Approaches To Countering Extremism In European Countries

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Abstract: The article explores the European experience in de-radicalization. It analyzes the principles of integrating individuals convicted of participating in terrorist organizations into the receiving society, fostering their socialization, and instilling a sense of local legal consciousness. Conclusions are drawn regarding the feasibility and applicability of adopting relevant practices from European institutions in the context of Uzbekistan.

Keywords: Deradicalization, Penitentiary System, Prevention, Extremism, Radical Ideology, Civil Society Structures.

Introduction

Extremism in Europe remains a critical issue, with its roots in social, political, and ideological factors. In response, European countries have developed multifaceted approaches to address the problem. These strategies range from security and legislative measures to community engagement, online regulation, and socio-economic interventions.

It should be noted that European governments have adopted a variety of approaches, ranging from policing and counter-terrorism measures to community engagement and social integration programs. This article explores these approaches and highlights their strengths and limitations.

Methodology

Below is an exploration of the key approaches to countering extremism in Europe.
1. Preventive Surveillance: Agencies such as the UK's MI5 and France's DGSI actively monitor individuals suspected of extremist activities. Advanced technology, including AI and data analytics, is often employed to detect potential threats.

2. Cross-Border Cooperation: The European Union has enhanced intelligence sharing among member states through initiatives like Europol's Counter-Terrorism Centre. This cooperation helps track cross-border movements of extremist groups.

3. Legislative Measures: Countries have introduced stricter anti-terrorism laws. For example, France's 2017 anti-terrorism law expanded police powers to conduct searches and surveillance without prior judicial approval.

Recognizing that security measures alone are insufficient, many European countries have developed programs aimed at preventing radicalization and supporting individuals in leaving extremist groups.

The European experience in implementing de-radicalization programs is of significant interest for development and application within Russian society, particularly in penitentiary institutions. This area of research and practical activity is highly relevant for modern Russia.

The studied practices for countering radicalization include a comprehensive set of preventive measures aimed at various population groups who are at risk of involvement or already engaged in such activities, as well as programs for working with individuals under investigation or convicted of extremist and terrorist-related offenses.

The experience of public organizations and government institutions in Austria, the United Kingdom, Germany, Denmark, and France deserves particular attention. The de-radicalization measures undertaken by state institutions and public organizations in European countries are primarily aimed at enhancing the integration of at-risk groups into the host society, promoting their socialization, and instilling an understanding of local legal norms.

A common element across most European countries is the expansion of radical Islam and the dynamic growth in the number of Salafism adherents. While the majority of these individuals adhere to the laws of their host countries, they also follow Sharia laws, creating preconditions for the expansion of radicalization. According to the British International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation, 1,200 individuals from France, 600 from Germany, 500 from the United Kingdom, and 440 from Belgium have joined ISIS (a terrorist organization banned in Russia). De-radicalization measures implemented by state institutions and public organizations in European countries are primarily aimed at enhancing the integration of at-risk individuals into the host society, promoting their socialization, and instilling an understanding of local legal norms.

Among the well-known examples of European-style de-radicalization is the experience of the Danish community in the city of Aarhus, which is considered one of the most successful and continues to develop to this day. In 2007, local youth organizations, supported by social services, initiated a mentorship program. This program was implemented with the help of city residents, who reported radical sentiments among acquaintances and even relatives to the municipal council. Importantly, it was not police officers or other official representatives who engaged with radicals, but volunteers from the program. These volunteers organized various consultations and provided assistance with employment, housing, and education. As a result, the number of individuals leaving Aarhus for Iraq and Syria decreased significantly, down to 1-3 people per year.

In Austria, significant challenges are posed by the expansion of jihadist ideology among the youth, as well as the presence of the largest Chechen diaspora in Europe. In this context, the experience of the "Radicalization" Advisory Center, established in 2014 and modeled after a similar structure created two years earlier in Germany, is of particular interest. The center's primary activity involves providing free consultations to relatives, friends, and teachers of young people who have either embraced or shown an interest in radical Islamic ideas. In the de-radicalization process, the focus is placed on involving individuals from the close circle of young Islamists.

