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POLICE OFFICERS' PERCEPTION OF VARIOUS FORMS OF RADICALIZATION AND EXTREMISM IN SLOVENIA AND CROATIA[1,2]

Abstract

The literature review indicates that there are different root causes underlying the radicalisation process. While radicalisation is primarily an individual process, also group dynamics and identity are often referred to in the literature as well as macro-level factors such as the effects of globalisation and modernization. Radicalisation and violent extremism present a security threat to the Central Europe and Western Balkan countries. In the past few decades, the Western Balkan countries have been viewed as a breeding ground for religious radicals and violent extremism. Nowadays, the police have assumed a crucial role in facilitating a preventive multi-stakeholder approach at the local or regional level, particularly in at-risk local settings. The paper presents findings of a study conducted on a sample of 117 students of the Croatian Police College of the Ministry of the Interior and 57 Slovenian police officers. The purpose of this paper is to compare Croatian and Slovenian police officers' perception of the impact of various factors on development of radicalisation and extremism.

Keywords: police, radicalization, perception, Slovenia, Croatia.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Terrorism and radicalization represent a security challenge that is common to both the European Union and the Western Balkans (European Council & Council of the European Union, 2018). Studies of radicalization are still at an early stage in modern societies, as they are largely dependent on the difficulty of studying difficult-to-reach or even closed-end social groups for researchers and the (in) transparency of state authorities in relation to them. This means that researchers still do not agree fully on the factors of radicalization and even on the concept of radicalization and related concepts (such as extremism or terrorism). The absence of a clear and globally accepted definition of violent extremism, terrorism and radicalization leading to violent extremism or/and terrorism is a major obstacle to exploring the problem, especially when using an evidence-based approach. Only in the last decade have terms such as radicalization and (violent) extremism emerged in researches, literature and policy debates (Macaluso, 2016; Sozer, Sevinc, & Ozeren, 2015; Butt & Tuck, 2014; Veldhuis & Staun, 2009). Violent extremism is a general term that refers to any violence that is inspired by ideological beliefs including, but not limited to political ideology (Sozer, Sevinc, & Ozeren, 2015; Nasser-Eddine, Garnham, Agostino, & Caluya, 2011). Radicalization is a process in which individuals adopt extreme political, social and/or religious ideals and aspirations, and where the arraignment of particular goals justifies the use of violence (Wilner & Dubouloz, 2010). Because the scope of this study does not allow a close look at the various definitions and approaches to the study of radicalization and extremism, we will use the operational definition summarized by the researchers in the R*adicalization and comprehensive countermeasures in the Republic of Slovenia [*RadCePro*]* study (Prezelj, Lobnikar, Sotlar, 2018). Radicalization is *the process of radically changing or transforming an individual's or group's perceptions, beliefs, values and behaviour towards political attitudes and behaviours that justify the use of undemocratic means and / or unlawful violence to achieve their own political, ideological, religious, etc. goals. Radicalization has milder and more severe forms, the latter being violent extremism and terrorism (as a possible endpoint of the process of radicalization). Radicalization is characteristic of a situation of political polarization in society (both locally and globally) leading to or resulting from politicization of views in society, between social groups, or with an individual*. Extremism is *a social phenomenon characterized by the call for or use of violent, anti-democratic, unconstitutional, intolerant, authoritarian, etc. means to achieve their own goals*. It is a "mature" degree of radicalism, characterized by the a*bsolute exclusion of the "different" and the desire to subjugate them. Using violence or calling for violence is a typical modus operandi*. Terrorism is a typical form of active violent extremism (Prezelj, Lobnikar, Sotlar, 2018).

1.1. Croatian and Slovenian Police

Croatia is a Central European and Mediterranean country that has gone through war for independence in the early 1990s and became an internationally recognized parliamentary democratic republic (Kovčo Vukadin, Borovec, & Ljubin Golub, 2013). Croatian police are a highly centralized organization, which is structured and operates within the Ministry

