THE ROLE OF ALBANIA'S CIVIL SOCIETY IN COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

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ABBREVIATIONS

AHC   Albanian Helsinki Committee
AIC   Albanian Islamic Community
ASCS   Agency for the Support of Civil Society
CSO   Civil Society Organizations
CVE   Countering Violent Extremism
EU   European Union
ISIS   Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
LCPS   Local Council for Public Safety
NSFVE   National Strategy for the Fight against Violent Extremism
RCP   Royal Canadian Police
TDH   Terre des Hommes
UN   United Nations
VE   Violent Extremism

INTRODUCTION

F or over a decade, efforts to counter violent extremism (CVE) on a global level have broadened in scope and actors. From a highly securitized approach, the sole domain of the state, CVE increasingly involves addressing conditions conducive to the spread of the phenomenon and impact on respect for human rights and the rule of law. As such, civil society has established itself as an essential factor in an effective strategy to counter violent extremism worldwide.[1] Albania follows a similar trend, with a boom in civil society led initiatives especially following the appearance of the foreign fighters phenomenon in the country and more broadly in the Western Balkan region. These efforts encompass a wide array of intervention topics and geographic focus. Albanian Civil Society Organizations (CSO) engage both at the national and local level through research, advocacy, awareness raising activities and services, creating a significant knowledge base and good practices in countering violent extremism. Civil society has been part of consultation processes at the national level and is becoming part of local structures, such as Local Councils on Public Safety, a multi-stakeholder advisory group established at the municipal level in several municipalities across the country. Furthermore, in recent years over 40 CSOs have made countering violent extremism an integral part of their work.

Despite playing an increasingly visible and important role in CVE initiatives, there are no systematic efforts to analyze and assess the impact and capacities of civil society to effectively counter violent extremism. A significant challenge of these initiatives, either undertaken by the government or civil society, is effectively measuring their

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[1]   Ginkel, B. (2012). Engaging Civil Society in Countering Violent Extremism: Experiences with the UN Global Counter-terrorism Strategy. International Center for Counter Terrorism – The Hague. Online: https://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Van-Ginkel-Civil-Society-in-CVE-August-2012.pdf (Accessed June 1, 2018).

success and impact, partly due to resource constraints and ambitious outcome goals and partly due to data collection strategies that make it difficult to analyze and evaluate interventions.[2] As such, there are few attempts to systematically conduct an impact evaluation of CSO-led interventions in the realm of violent extremism.

This policy paper aims to fill this gap by identifying CSOs engaged in countering violent extremism, analyzing their capacities and expertise in the field, and offer policy recommendations for a more effective intervention strategy and role for civil society in Albania. The first part analyzes the theoretical and practical role of civil society in CVE and tools to measure their capacities in dealing with violent extremism. The second part delves into the characteristics of violent extremism in Albania in recent years to better understand the context in which civil society organizations operate. The third part combines the theoretical and practical perspectives to understand the role and capacities of Albanian CSOs in countering violent extremism at home and the last part offers the main conclusions and a set of recommendations for relevant stakeholders.

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[2]   Barzegar, A., Powers, Sh. & Karhili, N. (September 2016). Civic Approaches to confronting violent extremism: Sector Recommendations and Best Practices. Georgia State University. Online: https://tcv.gsu.edu/files/2016/09/ Civic-Approaches-Sept-8-2016-Digital-Release.pdf (Accessed June 13, 2018).

DEFINING THE TERMS

VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Defining violent extremism is a challenging undertaking as there is no consent either in the literature or the policy-making community as to what it is and isn't. Even within a state, different agencies and institutions can apply incompatible definitions of the term. Violent extremism is often ill-defined, misunderstood or used interchangeably with other concepts such as radicalization and counter-terrorism. However, different actors have attempted to offer to agreed-upon definitions. Alex Schmid for instance (2013, p. 9), contends that violent extremist groups have several elements in common. More specifically:

1. Anti-constitutional, anti-democratic, anti-pluralist, authoritarian;
2. Fanatical, intolerant, non-compromising, single-minded black-or-white thinkers;
3. Rejecting the rule of law while adhering to an ends-justify-means philosophy;
4. Aiming to realize their goals by any means, including, when the opportunity offers itself, the use of massive political violence against opponents.

COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Countering violent extremism, on the other hand, is 'a realm of policy, programs, and interventions designed to prevent individuals from engaging in violence associated with radical political, social, cultural, and religious ideologies and groups.'[3]

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[3] United States Institute of Peace. (2013). Countering Violent Extremism, A Peacebuilding Perspective. Special Report. Online: https://www.usip.org/sites/default/files/SR336-Countering%20Violent%20Extremism-A%20 Peacebuilding%20Perspective.pdf (Last accessed May 29, 2018).

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CIVIL SOCIETY

An accepted definition of civil society is the one developed by CIVICUS that views it as "the arena, outside of the family, the state, and the market, which is created by individual and collective actions, organizations and institutions to advance shared interests."[4]

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[4]   CIVICUS. (2011). Bridging the Gap: Citizens, Associations and dissociation. Civil Society Index Summar Report 2008-2010. Online: https://www.civicus.org/downloads/Bridging%20the%20Gaps%20-%20Citizens%20%20 Organisations%20and%20Dissociation.pdf (Last accessed June 10, 2018).

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METHODOLOGY

The methodological approach employed in this policy paper is a qualitative case study analysis, which uses primary and secondary sources. Quantifying and measuring the impact and capacities of civil society in countering violent extremism is no easy feat. The multifaceted nature of the phenomenon and its intrinsic connection to other aspects of society makes it difficult to discern the direct impact of countering violent extremism programs initiated by civil society organizations. Nevertheless, existing literature points to efforts to measure the capacities of civil society in CVE. The desk research portion relies on academic articles, policy papers, research studies, and policy documents produced by academics, government and non-government actors at the international level. The bulk of the analysis stems from primary sources collected through interviews with civil society organizations operating in Albania. The latter were identified through existing knowledge of the authors regarding CSOs that work primarily in countering violent extremism in Albania, and identification of beneficiary CSOs from issued calls for proposals.

