalised within European societies. In order to address this issue, Switzerland, the EU and its Member States started elaborating **initiatives to address the root causes of this “local radicalisation”**.<sup>1</sup>

In **Switzerland**, a **National Action Plan to Prevent and Counter Radicalisation and Violent Extremism** has been published in December 2017. This action plan equally applies to federal and local authorities (cantons, cities, communities). It also acknowledges the crucial role civil society stakeholders play when it comes to the effective implementation of preventive measures.

**At the EU level**, the *Paris Declaration* agreed by Education Ministers in March 2015, sets out a common approach on how **education and training** can best meet the challenges of social inclusion, radicalisation and citizenship. This was followed by a number of initiatives launched by the European Commission and Member States. In order to further improve cooperation among Member States and develop EU prevention policies, the **High-level Commission Expert Group on Radicalisation** (HLCEG-R) was created in August 2017. The **Interim Report** issued in December 2017 recommends initiatives to the EU and Member States that are similar to those mentioned in the Swiss action plan.<sup>2</sup>

The measures detailed in these policy reports also cover the provision of training to experts – such as those working in the education, social and youth sectors and being active in different associations – in order to develop their expertise in the early recognition of radicalisation. The debate will focus on **two key measures**, involving these actors: **specific training and tools for public school teachers (e.g. handbook) and the education, in national universities, of imams and teachers of Islamic religion classes**. **Education is a cornerstone for effective prevention of radicalisation**, be it in local community structures or in public schools. Teachers, educators and youth workers play a crucial role in fostering social inclusion, promoting common democratic values and managing controversial issues with open discussions in safe classrooms. This applies in particular in a context where Switzerland and EU Member States are confronted to the phenomenon of child returnees. Yet, it appears that practitioners do not necessarily receive the appropriate training to deal with questions related to radicalisation and extremist attitudes in community centres and class rooms.

One aspect of the problem concerns the **training of teachers**. Currently, there is still a lack of preparation for situations involving questions such as identity, discrimination, orthodox Islam, Islamism and Salafism. This is why, in Switzerland, the city of Zurich is preparing a handbook for teachers, in collaboration with the European Foundation for Democracy (EFD) and on the basis of a similar guide developed by EFD in Germany, France and Kosovo. On the other hand, Berne was the first city in Switzerland which installed an Information Centre for

---

<sup>1</sup> Any reference in this text to “radicalisation” is to be understood as “radicalisation leading to violent extremism and terrorism”. The Swiss action plan and EU policies cover various forms of violent extremism, but the main focus of this event is Islamist extremism.

<sup>2</sup> For further details on the EU's and the Member States' initiatives see useful links at the end of this document.

Radicalised Persons, whose tasks include awareness raising and providing information to parents, teachers, schools and the community.<sup>3</sup> At the EU level, the Interim Report suggests further support for training directed at practitioners dealing with children at risk of radicalisation.

Another aspect related to education and radicalisation is the **way that Islam is understood and taught in Swiss and European societies**. As suggested by a recent study funded by the *Swiss National Science Foundation (SNF)*, the majority of imams active in Switzerland do not have sufficient understanding of the national context (political, social and cultural rules). This is also explained by the fact that they often do not speak one of the three national languages. However, the same study also concluded that a majority of Muslims living in Switzerland is in favour of setting up education programmes for imams and teachers of Islamic religion classes in Switzerland. It also appears that there is great approval for state oversight of such programmes to ensure the quality and transparency of the curricula. While in Switzerland a national regulation on this issue is absent, there is no general approach at the EU-level to this question either. Educating imams and persons teaching Islam in Switzerland and the EU might ensure that Islamic values are taught in hand with core European values and contribute to a better understanding between communities from different cultural backgrounds. A few projects have been launched in Swiss universities (Geneva, Fribourg) and are also discussed/being implemented in several EU Member States. In its Interim Report, the HLCEG-R recommends on the one hand to establish a joint overview of the different approaches and experiences within Member States with regards to the training of religious leaders. On the other hand, it suggests to facilitate the exchange of experiences on the provision of religious counselling in prisons and to provide guidelines on working with and training chaplains particularly imams. Yet, the training of imams is a complex matter, which requires an inclusive approach of all different communities of thoughts within Muslim communities in Europe. Moreover, it appears that the education of imams is not always directly welcomed by the general public in Switzerland and the EU. Therefore, both policy measures offer ample room for discussion.

As the aforementioned examples show, Switzerland and the EU face common difficulties and follow similar approaches when trying to prevent violent extremism from spreading. Therefore it would be beneficial to continue sharing best practices and explore possibilities for further cooperation in this field.

Swiss National Action Plan to Prevent and Counter Radicalisation and Violent Extremism (12/2017)



---

<sup>3</sup> In the meantime, other Swiss cities have adopted this approach, for example Winterthur.

## Useful links:

### **Switzerland**

*Swiss Security Network*: Swiss National Action Plan to Prevent and Counter Radicalisation and Violent Extremism (12/2017):

<https://www.newsd.admin.ch/newsd/message/attachments/50703.pdf>

*Federal Department of Foreign Affairs*: Switzerland's Foreign Policy Action Plan on Preventing Violent Extremism (2016):

<https://www.newsd.admin.ch/newsd/message/attachments/43587.pdf>

*Swiss Federal Office of Police (2018)*: 7 stages of radicalization:

<https://www.fedpol.admin.ch/dam/data/fedpol/aktuell/news/2016/2016-11-11/phasen-radikalisierung-e.pdf>

*Swiss National Science Foundation (2010)*: Imam-Ausbildung, islamische Religionspädagogik und andere Aspekte des Islams in der Schweizer Öffentlichkeit:

[http://www.snf.ch/SiteCollectionDocuments/nfp/nfp58/NFP58\\_Themenheft01\\_DE\\_def.pdf](http://www.snf.ch/SiteCollectionDocuments/nfp/nfp58/NFP58_Themenheft01_DE_def.pdf)

*Université de Genève*: Formation pour les imams et les enseignants d'instruction religieuse islamique : <https://www.unige.ch/rectorat/formations/formation-imams/culture-et-societe-suisse/>

*Université de Fribourg* : Formation continue « Prévenir les extrémismes. Idéologies, religions, violence(s) » : <https://www3.unifr.ch/szig/fr/>

### **EU**

Interim Report of the High-Level Commission Expert Group on Radicalisation (12/2017):

[http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regexpert/index.cfm?do=groupDetail\\_groupDetailDoc&id=36235&no=1](http://ec.europa.eu/transparency/regexpert/index.cfm?do=groupDetail_groupDetailDoc&id=36235&no=1)

*Communication from the Commission* supporting the prevention of radicalisation leading to violent extremism (14/06/2016): <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52016DC0379&from=EN>

*European Commission*: Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education (policy developments following Paris Declaration):

[https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/images/1/14/Leaflet\\_Paris\\_Declaration.pdf](https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/images/1/14/Leaflet_Paris_Declaration.pdf)

*European Commission*: Tackling radicalisation through education and youth action:

[http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/erasmusplus/files/library/fact-sheet-post-paris\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/sites/erasmusplus/files/library/fact-sheet-post-paris_en.pdf)

### **Others**

*UNESCO (2017)*: Preventing violent extremism through education: A guide for policy-makers:

<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002477/247764e.pdf>

*European Foundation for Democracy*: Integration fördern, Radikalisierung erkennen. Handreichung für Lehrkräfte in der schulischen und beruflichen Bildung:

<http://europeandemocracy.eu/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Handreichung-fuer-Lehrkraefte.pdf>