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How can far-right extremism be tackled through policy? Lessons from 10 European countries

This briefing sets out findings from an Institute for Strategic Dialogue research project, run in partnership with the Swedish Ministry of Justice, aiming to assess government approaches to tackling far-right extremism. This briefing presents policy recommendations, based on interviews with over 120 individuals tackling the far right across 10 countries.

The threat from the far right in Europe

Several recent events have focused attention on the growing dangers posed by the far right in Europe. In October 2013, Ukrainian born Pavlo Lapshyn was convicted of racially-motivated murder and for plotting a campaign of terror against mosques in the UK. In May 2013 commenced the trial of Beate Zschäpe, the only surviving member of the National Socialist Underground, a German far-right terrorist group linked to a series of murders of immigrants, a policewoman, and a series of bombings and bank robberies. While such high-profile and high impact events hit the headlines, the bulk of the threat posed by the far right is felt through smaller-scale localised harassment, intimidation and bullying by extremists targeting minority communities.

While there has been considerable attention devoted to the growing threat posed by the far right, this has mostly been nationally specific and focused on the problem rather than the response. This project is one of the first cross-European comparative studies of solutions to far-right extremism. It aims to document policy responses across 10 countries: the UK, Sweden, the Netherlands, Norway, Finland, Denmark, Germany, Poland, Hungary and the Slovak Republic. It involved interviews with over 120 inspirational individuals, from those writing National Action Plans to counter extremism to frontline professionals carrying out one-

on-one interventions with far right supporters. Based on their stories and experiences, this briefing makes 10 key recommendations for policy makers.

Policy Recommendations

1. Responses to the far right need to be underpinned by a strong legal framework

A sound legal framework is the bedrock of any response to far-right extremism and laws need to be visible, consistent and be accompanied by a communications plan.

- At a bare minimum, all countries should have a clear legal instrument on hate crime, underpinned by strong anti-discrimination laws. The EU should adopt a comprehensive framework on hate crime.
- National governments need to put in place legal recognition for victims groups across all prerequisites of discrimination (based on historical and current evidence, as well as anticipating future targeted identities). The EU should prepare a directive on victims' rights specifically targeted to victims of hate crime.
- Governments need to resource awareness and capacity building activities with police and NGOs to ensure the appropriate implementation of the law.

2. Public agencies and communities need to work together to deliver robust and effective public order management responses

Good public order management can minimise the impact of protests on communities, build trust between those who need to work together, and reduce the daily misery experienced by those targeted by far-right extremists. Some of the most effective methods have gotten community members involved in local policing initiatives, involved real-time tension monitoring, or engaged in dialogue with movements themselves before and during activities.

3. Governments need to make serious long-term investments in preventive measures

It is essential that governments invest in substantive prevention programmes to tackle the far right in both the short and long-term. This needs to cover a number of bases.

- Governments should support programmes for young people to build lasting relationships with others from diverse backgrounds. They should also invest in the resources needed for this work, including better use of technology (e.g. film testimonials and online resources).
- Governments should also fund tension-monitoring work and then deploy preventive programmes in particular areas with potential for far-right extremism.
- Governments, the police and NGOs need to work together to take on the difficult conversations with the hard to reach in all communities. Unacknowledged grievances left to fester can lead to more extreme manifestations of violence.

4. Governments need to put in place national Exit programmes to help individuals to leave far-right movements and groups behind

Many individuals who want to leave groups and movements end up trapped because they struggle to find jobs, housing and social support outside these extremist networks. This report advocates that all countries set up a national exit programme. These programmes tend to be more effective and credible when they are independent of government, though they are likely to only be sustainable through government or statutory funding.

5. Governments need to fund a variety of attractive deterrence activities to keep young people away from far-right influences

During key times, such as far-right marches, governments need to work with 'key influencers' and support activities to divert young people from taking part.

6. Governments and NGOs need to work together to enhance public understanding of the threat from the far right, underpinned by clear and decisive political messages

There is a real need for political leadership on this issue. Politicians need to be more courageous about making public statements denouncing far-right ideologies, intolerance, and hatred. Governments need to have in place dedicated media strategies focused on responses to the far right.

7. Governments need to put in place national strategies and action plans for tackling the

threat from the far right

It is vital that governments have a national strategy and action plan to coordinate efforts to tackle far-right extremism. This may fall within a broader strategy to counter violent extremism, or may stand alone.

8. The EU, governments, police and NGOs need to work together to improve and streamline data gathering on the threat from the far right

There are significant improvements required to data collection.

- States need to make better use of and pool existing data. Governments need to move beyond police data, given its limitations. The EU could help to ensure that data is collected systematically as a part of an EU framework on hate crime.
- Governments need to support research and testing on ways in which new media can support the collection of data.
- Governments should work to ensure more data on the problem is made publicly available, and weighty academic studies are translated into digestible formats for policy makers.

9. Major capacity building initiatives are needed to enhance the ability of frontline workers to spot and respond to the signs of radicalisation towards the far right

The effectiveness of legal instruments and policy frameworks is limited by the capacity of frontline workers. Governments should fund training and capacity building programmes for police, municipalities, teachers, NGOs, youth workers and elected officials. These are most effective when developed and delivered in partnership with civil society, involve human stories and testimonials, and make good use of modern technology.

10. Governments must adopt long-term funding arrangements to make responses to the far right more sustainable and effective

Legal and policy frameworks will help, but those working at the street level need the stability and long-term funding to do their jobs effectively. Short-termism in responses to the far right can actually lead to counter-productive or dangerous outcomes.

About the presenter: Vidhya Ramalingam is Research and Policy Manager on Far-Right Extremism and Intolerance at the Institute for Strategic Dialogue. The full report can be found here: http://www.strategicdialogue.org/ISD_New_Approach_Far_Right_Report.pdf.



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