



# 'Doing State' in a Civil Society-Based Fashion: The Standards of Exit and Rehabilitation Work—and the so-called “Inter-Agency Cooperation with Security Agencies”, in Germany and Europe

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## Abstract

Confronting predominantly ‘securitized’ governmental PVE programmes, this contribution sums up a decade of independent European research on good practice in ‘preventive counselling and intervention’—and provides ‘good governance’ standards in PVE policy-making and program design. Particular emphasis lies on controversial forms of inter-agency “cooperation with security authorities”, e.g. “joint case conferences” under suspended data protection.

After presenting a simplified conceptual framework: PVE-Education versus -Intervention, good practice guidelines are given: “trust building—relationship work” relying on uncompromised “confidentiality”; balance confrontational and accepting/supportive communication with clients, practice the “narrative/open-process mode of interaction”, including “group settings” with emphasis on “social/emotional learning”, on secondary level “ideological conflicts”, while maintaining particular attention on “gender role and sexuality-related” issues. Good governance PVE-programming means: strictly adhering to a

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“cross-phenomenon/non-partisan basic concept” including different anti-democratic phenomena, thus providing “non-stigmatizing” procedures; protecting unalienable “privacy of client interaction” by a “one-way street principles of data exchange”, embedded “in municipal social services”; providing independent “quality development” and “formative/participatory evaluation”, preventing “systemic losses of quality” due to “industrialization, bureaucratization and politicisation”; facilitating an independent institutional framework such as a “professional chamber of PVE interventionists”—thus upholding the division of functions/powers as essence of democratic societies.

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### Keywords

Good practice principles in ‘preventive interventions’ ·  
‘good governance’ in PVE programming · Trust building and confidentiality ·  
‘securitization’ of prevent work · ‘joint case conferences’ ·  
Cooperation with security agencies

### Introduction<sup>1</sup>

The great task of protecting our free, democratic societies from their risks and adversaries has very often been understood in a narrowed—and „securitized“—way. This has led us to adopt a predominantly security focus, constantly looking at possible extremists/terrorists. Accordingly, we have all too often felt called upon, even in our educational work, to look out for ‘young people who might become extremists’. Only slowly has the realization set in that this violates the humanistic principles of youth work and work with clients in general. This is also and especially true when we are dealing with young people for whom we must reasonably assume that a danger can emanate from them—as is the case with the addressees of the distancing and exit counselling.

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<sup>1</sup>A German translation of the article is available, as part 1 and 2 of the publication series “Distanzierungsarbeit” (Distancing and Deradicalisation Counselling) on Cultures Interactive’s websites largely reflects the content of this article (cf. <https://cultures-interactive.de/en/articles.html>)

This security focus of our work is undoubtedly also due to the fact that in most countries—and also on the exemplary level of the European Commission—the field of extremism prevention has been placed in the departments of the interior and with the security agencies. Yet prevention is not well placed there at all. After all, interpersonal work on pedagogical, counselling and therapeutic processes that aims at initiating and facilitating changes in the behaviour and attitude of young people does not primarily belong in the realm of security agencies. Rather, these areas of responsibility correspond to the ministerial departments of social affairs, health and education, whose main purpose is to enable the personal development of individuals as well as that of society as a whole.

This fundamental design flaw is inherent in the structure of European extremism prevention, which has been causing great friction and loss of value for some time. It additionally draws our attention to the following: the two aforementioned basic pillars of modern democratic constitutional states—the security agencies on the one hand and the stakeholders and practitioners of social affairs, health and education on the other—must interact well with each other. Above all, they must also work accordingly with civil society organisations and professionals who represent the non-state and not primarily business-oriented actors in democratic states. Without this cross-cutting interplay of different resources, we as a free democratic society are incapable of acting to our fullest potential. This can be particularly obvious regarding the addressees of distancing and exit work (deradicalization), who occasionally can be quite dangerous to themselves and others. For these addressees, most of whom are already delinquents, security agencies are naturally already involved. It is therefore all the more important to find a mode of interaction between security agencies and civil society practitioners of distancing and exit counselling that enables them to complement each other in working together, but also clearly demarcating from each other.

Based on this rough draft of society in the context of current initiatives of preventing extremism, the following section will outline the basic methodological principles of distancing/exit counselling. It will highlight the hallmarks of good practice in governmental program design, as well as the standards of good practice in the institutional framework required by society as a whole, the implementation of which does not yet appear to have been successful in European practice. Therefore, the last third of this article will discuss the societal blueprint implicit in our major efforts to prevent extremism in greater detail, as well as the central issues of good inter-agency cooperation between civil society and security agencies.

## **1 Client Groups and Conceptual Classification**

### **1.1 Distancing Work/Exit Counselling—What is it? And Who are the Clients/Addressees?**

Distancing/exit counselling is about supporting people in distancing themselves from Islamist, right-wing extremist, or otherwise anti-democratic or anti-human attitudes. Young people in particular, who have not yet committed a crime but have attracted attention with pertinent statements at schools or in youth clubs, should be approached as early as possible. This is worthwhile, as adolescents are still at this point in a trial and orientation phase. With targeted interventions, they can often be coached into adopting a more constructive and pro-democratic image of themselves and society.

The offer of distancing/exit work is therefore directed at adolescents and young adults who are on the spectrum of extremist or anti-human rights and anti-democratic attitudes based on statements, behaviour or codes (external appearance, clothing, brands/accessories, their political or religious symbols, music/texts). These may include, for example, racist, anti-Semitic, ideologically or religiously based attitudes and actions, or attitudes and actions that have aspects of group-based enmity/hatred (GBE) or ideologies of inequality. Gender- and sexuality-related prejudices and devaluations often play a special role, as do anti-Semitic, racist and xenophobic enemy images.

On an emotional level, these young people often tend to act out hateful and violent affects, while on a cognitive level there is a susceptibility to conspiracy theories. The social relational structures in which the young people move within their environment and in their peer groups often exhibit high levels of dependency and assault. Overall, it is not uncommon for these individuals to present multiple challenges involving school/education, family, delinquency/criminal justice, (mental) health/substance abuse, and more. These are related on a social level to challenges of social cohesion in the community. However, this is far from always the case, as similar needs for action can also be found among young people from more secure circumstances. Some adolescents and young adults in this groups already have concrete sympathies for and involvement in extremist scenes, which is why sometimes—in mixed social spaces—we also speak of outreach work to distance oneself from the scene and to prevent people from entering it.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> See the section on “Einstiegsprävention” in JUMP (2020), pp. 111–139.

An offer of distancing work in different settings and procedures can motivate these adolescents and young adults to move away from the mentioned anti-human rights and anti-democratic attitudes and ways of acting and to open up prosocial ways of life for themselves as in human rights and constitutional law. In this process, young people develop, for example, the skills to deal with conflicts and emotional tensions in an adept and constructive manner. Over all though, it is a wide range of personal development and change that is specifically stimulated for each individual.

## **1.2 Clarification of a Confusing Conceptual Framework—Education versus Intervention**

The measures of PVE and overall prevention of anti-democratic or anti-human rights attitudes are often classified as primary/universal, secondary/selective and tertiary/indicated. However, these classifications, taken from the field of health care, are controversial in professional practice. Among other things, it is critically noted that the concept of primary prevention sees all participants in educational and counselling programs primarily as potential problem carriers (e.g., as “extremists”) and thus implicitly applies a risk- and deficit-oriented pedagogy. This is known to have many disadvantages and unfavourable side effects. Another point of criticism would be that the theoretically differentiated levels can hardly be distinguished from each other in real intervention practice, e.g. in schools and youth work. Therefore, this discussion will be taken up here and ultimately the suggestion will be made to apply a merely two-tiered concept of societal action, which provides for measures of i) civic education and youth work on the one hand and ii) occasion-related interventions on the other hand.

### *How useful is the concept of prevention?*

In the practice of pedagogical work, we repeatedly experience that the boundaries between so-called secondary and tertiary prevention or those between distancing and exit work are fluid, while at the same time the basic methodological lines of these fields of work are quite similar. This even applies in part to aspects of so-called primary prevention. Also, the personal and communal needs associated with these three levels are in reality always present in complex mixes. For example, anyone who conducts a pedagogical project day of promoting democracy at schools will usually have to deal with a whole range of requirements. These range from a primary need for information and education in

the context of civic education, to a need for discussion and debate that may be secondary, to the need to initiate a targeted intervention of (tertiary) exit work.

This wide range of different needs often also extends to the various forms of so-called extremism, sometimes even at schools or in rural communities when children and young people of German origin and refugees attend the same school. It should be emphasized at this point that this mixture of needs and levels is by no means a fundamental problem. Quite the contrary, because here, too, the following applies: as different as the phenomena may appear and be in many cases, the basic methodological lines of pedagogical work not only at the different levels but also in the different fields of work of preventing religiously based and right-wing extremism as well as other forms of anti-democratic and anti-human rights attitudes largely coincide (cf. Notes 11 and 14). Furthermore, it is true that the immediate juxtaposition or coexistence of the phenomena is a methodological resource for the work, as can be seen, in the numerous initiatives of working across phenomena.