Upon identifying 45 CSOs engaged in CVE initiatives, the authors designed a questionnaire, which was distributed electronically to the targeted organizations. The questionnaire aimed to gather information on a variety of aspects. The general section collects information about the work of the organization, including the year of formation, staff number, areas of expertise and geographic spread. The experience of CSOs with countering violent extremism was discerned through questions relating to their interaction with the community, number of projects implemented, etc. Financial and human resources are important indications of an organization's capacities and impact. As such an entire section was devoted to CSOs financial resources, the number of staff dedicated to CVE initiatives, professional background and years of experience of

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key personnel and financial sustainability. Another section is devoted to the approach that organizations apply when tackling violent extremism, to gain a perspective on how they implement their projects and initiative. The interaction between civil society and governmental actors is an important one. As such, the questionnaire prods on interactions between these actors and the role of civil society in the policy-making process. The final section aims to gain insight into CSOs' evaluation of their impact.

45 organizations were approached, out of which around 13 responded to the questionnaire distributed, a 29% response rate. The policy paper develops a capacity framework, which is designed based on existing literature and filled with first-hand information collected from CSOs in Albania. While responses from the questionnaire form the most important analytical part of this policy paper, the full list of interventions from CSOs is available online and they were used to analyze the topics and forms of interventions of civil society in Albania in countering violent extremism.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND VIOLENT EXTREMISM (VE)

Countering violent extremism encompasses various measures of de-radicalization processes, education and awareness raising, conflict management, countering narratives and empowering the community to become resilient. Traditionally, CVE programs were under the purview of government, more specifically security agencies. However, there is an intrinsically vital role to be played by other actors at the national and international level given the multidimensional nature of the phenomenon. In many Western countries, the tendency is for the non-governmental sector to take center stage.[5]

UN Secretary General's Plan of Action on preventing violent extremism indicates that international actors often target the symptoms, not the drivers of violent extremism.[6] While governments play a crucial role in ensuring security and respect for human rights, they aren't always able to address grievances that linger in society. These grievances provide a space for violent extremist groups to recruit individuals or entire communities that are beyond the government's reach. There is thus a rationale for the active involvement of civil society in countering violent extremism.

This view emerged in the early years of the post-9/11 world when it was argued that dealing with terrorism should be the responsibility of all sectors in society, not only the

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[5] Aly, A., Balbi, A. & Jacques, C. (2015). Rethinking Countering Violent Extremism: Implementing the role of civil society. Vol. 10, Issue 1. Journal of Policing, Intelligence and Counter Terrorism. Online: https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/18335330.2015.1028772?needAccess=true (Accessed May 20, 2018).

[6] United Nations General Assembly. (2016). Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism. Online: http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/70/674 (Last Accessed June 20, 2018).

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government, calling thus upon diverse actors such as non-governmental organizations, social movements, the media, religious leaders, young people, etc., to play a more active role. Kaldor and De Oliveira[7] view civil society as an essential strategic player in promoting tolerance and pluralism by "protecting local communities, countering extremist ideologies and dealing with political violence" (p. 34). The shift to prevention came from the changing nature of violent extremism, with the advent of decentralized actors, the widespread use of social media as well as self-radicalized small groups and lone wolves.

In a 2017 Euromed survey, respondents asked to choose the main priorities to effectively counter violent extremism selected as their first choice by a vast difference with other options, addressing social and economic causes, such as unemployment and inequalities, followed in second place by the promotion of good governance, democracy, and human rights. Less than 2% selected increasing securitization measures.[8] These findings suggest a need for soft tools in countering violent extremism, which effectively focuses on prevention and intervention, rather than punitive measures and reaction. Promoting human rights, good governance, and accountability finds itself in the alley of CSO work.

Several avenues allow for the involvement of civil society in countering violent extremism, which ranges from taking on a leading role to serving as support mechanisms for other actors. As such, arguments are made that prevention programs should be left at the discretion of civil society organizations and social services because law enforcement agencies do not enjoy the necessary trust among the population to carry out such programs. Civil society organizations possess local knowledge, contacts, and the trust of target groups to address the multifaceted challenges of violent extremism effectively.[9]

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[7]   Club De Madrid. 2005. Civil Society. Towards a Democratic Response. Volume III. The Club de Madrid Series on Democracy and Terrorism.

[8]   Vila, L. (2017). Building a Bridge: Engaging Civil Society in Preventing all Forms of Violent Extremism. EuroMed Survey. Online: http://www.iemed.org/publicacions/historic-de-publicacions/enquesta-euromed/euromed-survey2017/building_bridge_engaging_civil_society_in_preventing_violent_extremism_Luca_Gervasoni_EuromedSurvey2017.pdf/ (Last accessed May 13, 2018).

[9]   Barzegar, A., Powers, Sh., & Karhili, N. (September 2016). Civic Approaches to Confronting Violent Extremism: Sector Recommendations and Best Practices. Georgia State University. Online https://tcv.gsu.edu/files/2016/09/Civic-Approaches-Sept-8-2016-Digital-Release.pdf (Last Accessed June 13, 2018).

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This is not to say that governmental and nongovernmental should act separately, in fact, their efforts could be complementary in reaching the same objective. In general, the government's role is seen as one providing support and an enabling environment for civil society. In public administration research, governance networks are considered essential in carrying out public policies. Governance networks have appeared in discourse about violent extremism and radicalization, whereby different actors in society are called to address this common threat. However, creating a governance network in this area carries added challenges and obstacles due to the securitizing nature of the phenomenon. One of these challenges stems from the lack of societal trust and a high degree of polarization. Despite its difficulties, there are arguments that "matching the complexity and dynamism of the phenomenon of violent extremism via a broad alliance of actors who, in between them, are much more likely to be able to intervene effectively to counter individual cases of violent extremism than any one single government agency acting on its own."[10]

1.1. INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

Aly, Balbi, and Jacques (2015) divide countering violent extremism strategies into three categories, with prevention forming the foundation of measures to counter radicalization (*Figure 1*). At the second level, intervention serves to conduct de-radicalization of individuals who slipped through the cracks of prevention mechanisms and are highly radicalized. At the top of the pyramid stands reaction or punitive measures, which has a highly operational nature and features mainly or only the engagement of law enforcement. Prevention mechanisms are used at the societal level and feature the participation of a large number of stakeholders from civil society, government agencies, and the private sector. At this level, it is essential to recognize violent extremism as a social phenomenon, which is what creates the space for civil society actors to serve as influential voices for counter-narratives. They argue that overall smart countering violent extremism strategies rely on a combination of hard and soft tools. Soft tools rely on harnessing the power of grass root civil society organization, which can serve as a counterbalance to institutionalized measures.

