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European Network on Religion & Belief

FAR-RIGHT EXTREMISM

Strategies to counter its Impact on Europe: Engagement, Exclusion, dialogue
Seminar 6

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ENORB REPORT ON SEMINAR 6 – Summer Workshop on rise of Far Right Extremism and Hate Crime

Summary of Workshop and Group Discussions

1.1 Context and Background

The context for this workshop was the European Parliamentary Elections of 2014 and the reports in the media were dominated by stories of a 'Far Right triumph' in the elections. In addition, the rise of hate crimes against religions and minorities in many European countries, especially in East European countries where ongoing inward migration was a very recent phenomenon, had been associated by some media with the rise in refugees from the conflicts in the Middle East.

But it had also been noted that some countries traditionally associated with European values and traditions of equality, tolerance and hospitality to minorities, such as Scandinavian countries, Netherlands, France and, UK had also experienced increases, both in hate crimes and in far-right representation at the European Parliament.

The rise in the number of terrorist attacks - the Woolwich murder in particular - and the rise of ISIS in the Middle East were also factors in the rise of the far right, and in the rising number of hate crimes, mainly against Muslims, but also against Jews and Sikhs as visible religious minorities.

Dennis De Jonghe MEP reported that the actual figures were much less dramatic. The total number of MPs from the far right was only 52 (an increase of 15 on 2009), entirely due to the increase in seats of the Front National in France. Far Right parties gained MEPs in 6 countries, but lost seats in 7 countries, and only 10 countries actually have any Far-Right MEPs. (NB 5 Star in Italy and UKIP in UK are not defined as far right, but anti-

European.) In addition, the Far Right in his analysis, are divided into three different factions. The results are not an 'earthquake', but certainly a wake-up call for Europe.

One damaging effect of thiscontext is the impact they are already making on political discourse in Europe. Hate speech against minorities – religious and ethnic minorities, and also LGBT groups – has been to a certain extent legitimised through their election successes.

The focus of the debate which is developing in various member states on the future development of the European Union is shifting, with stronger forces arguing against the EU which has been the source of much of the anti-discrimination legislation across Europe – and in favour of nationalism and against multi-culturalism and protectionism rather than free movement of labour (ie internal migration).

- they oppose the liberal democratic tolerant consensus – working for mutual understanding across religions and national and ethnic boundaries
- they exploit issues which worry ordinary people – jobs, poverty, insecurity, the impact of the economic crisis, lack of housing
- there are now several groups of the religious right across Europe – opposing liberal values and even the whole concept ofhuman rights with an appeal instead for a return to a 19th/early 20th Century version of 'family values'
- They adopt the politics of identity – national, regional, religious – using populist rhetoric which has led to the rise of totalitarian regimes in Europe's past, as pointed out by Raphael Liogier in his analysis of Populism, as designed to stir up collective emotion resulting in return to the 30s of Hitler who brought togethera Far Right,Fascist and Socialist programme resulting in national socialism ie the NAZI regime. In a similar way, Mussolini brought together a Far left programme and a

Fascist discourse to create Italian Fascism. Populism works on the idea of emotional discourse, and rational arguments are therefore totally irrelevant in combating it. Those who lead the discourse are not in fact 'close to the people', but they claim to speak in the name of the 'real people'. Therefore, you don't need a Parliament – 'they' members of parliament, civil servants are all 'bought by the system' so the leader can bring in a dictatorship.

So the collective realisation, that somehow we've lost control has not been possible again until recently. Now, the populist feelings of 'cultural war' – of being surrounded by 'them''they' are European or global and against 'us'. We are small and unprotected (Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, for example, are forms of paranoia – they are not just minorities, they are something to be feared.[1]

Europe is seen as having lost military dominance, to US, then economic dominance also to US.Now Europe has lost its symbolic/cultural dominance to Islam. So Europe is on the way down. We've lost our identity so we focus on Muslims,we need them as an enemy so they become the problem – they are powerful (reverse colonialism), they are confident in who they are. In 2000s terrorism has replaced 20[th]century extreme left opposition.

