

# Background of Jihadist Radicalisation and Measures for Prevention and Intervention in Switzerland

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ZHAW Soziale Arbeit

## Abstract

*This paper presents a development overview of prevention strategies in a federalist context. It builds on the results of the study on the backgrounds of jihadist radicalisation and the prevention strategies adopted in Switzerland (Eser Davolio and Rether 2019) as well as the measures outlined in the Swiss National Action Plan to Prevent and Counter Radicalisation. The methodological approach comprises descriptive quantitative data analyses of the different backgrounds of radicalisation and qualitative analyses of the prevention agencies and their strategies. This paper examines three such prevention and intervention agencies: counselling services, which have been set up in various cities and cantons for the universal and selective prevention of extremism in general and jihadist radicalisation in particular; community policing by the cantonal and municipal police; and, on the level of prevention, the Swiss penal system facing radicalised persons in legal procedures and in prison. The prevention and intervention measures implemented by these agencies will be analysed, assessing whether they are adequate in view of the findings on the backgrounds of radicalisation. Focussing on jihadist radicalisation in Switzerland – a problem area with relatively limited evidence but at the same time of national security relevance – we have to consider the federalist context with its own challenges and aspects of interferences.*

*Keywords: Jihadist radicalisation, prevention, intervention*

## Introduction

Since 2013, the advent of the so-called *Islamic State* (IS) in Syria and in Iraq has caused an unprecedented global wave of jihadist radicalisation as well as an upsurge in terrorist attacks. These dynamics have also affected Europe. It is estimated that since the conflict broke out in

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Syria, between 5000 and 7000 residents of Western European countries have gone abroad to join jihadi groups (Merz 2016). Furthermore, many European countries have also been targeted by terrorist attacks either directly perpetrated or inspired by IS. So far Switzerland has been spared such violent attacks. However, the wave of jihadist radicalisation that sweeps over the European continent has an impact on Switzerland. Up to now, the Swiss Federal Intelligence Service (FIS) has identified 77 individuals who have left Switzerland to join jihadist groups operating in Syria and Iraq (Merz and Saal 2019). In absolute terms, this number seems fairly small compared to other European countries (Eser Davolio et al. 2015). Per capita, however, this number places Switzerland at an only slightly lower rate than its neighbour Germany, and above Italy (Merz and Saal 2019:20). Additionally, in 2017 the Swiss authorities communicated that the Federal Intelligence Service was monitoring around 500 persons due to their online activity, i.e. the dissemination of content glorifying jihadist ideology or their contacts with such individuals. Furthermore, around 60 criminal proceedings related to terrorism have been instituted in the same year.

Reacting to the dynamics, Switzerland published its first comprehensive counterterrorism strategy in 2015.<sup>2</sup> One of the main pillars of this strategy is the focus on the preventive dimension of counterterrorism, i.e., amongst others, on the prevention of radicalisation or on what is usually referred to as Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE). Due to Switzerland's organisation as a federal state, the cantons and municipalities are responsible for the implementation of these PVE measures. In a federal system, the cantons have a certain autonomy and the federal government has restricted power to impose measures. As a result, the situation is quite heterogeneous, with cantons that have developed and implemented prevention agencies, and others that do not see the need for it or develop other forms of prevention measures.

As a consequence, in 2016 the Swiss Security Network, a coordinating body for federal, cantonal and communal security policy actors, published a report looking at different measures aimed at the prevention of violent extremism implemented in the different cantons and municipalities in Switzerland. The aim of this report was to get an overview of the prevention measures by the cantons and municipalities in view of creating a platform for knowledge transfer. Building on this, Switzerland then published its *National Action Plan to Prevent and Counter Radicalisation and Violent Extremism* at the end of 2017.<sup>3</sup> This action plan outlines five areas of activities subdivided into 26 broader measures aimed not only at preventing violent extremism but also geared to encouraging disengagement and reintegration.

In line with the measures proposed in the action plan,<sup>4</sup> in 2018 a team of researchers from different Swiss Universities was tasked with updating a study on radicalisation that had been conducted in 2015 (Eser Davolio et al. 2015); the latter had explored the background of jihadist radicalisation in Switzerland and made recommendations for prevention and intervention. The new study (Eser Davolio et al. 2019) focuses on the background and the factors contributing to radicalisation in the Swiss context and on the measures aimed at preventing violent extremism, namely the work of the different cantonal and municipal competence centres

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<sup>2</sup> See the draft of the Swiss Federal Council. Last accessed 24.11.2019 on: <https://www.news.admin.ch/news/message/attachments/41397.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Swiss Security Network 2017.