of the Interior as an administrative organization for carrying out police affairs (Kovčo Vukadin, Borovec, & Ljubin Golub, 2013). The Croatian police force is hierarchically organized at three levels: (1) General Police Directorate, (2) Police Administrations, and (3) Police Stations (Kovčo Vukadin, Borovec, & Ljubin Golub, 2013). Slovenia is a Central European Country which declared independence from Yugoslavia in 1991 (Meško, Lobnikar, Jere, & Sotlar, 2013). Since then, Slovenian police has gone through many attempts of reforms in order to move closer to the western style of policing (Meško, Lobnikar, Jere, & Sotlar, 2013). The police organization in Slovenia is centralized, with one national and state-funded police force, leaving local authorities with almost no influence in that area (Meško, Lobnikar, Jere, & Sotlar, 2013; Durić & Šumi, 2018) All police stations are state-level units, which operate at the local level (Meško, Lobnikar, Jere, & Sotlar, 2013). The local government has no control in their operation or the appointment of their commanders (Meško, Lobnikar, Jere, & Sotlar, 2013). While such centralization feasibly eased the management of reforms from a central level, it also conflicted with the new policing strategy that the police adopted – community policing (Meško, Lobnikar, Jere, & Sotlar, 2013). We can characterize the Croatian and the Slovenian police as relatively modern and professional law enforcement services far closer to its western counterparts than to the past communist "militia", a military-like organization in service of protecting the ruling elite (Meško, Lobnikar, Jere, & Sotlar, 2013). Both the Croatian and the Slovenian police are public services, which serve citizens at the local community level by adopting the community policing strategy.

As police play a crucial role in preventing radicalisation and violent extremism, and while respecting the need for international police cooperation in this task, the purpose of this paper is to compare the Croatian and Slovenian police officers' perception of the impact of various factors on the development of radicalisation and extremism.

2. LOCAL DIMENSION TO RADICALISATION AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND THE ROLE OF POLICE

There is always a local dimension to radicalisation and violent extremism: it always happens somewhere, whether it is the place where radicals and extremists hide, find support and operate, or where an individual or a group becomes involved with radicalization and violent extremism (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe [OSCE], 2014; Sageman, 2008). A local approach to preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalisation that leads to terrorism is necessary along to the ongoing regional and international strategies (OSCE, 2014; Butt & Tuck, 2014). Countries have sought to identify where to concentrate their efforts in trying to allocate resources better and improve the effectiveness of their action against radicalisation and violent extremism (OSCE, 2014; Sedgwick, 2010). Communities have suddenly become the centre of attention in the formulation and implementation of radicalization and violent extremism prevention policies. The above-mentioned leads to a conclusion on the importance of putting a community at the centre of countering radicalization and violent extremism policies and

measures, as well as the development of community-based approaches, with emphasis on prevention and development of partnerships with public.

Traditionally, countering radicalization and violent extremism policies and practices have been community-targeted, namely targeting communities for intelligence-gathering and enforcement activities driven by the security priorities of the country (OSCE, 2014). Such activities, however, involve little or no consultation with members and groups from the public, and are not aimed at gaining trust and support from people (Macaluso, 2016). Radicalisation and violent extremism is a threat to the public at large and, consequently, to all communities. Acts of radicalization and violent extremism do not only impact communities and their members, but radicals and extremists also need to find support, sympathizers and recruits from the public to be able to carry out their plans (OSCE, 2014).

2.1. Police in local environment

Struggle against radicalization and violent extremism was usually an exclusive task for security sector agencies (Prislan, Černigoj, & Lobnikar, 2018). Today, the police have taken a key role in facilitating a preventive multi-stakeholder approach at the local or regional level, particularly in at-risk local settings (Prislan, Černigoj, & Lobnikar, 2018; Butterfoss & Kegler, 2009). Police is a crucial factor in preventing and countering radicalization and violent extremism. *Community policing* is a strategy that proved to be the proper approach in countering radicalization and violent extremism because it genuinely requires building a partnership with the private sector and with communities (Sozer, Sevinc, & Ozeren, 2015). Community policing assumes the presence of contact police officers who have a permanent patrolling area where they rely on proactive and cooperative relations with citizens in order to observe and resolve problems of that particular area. The police redefine their role as they adopt community policing (Sozer, Sevinc, & Ozeren, 2015) as a strategy that changes the view of the role of police officers in the direction of police being a public service and changing the role of citizens and the local community in creating and maintaining security. Quality partnership with the public offers enormous opportunities for countries to gather intelligence and to share information and community policing poses less risk as build upon trust and community partnership. Nevertheless, the main goal of maintaining community participation requires a focus on building trust rather than gathering intelligence. Police officers know individuals in local schools, in youth centres, in healthcare and religious institutions, and are also familiar with individual families, and they are somewhat knowledgeable about extreme and violent groups operating in many local environments (Lenos & Keltjens, 2016a). In the context of extremism and terrorism prevention activities conducted in the pre-criminal stage of the radicalisation process, police initiatives are of utmost importance, especially from the perspective of modern approaches to policing (Lenos & Keltjens, 2016b; Prislan et al., 2018). Lenos and Keltjens (2017) summarise the tasks of the police in preventing radicalisation at the local level:

a) the police possess information and data not accessible or known to other institutions;

b) the police can represent a source of expertise for partners working in the local environment;

c) the police are authorized to use unique measures and procedures;

d) the police have a highly developed local network;

e) the police are a trustworthy partner in the field of providing the security and protection of people and property, preventing crime and maintaining law and order in the community;

f) the police can act as a link to other local security units and intelligence agencies; and

g) the police can cooperate effectively with local authorities (municipalities).

