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1 Introduction

The purpose of this baseline study is to present a conceptual and contextual framework for investigating offline and online (de) radicalisation in the MENA region and Western Balkans. One of the main goals of the PAVE project (Preventing and Addressing Violent Extremism through Community Resilience in the Balkans and MENA) is to “compare online and offline (de)radicalisation patterns, by examining the respective roles of online narratives fuelling radicalisation that get disseminated through social media propaganda, and peer-group socialisation patterns through local social networks within a given neighbourhood/municipality”, and to conduct “research on existing online media literacy and counter-narratives programmes, as well as on the offline role of social workers, cultural spaces and educational sites to foster peer-group de-radicalisation dynamics.” This research will be conducted in Western Balkans and MENA region, with a particular focus on four respective countries: Kosovo and North Macedonia and Tunisia and Lebanon.

Accordingly, this baseline seeks: to take stock of how major segments of existing research define online and offline (de) radicalisation and discuss related terms and concepts; secondly, to discuss key drivers of online and offline radicalisation, and to provide an overview of good practices and initiatives from governments and civil society organisations in the Western Balkans and MENA region to counter online and offline radicalisation. Throughout the report, experience of Kosovo and Tunisia will be utilised to illustrate or highlight particular points. This baseline study is organised in four main sections. The next section will discuss how the concepts of online and offline radicalisation are defined in current research, and identifies potential venues for further exploration in the framework of the PAVE project. The third section discusses how offline and online de-radicalisation is understood in current research, while the fourth section provides an overview of some government and non-government de-radicalisation initiatives and programs in the MENA region and Western Balkans. Some findings from this report include:

- There is no commonly accepted definition of the term radicalisation, however there seems to be general understanding that it is a sociological and psychological process that leads individuals to adopt extremist beliefs or worldviews. This is the understanding that the report also adopts;
- Radicalisation can be inspired by different ideologies, but in the case of the Western Balkans and MENA region, two are more prevalent: Islamist radicalisation and national ethno-political radicalisation;
- Most research into radicalisation has focused on Islam, which is a reductive approach and has come at the expense of ignoring other forms of radicalisation, including national and ethno-political;
- Part of a node that creates an environment conducive to radicalisation seems to include societal divisions and debates over the role of religion in the state, more concretely between those advocating for secular public space and institutions and those demanding state to reflect religious norms and doctrine. This tension is observed in MENA region, and in particular in Tunisia;
- Radicalisation does not always lead to violent extremism or terrorism. Therefore, creating an environment of social pressure for those simply adhering to radical beliefs can potentially tip them over to choose to act on their beliefs;
- Online platforms, especially social media play a key role in the process of radicalisation, however it is unclear how effective they are in practice. In MENA region and Western Balkans there seems to be an asymmetry between the online de-radicalisation initiatives and offline efforts.

2 Understanding offline and online radicalisation

As already noted in other baseline studies in the framework of the PAVE project, a key challenge in conceptualising terms such as radicalisation lies in the lack of a generally agreed and accepted definition. Nonetheless what we know from current research is that ‘radicalisation’ is a psychological and physical process and it is seen as the constant while, offline and online are largely means through which “someone interacts [...] with dogmatic extremism.” (Neumann, et.al. 2018, p. 6). Radicalisation as process can lead to violent extremism, which is to say that it is the pursuit of the ideological beliefs and goals through violent means. In the framework of the baseline study on cumulative extremisms in the framework of the PAVE project, it is noted that understanding what constitutes violence is central to understanding of violent extremism. In this sense, the study highlights that violence in current research when examining the concept of violent extremism is referred as direct violence, leaving out other forms of violence including structural violence.

This section discusses how the terms offline and online radicalisation are defined in current research as well as engages critically with some of the definitions of the terms that are widely utilised by scholars and practitioners.

2.1 Radicalisation

This section discusses the current research with respect to how the term radicalisation is conceptualised and understood and echoes the definition of the term as outlined in the PAVE project. The discussion focuses on definitions of radicalisation in general, Islamist radicalisation and national ethno-political radicalisation. The section also highlights the experiences of the Western Balkans and the MENA region countries, with a particular focus on Kosovo and Tunisia. Although both countries are at the focus of this report, being faced with the challenge of radicalisation and violent extremism, there are clear societal, political and historical differences between the two countries. In other words, both countries have differences in scale and the extent of security threat stemming from the stark differences in socio-political and historical context that shapes radicalisation and violent extremism in the respective societies.

As already mentioned the current research does not provide a conceptual clarity with respect to radicalisation. What we know is that radicalisation is not a new phenomenon and waves of its violent and terrorist expressions have been present historically. While today radicalisation is normalised as a negative connotation, from historical perspective the term was also used to refer to progressive ideas. For some scholars radicalisation started with the French Revolution of 1789. In other parts of the world radicalisation was used as a concept of ‘othering’ those that promoted ideas that challenged the status-quo. For instance during and in the aftermath of the American Civil War in 1865, ‘Radical Republicans’ were members of Congress who promoted emancipation of the slaves as well as believed in the equal rights and opportunities for the freed blacks (Britannica, n.d.). In other words, “ideas that are radical at some point could be liberal or even conservative for another.” (Kaya, 2020, p. 3). The connection between radicalisation and violent actions is relatively new.

Given that radicalisation is tied to global, sociological, and political drivers as well as ideological and psychological factors, its polarising tendencies can be witnessed among various ethnic, religious, and cultural population groups. While radicalisation into violent extremism can take many forms, following the rise of transnational terrorist organisations such as Al Qaeda and Islamic State (IS), the term has become largely associated with religiously-inspired, and specifically Islamist-based, non-state violence. If historical cases of radicalisation and violent extremism serve as a reference, it can be understood that prevalent extremist ideological tendencies can change over time based on the social and (geo) political context.

Since radicalisation often takes place at the intersection of an enabling (structural) environment characterised by factors such as deprivation, exclusion, experience of perceived injustice and a personal trajectory such as alienation/identity crisis, radicalisation has emerged from social processes and conditions common to societies throughout modern history, encompassing numerous radical and (revolutionary) social movements (Sageman, 2017). Thus, current efforts to conceptualise radicalisation often borrow from the framework of Social Movement Theory, viewing social movements as “A set of opinions and beliefs in a population, which represents preferences for changing some elements of the social structure and/or reward distribution of a society.” (Zald, 1987, p. 2) Comparatively speaking, it should be noted that across all past processes of radicalisation the number of radicalised individuals who commit to violence has been extremely low.

Ideological and behavioural radicalisation is an important dimension of our understanding of radicalisation. In this context the work of Peter Neumann (2013) on cognitive and behavioural radicalisation is considered most notable. Neumann holds that one common denominator across the research about radicalisation is that it is a process. Neumann (2013, pp. 874-875) explains that a key difference in radicalisation can be located between the “*political ideas* that are diametrically opposed to a society's core values”, or “*methods* by which actors seek to realise any political aim.” In other words, one of the challenges in defining radicalisation is the extent that we connect radicalisation with violent actions. As Neumann (2013) notes, for some governments it is mainly a cognitive process while for others there is explicit connection with violence. Timothy Williams (2019, p. 86) holds that ideological and behavioural radicalisation “co-exist and influence each other”. In this sense, we can understand radicalisation both as an incremental process of adopting extremist views and ideas but not necessarily acting on them, as well as a when extremist ideas influence an individual to commit violent extremist acts.

The European Union (EU) defines radicalisation as “a phased and complex process in which an individual or a group embraces a radical ideology or belief that accepts, uses or condones violence, including acts of terrorism within the meaning of the Directive on combating terrorism, to reach a specific political or ideological purpose.” (The European Commission, n.d., para. 1). In the framework of the PAVE project radicalisation is defined as: “Social, psychological or ideological process whereby certain individuals adopt increasingly radical worldviews that justify the use of violent methods.” (PAVE, 2020). Another contribution to the understanding of radicalisation comes from the psychological studies. Scholars such as a Trip *et.al.* (2019) drawing from existing research note that radicalisation can be understood as a functional as well as descriptive phenomenon. While from the functional perspective radicalisation is seen a “preparation for intergroup conflict” descriptive definitions denotes a change in “beliefs, feelings, and behaviours that justify intergroup violence.” (Ibid, para. 3).