<sup>4</sup> See in detail: Swiss Security Network (2017: 13)

for the prevention of violent extremism. It also deals with different community police initiatives aimed at preventing radicalisation as well as on the topic of radicalisation in the penal system.

In the following, the findings of this study will be presented and discussed with the aim of evaluating whether the intervention and prevention measures are adequate to prevent jihadist radicalisation considering the background phenomena and taking into account the federalist context of Switzerland.

### Methodological approach

The methodological approach comprises descriptive quantitative data analyses of the backgrounds of radicalisation and qualitative analyses of the prevention agencies and their strategies. The quantitative data on Islamic extremism in Switzerland was supplied by the FIS in 2019 (Merz and Saal 2019), which was provided with a classification grid for this purpose. The variables defined in it can be divided into four larger groups: 1) socio-demographic information, such as age, gender, relationship status, origin, place of residence, level of education and occupation; 2) social context and personality, such as family problems, use of drugs, psychological abnormalities, criminality and experience of violence; 3) radicalisation factors, such as peer groups, the internet, missionary activities and contact with Salafist preachers; 4) jihadist activities, with particular emphasis on jihadist-motivated travel.

The sample includes 130 people in total. The FIS selected them from its priority cases of the past ten years (Merz and Saal 2019:10). The persons selected meet the following criteria: Their place of residence is or was in Switzerland. They can be assigned to the jihadist spectrum, either because they have engaged in violence or because they legitimised violence in the context of their ideological and religious beliefs. The individuals selected by the FIS are or were mainly *high-risk persons*.<sup>5</sup> The only exception are a few older cases from back when the term was not yet used. The term does not include only violent extremists but also supporters and propagandists of jihadist groups, individuals who have come to the attention of the FIS due to jihadist-motivated travel as well as persons who have been identified due to indications of radicalisation, whether through internet activities or specific patterns of behaviour.

More than half of the sample (55.4%) consists of cases of jihadist-motivated travellers. In addition to the 72 jihadist-motivated travellers (FIS 2018), nine persons whose departure was prevented are listed (6.9%). The other 49 radicalisation cases selected (36.7%) have no direct connection to jihadist-motivated travel.

The data classification grid completed by the FIS is a list cumulatively compiled over the period of the last ten years and not a list of all persons currently under observation. Socio-demographic variables and information on jihadist-motivated travel are provided in almost all cases. In contrast, we only have information on half or sometimes even fewer persons in the sample with respect to some variables of social context and radicalisation factors. Descriptive

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<sup>5</sup> The FIS uses the term *high-risk persons* to designate persons who “present an increased risk to Switzerland’s internal and external security.” They are determined “using a combination of very precise criteria where a specific connection to violence is the decisive factor” (Federal Intelligence Service 2018a).

statistical methods, such as frequency distribution and averaging calculations, are used in the following analysis.

For the qualitative analysis of prevention measures (Eser Davolio and Rether 2019), a total of 12 interviews were conducted with all ten extremism specialist units (Geneva, Lausanne, Biel, city of Berne, Basel-Stadt, Aargau, city of Zurich and canton of Zurich, Winterthur and Lugano). The interviews examine the existing personnel resources, the integration of the specialist unit, target groups, their consultation and case-work activities and their intervention strategies. For the analysis of the prevention strategies of community policing, a total of seven interviews were conducted with the existing specialist units in the cantons of Zurich, Berne, Fribourg and Schwyz, as well as in the cities of Zurich and Winterthur (*ibid.*). The semi-structured interviews were carried out between August 2018 and January 2019. The analysis of the interviews focussed on the comparison of the specific approaches of the services in order to get an overview as well as insights into the interventions (without evaluating the effects of such interventions).

