

TEACHING APPROACHES FOR THE KEY ACTORS IN COUNTERING RADICALISATION AND BUILDING A RESILIENT SOCIETY

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Abstract

In recent years, radicalisation has greatly evolved. Armed conflicts from failed states have boosted radicalisation inside the EU, and the rise of foreign terrorist fighters (FTF) is only an example. Thousands of the EU citizens have joined the war theatres of Syria and Iraq. As a result, radicalized returnees with combat skills and indoctrinated against European values pose a great threat to the security of EU. Furthermore, terrorist propaganda led to uncoordinated attacks of home-grown lone actor terrorists, difficult to detect before they strike. A response strategy to the above mentioned societal trends might be dealing with their root causes. Education and good quality training remain at the central core of building a resilient society against extremist ideologies and radicalisation, as well as of having first line practitioners that hold expertise.

Practitioners like intelligence officers, community police officers, prison and probation officers, law enforcement, youth and social workers, healthcare professionals and others, are valuable key actors in the prevention and combat of radicalization. Each one of them provides a part of the solution; there is no single actor that can prevent the phenomenon on its own. Therefore, it is important that they all know how to contribute. Training practitioners in the spirit of creating a multi-agency network where they can share both expertise and information is a key solution to efficiently combating radicalization. In addition to this, having a society resilient to radicalisation is part of the wider desideratum of promoting a security culture among civil society. Building a resilient society means transforming teaching institutions into "labs for democracy" and "training the teachers" because they are at the frontline when it comes to potentially identifying early signs of radicalisation, besides raising awareness through educational programs and public campaigns or round tables that address the topic.

Keywords: radicalisation, training practitioners, building resilience.

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Introduction

In recent years, the terrorist phenomenon continues to pose a real threat at European level. In 2018, EU Member States reported a total of 129 terrorist attacks foiled, failed or successfully completed (TE-SAT, 2019). Islamist radicalization being one of the ideological engine which underlies the phenomenon. One of the causes for this is online propaganda. The INTERNET is currently the favourite environment for radical content due to obvious reasons: information is accessible, it facilitates real-time interaction with people from all around the world that have similar beliefs and on-line activities are anonymous.

In 2018, terrorist organizations and non-affiliated sympathizers diminished their use of mainstream platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube to disseminate radical content, increasing the use of start-up social media¹ (over 150 in number) (IOCTA, 2019) and of file sharing sites. Older propaganda materials are redistributed by new means. Some terrorist fundraising campaigns are also running on the Darknet (IOCTA, 2018).

Daesh's propaganda machine has encouraged lone actor terrorism. The destruction of the Caliphate did not remove the spreading causes of the jihadist terrorism on European territory due to repeated attempts by the organization to translate the idea of Caliphate into the on-line. The Daesh propaganda has shifted in the direction of encouraging European sympathizers to launch attacks against Western states in support of a "virtual Islamic state".

Daesh's non-affiliated sympathizers clotted into the home-grown terrorist trend which targets symbols of authority (Carcassonne, March 2018²), or indiscriminate attacks of civilians (Paris, May 2018³). Jihadist attacks are mainly committed by radical terrorists in their own country of residence, without traveling to a war theatre to join a terrorist

¹ Examples include Threema, Signal or Telegram.

² On 23 March 2018 a Moroccan male wounded and shot four policemen and two civilians, injuring several others. He also held the customers of a supermarket in Trebes hostage.

³ On 12 May 2018 a French citizen killed one person and injured several more in Paris, before being shot dead by the police.

organization. These actors are very diverse, being born or living largely in the EU. Most of them are known to the police, but not for terrorist activities, and often do not have direct links with Daesh or any other jihadist organization (IOCTA, 2019).

The *home-grown* terrorist trend emerged in a security context already characterized by vulnerabilities such as the migratory pressure and the associated risks, namely the infiltration of Daesh combatants and *returnees* into the migratory flows. European citizens who joined the organization into the jihadist theatre (*foreign terrorist fighters/ FTF*) have the possibility now to return to the EU member states taking advantage of their citizenship. FTFs pose major risks for the security status of the entire “common” space due to their military training and combat capabilities, high level of indoctrination and good counter-intelligence skills, which facilitates them to pass unnoticed by the national intelligence services.