Another closely related concept to radicalisation is violent extremism which is a diverse and multi-factorial phenomenon that is difficult to pinpoint to a single variable or driver. It is a complex process whose understanding requires an all-encompassing approach that takes into account socio-political contexts, groups' dynamics, and individual circumstances. As radicalisation and violent extremism studies experienced an exponential growth in the past two decades, various scholars have purported that there are multiple paths towards radicalisation and violent extremism, cautioning from any attempts to draw causal relationships between the inter-related factors. Increasingly, there is a focus on psychological factors influencing an individual's cognitive susceptibility to violent extremist thought/ideology. According to the Swedish scholar Ranstorp (2016), violent extremism can be best conceptualised as “a kaleidoscope of factors, creating infinite individual combinations.” Ranstorp further maintains that there are some basic primary colors which create complex interlocking combinations: 1) individual socio-psychological factors; 2) social factors; 3) political factors; 4) ideological and religious dimensions; 5) the role of culture and identity issues in radicalisation and violent extremism.

With respect to how radicalisation leading to violent extremism manifested itself, we can observe how in the case of Kosovo this was primarily through the phenomenon of foreign fighters while in case of Tunisia it included domestic violent acts as well. In the case of Kosovo radical ideological convictions have resulted with over 400 Kosovars traveling to Syria and Iraq to fight for the Islamic State (IS) (Perteshi and Ilazi, 2020), whereas Kosovo has yet to see a terrorist attack inside the country. Yet this was not for the lack of trying: in 2016, Kosovo police arrested 19 individuals who were suspected of planning to carry out attacks in Kosovo and in Albania (Kirezi, 2016). Tunisia also had its share of citizens going to Syria and Iraq and it is estimated that “around 27,000 tried to join, but only 2,900 actually made it to the conflict zone” (Zelin, 2018, para. 2). Recent security threats in the country are seen as coming from “dispersed sleeper cells composed of jihadists that returned from Syria, Libya, and Iraq” (Jawad, 2020, para. 11). This shows the relevance of reintegration and de-radicalisation policies and programs (Perteshi and Ilazi, 2020).

Ideological foundations for radicalisation

In the framework of the ideological dimension of radicalisation, a particular challenge has been with controlling the meaning and interpretation of religious and nationalist and ethno-political ideologies or beliefs. In this context, both Kosovo and Tunisia share a common challenge. For instance, in the case of Tunisia it is considered that the lack of effective control over mosques and preachers by a central authority or the government has resulted with more radicalised interpretation of the religious doctrine by particular preachers (Watanabe, 2018). Kosovo media have often reported on cases of mosques operating outside the oversight or control of the institutional framework of the Islamic Community of Kosovo, which is the central organisation in charge of leadership and management of the Islamic religious institutions. In the context of the PAVE project there is a particular focus on religious and nationalistic ethno-political radicalisation. This requires discussing religious and national ethno-political ideological concepts related to radicalisation, more concretely in Islam as well as far-right radicalism, which is often inspired by the Orthodox Christianity in the case of the Western Balkans.

Religious radicalisation

With respect to Islam, radicalisation is usually associated with the Salafai/Wahhabi school of jurisprudence (PAVE, 2020). Salafism represents the: “... idea that the most authentic and true Islam is found in the lived example of the early, righteous generations of Muslims, known as the Salaf, who were closest in both time and proximity to the Prophet Muhammad.” (Hamid and Dar, 2016, para. 8). Salafis can be also considered as fundamentalist as they promote “particular habits of the first Muslims, such as dressing like the Prophet (by cuffing their trousers at ankle-length) or brushing their teeth like the Prophet (with a natural teeth cleaning twig called a miswak).” (Ibid.) It is important to note that, religious fundamentalism was originally a characteristic of the conservative Protestant movement in the United States (Fry, 2020).

Salafi are often seen as “ultraconservatives.” Kaya (2020, p. 5) explains that “Radicalisation in the form of resorting to the past, religion culture, nativism and ethnonationalism is a youth revolt against society, articulated on an Islamic religious narrative of jihad, or an ethno-nationalist form of nativism and white supremacy.” For Bernard Lewis (1990, para. 44) “Islamist fundamentalism has given an aim and a form to the otherwise aimless and formless resentment and anger of the Muslim masses at the forces that have devalued their traditional values and loyalties and, in the final analysis, robbed them of their beliefs, their aspirations, their dignity, and to an increasing extent even their livelihood.” This understanding of the status-quo has resulted with segment of the Muslim world pursuing a more radical approach to pursue an Islamic way of life, in their interpretations. Islamic radicalism accordingly refers to an extreme interpretation of the Islamic religion which inform a vision for the society that required undermining and actively seeking to change the status-quo. However, an essential problem has emerged with respect to the authority that defines what an Islamic way of life should mean.

Another commonly used term to denote Islamist radicalisation is Jihadism. According to Shadi Hamid and Tashid Dar (2016, para. 8) this is: “driven by the idea that jihad (religiously-sanctioned warfare) is an individual obligation (fard ‘ayn) incumbent upon all Muslims, rather than a collective obligation carried out by legitimate representatives of the Muslim community (fard kifaya), as it was traditionally understood in the pre-modern era. They are able to do this by arguing that Muslim leaders today are illegitimate and do not command the authority to ordain justified violence. In the absence of such authority, they argue, every able-bodied Muslim should take up the mantle of jihad.” John Turner (2012, p. 186) argues “that Islamism does not need to be equated necessarily with Jihadism. Islam in the Middle East will find a space in which to operate with or without the consent of the ruling elite. By eliminating the marginalisation, co-option and extremism as the only alternatives to participation Islam can play a vibrant and productive role in politics that will serve the interests of both the West and the Middle East.” Jihadist glorify violence and conflict.

Jihadisation therefore, is a process of recruiting, indoctrinating/convincing individuals or groups to be part of jihad and commit violent acts. Jihadisation process does not require an external sponsors, there are cases of self-jihadisation, when an individual sees it as his or her duty to be part of jihad and commits violent acts. Sharia law refers to Islamic law and it is a code for living for Muslims, and it consists of Qur’an, the teaching of Prophet Muhammad (Sunnah) and the rulings by Islamic scholars. Sharia is a comprehensive code that cover both religious matter of worship as well as issues such as, social behaviours, marriage and divorce, etc. Salafism is another important concept associated with Islamist radicalism, particularly with respect to the ideological dimension of radicalisation. This is an important concept that informs radicalisation in Islam as it pertains to efforts to define what ‘true Islam’ means and in that context it ‘others’ different segments and interpretation of Islam as false, including in some Arab and Muslim countries. In this sense, radicalism in Islam is not only in relation to the Western world as it is largely understood, but it is also a phenomenon within the Muslim world, as those claiming to represent ‘true Islam’ actively oppose governments, and religious leaders, and seek to change the status-quo.

In the case of Tunisia a key issue that informs part of the radicalisation context lies in the so-called ideological debate between those supporting a secular states and others promoting an official transformation of the Tunisia into an Islamic state governed by Islamic laws. These differences are especially prevalent during electoral campaigns. In one case this division was manifested in a proposed law that would institute equality between male and female citizens of Tunisia with respect to inheritance. This heuristic issue generates a problem stemming from preliminary observations in the field and from the mapping of electoral ballots: why is extremism violent in some sites rather than others, while all of them share the same characteristics and drivers of vulnerability?

After the fall of the regime of Ben Ali in 2011, Tunisia has experienced an obvious comeback of radical Islam that had once fuelled violent extremism. Such a comeback has manifested itself mainly in the working-class neighbourhoods of large cities, in borderline towns in the west of the country, and in the south and in the small villages of the interior of the country as well. It has been advocated by "Koranic" Islamic associations, by particular mosques and schools, not to mention also by "moderate" Islamism, i.e. by the very one preached by the En-Nahdha Party—previously known as the Movement of the Islamist Trend, now a party comfortably represented in the Tunisian Parliament and a party whose past is not free from "violent" acts, either. Yet, the democratic process which has begun in Tunisia since the election of the second Constitutional National Assembly (ANC) in October 2011 has certainly promoted the institutionalisation of political and ideological conflicts, but without succeeding in pacifying relations between the different actors, nonetheless. Indeed, far from being able to eradicate the propensities toward violence, the political actors of Islamist tendency have showed leniency vis-à-vis violent discourse and religious activism.