What actually presents a problem of the complex mixtures present in real social life is the fact that the three levels designed in the theoretical abstraction, as well as the phenomenological fields of prevention, are also fortified and continuously demanded by the academic and administrative structures. The various departments, program units, divisions, funding lines, prevention councils, etc., each established for right-wing extremism, for religiously based radicalisation, and for other forms of anti-democratic or anti-human rights attitudes, often pose major obstacles to concerted, society-wide and non-stigmatising action. These create numerous funding-law barriers and jurisdictional conflicts that may impede work and sometimes thwart funding altogether. Consider, for example, the suggestion currently circulating among professional colleagues—in 2020/21—that responsibilities for tertiary and secondary prevention have been administratively divided between two different federal ministries, which are also associated with two different party political alignments. However (in)accurate such an assessment may be, the example illustrates that abstract-administrative and partly politically connoted arrangements can often lead to great remoteness from the subject matter and corresponding losses in the effective implementation of prevention programs.

It is not necessary to go into the other serious effects that these abstractly separated structures have. For example, there are unavoidable stigmatization and polarization effects whenever and wherever action is taken under the explicit banner of preventing Islamism or right-wing extremism. This is instead of working on both together across phenomena, or targeting phenomena of GMF/ group hatred and/or conspiracy narratives in their entire breadth and also in the so-called centre of society.

Anyone who is directly involved in practice and wants to work effectively and successfully, can confirm that the prevailing terminology in the field of so-called extremism prevention is not only confusing, but often completely unhelpful—and this weighs heavily. As is well known, theoretical concepts should not be right or correct or exist for the sake of mere order; rather, the central function of concepts is to be helpful operationally, i.e., to provide orientation and assistance in finding solutions to existing (social) problems.

That the terms of our field are often so unhelpful may stem, among other things, from the disease and medical analogies from which some of them have been derived. For example, the relevant literature on what is termed extremism prevention consistently refers to the Canadian psychiatrist Gerald L. Caplan, who in 1964, referring to a model of the *Commission of Chronic Illness*, spoke of primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention. In doing so, Caplan distinguished the three areas primarily on the basis of when an intervention is intended to prevent an undesirable development, either early on or when the undesirable development becomes apparent or afterward to prevent its recurrence (cf. Caplan 1964, p. 23). In addition to Caplan's model, the categorization of Robert S. Gordon is often used, who, also in the medical field, distinguishes between universal, selective and indicated prevention and focuses in his logic more on the different groups of addressees of the measures (Cf. Johansson 2012, p. 3). Gordon's system is often seen "as a modern variant ... of the 'old familiar' terms primary, secondary and tertiary", which is not conclusive in some respects (Cf. Ben Slama 2020, p. 445).

Therefore, individuals who are addressed by (tertiary) prevention measures—i.e., exit counselling—display attitudes and behaviours defined as problematic. This is firmly inscribed in their personality structure and can be classified as, for example, a consolidated extremist worldview with aspects of anti-democratic and anti-human rights attitudes. Or they may be persons who have already committed relevant criminal offenses and thus present a "proven risk". Secondary or selective prevention, on the other hand, would rather refer to "groups/persons with an increased risk or those who are about to commit an act" (Ibid.). In the field of right-wing extremism prevention, for example, this has been narrowed down so that this group of young people is understood to be "at risk of or oriented towards right-wing extremism" who, "viewed in terms of the process, have not yet entered into a consolidation process of their right-wing extremist orientation—or at least are not far advanced there". Or they are those, who "are not firmly integrated into right-wing extremist scenes and movements". However, this also includes "mostly individual young people or situationally changing 'small collectives' of two to three, four people", "which have neither the size nor the structure of cliques and are either 'below' the degree of self-organization of

these social associations or(/and) are connected to a broader, but then also mostly rather non-committal scene network” (Möller and Schuhmacher 2013).

On the basis of the different attempts to delimit the terms and groups of addressees, it becomes apparent that especially the practitioners, who carry out the work directly and are accompanied by intervision and (self-)evaluation, are in a very favourable position to contribute to a clarification of the terminology. In the practice of civic education, for example, it has been clear for quite some time that educational and youth work, which is usually classified as primary prevention work—and also the large field of civic education—decisively speak out against the proverbial “securitization” of their work. This places young people under general suspicion instead of recognizing and supporting them in their potentials.<sup>3</sup> There are good reasons for disputing the usefulness of the term “primary prevention of extremism” as a whole. Other authoritative authors from civil society and independent research also complain about the “successively increasing securitization”, which also places the advisory fields of action under a security policy prism (Cf. Schuhmacher 2018 and Kiefer 2021).

Furthermore, voices from the field of so-called integration promotion also reject the “securitization of educational measures” for good reasons (Qasem 2019, p. 6.). These “preventative measures” are not only improper, they argue, they also undermine all human rights education processes. It ultimately supports “violent exclusion mechanisms” and reinforces “securitized power relations” that run counter to the goal of social resilience and solidarity (Ibid.).

If one also takes the above-mentioned complex situation in the real social contexts of so-called primary prevention (e.g., schools, communal youth facilities) as well as the large methodological proximity of so-called secondary and tertiary intervention procedures into account and the “blurring of the boundaries” between the two fields of intervention (i.e., between “selective and indicated prevention” (Cf. Glaser et al. 2020)), a new conceptual system of great clarity emerges from the perspective of practitioners. This new system would recognize a fundamental, methodologically relevant difference only between two areas of action: namely between the area of education, upbringing and youth

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<sup>3</sup>“It is conspicuous that, in addition to educational and social work institutions, security authorities are also heavily involved; this is the case to such an extent and with such institutional effectiveness that there has been talk for some time of a “securitization” in the sense of security authorities over-shaping prevention work and political education”. (Federal Ministry for Family Affairs, Senior Citizens, Women and Youth 2020, p. 128). Further: Bürgin (2021) and Schuhmacher (2018).

work on the one hand, which supports individual development and personality formation, and the area of occasion-related preventive intervention on the other hand, which aims at behavioural correction and personal development (Meilicke and Weilnböck 2021a, b).

It is also noteworthy here that in this new conceptual system, the question of which phenomena and intensity of democratic hostility and group hatred are involved in each case is of significantly less importance than the questions of pedagogical methodology. These are largely of a cross-phenomenon nature, i.e., apply across all different forms of anti-democratic radicalisation. In this respect, occasion-based intervention is per se set to be cross-phenomenal, in that it focuses less on unit-logical categorizations and more on questions of effective pedagogical methodology—and these are predominantly the same or similar in the various phenomenon areas (cf. 2. below on the “guidelines”).

A stringent further development of discourse and methodology on the basis of this simplified, cross-phenomenon systematics drawn directly from practical experience—as well as a corresponding reorganization of responsibilities, budgets, program units, etc.—could presumably increase the effectiveness of the work and its sustainable embedding in the regular structures. Above all, however, it would also prevent the polarization and stigmatization effects that have often emanated from previous concepts and program logics.

Within this more appropriate system (education vs. event-related preventive intervention), distancing work can be understood as the dimension of preventive intervention that supports clients in turning away from anti-human rights and anti-democratic attitudes and behaviours and instead developing human, pro-social and democratic behaviours and lifestyles for themselves. This indication for preventive intervention would then exist in principle regardless of whether the person has already been organized in a relevant way or has committed a criminal offense and whether the need to leave and distance oneself is manifest—or whether they can be located more in the zones of the so-called societal mainstream, which may nevertheless express or act out anti-human rights and anti-democratic attitudes.

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## **2 Methodological Guidelines—How is Distancing Work Carried Out?**

Distancing work is carried out using a variety of approaches and methods, but follows methodological guidelines by which it can be assessed and further developed. These guidelines have been developed over the last ten to 15 years in

numerous federal model and EU projects. For example, from 2011 to 2016, the “WG Deradicalization” of the “Radicalization Awareness Network” of the EU Commission<sup>4</sup> implemented a systematic procedure of intensive and long-term expert exchange, which involved several dozens of colleagues from different EU member states across actors and phenomena in a four-year process. Basic principles of good practice in preventive intervention were identified, which were formulated and ratified by the practitioners themselves as the “RAN Derad Declaration” without having to go through an official review or editing process by any governmental agencies.<sup>5</sup> Building on this and on its own work as well as on a network of academic collaborators<sup>6</sup>, the “Federal Working Group on Religiously Based Extremism” has developed standards for deradicalization in recent years<sup>7</sup>, while at the same time the EU project “Exit Europe” continued to review, expand and update the RAN Derad Declaration (Weilnböck 2021c and 2021d, also Weilnböck et al. 2015). Unaffected by this, the quality standards of the “Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Ausstieg zum Einstieg”<sup>8</sup> (federal working group on exit work with clients from right-wing extremism), which go back to many years of professional exchange, are also valid, as are the quality standards of the “Bundesverband Mobile Beratung” (Federal Association of Mobile Counselling in the area of right-wing extremism) and the “10 Theses” of the “Bundesweiten Netzwerk Offene Jugendarbeit” (Federal Network of Open Youth Work) in Austria (Bundesverband Mobile Beratung e. V. 2010 and Beratungsstelle Extremismus 2020). Of course, it should not be left unmentioned that most of the methodological guidelines of distancing work and preventive intervention correspond with “the wealth of experience gathered over decades” in the area of “youth social work” (Baer and Weilnböck 2019).