In addition, qualitative interviews were conducted in order to analyse challenges of jihadist radicalisation in the Swiss penal system. There were two objectives: on the one hand, to provide information on the impact that the detention of radicalised persons (incarcerated for violating SR 122 and article 260ter SCC) has on the day-to-day running of prisons. On the other hand, the role of imams and Muslim chaplains in prison and their view on the phenomenon of radicalisation in Swiss prisons were examined (Schneuwly Purdie 2019). The sample of persons interviewed was compiled using a multifaceted approach. First, the prisons dealing with the incarceration of detainees suspected of violating SR 122 or article 260ter SCC were contacted. Second, the names of prisons faced with situations involving radical profiles were provided to us by the professionals interviewed. Third, the prison imams and Muslim chaplains were contacted. Finally, 15 persons performing various roles in 18 establishments in seven different cantons (three in the French-speaking, four in the German-speaking area) were interviewed between December 2018 and February 2019 (*ibid.*). As the study was exploratory, the analysis of the interviews focused on the challenges the presence of radicalised inmates poses for day-to-day management (security, group dynamics, separation etc.) and prevention measures in order to get an overview of relevant issues in this context.

The findings about the prevention and intervention measures in the Swiss penal system and advice centres will be discussed, assessing whether they are adequate in relation to the backgrounds of radicalisation, always considering the federalist context with its interferences.

## **Findings**

### *Individual context of jihadist radicalisation*

Findings on individual factors of jihadist radicalisation in the Swiss context are presented in comparison to the findings obtained (Merz and Saal, 2019) on the issue in other European countries.

The evaluation of the FIS data classification grid reveals the individual, psychosocial and socio-demographic backgrounds of persons classified as radicalised jihadists. Here, extensive

correlations with studies from neighbouring countries as Germany, Austria and France are observed, such as the fact that jihadist radicalisation mainly concerns males between 18 and 35 who are second-generation immigrants,<sup>6</sup> live in urban or suburban areas and tend to have a low level of education and to be poorly integrated into the employment market (Merz and Saal 2019). The fact that around 40% of the sample depend on state support (welfare benefits, unemployment benefits, disability insurance or refugee assistance) raises questions about societal alienation, the approaches of social work to these persons and their economic and social reintegration opportunities. It remains unclear if this dependency on state support started before their radicalisation or if it is the consequence of jail or other forms of exclusion.

As observed in studies conducted in Germany (Bundeskriminalamt 2016), Italy (Marone and Vidino 2019) and France (Hecker 2018), it appears that the consumption of specific content on the internet plays an important supporting role in Switzerland, too. However, it is a sufficient sole criterion for radicalisation in only very few cases. Instead, group-dynamic factors of influence through like-minded peers and recruiters play a key role. This is contradictory to the position often expressed in public debate that Islam per se represents a radicalisation factor. As in other European countries, compared to the entire Muslim population the 20% of converts are overrepresented in the sample countries (Bundeskriminalamt 2016, Hecker 2018, Marone and Vidino 2019).<sup>7</sup> Of the 34 cases of persons of the Muslim faith for which we have information regarding their family's religious background, five persons grew up in secular family homes, 14 in liberal, eight in observant and only seven in fundamentalist (but not necessarily jihadist) family homes. These results in the Swiss context correspond to the findings of other studies (e.g. Marone and Vidino 2019, Vergani et al. 2018), which consider familial religiousness not a central pull factor.

Furthermore, the introduction to social interactions in the milieu of jihadists had a major influence on the radicalisation process of the sample. They were primarily introduced by peers: during their radicalisation, 93 of 97 persons were influenced by people of the same age and from their personal environment. For most of the 45 persons for whom we have detailed information on the nature of these *strong links*, it was an individual friend (11) or even several friends (25). Finally, we can conclude that jihadist radicalisation and religious conversion are generally a long-term process and the phenomenon of *blitz radicalisation* is the exception; for 72%, the process of radicalisation took over a year. The persons in question often experience personality changes during this process. This is due to the fact that they not only spend time with old and new social contacts in the radical milieu, but often also isolate themselves from friends, acquaintances and family members who do not share their new ideological convictions (Merz and Saal 2019).

Switzerland is not an exception in terms of the proportion of radicalised persons in relation to its overall population (ratio per million). Its ratio lies at 9.2, similar to that in Germany (12.7), while Italy (2.9) has a lower and France (28.5), Austria (34.1) and Belgium (36.2) have higher rates (Merz and Saal 2019:18). Nevertheless, the radicalisation phenomenon has not

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<sup>6</sup> In this respect, Italy diverges from the norm with initial immigrants predominantly accounting for the persons affected by radicalisation (Marone and Vidino 2019).

