

Austria and the Threats from Islamist Radicalisation and Terrorist Involvement: An Overview of Governmental and Non-Governmental Initiatives and Policies

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Abstract

Unlike other European countries, Austria has so far been spared from terrorist attacks in the context of radical Islamism. However, the perceived threat, several criminal cases of terrorist involvement as well as being indirectly affected by attacks in other countries led to a high level of public and governmental attention to the issues of radicalisation, terrorist involvement and deradicalisation in Austria. Due to strong public pressure and growing recognition of the existing problem and hazard areas by governmental and non-governmental actors, a number of (1) initiatives providing support and counselling in case of radicalisation have been launched (e.g. Extremism Information Centre; DERAD) or extended. Furthermore, (2) governmental agencies and political stakeholders have been pushing for enhanced means for the criminal prosecution and conviction of criminal offenses in the context of terrorism. The article presents an overview and review of new and renewed initiatives as well as (planned) policy changes countering radicalisation and deradicalisation and terrorist involvement (support of terrorist organisations, membership, plans for terrorist attacks, etc.) and thus a summarising insight into the case of Austria.

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Introduction – ISIS and the Need for Counter-Narrative

Unlike other European countries, Austria has so far been spared from terrorist attacks in the context of radical Islamism. However, the perceived threat (Götsch 2016), several criminal cases of terrorist involvement (Verfassungsschutzbericht 2016, Seeh/Wetz 2017,

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Seeh 2016) as well as being indirectly affected by attacks in other countries led to a high level of public and governmental attention to the issues of radicalisation, terrorist involvement and deradicalisation in Austria (Prinzjakowitsch 2017, Schmidinger 2015, Henckel 2016, Güngör & Nafs 2016, Mattes et al. 2017). Thus, Austria is an interesting case of a country not being directly affected by terrorism but still become increasingly active in the field of deradicalisation and the prevention of extremism.

Compared to other European countries, many people from Austria went to Syria and Iraq to join Islamist militias (Neumann 2015, 110), primarily the so-called Islamic State (IS): at the end of 2016, 296 persons from Austria were actively participating in ‘Jihad’ in Syria and Iraq, had participated or tried to do so (Verfassungsschutzbericht 2016, 24). Around 90 have already returned, 51 could be prevented from leaving Austria and 45 are assumed to be dead (ibid.).

This article presents an overview and review of new and renewed initiatives from governmental and non-governmental organisations as well as (planned) policy and legal changes countering radicalisation and terrorist involvement (support of terrorist organisations, membership, plans for terrorist attacks, etc.).

The policies and activities examined in this article cover the whole range of efforts countering radicalisation and violent extremism (in the area of jihadism). Depending on the concrete situation (e.g. radicalisation phase from radical ideas to terrorist involvement), the individual (e.g. personal history of delinquency, or in general the “biographical exposure” to facilitating factors, cf. Dzhekova 2016, 7) or environmental factors (e.g. institutional affiliation and/or funding of the activity) the presented initiatives cover different approaches and tasks.

The Austrian spectrum of initiatives and programmes dealing with prevention, intervention and deradicalisation efforts is a heterogeneous mix of private, non-governmental bottom-up and official government initiatives alike. So far, no comprehensive overview on NGOs and public initiatives in this field in Austria exists.

Like in other European countries, public and civil society activities often started on an ad-hoc basis and remained isolated efforts at least for some time (Koehler 2017). So far, radicalisation and deradicalisation in the jihadist-Islamist spectrum within Austria are still very under-researched² social phenomena. Thus, this article is of an exploratory and largely descriptive nature and will not present an exhaustive list of initiatives; rather a purposeful sampling approach (Patton 1990) of information-rich, exemplary cases of Austrian efforts countering violent extremism (CVE) is applied. This includes “programs, policies, and activities sourced and/or implemented by government and non-governmental actors intended both to prevent individuals and groups from radicalizing to facilitate or commit violence, and to disengage individuals and groups who are planning to commit or facilitate, or who have already engaged in, extremist violence” (Beutel & Weinberger 2016, 5). As this article focusses only on prevention and deradicalisation of jihadist violent extremism, the selection of presented initiatives and policies is limited to this field, too.