However, in order for police officers to successfully participate in a multi-agency approach to preventing radicalization, it is important to analyse how they perceive the factors that lead to radicalization and extremism.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Sample

The study was conducted on a sample of 117 students of the Croatian Police College of the Ministry of the Interior and 57 Slovenian police officers to evaluate the perceptions of police officers about various forms of radicalization and extremism in Slovenia and Croatia. The data in Croatia were collected during the students' courses in December 2018. Respondents who were regular students without any work experience in the police accounted for 28.1 percent of the sample, with the rest working on the local level – police stations (66.7 percent) and regional level – police department (4.6 percent). Those respondents who were employed by the police possessed 1 to 11 years' work experience (on average 5.7 years; standard deviation 2.93). The Slovenian sample represents 57 police officers who were included in the training process in the field of radicalization prevention and extreme violence in 2017. The police officers included in the sample had an average of 23 years of work experience (min. 10, max. 35). 12.3% of the respondents came from the local level, 47.4% from the regional level, and 40.3% from the state level of the police organization. All participants have already had experience in responding to the phenomenon of radicalization leading to violent behaviour.

3.2. Instrument

We used a questionnaire developed in the *First Line*[3] project dedicated to the training of various stakeholders (e.g. representatives of the police, local governments, NGOs, education, and health) in the area of radicalisation and strengthening deradicalisation/

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[3]   *FIRST LINE* Practitioners Dealing with Radicalisation Issues – Awareness Raising and Encouraging Capacity Building in the Western Balkan Region, project No. HOME/2014/ISFP/AG/RADX/7533 (2016-2018), funded by the Internal Security Fund (ISF), European Commission.

disengagement processes in the Western Balkans (Prislan et al., 2018). For the purpose of the study, we adapted the questionnaire to suit the Croatian environment, including altering different parts of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was composed of several sets of questions. Respondents were asked to share information about the extent of their knowledge in the area of radicalisation and to assess the presence of various types of radicalisation in their local environments. Responses were provided on a five-point scale, where 1 meant the lowest possible level (of occurrence or agreement) and 5 the highest (of occurrence or agreement).

All respondents were involved in the training process for the prevention of radicalization and extreme violence in 2017 (Slovenian subsample) and 2018 (Croatian sample). Slovenian police officers were involved in the training process in the field of prevention of radicalization and extreme violence in 2017, when the survey was conducted. In 2018, a four hour training session on radicalization was prepared in Croatia within the framework of the bilateral Slovenia – Croatia project "*The Community Policing and the Role of the Police in Preventing Violent Radicalization in Slovenia and Croatia*". The participants were presented the latest trends concerning terrorist attacks in Europe and the different approaches to preventing radicalisation and violent extremism. Participants were interviewed at end of the training.

Participation in the survey was voluntary and anonymity was provided to participants.

4. RESULTS

We asked the participants to indicate on a scale from 1 to 5 (where 1 means that the factor in their opinion has no impact and 5 that the factor has a strong impact) how much they think the following conditions or factors affect the development of extremism and strengthening the radicalisation of an individual. Results are presented in the Table 1.

Respondents from the Croatian sample are of the opinion that radicalization is mostly contributed by religious or other ideological indoctrination of people, the promotion / fuelling of hatred by political leaders, online propaganda, and the propaganda by religious leaders. Respondents in the Slovenian sample generally considered all the factors listed to be more influential than those from the Croatian sample. Respondents in the Slovenian sample cited online propaganda, promotion / fuelling of hatred by political leaders, and religious or other ideological indoctrination of people as the most important factors influencing the emergence of extremism and strengthening the radicalisation of an individual.