National ethno political radicalisation

When it comes to religiously inspired radicalisation, the current research is dominated by references to Islam, which represent an arguably biased and reductive approach. While Islamist radicalisation dominated the research and policy responses in the post 9-11 context, the far right in recent years has posed a growing threat to security and peace. Extreme right-wing violence is not a new phenomenon but in the more recent years there has been an increase in its “frequency and lethality, with some individuals, groups and movements pursuing transnational aims in a national context, drawing on international networks, ideas and personalities and seeking to mobilise others, often using the Internet.” Already in the 1980 research started to pay more attention to right wing terrorism with a string of attacks in Italy, Germany and France, noting that the “right-wing terrorist appear more willing to shed blod.” (Hoffman, 1982) Right-wing terrorism is closely associated with nationalism and nativism.

In the framework of this report we will use the concept of national radicals to refer to extremist view or ideas stemming from national ethno-politics, which is particularly present in the Western Balkans, whereas religious radicalism is predominant in the MENA region.

Alongside Islamic based radicalisation and violent extremism in the Western Balkans, which has been mainly manifested through the phenomenon of foreign fighters, the region also faces a national ethno-political radicalisation. The national ethno-political radicalism in the Western Balkans is often manifested as a racist ideology, and as such is largely understood in the context of the far-right politics and nativism in the region. This does not imply that nationalism is equated with far-right, it suggests that in the case of the Western Balkans it has a tendency to manifest itself as far-right. In this sense, national ethno-political radicalism in the Western Balkans often promotes hatred against particular ethnic groups drawing from alleged historical injustices, immigrants, LGBTQ+ community, etc. While the Serbian nationalist groups dominated the current research into far-right politics in the Western Balkans, similar groups exist also in Kosovo and North Macedonia. For further read on the far-right in the Western Balkans Věra Stojarová (2013) provides an important account.

The nationalistic ethno-political groups in the Western Balkans represent a continuation of the politics of the 1990s that draw on historical myths to promote as well as justify violence especially against particular ethnic groups. The two so-called projects of “unified Albanians” as well as “Great Serbia” – among others – best illustrate how the national ethno-political radicalism is often manifested in practice in the Western Balkans. Both projects reinforce historical myths, ethnic hatred narratives and are based on annexing existing territories from their neighbouring countries (Janjevic, 2017; Gadzo, 2018).

The current scholarship seems to overlook the impact that the wars of the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s had in creating the modern far-right extremism movement, as thousands from Europe joined the Serbian (Orthodox) and Croatian (Catholic) armies out of religious convictions. Both Anders Breivik and the attacker of Christchurch/New Zealand, among others, were inspired by Serbian nationalism (Coalson, 2019). But, promoting ethnic-division and hatred is only part of how nationalistic ethno-political radicalisation is manifested in the Western Balkans. It is also shaped by the perceived threat from Islam echoing a similar theme across the EU. Another dimension of the national ethno-political groups in the Western Balkans is their international links, especially to Russia. Kosovo holds a particular relevance for Serbia and is an important space where ethno-national extremism combined with religion are performed. National ethno-political radicalism in the Western Balkans is also manifested through anti-liberal and anti-EU narratives.

Foreign fighters are considered an important aspect of contemporary terrorism research as well as it is often associated with radicalisation. In the case of Western Balkans, the focus has been on Muslims joining IS in Syria and Iraq, but less attention has been paid to Serbs, an estimated 300, traveling to

Ukraine to participate in the civil war there on the side of the pro-Russian groups out of cultural and historical ties with Russia as well as religious convictions as Orthodox Christians. However, the international community at large has been rather silent on problematising Serbia's FTF problem as it did with Kosovo.

Accordingly we could understand radicalisation first and foremost as a process that involves a cognitive trajectory, and is influenced by different dynamics and factors whereby incrementally an individual adopts extremist ideas, views or interpretations.

Through this understanding the PAVE project accentuates the relevance of how different narratives and interpretations of doctrine and ideologies shape radicalisation of an individual. This is in accordance with one of the main goals of the PAVE project which is to "compare online and offline (de)radicalisation patterns, by examining the respective roles of online narratives fuelling radicalisation that get disseminated through social media propaganda, and peer-group socialisation patterns through local social networks within a given neighbourhood/municipality" and "research on existing online media literacy and counter-narratives programmes, as well as on the offline role of social workers, cultural spaces and educational sites to foster peer-group de-radicalisation dynamics." (PAVE, 2020, p. 9).

2.2 Online radicalisation

The internet has undoubtedly transformed the communication and networking culture, and in doing so it has created ample opportunities to expand, diversify and access general populace or particular targeted audience and this opportunity has been seized by radical groups. Determining the exact role that the internet plays in the radicalisation process is subject of debate in academia, What we know for sure is that online platforms, including social media are widely utilised to spread extremist ideas and such content is increasing incrementally and it is not limited to a particular religious or other ideologies (Conway, 2017). One of the main findings of a RAND report investigating 15 cases of violent extremism is that the internet can serve as a source of information, communication and of propaganda for extremist ideology, and it can enhance opportunities and accelerate the process of radicalisation (Behr, et.al. 2013).

Part of the conceptual debate on the role of the internet for radicalisation is the question, if online propaganda is more effective than physical social networks (Meleagrou-Hitchens and Kaderbhai, 2017). However, internet is increasingly becoming a main tool of interaction and networking among people, and especially youth. The internet has been especially important to 'normalise' both radical ideas that lead to violent extremism and terrorism (Torok, 2013). As Torok notes the challenge lies in determining "the mechanisms and power relations that underlie this phenomenon of online media used to promote radicalisation which in some cases can develop into terrorism." (Ibid.) In this sense, PAVE research into Western Balkans and MENA region can tackle this challenge as well.

Maura Conway (2017, p. 80) explains that for some researchers individuals engaged in promoting radicalisation online are confined to that role and are not detrimental in the 'real world'." Here internet is portrayed positively because it allows these individuals to 'vent' "satisfied their desire to act" (Ibid). A difficult aspect for the argument that radical content online leads to radicalisation, is that often other consumers of the same content do not show the same result (Ibid). In this sense, it is important to understand if it is only online narratives or even different types of online media channels, including social media platforms that can affect in different ways different communities. Internet access is high, both in Western Balkans as well as MENA region. For instance active social media penetration in Tunisia is at 62% and in Lebanon at 66% (Statista, 2018). In the case of the Western Balkans, in Kosovo overall internet penetration is considered at 88% (Tota, 2018) while for North Macedonia at 79% (World Bank, 2018).

The use of narratives

In the framework of the PAVE project we want to understand the process of how “respective roles of online narratives fuelling radicalisation that get disseminated through social media propaganda, and peer-group socialisation patterns through local social networks within a given neighbourhood/municipality.” (PAVE 2020, p.9). Narrative is understood as “an account of events in the order in which they occurred to make a point” (Aarten, Mulder, and Pemberton, 2018, p. 559). In this sense, the current research shows that an essential aspect of online radicalisation lies in the narrative of victimhood.

Narratives of victimisation play an important role in the process of radicalisation, especially with respect to online radicalisation. Online radicalisation narratives often involve shock and awe tactics or moral shock campaigns. Aarten, Mulder and Pemberton (2018, p. 558), hold that: “The link between victimisation experiences and radicalisation can be direct, with victimisation experiences serving as a causal factor in the development and extremity of religious and political views that may motivate political violence and terrorism.

For instance, an investigation of the Islamic State’s (IS) use of online narratives targeted for the Kosovo audience shows that it exploited the vulnerabilities of the post-war society in the country which grappled “with forging an identity, past grievances pertaining to the 1998-1999 war such as wartime rape and the perceived bias against Muslims” and used this to “incite recruits from Kosovo to join its war efforts in the Middle East.” (Kraja, 2017, p. 6) In addition to this “the IS narrative to Kosovo’s public is a power play that lures its followers with the promise of an alternative way of life in the so-called caliphate, purportedly compliant with Sharia laws.” (Ibid).

Another report by the Kosovar Centre for Security Studies (KCSS) found that Imams have a tendency to develop their own profiles on social media and publish sermons and other lectures. This can be both important for counter-narrative measures as well as potentially be abused to promote radical content by lectures or sermons not sanctioned by religious authorities. (Jakupi and Kelmendi, 2019). The most worrisome finding of the report is that online extremist narratives are much better organised and effectively disseminated than counter-narrative activities (Ibid).

In the case of Tunisia, so-called ‘radicalised Imams’ requisitioned several mosques and a self-proclaimed ‘morality paramilitary brigade’ emerged as sermons and statutes on social media started calling out for Jihad in Syria. This was not all, in addition to these forms of violence, there were terrorist attacks perpetrated against the police forces the army. These acts of violence, often perpetrated by vulnerable young people, cannot be dissociated from the religious preachers’ sermons and ‘fatwa-s’ mostly issued by Tunisian and other Arab ‘Salafist’, Islamist personalities who have become notorious for displaying ‘globalised’ Islam.