From the 60s-90sit was difficult to be racist – European culture and values excluded it, but now it is again possible – in relation to Muslim. In today's populism, Muslims can be anything – enemies of religion (Christianity), enemies of liberty (the veil), and also enemies of our 'secular heritage' (laicisme) or even violent terrorists.

The Far Right uses language to colonise the normal basic values of Europe or a specific country, to use in their own discourse – eg Sweden Democrats, French Laicité, British values, Poland Justice Party, even European Fundamental Rights, its negative prohibitions – against Muslims, refugees, LGBT people, religious minorities etc. So supporters need to take back the language, and demonstrate EU values as positives.

1.2   Round Table – Hate Crime

There is an EU Framework Decision the "Victims Directive" in 2015 (check!!) with a particular focus on Hate Crimeand Hate Speech against any form of minority (ie R&B, LGBT)also crimes committed with a "discriminatory motive". Priorities: Improving Data Collection, Enhancing Recording Methods, Improving Under-Reporting by**EU Officer -** Improve Under Reporting

- – Civil Society action – churches, mosques, (create a noticing and reporting culture)
- – Improve state funding for information structure, legal advice, police who understand/ are sympathetic with
- – Public Consultation at national and local level with community organisations on what is really happening

1.3   Workshop 1 – Eastern Europe

Romania
89 Persecution of Yoga School – 40,000 – non-registered association

Macedonia
One major problem is the hate-crimes and violence against mosques and community of theBektashian Muslim (Sufi) minority. The Official Status is that since 1998 only 5 religions are recognised by the state and registered, Macedonian Orthodox, Catholic, Methodist, Anglican, Sunni Islam. The Sufi version of Islam Bechtaslian was not recognised eg there were formerly 77 mosques,

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[1] The famous example of the spider was given - (i) if there is a spider in the room you are afraid (ii) if there is a spider outside – he's trying to get me, it has a plan to get in (iii) if there is no spider – it's hiding. (Ie you can't win.)

now there are 3, the rest had been de-registered and many Sufi Mosques had been occupied by Islamic community. In 2008 the UN Space Rapporteur's report documented the situation.

Czech Republic

The country has a long-established atheistic, secularist tradition – before and after communism and now in the post-communist period. Unlike Slovakia and other East European countries, there has been little evidence of a religious revival. The key areas of discrimination are against the Roma at all levels of society, including many local authorities, schools and even government institutions though any discrimination was against the law in theory, in practice very little had changed. There is also a fear of Muslims – prejudice against headscarf. In a notable recent headscarf case 2 girls were excluded from nurse training school – on grounds of wearing the Hijab to classes. Newer religions, including the Pagans are also unable to register as an association because of the need to own property in order to be recognised.

Poland

Wearing religious symbols or headwear is not a big issue. There is a long-standing Muslim minority in Poland, especially Warsaw, originally from Tatton immigration in the medieval period. They have their own mosques, and rituals, and are highly secularised, with a seat on the State Council of Religions. But there are tensions with some recent Muslim migrants. Racism is a big issue – the Far Right are strong so anti-Roma discrimination, and strong prejudice against Black communities are both found. Economic expansion has led to more immigration, Muslim (who have complained that Halal slaughter has been banned despite opposition from the Church and Human Rights organisations. Utilisation of other issues – Animal Rights, as a proxy for racism.

1.4 Points from Workshop 2 – N & W Europe

(i)   Introduction

ECHR has several cases where member states have failed to support individuals who have been discriminated against on religious grounds. It appears to be moving towards the French "*laïciste*" version of secularism, rather than the pluralist version embedded in the EU treaties and Charter of Fundamental Rights.

(ii)   Comments from delegates:

Bulgaria – no legal Article on LGBT discrimination (CHECK), hate crimes in legislation, but police don't record hate crimes as such.

Latvia - equalities in law, racial and religious hate speech are recognised, but not homophobic abuse – politicians are unwilling to recognise that it exists.

Malta – NGOs offices are being torched because ofthe support they give to migrants from Libya and Africa.

Netherlands– There is a specific funded project on respecting women, and preventing violence and abuse.