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<sup>4</sup>European Commission, n.d.

<sup>5</sup>Weilnböck et al. 2015, Weilnböck 2013, cf. also note 66. Significant preparatory work was done in the EU’s Belfast-based “Challenge Hate Crime” project (2008–11) under the leadership of NIACRO (Northern Ireland Association for Care and Resettlement of Offenders), with scientific support from Harald Weilnböck, cf. Weilnböck 2013 and also Thomsen 2012.

<sup>6</sup>In the context of the project “Research-Practice-Transfer in the Phenomenon Area of Islamist Extremism” (FoPraTEEx), made possible by the Federal Office for Migration and Refugees.

<sup>7</sup>Federal Working Group on Religiously Based Extremism 2021.

<sup>8</sup>Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Ausstieg zum Einstieg 2019.

*Building trust—relationship work*

The most important prerequisite for successful distancing work is establishing a sustainable working relationship, which is a trusting personal but not private relationship, in which basically both sides can give impulses, learn and undergo personal change and growth. For if personality development in a pro-social, constructive and human rights oriented direction is to be set in motion among young people in highly stressful situations, this can only happen through “social work, [understood] as professional relationship work” based on trust. This is also due to the fact that the mostly young addressees of distancing work are often characterized by mistrust, experiences of disappointment and fear/aggression affects and the development of a personal trust relationship is often a challenge (Cf. Rothballer 2018).

This requires an approach that initially does not focus so much on ideological, political or religious issues, even if “problematic statements” seem to call for apt counterarguments or seek provocation. Rather, the practitioners of distancing work initially offer their openness to a personal work relationship and have a corresponding attitude, which among other things, testifies to great personal honesty, responsiveness and transparency—and maintains unconditional confidentiality! In doing so, the practitioners act reliably and consistently, are able to provide information about themselves and, if necessary, are self-critical, show respect, appreciation and attentiveness to the young person and thus also model what an attitude of appreciation of others entails. With this basic attitude, the professional will then be able not only to act in a trust-building manner, but also to critically distinguish themselves from the clients in terms of content, and to confront and enter into conflict with them—be it ideological or personal. In doing so, they will fan out the conflict into its various aspects in a confidential manner and make it transparent, providing additional information and clarification in order to work through the issue together—on a mental and emotional level.

*The critical-approachable-attitude*

This approach to professional relationship work has also been termed the critical-approachable or the critical-accepting-attitude,<sup>9</sup> in order to also bring the proven working principles from youth and youth social work into the field of—human rights-oriented—extremism prevention and distancing work. In doing so, the

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<sup>9</sup>On the concept of the critical-accepting-attitude, see Baer und Weilnböck (2010). Further: Weilnböck (2011) as well as Weilnböck (2013).

sometimes quite irreconcilable polarization that exists in this field between so-called accepting and so-called confrontational approaches can also be balanced out. Ultimately, it is essential to recognize and accept young people—and individuals in general—as persons without failing to confront their possible hateful, anti-human rights or so-called extremist views and actions in a critically well-founded manner. This means taking the person seriously in everything they are, say and do. In this, the critical attitude is also supported by the humanistic concept of the universal dignity of each individual, which is anchored in the Basic Law and describes the “part of the human being” that is inalienable—and which makes a critical discussion with recognition of the individual’s freedom of choice possible in the first place.

#### *Maximum confidentiality*

Because of this basic humanistic concept, the setting of distancing work offers young people a safe and absolutely confidential space in which they can openly express their thoughts and experiences without being personally judged—and without disclosing any of what they say. This secrecy and confidentiality is essential for the indispensable relationship of trust or continuous trust-based work between client and practitioner. Without it, the usually lengthy and changeable processes of ideological distancing from certain ideologies—but basically all processes of (preventive) intervention and personal life counselling in general—cannot take place. Many young people may be unaccustomed to the experience of being given a confidential setting in which they can meet with personal interest and always be confronted in a well-meaning manner without being subjected to moral condemnation. Up to now, they have often been confronted primarily with moral rebuke—that, for example, racist or religiously based prejudices, glorification of the Nazi regime or the IS, etc., are in principle unspeakable—without, however, the personal-biographical experience and motivation factors behind such statements being tapped at the same time. This can lead to students who are susceptible to this sometimes drawing the conclusion that “you can’t talk about such things at school anyway” (Cf. Weilnböck 2021e).

#### *Narrative conversation—open-process approach*

The biographical-narrative orientation towards recounting experiences—as opposed to argumentation—is for this reason an important methodological guideline for conducting conversations in distancing work. Only those who recall and narrate pertinent personal experiences and thereby involuntarily relive them in part, supported and safeguarded by actively listening co-narrators, can process the experience mentally and emotionally in a sustainable way. This can then change their future experience and behaviour. In this context, a consistently

narrative approach to the conversation and the design of the intervention measure requires an approach that is open to the process and refrains from strict planning of content, e.g., in the form of thematic modularization.

This is especially true for political and religious issues. For here, too, one of the most effective ways of entering into a serious personal and pedagogically effective conversation about the views of young people is to ask them—narratively—about their individual experiences in the respective political or religious spheres of action. While putting aside all the “why” questions and discussions, which always generate pressure to justify oneself, one can in this way first inquire about the experience: Where does this actually come from for you? What was it like at that time/recently? Which people played(d) a role in it? What do they mean to you personally and what do you experience with them? In which situations that you experience does the political/religious become particularly important? How do these situations unfold and how do you experience the other people in them? What other experiences/situations does this remind you of? And what might you need in all of this? etc.

#### *Gender role and sexuality-related prejudices*

Within this open process, non-modularized approach, occasions that enable an examination of gender role and sexuality-related prejudices and devaluations should be perceived with particular attention, even if they do not initially appear in the person's explicit ideological and ideological statements. For understanding the views on gender roles of masculinity and femininity, i.e., the views of what characterizes a “real man” or what characterizes a “real woman” and the corresponding conformity pressure in groups, is not only quite naturally an important topic of youth work, but also essential for all areas of prevention of attitudes that are hostile to democracy and human rights. It can be observed that basically all types of so-called extremists are also sexist, misogynist and homophobic—and here the humanly closest temptation to either-or thinking and to the polarization of groups of people—the distinction between biological sexes—has already solidified. Therefore, in all ideologies of the spectrum of violent extremism—i.e., of anti-democratic and anti-human rights attitudes—ideas of inequality about men\* and women\* also represent an essential thought-guiding motive for action. In addition, gender role expectations are omnipresent especially in adolescence—already in pre-ideological spaces of action, so to speak, which are thus all the more accessible to pedagogical intervention.

Generally, girls and young women have long been perceived as less at risk and less present in so-called extremist scenes. However, research results and practical experience show, especially from the last ten years, not only that women\* are

definitely present in both Islamist-based and right-wing extremism, but also that they have an active and important role in these scenes (Cf. Weilnböck 2021e). The considerable participation of girls\* in right-wing extremist groups and in right-wing populist initiatives has also been brought to the attention of the wider public at the latest since the relevant film “Kriegerin” (“Combat Girls”) (2011) (Baer 2017). In the field of religiously based extremism, the example of the Hafidat A`isha brigade shows how much and in what way women\* were committed to the so-called Islamic State. This brigade, consisting of women\*, took on the task of monitoring the behaviour of women\* in public in a draconian manner and contributing to propaganda activities via social media.

With this in mind, gender-reflective work has increasingly become a methodological standard. On the one hand, this means that gender-specific offers for girls\* and boys\* groups are set up both in general pedagogical work and in preventive intervention. This gives young people the opportunity to discuss questions and uncertainties that they would not want to address in a gender-mixed group. Critical, gender-sensitive settings of girls\* and boys\* work can help to deal with the sometimes very stressful and detrimental demands of traditional ideas of femininity and masculinity. Empowerment approaches can provide targeted experiences of self-efficacy and impulses for personal development, also with regard to alternative gender role concepts. Above all, the gender-specific reasons for radicalization of young women\* and men\* can be explored and discussed, which is particularly relevant in distancing work, but can also be the subject of general pedagogical work. Gender-reflective methodologies can then be used analogously in gender-mixed groups and workshops.