Online radicalisation has been an important tool also for recruitment of sympathisers and supporters. With respect to which online platforms are utilised for radicalisation, a research by Conway, et al., (2019, p. 145) found that for Twitter was the “preferred online spaces for IS and their ‘fans’, with an estimated “46,000 and 90,000 pro-IS Twitter accounts active in the period September to December 2014.” The same study shows that although Twitter tried to disrupt IS propaganda on their channel, a “large number of accounts were created daily to disseminate this propaganda.” (Ibid. p. 149). The sheer numbers show how challenging it is to effectively counter and disrupt radical narratives and propaganda online.

You Tube has become a popular choice for those preaching extreme views and in some cases effective in ideological indoctrination, prompting the concept of ‘YouTube Preacher’. Part of the problem has been “YouTube’s recommendation algorithm, which some argue has turned the service into a

“radicalisation engine.” (Ingram, 2020, para.1). However, a recent study by Penn State into far-right radicalisation holds that this thinking is misleading, because it implies that simply changing YouTube’s algorithms will solve the problem (Meisenzahl, 2019). The study from Kevin Munger and Joseph Phillips, shows that “YouTube makes uploading content and forming communities around shared ideas easier than on other platforms” and as such it poses a threat in “the capacity to create radical alternative political canons and interpretive communities to match.” (Ibid, para. 4-5).

A study on IS’s use of Twitter for propaganda purposes shows how algorithms may connect different unintended users to radical channels: “For the uninitiated user, once one IS-related account was located, the automated Twitter recommendations on “who to follow” accurately supplied others” (Conway, et al., 2019, p. 150). IS even created sub-communities in Twitter to target particular ethnic-groups based on language as well as other interests (Ibid). Creating a similar understanding about the extent of outreach and how online radical channels operate in Western Balkans and MENA region can be proven an important tool to deploy effective de-radicalisation interventions online.

A key difference between offline and online radicalisation seems to be that spaces of offline radicalisation are generally identifiable, such as radicalised mosques, educational establishment, and prisons. However, online radicalisation is much more diverse and dispersed and it is difficult to both pin-point key venues of concern, as well as devise responses that are effective. A particularly important challenge for online radicalisation is also the cooperation and relationship between government and regulatory bodies and companies that created and manage social platforms or other online communication means. There seems to be an inherent tension in deploying counter radicalisation measures online, without the state appearing to establish a comprehensive interception abilities that can infringe upon civil liberties and rights of citizens.

3 Understanding de-radicalisation

This section discusses definitions of offline and online de-radicalisation in the current research, focusing on interrelated concepts such as disengagement, rehabilitation and disruption of radical content online.

Like with the concept of radicalisation, the current research is inconsistent and does not provide much clarity concerning de-radicalisation. This is interesting considering that nowadays governments have even created dedicated institutions to deal with de-radicalisation. Policy-makers recognise the importance of reintegrating in the society radical individuals that committed violent or terrorists acts (Horgan and Braddock, 2010). In practice, lack of conceptual clarity for de-radicalisation can also affect the lack of clear purpose of government or non-government initiatives. Is the goal to pacify the citizens and target their ideology or manage and prevent their potential violent behaviour? (Veldhuis, 2012). In practice most de-radicalisation efforts seem to be grouped into two overall approaches: securitised and punitive approaches and restorative and rehabilitation approaches. The securitised approach tends to only deal with the symptoms of radicalisation while rehabilitation approaches focus on helping the individual disengage from radical beliefs and views.

In the framework of the DARE project de-radicalisation is understood “marking a specific kind of societal negotiation between a community and perceived deviants aiming at conflict reduction.” (Köhler, 2018, p. 8). An important challenge for de-radicalisation approaches lies in effectively demarcating such efforts from the principle of democratic functioning of the society that upholds freedom of expression and opinions (Ibid). In other words, to have radical ideas or beliefs is not necessarily illegal and can be considered a freedom of expression in a democratic society, as long as an individual chooses not act on such beliefs and they do not represent a violation or infringement

upon the rights of other individuals or groups. For instance, many European countries have laws against Holocaust denial and the systematic genocide against the Jewish people.

Disruption

In a generalised context, de-radicalisation refers to efforts to counter and oppose the radical doctrine, the ideological positions or interpretations that are utilised to justify radical views as well as violence in their pursuit. In accordance with our understanding of radicalisation outlined in the previous section, the cognitive dimension of de-radicalisation is very important. In many instances it implies a prevention and disruption of radicalisation (i.e. non-radicalisation). Yet, behavioural and cognitive elements of de-radicalisation are often not clearly identified and there are inherent challenges to determine whether changes in behaviour match changes in objective/intentions – exacerbated by the fact that de-radicalisation programs are implemented in the prison contexts where inmates have strong incentives to misrepresent their views.

Some studies show that de-radicalisation process is affected by the nature and trajectory of radicalisation of the individual. Lina Grip and Jenniina Kotajoki (2019, p. 391) hold that “The degree of voluntarism, motivations for joining extremist groups (including ideological beliefs) and role and time spent in the organisation are suggested to have an impact on disengagement and reintegration processes.” Factors such as the status and the time that the individual spent with the organisation are important to consider (Ibid).

Disengagement

Disengagement, describes the behavioural de-radicalisation process, which means the efforts are not oriented towards convincing the individual to abandon her/his radical worldview or beliefs, but to convince the radicalised individual to disengage from the violence associated with the radical beliefs. Disengagement is often implemented through programs that seek to develop critical thinking or counter the radical beliefs by a figure of authority. For instance, in Spain between 1982 and 1986 the government implemented the ‘social reinsertion’ program for members of ETA (Euskadi Ta Askatasuna), which saw no case of recidivism for those members who participated in the program. In the case of Kosovo for instance, one de-radicalisation program involved bringing verified Imams to have sessions in the correctional facilities with the repatriated foreign fighters from Syria, in the hopes that they would be able to discredit their ideological views. However, because the program was sponsored by the government and was heavily promoted to show resolve of the institutions to fight radicalisation, the Imams were seen as collaborators and they had no credibility among the targeted audience in correctional facilities, and therefore the program was cancelled.

Often de-radicalisation efforts can contribute to strengthening the radical beliefs of individuals when government programs follow a heavily securitised approach or when programs from non-government organisations are perceived as doing the bidding of the ‘Western countries’. Although de-radicalisation, understood more broadly as the reversal of radicalisation processes, remains a significant strategic policy objective in countering violent extremism, the approach presents numerous challenges. When it comes to de-radicalisation, important gaps in the current knowledge persist and existing literature is marred by lack of empirical research investigating drivers to de-radicalise. Moreover, de-radicalisation programs often have a more limited focus on cognitive factors and the socialisation context without accounting for other structural conditions.

In the case of the Western Balkans, more concretely Kosovo, the government has even established a specialised unit within the Ministry of Internal Affairs to coordinate de-radicalisation and reintegration process for radicalised individuals (MIA, 2019). This unit when it was officially established in 2019 was unique not just in the region but arguably beyond. It has also developed dedicated de-radicalisation and rehabilitation program in the Kosovo Correctional Service.

In the case of Tunisia in 2015 the state amended the 2015 Anti-Terrorism Act and created the National Authority for the Fight against Terrorism, with the latter term being understood as violent extremism (NAFT/INLCT). The approach of this mechanism was not security centred but focused on the pre-emptive rehabilitation and de-radicalisation of mainly young people. However, the preventive approach advocated by the NAFT/INLCT has involved the main Departments of State (Ministries) responsible for the integration and socialisation of young people, as well as worked in close collaboration with civil society.

Rehabilitation

Having discussed disengagement, another important associated concept with de-radicalisation is rehabilitation. The Rehabilitation Manual of the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) defines rehabilitation as “a comprehensive process, ideally resulting in the rehabilitated person leading a self-determined and self-sustained life in a democratic society, without adhering to extremist views or participating in extremism-inspired activities (including violence).” (Walkenhorst, et al., p. 5) The manual recognises that essential to rehabilitation are effective integration programs that combine social and economic support that facilitate the individual’s return to society or community (Ibid). There are examples of rehabilitation programs across the globe. For instance, in the case of Pakistan, a rehabilitation program for radicalised individuals included four components: “formal education, vocational training, counselling and therapy.” (Noor, 2013, p. 17)

Often de-radicalisation efforts through rehabilitation are focused primarily in prisons (See for instance: Hettiarachchi, 2018). In the case of Kosovo the government introduced vocational training in prisons, as well as communication courses, with the hopes of building a sense of community responsibility for the radicalised individuals (Perteshi and Ilazi, 2020). It also rotated radicalised individuals from one prison to another and it did not isolate them in one wing of a prison (Ibid). The case of Singapore which is considered somewhat a successful rehabilitation program is based on producing counter-ideological materials as well as education of the Muslim community on religious extremism (Hannah, Clutterbuck, and Rubin, 2008).

