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(Notices)

NOTICES FROM EUROPEAN UNION INSTITUTIONS, BODIES, OFFICES AND AGENCIES

COUNCIL

Conclusions of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council, on the role of the youth sector in an integrated and cross-sectoral approach to preventing and combating violent radicalisation of young people

(2016/C 213/01)

THE COUNCIL AND THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE MEMBER STATES

RECALLING:

1. The political background to this issue as set out in Annex to these conclusions.

ACKNOWLEDGING THAT:

2. Young people, their values and attitudes, as well as skills and competences, represent a great potential for our societies. Constant changes and societal and economic challenges make sharing of democratic values, young people's social inclusion and active citizenship even more important.
3. The recent terrorist attacks in Belgium, France and Denmark, and similar atrocities in Europe in the past, as well as the rise in incidents of hate-speech and hate-crime⁽¹⁾, propaganda and violent xenophobia in Europe, show an urgent need for contributions from all sectors in society, including the youth sector, to fight violent radicalisation⁽²⁾, maintain social stability and a positive and safe environment in which to grow up.
4. While violent radicalisation needs to be confronted and tackled on a number of fronts, it is of crucial importance that the threat and dangers that it poses for young people are recognised, prevented and acted upon by early and effective intervention measures, respecting young people's cultural diversity.
5. The process of identity development can be influenced by many factors such as a multi-problem family background, peers, internet and social media, political environment and the position of groups of young people in society often confronted with discrimination, humiliation, exclusion, injustice, a lack of prospects and feelings of frustration, which could lead to violent radicalisation.
6. Parents, siblings, peers and other relevant actors⁽³⁾ are crucial in supporting a positive development of identity. This can include intercultural awareness and respect for others, active participation in society, but also aspects of spirituality, religion or belief, and involves strengthening the sense of belonging necessary to counterbalance the information and extremist ideas young people may be exposed to.

⁽¹⁾ Special Eurobarometer 437 (2015) Discrimination in the EU in 2015.

Fundamental Rights Agency (2012): Making hate crime visible in the European Union.

⁽²⁾ Violent radicalisation is a complex matter that has not been defined uniformly. In this context *violent* radicalisation refers to a process whereby a person accepts the use of violence to achieve political, ideological or religious goals, including violent extremism and terrorism. Take note that radicalisation does not necessarily leads to violent extremism or terrorism and radical expressions do not have to be problematic per se.

⁽³⁾ Such as teachers, educating staff at universities, social workers, youth workers, healthcare providers, volunteers, neighbours, sports coaches, religious and informal leaders, local police officers.

7. Young people should be encouraged to engage in self-reflection, develop empathy, learn critical thinking, how to live with challenges and uncertainties and how to deal with situations and emotions that cause them discomfort, thus becoming more resilient, and maintain constructive relations across social groups.
8. Young people must have awareness and understanding of democracy, equality, respect for human dignity, human rights, pluralism and diversity, and be skilled in media and information literacy. This contributes to critical thinking, an awareness of and knowledge about how information can be biased and exploited by violent extremist groups in order to spread propaganda.
9. Measures aimed at preventing violent radicalisation should not lead to the stigmatisation of, discrimination against or xenophobia towards groups of young people.

UNDERLINE THAT:

10. Youth work is an accessible and outreaching service, method and tool aiming for the positive identity development of all young people, providing a non-formal and informal environment for the development of values, skills, competences, talents and open attitudes, which also enables them to recognise and manage the risks they are likely to encounter, including violent radicalisation.
11. Youth work uses a broad and holistic approach, involves young people actively and works together with individuals and groups of young people to find solutions to their questions and problems. In this way youth work offers a safe environment to grow, build an identity, feel a sense of belonging and be exposed to positive peer influences, and could prevent negative peer pressure leading to violent radicalisation.
12. The youth sector, in cooperation with the education sector and other relevant sectors and actors, can play a crucial role in an integrated and cross-sectoral approach in addressing violent radicalisation, in particular in its early stages, by supporting young people in their development and actions, promoting democratic and pluralistic principles, inclusion and active citizenship and targeting negative factors such as discrimination and a lack of prospects that influence young people's lives.