The degradation of Daesh's organizational structures may reduce the attractiveness of the group, but it will not affect the threat posed by jihadism because individuals and sympathizers disillusioned with the Islamic State – including those living in EU Member States – may refocus on other terrorist groups. Al-Qaeda maintains itself as a strong and active key actor who seeks to fill in the power gap present in the jihadist arena and continues to encourage terrorist attacks in the EU and beyond. The terrorist activities guided or inspired by al-Qaeda or other jihadist organizations remain a realistic possibility for the EU's close future (TE-SAT, 2019).

The radicalization process

To better understand terrorism, first of all, it is necessary to analyse the underlying phenomenon, which is (self) radicalization. A wide range of formulas have been proposed to define (self) radicalization, all of which have as a common element the fact that **some individuals adopt ideologies or beliefs on behalf of which they commit terrorist acts**. These individuals give up a common life to “make justice” for the community or for themselves and may be Westerners vulnerable to jihadist propaganda, migrants, refugees, asylum seekers, prisoners, probationers or members of the Muslim

diaspora who, due to social polarization and failure to adapt in the European host countries, can turn to radical views.

Current research has shown that radicalisation is caused by multiple causes. Gøtzsche-Astrup (2018) analysed the literature on the psychological mechanisms of radicalisation and discovered that social motivational processes are essentially driven by primitive mechanisms of aggression (Gøtzsche-Astrup, 2018). Also, negative life experiences can act as “triggers” of radicalisation because the individual starts raising fundamental existential questions. This can be exploited by subcultures offering alternatives and manufactured answers.

The dynamics of small groups represents a key factor in converting radical belief into action by accentuating polarization. Strong emotions, such as anger and contempt, are important motivational factors. Another motivational factor is the “dynamics of self-identity and of social identity” which, through a fractionalization process, contributes to raising individual's confidence in the social identity of the specific group.

The sociologist Kevin McDonald argues that radicalisation is a social process that involves exchanges, connections and shared emotions. This implies that someone's ability to feel certain things makes it possible for that person to think those aspects. In this sensory process, the social media and jihadist culture play an important role.

Some researchers have studied acculturation and its potential role in the radicalisation process: individuals who do not have a good relationship with their parents and feel rejected by the society, embrace another culture that gives them a sense of belonging, which instead can lead to radicalization.

Campelo *et al.* (2018) mention a multitude of factors that make the individual more vulnerable to radicalization: individual factors such as psychological vulnerabilities (depression, addictive behaviour, abandonment at an early age, trauma, the death of someone close etc.), micro-environmental factors (such as the friendship with a radicalized person, family dysfunctions), or macro-environmental factors like social polarization, religious ideology or the geopolitical context. In the same regard are the conclusions of the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN, 2016) that indicate the socio-psychological, social, political,

ideological and/or religious factors, cultural and identity factors, trauma and other trigger events, group dynamics and social-media role as being responsible for radicalisation.

Understanding radicalisation implies multi-causal explanations: there is no standard profile of radicalized individuals and the pathways to radicalisation are diverse. Radicalisation is a complex social issue that research has attempted to explain through a mix of factors originating from distinct sciences: sociology, psychology, psychiatry etc. Therefore, an effective response to this phenomenon implies interdisciplinary cooperation and collaboration among practitioners from all the above mentioned areas.

This multi-dimensional challenge requires multifaceted responses involving all relevant policies and all relevant actors at local, regional, national, European and international level (HLCEG-R, 2018). Multi-agency working formats can provide adequate support for vulnerable individuals from an early stage.

Education as a response to the needs of practitioners in the field of prevention and combat of radicalization

For a long time it has been thought that preserving the national security status is under the exclusive privilege of intelligence and security field actors, whose institutional culture is defined by exclusivity and secrecy. However, the combat and prevention of radicalisation, as we mentioned earlier, requires multi-disciplinary practitioners acting in order to achieve a common goal.

Cooperation in an integrated manner of the empowered institutional actors is important for dealing with radicalisation cases efficiently. Practitioners need to learn to adapt to a new paradigm where more and diverse actors collaborate and share the responsibility of an area that is no longer under the exclusivity of one institution.

Professionals from different domains need to cooperate for an unique purpose in an integrated manner and contribute through skills, knowledge and support to prevent and counter the radicalisation process. Responsibility lies with practitioners in areas such as intelligence and national security, law enforcement agencies, police, the

penitentiary and probation systems, health and social care, child protection, psychology, psychiatry and education.

The first step for readjusting the institutional actors with responsibilities in intelligence and national security is learning to do so. Learning is essential for maintaining a spirit of professional adaptability in such a dynamic field like anti- and counter-terrorism.