3.1 Online de-radicalisation

When it comes to online de-radicalisation the main focus in the existing research seems to be understood in the framework of the concept of disruption. The disruption approach is defined by the UK government as “working with filtering companies, disrupting the use of the internet for extremist messaging and increasing the use of the internet to promote alternative views to the radicalised messages that may otherwise be accessed.”(Behr, et.al., 2013, p. 4). There are two levels top the disruption activity, there is a technical element which involves tracing and tracking radical content online, including different channels or handles in social media platforms that disseminate such information. But, there is also, a narrative component, disseminating counter-narratives online to the radical content.

With respect to the technical dimension of online de-radicalisation through disruption, in 2017, companies such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube established the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT). The forum provides direct support, including through technology and knowledge, as well as helps coordinate main stakeholders to disrupt extremist content in their platforms (GIFCT, n.d.). While important progress has been made by tech companies to counter radicalism and prevent their platforms from being abused by extremist groups, a key challenge remains the versatility of these groups. Groups promoting radicalism and extremist ideas if blocked or removed by a particular channel from an online social media platform, simply open a different one. One way that GIFTC has responded to this is by creating a data of ‘hashes’ which is used as a digital fingerprint to track radical activity online (Macdonald, 2018). This approach has been proven useful and with practical impact. Based on available data, governments in the Western Balkans as well as MENA region, have been less active in

pursuing cooperation with the information technology community in their countries to implement a similar approach. In this sense, one potential avenue to explore in the research is the potential for such cooperation.

With respect to online de-radicalisation, current research regarding Kosovo finds that government agencies have not put forth a strategic communication effort to counter violent extremism despite the centrality that they accorded to it in the Strategy. No consistent counter-narrative sponsored by public institutions or NGOs that continually are implementing projects to prevent violent extremism at the local level and central level Kosovo has been found. (Jakupi and Kelmendi, 2019). Furthermore, the The Islamic Community of Kosovo (BIK), the body that regulates the religious affairs for the Muslim followers in Kosovo, lacks a coordinated, unison platform to provide counter-narratives against extremist groups.

4 Understanding drivers of radicalisation

Violent extremism is a diverse and multi-factorial phenomenon that is difficult to pinpoint to a single variable or driver. It is a complex process whose understanding requires an all-encompassing approach that takes into account socio-political contexts, groups' dynamics, and individual circumstances (Ranstorp, 2016). Research that focuses on individuals and their paths towards violent extremism highlights the critical role of social networks in these processes (Sageman, *Understanding terror networks*, 2004) and that they are usually inspired by some form of militant ideological community, whether in the virtual realm or in real life (Gill, 2015). For the majority of those engaging in violent activities, the social ties to radical individuals and groups signify the means through which they become engaged in militancy, often developing prior to their own radicalisation at the level of ideology and acceptance of violence (Bjørger and Silke, 2018).

Yet, as Schmid argues, a micro-level and person-centred approach deflects attention from the role of a wider spectrum of factors, including the role of repressive government policies which may shape up radical views (Schmid, 2013). In addition to micro level factors such as identity problems, feelings of alienation, and stigmatisation, to understand what leads to radicalisation Schmid suggests that one has to look into factors at meso-level as well as macro-level (Ibid., p. 3). The meso-level type of analysis includes "the radical mileu" (Malthaner & Waldmann, 2014), or the enabling environment which offers to those willing to join adventure, comradeship, and support structures, while the macro-level of analysis includes, among others, effects of government actions at home and abroad and society's relationship with minorities, particularly migrants that find themselves in between cultures (Schmid, 2013). Exploring radicalisation through these units of observation makes it easier to understand socio-psychological drivers, socialisation, and mobilisation into violent extremism, however, efforts to draw a profile of persons who are likely to radicalise have thus far been inconclusive (Ibid., p. 2). Inherent methodological challenges related to violent extremism research, such as limited sample sizes, hinder the ability to draw generalisations from a small group of people. Moreover, as Gurski notes, assuming that the same conditions apply across societies is erroneous and calls for conclusions related to radicalisation and violent extremism to be drawn from research into local circumstances, since false assumptions often lead to policy recommendations which will fail to address the problem (Gurski, 2016).

Interwoven with drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism in the online and offline sphere is the power of narratives, both in the sense of constructing meaning and social realities for individuals/groups and for constraining understanding (The Change Institute, 2008). The term 'narrative' itself is largely synonymous with 'story' or a narrated series of connected events (Ibid. p. 9). However, pertaining to violent extremism, its meaning broadens to refer to an explanation, a belief, or a worldview - to the point of also being used interchangeably with "ideology" as a systemic set of

political beliefs (Ibid. p. 9). 'A narrative employed by extremist groups can be a useful means of influencing beliefs not only in terms of what they share, but also in what they decide to leave out. For instance, IS narrative that portrays Kosovo as run by non-believers and servants of the Western powers who allegedly fight Islam, fully omits NATO's intervention and US-led airstrikes against Serbia to stop the brutal ethnic cleansing campaign against Kosovo Albanians (Kraja, 2017).

When it comes to analysing the drivers and factors of radicalisation factors, researchers explain that neither poverty nor socio-economic deprivation are direct root causes of terrorism (Ranstorp, 2016). In the case of Kosovo and Northern Macedonia, research authors have categorised the drivers of violent extremism into political, ideological, social and psychological factors. These drivers share similarities not only with other countries from Western Balkans, MENA region and European Union countries. Specifically, studies have found that violent extremism in Kosovo has been driven by a combination of tangible internal conditions – weak economy, political instability, poor education system and the rise of various Islamic nongovernmental organisations, competing in Kosovo's newly democratised public sphere, as well as a number of less stringent circumstances, such as identity issues, social isolation or exclusion (Kraja, 2017). While other studies have linked the emergence of this phenomenon in Kosovo to the work of faith-based Islamic organisations that promoted a pan-Muslim identity, galvanised by the wars in the Middle East (Ibid. p. 5). Factors such as economic development, poverty, education and unemployment have proven not to be a key factor in process of radicalisation and violent extremism. The British report on violent extremism in Kosovo states that the education is not the main driver of violent extremism in Kosovo (Kursani, 2018). According to this report, the educational level among Kosovo's foreign fighters compared to the country's general population reveals no correlation between education level and phenomenon of foreign fighters (Ibid., p. 10). Comparing the data of education levels of individual foreign fighters with the Kosovo average populations, FF's appear to have attained a slightly higher level of education for around 10 percent more than Kosovo average (Ibid., p. 10).

Kraja (2017) argues that the IS narrative has been central to its recruitment efforts in Kosovo, and social media – particularly Facebook, Twitter and YouTube - have been the means through which propaganda almost in its entirety has been delivered and disseminated (Kraja, 2017). Every single platform is used for various purposes and by targeting different target audiences in disseminating the propaganda, content based on the specific audience, language, and historical context (Aly, Macdonald, Jarvis, & Chen, 2016). The social media or virtual 'caliphate' create opportunities to meet other young people who are willing to join and involve in creating the 'alternative' frames and images like showing battle scenes, fights, living in the "land of caliphate" beheading and captures presenting such as in ISIS Dabiq magazine (Hughes & Vidino, 2015). For instance, YouTube creates a community with a subculture allowing comments, exchange comments about videos, etc. (Wienmann, 2014). The other platforms such as Instagram and Flickr create an imagined world with jihadi figures, revolutionary scenes while Telegram constitutes a significant tool to create a direct relationship between IS's central organisation and its supporters (Krona, 2020).