For initial contact with the Center, a toll-free hotline is available, which is widely advertised among youth and other social and age groups. The team of consultants includes qualified social educators, Islamic scholars, imams, and other specialists who assist the relatives and close associates of those affected by radical ideas. Consultations are available in German, English, French, Turkish, Arabic, Persian, Russian, and Uzbek. The "Radicalization" center closely collaborates with various civil society organizations, including the Association for Multicultural Youth Support Programs, the Center for Democratic Culture, and others. The organization adheres to the principle of confidentiality when working with individuals seeking assistance from its specialists, which helps build trust. The hotline is managed by the Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Youth, and Consumer Protection. Consultations are provided free of charge, anonymously, and in five languages. Unlike the German hotline, the Austrian structure focuses on preventing not only Islamic radicalization but also other forms of extremist radicalization.

In Germany, the experience of decentralization and liberalization of the penitentiary system is particularly noteworthy, with guaranteed observance of prisoners' rights and the delegation of most decision-making powers to state-level structures. As a result, nearly one in ten prisons in Germany is classified as open, allowing inmates, who are supported by the state, to leave the facility during the day to perform social functions or work. Consequently, Germany has one of the lowest incarceration rates in Europe -78 inmates per 100,000 population. By comparison, in Russia, the rate is 408 inmates per 100,000 population.

Thus, Germany's de-radicalization practices aim to reduce the number of prison sentences and expand the application of probation programs. As a result, more than one-third of inmates are released on parole. According to experts, this approach reduces the influence of prisons on the recurrence of criminal behavior and limits the recruitment base for terrorists.

In the United Kingdom, relevant activities by prison staff, alongside social welfare workers, educational institutions, local government bodies, and police, are conducted under the "Channel" program, which is part of the "Prevent" strategy. Its goal is to support individuals vulnerable to extremist recruitment. Thanks to these efforts, in the early 2010s, approximately 2,000 children and adolescents at risk of radicalization received support. However, British police leadership has noted that the at-risk group continues to grow, and tensions between society and local Muslim communities are intensifying.

France was among the last European countries to begin implementing de-radicalization programs, following seven major terrorist attacks over the past three years that claimed the lives of more than 400 people. ISIS operatives, who are highly active in the

country, have targeted Europe's largest Muslim community. The evident failure of countermeasures is attributed to several systemic flaws and staffing issues. For example, the state program launched in 2014, "Maison de la prévention et de la famille" (House of Prevention and Family), aimed at rehabilitating potential jihadists, ended in 2017 when its director, Sonia Imloul, was accused of embezzlement. Attempts to establish 13 regional rehabilitation centers also failed, as they failed to attract the attention of the target audience. By 2017, a parliamentary commission officially acknowledged the complete failure of de-radicalization measures in France. No significant changes have been observed since, as effective solutions to ideological and religious issues have yet to be developed. The effectiveness of these measures is further hindered by the critical state of the country's penitentiary system, where the shortage of prison spaces exceeds one-sixth of capacity, and jihadists have formed cohesive groups.

There are also positive examples, such as the RIVE program ("Research and Intervention in Violent Extremism"), implemented by the association Apcars ("Association for Applied Criminal Policy and Social Reintegration"), which specializes in social and judicial oversight. The program involves keeping individuals convicted of or awaiting trial for terrorist offenses within society for a year or more. During this period, they engage with psychologists, educators, and religious leaders, while work is also conducted with the families of the individuals involved.

European legislation provides severe penalties for terrorist activities while also allowing opportunities for sentence reductions. For instance, under the main anti-terrorism article of the German Criminal Code (§ 129 "Formation of Criminal Organizations"), the range of penalties varies from one to 10 years. Similarly, the corresponding article in the Austrian Criminal Code (§ 278b) stipulates imprisonment ranging from one to 10 years, and for those leading a terrorist group, from five to 15 years. Such a significant disparity between the minimum and maximum sentences prompts courts to thoroughly examine every circumstance, enabling the defense to reclassify offenses and seek reduced penalties.

It should be noted that the sharp increase in the number of inmates in European prisons convicted of terrorist activities is a relatively recent phenomenon, based on relatively new developments, and remains insufficiently studied. Additionally, there is a growing number of prisoners with suspected involvement in extremist activities, although such claims have not been proven in court. Consequently, relevant programs are primarily aimed at the de-radicalization of those whose guilt has been established but also extend to working with individuals convicted of other offenses.

