RESEARCH REPORT

Cyprus

CONCORDIA

Introduction

This research report has been produced within the framework of the CONCORDIA project which is funded under the ERASMUS+ programme.

The project focuses on harnessing the power of digital media tools to prevent the radicalisation of vulnerable youth and is being simultaneously rolled out in Germany, Austria, Czech Republic, Romania, Cyprus, France, Finland and Ireland. The project will support key front-line workers to develop core skills to work with vulnerable youth to produce and disseminate counter-extremist narratives. It proposes bringing skills of front-liners right up to date where the production of digital media and the managing of social media platforms is concerned promoting high quality of youth work in response to the radicalization threat. The report will take a look at the thread and causes of radicalisation in Cyprus at a political, social and religious level and will study the impact of the social media in the increase of radical behaviour. Finally, it will go through initiatives that aim to tackled the causes of radicalization and promote collaboration among the citizens of the island.

Organisation: SYNTHESIS Center for Research and Education Ltd.
Country: Cyprus

Radicalisation Threat in Cyprus

The Cyprus problem is one of the main sources of political radicalization in Cyprus with incidents involving sporadic, violent attacks against Turkish-Cypriots and Greek-Cypriots.

After the military invasion by the Turkish military in Cyprus in 1974, the island has experienced division amongst its citizens, with the Turkish-Cypriot and the Greek-Cypriot communities living side by side without a solution. Since 1974, members of both communities have been involved in numerous hostilities with the most notable one taking place in August 1996. Specifically, during a confrontation in the UN buffer zone between Greek Cypriot bikers and the Turkish Grey Wolves (an extreme and often violent Turkish nationalism group), Tassos Isaac, a Greek Cypriot biker, found himself trapped in barbed-wire and was fatally attacked by a group of Grey Wolves and Turkish policemen (Amnesty International, 1997). Four days later, Solomos Solomou, a Greek Cypriot protester, was shot in the head by a Turkish officer while attempting to climb a flagpole to remove the Turkish flag in the United Nations Buffer Zone in Derynia (Cyprus PIO, 96-11-22). In 2003, the check points between the north and south opened and both Turkish-Cypriots and Greek-Cypriots were able to cross over to the other side. In 2004, after the presentation of the Annan plan, the two communities were called upon to vote on a referendum. The ¾ of the Greek-Cypriots (75.9%) voted against the implementation of the Anan Plan which was presented by the UN, whilst more than half (60%) of the Turkish-Cypriot community voted for the implementation of the plan. This unfortunately widened the gap between the two communities and for several years following the breakdown of the peace plan there was no attempt to restart negotiations. Since 2004, an increased nationalism has been observed with violent attacks between the two communities being reported to the press.

For example, during the "Rainbow" Festival in 2010 a Turkish Cypriot musician was stabbed, while another was beaten up with butts (POST Research Institute, Rana Feridun, 2011) by Greek Cypriots. Another example, includes the event where Greek-Cypriot students attacked Turkish Cypriots during the protest against the establishment of the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (self-declared state) on Monday, the 16th of November 2015 (George Psyllides, Cyprus Mail, Nov. 2015). In February 2014, renewed reunification talks began between the leaders of the Greek and Turkish Cypriot communities leading to a joint declaration.

For the past few decades, Cyprus is experiencing football hooliganism and incidents are usually involving attacks related to vandalism and intimidation from fans of the major Cypriot clubs. A significant number of events are being reported annually, with the government taking measures to prevent these events from happening. Many incidents have been reported over the past decade with one of the most notable taking

place in 2015. According to police reports in 2015, the fans of a major Cypriot club have set on fire stadium seats, a fire escape exit and a canteen warehouse causing extensive damage (Cyprus Mail, 2015/01/12).

Meanwhile, the financial crisis and the war in the Middle East have brought more migrants and refugees to the island, an event which has strengthen the locals' attitude towards discrimination and xenophobia. The beginning of 2008 saw the development of the nationalist movement ELAM (National Popular Front), which later became the first far-right political party that entered the Parliament in Cyprus. ELAM describes its ideology as "popular and social nationalism" and promotes Greek nationalism. The rise of ELAM has "normalized" racist behaviors and many events which have taken place are linked to ELAM (Ethnikolaiko metwpo Blogspot). On December 28, 2010, ELAM organized a march against Turkish Cypriots and migrants under the pretext of the "threat" from migrants and Turkish Cypriots. Following the protest, ELAM has been accused of events that promoted racism and the act of violence, though ELAM has opposed its association with most of the accusations.