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[10] Daalgard-Nielsen, A. (2016). Countering Violent Extremism with Governance Networks, Volume 10, Issue 6. Perspectives on Terrorism. Online: https://pure.fak.dk/files/7271026/Countering_Violent_Extremism_with_Governance_Networks.pdf (Last Accessed June 20, 2018).
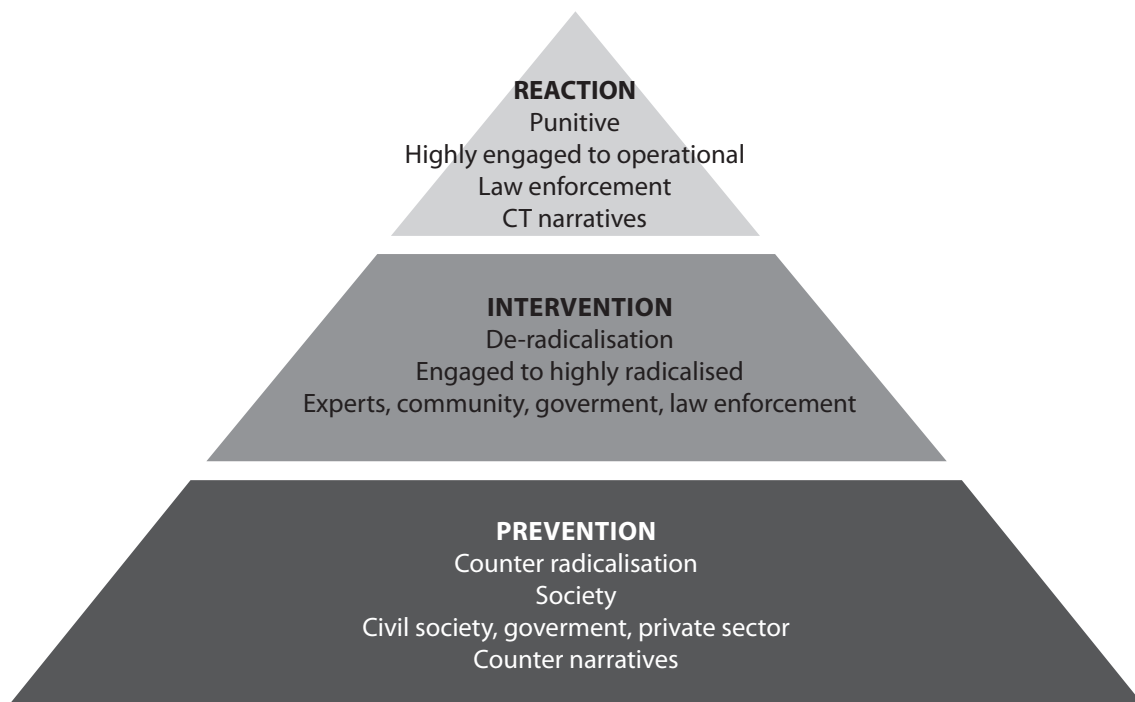
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Figure 1 – CVE Pyramid (Aly, Balbi, and Jacques, 2015)

1.2. BENEFITS OF CSOS ENGAGEMENT

Because civil society is involved with CVE at the societal level, there are some advantages it sustains due to its involvement. First, CSOs work on a broad spectrum of measures from conflict transformation and peace-building, to good governance, political participation, human rights, interfaith dialogue and freedom of the internet. As such, addressing these issues provides an avenue for addressing grievances in society, which could otherwise develop into radicalization and violent extremism. Therefore, at the most basic level CSOs contribute to countering conditions that are conducive to the spread of terrorism. The massive body of experiences and knowledge accumulated by the work of civil society organizations is a considerable advantage for their inclusion in CVE efforts.[11] Second, CSOs channel the different voices in society by creating platforms for dialogue and provide the inclusiveness that is often lacking in

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[11] 10 Reasons Why Civil Society Is an Ally and Not an Adversary in the Struggle Against Violent Extremism (Global Solutions Exchange, 2017) http://www.gsxpve.org/10-reasons-why-civil-society-is-an-ally-and-not-an-adversary-in-the-struggle-against-violent-extremism/ (Last Accessed May 15, 2018).

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elected officials. Finally, CSOs are well rooted in local communities and thus more in touch with the realities at the local level. They are mission-driven and have a genuine concern for their communities.[12] The latter enables them to provide responses that correspond to the specific context of a community, shying away from one size fits all approaches.[13]

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[12] Engaging Civil Society in Countering Violent Extremism: Experiences with the UN Global CounterTerrorism Strategy (Dr. Bibi van Ginkel, ICCT Hague, 2012) https://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Van-Ginkel-Civil-Society-in-CVE-August-2012.pdf (Last Accessed June 3, 2018).

[13] Ginkel, B. (2012). Engaging Civil Society in Countering Violent Extremism: Experiences with the UN Global Counter-terrorism Strategy. International Center for Counter Terrorism – The Hague. Online: https://www.icct.nl/download/file/ICCT-Van-Ginkel-Civil-Society-in-CVE-August-2012.pdf (Accessed June 1, 2018).