STRESSING THAT:

13. The different elements involved, the complexity of violent radicalisation and its deep impact on society require an integrated and cross-sectoral approach at local, regional, national and European levels. This approach involves various sectors and actors including youth work, youth-led organisations and education.
14. In an integrated and cross-sectoral approach, youth policies and youth work, with a focus on a safe and inclusive environment, informal and non-formal learning as well as prevention, should be attuned with the policies, tools and activities of other relevant sectors such as early signalling, effective intervening and countering of violent radicalisation. In this way, a coherent, structured, mutually informed and mutually supported approach to young people, peers, families and their social networks can be achieved.
15. Such an approach should mean different strategies are deployed depending on the degree of radicalisation: ranging from generic prevention strategies ⁽¹⁾ in early stages of radicalisation to a more targeted approach directed at specific groups or individuals when violent radicalisation actually occurs. This complements the core role of youth work as part of a cross sectorial effort in helping young people to find their way in society and in safeguarding young people from the dangers of violent extremism.

ACCORDINGLY INVITE THE MEMBER STATES, TAKING INTO ACCOUNT THE PRINCIPLE OF SUBSIDIARITY, TO:

16. Work on an integrated and cross-sectoral approach at national, regional and local level in order to reach all young people who are at risk of violent radicalisation by:
 - a) promoting effective and well-attuned cooperation between the youth sector, the education sector and other relevant sectors and developing common tools, measures and the exchange of good practices ⁽²⁾ to handle cases of violent radicalisation;

⁽¹⁾ Generic prevention strategies are designed to reach the entire population, without regard to individual risk factors. They can be targeted towards for example all young people within a certain age group. The objective is to ensure a certain basic level of resilience among young people.

⁽²⁾ For instance RAN good practice database, Youth WIKI tool, EKCYP good practice database.

- b) exploring and promoting the role youth work can play as a partner in coalitions and networks at the national, regional and local levels to form a strong support base for the development of young people, including their resilience and the strengthening of protective factors.

17. Where relevant recognise and strengthen the youth sector in:

- a) its role in supporting young people to find their way to adulthood and a place in society and creating a safe and inclusive environment for young people to develop their identity, taking into account, where relevant, the development of spiritual or cultural and religious identities;
- b) its role in promoting democratic values and active citizenship through the different forms of youth work practice in promoting respect for cultural diversity through intercultural, interreligious and intergenerational dialogue and to challenge all forms of discrimination;
- c) its outreach towards individuals and groups of young people in danger of violent radicalisation and exclusion from society, and in supporting and involving young people in peer-to-peer activities;
- d) reaching out to young people to undermine and challenge existing violent extremist ideologies and to counter-balance them with appealing non-violent alternatives through the internet and social media ⁽¹⁾;
- e) promoting the education and training of youth workers and broadening their competences so that youth workers are able to recognise questions related to violent radicalisation, as well as are able to identify and counter propaganda, rhetoric and behaviour that might be linked to violent radicalisation;
- f) supporting young people in strengthening media and information literacy and critical thinking using a cross-sectoral approach by, for example, the youth work sector working together with schools or local centres, which can help to prevent the recruitment of these young people for violent activities through peer influence and through social media;
- g) promoting involvement of civil society;
- h) its capacity to fulfil its role by improving up-to-date awareness, knowledge and tools, as well as good cooperation with relevant sectors and persons leading to a situation where violent radicalisation amongst young people is recognised and prevented at an early stage;
- i) encouraging and supporting young people in participating in volunteering, as it can play an important role in a positive identity development, promote empathy and responsible thinking.

18. Preserve existing sustainable measures and practices which have proven to be successful and implement innovative and sustainable measures and practices, where appropriate, tailor-made for young people, in local action, democratic participation, intercultural learning and dialogue, active citizenship, and in positive peer-to-peer education.

ACCORDINGLY INVITE THE MEMBER STATES AND THE COMMISSION, WITHIN THEIR RESPECTIVE POWERS, TO:

- 19. Increase cooperation at European level in sharing knowledge and practice by working together in the EU context, including the Expert Group on Active Citizenship, Preventing Marginalisation and Violent Radicalisation, the Expert Group on Digitalisation and the Radicalisation Awareness Network, and with relevant third countries and the Council of Europe ⁽²⁾ to exchange knowledge and best practice on preventing violent radicalisation, including the use of social media, counter-narratives ⁽³⁾ and digital youth work.
- 20. Exchange information and best practices and develop guiding principles, where appropriate, how to set up coalitions or networks for an integrated and cross-sectoral approach, learning how to cooperate in an effective, well-attuned and cohesive way, taking into account the diverse cultural context of the EU.

⁽¹⁾ Examples are: No Hate Speech Campaign, Youth Information, and Eyca and Eryica.

⁽²⁾ E.g. in the framework of the No Hate Speech Movement.

