PROJECT
OPEN

MUSLIM RADICALIZATION IN SELECTED AREAS OF EUROPE: PRACTICAL TOOLS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATIONS AND ACTIVISTS

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1. INTRODUCTION

The OPEN project is an EU-funded project that examines the possible radicalization of young people in online media. Here, Muslim and non-Muslim organizations from all over Europe work together with the aim of emphasizing the positive social contribution of Muslims and preventing possible radicalization of young minorities. In addition to the religious factor, we also examine the social, especially the social and economic situation of young Muslims.

In the first six months of the project, we created the prerequisites and basis for content-based public relations through an extensive desk and field analysis, as well as a survey. Now we want to exchange ideas with as many actors as possible from European civil society.

The basic Question that we wanted to find an answer for, was: if and how radical online content is spread in Social Media. We are also interested in whether and in what form - in practical experience - social media contribute to the radicalization of young Muslims. Of course, we also wanted to know the form in which Muslim organizations are already successfully active in prevention.

An important result of our project was initially that there are hardly any direct calls for violence in the most important social media. In the last couple of years the European Commission and the leading technology companies (Microsoft, Google [YouTube], Facebook, Twitter) worked together to prevent the spread of violent radical content, by deleting accounts and Content, that is considered as radical.

Nevertheless, we did find several actors that are still active inside social Media, that do not call for violence, but still spread problematic content.

The Goal of this Document is to share our first experience and to introduce our action plan that can teach young Muslims, but also young people in general about the radical sites of social Media that still exist. We hope that we can find a partner in your organization to support the campaign we are planning to strengthen Muslim civil society.

2. CONCEPT

The following content concept is not a fixed one, but should open a discussion process between the Partners of the OPEN Project and Members of Civil Society Organizations to start to exchange their knowledge about solutions regarding the dangerous aspects that radicalization can cause. Our expectations are to find practical solutions to work together with young People to understand and detect radical Content and strengthen their search for Identity and acceptance inside a pluralistic society.

Inside our research we found some existing prevention and deradicalization activities inside all the OPEN Project Partner Countries. They are presented inside

our final document to have an overview about existing concepts. OPEN do not want to miss the opportunity to gather his experience of the last months to introduce an own concept. That makes it easier to introduce the main aspects we found out inside our online research and separate the Topics from each other.

Target group

Our Target Group are young People in the age from 15-22. Our offline activities will focus on the regions of Berlin, Nice, Strasbourg, Rome and Alicante. The Implementation of the topics, to address their inputs to our target group will be done by workshops and public events, organized by OPEN. In addition, OPEN will design a website and an online campaign to empower young Muslims to differentiate themselves from extremism.

Topics

The overall concept is structured into 4 main Topics and will address the main challenges that have been discovered so far.

Topic 1: Personal Discrimination

In this Topic the personal discrimination experience of young people will be addressed. A Radicalization of young people often is linked to a discrimination experience. All Civil Society Organization involved in our project have gathered knowledge what the common circumstances of a discrimination can be. The answers inside our surveys showed that the circumstances young people are discovering in their environment can be diverse, and different in every country, and even inside the operating areas of the Partners of the OPEN Project.

We want to rise the awareness of what the day to day life of the participance look like: What is happening inside your life? What are your goals? What do you want? What are you convinced of? Can you express your goals into a language? How does it sound? What are the biggest needs inside your environment?

A personal experience about discrimination is – from our point of view - one of the important information's, that is necessary to gather. We need an overview about the circumstances young people inside our target group are discovering. An Ideology that could lead to radicalization is often effective if an individual had experience with a form of discrimination in the past. A discrimination Experience creates space for further development, the victim is searching for an answer and can find confirmation within an extremist group, that seems to provide solutions for the problems of the individual.

We must create an alternative answer.

Key points:

• Religion is only one factor in the radicalization of young Muslims. The economic, social, and political situation of young Muslims must be given greater attention.

• Young Muslims expect a higher level of social recognition than European citizens with equal rights, but often suffer from experiences of discrimination.

Topic 2: Political Education

Political education is also crucial for protection against the possible radicalization of young people. Young people need to understand the content of social, political and religious terminology as well as possible.