In this new context, there is a need to develop training programs that teach a new mechanism of collaboration between the actors involved in the combat of radicalisation. These programs of learning need to approach within its curriculum the phenomenon, the role of each actor involved and the cooperation mechanism mentioned. The aim of the learning program is to form new competences for a unitary approach within a generally accepted framework, bringing together all institutional actors in an action plan and a homogeneous structure.

This initiative is intended to lay the foundation of a multi-agency cooperation mechanism already in place in other countries. An example of this type is the Respect.lu in Luxembourg, which has been operating since 2017 and it comprises 4 psychologists, a communications manager and a director. The centre provides prevention and awareness-raising services, individual therapeutic support, therapies for families and friends, social therapy and reintegration, training and workshops. The multi-agency network brings together representatives from various institutions and associations to create partnerships within the health, education, social, judicial and media sectors. Another example is Croatia where multi-agency structures were created ad-hoc, based on protocols explaining in detail the way authorities cooperate in the event of certain risks being materialized. United Kingdom also implemented such a multi-agency approach in dealing with prison radicalisation cases. The mechanism operates under a legislative framework called MAPPA – Multi Agency Public Protection Agreement – which brings together several authorities and services that evaluate the release conditions for each radicalized detainee.

The learning programme we propose in this paper consists of a workshop dedicated to practitioners at national level on how to cooperate in order to prevent and combat Islamist radicalisation. The

workshop includes two distinct sections: a theoretical module and a practical one (according to the structure presented below).

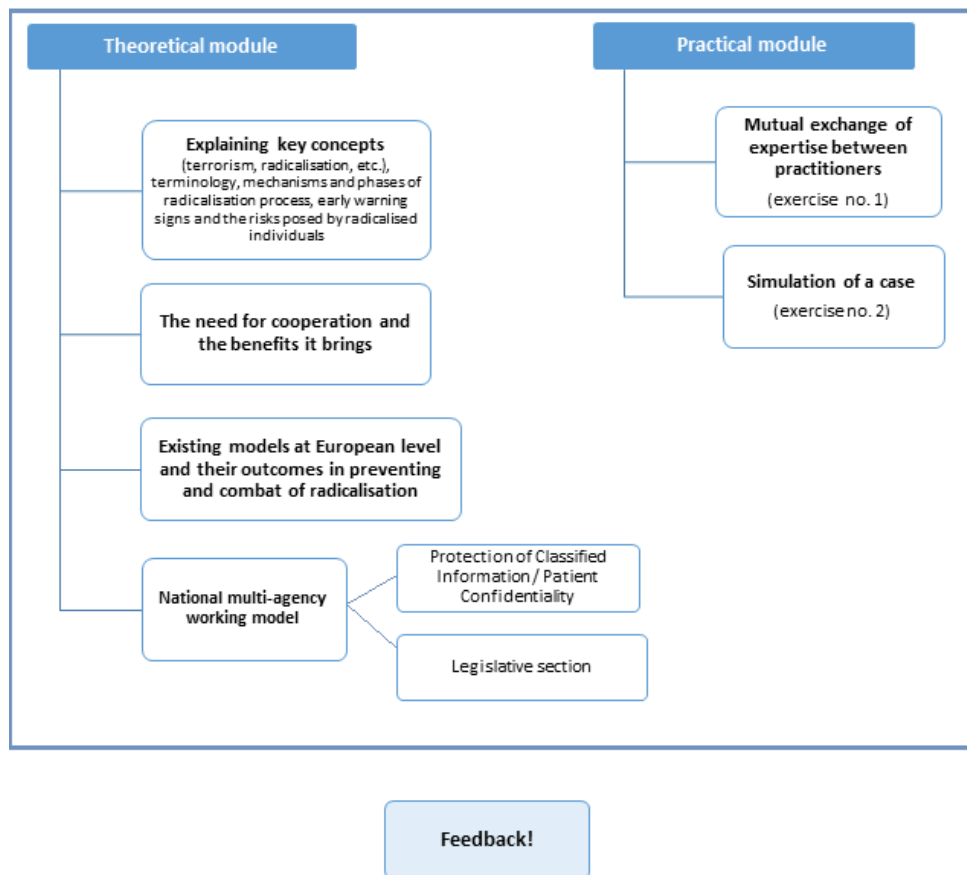


Figure 1: The structure of the learning programme proposed

The theoretical part of the workshop is imposed by the need to know of the participants who are not only practitioners in intelligence and national security, but also social workers, psychologists, psychiatrists or penitentiary staff etc., who by the nature of their professional experience are not necessarily familiarized with the concept of radicalisation. It is, therefore, essential that this workshop includes **a theoretical part focused on explaining radicalisation and**

other basic concepts like terrorism, Islamist fundamentalism, *foreign terrorist fighter*, *lone actor* etc., the specific mechanisms and stages of radicalisation, characteristics, risks involved and early warning signs.