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ALBANIA'S VIOLENT EXTREMISM CONTEXT

Albania did not stay immune to the spread of violent extremism of the past few years, especially from the phenomenon of foreign fighters. The issue came to the public attention in 2012 when media started reporting of Albanian citizens joining ongoing fights in Syria and Iraq later becoming part of terrorist organizations such as ISIS. The occurrence of such cases culminated in 2014 and has significantly dropped since then.[14] While violent extremism came to the forefront of the public's attention only a few years ago, risks of radicalization have lingered longer, at least since the 1990s with influence coming from specific religious centers and organizations spread throughout the country.[15] According to official data, 148 Albanian citizens have joined the ranks of ISIS and Al-Nusra in Syria and Iraq, of which about 48 have returned home. Although the number of Albanian citizens participating in the conflict in Syria and Iraq drastically decreased during 2015 and 2016, tendencies of radicalization have not entirely disappeared. The trials of self-proclaimed imams are a testament to that.[16]

Radicalization drivers, push and pull factors that lead to violent extremism are numerous and depend on the specific context of the country, local community, and individual. Some of the reasons prompting Albanians to become foreign fighters undoubtedly

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[14] Hide, E. 2016. "Emerging Security Issues: Countering Violent Extremism in Albania." Strategic Study, Albanian Center of Excellence, Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

[15] Institute for Democracy and Mediation.2015. Religious Radicalism and Violent Extremism in Albania. Online: http://idmalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Religious-Radicalism-Albania-web-final.pdf (Last Accessed June 10, 2018).

[16] Panorama. 2016. Rekrutimi i shqiptareve per ne Siri: Imami ne gjyq: sjemi terroriste njerezit po vrasin e po lirohen mos kujtoni se nuk i shohim lajmet, Online: http://www.panorama.com.al/rekrutimi-i-shqiptareve-per-ne-siri-imami-ne-gjyq-sjemi-terroriste-njerezit-po-vrasin-e-po-lirohen-mos-kujtoni-se-nuk-i-shohim-lajmet/ (Last Accessed June 15, 2018).

relate to socio-economic conditions, especially in isolated and remote areas where the presence of state services is lacking. High unemployment levels, low income, illiteracy, lack of religious education and isolation often serve as prime motivations for these individuals.[17]

There has been some hesitation in categorizing the type of risk and threat coming from radicalization and violent extremism in Albania, with some arguments that it is only in the early phases, also considering that religious tolerance and coexistence is taken for granted and even branded as an Albanian phenomenon. However, informed debates on violent extremism and radicalization need to take into account several other elements. First, there is tension between Albania's traditional belonging to the Hanafi tradition and the emergence of clerics educated in more conservative schools. Second, the existence of illegal mosques and an increasing tendency to question the authority of the Albanian Islamic Community (AIC) provides a fertile ground for manipulation and shows that there is financing for these tendencies to flourish. There is a lack of presence of civil society organization in rural and remote areas and inexistent cooperation and coordination with the AIC, which undermine CVE efforts.[18]

As a response to the increasing threat of violent extremism, the government of Albania adopted in 2016 a National Strategy for the Fight against Violent Extremism (NSFVE) and the accompanying Action Plan. What stands out from this governmental approach is a significant focus on education, engagement with religious leaders, socio-economic aspects of radicalization and communicative tools of de-radicalization and disengagement. This focus leaves plenty of space for civil society to play a part in the struggle against violent extremism. Civil society is specifically mentioned early on in the strategy, which foresees its meaningful inclusion in adopting a proactive bottom-up approach to tackle the phenomenon.[19] Point four of key measures and areas is entirely dedicated to civil society, stipulating that strengthening civil society to build community resilience is an essential measure in the fight against violent extremism.

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[17] Hide, E. 2016. "Emerging Security Issues: Countering Violent Extremism in Albania." Strategic Study, Albanian Center of Excellence, Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

[18] Institute for Democracy and Mediation.2015. Religious Radicalism and Violent Extremism in Albania. Online: http://idmalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Religious-Radicalism-Albania-web-final.pdf (Last Accessed, May 4, 2018).

[19] Government of Albania. National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism and Action Plan 2015-2020. Online: http://www.qbz.gov.al/botime/fletore_zyrtare/2015/PDF-2015/203-2015.pdf (Last Accessed April 13, 2018).

Concrete support from line ministries and the Agency for the Support of Civil Society (ASCS) is present as a promise in the strategy. Similarly, the Action Plan foresees financial support for civil society in building resilience and spreading alternative narratives to violent extremism.[20] Despite this stipulation, the strategy and the plan itself does not commit concrete financial resources that will be used to support civil society. As such, it can become over time a weak measure as long as there are no specific commitments to this process. The second dimension is the inclusion of civil society organizations in designing a communication strategy to counter extremist propaganda in targeted communities.

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[20] Ibid.

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C ivil society involvement in radicalization and CVE programs is very recent and embryonic in Albania. Research shows that CSOs have only recently expressed interest and made attempts to address religious radicalization in their efforts. There are virtually no organizations that work primarily or solely to deal with religious radicalization, violent extremism, and counterterrorism.[21]

However, there are efforts from civil society organizations at the local and national level to become active players in countering violent extremism. It should be recognized that it was several civil society organizations that conducted the first national research looking into violent extremism and radicalization in Albania. A body of literature has already been established that has provided an in-depth look into push factors, characteristics of radicalization and violent extremism in Albania, collected firsthand information from communities and actors, etc.[22] This research agenda led by civil society has served as a starting point for interventions at the local level. An analysis

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[21] Institute for Democracy and Mediation.2015. Religious Radicalism and Violent Extremism in Albania. Online: http://idmalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Religious-Radicalism-Albania-web-final.pdf (Last Accessed, May 4, 2018).

[22] Hide, E. 2016. "Emerging Security Issues: Countering Violent Extremism in Albania." Strategic Study, Albanian Center of Excellence, Albanian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Online: http://www.aiis-albania.org/sites/default/files/Violent%20Extremism%20and%20%20Religious%20Radicalization%20in%20Albania.pdf (Last Accessed May 4, 2018). Institute for Democracy and Mediation.2015. Religious Radicalism and Violent Extremism in Albania. Online: http://idmalbania.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Religious-Radicalism-Albania-web-final.pdf (Last Accessed, May 4, 2018).

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of geographic focus for different CVE initiatives shows that they are predominantly happening in a few cities where radicalization was most observed and acute.