<sup>7</sup> Estimates from the Swiss Centre for Islam and Society (SZIG, Themenheft 4) in 2016 indicate there are between 8,000 and 11,000 converts in Switzerland, which equates to 1-2% of the Muslim population.

been as much a matter of public concern as in Germany, probably due to the fact that so far, no terrorist attack has been realised on Swiss territory.

### **Structural answers to jihadist radicalisation**

This section of the paper presents measures of prevention and intervention on the federal and the cantonal level. On the federal level, the Swiss National Action Plan represents an important instrument. It offers guidelines for prevention and intervention regarding expertise through further education and research, the use of early detection instruments and the improvement of risk assessment and risk management procedures in prison, the prevention of extremist ideologies and groups, disengagement and reintegration as well as international cooperation. The measures regarding cooperation and coordination involve first, competence and advice centres for the issues of radicalisation and violent extremism, and, second, community policing. While advice services are addressing at an individual level, community policing points rather to the broader social level with an universal conceptualisation of prevention. As Switzerland is a federalist nation, the guidelines of the National Plan are not binding for the cantons. They have the sovereignty to implement the recommendations. A participative process with these actors in the establishment of the National Plan is important in view of their long-term commitment. This democratic process needs time and can dilute initial goals and directives. However, once such a common ground is established, the probabilities of acceptance are increased and the implementation and funding responsibilities are determined. In the following, we present the measures adopted by advice centres, community policing and the penal system, which we analysed in the framework of our commissioned study (Eser Davolio et al. 2019).

#### *Advice Centres*

Early detection and counselling are key for the universal and selective prevention of jihadist radicalisation. Therefore, in line with other countries such as Germany (Said and Fuad 2018), France (Bouzar 2014) and Great Britain (RAN 2016), Switzerland seeks to address the problem through counselling centres and other measures. The development of quality guidelines for such prevention and disengagement work encompasses the following aspects: respect, credibility, building of trust, the absence of pressure, the promotion of emotional and social learning processes, and the focus on individual resources more than on deficits (Weilnböck and Uhlmann 2018, RAN 2016). From just two advice centres in 2015 in Zurich and Berne, the number of such counselling facilities has risen to ten centres in 2018, in cantons and cities concerned with jihadist radicalisation, such as Winterthur, Geneva, Lausanne, Biel, Berne, Basel, Lugano and (city and canton of) Zurich. They accepted counselling requests from cantons without any advice centres, even though they are supposed to focus on their respective areas. They offer advice to institutional actors (e.g. teachers, social workers and psychologists) and are required to respond to inquiries from the internal administration.

What first emerged was the problem of the classification and evaluation of the phenomena of radicalisation. Where does radicalisation start, and at what point should intervention be

deemed necessary? Analogous questions arose regarding anticipatory measures and reporting processes, at what point of a suspicious case it is appropriate or obligatory to call in the police. This challenge also applies to potential actions by social workers: namely whether and to what extent they should call in the police when their clientele turns to them for assistance, and whether in doing so they are violating the professional code of practice with respect to action geared to an advocacy and protective approach. This concern arose less in communities where the cooperation between youth work and the police, in particular youth services,<sup>8</sup> is already established and can build on experience in working closely together, since there is also a common understanding regarding the aims and possible counter-productive effects of interventions. One interviewee commented:

*With an expert group, in one case we made a triage and passed the case on to the police; the police then gave an all-clear signal. Idea exchange in the expert group is going well, we all know one another and have the same instinctive feeling. There, we discuss and agree on who will be involved with the case; otherwise we pass it on to the Expert Body Protection from Violence (Interview with advice centre, January 24 2019).*

Similar questions regarding the prevention of radicalisation arose in connection with particularly vulnerable target groups, such as asylum seekers.

The prevention goals and strategies are key conceptions taking into account the origins and causes of radicalisation processes. Here we can distinguish two fundamental perspectives. One investigates societal causal factors, such as discrimination, exclusion, lack of recognition and equal opportunities. The second looks into individual causes, such as deprivation, lack of integration, personal deficits, etc. (Van Bouchaute 2018). The recognition of societal root causes of radicalisation can cause problems even if both perspectives are taken into account. Counter-productive effects can crop up if strategies for the prevention of terrorism are embroiled in broader debates on Islam and integration.