Understanding terrorism and its underlying mechanisms facilitates a better comprehension of the way experts can use their own knowledge and professional background in the benefit of prevention and combat radicalisation. Understanding the concepts, terminology and the early warning signs of radicalisation can contribute as well to having a common language for practitioners coming from different domains with distinct visions, which later facilitates communication and collaboration.

It is necessary that the workshop stresses the need for practitioners to have a transversal collaboration and highlights the benefits of the multi-agency approach. The workshop needs to include a presentation of the existing models of multi-agency working (MAW) formats that tackle radicalisation and the good practices available at European level (as are the cases of Germany, Belgium, France, Finland, Luxembourg, Lithuania and Croatia). This will also include the results obtained by the earlier mentioned states in preventing/combating radicalization.

In addition to the above, the theoretical module of the workshop will present a national multi-agency working model which includes intelligence services and law enforcement agencies, on the one hand, and other practitioners, on the other hand, working together in order to prevent and combat radicalisation.

The model will take into consideration the challenges posed by the regulations regarding classified information / patient confidentiality in the case of partners from the health sector. Specifically, it will explain how an intelligence officer can collaborate with a healthcare service worker without violating the rules of classified information or patient confidentiality. This involves explaining the distinction between classified and sensitive information that could be shared with caution, the principle of reciprocity, the principle of prioritizing the national interest etc.

Furthermore, a legislative section on the legal provisions and mechanisms that can support cooperation through partnerships and establishing a coordinating institutional actor will be necessary.

If professionals with different backgrounds (police officers, psychologists, teachers etc.) co-operate, difficulties may arise from the difference in professional vision (scientific knowledge, experience, values, terminology etc.), which makes communication and ultimately achieving the common goal even more difficult.

In this respect, the applicative side of the workshop involves an interactive area in which practitioners exchange expertise for raising awareness on the difficulties, experiences and challenges faced by each other. Sharing of the experiences and difficulties faced by intelligence officers will take into account the need to anonymize the information and the cases presented.

An important aspect is to invest in mutual trust and understanding before continuing to develop a cooperative structure. Reciprocal trust is a significant component for any multi-agency approach. This can be achieved through exercises based on expertise exchange. The goal is to determine the actors involved to become conscious about each other's role in the process of preventing and combating of radicalization. Clarifying the role of each professional sets the right expectations and the tasks of each actor to achieve the final result, which are essential conditions for success.

The second part of the workshop is a simulation exercise of a real situation in which practitioners will have to work together in order to prevent and combat radicalization as part of a multi-agency mechanism. The simulated situation is an anonymous case that includes most of the key issues that practitioners can encounter: lack of a common terminology, absence of mutual trust, shortage of knowledge of the role and skills of the other etc. At the end, participants will provide feedback on the exercise, on ways for improving cooperation in order to optimize results and their final conclusions.

The applicative side of the workshop is designed to demonstrate the reliability of the mechanism and to test the willingness of practitioners to engage in this line of work. Its main role is to raise awareness on the necessity of cooperation in one of the main areas of

action of the Romanian Intelligence Service, which is the Prevention and the Combating of Terrorism, and will subsequently be the basis of creating a MAW mechanism for preventing and combating radicalization at national level. MAW formats are not the only available responses to radicalization but they provide a comprehensive framework in which cases of *lone actors*, FTF/*returnees*, refugees/asylum seekers are addressed through the involvement of all competent institutional actors, taking into account possible issues such as trauma and/or mental disorders.

The Romanian Intelligence Service is the national authority in the field of preventing and combat of terrorism and, implicitly, Islamist radicalization. The Service has the required institutional resources to run such a workshop via “Mihai Viteazul” National Intelligence Academy that provides ongoing training programs for the personnel of the Service in various areas and professional fields.