At the local level, there are several governments led initiatives that involve a role for civil society organizations. For instance, in 2017 the municipality of Cerrik established the Local Council for Public Safety (LCPS). CSOs are part of this council, and its stated aim is to encourage partnerships and joint initiatives between state and non-state actors to analyze and tackle the root causes of violent extremism.[23] Specifically, the Council aims to increase awareness, improving the safety of the community, and identify risks in the community. The decision stipulates that it will require CSOs to finance projects related to community safety. It is unclear however if this means CSOs will benefit from public funds or asked to invest with their funds.

3.1. RECENT TRENDS IN CSOS' CVE ENGAGEMENT

The ASCS is the primary source of state financial support for CSOs in Albania. Since 2010, the Agency has provided support for CSO projects in several areas of interest and priority, funding dozens of organizations each year. Despite a commitment to support civil society in countering violent extremism enshrined in strategic documents, it is yet to materialize as ASCS has funded no projects and initiatives in its 11 calls for proposal since 2010.[24]

Currently, there are 45 civil society organizations that have some engagement with countering violent extremism and radicalization throughout the country. Similar to other types of civil society organizations, those working on violent extremism and radicalization are heavily foreign donor dependent. The European Union is one of the largest donors in this regard. In 2017, a consortium of organizations led by the Albanian Helsinki Committee (AHC) and supported by the European Union provided sub-granting to 19 organizations to promote countering violent extremism in local communities. The overall budget of this initiative was over 300,000 Euro for a period of one year (2017 – 2018). Similarly, 21 organizations received sub-granting from Terres

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[23]   Decision No. 167, dt. 23.02.2017 On the creation of the Local Council on Public Safety, Municipality of Cërrik.

[24]   Full list of projects can be accessed in the website of the Albanian Agency for the Support of Civil Society: http://www.amshc.gov.al/web/thirrje/ (Last Accessed May 5, 2018).

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des Hommes (TDH) in 2017, again with the support of the European Union. The overall funding for these organizations was 200,000 Euro, while individual projects ranged from 5,000 to 10,000 Euro.[25]

These two projects speak to the relatively ad-hoc nature of civil society support in countering violent extremism, characterized by one-time, short-term, and small interventions. While these interventions provide much-needed financial support to organizations working in CVE programs, the approach is not in itself sustainable. Coupled with the lack of government funding and support, this dimension of civil society organizations in Albania is no different from other ones.

Table 1: The Geographic spread of CVE projects

DISTRIBUTION OF INTERVENTIONS
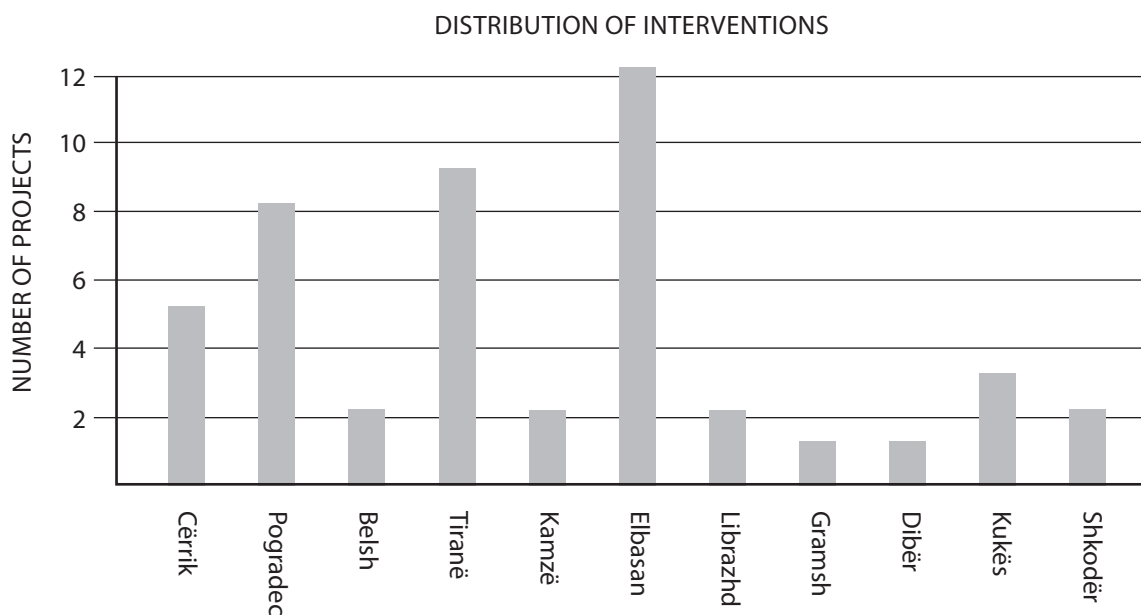
Source: Analysis of projects supported by the EU

An analysis of the projects funded under the two initiatives above shows that geographical coverage is highly concentrated in a few cities. Elbasan has the highest number of interventions, followed by Tirana, Pogradec, and Cerrik. The concentration

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[25]   Full list of projects is accessible here: http://www.ahc.org.al/press-release-11-05-2017/?lang=en; https://www2. fundsforngos.org/civil-society/terre-des-hommes-albania-strengthening-civil-society-to-build-youth-resilience-to-violent-extremism/

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of projects in these areas is consistent with findings that most radicalized individuals and foreign fighter returnees come primarily from these cities. A few projects are also implemented in other cities, but this coverage falls short of including the whole country.

Table 2 – Prevention levels

PRIMARY PREVENTION	• Broadest scope - society as a whole • Aim to tackle root causes of radicalization • Prevent radicalization indirectly
SECONDARY PREVENTION	• Limited, those at risk • Aim to tackle process of radicalization • Prevent radicalization directly
TERTIARY PREVENTION	• Narrow scope - those engaged • Aim to deradicalization or disengagement • Prevent continued involvement directly

Source: https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/countering-violent-extremism/
(last accessed June 21, 2018)

CVE prevention programs can be divided into three dimensions. At the first level interventions have a broad societal scope and aim to tackle the root causes of radicalization by preventing radicalization indirectly. At the second level, interventions are limited geographically especially in communities most at risk of radicalization and violent extremism. At the tertiary level, the scope is narrowed to individuals directly involved in radicalization to prevent continued involvement. An analysis of the projects funded under the framework mentioned above reveals that they fall under the secondary prevention level because:

1. None of the projects have a nationwide scope, instead of a specific focus on a few municipalities, thus they don't have society as a whole in their primary scope. Few interventions from civil society in this sector seem to conduct nationwide initiatives. This tendency stems from recommendations of different research

studies and reflects priorities of those supporting financially organizations involved with CVE efforts.

