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***Police Contribution to the Prevention of Violent Extremism
in Baden-Württemberg***

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Police Contribution to the Prevention of Violent Extremism in Baden-Württemberg

Abstract

The article draws a picture of the different tasks and actors in the prevention of violent extremism in the German state of Baden-Württemberg to demarcate the police contribution to the prevention network. It describes which tool was chosen in order to meet the objective to standardise prevention messages in secondary, behavioural prevention but also to be adaptable to a big variety of different addressees concerning their special needs and requirements. The article argues for an approach using a standardized presentation consisting of a common thread of core preventive police messages and a large number of hidden slides, that can be shown if the discussion in the preventive event requires them. Even though the task for an evaluation is getting more complex, the procedure may be a way out of the dilemma of standardization versus adaptability and can be seen as evidence oriented prevention.

1. Prevention of violent extremism as a task for the whole of society

There are many actors playing an important role in the prevention of violent extremism. To build a close-knit network many of them are mandatory – in the best-case scenario they complete each other (Lenos and Wouterse 2018): The political education forms the basis, fosters democratic behaviour and makes their addressees aware of antidemocratic narratives and movements (Buchheit 2016). In the federal state of Baden-Württemberg the most relevant actors in this field are the School System, the State Centre for Political Education (Landeszentrale für politische Bildung) and the Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Landesamt für Verfassungsschutz), which run special information and prevention programmes. The primary (or universal) prevention is covered mostly by civil society initiatives (and is coordinated by the State Ministry of Social Affairs). Especially the State Democracy Centre (Demokratiezentrum Baden-Württemberg, funded by the federal programme “Live Democracy!”) with its regional and

specialized offices (Ostwald 2018) plays an active role. In the domain of tertiary (or indicated) prevention state initiatives are run and coordinated by konex – State Competence Centre against Extremism (konex – Kompetenzzentrum gegen Extremismus). State run countering violent extremism (CVE) measures are under the stewardship and provided by konex (Koehler et al. 2018) as well as the special trainings for professionals who are or could get into contact with radicalized persons (Fiebig and Koehler 2018).

The police of the federal state of Baden-Württemberg (about 11 million inhabitants) with approximately 24.000 police officers and about 7.000 civilian employees is 24/7 on the scene. The internal State Protection Division (Abteilung Staatsschutz) holds an expertise in combatting politically motivated crime. About 850 officers who are specialized investigators in cases of juvenile delinquency (Jugend-sachbearbeiter) contribute their knowledge about developmental criminality. In 2018 more than 6.500 crime prevention classes (on the subjects of drugs, violence and risks in digital media) were held in schools by officers specialized in prevention and almost 23.000 events were held with other targeted groups. The police have a distinctive sensorium for the consolidation of problems that could lead to criminal acts and also realize sentiments among the population like the lack of their subjective sense of security. A recent study shows that the citizens of Baden-Württemberg state in their top 10 fears that they feel scared about terrorism and extremism as well as they are afraid if the country and its administration could handle the migratory situation (R+V Versicherung 2018). The police are the central contact institution for people's concerns of security and to foster the individual sense of security is part of their mission. In Baden-Württemberg there is a long-standing tradition to involve the people in security matters through community policing on a local level (Kommunale Kriminalprävention). If a special crime situation or a hotspot emerges, the police are able to react quickly with repressive or preventive measures to people who are at risk of choosing a way that may lead to delinquency. In consultation with other PVE-actors the police act preferably with others, but also on their own with preventive measures.

2. The police mission in PVE

The police perspective on politically motivated crime is specific and can be distinguished to the other perspectives of for example the educational system or intelligence services. The focus point in their point of view is delinquency. The motivation of the offender is the basis

of the definition system “Politically Motivated Criminality (PMK)”. PMK is on the one hand side a broader view on the scene than for example extremism or hate crime¹: To paint a swastika on a school toilet wall “for fun” is a criminal act (as the public use of this sign is illegal according to the criminal law) and a case for police prosecution – although the youngster, in most cases wasn’t hot-blooded or trying to offend the democratic system as a whole. On the other hand legal political efforts like fundamental religious groups with a political agenda or populist parties are not subject to police prosecution (but in many cases subject of the surveillance by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution). The framework of politically motivated crime is defined by the quality of the criminal offence (for example with or without violence, terrorism), the thematic field (for example xenophobia or hate crime). It differentiates phenomena (right- or left-wing, religious or foreign ideology, not possible to classify) and includes crimes against the internal or external security and extremism.