Moreover, members of the LGBT community are experiencing the effects of radicalization through violent attacks and incidents involving discrimination and violation of Human Rights. It should be noted that up until 2004, there was no anti-discrimination law forbidding discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in employment. Since 2004, Cyprus has implemented the Equal Treatment in Employment and Occupation Law 2004 that explicitly forbids discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation in employment. However, there is no legislation in Cyprus addressing homophobia, homophobic hate speech or homophobic motivation for a crime on the grounds of sexual orientation (Margarita Kapsou, Anna Christophi, & Maria Epaminonda,

2011). Consequently, homophobic hate crimes are treated in the same way as other crimes and thus remain undocumented. Furthermore, the Cyprus military still bans homosexuals from serving believing that homosexuality is a mental illness and thus promoting discrimination linked to sexual orientation. However, Cypriots' opinion on homosexuality has seen a seen a rapid turnaround in the past 10 years. A 2006 survey showed that 3/4 of Cypriots disapproved of homosexuality, while a 2006 EU poll revealed that only 14% of Cypriots are supporting same-sex marriage and only 10% supporting adoption (Politis Newspaper, 2009). Evidence showed that this has changed when a 2014 survey revealed that 53.3% of Cypriot citizens believe that civil unions should be made legal (Special Eurobarometer 437, October 2015.). On November 2015, the civil union bill was passed by the parliament and the law was published on 9 December 2015.

In Cyprus, radicalization through religion seems to be associated with racial and religious hatred. Radicalisation against migrants and Turkish Cypriots is according to Balibar and Wallerstein "a form of neo-racism, inciting racial and religious hatred via the substitutes of 'race' such as other essential or inherent or hereditary characteristics which derive, not from blood or DNA, but from culture, language, migration and religion, in what scholars refer to as neo-racism" (Balibar and Wallerstein, 1991). In Cyprus, incidents involving religious and racial hatred mainly concern attacks against Turkish Cypriots, Greek Cypriots and migrants. Events involving radical behaviour on a religious level are sometimes linked to events involving radicalization on a political level. The groups involved in radical behaviour are usually people who are supporting the beliefs of the far right wing ideology who cannot accept the idea of sharing the island with people of different religious beliefs.

Islam was introduced to Cyprus more than four centuries ago. Today, the minority of Muslim population in Cyprus consists of many different ethnic backgrounds and cultures; the majority of muslims, however, are Turkish Cypriots. Over the past few decades, there are no documented incidents of behaviour associated with Islamic radicalisation. However, the current extremist acts committed in the name of Islam in the world as well as the Islamisation process of Turkey under the current Erdogan government (which to a large extent controls the northern part of the island) increase the risks of a religious-oriented radicalisation in the future.

Causes of Radicalisation in Cyprus

Individuals being involved in radical incidents in Cyprus are usually people who feel that their culture and beliefs are being threatened such as young people who succumb to peer pressure and manipulation by the supporters of far right wing ideology or people who are feeling isolated and frustration because of their exposure to radical behaviour.

Over the past two decades, Cyprus is moving from a conservative society towards a more accepting society. However, the financial crisis, the lack of a solution to the Cyprus problem, and the increasing number of migrants and refugees arriving to the island had an increasing effect in the development of initiatives that support the beliefs of the far right wing ideology. In most cases, the beliefs of these initiatives are interconnected and the causes of radicalization are at the same time social, political and religious.

The impact of Social Media on Radicalisation in Cyprus

Social media are providing people with a great way to connect with their friends, colleagues and families. However, this does not mean that there is a moral education supporting their use. The cases of social media abuse that are being reported in Cyprus mainly concern bulling, phishing and incidents concerning attacks related to racism and xenophobia.

IAccording to a research carried out by governmental statistics services in Cyprus in 2014, 428 555 (66.7%) people using the Internet are using social media to connect with others. The research included social media accounts such as Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube, Trip Advisor, Instagram and other.

The following information show the number of internet users among age groups (Alecos Loucaides, Jun. 2014):

- The number of internet users in Cyprus aged 16-24 is 104 848;

- The number of internet users in Cyprus aged 25-54 is 377 488;

- The number of internet users in Cyprus aged 55-74 is 159 495;

- Young people aged 16-24 (94.7%) are noted as the group with the highest use of the Internet.

Currently, there is no information indicating that organized groups in sports and religion or/ and members of the extreme far right wing ideology are reaching out to individuals to enforce their ideology. However, members of the above mentioned groups are active on social media which probably has an effect in the expansion of their network.

Addressing the issue of radicalisation in Cyprus

In April 2016, the Minister of Education Mr. Costas Kadis has participated in the Ministerial Conference of the Council of Europe against radicalization and extremism and discussed the strategy that Cyprus among other EU states is planning to implement in order to address radicalization in Cyprus.