From a compiled non-exhaustive sample of local, regional and federal initiatives from the governmental and non-governmental sector, examples were chosen on the following basis: the selection aims at presenting initiatives and policy efforts of varied types such as public-private partnerships (*Extremism Information Centre, Neustart*), governmental efforts (policy debate and inter-ministerial task force), private civil society associations (*Not in God's Name*) and hybrid initiatives (*DERAD*). Furthermore, the selected examples are supposed to cover the full spectrum of deradicalisation efforts as defined by Beutel & Weinberger (2016, 6f.): engagement (e.g. *Viennese Network for Deradicalisation and Prevention*), prevention (educational activities across all Austrian regions, *Not in God's Name*), intervention (*DERAD, Extremism Information Centre*), interdiction (task force in the Ministry of Justice) and rehabilitation/reintegration (*Neustart*).

² While the study of right-wing extremism and right-wing parties and organisations has a longer tradition in Austrian academia (exemplary Hartleb 2011, Schickermüller 2004, Bailer-Galanda & Neugebauer 1996), research on radicalisation and extremism related to jihadism in Austria is scarce (Aslan 2017, Schmidinger 2015) and still insufficient.

The sample and thereby this article aim at providing a preliminary and thus limited overview on Austrian initiatives. Further research, both in-depth and extensive, is needed to achieve a more comprehensive picture of Austrian efforts in countering violent jihadist extremism.

Violent Extremism and Terrorist Involvement: The Current State in Austria

Radicalisation, especially with a radical Islamist background, and terrorist threats had been on the agenda of governmental agencies already since the 9/11 attacks in New York and near Washington, DC (Hofinger & Schmidinger 2017, 5). In the years afterwards, one criminal case in particular received broad attention beyond Austria: Mohamed Mahmoud – an Austrian citizen of Egyptian descent was sentenced to jail in 2008 for being a member in a terrorist organisation. After his release four years later, he moved to Germany where he became a leading figure within the jihadist-Salafist scene before joining the Islamic State (IS) in Syria (Schreiber 2016).

Further, within some groups from the community of Chechen diaspora in Austria, radicalisation trends were noticed already before the current wave of Islamist radicalisation in the context of the IS and Syria (Hofinger & Schmidinger 2017).

Still, it can be said that before the year of 2014, the phenomenon of Islamist radicalisation was – “in contrast to countries like the UK and France” – “not present in Austria (...), either in public discussion or in scientific dispute” (Prinzjakowitsch 2017, 67). This completely and abruptly changed in 2014, when the extensively reported and broadly debated case of two Viennese school girls, Samra and Sabina (then aged 16 and 15) of Bosnian descent, who left Austria to join the Islamic State in Syria, stirred up the country (Kröll 2014, APA 2014).

However, even before this time, a number of legal adaptations and new criminal offences (e.g. membership in criminal associations, financing terrorism, training for terrorist purposes etc., cf. Hofinger & Schmidinger 2017) were introduced. Still, the current

phenomenon of radicalisation, European citizens leaving as Foreign Fighters for Syria and Iraq and finally terrorist involvement led to a new wave of legal aspirations in Austria aimed at dealing with radicalised (proto-)jihadists. The large-scale refugee movements in 2015 and 2016 additionally sparked the public debate (in media and politics alike) on security threats posed by radical Islamism to Austria – a discourse that often intermingled issues of migrant integration, refugees, radicalisation and violent extremism (cf. Mattes et al. 2017, Götsch 2016).

In the following, the development of the relevant policy debate and its measures will be briefly outlined.

Legislative developments since 2001

In 2002, as a reaction to the terrorist attacks of 9/11 in the United States of America, Austria passed the law amending criminal law ('Strafrechtsänderungsgesetz') which introduced § 278b into the Austrian penal code (StGB). The new law penalised the membership within a terrorist organisation with a prison term of up to ten years³.

Further legislative changes penalised the financing of terrorism (§ 278d StGB) and the training for terrorist purposes (§ 278e StGB, 2011). A year later (2012) the instruction for committing a terrorist crime and the public support for terrorist activities were introduced as new criminal delicts (Hofinger & Schmidinger 2017, 6). Since 2014 symbols attributable to the Islamic State (IS) or Al-Qaida are forbidden (ibid.).

In 2014, 28 persons were detained based on § 278b StGB for the membership within a terrorist organisation and numbers increased in the following years (43 new suspects in 2015). At the beginning of 2017, 68 persons were imprisoned in Austria due to membership or support of terrorist organisations (ibid.).

In 2016, the Austrian Federal Office for State Protection and Counter Terrorism (BVT) was provided with extended powers to observe and gather data on suspects

³ https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/VHG/XXI/II_01166/index.shtml

(‘Bundesgesetz über die Organisation, Aufgaben und Befugnisse des polizeilichen Staatsschutzes’, PStSG).