### *Social and Emotional Learning—in triangulated and in Group Settings*

Narrative and lifeworld-biographical approaches are always closely linked to a pedagogical focus on emotional and social learning. Experience has shown that the distancing from or preventive intervention against anti-democratic and anti-human rights attitudes often depends less on cognitive learning or historical-political education. The promotion of social-emotional intelligence and biographical awareness of the clients plays a very important role. In this emotional intelligence, the personal experience areas of conflict, ambivalence, uncertainty as well as the affect areas of shame/guilt, fear/panic and aggression are of particular importance. This is also true in the case of resource-oriented perspective, the emotional states of joy and the individual experience of sense and meaning being important as well (Möller 2014). This social-emotional dimension is crucial for (intensive) civic education with hard-to-reach and/or vulnerable young people. scientific practice research.

Personal relationship work in the field of social-emotional learning is, however, frequently challenging for practitioners as well. They should therefore by no means hide their possible dismay or sadness when vehement anti-human rights or anti-democratic statements are made—especially if they or their acquaintances could feel personally hurt by them. If this is done in a transparent and informative manner—in a critical and approachable way—and without reproachful indignation or subtle devaluation, the young people feel all the more clearly that a hurtful effect can emanate from them. Therefore, limits must sometimes be set in public and semi-public spaces,—and one must distance oneself (!)—however, this can always be done in a way which does also avoid the break-down of the pedagogic relationship as such.

Particularly with regard to social-emotional learning, wherever possible, work should also be done in groups that are led in a process-open manner and in which the intensive pedagogical effects of the intervention are thus additionally strengthened. However, this requires a certain level of leadership skills with flanking options of a timeout area and supplementary individual work. A certain degree of heterogeneity is favourable for the composition of the participants, which supports the group dynamic drift toward diversification (this is always effective anyway). For the same reasons, many approaches intuitively follow a method of triangular relationship work in individual intervention as well (Weilnböck 2018a, b, c). The client is cared for jointly by two colleagues working closely together, who, as a tandem team, can nevertheless show a variety of internal differences (gender, origin, professional and ideological background), making them transparent as well.

### *Ideological and World View Conflicts*

If the relationship and the basis of trust—and, if necessary, the group dynamics—are sustainable and a narrative-friendly climate for personal exchange exists, the argumentative and confrontational paths can and should also be taken. This can involve a more detailed discussion of questions of an ideological, worldview or religious nature. This must then again and again also seek the connection to the respective personal experience background of the person within the respective ideological building. This in turn is helpful as a rule for the further deepening of the intellectual-theoretical discussion. Enlightening information and hints to self-contradictions can then also be better absorbed and accepted. If this personal experience background is basically accessible, young people who, for example, evoke the “discipline and order” of the “good old days of yesteryear” in pithy words will also be responsive to a confrontational question of whether they themselves would not have been massively threatened “back then”. Threatened

precisely by their often inappropriate and sometimes delinquent behaviour, their drug use or poor school performance. Furthermore, joint music or video analysis can be used to identify and discuss certain enemy images (“foreigners,” Muslims, “non-believers,” etc.) or world views from a personal prejudice perspective—as soon as a functional pedagogical relationship and thus the willingness of the young people have been created.

*“Functional Equivalents” replacing radicalised behaviour*

If this open-process method proceeds well, the last important vector of pedagogical support will then be able to come into play: Namely, since distancing oneself from a worldview and the corresponding social environment leaves great and painful personal needs behind, alternatives of binding membership in a group, of individual experience of meaning and sense, and of self-realization must be opened up—so-called “functional equivalents” (Möller 2014, p. 342 and Möller et al. 2021). These, of course, have to be found within prosocial and human rights contexts. To open them up for oneself is therefore often a personal venture in which young people should definitely be accompanied.

*Intensive Pedagogical Work*

A favourable conceptual and institutional denominator for the interventions of distancing and outreach exit work (reaching out to those who are not yet intrinsically motivated to seek exit counselling) may be the newly profiled academic field of intensive pedagogy (Baumann 2019). This concept cites three basic elements of—intensive pedagogical—client work processes: a) conveying reassurance/building trust (“de-escalating”), b) maintaining personal “presence” and awareness of the common work and developmental task, and c) having “conflict security” in attitude and setting, so that safe and systematic handling of conflicts is always possible (Baumann 2015). In doing so, intensive pedagogy always refers to psychological and youth psychiatric resources, yet without the pedagogue losing their self-understanding as youth worker, educator or counsellor or claiming psychotherapeutic status.

Within this conceptual framework, distancing and outreach work are to be understood methodologically as intensive pedagogical interventions. In a broad (and adequate) understanding of the political and of education, these interventions can also then be understood as “intensive civic education”. This is because the personal development tasks supported in the distancing work have their essential focus in conveying the ability to participate as a committed citizen in a democratic, open and human rights-based society and to help shape it (Weilnböck 2020). This synthesis of social, civic and emotional education in the context of

distancing processes becomes concise, for example, in the development of non-violent conflict resolution strategies, which can also be called 'strategies of dealing with controversies' in the language of civic education. This is because these strategies of dealing with conflicts and controversies always have an inherent democratic moment that enables young people to formulate their own positions peacefully and to stand up for them. This is also while recognizing divergent attitudes as such, tolerating them if necessary, or confronting them in a way that respects the other person as basically equal. A special added value of the concept of "intensive civic education" is that it makes it possible to understand civic education in certain contexts of application as an occasion-related preventive intervention. This would be without making it subject to the rightly criticized securing of pedagogical work at the same time. This intervention, too, would remain civic education, however, insofar as it is primarily aimed at supporting the ability and motivation for democratic participation and controversial debate.

#### *Methodological Approaches and Therapeutic Reference Resources*

Looking at the current field of distancing work, two general observations emerge: On the one hand, it is possible to identify—in the great variety of dedicated teams—the promising tendency that more and more approaches incorporate psychological and psychotherapeutic resources, e.g., interactional-psychodynamic based procedures (regarding patterns of self- and relationship regulation, cf. Denkzeit e.V.), approaches based on attachment theoretical psychology (cf. Jump e.V.), systemic counselling (mobile counselling teams against right-wing extremism), procedural elements from group-dynamic, narratological psychotherapy (cf. Cultures Interactive e.V) and several approaches related to client-centred psychological counselling, supervision or mediation.<sup>10</sup>

On the other hand, however, it is noticeable that the vast majority of methodological guidelines for distancing work and extremism prevention "have basically already been contained for a long time in the wealth of experience gathered over decades ... in youth social work" (cf. note 20). However, secure funding for regular structures of youth work and education as well as of specialized interventions is needed to ensure and further develop the quality of the work.

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<sup>10</sup>Cf. the program of the Summer School of cultures interactive e.V. 2019 as well as the training manual of the project "Exit Europe" on European distancing and exit work, conceived and led by cultures interactive e.V. (cf. Weilnböck and Harald 2021c).

### 3 Framework Conditions—Good Practice in Program Design

Good intervention practice also depends on corresponding quality standards in policy and program design in the field of prevention. However, the latter is not yet talked about systematically enough. Nevertheless, it is obvious that the regulations of the funding practice, the way in which groups of addressees are defined, whether a strong specification of areas of action and objectives is given, how the relationship between authorities and civil society-based practitioners is shaped—and many other factors of policy and program design have a very significant influence on the work. These factors determine how the projects applied for are designed, which prevention services and methodologies are available and, ultimately, to what extent good practice in preventive intervention can be achieved at all.

For these reasons, some principles and quality standards of good practice in program design will be discussed in detail below. For the practitioners of distancing work as well as the readers of this handout, it is important to be able to orientate themselves according to which criteria good practice in policy and program design is to be measured. Only then can they know what they—as responsible practitioners and partners of the national prevention program „Demokratie leben!“ (“Live Democracy!”) can and should work towards within the scope of their possibilities and what they can and should help with. Also, where and when they must decisively object.

In this context, the framework conditions for good and effective cooperation between state and civil society-based actors are of particular importance, with the relationship to the security agencies being especially crucial for distancing counselling. This is because prevention cannot be successful in the long term without a relationship to the security agencies. That is, if for this reason alone security agencies can establish many access points to clients with great needs and risks. Both in the areas of justice and the penal system, as well as through information that can be provided by the Office for the Protection of the Constitution in the so-called “pre-criminal” state, there are valuable opportunities to address and reach clients who are presumably at risk.

Anticipating the future, however, it can already be emphasized here that the overarching main criterion of good practice in the policy and program design of distancing counselling/preventive interventions has hardly been named and formulated in the professional debate to date. This is possibly because this main criterion has been taken for granted, namely the civil society nature and subsidiarity of the program logic. This overarching criterion stipulates that the

basic concept and detailed planning of an extremism prevention program must be consistently aligned with the fundamental principles of civil society, subsidiarity and sustainable social resilience. Subsidiarity at this point means above all the principle of democratic theory according to which the state should not do what civil society is capable of doing itself or what it can be put in a position to do. That is, a corresponding clarification of roles, differentiation of functions and mutual demarcation as well as correspondence between state and civil society tasks and actors must be developed. On the other hand, civil society-based practitioners must also ensure systematic quality development and reliable commitment to professional and ethical standards.