### *Community Policing*

Community policing strategies to prevent violent extremism aim at the establishment of trust between police and the communities through regular contact and exchange as well as integration (Spalek, Zahre McDonald and El Awa 2011). The sole focus on Muslim communities and security issues however bears the risk of reproducing negative stereotyping (Abbas 2018, Schenker et al. 2016). There are community policing services operational within Switzerland solely in four cantons and four cities (Eser Davolio et al. 2019). In seven interviews the actors responsible in this sector claimed that their main objective is to build trust in various communities, including Muslim organisations, other religious communities, and migrant associations. One of the principal tasks of such community policing is the realisation of information evenings in refugee centres that aim at diminishing the asylum seekers' fear of the Swiss police and the distance between the parties involved. As universal prevention, contacts and exchange are improved in order to guarantee a better reciprocal understanding. The community polic-

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<sup>8</sup> Youth services are special services of the police, specialised in working with teenagers.

ing services maintain a network with other administrative key players and institutions with whom they exchange information and coordinate interventions. They give advice to the religious communities regarding security concepts and precautions, or they mediate quarrels in the neighbourhood. The communities appreciate this form of contact and reach out to the police agents when they are in need of assistance. In accordance with this give-and-take approach, the prevention of radicalisation becomes a common goal, and the willingness to assume responsibility leads to a closer cooperation with the police (Ülger and Çelik 2018).

In the context of extremism prevention, community policing has to distance itself from repressive functions of the police. For example, when there are police raids in certain mosques, the imam will call his contact person within community policing to obtain an explanation. Vice-versa: communities can provide the police with information if they notice possible risk groups in proximity of their mosques. The effects of community policing are quite difficult to assess, as universal prevention is widespread and has a low threshold.

The limits of community policing, for example its weak impact on religious discourses, are evident. Nevertheless, the bridge-building and networking activities can establish a basis for common interventions as well as interconnected social control and monitoring of the situation.

In conclusion, we can state that advice centres and community policing represent low-threshold local strategies for support and counselling to counter radicalisation and extremism. They are instituted when a certain level of concern in cities or cantons sensitises the authorities for the need to allocate the necessary resources. Cantons and cities which are less concerned by radicalisation phenomena will not establish such services. In this context, not only the recognition of the effective needs but also the problem awareness triggered by media reports and public discussions play an important role. In the end, the combination of effective need, perceived need and political will leads to a very heterogeneous landscape of prevention measures.

### *Penal system*

Prevention and intervention in the framework of jihadist radicalisation frequently concern legal procedures and detention. Prisons are a place where people face diverse vulnerabilities (emotional, psychological, physical, spiritual); negative thoughts, hate towards the broader society as well as group dynamics can promote radicalisation (Schneuwly-Purdie 2019). For this reason, the detention of radicalised detainee can – especially if they have some charisma – pose a risk for other rather labile detainees to be influenced by their ideas and a religious sense of mission. Prisons in Switzerland are also used to deal with diverse extremist groups such as Tamil Tigers, Grey Wolves, PKK and various exponents of organised crime. Therefore, they have developed their own strategies of separation in different sectors of the prison and cells, equipped with special monitoring. Most of the directors interviewed declared that they have everything under control as long as there are not more than two or three prisoners who have to be isolated. The directors, however, stated that they would be overburdened with five cases, as it would become difficult to really separate them from the other prisoners. Moreover, they pay special attention to radicalised detainees. Several prison directors interviewed noted that radicalised prisoners, especially intelligent ones, remain *black boxes*, i.e. they do not attract the



guards' attention and remain below the radar. The directors interviewed claimed that they provide further specific education for their guards to recognise such *undercover behaviour*. A prison chief of surveillance interviewed explained that he has found that co-prisoners resisted when a jihadist-motivated detainee sought to influence and missionize them.