Table 1. Factors influencing the emergence of extremism and strengthening the radicalisation of an individual[4]

	Mean/SD		strong impact (4+5) %		t –test; p	Cohen's d test[4]
	CRO	SVN	CRO	SVN		
Injustice in world	3,02/1,09	3,82/0,93	34,2	70,6	4,76; 0,000	1,03 Large
Financial/economic crisis	3,36/1,01	3,39/0,94	42,6	47,1	no sig. diff.	0,03 No diff.
Political disagreements in the world	3,59/0,98	3,86/0,77	60,1	70,6	1,82; 0,07	0,30 Small
Political disagreements in the local environment	3,31/1,08	3,16/1,06	45,4	35,3	no sig. diff.	0.14 No diff.
Religious or other ideological indoctrination of people	4,06/0,82	4,02/0,76	72,9	76,5	no sig. diff.	0.05 No diff.
Promotion/fuelling of hatred by political leaders	3,86/0,92	4,22/0,75	67,6	80,4	2,57; 0,01	0,42 Moderate
Propaganda by religious leaders	4,04/0,89	4,00/0,95	75,0	68,0	no sig. diff.	0,04 No diff.
Individual's feeling of powerlessness	3,11/1,08	3,96/0,80	30,6	70,9	5,27; 0.000	0.93 Large
Individual's characteristics/ personality	3,43/1,02	3,92/0,85	48,3	68,8	3,13; 0,002	0,52 Moderate
Reporting of the media (newspapers, TV)	3,73/0,96	3,84/0,86	61,1	66,6	no sig. diff.	0,12 No diff.
Online propaganda (Internet, FB, Twitter)	4,08/0,89	4,16/,81	72,2	82,4	no sig. diff.	0,09 No diff.

We can see a large difference in assessing the impact of injustice in the world on the development of extremism and strengthening the radicalisation of an individual. The Croatian respondents mainly asses that the injustice in the world has a moderate impact on the development of extremism, while the Slovenian respondents mainly asses that there is a strong impact of injustice in the world on the development of extremism. A big difference can be the result of no Slovenian respondents answering to the first particle of the given 5-point scale. Next, we can see quite a difference in the assessment of

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[4] One type of effect size, i.e. the standardised mean effect, expresses the mean difference between two groups in standard deviation units. Typically, this is reported as Cohen's d. Though the values calculated for effect size are generally low, they share the same range as standard deviation (-3.0 to 3.0) and can thus be quite large. Interpretation depends on the research question. The meaning of effect size varies according to context, however, the standard interpretation offered by Cohen is: ≥ .8 = large; .5 = moderate; .2 = small (https://researchrundowns.com/quantitative-methods/effect-size/).

political disagreements in the world and its impact on the development of extremism and strengthening the radicalisation of an individual among the two groups of respondents. Slovenian respondents assess considerably more that there is the impact of political disagreements in the world on the development of extremism and strengthening the radicalisation of an individual, while Croatian respondents assess the same problem closer to mid-point. We found a moderate difference between groups in evaluation of promotion/fuelling of hatred by political leaders' impact on the development of extremism and strengthening the radicalisation of an individual. Compared to the Croatian sample, more than ten percent of Slovenian police officers consider this factor as an important factor in explaining radicalization. Results shows that Croatian respondents tend to consider the impact of an individual's feeling of powerlessness on the development of extremism and strengthening the radicalisation of an individual as a weaker factor then Slovenian respondents. We can see the same pattern when comparing the responses of Slovenian and Croatian police officers in assessing the impact of individual's characteristics / personality on the development of individual radicalization.

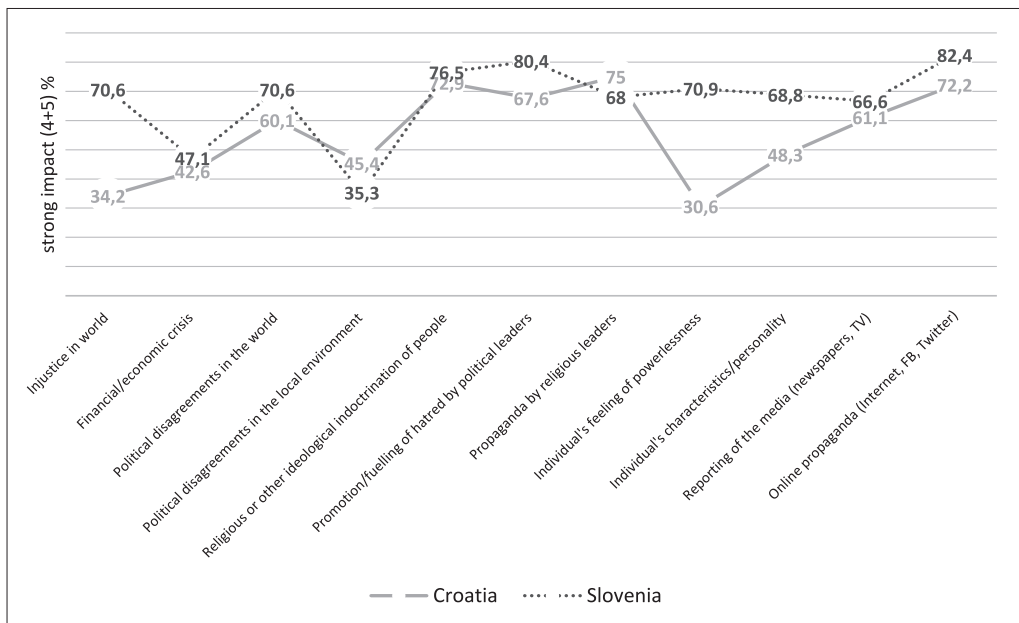The differences between the two samples are also shown in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Comparison between Slovenia and Croatia on the influence of various factors on the occurrence of radicalization