On the importance of education: On the conclusions of the ministerial conference, Mr. Kadis said that "the current expansion of violent extremism has created once again the need to strengthen the mission of education and the role of schools in the formation of active and democratic citizens" (Newsbomb, April 2016). The 50 Ministers have highlighted the importance of education for the promotion of democracy and intercultural understanding and combating radicalization and extremist violence.

On the role of research: In regards to the role of research in identifying radicalization causes, the Minister said that research has an important role to play in order to detect the root causes of radical behaviours such as those we have been lately experiencing.

Global education initiatives: Currently, the Ministry of Education is working along with some local NGOs and universities for the promotion of global education and the promotion of intercultural understanding. This is being achieved through the introduction of subjects and training courses to tackle the challenges faced by children and adults in an increasingly complex and globalized world.

Collaboration between the Turkish Cypriot and the Greek Cypriot communities: Over the past 20 years several NGOs have been working on initiatives that aim to promote cooperation and collaboration between the Turkish Cypriot and the Greek Cypriot communities. Over the past few years, several NGOs have been involved in activities that promote dialogue and critical thinking. Furthermore, some NGOs are located closed to the buffer zone in order to provide a mutual space for collaboration.

Social media impact: In regards to the impact of social media, the Ministry of Education as well as local NGOs and private institutes developed initiatives that work with children and youth on developing an understanding on the impact of social media.

Summary

Over the past few years, Cyprus has moved from a conservative to a more accepting and tolerant society. However, the long political confict in Cyprus which remains unresolved, along with the the financial crisis, the war and in the Middle East and the arrival of migrants and refugees has contributed to the increase of radicalization.

Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots are living side by side for more than 40 years without a solution. This has contributed to the increase of radical behavior associated with the promotion of aggressive nationalism between the two communities. The events that took place during the military invansion of the Turkish Army in Cyprus have been shared from generation to generation and have contributed to racial and religious animosity between the two communities. However, the joint declaration which was signed in 2014 between the two leaders of the two communities has renewed the hopes for a solution but at the same time has increased the need to prepare the ground for collaboration and cooperation between the two communities.

Furthemore, the war in the Middle East and the instability in the wider region has increased the number of migrants and refugees arriving in the island. The hatred towards migrants and refugees could be linked with the belief that migrants are taking the jobs of the Cypriots. This is strengthen by the impact of the financial crisis in the job market and it is widely shared among Cypriot citizens. In addition, the entrance of ELAM to the Parliament has let society believe that there is an increase in the number of people who share the same ideology.

Aggressive incidents related to social issues such as sexuality have been observed over the years but studies show that the attitude of Cypriots towards same sex marriage has positively changed and the civil union bill being passed by the Parliement. In regards to football hooliganism, although the police has taken further measures to minimise incidents of radical behavior among the fans of the Cypriot Football clubs, violent incidents during and after football games are common. Thus, there is an urgent need to provide front-line youth workers and potential staff with the tools to combat any form of radicalisation.

Islam was introduced to Cyprus more than four centuries ago. Today, the minority of Muslim population in Cyprus consists of many different ethnic backgrounds and cultures; the majority of muslims, however, are Turkish Cypriots. Over the past few decades, there are no documented incidents of behaviour associated with Islamic radicalisation. However, the current extremist acts committed in the name of Islam in the world as well as the Islamisation process of Turkey under the current Erdogan government (which to a large extent controls the northern part of the island) increase the risks of a religious-oriented radicalisation in the future.

Overall, many initiatives have been developed over the past two decades to support education and research for the promotion of democracy and active citizenship. Many NGOs and local organisations have joined efforts to promote collaboration among citizens and hence, tackled issues associated with radical behavior with some of these efforts being supported by the governement. The comments of the Minister of Education on the role of education have created a positive ground for social and attitudinal change in Cyprus.

The increased number on social media usage is believed to contrubuted to the promotion of the ideology of organised groups in sports, nationalism and religion. However, there are no studies that show the link between the use of social media and radicalisation.

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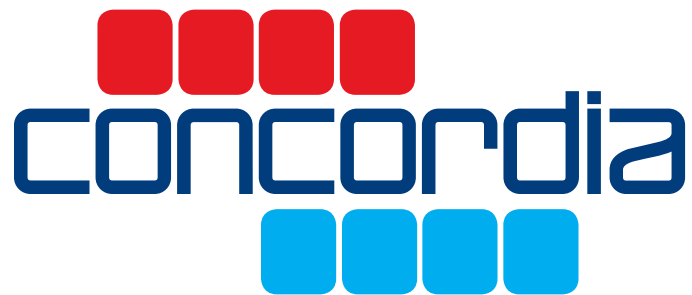Special Eurobarometer 437, Discrimination in the EU in 2015, Report. October, 2015. Available at:
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