There have been cases of former right-wing extremists in Germany who as a result of positive encounters with foreigners in prison began to rethink their racist attitudes and sometimes even disengaged from extremism (Tramitz 2003). According to interviews conducted with right-wing extremists imprisoned in Germany, group dynamics reinforcing extremist attitudes and group cohesion emerged when the number of extremists led to the forming of core groups or when the influence by extremist support groups from outside encouraged them to maintain and adhere to their ideology (Tramitz 2013). The findings of interviews conducted in the Swiss penal system revealed that the small number of radicalised inmates and solitary confinement serve to prevent such risks. On top of that the statements by prison directors and staff show that communication with radicalised prisoners poses a problem, since they generally do not trust others. To them, prison staff represents the state. According to the prison directors, they only trust in Allah and this leads to difficulties in making contact and establishing a relationship, especially considering that the prisoners remain convinced that their actions serve a higher purpose.

As most of radicalised suspects are in pre-trial detention for an extended period due to the difficult and complex investigations (up to three years in some cases), no measures or therapies are initiated. After their sentences, the final detention period corresponds to the duration of pre-trial detention and no further *normal* detention with possible measures follows (Schneuwly Purdie 2019). Since the sentences often do not recommend or prescribe probation assistance or therapies, no supporting measures take place after their release. These two conditions – the long pre-trial detention and the sentences without probation assistance – are the main reasons for the complete lack of resocialisation and reintegration of radicalised detainees. One of the prison directors stated that in cases of long pre-trial detention re-socialisation measures should be required to promote reintegration after a prisoner's release. With a view to France and Great Britain, where such phenomena have been researched (Khosrokhavar 2013, Mulcahy, Merrington and Bell 2013, Neumann 2010), this risk shows effects on organisation within the jail. The contact between inmates during pre-trial detention is reduced to a minimum, since they are kept in solitary confinement. Some of the prison directors interviewed who had radicalised suspects tried to make the pre-trial detention more bearable by allowing these individuals two daily walks in the courtyard, to do sport, or by providing limited work activities.

In France, Mulhouse authorities are facing a substantial number of jihadist-motivated perpetrators and acknowledge the risks posed by the breeding ground that is prison. Municipal authorities have started a radicalisation intervention programme that also involves judges. They suspend sentences for detention if the perpetrators agree to participate in an intensive intervention programme – if they refuse to cooperate, they have to go back to jail. The programme is similar to the Danish Aarhus Reintegration Model (Bertelsen 2015), but contains some further elements such as restorative justice (e.g. contact and discussions with the victims of the Paris Bataclan attack), vocational guidance, psychological counselling, workshops on

conspiracy theories, socio-cultural coaching, etc. Such a multilateral programme does not aim at *brainwashing*, but those participating in the programme have to engage seriously and must show improvements. The suspended prison sentence puts pressure on the detainees. Otherwise they would probably not agree to actively participate in the intervention programme. This means that the judges play a key role in the programme, and they monitor development of each participant regularly. Of course, it was the number of cases in Mulhouse that caused pressure to institute a disengagement programme: in March 2018, approximately sixty individuals were participating in it. Since this intervention project is not evidence-based and no other de-radicalisation programme with detainees has been scientifically evaluated (Beilmann 2019:18), establishing effective intervention measures for prisons remains difficult.

Since there have been neither approaches involving judges nor critical situations regarding the concentration of radicalised prisoners in the Swiss context up to now (see Schneuwly Purdie 2019), such mandatory intervention programmes are not yet possible. Given these circumstances, the prison wardens have to leverage the means at their disposal, and one such option are the Muslim chaplains within the jails. They come into contact with the Muslim prisoners who wish to participate in Friday prayers or to have individual contact with the imam. Findings show that these Muslim chaplains establish quite confidential relationships with the inmates and gain insight into their religious way of thinking and interpretation of current events on a geopolitical level, e.g. their grievances against Western nations, etc. Sometimes they even obtain information about group dynamics. The information we gathered from the interviews with Muslim chaplains suggests that radicalised prisoners did not participate in Friday prayers. Only one of them had an informal meeting with an imam. The imams interviewed noted that radicalised inmates consider them as traitors or spies, and consequently do not want to pray with them. The interviews with the imams show that they notice the underlying radical discourses of Muslim prisoners, as expressed in questions or claims about injustices in regard to their religion. The imams heard worrying statements after the Charlie Hebdo and Bataclan attacks, such as *well done*, or *they deserve it*. In these situations, they stated, it is of fundamental importance for imams to be able to contest and clarify such discourses and accusations, and to argue with them about pretending to be “a real Muslim” (Schneuwly Purdie 2019:27). They agree that it is better to be neither naive nor alarmist but rather vigilant and to try, within the limits of their professional role inside the prison, to contribute to a moderate climate inside the institution. In recent years, they report to have noticed more frequent questions regarding geopolitics in Iraq, Syria, Palestine, and Afghanistan. This has motivated them to take the initiative by raising these topics in their Friday prayer sermons. One of the imams interviewed stated that he likes to *vaccinate* the prisoners against extremism in his sermons, in order to protect them from being manipulated by radicalised inmates.