At present (2017), this highly contested law is again debated as for some it is insufficient⁴ given repeated terrorist attacks across Europe (Nice 07/2016, Berlin 12/2016, to name but two). Thus, the ministers of Justice and the Interior presented a draft version of a new package of security measures earlier in 2017. It includes the increased use of video surveillance in public areas and road traffic, extended observation of Internet communication with a state-run espionage software (‘Bundestrojaner’), retention of data as well as the mandatory registration of pre-paid cell phone cards (APA 2017). During the review process, over 9.000 advisory opinions and statements from data protection watchdogs, political and non-profit organisations and others were submitted. An imminent adoption of the law is therefore not expected (ibid.). However, with parliamentary elections ahead in October 2017 and a general deterioration of public sense of security, the debate on the proposed legislation might change when a new party coalition eventually forms the next government.

Governmental and judicial measures since 2015

In 2015, the Ministry of Justice (BMJ) established a Task Force consigned with elaborating a comprehensive package of measures for deradicalisation in prisons (cf. Federal Ministry of Justice 2017). Comprising criminologists, psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers and chief executives from the area of law enforcement, the Task Force collaborates with the Ministry of Interior (BMI), the Ministry for Families and Youth (BMFJ) and the Federal Office for State Protection and Counter Terrorism (BVT) (ibid.). Measures developed within a year included the definition of internal regulations on how to deal with inmates suspected or convicted of membership or support of a terrorist group. Furthermore, special trainings were installed for prison guards and the deradicalisation counselling through the association *DERAD* (s. below) was expanded for detainees prone of Islamist radical or violent

⁴ https://www.parlament.gv.at/PAKT/PR/JAHR_2017/PK0782/

extremist ideas and beliefs. The Task Force also designed new anti-violence trainings, preparation and support measures before and after prison release for resocialisation etc.

Besides an early systematic screening for inmates at risk of being vulnerable to radicalisation, the external evaluation of the new measures (conducted by the Institute for the Sociology of Law and Criminology, cf. Hofinger & Schmidinger 2017) found that religious counselling for Muslim prisoners is hardly available, an issue that is identified as highly important. The nation-wide cooperation with specialist organisations such as *DERAD* and *Neustart* were planned to be continued and extended.

New Initiatives Against Radicalisation and Violent Extremism in Austria

The previous section outlined so-called “hard” counter-terrorism and counter violent extremism measures in Austria: the introduction of new judicial possibilities to penalise, monitor and detain individuals and groups suspected or convicted of terrorist involvement. Beutel & Weinberger (2016, 6) call these the CVE efforts of ‘*interdiction*’ targeting “those who are taking significant steps toward violent action, are already engaged in violence, or facilitating other illicit actions in support of violence” (ibid.).

At the same time (starting in 2014) several bottom-up as well as official initiatives supported by governmental agencies started to develop counselling, information and awareness-raising measures in various areas. As will be seen below, youth work and educational means were at the core of these new developments.

Beratungsstelle Extremismus

The *Extremism Information Centre* (‘Beratungsstelle Extremismus’) was launched on December 1, 2014⁵. It was set up as an institution similar to such centres in Germany and Switzerland⁶.

⁵ <https://www.beratungsstelleextremismus.at/>

⁶ <http://www.bamf.de/DE/DasBAMF/Beratung/beratung-node.html> and
<http://www.polizei.bs.ch/praevention/kinder-jugendliche/radikalisierung.html>

Initiated and funded by the Federal Ministry for Families and Youth (BMFJ), the *Centre* is run by BOJA, the *Austrian Network of Open Youth Work* ('Bundesweite Offene Jugendarbeit'), and offers support and counselling in cases of extremism and radicalisation such as right-wing extremism, nationalist movements or jihadist-Salafist groups (BOJA 2015).

The *Centre* was the government's flagship initiative in the context of dealing with youth radicalisation. It was however not institutionalised at the funding ministry itself to offer a safe, open and authentic central contact point for all concerns regarding extremism and radicalisation.

Its main activities are a telephone help line for family members, teachers, social workers and friends of persons, who are confronted with extremism; personal counselling in individual cases; and workshop and training offers.

As it is run by an organisation from the field of open youth work, it comes as no surprise that the *Centre* also follows a deradicalisation and intervention approach that emphasises social relations, the establishment of trust and mutual respect, new perspectives and individual solutions for the adolescent concerned. Individual solutions as well as policy recommendations are the initiative's core output.