Propaganda is at the core of violent extremists' efforts to garner support, increase recruitment, and extend their influence beyond their immediate targets (Kruglanski, et al., 2014). Various studies have explored the role of propaganda in driving violent extremism, both in the offline and the online sphere. In addition, with the proliferation of online social networks and the online media, questions are raised whether a person can be radicalised solely through online sources, especially as it relates to cases when individuals who commit violent/terrorist attacks are not affiliated with any groups. These individuals who commit extremist/terrorist acts while not being affiliated with any terrorist/extremist group are considered to have gone through a process of "self-radicalisation" with the internet playing a facilitating role (Koehler, 2014). Behr et al. note that what distinguishes self- radicalisation from radicalisation via the internet is that it is a process which occurs in isolation, whereby no contact is made with other terrorists/extremists, whether offline or online (Behr I. v., Reding, Edwards, &

Gibbon, 2013). Yet, reviewing available literature they highlight that among scholars and practitioners there is a consensus that self-radicalisation is extremely rare, if possible at all (Ibid., p.20). While the internet has expanded opportunities to radicalise, Wittaker and Herath (2020) argue that the focus should be on how online activities interact with comparable offline behaviour, with the two domains not to be viewed as mutually exclusive (Whittaker & Herath, 2020).

Scholars, however, caution from overemphasising the role of the internet in radicalisation since studies on online radicalisation tend to not be supported by empirical data (Zelin, 2013). According to Zelin, studies on online radicalisation remain highly descriptive and not empirical (Ibid. p. 10). For instance, in the case of Kosovo and North Macedonia, extremist narratives have been delivered through a set of illegal mosques and breakaway preachers³, who would making use of alternative means, such as online presence and summer camps, to attract a young body of followers (Jakupi & Kraja, Accounting for the Difference: Vulnerability and Resilience to Violent Extremism in Kosovo, 2018). Based on KCSS data, the majority of those who travelled to Syria and Iraq and joined IS are between 20-26 years old, lacking religious knowledge and illiterate on references from credible religious scholars, they are usually attracted by a third group which follows distorted paths for rebellion that are drawn by hypocrisy. The majority of individuals who have travelled to Syria and Iraq are from families who do not have a long tradition of practicing religion. Around 50 % of those who have travelled in Syria and Iraq have a previous criminal record. The dismissive approach and the marginalisation of religious conservative communities in Kosovo and North Macedonia then became part of the narrative used by the Islamic State to inspire many individuals and families from both countries to travel in Syria and Iraq (Qehaja & Perteshi, 2018).

Similarly, both countries are experiencing a rise in right-wing extremism and ethno-nationalist extremism. Ethnic tensions in North Macedonia and the marginalisation of Albanian communities by state authorities are driving the Albanian community closer to the religious-based extremism and identity (Ibid., p. 6). The clashes between Albanian and Macedonian communities in Northern Macedonia has increased the ethnic based extremism among the both communities. The ethnic clashes between both communities make a fertile ground for the nationalists and extreme political parties in North Macedonia to increase their power in country and shift away the focus of the citizens in the real problems of the country such as: state capture, corruption and organised crimes, unemployment and lack of rule of law in the country. In the last eight years, all the focus in researching of foreign fighters was towards individuals who have fought in Syria and Iraq as a part of Islamic State. On the other hand, around 300 Serbs from Serbia, have travelled in Ukraine to fight as a part of pro-Russian paramilitary forces in Donetsk (Zivanovic, 2018). In line with the growing trends of far-right extremism at the European level and the US, Far-right violent extremism is considered widespread also in the Western Balkans, though it remains under researched (Rrustemi, 2020).

5 De-radicalisation initiatives in the Western Balkans and MENA region

The burgeoning field of preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) research has been exploring factors that make individuals or groups more vulnerable to radicalisation. While many studies have looked into individual-level factors, in the more recent years, there is greater focus on exploring the role of communities, a meso-level type of analysis of investigating the issue. This presents a paradigm shift in the conceptualisation of violent extremism - shifting away from a pathways approach focused on a person's radicalisation trajectory, and towards an ecological view that takes into account how characteristics of the social environment can either incite or reduce involvement in violent extremism (Weine S. , 2013). This increased attention towards community resilience is

³ Functioning outside the authority of the Islamic Community in Kosova (BIK)

grounded on research that identifies community engagement as one of the main factors determining the presence, prevalence, or absence of violent extremism across contexts (Jakupi & Kraja, *Accounting for the Difference: Vulnerability and Resilience to Violent Extremism in Kosovo*, 2018). Thus, strengthening community resilience has become the goal of numerous projects operating within the P/CVE framework. This chapter seeks to map out good practices and promising initiatives in building community resilience against online and offline radicalisation in Kosovo, North Macedonia, Serbia, Lebanon, Iraq, and Tunisia. In doing so, it aims to identify how these projects engage with the communities, positive results, as well as potential challenges or shortcomings they face in achieving their goals.

In mapping out good practices or promising initiatives for community resilience a few initial challenges become apparent that should be recognised – namely, an ambiguity over the understanding of community resilience and a lack of systematic impact assessments of implemented P/CVE projects. To begin with, one of the challenges in identifying good practices for strengthening community resilience against online and offline radicalisation is the lack of an agreed-upon definition of the concept itself. Based on an inductive thematic analysis of definitions and descriptions, community resilience remains an amorphous notion that is perceived and applied differently by different actors (Patel, Rogers, Amlôt, & Rubin, 2017). This implies that too many projects may often be mistakenly labeled as functioning to strengthen community resilience. Alternatively, a number of projects that even though they work on supporting core elements of community resilience such as local knowledge, community networks and relationships, or resources, they are not categorised as such.

Many projects seem to also employ counter-narratives to push back against extremist recruitment and propaganda. Counter-narratives aim to offer a positive alternative to extremist propaganda, or to deconstruct or delegitimise extremist narratives (Silverman, Stewartl, Amanullah, & Birdwell). Nevertheless, while the counter-narrative approach has gained widespread acceptance, Glazzard argues that it is built on very shaky theoretical and empirical foundations (Glazzard, 2017). Reed confirms that there is a lack of empirical evidence to support underlying assumptions in current counter-narrative approaches, but he also adds that “it is not so much a question of whether counter-narratives work, but rather which ones work and why?” (Reed, 2018) This underscores the need for the use of rigorous standards and methodologies to ensure a more effective approach, including a clear theory of change, monitoring and evaluation provisions, and application of lessons learnt in future counter-narrative campaigns (Ibid. p. 3).

The absence of systematic impact assessments as a result of inconsistent and incoherent monitoring and evaluation practices for P/CVE projects is factor that hinders efforts to identify good practices on community resilience. The evaluation of projects aimed at building community resilience is one of the main ways to assess the effectiveness of programming. Yet, practitioners can only test their programs reliably when adopting rigorous research designs, but these are often the most challenging and costly research designs to implement (Ambrozik, 2018). What does constitute a good practice? What are some of the criteria used in determining whether a project has had a positive impact on community resilience? Are these criteria being applied, monitored, and evaluated consistently? In the countries/case studies that are subject of this research, there is a significant dearth of projects that seem to provide clear answers to these questions.

This research project offers an attempt to recognise initiatives that have demonstrated potential for building resilience in communities and for empowering local communities to intervene to prevent or disrupt the process of radicalisation of members in their midst. This chapter relies on the following basic criteria to identify good practices or initiatives operating in Kosovo to build community resilience: 1) a project’s stated goal is to address the issue of violent extremism, 2) direct engagement with community beneficiaries, and 3) a transfer of skills/tools/knowledge to local actors to intervene to

prevent or disrupt the radicalisation process. Given these three basic criteria, a number of projects stand out.

5.1 Kosovo

Kosovo citizens primarily identify through their ethnic backgrounds, i.e., Albanians, Serbs. Religion was always a secondary source to identification especially to Albanians which was largely maintained in the private sphere. Kosovo's majority Albanian population is Muslim, but there are strong Albanian-Catholic as well as Protestant communities. The Serbian community in Kosovo which represents over 5% of the population is predominantly Orthodox-Christians. In the aftermath of the war in 1999, Kosovo started to receive much needed help from other countries, including from Gulf States, which also brought along also different programs that promoted different schools of interpretation of Islam, including Wahhabism (Gall, 2016). After 1999 Kosovo's indigenous Islamic tradition was challenged by faith-based organisations coming mainly from Gulf States that promoted a version of religious doctrine that promoted intolerance and opposed secularism (Blumi, 2005). Kosovo post-war situation, including socio-economic vulnerabilities were abused and exploited to create "an environment conducive to radicalisation." (Shtuni, 2016, p. 1). This section examines some of the government and non-government initiatives to respond to radicalisation in Kosovo.