Under this perspective it is possible to describe – at least ex post – radicalization as a criminal career in which the consecutive steps are resulting in one or many criminal offences (Srowig et al. 2018). The police are highly interested to stop this development as early as possible and hence are keen on timely indications. The possible measures cover a high inspection pressure on suspect individuals and groups, criminal investigations, measures to raise awareness (like preventive external communication and press relations) but also situational (for example bollards on public places) and behavioural prevention approaches. The lowthreshold measures of behavioural secondary (or indicated) prevention by the police put an emphasis on the elucidation of judicial standards, awareness raising and warning of the consequences of a criminal career. Most of the times the PVE-prevention is trying to address multipliers like parents, teachers or other pedagogic professionals, but in some cases also young people are the targeted group².

¹ In Germany there is a long running (Pfahl-Traugheer 2004) controversial academic debate about the terms “hate crime”, “extremism” and “radicalization” (Sohn 2017; Bötticher 2017, Ostwaldt and Coquelin 2018). For a summary overview on “extremism” see Bötticher and Mareš 2012 for “radicalization” Gaspar et al. 2018, for hate crime Geschke 2017; for the education systems concerns about “radicalization” Glaser et al. 2018: 12-13.

² For an overview over the German field of PVE see Steffen 2016 or Baier 2018.

3. Examples for PVE measures

The prevention of PVE is not a new task for police crime prevention in Baden-Württemberg. Already in 2000 a prevention concept was released, that contained a set of presentation slides against right-wing extremism (“Extrem gegen das System”). In the following years other concepts against right-wing extremism (2004: “Wölfe im Schafspelz”) and in the context of religious motivated delinquency (2005: “Polizei und Moscheevereine”³) or against both types of politically motivated crime (2013: “Mitreden!”⁴) followed. The last three examples were campaigns run by the federal working group “Programm Polizeiliche Kriminalprävention der Länder und des Bundes (ProPK⁵)” which has its office in Stuttgart. Baden-Württemberg police officers played an important role in the conception and implementation of the mentioned programmes. Police prevention of violent extremism on the ground level puts these programmes into the practice but most of the time prevention officers are invited to speak in front of an audience about a pressing problem: a group of adults, like round tables, town meetings, a school conference or a parent evening request information about a phenomenon and ask for advice how to counteract with preventive measures. In exceptional cases the police themselves initiates programmes for multipliers or even pupils and integrates partners in the implementation as a prevention network:

- Starting in 2015 a growing number of mostly young people left Germany to the so called Islamic State (or Daesh) in Irak and Syria. In many cases it was obvious that the leaving people weren’t informed about the consequences and were enticed by extremist (online-) propaganda. The police crime prevention organized thereupon with education authorities 2016/2017 five decentralised further trainings for pedagogic multipliers. Up to 200 teachers and social workers on each event were informed in a comprehensive manner, starting from religious over phenomenon-specific to judicial aspects. The training course ended with different workshops to facilitate the transfer to the educational work. With the event series the addressees could be sensitized to play their part in PVE.

³ The programme „Polizei und Moscheevereine“ reflected the insight that parallel predominantly Muslim societies and the lack of intercultural competence on the side of state authorities could be risk factors for radicalizations. The aim was not to address extremism directly but to create a win-win situation by fostering resilience and proximity policing. See also: <https://www.polizei-beratung.de/startseite-und-aktionen/polizei-muslime/>.

⁴ The project Website is: <https://www.polizei-beratung.de/medienangebot/detail/200-mitreden/>.

⁵ ProPK runs two internet presences with information and PVE content: for the general public <https://www.polizei-beratung.de/themen-und-tipps/> and for young people <https://www.polizeifürdich.de/deine-themen/hass-gewalt-politik.html>.

- Another example is the programme “ACHTUNG?!” (a pun with the two meanings in German: respect and warning). At this a theatre play written for the programme is staged in schools to sensitize the pupils to radicalization processes in right-wing extremism and Islamism. The EU-funded initial project was run by the regional police headquarter in Ludwigsburg, the subsequent project is actually implemented state-wide by konex. The police are focusing here on their core competencies in prevention (sensitization and elucidation of judicial norms), while other project partners bring a wide range of elucidation, prevention and education. The aim is to start an intensive occupation at the school by successive input.