The *Centre* itself is located in Vienna, but offers personal, face-to-face counselling across the country through cooperation with partner organisations. In addition to partners from the field of social, youth and family work, the *Extremism Information Centre* participates in a wide network of deradicalisation initiatives like the *Radicalization Awareness Network* (RAN), *SAVE (Sisters against Violent Extremism)* – Women Without Borders, the *Organisation for Security and Cooperation* (OSCE, seated in Vienna and currently under Austrian chairmanship with a special focus on countering radicalisation⁷, as well as national associations (e.g. *Neustart*, *Not in God's Name*, *Safer Internet* and others).

⁷ <http://www.osce.org/node/294451>

As of August 2017, the *Centre's* help line received more than 2.500 phone calls (more than 1.300 first calls), approximately 125 families in Austria were individually and personally counselled and supported by a team of psychologists, social workers and others; over 320 workshops were held (mainly in schools, more than 7.000 participants since 2014) and collaborations with public and civil society organisations and associations were established⁸.

Viennese Network for Deradicalisation and Prevention

In 2014, the city administration of Vienna founded the *Network for Deradicalisation and Prevention*⁹ to tackle radicalisation trends amongst children and young adults in Austria's capital. Institutionalised at the Vienna Children's and Young Persons' Representative, the network comprises experts and representatives from several municipality departments, open youth work, schools as well as the city parliament.

With almost half of its residents having a migrant background, the city of Vienna is particularly attentive and eager to invest into preventive and deradicalising initiatives, "in order to prevent our children and youths from extreme or extremist elements in our society"¹⁰ (Wiener Netzwerk für Deradikalisierung und Prävention 2016). The general aim of the interdisciplinary *Network* is described by its director Ercan Nik Nafs:

"Our goal is to make social workers, psychologists, youth workers, police officers and teachers experts – not only with regards to the topic of extremism of all kinds and its prevention, but especially in creating better life perspectives for adolescents. Key points of the Network are expertise, education and training, periodic exchange and collaboration of all agencies, organisations and institutions"¹¹ (ibid.).

⁸ https://www.beratungsstelleextremismus.at/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Bilanz-Beratungsstelle-Extremismus_Dez_14_Juli17.pdf

⁹ <https://kja.at/site/praevention/netzwerk-deradikalisierung-praevention/>

¹⁰ Translated from German original by KG.

¹¹ Translated from German original by KG.

In addition to a more effective and streamlined collaboration between different city departments – e.g. those concerned with youth and family (MA 11), integration and diversity (MA 17), the Viennese kindergartens (MA 10), education and youth care (MA 13) and the Vienna Children's and Young Persons' Representative – the *Network* cooperates with external experts (*EXPERT_Forum Prävention, Deradikalisierung & Demokratiekultur*) as well as external partner organisations such as the association *DERAD*, the *Extremism Information Centre* or the Public Employment Service for Youths (*AMS Vienna*).

So far, this new initiative has reached over 6.000 stakeholders, practitioners and gatekeepers in schools, social, family and youth work, public administration, education and the like (ibid.). The *EXPERT_Forum* presented a strategy paper in 2015 including 27 policy and action recommendations for the city of Vienna as well as the *Network* partners (Wiener Netzwerk für Deradikalisierung und Prävention 2016).

Not in God's Name

This initiative is an example of a genuine grass-root enterprise, still on its way towards institutional collaboration and the acquisition of public funding for the provision of its services and activities.

In 2015, political scientist Alexander Karakas and Thai boxer Karim Mabrouk founded the non-profit organisation *Not in God's Name* (NIGN) in Vienna¹². Located in a martial arts training centre, Karakas' initiative lives from its direct contact with adolescents of which many are Muslims and have a migrant background. When Karakas noticed that several struggling youths he met in the sports community sympathised with radical and extremist ideas and beliefs, his idea emerged to use positive role models from the field of sports as 'testimonials' against violence and radicalisation.

"Together with carefully selected martial art fighters we design programmes which allow us, due to the role model function of sportspeople, to guide these

¹² www.nign.eu, <https://de-de.facebook.com/notingodsname.eu/>

adolescents into the right direction and to refute the messages they hear from ISIS recruiters and other radical groups”¹³ (<http://www.nign.eu/>).