### **3.1 Cross-Phenomenon and Non-Partisan Basic Concept**

An essential framework prerequisite and quality standard for good practice in the programming of the field of preventive interventions or distancing work is that it is based on a cross-phenomenon and non-partisan understanding. This cross-phenomenon understanding takes all current and emerging forms of anti-human rights and anti-democratic attitudes and group-based hatred into account. It also refrains from any (party) political appropriation of this field of action and contributes in a proactive way to the prevention of such politicization. In this sense, one could speak of a non-politicized or depoliticized basic understanding of extremism prevention in the sense of preventing hostility in regards to democracy and humanity.

From a cross-phenomenon perspective, all aspects and areas of program design would be conceived and designed “as far as possible—initially independently of whether we are dealing with the phenomenon field of ‘right-wing extremism’ or ‘Islamist extremism’” or even other forms of hostility to democracy and humanity (Glaser et al. 2020, p. 473). For only under these framework conditions can social polarization and stigmatization effects be avoided through prevention and social resilience be promoted in the long term. Furthermore, all those methodological and operational synergies can be exploited which entails the aforementioned methodology of the so-called secondary and tertiary (sometimes even primary) prevention as well as the proximity in the methodology in the case of different forms of group hatred and anti-humanism entail.<sup>11</sup> In addition, it is possible to build on the synergies that arise from the

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<sup>11</sup> This is also emphasized by Glaser et al. (2020), p. 473.

mixed situations in the natural working contexts of prevention. Examples being those schools in rural areas mentioned above that are attended jointly by children and young people of German origin and refugees.

For the responsible practitioners, this quality standard for good program design results in the possibility and obligation to help constructively and, if necessary, to raise objections wherever political appropriation of or measures distant from the facts become apparent in a program of extremism prevention. It may also result in the principle of a cross-phenomenon and thus also depolarizing and stigmatization-preventing approach is not implemented sufficiently or as far as possible.

### **3.2 Embedding in Standard Municipal Structures and Support Systems**

Another important framework requirement for good practice in program design is embedding various measures of preventive intervention, e.g. distancing work, in the cross-cutting framework of regular municipal structures and assistance systems. This is due to specific and occasion-related networking, i.e., with family and youth welfare services, schools or employment agencies, and possibly also the health sector, etc., can decisively strengthen and optimize the effect of local distancing work with certain clients on site (cf. also below on “inter-agency cooperation”). This can and should also include good “cooperation with the public security agencies”, but by no means in the way that has been the practice in some places for some years in Germany and Europe (cf. Excursus II). Instead, comprehensive restructuring, precautions and demarcations between different actors and practitioners of prevention are required for this purpose, following the principle of a consistent “one-way street in the exchange of information” (Ibid.).

### **3.3 Quality Assurance and (formative) Evaluation**

A significant framework prerequisite for the sustainable further development of prevention/preventive intervention as a whole is the reliable involvement of adequate quality assurance, which can be ensured, for example, through measures of intervision and/or supervision, formative evaluation, but also methods of cross-collegial consultation. Scientific monitoring and research of practice in participatory research settings should complement this.

It is essential, however, that evaluation and quality development are conceived as far reaching and wide spread as possible. It should be implemented through an independent and association-like structured peer review process with the greatest possible responsible participation of all providers and professionals involved in the field, including academic support. This is because sustainable quality development requires mutual trust as well as confidentiality and a reference to collegiality to the field as a whole. For example, quality development in amongst distancing work should not only be thought as a separate agency (and potentially in competition with each other), but also and above all cross sector based and in relation to association structures. Within such a framework of professional collegiality, the participating civil society stakeholders and practitioners form, so to speak, a peer evaluation community that can and should be scientifically supported, yet acts independently and self-responsibly. This evaluation community works subject-specific and formulates and agrees on the quality standards of its own field of work. Building on this, it conducts mutual case consultations, intervision and formative case and method evaluations. In cooperation with academic support, it can successively further develop its methods.

For the development of such a procedure of association-like structured quality development through systematic procedures of peer review in a professional peer evaluation community, a federal working group could offer the appropriate framework. Subject—and case-related “evaluations would take place not only within the agencies, but also within the framework of meetings” of the actors and practitioners of the federal working communities or one of their programs. These cases would become an essential element of the field-wide joint work in a systematic way, as the Federal Working Group on Religiously based Extremism (BAG RelEx) suggests.<sup>12</sup> Such a peer review process can “ideally also include external evaluations and quality management systems” as well as scientific practice research.

As a long-term consequence, this independent, association-like structure within the framework of an over-arching federal working group of practitioners can and should set itself the goal of preparing the establishment of a subject-specific professional chamber. It would continue to professionalize and advance the field's quality assurance (Weilnböck 2021a, b, c, d, e, f, g). Such a chamber—for practitioners of distancing counselling and preventive interventions—would also then be able to reliably carry out the professional and legal self-control in

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<sup>12</sup>Federal Working Group on Religiously Based Extremism 2021.

methodological and ethical questions of doubt (cf. also note 70 on the “Alliance for a Right to Refuse Testimony”). This can be seen by other professional field-specific chambers, e.g., the relevant psychotherapists’ chambers. Moreover, this association-logical and civil society-anchored procedure of quality assurance would be much more able to meet the fears of the security agencies that public funds might be misused and not used for prevention but, on the contrary, for radicalization and recruitment. For, it is hardly conceivable for an associational peer review by colleagues within the evaluation community, along with academic practice research, to overlook any such misuse, in which practitioners would exert influence on their clients so that they maintain or strengthen their anti-democratic and anti-human rights worldviews—i.e., radicalise them. Though it must be mentioned that it is currently not documented at all to what extent such abuse has actually ever occurred in a substantial way.

In terms of quality assurance, procedures of top-down evaluation, for example by governmental structures or ministerial project funders, should therefore be avoided at all costs. It seems absurd in several respects for the ministerial funding agency itself—for example, through a “Federal Institute for Quality Assurance”<sup>13</sup>—to be responsible for the evaluation of civil society actors. This is because the power of such a federal institute, as well as any departmental or political interests, would impair the independence and professionalism of the evaluating assessment and thus also the scope of its impact. Furthermore, a federal institute (or a subordinate authority of a ministry or an NGO already growing into the status of a subordinate authority) would not be able to grant the relationship of trust and the confidentiality without which an effective evaluation cannot take place—as authority employees are in principle obliged to report to their ministerial superiors and bound by instructions. This would make it all the more impossible for such an agency or agency-bound federal institute to establish the collegial relationship with the whole field of NGOs and practitioners without which quality development of the field as a whole is utterly impossible. Not to mention the field specific competence necessary, which is not available in an authority in the first place. This would have to be created secondarily, which however would create double structures (cf. Weilnböck 2021f.).

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<sup>13</sup>Cf. Press and Information Office of the Federal Government 2020, also Cultures Interactive e. V. 2021.

It must also be noted here: An officially anchored top-down evaluation, for example by a federal institute, would thwart the development of an independent civil society-based quality and association development that takes place in autonomy, self-responsibility and through peer-supported procedures, as outlined above. Hence it would nip civil society and subsidiarity in the bud, which is the very substance of democratic constitutional states. Likewise, it would destroy the work already done by the federal working groups and competence networks (in the federal program “Live Democracy!”). These working groups have been committed for years and would then have no choice but to stop their work in order not to have to lead a reduced existence as, so to speak, expropriated structures.

For the responsible practitioners of distancing work in the nationwide field, this quality standard for good program design and evaluation results in the possibility, but also the obligation, to participate in a civil society anchored mechanism of quality assurance in the peer evaluation community and to participate proactively. Furthermore, constructive and emphatic objection may need to be made wherever top-down procedures of evaluation are to be used that are not autonomous and non-association-logical, but rather authority-anchored. These by their very nature are subject to official and political control and are in principle bound by instructions.

Looking ahead to the point made below regarding the “joint case conferences” of security agencies and exit workers, with the abrogation of confidentiality and data protection, it can be stated here that the current governmental plan for a “Federal Institute for Quality Assurance” and an officially anchored top-down evaluation is also based on the same fundamental misunderstanding of the nature of civil society and subsidiarity as the concept of case conferences.

For similar reasons, a call such as that of the European Commission of Home Affairs or the EU Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG Home Affairs), which in 2020 in its funding line “Internal Security Fund—Police” explicitly calls on applicants in Europe to submit funding concepts that develop “instruments to assess the credibility of NGOs”, can only be viewed with great concern (European Commission 2020, p. 6). It is hard to imagine a more explicit declaration of mistrust in NGOs and civil society. Just imagine if a German federal agency were to start using such “instruments” to assess the credibility of German NGOs in the field (and in the process, for example, flag supposedly Islamist or supposedly left-wing extremist NGOs). Especially since only a few years ago it was established by inquiry to the Bundestag that the federal program “Live Democracy!” had conducted an unsubstantiated and covert security check of dozens of NGOs at the instigation of the Federal Office for the Protection of the Constitution (Weilnböck 2018a, b, c).