2. As the geographic coverage in the previous table shows, interventions are mainly implemented in three municipalities, which also corresponds to the areas where most foreign fighters and radicalized individuals come from. Thus, it is consistent with the secondary prevention limited scope to communities at risk. However, there are other hot spot areas in different parts of the country that have not enjoyed the same attention in intervening projects.

3. Most projects funded aim to tackle the process of radicalization by raising awareness, educating, building capacities and helping communities build resilience. However, there is a need to broaden the scope of interventions especially in engaging youth from rural and remote areas that are completely isolated and lack services and the needed attention to address the conducive environment for radicalization.

3.2. FINDINGS FROM INTERVIEWED CSOs

As mentioned in the methodology section, to evaluate the capacities of civil society organizations to counter violent extremism and radicalization effectively we approached 45 organizations that carried out CVE initiatives, of which we received 13 responses. It should be noted that none of them are primarily an organization that deals with radicalization and violent extremism; rather they are CSOs that have at least some experience with CVE, which qualified them to be interviewed for this assessment. The following offers an overview of general characteristics of these organizations and their work in the Albanian civil society space.

The average number of people employed in these organizations is 7.6. However, only three of the 13 organizations interviewed have in their staff more than 10 people, which is indicative of relatively small organizations. With one exception, all other organizations work at the national and local level alike. Similarly, all but one has a considerable number of partners at the regional and international level. Some are part of international networks of organizations; others cooperate with organizations that conduct similar work in other countries and others still have support from international organizations that operate outside of Albania. Their work spans a variety of thematic

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areas, from a concentration on youth empowerment to gender issues, democracy, good governance, social service delivery, education, and religion.

3.2.1. Experience with countering violent extremism

This section prods questions of prior and present experience of organizations with countering violent extremism primarily through dedicated infrastructure as well as approaches taken to tackle the phenomenon. CSOs experience with violent extremism is relatively recent, emerging predominantly as a response to the advent of radicalization and violent extremism in Albania, which has gained increasing media and public attention.

Out of 13 organizations, only 1 has a specific security department led by a CVE expert. All other organizations work either through outside experts or current employees that have a similar background on issues pertaining to CVE. Further, one organization considers CVE a primary objective of their work while the rest are divided between those that do not focus on CVE but have recently engaged with projects and initiatives that address violent extremism while falling in their general line of work and those organizations whose mission while not specifically geared towards violent extremism and radicalization, work in similar thematic areas such as promoting peace and conflict resolution. These organizations have adapted their existing expertise and experience to the challenges posed by violent extremism. This is evident by the fact that for 7 out of the 13 organizations interviewed CVE projects started for the first time in 2018. For four of those organizations, projects and initiatives addressing radicalization and violent extremism began in 2015 at the earliest.

Being in the frontlines of contacts with community members, the experience that CSOs have when implementing their initiatives is telling for both the current perception of the public on the phenomenon as well as an indication of the strategies that could work best when working in specific communities. In this regard responses from CSOs are almost split in half between two extremes. On the one hand, there are organizations reporting that communities, where they have worked, have been closed off and generally refused that the phenomenon exists. On the other hand, some organizations indicate that there has been active participation and involvement with their initiatives. It seems that young people and religious leaders are quite willing to accept and

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consider interventions to counter violent extremism as positive and necessary. The type of response to intervention depends on a variety of factors, including the kind of relationship established between the CSO and the targeted community, the nature of the targeted population (close-knit, rural/remote, open), as well as preconceived notions of the targeted community regarding the existence of radicalization and violent extremism in their midst.

In general, there is an emphasis on educational and awareness raising campaigns as tools to approach the community. Schools are featured prominently in interventions, engaging students, parents, and teachers in targeted areas. One of the organizations interviewed is currently focusing on creating a local CVE network and supporting a municipal employee specifically focused on issues of violent extremism and radicalization. For interviewed organizations and more broadly from a review of funded projects on CVE there is less attention and engagement from religious leaders and representatives. Only 1 out of the 13 organizations interviewed targets explicitly religious leaders as essential actors in countering violent extremism.

Table 3 categorizes identified CVE projects into three types of interventions, namely:

1. Awareness raising and education, which refers to programming that targets broad and small groups to educate them on issues about violent extremism and religious harmony;
2. Capacity building, which refers to interventions that focus on increasing the capacities of different stakeholders in effectively countering radicalization and violent extremism and;
3. Service delivery, which relates to the promotion and offering of economic and social services from civil society organizations to address economic and social causes of radicalization and violent extremism.

An analysis of the stated objectives of supported projects shows that the vast majority of efforts concentrate around awareness raising and education category. Only two projects focused on service delivery, namely on promoting youth employment and entrepreneurship as a way to counter violent extremism and establishing integrated services for young people in affected communities. What is lacking in current interventions are working with individuals affected directly by radicalization. We don't

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Table 3 – Intervention themes

AWARENESS RAISING AND EDUCATION	• Women's role in CVE counternarratives • Information spreading and educating youth • Awareness raising amnog local stakeholders • Building bridges with religious communities • Promoting youth and religious harmony • Discussions against violent extremism • Educating students through art • Counter narratives • Human rights education • Learning about identities • Civic education
CAPACITY BUILDING	• Youth resilience through capacity building • Promoting dialogue and interaction in countering radicalization • Early identification and prevention capacities • Enhancing teacher competencies • Peer to peer empowerment • Coalitions for counter narratives • Peacebuilding and conflict management
SERVICE DELIVERY	• Youth employment and entreprenuership • Integrated service

see rehabilitation programs for those individuals, direct engagement of those who have experience with radicalization to serve as positive models for others to follow. While most interventions are concentrated in communities considered most at risk, interventions themselves have a broader focus on raising awareness, which is a necessary intervention, but not a sufficient one in effectively countering violent extremism.