UK – Hate crime is seen as an aggravated form of violence or verbal attack

Germany – Reporting is based on affiliation to political parties

Spain – There is an official Hate Crime Prosecutor at the Supreme Court – also one specialist in each of 52 regions

Greece – Hate Crime is not even recognised as a legal concept yet in Greece.

Next Steps

Estonia – Equal Treatment – the lack of a legal framework for human rights means there is no implementation in the education system therefor there is no information for young people on Religious minorities, LGBT, Civic Partnerships

Latvia – There is a migrants' advice service, but all money is channelled through state, so there is no real protection from abuses in the system.

Poland – There is a project on rights awareness among prisoners. There is awareness of LGBT rights among the general public, but not in schools, where sometimes priests in classroom are attacking gay and lesbians, and denouncing LGBT rights.

Czech - Equinet has a project tointroduce standards for independence of Equality Bodies from State.

Key Lessons for Action against Extremists

(i) Don't isolate them- we have to engage. Refusing to debate merely fuels their sense of being persecuted victims,or pariahs, which:
- Allows them to exploit ordinary peoples' sometimes (justified) feelings of being ignored
- Enables populists to say they are the only ones presenting the real issues for ordinary people.

(ii) Advocates for EU Fundamental Rights need to improve:
- The way the human rights and democracy arguments are presented in the media etc.
- The way we have to show our unity – and closeness to ordinary people
- The liberal democratic discourse around shared values

(iii) This doesn't mean not demonstrating against violence or racism. But it means for example, demonstrating solidarity between faith communities and Bulgarian hers, both religious and non-religious – ENORB demonstration at the Brussels Jewish Museum led by Christians, Muslims and Humanists Converting space for Dialogue.

(iv) It also means not shouting down but engaging in dialogue, even with those who refuse dialogue. This means creating local structures and safe places where dialogue takes place. Public round tables like the ENORB seminar is a good example, but we need to reach out further to include the opposition, the racists, but this will not happen unless interfaith groups and their secular allies reach out. Young people are the key to long term improvement in social harmony – they have grown up in multicultural societies. But they need education in religion and ethics – an education which enables them to meet and understand other religions, and atheist and humanist worldviews.

For Section 8
Results. Well, it won't change things overnight – we are facing a historic shift to the right. But we have to try to work for change in this new reality: and many pressure groups across Europe have achieved change in far tight groups
- In UK, UKIP is now acting against racists and anti-Muslim candidates
- In Sweden, the Sweden Democrats have changed from being a Neo-Nazi movement to being a right-wing party, part of a coalition in government
- In Netherlands PUV (Gert Wilders) has refused to make an alliance with the Front National in the European Parliament
- Even in France, Marine le Pen has repudiated the anti-Semitic views of her father, and founder of the Front National.

3.   Keynote Speech – Dr Vidhya Ramalingam

Reflections on the implications of the European election results on the context for religion and belief in Europe – Vidhya Ramalingam

3.1 Introduction
The Far-Right Extremism in Europe (FREE) Initiative which we have completed, and on which this paper is based, is an EU-funded initiative of the Institute of Strategic Cialogue in partnership with the Swedish Ministry of Justice, and the governments of Norway, Denmark, Finland and the Netherlands as additional partners with the aims of:
- Understanding the problem of far-right extremism across 10 European countries

- Identifying what works in prevention, intervention and response

The 10 countries of focus have been Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Finland, the UK, the Netherlands, Germany, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia. Necessarily, in working with governments, over the yearsthe working definition of far-right extremism has shifted, for example:

- In the UK, local authorities and national government have gone back and forth on whether or not to term the extreme right anti-Islam English Defence League as an extremist organisation. It is today understood not to be an extremist organisation – and yet the Tackling Extremism and Hate Crime team in Government is responsible for measures to deal with it
- In Hungary the High Court recently ruled that Jobbik – an anti-Semitic far right party, linked with paramilitary groups that have condoned and used violence – can no longer be called a far right party by media outlets. (NB The strangeness of the Court's ruling what independent journalists can and cannot call far right)
- In Denmark, the Danish People's Party is a legitimate mainstream party these days, and is no longer considered 'far right' as it once was

1. The European Elections

Here again, there is confusion over what parties that fall within the 'far right' family stand for – who is an extremist and who isn't. Who is to be treated like a pariah and who is to be engaged with.