The role of education in building a society resilient to radicalization

The society and, implicitly, the citizen is the main beneficiary of the activity of institutions responsible with the prevention and combat of terrorism. In the current state of security, society can no longer be a passive beneficiary and can become an active contributor to maintaining the national security status. This can be achieved through adequate education, by raising awareness on the phenomenon of radicalisation and self-radicalisation.

In preventing and combating radicalisation, resilience is often considered a precautionary measure based on the assumption that young people can be educated to withstand the attractiveness of recruits and agents of radicalisation. Resilience is defined as the ability to cope, learn and even evolve in the face of change, challenge and adversity (Cahill, 2008). So, in terms of resilience to radicalization, this implies the ability to rebalance after a deception, a personal crisis, perceived/ real injustice or dissatisfaction. In this respect, resilience involves questioning the “us vs. them” narratives characteristic to the radical propaganda discourse.

Resilience is a normal human adaptation process present both in young people originating from high-risk environments (poverty, parental conflict etc.), as well as in the cases of those raised in healthy environments.

Studies demonstrate that protective factors of resilience produce positive results for a percentage ranging from 50% to 80% of the children growing in high risk environments. The obvious conclusion is that efforts focusing on **strengthening personal skills and protective factors** that promote youth resilience in the family, community and schools (Benard, 2004) are more effective than those aimed at removing the risk factors that reduce resilience.

Education is the cornerstone in effectively preventing radicalisation by increasing resilience to radical propaganda and recruitment. Although, schools cannot influence all protective factors that increase resilience to radicalization, a good school experience can contribute solidly to this (Bonnell, 2011).

There are many reasons why schools play such an important role in the prevention and combat of radicalism. In the first place, it could be noticed that the age of those who joined the terrorist organizations in Syria and Iraq has fallen to 13-15 years (Van Ginkel, 2016), with young teenagers being a vulnerable group in the face of the phenomenon. Schools can provide a safe environment in which delicate issues such as social identity, immigration, social and international conflicts, discrimination, social marginalization can be addressed openly. In addition to these, schools can provide alternative narratives to the hate speech available in social media and can contribute to the development of critical thinking skills, which are essential in countering the effects of jihadist propaganda.

Teachers and educators play a crucial role in promoting social inclusion, common democratic values and managing controversial issues through open discussions in classrooms (HLCEG-R, 2018). Teachers are in the first line when it comes to observing early warning signs of radicalisation or unusual behavioural patterns in students. It is, therefore, important for teachers to be aware of their role, to be well trained to understand the phenomenon and how to contribute to an efficient mechanism of prevention and combat of radicalisation.

To begin with, this training needs to provide teachers with the necessary knowledge about the key concepts surrounding terrorism and radicalisation. Although we have all heard of radicalism, religious extremism and other similar concepts, in fact few people are aware of the phenomenon, its mechanisms, stages and early warning signs. A teacher is no exception to this despite the pressure parents and society in general put on teachers and educators to effectively manage all issues related to youths.

Practitioners (including teachers) involved in the prevention and combat of radicalisation need to have solid knowledge of the phenomenon to counteract the disinformation produced by jihadist propaganda, to question inaccurate assertions and to help young people develop constructive arguments and healthy lines of thought. Teachers need to be able, for example, to counter stereotypes or wrong assumptions about a particular religion or, if this is not feasible, to know how to access the necessary information.

Training the teachers to do so should take into consideration teachers' need of knowledge in terms of radicalisation, particularly the way it affects young people, main causes, the vulnerable categories of youth, the mechanisms and the stages of the process, risks posed by radicalized individuals and early warning signs.

Once teachers know these aspects, it is important that they become conscious about the role they can play in promoting a democratic discourse and in increasing the resilience of young people to radicalisation through effective teaching methods. Most of the key features of teaching methods that aim to increase resilience to radicalization are in fact general principles of good teaching: providing a "safe" space in classrooms where young people can express openly their opinion on sensitive issues in society, developing critical thinking skills, positive interactions in the classroom and a spirit of cooperation.

In order to prevent and combat radicalisation, schools can have a positive impact through classrooms that provide a safe space, meaning an area where participants feel safe to talk about controversial issues and express their views comfortably, regardless of the reactions they may cause. Facilitating a safe space for positive interactions and communication (for example, by using basic rules for dialogue, through the teacher's ability to resolve conflicts and by paying attention to the

needs of individuals) is an essential feature of any pedagogical method aimed at increasing resilience to radicalization. The teacher should be able to create such an environment that facilitates discussion on sensitive issues without experiencing negative emotions (frustration, anger, annoyance etc.).