3.2.2. Financial and human resources

On average, each organization employs 3 people to manage projects and initiatives on CVE. The majority of them have bachelors and masters degrees in the realm of social sciences, most notably law, psychology, political sciences. Only a small number of organizations report having experts that come from a security, educational or

professional background. Regarding staff experience with violent extremism, it should be noted that the majority has less than 3 years of experience specifically with extremism. Only two organizations report staff with 10 or more years of work in radicalization, security studies, and violent extremism.

Six of the 13 organizations have implemented their first CVE project recently, while 6 others have implemented two projects already, one organization has implemented around 5 projects in this thematic area. An evaluation of funding received to support such projects mirrors the analysis above on existing financial support through different donors. Funding is relatively small, not exceeding 10,000 Euros, mostly below 5,000 Euros. This funding structure affects both the sustainability of CVE initiatives undertaken by civil society as well as their ability to have a wider target group and geographic spread.

The European Union is the most important for CSOs interviewed. Through sub-granting from the Albanian Helsinki Committee and Terre Des Hommes, the EU has financially supported over 40 organizations in countering violent extremism in Albania.[26] All of the interviewees mention these projects as their primary source of funding for CVE initiatives. While this support has been vital for CSOs to become actors in CVE, it also shows a general lack of sustainability as none of the organizations reports any support from the Albanian government in carrying out their projects and initiatives. Diversifying sources of funding becomes thus evident and necessary.

3.2.3. Cooperation with government agencies

As literature suggests, countering violent extremism is not the sole domain of the government. Civil society organizations have an essential role to play due to their expertise, experience, direct contact with local communities and the fact that their work is mission-driven. As mentioned in other sections, so far support from the

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[26] Netherlands Helsinki Committee. (2017). Civil Society Countering Violent Extremism in Albania. Online: https://www.nhc.nl/themes/building-up-rule-of-law/prison-reform-probation/civil-society-countering-violent-extremism-albania/ (Last Accessed June 30, 2018); Terre des Hommes. (2017). Terre des Hommes Albania: Strengthening Civil Society to Build Youth Resilience to Violent Extremism. Online: https://www2.fundsforngos.org/civil-society/terre-des-hommes-albania-strengthening-civil-society-to-build-youth-resilience-to-violent-extremism/ (Last Accessed June 30, 2018).

government to CSOs has wanted as there are little to none financial allocations to civil society-led initiatives. On the other hand, the meaningful inclusion of CSOs in the policy cycle also is weak. The latter was not part of discussions when designing and adopting the National Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism and its Action Plan. One of the interviewed organizations reports that opinions expressed by them on the strategy were not taken into consideration. It should also be noted that organizations interviewed are mostly engaged with the community rather than advocacy activities directed at the state.

In this regard, some CSOs report that cooperation with local institutions has been satisfactory, especially for those working with schools, teachers, and parents. There has been a general willingness to facilitate the engagement of CSOs with the community through government channels. However, there are no institutionalized relationships between government authorities in charge of CVE and civil society organizations.

3.2.4. Self-reported Impact

The perceived impact of civil society organizations in countering violent extremism is mixed. Most interviewed organizations point out that it is early to conduct an impact evaluation of their interventions as for the majority CVE is a new area of work. One perspective shared from the interviewees is that a needs assessment in affected communities is lacking and often civil society organizations undertake initiatives not always based on evidence, instead based on universal principles of countering violent extremism and radicalization. Closely connected to this, it is pointed out that civil society should not be an only project and donor-oriented but have longer-term initiatives.

Considering the most common approach to tackling violent extremism, education and raising awareness, interviewed organizations note an increase in attention towards their CVE work from the community, seen through their social media outlets. Introducing curricula that address violent extremism and radicalization in school is another specific focus of some of the organizations, which if successfully implemented would increase the impact of CSOs in raising awareness, producing alternative narratives and messages. CSOs are well aware of the limitations in their impact and are themselves in a quest of increasing their sustainability for better results in the short-term and more long-lasting impact in society.

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3.3. EVALUATION OF CAPACITIES

In 2012 the Royal Canadian Police (RCP) developed a framework for analyzing their success in counterterrorism, which features five levels of engagement on an ascending approach. This framework helped them place their efforts in the scale of engagement, develop indicators of success and undertake policies that would move them up the scale.[27] This framework is modified and adapted to reflect the role of civil society, and further used in the analysis of the capacities of Albanian CSOs in engaging with communities and other stakeholders, to further propose recommendations on moving up the ladder.

Table 4 – Levels of engagement

LEVELS OF ENGAGEMENT	INDICATORS OF SUCCESS
Level 1 – There is no established relationship between CSOs and communities and law enforcement	Increase in community contacts
Level 2 – Potential contacts within the community and government agencies have been identified, but there is no relationship	Number of contacts established
Level 3 – Initial contacts established but with limited coverage	Increase in the number of new contacts and engagement with the community and public institutions
Level 4 – Critical spheres of influence are addressed; mutual understanding and shared education is developing	Increase in the participation of events and initiatives Sharing legislative and policy knowledge with public institutions
Level 5 – a Comprehensive network of meaningful relationships among CSOs and the community,	Wide sections of local communities participate in CSO initiatives Levels of trust increase Common actions between CSOs and government agencies, sharing experiences and knowledge Support for CSOs increase

Source: Fink, Romaniuk & Barakat, 2013

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[27] Fink, N., Romaniuk, P. & Barakat, R. September 2013. Evaluating Countering Violent Extremism Programming. Global Counter Terrorism Forum. Online: http://globalcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Fink_Romaniuk_Barakat_EVALUATING-CVE-PROGRAMMING_20132.pdf (Last Accessed May 15, 2018).