European prison de-radicalization systems are characterized by an individualized and differentiated approach to the development, implementation, and monitoring of measures targeting radicals. Of particular interest are the European typologies of target groups. For instance, the multi-level classification of target individuals, developed for practical use in Austrian prisons, identifies three main groups. Firstly, there are extremist preachers and ideologues, professional militants, and repeat offenders, for whom most intervention measures are ineffective. These individuals should be isolated from the general prison population. The second group consists of migrants who moved to Austria as children, accidental veterans and war-disabled individuals, victims of external circumstances, and

those subjected to extremist influence. These individuals joined jihadist ranks situationally and usually lack entrenched extremist beliefs, making them a primary target for de-radicalization efforts and reintegration into peaceful life.

Additionally, a third group is identified: marginalized youth with unformed views and "criminal opportunists" who profited commercially from the war. The latter lack firm ideological convictions and are often willing to cooperate with authorities for personal gain. However, they can also reestablish lucrative collaborations with jihadists when it benefits them.

The specifics of European legislation do not allow the deportation of individuals who have served sentences for participating in terrorist organizations to their home countries. These individuals often live in a quasi-illegal status without social support, which pushes them toward reconnecting with radicals. To ensure continuous de-radicalization efforts, break old ties among former inmates, encourage them to renounce terrorist activities, and disengage from extremist ideology, various organizations operate across Europe.

Result and Discussion

One such organization is DERAD, which operates in Austria and Germany. Established in 2016 under contractual agreements with justice institutions, it functions as a "network for social cooperation, prevention, dialogue, and democracy". Members of DERAD hold discussions with radicalized inmates in prisons, assist those wishing to continue their education, organize psychological support, and facilitate contact with families. DERAD simultaneously implements up to a dozen projects. Its support is particularly crucial after release, as former inmates often face partial restrictions on their rights. Religious and pedagogical staff help individuals reshape their cognitive structures and independently address problems based on their experiences. The practical application of newly acquired knowledge enhances their capacity for self-reflection. Enemy images are overcome through social cooperation. These measures enable DERAD to function as a community-based organization capable of working with inmates both in prison and after their release.

The VERA-2 system (Violent Extremist Risk Assessment) also employs individualized approaches, with particular interest in its criteria for assessing risks, as well as the prospects and needs of inmates classified as "radicals". When working with an inmate, a balance is determined to adequately address the individual's interests while simultaneously mitigating the risks of radicalization. VERA-2 takes into account numerous personal parameters and the unique aspects of the individual's development. There is also an extended version, VERA-2R, which considers the mental state, motivations, status of the inmate, and other associated factors. After conducting the interviews and assessments outlined in the program, an empirical database is formed. This database enables the justification of practical steps for addressing specific individuals and groups.

Thus, familiarity with European practices in preventive and de-radicalization work highlights elements worth studying for potential application in the domestic penitentiary

system. Foremost among these is the individualized approach to inmates, where work plans are developed as early as the pre-trial detention phase and are continuously adjusted by specialists overseeing the de-radicalization process throughout the period of incarceration. Information about cooperation with the inmate and the progress of social rehabilitation is documented and considered during the release process. At the same time, European approaches should not be viewed as overly liberal or detrimental to counter-terrorism efforts, as judicial authorities collaborate closely with regional divisions of national intelligence agencies, ensuring they are provided with operational information.

Another important aspect is that many European countries have managed to establish an objective assessment of needs, followed by the organization of advanced training courses for specialists in countering radicalization. In this work, particular attention is given to the study of radical Salafist ideology. While experts deny a linear connection between radicalization and terrorism, they acknowledge the presence of dynamic relationships between the two.

Conclusion

In conclusion European anti-radicalism programs represent a critical effort to address the multifaceted challenge of extremism. While these initiatives have achieved notable successes, experts emphasize the need for continued refinement, trust-building, and resource allocation to maximize their impact. By learning from both successes and shortcomings, Europe can enhance its strategies to counter radicalism and foster a more inclusive society. Europe's de-radicalization programs reflect a blend of security, prevention, and rehabilitation approaches. By addressing both the symptoms and root causes of extremism, these initiatives aim to create a safer and more inclusive society. However, the effectiveness of these programs depends on community trust, adequate resources, and continuous evaluation.

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