

Politics and society have a shared responsibility to combat youth radicalisation

Despite a number of high-quality EU and Member State initiatives and measures, not enough is being done to successfully prevent young people from succumbing to the lure of violent extremism, the EESC says

In the fight against the radicalisation of their young citizens, Member States and EU institutions need to involve civil society organisations more effectively as partners who can make an essential contribution to social and values-based resilience against extremist ideas, **the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)** said at its plenary session in December.

Instead of focusing on short-term, punitive security policies driven by “crisis” events, such as the recent terrorist or violent attacks in Europe, many of which were committed by young radicalised EU nationals, the EU’s policies should invest more in prompt but also long-term and coordinated prevention efforts, the EESC stated in its opinion on *Cooperation with civil society to prevent the radicalisation of young people*, adopted at the plenary.

“Violent extremism motivated by radical ideologies has many faces, and many of them are young”, the rapporteur for the opinion, **Christian Moos**, said, adding that young people are especially vulnerable to extremist propaganda of any kind, as they do not have a strong sense of identity and often feel excluded by society.

“Radical ideologies often claim to provide guidance, direction and support in daily life and compensate for feelings of inferiority stemming from a variety of reasons. But radicalisation is a brainwashing process which sends people into a tunnel out of which they emerge with black and white answers to all questions of life, in addition to an enemy that needs to be fought,” **Mr Moos** told the plenary.

“This is where civil society can play a major role by providing alternatives and, more generally, contributing to sustainable social resilience against radicalisation, based on our common rights and values, as set out in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights”, **Mr Moos** maintained.

The prevention work in this field requires a multi-agency approach involving policy-makers and national institutions such as police and prisons or social workers, but also schools, the media, businesses and civil society organisations representing, amongst others, families, the social partners and youth workers, according to the EESC.

Mr Moos commended the valuable work of the European Commission in this area. Its [Radicalisation Awareness Network \(RAN\)](#), set up in 2015, gathers frontline

or grassroots practitioners in the field of countering extremism and terrorism and promotes the exchange of best practice and on-the-ground experience. The practitioners include the police and prison authorities, but also teachers, local authorities, civil society representatives and healthcare professionals.

Among other similar measures instigated by the Commission and praised by the EESC is the establishment of a High Level Commission Expert Group on Radicalisation that will advise on further development of EU policies in this area and on more structured future cooperation between various stakeholders and between Member States.

Nevertheless, the EESC said it viewed these initiatives and steps to implement them "as still being insufficient". It has repeated its call for closer involvement and stronger institutional support of civil society and local authorities, a call already made in its previous [opinion](#) on the countering of terrorism.

In order to build resilience against radicalisation, the EESC places special emphasis on the importance of inclusive formal and non-formal education, which is indispensable for active participation in a diverse society and for teaching critical thinking and media literacy.

Fighting xenophobic and populist tendencies through increasing intercultural awareness but at the same time conveying a firm understanding of EU values is also seen as helpful. In this connection, however, core subjects such as civic education are neglected in many countries, the EESC warned.

Youth organisations, such as sports clubs or the scouts, were singled out as providing valuable alternative opportunities for developing a healthy sense of personal identity. The EESC also stressed the role of trade unions and religious communities in the prevention of radicalisation, as well as of support services and networks that can help schools and families in detecting the signs.

Combating youth unemployment and poverty should also be high on the agenda and the EESC said that Member States did not "invest nearly enough" in providing excellent opportunities for young people. Active partnerships with businesses, involving social media, and building strong communication skills on the part of various civil society organisations, could foster the creation of effective counter-narratives to extremist propaganda in media outlets.

Prevention of radicalisation in prisons and the integration of former prisoners into the labour market and society are also seen as important steps in the right direction.