5.1.1 Government Initiatives

Government of Kosovo has undertaken a number of initiatives to curb radicalisation process, especially in the aftermath of the phenomenon of foreign fighters in the country, which saw over 400 citizen travel to Syria and Iraq to join, mainly, IS. Kosovo is a member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. In 2015 the government approved a national "Strategy on Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism 2015-2020" as well as the Law on Prohibition of Joining the Armed Conflicts Outside State Territory (Kosovo Assembly, 2015). Kosovo's Financial Intelligence Unit is part of the Egmont Group which strengthens cooperation internationally against money laundering and finance of terrorism.

Kosovo was the only country in the Western Balkans to establish a specialised unit to focus only on rehabilitation and de-radicalisation programs. The ***Division for Prevention and Reintegration of Radicalized Persons (DPRRI)*** operates under the Department for Public Safety of the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The purpose of DPRRI is to coordinate and monitor the reintegration process of radicalised individuals. ***Ministry of Justice of Kosovo*** has established a rehabilitation and de-radicalisation program in the Kosovo Correctional Services which includes vocational training opportunities. The Ministry of Justice also launched a program with the Islamic Community of Kosovo to provide imams in the prisons to address the ideological dimension of radicalisation and provide counter-narratives, but such a program was not successful.

Besides DPRRI, at the local level the Ministry of Internal Affairs has piloted a new mechanism for early detection and prevention called ***Referral Mechanism***. This program was very successful in the Municipality of Gjilan with 12 cases of early detection among youth and successful rehabilitation and reintegration in the society, through a combined intervention of peer support, family support, and counselling. The government plans to establish similar mechanisms across all municipalities of Kosovo. In addition to this, each municipality in Kosovo has established ***Municipal Community Safety Councils (MCSC)*** which are security forums where the Police Station commander participates in regular monthly meetings and reports for the security situation. MCSC include also participants from civil society, religious leaders, community leaders, and departments from the local municipal government. MCSC play an important role in de-radicalisation efforts by facilitating coordination and mobilisation of resources.

With respect to online de-radicalisation, the government of Kosovo adopted the ***National Cyber Security Strategy and Action Plan 2016 – 2019*** which states that "Extremist and radical groups are

increasingly using Cyberspace for organisation and media propaganda to promote their activities, recruit new members, organise terrorist actions, and thus pose a threat to national security of the Republic of Kosovo.” (MIA, 2015, p. 11). The strategy includes ‘incitement to terrorist acts and glorification of violence’ as part of the definition of cyber-crime. The strategy utilises the concept **Cyber-Terrorism** and refers it as a preferred choice for “terrorists because it can be accomplished with only modest financial resources, with anonymity, and from a great distance.” (Ibid. p. 7). However, the action plan comes short of outlining concrete measures for online de-radicalisation.

5.1.2 Non-government initiatives

Civil society in Kosovo has been a pioneer of de-radicalisation efforts, including promoting important policies which the government has adopted. For instance, **Global Community Engagement Resilience Fund (GCERF)** is a global fund that aims to strengthen community resilience by supporting local initiatives to address the drivers of violent extremism. GCERF operates in seven countries, including Kosovo where it has worked with local partners on awareness, life skills training, development of alternative narratives, leadership training, cultural and sports activities etc. GCERF has also helped to establish a Referral Mechanism in the municipality of Gjilan, but in spite its heavy promotion, this structure remains largely unknown to many, potentially due to its limited competencies and perceived overlap with the Municipal Community Safety Councils (MCSC). It is important to note that GCERF does not distinguish between targeting online (de)radicalisation and offline (de)radicalisation, though based on the type of the projects they support, it is evident that implemented activities often cover both. Although GCERF publishes information regarding project (local) partners, activity type, total resources allocated in Kosovo, there are no publicly available assessment reports on project impact – which makes it harder to evaluate whether the implemented activities follow a theory of change or resources match its stated goals.

Resonant Voices Initiative (RVI) is a regional project in the Western Balkans that aims to counter terrorist propaganda, hate speech, disinformation, harassment, and intimidation present in the online sphere. This initiative addresses (de)radicalisation primarily in the online sphere. It seeks to provide a platform for networking journalists, activists, and community leaders who challenge dangerous messages online, it maps online radicalisation trends, and it offers training, mentoring, and technical support to counter-narrative campaigns. In such a manner, they aim to mobilise local actors to address the ‘weaponization’ of information that targets vulnerable audiences and disrupts community cohesion with their target communities involving a diverse set of stakeholders. As part of their programs to build community actors’ skills to develop counter-narrative campaigns, they purport to provide training on impact metrics, which is encouraging in terms of testing campaign outcome. However, there is no publicly available study that provides a comprehensive analysis of how impactful the RVI projects have been. Without such a study, it becomes harder to determine the rigor of RVI project monitoring and evaluation practices and the consistency of their coherent application throughout different projects.

The Dutch Embassy in Kosovo, supported through the Netherlands’ Fund for Regional Partnership – MATRA fund has implemented a series of projects in Kosovo that target community resilience. The **"Building Resilience: Communities against Violent Extremism" project** is currently being implemented with the purpose of strengthening community resilience through inclusivity. This project aims to empower local communities in Kosovo, targeting women and youth to mobilise informal resilience networks against violent extremism. This project seeks to also provide local communities a platform to address security-related concerns as well as information how to facilitate the reintegration process of conflict-zone returnees. As a result of this project, one of implementing partners (KCSS) has established Women’s Security Forum – which is the only platform in Kosovo to provide women across different municipalities in Kosovo a venue to discuss issues related to security. These forums offer a chance for women to address their concerns related to security, including radicalisation and violent extremism, and to discuss ways in which they can mobilise in their communities to address these

issues. While there is no specific targeting of online or offline (de)radicalisation, the multi-media coverage of the project on raising awareness about violent extremism and how to facilitate the reintegration of FFs and their family members allows for a wider audience reach. Similarly, data are currently lacking in terms of monitoring and evaluation of these projects, which could help to determine their impact.

“Youth for Youth- increasing resilience among the vulnerable youth in Kosovo” is a project that is currently being implemented in Kosovo to support the reintegration of children returnees from the foreign conflict zones in Syria and Iraq. While the main target audience of this project are the children returnees, children from other backgrounds participate in project activities as well - to avoid stigmatisation and promote inclusiveness. This project targets offline (de)radicalisation by promoting social skills of the children returnees and facilitating the reintegration in society. Its strength relies on engaging directly with the affected communities from violent extremism, fostering cooperation between civil society and institutional representatives that lead rehabilitation and reintegration efforts for FTFs and their family members. However, as the project is ongoing, to date there are no evaluations of the project activities in achieving the intended project goals.

It should be noted that in mapping of initiatives with the purpose of building community resilience against violent extremism, project which function primarily in an unstructured or informal manner have not been taken into account. This chapter mapped out a number of initiatives that fall within the selected criteria to support community resilience to highlight the type of projects that are being implemented in Kosovo. However, this chapter does not provide an extensive evaluation of the impact of such initiatives in increasing community resilience against online and offline (de)radicalisation. To a great extent, such an undertaking hinges upon publicly available data on community resilience projects and the (lack of) project monitoring and evaluation reports. Moreover, the P/CVE moniker attached to projects that seek to build community resilience often garners criticism for being too narrowly tailored to violent extremism when other issues are of equal or greater concern to communities (Weine S. , 2015). The design and implementation of projects to foster community resilience against online and offline (de) radicalisation is also donor driven, which in turn is influenced by countries’ broader strategic policy framework to counter terrorism and prevent violent extremism, which may conceptualise the term resilience differently and as a result seek different ways to engage with the communities.

5.2 Tunisia

Regional and international contexts have been conducive to the spread of religious radicalisation and violent extremism, since the 1990s. The most shocking expression of V.I. took place, as we know, on the 2001 black September 11 (9/11) in the United States. Those attacks claimed by Al Qaida undoubtedly represented a strong reaction to the deep "identity wound" caused by the systematic double destruction of Iraq, both in 1990 and in 2003, and also that of Afghanistan, as well as by the irrevocable deployment of American military forces over large spaces of Arab territories, including in the "holy" land of Muslims in Saudi Arabia. The 9/11 attacks also represented the announcement and the justification of the "return" of radical Islamism in denunciation of the so-called "false Islam" of the regimes in some Arab and Muslim countries.