### **Discussion: Community-based prevention approaches in a federal system**

In comparison to other Western countries, on the Federal level, the answer to the challenges of jihadist radicalisation in Switzerland arrived relatively late. The National Action Plan to Prevent and Counter Radicalisation and Violent Extremism was published in December

2017,<sup>9</sup> almost two years later than in other European countries. Terrorist attacks, mainly in the years 2015 and 2016, had a catalysing effect on countries such as France, Belgium, Germany, and Great Britain, generating a call for national prevention strategies and action plans against extremism and terrorism. These national plans often juggle between repressive measures (law enforcement, security, police) on one hand, and prevention concerns and frameworks (education, welfare, integration) on the other. Terrorist violence is often seen as the logical result of a radicalisation process on a large scale, promoted by recruiters and preachers. Seen from this perspective, adolescents must be protected from contacts with dangerous beliefs (Van Bouchaute 2018).

Furthermore, there is little concrete evidence of jihadist activity in Switzerland. Therefore, the question emerges as to whether universal or also quite specific prevention measures are applicable to these few and hidden cases of home-grown perpetrators. On the other hand, there is considerable public attention paid to jihadism, especially if violent jihadist incidents occur in European countries, raising questions regarding how to face jihadist travellers and returnees. Moreover, serious thought must be given to the possible collateral damage that prevention measures directed toward the Muslim communities can cause when these measures implicitly blame communities for being *breeding grounds*. This discourse construes the entire minority as a potentially suspect community. Especially religious Muslims and mosques are gaining the increased attention of the police, local authorities and prevention agents. Muslim youth and women in particular are often made the subject of discussions on integration and the relationship between Islam and Western societies. The discourses regarding the topic of jihadism are a melange of diverse discourses on integration, parallel societies, fundamentalism and Salafism, violence, security and control, etc. Media reports on Muslim communities and mosques have been largely shaped and defined by the problem of radicalisation in recent years (Schneuwly Purdie and Tunger-Zanetti 2014). These circumstances have an impact on prevention and intervention programmes and on the cooperation with Muslim organisations, and thus must be carefully reflected upon.

The effects of the National Action Plan against extremism on the structural level depends on the priorities and resources of a canton to implement the recommendations in practice. Especially small, rural cantons feel little concern about jihadist radicalisation. Additionally, the effort to establish specific services would disproportionately strain their economic resources. In our view, to tackle the limited number of jihadist radicalisation cases in Switzerland, centralistic strategies with federal structures might be more appropriate. However, the cantons have clear reservations about handing over competences to the federal level of governance. Given that adequate language competencies and local knowledge are highly relevant for effective counselling (Eser Davolio et al. 2015), at least three advise centres, one each for German, French and Italian speaking regions, is needed.

A consequence of such fragmentary implementation on the cantonal and municipal level is the risk of independent parallel structures lacking exchange and intercommunication. In light of that, one of the benefits of the research conducted (Eser Davolio et al. 2019) is the

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<sup>9</sup> Swiss Security Network 2017.

overview and analysis of the federalist implementation in the cantons and cities concerned as well as of the cases and situations the respective services encountered.

## **Conclusions: The different backgrounds of jihadist radicalisation and prevention and intervention agencies**

The findings on the different backgrounds of jihadist radicalisation in Switzerland correspond to risk factors in other European countries (Hecker 2018, Marone and Vidino 2019). This shows that Switzerland does not represent a special case. Regarding intervention and prevention of radicalisation in the penal system – in light of the possibilities, with jails that are not overcrowded as is the case in many other European countries – it seems easier to keep possible negative group dynamics or recruitment in prison under control than elsewhere. However, there is a complete lack of disengagement programmes for individuals in jail as well as after their release. Because of that, prevention strategies in the framework of the Swiss Penal System cannot be considered to be sufficient.