For the context of liberal democracy and equalities the results mean:

- Contrary to the symbolic importance of some of the far right gains in the European elections, the actual electoral successes of the far right were not as substantial as claimed in the media

- Certainly, twoor three far right parties (depending on how you classify UKIP) became the biggest party in their country. This is the first time that far right parties have come first in nation-wide elections in the EU.
- The far right won seats in Austria, Denmark, France , Germany, Greece, Netherlands, and Sweden. Two Neo-Nazi parties entered the EP – Golden Dawn and National Democratic Party of Germany
- But, it is important to remember that as many far right parties lost seats in this election. They lost seats in Belgium, Bulgaria, Italy, Romania, Slovakia, the UK and Malta.There are 28 member states and the far right remained irrelevant in the majority of them!
- There are interesting dynamics over Parliamentary groupings.The European far right is a disparate group in many ways and they continue to struggle to find a single strong grouping to wield any power in the European Parliament. (In fact two groups emerged from negotiation: one associated withUKIP (EFDD), and one associated with France's Front National (ENF)). (CHECK)

3.2 Impact of these changes:

Europe is not entirely turning to the extremes. To quell the alarmist approach, it is clear that the European Parliament will maintain its existing positive stance on equalities. The main centre-right and left groupings still hold the majority of the seats, and with the Liberals and the Greens, parliament is still pro-EU. That has not changed, but national communities and politicians cannot ignore these gains.

The feelings of marginalisation and political alienation, and concerns over issues like immigration, faith, identity are not going to disappear.The more these parties grow, the more they may wield more influenceover national and European policy on economics, immigration, minority rights, and other social issues – where they largely put forth political

programmes based on simple solutions that simply will not work.

On other issues, they will not wield influence themselves, but by the default of being there and being noisy, they will push the public debate and the general climate further in a direction of legitimating the far right discourse, including its racist and xenophobic content.

3.3   Religion and belief:

The European far right and radical right are challenging the narrative that ENORB and the other Equality Networks have worked to foster in Europe – a liberal democratic narrative based on freedom, dialogue and understanding across and within religious communities and a respect for difference and an understanding of the fluidity *and* intersections across identities – faith, ethnicity, nationality, etc.

The far right is particularly adept at picking on polemical, divisive issues – existing divides between communities, and driving a wedge between them further. A strategy of sorts aiming to divide and conquer.

For example, at a recent event on the Israel Palestine situation it was clear that the far right is using this conflict to attempt to drive a stronger rift between Jewish and Muslim communities in Europe. This international conflict has become a useful anti-Muslim propaganda tool for the far right.

They tap into something that resonates with some people's personal identity, it can have a powerful impact, acting on latent prejudices.They don't needfacts, they rely on latent prejudice and provide tangible, sometimes mythicalexamples to inflame those latent beliefs.

Dealing with the far right in Europe:

The project's findings suggest that European governments need to forget the strategy of ignoring and isolating the far rightwhether enacted through refusing to engage with them, removing state subsidies, or even as simple as refusing to debate them on live television, refusing to shake their hand, or debating them on live television. This hasn't worked – and this stigmatisation strategy can backfire:

- It allows them to present themselves as the sole voice on certain issues
- It allows them to offer unrealistic promises to voters – which they never have to actually deliver
- It enables them to claim victim's status – victims of faulty implementation of democracy
- It can increase their curiosity value and attractiveness to media
- Excluding them can even make them more radical over time

4.1   Two ways forward:

(a)   Admit the real issues. Need to make sure we don't fall trap to the idea that it is just economicsthat leads to far right successes, nor that they are simply acts of protest

- Chancellor Angela Merkel said about the far right victories that the best response was to boost economic growth and jobs. Not enough!
- The highest electoral results of far right parties are largely in countries that were little affected by the crisis – Austria, Denmark, France, Sweden. Hungary is maybe an exception here, in that it was hit hard by the crisis
- The far right is captivating a large proportion of the European population. Instead of simply dismissing this and placing the blame on structural issues, let's accept responsibility and take these concerns seriously
- There are real and perceived grievances among European communities about

politics, about religion, about identity and cultural values

- The liberal democratic vision of a diverse Europe hasn't fully been sold to large portions of the European population.