We explain the meanings of preselected words, before we do so, we want to define words with the participants. The Following List include a selection of words, that were gathered by our Researchers in the Field Analysis. The Criterion of Selection was if a word was discovered with different practical meanings: Freedom, Democracy, Freedom of Speech/Expression, French/German Islam, Immigration, Religious freedom, Laicity, Society, Propaganda, Ideology, Radicalization, Capitalism, Nationalism, Individualism, Islamism, State, political participations, War against Terror, Arabic World, Islamism

Inside of our study we came across a phenomenon that we would describe as, the different definition of words. Every word has a different definition. One is the one we take out of a dictionary, the other one is our true understanding of the word. We found out that a word can have different meanings.

Someone that is speaking of democracy and thinks about freedom, participation inside political decision making, security before despotism, thinks in a positive way regarding the word. Another person can have negative associations like "unemployment, voting is not changing my situation, hopelessness" with the same word. Goal is to define words, by the working task of the group, and then get a professional explanation by an expert, that is describing the background, history, and meanings of a word. We want to understand if there is a different understanding of words, how are words defined, what is the history behind words.

Key points:

• Muslim life and lived democracy are not a contradiction. The freedom to practice religion is a fundamental European right. Muslim and democratic beliefs are not mutually exclusive.

• The European experience with ideologies (dictatorships) explains the rejection of Muslim ideological approaches. Historical education is therefore an important element in the training of Muslims in Europe.

• European foreign policy and its moral objectives need to be better explained to young people. The arguments of "hyper moral" must be put into perspective.

• The political engagement of Muslims within the framework of European laws and their use in civil society is welcome. The accusation of "legalistic" Islam requires careful examination and differentiation.

Topic 3: Media Education

In this topic we want to show a selection of News in France/Germany that are highly discussed. Goal is to strengthen the understanding of media, news, and social Media, and the exchange of experience with it, regarding topics like "Islam, Islamism, Salafism, Muslim Brotherhood, political Islam" etc. We want to discuss what the different perspectives of our target group is regarding Muslims and Islam and how the topics are represented inside the Newspapers, Platforms, Politics etc. Often young Muslims are concerned how their community is presented in the public. We want to focus how the participants see themselves and their opinion presented inside the media and we want to educate young people in interacting with it.

In this Topic we also want to present and discuss some of the Screenshots of radical Content we gathered.

Inside the Online Research of the last Months we gathered around 250 Screenshots (Germany and France) of Posts and Content that are showing examples, how radical Content looks like. We want to discover what is radical and what is acceptable in the eyes of young Muslims and we want to strengthen the awareness of participants of problematic content.

Key words:

• Success stories of European Muslims must be better perceived by the public and underline the positive contribution that Muslims make in Europe today.

• Muslim media and Muslim journalists (offline / online) are important partners for the dissemination of constructive and positive approaches by Muslims.

Topic 4: Religious Education

We want to learn something about religious education, what does that mean, how do someone become a religious personality, what study is standing behind it, what rules does education follow regarding religion. For this Topic, we also want to involve Muslim Scholars to explain the religious context of Quotations of the Quran, History of scholars and religious education in general.

After our research and the experience in our online activity we realized that the radicalization of young people takes place fast and is mostly not the result of a high religious knowledge by the individual. We want to open an opportunity for young people to speak openly about their current religious understanding.

In our Analysis we found out that Channels (that spread radical Content) are often based in discussion statements of scholars and some quotations of the Quran. The dialogues are following a religious understanding of sources and books, but for someone without education in this regard it is difficult to follow the Content. The Channels can in some cases be understood as a kind of "book review "club.

Inside the Online Channels one post comes after another, space is limited, and often statements regarding; State, Society, Perversion, the relation between human beings, man and women, are following each other. Often there is not much room describing the context of the quotations, the background of the scholar is not addressed, the context is transported into a current situation without further explanation.

Key points:

• Muslims willing to use violence are a relatively small minority even in problematic Muslim groups. Good Islamic education protects against radicalization.

• Muslim organizations and their mosque communities are already making an important contribution to preventing radicalization.

• Equality between men and women is not only a European value, it is also emphasized in Islam. The commitment of young Muslim women is therefore to be welcomed.

3. CONCLUSION

At the European level, with as many partners as possible, the aspiration of OPEN is to contribute to a positive and socially recognized future of Muslim youth. The radicalization of young people can only be prevented together and within the framework of good cooperation with the Muslim communities. This requires a substantive dialogue between the civil society partners involved, but also with the young people themselves.

We hope that the concept and orientation of this project will interest you. We will keep you informed about the development of this project, our events and our online campaign in the coming weeks. We would also be grateful to name the appropriate contact person in your organization