An evaluation of the work of civil society organizations in countering violent extremism shows that initial contacts have been established between CSOs and community members on one hand as well as government agencies on the other. However critical spheres of influence are not formed yet, more work and initiatives would be necessary to reach this level of CSO engagement. As such, CSOs stand at the third level of involvement, where initial contacts are established, but with limited coverage. The geographical coverage analyzed above shows a heavy focus on specific cities and communities where radicalization has been more prevalent. There are no identified national initiatives that target the whole country. To reach a new level of engagement, it becomes necessary for CSOs to continue establishing more contacts with public institutions, both in number and in depth and increase the number of community members engaged with their activities and efforts. This way, increasing the breadth and depth of collaboration and presence, would create the critical mass necessary to establish networked governance of CVE activities in Albania, where CSO work is complementary to that of the government.

Table 5 – Evaluation of CSO capacities in Countering Violent Extremism

COMPONENT	EVALUATION
ENABLING LEGAL ENVIRONMENT	**High** Current Albanian legislation and policies are highly conducive for a constructive role of civil society in countering violent extremism; inclusion of civil society is stipulated in CVE strategies and action plans; there are no impediments for civil society in dealing with preventive programs in the VE realm.
FINANCIAL RESOURCES AND SUSTAINABILITY	**Low** State funding is lacking; heavily foreign donor dependent; mostly one-time projects rather than long-term initiatives.
COOPERATION WITH GOVERNMENT AGENCIES	**Low** The government does not provide any support for CSOs wishing to promote CVE measures, despite commitments set in the National Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism. CSOs also did not contribute to the design and adoption of the latter.

HUMAN RESOURCES AND KNOWLEDGE ACCUMULATION	**Moderate** Most organizations use current employees for whom CVE is a novelty. However, there are CSOs that are constituted of CVE experts with over 10 years of experience or rely on outside contracting of experts for CVE projects.
PERCEIVED IMPACT	**Moderate** There is a strong emphasis on education and raising awareness, rather than direct engagement with individuals affected by VE and radicalization. However, some initial positive results are evident from current efforts.
ENABLING LOCAL CONTEXT	**Moderate** A considerable number of local communities where CSOs work to counter radicalization and violent extremism often negate the existence of this phenomenon and refuse to recognize it. However, certain groups, such as young people and religious representatives are more amenable, which facilitates the implementation of CVE initiatives.

CONCLUSIONS
AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering their grounded nature in respective communities, CSOs have a significant role to play in the preventive stage of CVE programming. In general, CSOs act in an enabling legal environment, which does not pose obstacles to their engagement in CVE efforts. However, other obstacles become evident in assessing their sustainability and available resources. To overcome these obstacles, below we outline a set of recommendations for different actors.

ALBANIAN GOVERNMENT

1. The meaningful inclusion of CSOs in the policy cycle and collaboration with the government is one of the weakest areas identified in this study. With CSOs increasing their capacities and experience with CVE initiatives it would be beneficial to include them more broadly in CVE legislation and policies since the inception phase and provide meaningful inclusion, not only superficial one to comply with legislation that requires consultation with other non-governmental actors. The Coordinator for Countering Violent Extremism could create a database of organizations dealing with CVE and conduct regular meetings, engage with their activities and advertise them to expand CSOs coverage.
2. The Agency for the Support of Civil Society should include countering violent extremism in their yearly priorities so that CSOs can obtain government support in their initiatives. Commitments to support CSOs are legally binding as they are stipulated in the National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism.

3. Include specific roles, expectations, and deliverables for CSOs in the existing National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism, especially its Action Plan, which is currently very broad and lacks clear indicators.

4. Local government units could be more inclusive for civil society organizations operating in their territory. Bringing CVE actions at a grassroots level is essential and requires the support and willingness of local government structures.

5. Frontline government officials, especially at the local level should be trained to interact and include CSOs in their area by sharing information, conducting joint activities and share experiences, which should go both ways. The creation of Local Public Safety Commissions in municipalities provides an excellent opportunity for greater engagement of CSOs at the local level, which would increase their interaction with law enforcement, local government units, and the local community in general.

6. Civil society organizations could be included in an advisory committee set within the structure of the Coordinator for Countering Violent Extremism.

7. The basic structure of the private, public and nonprofit sector is the existence of market and government failures in the economy, which provides a rationale for why specific services are offered by the government and not the private sector, and others are more efficiently delivered by the nonprofit and not the public sector. In a similar vein, it is important to recognize some services that are better offered by CSOs or government agencies and cede responsibilities to maximize efficiency. Where CSOs have an advantage, for instance, their grassroots presence in the community, the government could cede such a responsibility to them and transfer sources dedicated to these efforts to non-governmental actors.

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS

1. Diversify CSOs portfolio to focus on other thematic areas of CVE programming. While raising awareness and education are essential tools for tackling radicalization and violent extremism, CSOs could be engaged in other forms, through policy advocacy or working directly with individuals affected directly by radicalization and violent extremism.

2. Current sub-granting from the two EU projects identified is a good step in involving civil society actors from different parts of the country, and that come from various fields, which enables them to tackle a variety of push factors. However, this opportunity could move a step forward to establish a network of CSOs that coordinate among themselves and conduct joint initiatives for maximum results. In addition to the current project-based approach, core funding for several well established civil society organizations would ensure the sustainability of efforts.

3. More engagement of religious leaders and groups is necessary for civil society intervention. Leveraging their ties to the community, extensive religious knowledge and resources would be an added value to the work of civil society organizations, especially those that are newcomers to CVE initiatives.

4. Engagement of more professionals with extensive expertise in the security sector, especially countering violent extremism, is a necessity in carrying out CVE initiatives.

5. Professionalization and capacity building for CSO staff members working on CVE programs to increase the level of knowledge, expertise, and evidence-based initiatives could become part of CSOs efforts to efficiently counter violent extremism and radicalization.

6. While focusing on geographical areas where radicalization and violent extremism is most present, having a wider geographic spread, on a national level could provide a more comprehensive strategy in countering violent extremism.

7. Communities from rural and remote areas are often left out of public services and civil society presence. Civil society could make greater efforts to work with rural and remote communities, and where possible complement lacking services.

8. Civil society organizations could engage proactively with individuals directly involved with radicalization and violent extremism, such as foreign fighter returnees, to encourage rehabilitation and sharing experiences to discourage others.

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