(b) **European values and Human Rights - sell it better**

- This means firstly, systematic engagement with the concerned public, listening to concerns – yes even those that may be unpleasant to hear -- and addressing them directly
- The fact-free emotional rhetoric of the radical right must be met with *equally compelling*rhetoric and arguments, underpinned by the facts
- Facts alone will not triumph; people need to feel listened to – and we need to appeal to the emotions. This needs to happen not just in the national arena, but at the local level, where local actors need to be having the difficult face-to-face conversations with their constituencies

The importance of grassroots work

As part of the EU project we undertook field visits to all 10 countries of focus. We interviewed and gathered experiences from front-line professionals and activists who are coming face-to-face with this issue on a regular basis, whether it is those working specifically on countering extremism, or those who encounter the far right as part of their daily responsibilities policing communities or educating young people. We gathered over 100 case studies of different approaches to tackling far-right extremism and intolerance.

Here we can present 8 key learnings on dealing with far-right extremism and intolerance in its daily manifestations in our communities; these apply to all front-line professionals and community leaders working in this field, whether broader human rights or working for freedom and non-discrimination across Europe**:**

- Importance of promoting meaningful contact across community divides, and doing this well.
- Importance of peer education for longer-term impact
- Tackle grievances head on
- Along with prevention, there is a need to focus on "deterrence" – (by which we mean offering alternatives, not threatening punishment)
- Get the community involved in positive ways
- Consider who to target. In some contexts the best focus is on youth
- In other contexts, adults, even older adults should be the target
- Learning to speak up in the online space is a non-negotiable precondition for success

5.1 Importance of promoting meaningful contact across community divides.

The first aim of preventive efforts should be to change attitudes which will only change through actual experience, so we need to create opportunities for people to engage with and form meaningful relationships with people who are different from them.

Some of the most successful methods include:

- Dialogue events and mentoring programmes across different communities,
  Mixed-religion/ethnicity clubs, sports or work experience initiatives
- Promotion of role models from minority communities. This is really about providing spaces for meaningful relationships between people from different backgrounds

But bringing people together for one-off events on its own is not enough, we need a longer-term methodology. 2 key points:

(a) Experiential learning rather than simply myth-busting

- Myth-busting is notoriously difficult to do. Providing facts to undercut far-right narratives is often not the most effective way to change attitudes

- Myth-busting has to be done in conjunction with experiential learning. This means rather than telling someone the facts about people from different backgrounds, giving them the opportunity to engage with someone from that background and feel comfortable asking difficult questions first-hand
- For example: through engagement with a Muslim programme instructor who is willing to field tough questions about their identity and who is trained in how to do this appropriately.Simply saying someone is wrong can shut down the conversation – the need is to approach the intolerant in a non-judgmental manner
  (b) Long-term programmes rather than one-off events
  Though organising one-off events like a football tournament can be meaningful for a day, they will not on their own lead to long-term attitude changes. They need to be:
- repeated at regular intervals with the same groups
- Or incorporated as part of a broader programme
- or mainstreamed within schools or community-level contexts (youth clubs, colleges etc)

5.2 Importance of peer education for longer-term impact
Initiatives will have a wider impact if they can help to train up young people to:
- ask the right questions
- critically engage with the arguments they hear
- have tough conversations themselves with their peers who express intolerant viewsAlong with prevention, there is a need to focus on "deterrence" – (by which we mean offering alternatives, not threatening punishment)

There are somegreat interfaith initiatives in the UK and some other countries that train young people on how to engage in dialogue with their classmates who express racist views,
- other initiatives have focused on how to undermine conspiracy theories which young people hear in the classroom or over the internet
- other initiatives equip young activists with the tools they need to run effective campaigns against the far right or other anti-human rights forces