Universal prevention agencies, such as advice centres and community policing, offer information and low-threshold counselling as well as case management to address radicalisation at an early stage and to build up mutual trust. For example, conversions represent a risk factor, and alarmed parents, friends or teachers can ask for advice and counselling to assess whether it is a harmless conversion or possibly a risky case. When questions about such individual developments emerge, it is important that the counselling is low-threshold and can be provided anonymously. Both existing prevention agencies however focus on universal prevention and therefore use rather broad strategies addressing the topic.

Considering the findings on risk factors for jihadist radicalisation, it seems obvious to seek to intervene at an early stage of radicalisation. As soon as relatives and peers perceive radical changes in an individual, counselling and assistance must be provided. Additionally, it is crucial to raise awareness among actors on the social level, such as mosques, and to strengthen cooperation in order to agree on at least a minimal consensus regarding common prevention strategies. Even though the research findings do not indicate mosques to be frequent promoters of radicalisation (Eser Davolio et al. 2019), they are key for early detection and prevention. For this reason, we think that advice centres and community policing seem to be most suitable for prevention.

Moreover, the two prevention agencies are in contact with other key actors and experts and function as a link; they inform and sensitise other actors and make case management easier. This link is missing in cantons without prevention agencies. Thus, the federal system leads to a disparity between cantons with regard to measures taken against jihadist radicalisation.<sup>10</sup> The other cantons represent blind spots on the Swiss map of prevention work. This calls for the development of a transfer strategy from better equipped and experienced cantons to those with fewer resources and services. Furthermore, the creation of a national prevention centre which coordinates measures, organises the exchange of experience of and for practitioners

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<sup>10</sup> Often the advice centers offered assistance to citizens of other cantons, although they technically would not have been allowed to.

and promotes the evaluation of prevention strategies in order to develop evidence-based measures would be an important step towards more effective prevention programmes.

Apart from the constructive effects of prevention measures, it is also important to have a look at their possible counter-productive or stigmatising effects. Both intervention agencies – the advice centres and community policing – are not directed uniquely towards Muslims, but towards a broad spectrum of possible target groups: advice centres cover all kinds of extremism, some of them also various forms of religious fundamentalism, including sects. Community policing is directed toward various religious communities. But because of the hype about jihadist radicalisation, both agencies started focusing solely on the *Muslim* target group. However, both prevention agencies distance themselves from modes of repression and try to build up trust and cooperation with their respective target groups, thereby partly avoiding the risk of blaming and stigmatisation of the Muslim community in Switzerland.

In conclusion, it can be stated that intervention and prevention strategies in a federal system like Switzerland do not provide general and standardised offers and measures for the whole territory. They are, however, quite adequate for preventing and countering radicalisation at an early stage. Intervention measures for manifest forms of an advanced stage of radicalisation, such as in the penal system, are still lacking.

Finally, the question of whether the prevention and intervention measures are adequate in relation to our findings on the backgrounds of radicalisation can only be answered partly within the framework of this article. On one hand, advice centres and community policing are restricted to some areas and operate merely on a universal and selective prevention level. For this reason, their approaches remain quite general and low-level. On the other hand, we can state that the advice centres operating as prevention agencies offer services in urban areas, which have been seriously concerned about jihadist radicalisation. Thus, they take action where a major need for counselling operating on an individual level exists. At the same time, the community policing tries to build up trust with the Muslim minority and promote cooperation. This diminishes possible negative effects like the increase of polarisation within society. In the light of this, the two prevention agencies, advice centres and community policing, are operating in complementarity on two different levels, cooperating with the security sector when necessary.

### Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the anonymous reviewers and the editors of *socialpolicy.ch* for helpful comments and feedback. The author would like to thank all the members of the research group who have contributed to the initial study upon which this article is based on. This includes Dr. Mallory Schneuwly Purdie from the University of Fribourg, Fabien Merz from the Center for Security Studies (CSS) at the ETH Zurich, Johannes Saal from the University of Lucerne and Ayesha Rether from the University of Applied Sciences Zurich. Furthermore, the author would also like to thank Bill Templer and Ewgenia Baraboj who have edited and proofread the text.

### Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

### Funding

The author disclosed receipt of the financial support of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs for the research.

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