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Vergani, Iqbal, Ilbahar and Barton (2018) have made a systematic scoping review of scientific literature on radicalization into violent extremism since the Al Qaeda attacks on 11 September 2001. They analysed all scholarly, peer-reviewed, English-language articles published between 2001 and 2015 that empirically investigated the factors of radicalization into violent extremism. In the analysis authors considered two main dependent variables (behavioural and cognitive radicalization) and three main independent variables (push, pull, and personal factors). "Pull" factors of radicalization emerge as the main factors of radicalization across studies focused on different geographical areas and ideologies. The systematic literature review on factors of radicalisation was performed by researchers within the TRIVALENT (2017) - Terrorism Prevention Via Radicalisation Counter-Narrative - the European Union's Horizon 2020 founded research project - and the review indicates that different root causes underlying the radicalisation process are suggested. These root causes can be divided depending on the level on which they occur, i.e. micro-, meso- or macro-level. While radicalisation is primarily an individual process, group dynamics and identity are also often referred to in the literature as well as macro-level factors such as the effects of globalisation and modernization. The meta-analysis on international scientific articles however shows that individual identity-related factors seem to be more numerous than articles focused on macro factors (TRIVALENT, 2017). Next to these micro and meso factors of radicalisation, the review identifies some specific trigger events that can induce radicalisation. Almost 1 out of the 4 studies reviewed refers to a micro-level event such as the dead of a loved one or a divorce which preceded the radicalisation. Meeting a recruiter or the use of the internet to come in contact with like-minded people is even mentioned by 1 out of 3 studies as a crucial factor in the process. In doing so, the study authors noted the lack of studies on gendered radicalisation and the limited availability of studies focused on the relationship between structural aspects (for example inequality problems) and radicalization.

Research on radicalization in Western Balkans in Central Europe (Prislan et al., 2018) confirms that the police and similar security-based agencies/services play an important role in preventing radicalisation. Based on the change in overall terrorism tackling doctrine, a move from a very repressive to a very preventive strategy means that police organisations are challenged with new expectations. The police are becoming an interconnector or facilitator for multi-stakeholder cooperation at the local level. In order for police officers to successfully participate in a multi-agency approach to preventing radicalization, it is important to analyse how they perceive the factors that lead to radicalization and extremism. The results showed that respondents in the Croatian sample are of the opinion that radicalization is mostly contributed by religious or other ideological indoctrination of people, the promotion / fuelling of hatred by political leaders, online propaganda, and the propaganda by religious leaders. Respondents in the Slovenian sample generally considered all the factors listed to be more influential than those from the Croatian sample. Slovenian cited online propaganda, promotion / fuelling of hatred by political

leaders, and religious or other ideological indoctrination of people as the most important factors influencing the emergence of extremism and strengthening the radicalisation of an individual. Large difference in assessing the impact of injustice in the world on the development of extremism and strengthening the radicalisation of an individual was discovered when comparing two groups of police officers. The Croatian respondents mainly asses that the injustice in the world has a moderate impact on the development of extremism, while the Slovenian respondents mainly asses that the injustice in the world has a strong impact on the development of extremism. Injustice in the world is a macro factor for the emergence of radicalization and as such is more widely recognized by the Slovenian than by the Croatian police officers. Results also showed that Croatian respondents tend to consider the impact of an individual's feeling of powerlessness on the development of extremism and strengthening the radicalisation of an individual as a weaker factor then Slovenian respondents.

As we mentioned earlier, police officers within community policing strategy have an important role in preventing radicalisation leading to extremist acts and the emergence of terrorism, but they must be adequately trained for such activities. Lenos & Keltjens (2016b) emphasized the importance of the role of police training, where four key elements for police officers working in the field of preventing radicalisation were identified. The first one is the understanding and recognising the process of radicalisation, the areas where radical groups develop (locations) and their weaknesses. The second key element is exercising control in the community and community policing, which is based on a network of trust within a community, followed by understanding the diversity of multicultural society, guaranteeing equal treatment of all individuals within a community and respecting human rights. The last one is the understanding that the police are a crucial link in inter-institutional cooperation.

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