In both cases the police prevention used standardized presentations, which were open to adapt to the information needed and questions of the addressees.

4. Evidence oriented prevention against politically motivated criminality

It is the aspiration of the police to speak in these diverse prevention situations with one voice. To avoid different emphasises in 2016 an initiative was started to describe the most frequent police prevention programmes with product descriptions to be standardized thereby. The product descriptions are to be rigorous on the one hand side to point out the police prevention message, but they have to be adaptable to fit into the diverse prevention situations and audiences. People demand answers to their specific questions, so a “one-size-fits-all” approach cannot be the solution!

This requirement – between standardization and adaptability – is a challenge for evaluation. A manualized programme that is implemented with high fidelity (Albers 2014) would enable research designs based on randomized control trials. If context-mechanism-outcome pattern configurations matter, realistic evaluation (Pawson, Tilley 1997) could be an appropriate but more complex approach.

The standardized presentations that were chosen in this process try to comply with the requirements of evidence oriented prevention (Walsh et al. 2018) by integrating the perspectives of quality assurance and the best possible fit of people’s varying expectations with the preventive messages by the police.

5. Standardized Presentations

Based on the practitioners experiences standardized presentations for all phenomena of politically motivated criminality were developed in 2018/2019. In addition two comprehensive presentations, a short and a longer one were prepared to give the police officers the opportunity to join local prevention measures or networks and to add the police perspective. The presentations were built in a bottom-up process in collaboration with experts from the state-wide responsible departments (konex and State Office for Criminal Investigations). They consist of a common thread of core police preventive messages and the description of the criminal focus point in the phenomena. Of course the police inform about legal regulations and criminal behaviour. Herby it is important to ensure that the police are speaking with one voice in every prevention event: a participant should not leave without having heard these core information and messages.

The common thread is augmented by topics frequently asked by the audience. By adding these hidden slides the presentation gets flexible to meet the needs and questions of the targeted groups or to dig deeper into complex subjects. For example the practitioners pointed out that almost every audience is asking for advice about external distinctive signs that may be indicators for an individual radicalization. These signs are presented as an overview slide and can be explicated with hidden slides if the addressees are asking for it. It became clear that the unambiguous signs constituting a criminal offence (like the swastika) are less important than the ambivalent ones playing an important role in the hide-and-see game of radical groups. The prevention officer's task is to make sure that only the combination of statements, habits, behaviours, change of attitudes, distinctions and devaluations enables to draw a conclusion – and to put an emphasis on the request, to get into contact with counselling organisations or the police, if a person drifts into suspicious behaviour.

In the comment section of every slide there is a pre-formulated core message added, some didactic hints based on the experiences of other colleagues and relevant background information for the speaker. The sometimes extensive information are meant to give the speaker a sufficient information reserve to stand solid in front of the audience even if tricky questions are asked. The comments can help prevention officers who become acquainted with the presentation and support a consistent prevention message by the police.

The last section of the presentation is giving hints to the broad network of competence, advice and support centres provided in Baden-Württemberg. This should increase the likelihood for parents, contact persons and multipliers to choose an appropriate support if they are in need or should contact these centres. Among other offers police departments are also listed – from the emergency number 110 over the possibility to get into contact with the police anonymously to the exit-assistance programmes run by konex. The police are placing themselves as a partner among others at the service of the public security: to knit a dense network to prevent criminality!

6. Project completion and und quality circle

The first edition of the standardized presentations for all phenomena of politically motivated crime will be presented to the professional public at the German Congress on Crime Prevention in May 2019 in Berlin. But the experience with the first standardized presentation on religious motivated criminality shows that a regular revision and update is mandatory. This Shewhart process (“plan, do, check, act”) is guaranteed by a permanent working group consisting of police practitioners and academic experts. Further internal training is offered, but also the close contact to other partners in the prevention of violent extremism support the effort to a high topicality and quality.

As it is not possible to get one final presentation but rather a continuous process of quality assurance, the intention of the state office for criminal investigation is to start an internal formative evaluation. A summative evaluation that would meet the requirements of a social sciences “gold standard” seems to be inappropriate for a flexible and adaptable presentation. A “best-practice” solution for the prevention of violent extremism by the police in Baden-Württemberg should highlight the core skills of the organisation that follows a structured approach to meet the needs and requirements of the people. Like this the police are able to contribute to the task for the whole society: to prevent violent extremism⁶.

⁶ The author would like to thank Christiane Honer for her linguistic support!

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