### **Excursus I: Preventive Planning against Systemic Loss of Quality—Using the Example of Industrialization and Bureaucratization of Social Fields of Action**

An important general criterion of quality development of good program design in the field of extremism prevention concerns its organizational or organizational-dynamic level. This criterion refers to the need for planned prevention of those quality losses that have systemic causes and therefore affect not only individual agencies, but its policy context as a whole. This need for prevention remains largely unrecognized or unacknowledged, although it is now relatively evident in numerous respects.<sup>14</sup> Also, phenomena of systemic quality loss are often not or not sufficiently accounted for in regards to evaluation and scientific practice research. Instead, it often is taken for granted that the quality of the field of action and the program design as a whole is adequately covered by the evaluation of individual agencies or—in the best case—individual areas such as distancing work. This, however, is not conclusive in terms of organizational psychology. For the programs and their program logics themselves, too, always require evaluation—i.e., concept evaluation. This applies even if the political factors of influence were not as pronounced as they are in the area of PVE.

Experience has also shown that the need for planned prevention of systemic quality losses is particularly acute when a field of action is experiencing high growth rates or an exponential increase in government and other funding as well as in public and political attention. It is, after all, a basic observation in organizational psychology that when growth dynamics of this magnitude occur, many different interests, some of which are remote from the field, always have an impact on an area, so that improper compromises, and thus systemic quality losses, are almost inevitable. For example, such non-specialist interests and ambitions may aim in economic and/or political and/or carrier—or career-logical strategic directions. They may sometimes be reflected as business and career interests, as a breach of rules of collegial fairness, or as legally relevant violations of competition law. Furthermore, in such framework conditions, dynamics of the formation of groups of providers with similar business interests can always be expected or have been observed for some years. These are sometimes also characterized by an increasing closeness to the state and a loss of

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<sup>14</sup>At best, these needs and risks are addressed in a cursory manner under keywords such as the concept of industrialization or bureaucratization of prevention – including securitization. Cf. e.g. Weilnböck (2019).

professionalism and result in a reduction of social diversity and methodological diversity of providers and approaches. Furthermore, there seem to have been cases of breakups and asset-stripping of existing NGO structures and the artificial creation of new NGOs which are politically supported by the state.<sup>15</sup> This can be seen i.e., as the dynamic of curtailing the independence of NGO that originated in civil society. Within the official structures, there may be comparable dynamics of impulses and interests from outside the field, which might have political or strategic causes, for example—and also result in systemic quality losses.

Such losses in quality—and even more: endangerment of or damage to civil society as such—occur mostly involuntarily and extend across all areas. They are also often perceived only belatedly and admitted only hesitantly. Furthermore, experience has shown that there is a great deal of resistance to remedying such systemic losses. This may also have to do with the fact that in the course of the encroachment of not professionally related interests (as mentioned above), dependencies and collusions of interests always arise as well. This, e.g., can be observed between state and civil society actors. Nevertheless, it is undoubtedly thorough independent research into these developments—which must first be clarified as precisely as possible in terms of their evidentiary basis—would do an important service to our work on the further development of our democratic constitutional state.

All the more, the great importance of civil society and subsidiarity as central framework requirements for good practice in program design now becomes apparent here once again. Furthermore, the obligation of the responsible practitioners of civil society to be clearly aware of the risks of systemic quality losses due to special interests which are not of a work related, professional nature becomes obvious. They should be pointed out when necessary, and worked on proactively to correct them. In this regard, even small steps are effective. For example, the establishment of a program-related ombudsman or mediation office could help clarify disruptive influences caused by interests, situations in which the independence of civil society organizations is endangered, or conflicts arising from such environmental dynamics. In this way, some damage could possibly be prevented in advance. Effective prevention and quality assurance could also be ensured, which minimizes the risks of systemic quality losses as

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<sup>15</sup>Cultures Interactive e. V. 2022 (in preparation).

a result of special interests that are distant from the subject matter. Hence, civil society players should always be aware of their own subsidiary obligation to ensure systematic and disciplined quality development and reliable adherence to professional and ethical standards.

### **3.4 Confidentiality and Protection of Privacy**

The presumably most important basic institutional prerequisite for positive implementation of preventive interventions, such as distancing work in particular involving those with criminal charges—is that the secrecy and confidentiality of the clients' exchange within the work process absolutely remains unobstructed. This is because processes of distancing and exit counselling are of extremely sensitive nature, since—comparable to coaching, psychosocial counselling or psychotherapy—a great deal of personal and possibly also justiciable information must be discussed. This logically leads to the quality standard explained above: “Building trust—relationship work”. This standard is committed to the creation of trusting personal relationships. It can only be achieved through intensive educational social work, which is understood as “professional relationship work”—and this requires unconditional, unobstructed confidentiality.

For this reason, such services can generally only be provided by civil society practitioners who are not subject to personal reporting obligations or even instructions from any governmental authority. This also applies to the processes of formative evaluation of this work accordingly (cf. below on evaluation). In closed institutions (schools, judiciary), these practitioners thus work as external service providers, but in positive agreement and cooperation with the institutional staff. In this way, they are all the more able to be a continuous reference person for their clients even during a transition from one institution to another and to avoid experiences of relationship breakdown in care responsibilities. The autonomy and independence of the external practitioners, which makes this confidentiality possible in the first place, would be secured by the above-mentioned, association-based evaluation and quality development in the peer review process, so that sustainable quality development is guaranteed.

### **3.5 Good Practice in Inter-Agency Cooperation**

Just as important and indispensable as the unbreakable confidentiality of all preventive interventions is, of course, the cooperation of all actors, mentioned

often before. An example being, in the reference above to the necessity of municipal networking and cooperation. In this context, the relationship between those working in civil society or professional service providers and those working for the authorities is of particular importance. Without this, good practice in the policy and program design of prevention cannot be achieved at all, which, as is well known, requires a whole society, cross-sectoral approach. Of course, the indispensability of cooperation with the authorities also highlights the need for confidentiality in interventions. This is because such interdisciplinary cooperation often implies the exchange of personal information and assessments.

The cooperation and, if necessary, the exchange of personal data with the authorities of social services, such as family and youth welfare, schools or employment agencies, and possibly also the health sector, etc., is sensible and comparatively problem-free. This is because it allows the support and promotion of clients to be optimized and made more efficient. Such cooperation with the authorities of the social sector—which can be realized not only bilaterally, but also in the form of help conferences—should, however, only take place under the condition of precisely defined regulations to protect the personal rights of the clients. This means in detail i) that the exchange always takes place transparently and with the explicit consent of the client. Whereby this consent must have been given of one's own free will and without any external pressure.<sup>16</sup> ii) Furthermore, this exchange must not take place generally and continuously, but rather on an occasion-related and justified basis for the benefit of the client and is minimized to the extent necessary for the occasion. Lastly, iii) the oral and especially written communication in the course of this exchange should be pseudonymized from the beginning, i.e., avoiding clear names. i.e., avoiding clear names and still easily identifiable aspects of the case. An exchange taking place under these premises, or a corresponding help conference, offers on the one hand the possibility of inter-agency and cross-actor synergy effects, also in the sense of professional quality development, and on the other hand respects the confidentiality of the exchange between client and professional counsellors. This must be maintained at all costs, without which a productive pedagogical working relationship simply cannot be realized.

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<sup>16</sup>Regarding “voluntary and informed consent of the client,” see WeInböck (2021c), also Rigotti and Weatherburn (2021): “The Data Protection and Legal Framework” of the EXIT Europe project, [exit-europe.at](http://exit-europe.at); therein, “Consent is freely given when the data subject is capable of making a genuine choice and there is no risk of deception, intimidation, coercion, or significant negative consequences if he or she does not consent” (p. 16).

## **Excursus II: The Inter-Agency Cooperation with the Security Agencies—and the so-called “Joint Case Conferences”**

On the other hand, the question of cooperation between civil society organizations and state security agencies presents itself in a more challenging way. By way of introduction, it should be said that the extremely desirable and significant interaction with public security agencies must be distinguished, from what has been established and implemented by governmental security agencies in Europe for some years now as “cooperation with security agencies.” This is because these “cooperations”, which seem to have exclusively concerned distancing or exit work in the area of so-called Islamism and thus tends to stigmatize this societal group, are currently and have for many years been carried out in a largely non-transparent manner without any evaluation. For this was implemented only at the level of official classified information, so that no sufficient documentation is accessible at the present time and therefore no actual expert discussion on this can take place.

Among other things, this situation has led to the unfortunate consequence that colleagues from the “cooperating” civil society NGOs in distancing and exit work are often sworn to secrecy and thus made confidential. This means that they are not allowed to share any information or assessments about the “cooperation” with their colleagues—while, paradoxically, the basic confidentiality vis a vis their clients is lifted. This not only hinders professional exchange among civil society colleagues, it also makes any evidence-based professional debate about the procedure of “joint case conferences” momentarily impossible. Hence, basically, everything that is discussed in the following can only be said with a certain reservation due to the lack of information sharing and transparency on the part of the authorities. It is true that the informal knowledge that has been accumulated and exchanged over the years can be regarded as substantial. However, precise and independent scientific research of the concepts and implementation practices of the “joint case conferences” and “cooperations” by means of reconstructive research methods is urgently needed and desirable.