In Tunisia, the echo of this shock and of this return was translated by the departures toward the Jihad of hundreds of purportedly "outraged" young people, particularly to Iraq and Afghanistan, in reaction against what they considered as the Western "crusades". Likewise, the echo of this shock and of this return was translated either by that or by the 2006 December 23 shooting, in Soliman, a town to the south of Tunis. The shooting opposed the police forces and an armed group of Jihadists. This incident was not the only one, reflecting the extent of the presence in Tunisia of the ingredients for the

emergence of a radical V.I., one which had already been there, since the 1980s, with terrorist attacks carried out by the movement of “El Jihad Al-Islami”.

The actors involved in this preemptive effort can be classified into two categories: that of those active in governmental institutional socialisation and that of non-governmental actors.

5.2.1 Governmental actors

The government in Tunisia has taken important steps to counter and curb radicalisation in Tunisia. However, as already noted, the division in the society between those promoting greater influence of religion in the state and those defending secularity has made the job of the public institutions more challenging. Here we mention two key government initiatives or institutions that deal more with offline and (de) radicalisation.

National Authority for the Fight against Terrorism – (NAFT/INLCT) is an authority independent from the governmental Ministries, and maintains close relations with the various associative and academic participants. It adopts an open approach based on the concepts of rehabilitation and recuperation. With respect to **Departments of State** that contributes to the fight against radicalisation are of **two types**. On the one hand, **those of the Justice and the Interior** giving preference to the security and penal approach; and, on the other hand, the **Departments which rather follow the preventive approach**, namely the **Departments of Education; of Higher Education and Scientific Research; of Culture, of Women, the Family, Children, and Seniors; of the Youth and Sports; and most importantly, the Department of Religious Affairs**, which monopolises the management of the religious arena in the country.

However, these departments are often subject to conflicts and political controversies and, thus, often find themselves inadvertently involved, one way or another, in the legitimisation of violent religious extremism. A recent phenomenon has concerned the Department of Religious Affairs which has seen a rise in support in terms of budget, and it seems to follow a **laissez-faire approach** towards Imams and the **Koranic schools** affiliated with this Department. In some cases, this autonomy yields moderation, but in other cases it can facilitate radicalisation. Often a key issue that highlights the differences between different departments, unearthing religious influence, revolves around the approach of how they treat the issue of socialisation of young people.

5.2.2 Non-Governmental actors

There are around 23,000 associations in Tunisia with different vocations, including academic, cultural, political, human rights, youth, charity, etc. Organisations such as the Institute for Human Development, the Arab Institute for Human Rights, the Forum of Applied Social Sciences, the Mouminoun bila Houdoud Association (Believers Without Borders, literally) and many more are all increasingly worried about the emergence of a “Religious State” in Tunisia and, more particularly, about violent extremism. Supported by regional and international donors, these actors attempt, through surveys, studies, reflection, mediation, and training workshops to spread the culture of diversity, and of the “living together” in peace. A problem that has been noticed with civil society organisations in Tunisia is their commitment to different political parties which than shapes their approaches and positions. This goes against the perceived character of the civil society community as impartial and neutral actors in the society promoting public interest. Nonetheless important initiatives are still present.

We Love Sousse (WLS) is a not for profit youth organisation established in 2011. Sousse is a Tunisian, coastal, mid-eastern city and a touristic destination. Its main objective, according to its founders, is to develop the quality of life, by working on the major issues linked to democratic transitions and to the mobility of young people and to support the latter and older ones, alike, in building a better future.

WLS **targets both online and offline radicalisation**. Its main activities include informative workshops in different regions in the country, including that of el-Kef, which represents one of the sites selected for our field survey.

Another well respect civil society organisation is **the Forum of Applied Social Sciences**, which is led by the sociologist Abdelwaheb Ben Hfaiedh. This organisation aims to “contribute to solving social problems, supporting reform initiatives, informing public policies, and influencing legislations and institutions.” (ASSF, n.d.). One of their programs includes EMROHD which stands for e-Monitoring digital resilience against violent extremism & online/offline hate discourse. The **organisation tackles online and offline radicalisation**.

Another organisation is **EL-Jahidh Forum** led by Slaheddine Al-Jourchi, journalist and one of the founding figures of the movement known as "the Islamic left", and also co-founder of the Revue 15/21 issued in the 1980s. The latter Forum organises a "series of training workshops for the benefit of religious leaders in the el-Kef and Sahline regions, within the activities of the pre-emptive project named "Network of Religious Leaders for the Prevention of Violent Extremism." Primary focus of the organisation is **tackling offline radicalisation**.

6 Conclusion

This baseline study report has summarised major segments from the current research that define the concept of offline and online (de) radicalisation. The purpose of this report is to provide a conceptual and contextual framework for the research into offline and online (de) radicalisation in the Western Balkans and MENA region. It has also discussed the phenomenon of radicalisation and its manifestation in Western Balkans, using Kosovo as an example, as well as MENA region, using Tunisia as an example. The report also highlights key government and non-government initiatives that are tackling radicalisation process in the respective countries. The report shows an asymmetry of offline re-radicalisation initiatives, both by government and non-government actors, compared to those tackling the problem online. This requires further research into understanding why this is the case.

The report recognises that radicalisation processes are driven by different ideologies, but for the purpose of research in the framework of the PAVE project, two ideologies shaping radicalisation in Western Balkans and MENA region are highlighted, and they include: radicalisation inspired by Islam and radicalisation inspired by national and ethno-political ideologies. The report notes that the latter is more present in Western Balkans than MENA region. However, the current research does not cover sufficiently the phenomenon of national ethno-political radicalisation in Western Balkans, and a particular important question to explore is if they feed on each other. In the MENA region the tension between secularists and those aspiring a more religious state is noted in the report, however, their concrete agendas are less known, and a further exploration of this issue would deepen our understanding of radicalisation in the MENA region.

This study echoes the conceptualisation of radicalisation by the PAVE project and defines it as a process that involves psychological and physical mechanisms that lead an individual to adopt extremist world views. However, there is insufficient research into how and what particular vulnerabilities as well as mechanisms in Western Balkans and MENA region affect an individual to believe in radical ideologies. In the same context, also understanding what psychological factors can prevent radicalisation as well as support disengagement are important to examine. For instance, the report shows how a government initiative reports 12 successful cases of early detection of radicalisation and disengagement of the identified individuals. Understanding how this was implemented can provide potential alternative views to de-radicalisation efforts led by governments and help inform concrete policy actions in MENA region and wider Western Balkans.

The report also examines offline and online de-radicalisation as a concept and how it is being pursued in Kosovo and Tunisia. The report notes that in both countries government sponsored initiatives on online de-radicalisation are limited if not inexistent. Much of the work is focused on offline de-radicalisation and limited to prisons. Civil society organisations are also less active on tackling online de-radicalisation. This is perhaps an indicator of offline radicalisation being more potent than online efforts in Western Balkans and MENA region, which is a mismatch from what the current research implies, which is that internet is the preferred means of radicalisation of individuals, especially youth.

Internet penetration is high in both regions, therefore it is important to explore the question of media literacy as well as exploring effectiveness of offline and online radicalisation process. The report also highlights the impact of narratives and how they affect radicalisation process. In this sense, the research on offline and online (de) radicalisation, should map how different narratives are utilised in radicalisation and de-radicalisation process, and if particular socio-economic factors of a community affect their effectiveness. There also should be further research into understanding if online and offline (de) radicalisation narratives are different.

The third cluster of the PAVE project aims “to compare online and offline (de)radicalisation patterns, by examining the respective roles of online narratives fuelling radicalisation that get disseminated through social media propaganda, and peer-group socialisation patterns through local social networks within a given neighbourhood/municipality.” (PAVE 2020, p. 9) In addition to the questions outline throughout this report, some of the questions defined in the PAVE project can already be supplemented with the following more detailed questions:

1. How do narratives fuelling radicalisation towards violent extremism get propagated?
 - a. Do socio-economic factors in a given community play a role in how susceptible they are to particular radical narratives?
 - b. What makes a community vulnerable/resilient to radical narratives?
2. What are the respective roles of social media propaganda (e.g. ‘youtube imams’) and physical ties such as peer-group socialisation through social networks or prisons?
 - a. What concrete social media channels are utilised to propagate radical ideologies in communities and why?
 - b. Are offline tools more effective than online platforms to propagate radical ideologies in the case of MENA region and Western Balkans?
3. What are the respective roles and impact of online media literacy and counter-narratives programmes, as compared with the offline role of social workers, teachers and educators to foster peer-group deradicalisation dynamics?
 - a. How does online media literacy affect (de) radicalisation process?

7 References

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