5.3 Tackle grievances head on:
- In many cases, prejudiced and racist ideas can be traced back to perceived grievances about different groups, and in some cases real grievances, such as experiences of young people being bullied by ethnic minority gangs.
- When individuals express ideas contrary to popular norms against racism, there is a tendency to deny them the right to be open about these grievances. The tendency to deny and shut down conversation with 'don't be a racist' can inadvertently push people further down the path to radicalisation.
- It is important for those with grievances to have their views listened to and heard, before they are challenged. This kind of approach is often not easily achieved in a mainstream community or educational setting, and may require special educational programmes that can provide a safer environment for people to express and discuss unsavoury opinions.

5.4 Along with prevention, there is a need to focus on "deterrence"
(by which we mean offering alternatives, not threatening punishment)
- Prevention needs to be accompanied by deterrence measures that <u>offer</u> alternatives for young people and also help to build a sense of purpose and self-worth.
- We need to get young people excited about positive community activism and engagement.

5.5 Get the community involved in positive ways

- When it comes to dealing with the far right's presence in a local community, communities may feel fear, powerlessness and frustration when faced by far-right demonstrations.
- Communities may not know how to show that they stand against the far right. Counter-demonstrations are valuable in that, in the best scenarios, they are peaceful displays of communities uniting against hatred, demonstrating that the far right is unwelcome in a community. However the risks of counter-demonstrations are that, in the worst scenarios, they can inadvertently inflame the actions of the far right, and end in clashes between groups, sometimes provoked by fringe extremist groups
- Other ways that community members can take action, which get the community involved in more positive ways, include:
  - involving community members in demonstration management,
  - local businesses declaring themselves extremism-free or inclusive zones,
  - organising alternative community-building and socially relevant activities.

5.6 Consider who to target. In some contexts the best focus is on youth

- Much prevention has been carried out amongst young people (ages 15-30); they commit the overwhelming number of right-wing-related, as well as violent crimes, and even in Scandinavian countries we're seeing very high percentages of students that are, for example, sceptical of the Holocaust.
- In some countries, like Hungary, far-right attitudes are widespread amongst young people. In others, like the UK, younger generations are more tolerant than older generations.

- However, it is important that front-line professionals do not assume this trend will continue. Programmes need to be put in place to promote tolerance and democratic behaviour among those vulnerable to far-right ideologies.

5.7 In other contexts, adults, even older adults should be the target

- However, adults are also some of the worst evangelists for far-right ideologies and perpetrators of violent crimes (eg biker groups in some counties) so preventive efforts need also to focus on these groups.
- Methods used have included going informally to the cafes etc where these groups socialise and engaging them in conversation about their grievances. Also exploring whether the groups they are targeting are really responsible for their problems, and whether there are positive alternatives to violence
- In different contexts public roundtables on divisive issues have proved successful – methods timed around the work schedule and made accessible to working adults.

5.8 Learning to speak up in the online space a non-negotiable precondition for success

- Many front-line professionals and community leaders struggle to grasp social media, alongside their traditional responsibilities. They need to make the time and investment to understand this space, and how it can be used to maximise their own work.
- Engagement with the young people (or adults) who are actually using social media, including those involved in far-right or other radical groups, is essential not only to understanding but to countering the extremist messages.

Final points:

- Front-line professionals and local communities often develop innovative solutions to these challenges.

- These rarely make headlines or send ripples beyond the community immediately affected.
- For the public media, they are much less exciting news stories than the far right and the intolerant have to offer.
- A practitioner's handbook 'On the Front Line', on tackling far-right extremism and intolerance, based on this project, and including some of the 100 case studies the project gathered and a much more detailed set of learning points, is available at www.strategicdialogue/handbook
- An online resource - The FREE Initiative – (FREE = Far-Right Extremism in Europe) is also available as a resource for those working for a Europe free of far-right extremism. It will include case studies, films, and other resources from the European network of individuals tackling the far right across Europe, available at www.thefreeinitiative.com.