It is hardly necessary to stress the great importance of these evidence-based clarifications. For the establishment of a structurally appropriate and trustful interaction with the security agencies is absolutely reliant on an evidence-based, independent assessment of the relevant facts from past practice and the overdue expert discourse on this practice. Only in this manner will it ultimately be possible to establish the much-invoked “relationship of equals” between the two actors. At present and in the past, this “relationship of equals” exists and existed only to a very limited extent. And at present, there was and is often no adequate

clarification of roles, differentiation of functions and division of tasks between the experts in distancing work/prevention and the security agencies.

This notwithstanding, the importance of good, complementary and role-clarified interaction between civil society practitioners and security agencies (versus “cooperation”) cannot be overestimated. In order to protect and strengthen a vibrant democratic constitutional state, it is indispensable, especially in the prevention of hostility toward democracy and human rights, to take the path of a consistent, whole-society and subsidiary approach.

The greatest challenge in this area seems to be posed by the so-called “joint case conferences” that have apparently been held between security agencies and selected civil society distancing workers for the last eight to ten years. These case conferences seem to focus on certain clients who have been assessed in advance as “security-relevant cases” or as so-called “endangerers”. The basis of this assessment does not, however, seem to be definitively clarified and in any case the term “endangerer” does not seem to have any legal foundation, but represents a “police working concept”.<sup>17</sup> Ongoing security and risk assessments of the clients apparently have been the most important subject of these joint case conferences. In the service of these ongoing risk assessments, the civil society practitioners of intensive educational interventions (distancing/deradicalization) have regularly exchanged—to a certain, indeterminable extent and with completely unknown effects—personal information and assessments from their client work with the security agencies. This seems to be the case today as well—and this practice apparently is set to be expanded and deepened in the future (see note 47). So far, this seems to have only affected individuals from the spectrum of so-called Islamism, i.e., individuals with a Muslim background.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup>According to Hunold and Raudsuz (2020): “The application of the term, i.e. the classification of a person as a ‘dangerous person’/‘endangerer’, is controversial, as it is primarily based on assumptions and findings of the security authorities, but results in intensified police measures and extended powers. For example, with the adoption of the new Police Tasks Act in Bavaria in 2018, police powers against a person classified as a ‘endangerer’ were significantly expanded. (...) Many federal states seek to deport ‘endangerers’ if they are foreign nationals. (...) An already existing concrete danger in the sense of police law is explicitly not necessary for this (...)”.

<sup>18</sup>The legal preconditions for the suspension of data protection with so-called ‘dangerous persons’/‘endangerers’ seem to have been prepared since the beginning of the last decade by the EU Commission in a directive (Directive No. 2016/680), which was established for “processing of personal data by competent authorities for the purposes of the prevention,

Exacerbating this situation is the fact that there are currently many indications of a strong desire on the part of the authorities to further “expand and deepen” these “case conferences”/“cooperations” with security agencies (Korn and Mücke 2020). This is despite the fact that these measures have so far been carried out almost in a kind of dark field and have completely evaded independent evaluation, scientific monitoring and solid expert discussion. At the same time, it must be pointed out that some of the civil society actors ‘cooperating’ with the authorities explicitly share this desire (see Korn and Mücke 2020). Although the wider circle of ‘non-cooperating’ civil society colleagues seemed to be critical of “case conferences”/ “cooperations”, they still lack an appropriate forum for finding a common voice on such issues (cf. “Quality assurance” above). Furthermore, according to informal information from agencies involved in so-called primary prevention—i.e., youth work and civic education—tendencies are emerging to also extend these “cooperations” with security agencies to this primary area, as well as to intervention/distancing work in less security-relevant cases. This leads to understandable confusion and scepticism regarding the status of civil society autonomy in the face of increasing “securitization” by state authorities. An increasingly frequently voiced question is the following: If civil society practitioners become special actors of authorities taken under an official pledge of confidentiality, what is then and for what purpose does one have the much-invoked civil society? All the more, from the perspective of some civil society practitioners (especially beyond the ‘cooperating’ agencies), the following fundamental concerns arise, which are currently being increasingly articulated.

1. The practice of joint case conferences between civil society distancing workers and security agencies staff regarding clients and the exchange of personal data that takes place there violates the inalienable confidentiality and secrecy of the counselling processes and the personal rights of the clients, their families and close social circles. In this context, the extent to which clients are given

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investigation, detection or prosecution of criminal offences or the execution of criminal penalties” and “in the interest of preventing an imminent perpetration of a crime, including terrorism” (13). To what extent it is true that this directive of the EU was introduced and advanced by Germany, on the basis of which assumptions this was done at that time and whether there were dissenting voices, belongs to the numerous unknown components of this important process with regard to the further development of European civil societies and should be the subject of a meritorious joint research endeavor.

the opportunity to consent (or refuse) in writing to the explicitly requested exchange of data is also of little relevance. After all, it is difficult to assume that consent is given “of one’s own free will” and “without any influence whatsoever” in the case of persons in prison or under surveillance by the security agencies (see also note 44).

2. The second major concern about the case conferences regards the personal well-being of the clients and the quality of the individual counselling relationships and processes, whose depth of effect depend on trust, complete confidentiality and continuous trust-building work (cf. above on the criterion “building trust—relationship work”). Given that case conferences imply exchange of data and continuous risk assessments of the client, doubts with regard to professional ethics are voiced. This is because trust is an absolute prerequisite for social or intensive pedagogical work with clients as is the case in any kind of work in fields of personal development-related counselling. Furthermore, the professional fields addressed here are always committed to a kind of Hippocratic Oath—the do-no-harm principle of all pedagogical measures (Rhodes et al. 2009). This principle demands that the helping measures be set up in such a way that any harmful effect for the clients under protection is prevented as best as possible. That this do-no-harm principle would be guaranteed in the joint case conferences, however, seems to be out of the question. On a purely operational level, it should be added that it is fundamentally contrary to the way intensive pedagogical or social work and behavioural therapy processes work—and that it would simply be disruptive—to organize meetings by working through standardized questionnaires on risk assessment.
3. Further, there are concerns about the viability of exit programs as such and as an important social tool that depends directly on the credibility and confidentiality of their practice. After all, distancing and exit assistance can only be perceived as a credible offer of a democratic and socially responsible society if it enjoys an impeccable reputation in the confidential handling of clients’ personal data. If, on the other hand, there is a regular exchange of personal data with the judiciary, the police and the Office for the Protection of the Constitution, many clients will hardly confide of their own free will. Nor will they hardly do so without then behaving strategically in their exchange with their exit counsellor. However, any strategic behaviour basically makes the trust and relationship-based and collaborative process impossible. Thus, the resulting practice could not really qualify to be called sustainable distancing work. The power of attraction and the ability to reach the addressees of distancing work in the relevant communities and areas of action would also be lower.

4. Furthermore, many experts are concerned regarding the rule of law and the democratic separation of powers. The well-intentioned interconnection of security agencies and socio-educational and socio-therapeutic counselling under the—now legalized—suspension of data protection (note 46) puts an essential aspect of the constitutional division of powers and functions in democratic societies based on the rule of law under tension. This division of powers should also be taken to heart, especially in the area of preventing anti-democratic movements. It seems all the more understandable, then, that civil society employees are quickly becoming concerned about a possible slide not only into securitization, but also into a kind of postmodern prevention-police state (Weilnböck 2021b). This is because civil society organizations have been found in each of the German states that have not wanted or been able to avoid this cooperation for many years, despite the questions that have arisen. The fears of a prevention-authority-state exist all the more at present, since in any case a “securitization” of prevention, youth social work and (civic) education is widely deplored (cf. Möller und Schuhmacher 2013).
5. Some of the practitioners fears are specifically that, under the impression of the presumed threat of dangerous people/ “endangerers” in the field of tertiary prevention, an example is being set for a practice of “cooperation” that could increasingly become a general expectation on the part of the state in other sectors of prevention and education (cf. the controversy surrounding the “prevent duty” for British teachers, who are required to process and document every suspicion in this regard (Thomas et al. 2017)).
6. Finally, in the practical implementation in the federal states, there seems to have been a tendency towards exclusive working relationships between one civil society actor and the respective state authority, so that associative structures such as federal working groups and corresponding quality assurance in the peer review process (cf. 3.3 Quality Assurance) could have less effect there or were indirectly prevented. This would raise concerns about the dependency risks and collusion of interests between certain state and civil society actors, which could hardly be avoided in this way and would not be conducive to quality assurance of the social instrument of distancing work (cf. above Excursus I on “systemic losses of quality”).
7. Moreover, apart from the fundamental concerns mentioned above, it is difficult for civil society practitioners to imagine from the outside what the special added value of such joint case conferences is supposed to be to begin with. To what extent can an improved risk assessment and ultimately an increase in general security be expected if exit counsellors and security officers maintain a continuous, mutual exchange of information, assessments, or fears about a

client? As a rule, neither of these professions has the basic qualifications for this. Only the profession of forensic psychiatric experts would represent a significant gain in competence here, who are therefore also involved in legal processes. The use of independent experts would also guarantee the essential division of functions of a democratic and human rights procedure. However, the exchange of personal client data between exit counsellors and security officers cannot promise any added value in public security at all.