A safe space for discussions provides the opportunity to mitigate the factors favouring radicalism as it offers the chance to explore grievances, feelings of injustice and real/perceived humiliating experiences, to express personal opinions (without which young people may feel frustrated and become attracted by terrorist groups exploiting their views) and to address the knowledge gaps that are used throughout the terrorist recruiting process.

Discussions must follow certain rules for a respect-based environment. A clear definition from the beginning of what positive and negative behaviours mean, gives equal rights and responsibilities to the discussion participants. Also, conversations must be inclusive, open and non-conflictual because not all participants have the confidence to share their opinion. The teacher must be able to respond effectively to emotionally intense conflicts. Sensitive and profoundly offensive statements must be dealt with through effective responses that maintain the safety of space and do not contradict their content, as it can enhance extremist attitudes and views.

Paradoxically, preconceived ideas must be respected by allowing young people to express their thoughts and feelings in their own way, even in cases where teachers do not agree with the opinions or the language used. These preconceptions may reflect extremist thinking, but rather than be ignored, teachers should allow views to be expressed and treated. The opposite situation makes vulnerable young people feel judged and less likely to engage constructively in activities to increase resilience to radicalization.

A relevant skill for all young people but particularly valuable for vulnerable people who may be targeted, exposed to or attracted by extremist propaganda is the analytical approach that allows youths to critically analyse propaganda and other messages they may encounter in the media (online, newspapers, television etc.). In classrooms, critical thinking should be encouraged. Critical thinking skills imply the ability to ask questions and not receive information and ideas from others

passively, to review a balanced range of evidence to analyse a situation, hypothesis, opinion or message, to realize that there are different perspectives from one's own and remain open to the integration of new points of view in personal thinking. Critical thinking competencies – essential to interrogating and challenging extremist ideologies – can be successfully developed through teaching methods that support intellectual research by young people themselves. To develop a mind open to “critical thinking”, young people need to be actively encouraged to become aware of their own opinions and experiences, empathize and understand the reasons behind other people's vision.

Last but not least, a safe space for communication involves positive interaction within the group. By this we understand the ability to listen to others without provoking, to work collaboratively to achieve a common goal, to negotiate with others and to have patience in working with other persons. Teachers are the actors responsible for shaping such skills in young people.

Although the above-mentioned aspects are partly general features of good teaching, it is necessary to synthesize them in training for teachers and educators specialized on the responses to radicalisation through education. The training will be included in a two step approach consisting of two cascading workshops – the first one is the one dedicated to practitioners from different fields, including teachers, which will provide them the necessary knowledge on radicalization, while the second workshop is solely dedicated to teachers so that they can develop and practice the teaching methods that could ultimately lead to increasing resilience in schools through appropriate teaching methods.

Creating society resilient to radicalization through education is a reliable partner for preventing the phenomenon. Schools are the best places to increase youth resilience to extremist ideologies and to promote democratic values. To achieve this, we need to have well-trained teachers, better equipped schools, time and resources.

Conclusions

Education is the long-term response to many of society's issues, including radicalisation. Educating practitioners active in the field of

prevention and combating of terrorism must be constant and synchronized with the evolution of the terrorist phenomenon and the latest research in the field. Officers from areas such as intelligence and national security, police, prison and probation systems, doctors, social workers, child care assistants, psychologists, psychiatrists and teachers need to be aware that addressing such a complex issue like radicalisation is no longer under the responsibility of a single institution. Addressing Islamist radicalisation from a multi-agency working format makes it more effective.

The preventive approach also aims at educating teachers who, through enforcing good pedagogical practices, can contribute to increasing resilience to radicalization of young people. In addition to the fact that schools can act as incubators of radicalization and teachers are part of the first line of practitioners who can detect early warning signs of the phenomenon, a safe space in classrooms where delicate subjects can be approached without restrictions mitigates the factors leading to radicalization. Creating such an environment is the responsibility of the teacher who becomes one of the key actors in preventing and fighting the phenomenon.

The Romanian Intelligence Service – as a national authority in the field of prevention and combat of terrorism – has the potential to develop customized trainings for educating and raising awareness to the key actors in preventing and combating of radicalization. This can be achieved through “Mihai Viteazul” National Intelligence Academy that provides ongoing training programs for the employees of the Service and members of civil society, covering diverse professional areas and fields.

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