After a year, more than 20 trainers and sportsmen (Muslims and Christians alike) were active within the bottom-up prevention initiative. As a strategy NIGN completely focuses on its ‘role-model-approach’ emphasising that adolescents would not listen to politicians but ‘obey to their sportive idols every word’ (cf. Goldmann 2016). Using methods similar to open, low-threshold youth street work, NIGN visits youth clubs and bars in addition to its training centre to start conversations with youths. They discuss potentially radical and extremist views and beliefs which they seek to counter with positive examples of successful role models from sports.

Currently, the start-up project is already internationally known ([Winroither](#) 2016) but institutional and financial support from Austrian public agencies comes very tentatively. However, the initiative managed to advance its activities from its extensive social media campaign and informal street work in its training centre to official cooperation with schools in Vienna where they hold information workshops in classes. In addition, NIGN’s testimonials give short introductions in non-fighting sport lessons combined with the workshops (inter alia Karim Mabrouk, Foad Sadeghi or Adnan Sert; cf. [Winroither](#) 2016).

DERAD

The ‘Initiative for societal Cohesion and Dialogue’, called *DERAD*, started as a loose initiative of experts in the field of Islam and Islamism who became active in supporting families, friends and others confronted with people vulnerable to radical Islamist ideas and violent extremism (Schmidinger 2015). In its early period, the association held counselling and information meetings with individuals and their families trying to counter early or advanced radicalisation developments and intervene in cases where young people were already on the road towards extremist violence and terrorist involvement.

¹³ Translated from German original by KG.

In 2016, the non-profit organisation began to cooperate with the Austrian Ministry of Justice (BMJ). Now it is responsible for deradicalisation programmes for prison detainees accused or convicted of criminal charges based on § 278b StGB (Hofinger & Schmidinger 2017).

Within the last two years, the expertise and personal engagement of the initiative's members made it a key player within the context of deradicalisation in Austria (Federal Ministry of Justice (2017). Due to its scholar and practice competence, Moussa Al-Hassan Diaw (head of *DERAD*) and his colleagues are in high demand for workshops, expert exchange, and official assignments (such as their work within Austrian prisons).

A pilot project in 2016 (Hofinger & Schmidinger 2017) showed the need for systematic and ubiquitous provision of deradicalisation support and mentoring for detainees in Austrian prisons in order to prevent and counter radicalisation.

“It can be seen (...) that more of the competence provided by *DERAD* would be needed to handle the increasing demand for deradicalisation work. The association, that is featured by the great engagement of its employees, is not able with its current structures to provide regular support to all the persons that would need further mentoring according to their own assessment” (Hofinger & Schmidinger 2017, 147)¹⁴.

The Ministry of Justice, in charge of overseeing prison programmes, concludes that an intensified collaboration with external partners, such as *DERAD*, would be necessary for which additional resources are required. So far, the collaboration represents a successful example of public-private partnerships to counter violent extremism (Beutel & Weinberger 2016).

Furthermore, a wider discourse and transparent assessment of such public initiatives and efforts (as in the collaboration of law enforcement agencies with associations like *DERAD* and *Neustart*) would be desirable and necessary. Here, the external evaluation conducted by Hofinger & Schmidinger (2017) represents a very good starting point for

¹⁴ Translation from German original by KG

assessing the key impacts and outcomes of public initiatives (cf. Khalil & Zeuthen 2016) and an overall evaluation of countering efforts.

NEUSTART

*Neustart*¹⁵ (“new start”) is a non-profit organisation (headquarter in Vienna) providing services in the areas of judicial social and prevention work, probation and prisoners’ assistance since the 1950s.

Faced with the new situation of delinquents accused or convicted of terrorism crimes (§§ 278b ff. StGB) in Austria, *Neustart* was at the hotspot of dealing with (mainly young) detainees sympathising with or being involved in extremist organisations and activities from the beginning. Thus, *Neustart* is involved in focus programmes within several prisons across the country where it cooperates with the Ministry of Justice as well as the private deradicalisation association *DERAD* (Hofinger & Schmidinger 2017).

As of June 2016, *Neustart* has counselled around 30 persons, mostly between the age of 14 and 30, who are or were imprisoned based on § 278ff. StGB (Neustart 2016). Its goals are defined as supporting and enabling disengagement and deradicalisation by assisting delinquents during imprisonment (individual supervision, biographical work, continuous behaviour analysis, individual perspectives for post-prison life etc.) as well as afterwards (probation services, preparation, rehabilitation) (Neustart 2015).

Educational, training and awareness-raising measures across the country

Finally, a great number of educational and information efforts are taking place across the country. These initiatives are not centrally coordinated, although several organisations offer their workshops and information events within several counties.