⁽³⁾ Counter-narratives are communication activities directly or indirectly challenging extremist narratives either online or offline, including counterfactuals, on a more factual basis.

21. Foster the development of a dialogue and effective counter-narratives to support parents, siblings, peers and others in contact with young people who are at risk of violent radicalisation, and the provision of information on existing support systems and counselling possibilities.
22. Where appropriate, develop training and education modules for youth workers as a basis for educational materials to be used at national, regional and local levels in order to ensure that youth work acquires sufficient up-to-date knowledge, awareness, tools and skills concerning:
 - a) the phenomenon of all kinds of violent radicalisation, an understanding of subcultures, as well as the specific methods of intervention to prevent violent radicalisation at an early stage;
 - b) trigger factors leading to violent radicalisation;
 - c) the digital world including the internet and social media;
 - d) countering extremist influences on the internet and in social media and challenging violent extremist opinions;
 - e) supporting young people to develop critical thinking and the relevant knowledge, skills and competences to understand the different sources and agendas behind the information provided, including propaganda and hate speech;
 - f) supporting peers to help young people to avoid violent radicalisation by offering positive peer influences;
 - g) working together in cross-sectoral partnerships;
 - h) supporting the development of young people's identity, intercultural competences and understanding of democratic and pluralistic values and active citizenship.
23. Promote and support peer-to-peer seminars for youth workers, experts, policy makers and researchers, in order to enable the sharing of best practices and information on how best to approach the issue of violent radicalisation.
24. Promote, initiate, coordinate, support and make available the results of further research on violent radicalisation aimed at the enhancement of knowledge of issues such as the scope, origins, protective factors, causes and cognitive as well as emotional dynamics of violent radicalisation, in order to enable Member States and the European Union to develop evidence-based policies and practices.

ACCORDINGLY INVITE THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION TO:

25. Ensure the optimal dissemination of the results of the Expert Group for Active Citizenship, Preventing Marginalisation and Violent Radicalisation, which will offer usable guidance for youth workers, social work organisations and professionals in an integrated cooperative context on how to reach out to and work with young people at risk of violent radicalisation
 26. Consider how existing EU programmes such as Erasmus+, Creative Europe and the Europe for Citizens programme could best be used to promote the social inclusion of young people with diverse backgrounds, thus contributing to the prevention of radicalisation and ensuring strengthened capacity in youth work, cooperation with education and other relevant sectors on this topic as well as the empowerment of the young people themselves.
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ANNEX

In adopting these conclusions, the Council RECALLS in particular the following:

1. The European Council of 12 February 2015 at which Heads of State and Government called for a comprehensive approach, including initiatives regarding social integration, among others, which are of great importance to prevent violent radicalisation.
 2. The Declaration adopted by EU education ministers at their informal gathering in Paris on 17 March 2015 in which they provide guidance on how to cooperate at European level. The importance of efforts to prevent and tackle marginalisation, intolerance, racism and radicalisation, to promote citizenship of young people and to preserve a framework of equal opportunities for all were highlighted.
 3. The Council conclusions on the Renewed Internal Security Strategy of 17 June 2015, which prioritise the specific issues of disengagement, rehabilitation and de/anti-radicalisation as a priority for action in the next years.
 4. The current EU Work Plan for Youth 2016-2018 which focuses on increased social inclusion of ALL young people, taking into account the underlying European values, and the role of youth work both in the non-digital and the digital world.
 5. The 2015 Joint EU Youth Report of the Council and the Commission on 'the implementation of the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018)' which underlined that young people should be able to grow up in inclusive and pluralist societies based on European democratic values. The joint EU Youth Report also illustrates the need to empower diverse young people even more, especially those at risk of exclusion.
 6. Cooperation between the European Commission and the Council of Europe within the Partnership Agreement.
 7. The European Agenda on Security, dated 28 April 2015, in which the Commission considers participation of young people to be a key factor in preventing radicalisation by promoting European values and fostering social inclusion, also mentioning the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), an EU-wide umbrella which enables the exchange of experience and practices facilitating early detection of radicalisation and the design of preventive and disengagement strategies at local level.
 8. The European Parliament Resolution of 25 November 2015 on the prevention of radicalisation and recruitment of European citizens by terrorist organisations.
 9. The Resolution 2250 (2015) adopted by the UN Security Council at its 7573rd meeting, on 9 December 2015 noting the important role youth can play further as positive role models in preventing and countering violent extremism
 10. The Action Plan of the Committee of Ministers (Brussels, 19 May 2015), CM(2015)74 final, on 'The fight against violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism', and with the United Nations Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism.
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