Following the first sensational cases of Austrians joining Islamist-jihadist groups in Syria and Iraq in 2014, governmental agencies (including several ministries in the fields of

¹⁵ <http://www.neustart.at/at/en/>

justice, education, family and youth, integration etc.) started initiatives to counter the growing trend of radicalisation and violent extremism. Beside the main efforts (*Extremism Information Centre, RAN Austria*, special task force in the Ministry of the Interior and others) the government announced in January 2015 a special budget for information and counter narrative workshops as well as additional personnel in schools and other educational and youth-related institutions (Kogelnik 2015). Since then, a great number of initiatives and groups held events throughout the country (e.g. *erinnern.at*, *Friedensbüro Salzburg*, *ZARA*).

Conclusion

Since 2014, the year when increasing numbers of young people left Austria (similar to other European countries after the proclamation of the so-called Caliphate in June 2014, cf. Neumann 2015) and a particularly spectacular and shocking case of two Viennese school girls who joined Syrian ‘Jihad’, the phenomena of Islamist radicalisation and violent extremism, homegrown terrorism and the threat from Jihadism were on top of the public agenda in Austria (Schmidinger 2015).

From 2014 to 2015, a first phase of consternation and shock featured the public debate and sparked first events and initiatives discussing the newly emerged issue. The year of 2015 brought Islamist terrorism and the threat stemming from Middle Eastern movements and developments to Europe: in January, French-born radicals attacked journalists and Jews in Paris; ten months later, the French capital was hit by a series of terrorist attacks across the city, leaving more than 130 people dead.

Starting with 2015 governmental agencies and private initiatives began a wide range of new programmes and pilots. As the issue became more severe and imminent, when more and more cases of Austrian ‘foreign fighters’, returnees and information about radicalisation trends amongst certain diaspora and ethnic groups in Austria were publicly discussed and sensationalised, concerned citizens, political and administrative stakeholders as well as

academia became active and tried to shed more light on the unacquainted phenomenon of (youth) radicalisation and (planned) terrorist activities.

Combined with the historic peak of refugees from Muslim countries in 2015 and 2016, of which Austria received a fairly large part, the public discourse deteriorated and shifted towards a broad suspicion against Islam and Muslims (Götsch 2016). Tougher policy measures were the result and so far reduced the general sense of security amongst the Austrian population.

For the domains of youth and family work on the one hand and criminal justice and prison detention tutoring on the other, the issue of Islamist radicalisation and violent extremism posed a new and complex challenge (Prinzjakowitsch 2017). Between 2014 and 2017, official measures to counter the threat and meet the new challenging situation were elaborated and implemented within all relevant governmental agencies such as the Ministries of the Interior, Justice, Family and Youth. Repressive and supportive approaches (comprising prevention, disengagement and deradicalisation programmes, cf. Mastroe & Szmania 2016) were running in parallel, as were governmental and non-governmental efforts. As regards the latter, a comprehensive coordination between relevant actors – such as the now established cooperation of the non-profit association *DERAD* with the Ministry of Justice – came along reluctantly and still poses one of the greatest tasks for a comprehensive deradicalisation strategy in Austria.

Therein, Austria is to some extent similar to other countries and the whole field of countering violent extremism and jihadist radicalisation:

“Despite its impressive growth, CVE has struggled to establish a clear and compelling definition as a field; has evolved into a catch-all category that lacks precision and focus; reflects problematic assumptions about the conditions that promote violent extremism; and has not been able to draw clear boundaries that distinguish CVE programs from those of other, well-established fields, such as development and poverty alleviation, governance and democratization, and education” (Heydemann 2014, 1).

While other European countries that have been confronted with actual terrorist attacks such as Germany, the United Kingdom or France are already far more advanced in developing a comprehensive strategy and facilitating partnerships amongst governmental agencies, non-governmental initiatives and academia (cf. Koehler 2017, Mastroe & Szmania 2016), this effort is still in its infancy in Austria. The examples presented and outlined in this article show some progress such as the increased collaboration between governmental agencies and ministries with organisations such as *DERAD* and *Neustart*. On the other side, the shortcomings are no less obvious: little systematic and in-depth research has been done on radicalisation and deradicalisation efforts in Austria, both empirically-based study reports as well as more theoretically-based and internationally comparative studies (cf. Koehler 2017, Mastroe & Szmania 2016) are necessary to soundly evaluate Austria's current and future state in this field.

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