With regard to civil society practitioners, it can be said that they are well aware of the difficulty of assessing risks that may be associated with their clients—and are increasingly seeking to produce helpful guidelines and training (e.g., along the lines of how psychotherapists assess suicidality). Relevant information from the security agencies can be of additional help to practitioners in individual cases and open up new options for client conversations, which some practitioners are happy to take advantage of. (Other practitioners refrain in principle from providing any secondary information that goes beyond event-related information on acute danger situations, in order to maintain as authentic a relationship with the client as possible). However, the fact that practitioners working in civil society and pedagogy continuously pass on information and personal impressions about clients to security police officials and the Office for the Protection of the Constitution for the purpose of threat assessment can hardly be helpful. This is only because of the procedure and the background of competence. And, as already mentioned, it would be at an unacceptably high cost for the entire system of exit work and the democratic and civil society constitution.

Given the many years in which these questionable case conferences have been conducted it seems all the more necessary to, at least, conduct some reconstructive research on them at this point in time. For many years these have been conducted under official secrecy, in order to be able to make further considerations in this regard. Along with this pending research and documentation, there are currently many indications that public safety would be most effectively supported if both partners—the security authorities and civil society distancing and disengagement agencies—each would first develop and optimise their own procedures of risk assessment and safety precautions. Interconnecting the two would naturally only make sense and be mandatory in the case of immediate imminent danger. Otherwise, these “two royal children” of inter-agency interaction would first have to fully learn to swim “in their own waters” instead of “rashly throwing themselves into the stormy waves to the other continent” (Weilnböck 2021a). This might even lead to a two-fold increase in security, which would presumably

be more effective and sustainable than a provisional and misleading makeshift solution soldered together from two basically unsuitable halves.

In the course of this very desirable reconstructive practice research, the question most certainly would also be discussed to what extent this seemingly exaggerated urge toward each other—and into the joint case conferences—is not simply due to the fact that “we are all afraid that something will happen” (Ibid.). This would be in addition to all the strategic interests that always have existed. Both the authorities and the civil society exit facilitators are understandably always afraid that one of their clients could commit an attack (which occurred frequently in 2020 alone (Cultures Interactive e. V. 2020)). Those involved in the program, attentive to the media, would possibly also harass each other with accusations. If this fear—and the still weakening mutual trust in each other—were the actual, unconscious motivation of the joint case conferences, then quite different precautions would actually be indicated. This might help us to find a professional joint and delimited way of dealing with the fear.

In any case, from the practitioners’ point of view, it can be stated: In light of these numerous and serious doubts regarding essential quality standards of good practice in the programming of prevention and distancing work interventions (confidentiality/personal privacy, civil society/subsidiarity, division of powers or functions, transparent policymaking, sustainability/sustainable security, and societal resilience, among others. a. o.), a very concrete possibility or an urgent obligation arises for practitioners from civil society to object and constructively contribute to remediation. In other words, this obligation to object already seems to have arisen with some urgency some ten years ago and the opportunity was obviously missed.

### **Excursus III: Coming to Terms with the Past in the Field of Extremism Prevention**

Why civil society practitioners obviously did not or could not perceive this obligation to raise professional and ethical objections and to take corrective action—and, of course, why this situation had become virulent in the first place (!) as a result of state action—should be the central questions of a still outstanding reappraisal of the past decade of inter-agency extremism prevention.<sup>19</sup> Such a

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<sup>19</sup>Here, one can always keep in mind the accompanying question of how this situation and the open questions and doubts with regard to the last decade of practice are related to the German and European history of state governance and social work action, including autocratic state structures; cf. e.g. Leinenbach (2020).

reappraisal on the part of both practitioners and authorities would in principle be of the utmost importance. Only the successful joint reflection and overcoming of the events of the immediate past would really put us in a position to arrive at a practice of inter-agency prevention of threats to democracy in the future that meets all quality standards of good program design in a democratic constitutional state.

With regard to this potentially very important dimension of the reappraisal, it can be assumed that the “cooperation” and “case conferences” would not have taken place if the employees in the field of extremism prevention had belonged to a firmly established, independent association of youth and youth social work. This would have meant that they would have been bound by the established professional ethics and the basic rules and quality criteria of professional conduct and work—and also, for example, the do-no-harm principle—which characterizes the field of youth work and youth social work. Probably then all forms of “cooperation” would have been transparently discussed and debated from the beginning and case conferences would have been prevented. However, none of this—independent association, established professional ethics—was and is the case in the relatively young field of model projects for the prevention of extremism and deradicalisation. These emerged in Germany around the year 2000 and were the result of special political processes. Rather, a very unique and precarious culture of model projects had emerged since, which has been kept at project status for an excessively long time, namely until today (due to the phenomenon of so-called “projectitis”).

Thus, the newly growing personnel of this model project culture did not belong to a common profession and rather had interdisciplinary affiliations and mixed qualifications (mainly religious scholars or social/political scientists and politically engaged, only since a few years also colleagues from the fields of counselling sciences/psychological counselling). Above all, these were predominantly young professionals who were and are extremely innovative, committed, willing to perform, ambitious, and sometimes also quite business-minded. They have also found themselves in a relatively unprotected professional situation, and, as I said, for an overlong, unfinished phase for about 20 years.

This culture of model projects, located in a kind of professional no-man's land, had arisen from the great political conjuncture of fear of terror—which was directed primarily against so-called Islamism and also against the population groups associated with it. Due to this political dynamic of fear—and its discourses and measures—this model project culture and its personnel were and are affected by a fundamental precariousness and ambivalence. These are not conducive to a goal-oriented professional development and quality management (cf. also above on “systemic quality losses”). This is obvious by the fact that over

20 years only few sustainable links between these model projects and the regular structures of social work or education and training could be created.

Not surprisingly, this political dynamic of fear seemed to result in a far-reaching construction flaw in German and European radicalization prevention right from the very start of the program's creation. The two realms that were directly related to one another—in an already asymmetrical, precarious relationship—(prevention and security agencies) were actually not very suitable for each other from the outset. After all, in many European member states, the responsibilities for radicalization prevention and deradicalization were placed ad hoc in the interior ministries and security agencies. Or corresponding programs were set up with a lead role (as is also the case with the European Commission), whereas the areas of action of prevention and rehabilitation—as already mentioned at the outset—by their very nature rather belong to the ministries of social affairs, health, family, which provide the measures of social welfare/security, (social) pedagogy/education, counselling and therapy. It seems all the more regrettable and unfortunate today that the practitioners located with the civil society partners, who de facto carry out the challenging work of preventive intervention, have for almost 20 years been in this less than appropriate assignment to the security agencies. They have remained there in a temporarily funded and thus extremely weak model project status, which has been maintained to this day due to political circumstances. Furthermore, it must seem almost inevitable in retrospect that this has resulted in the much lamented securitization of pedagogical intervention, which also seems to want to progress inexorably at present (cf. Press and Information Office of the Federal Government 2020, also Cultures Interactive e. V. 2021).

This highly ambitious culture of model projects in the professional no-man's land, (and their similarly ambitious equivalents within the authorities) therefore was and is, so to speak, a ready-made meal for that irrelevant political dynamic of fear of so-called Islamism. This being as well as distrust of certain population groups. Therefore, what probably would not have happened, or not to the same extent, with "seasoned youth workers" who belong to a solid profession and association and are committed to it, did happen. Because the far weaker partner of these inter-agency and cross-actor "cooperations", the civil society actors from the precarious area of the model projects, have basically been involved in an awkward situation and have allowed themselves to be entangled, and this still seems to be the case at present.

As a result, and viewed from today's perspective, this political dynamic, including the weakening of civil society actors that it has brought about, ultimately seems to have led to essential pillars of our democratic civil society conception

of the state being quietly suspended and thrown overboard, so to speak, as a disruptive load. Without this seeming to have attracted much attention so far (e.g., the above-mentioned pillars of the democratic-civil society/subsidiarity, division of powers and functions, transparent policy-making, protection of personality/confidentiality of client relations, sustainability/sustainable security, etc.). The fact that this imperceptible throwing the state's essentials of the democratic conception overboard, is one of the typical effects. The implicit intentions of terrorism is hardly comforting either. After all, we actually wanted to make it our supreme goal to withstand precisely this effect of terrorism in a clever way.

All the more, civil society practitioners in the field of prevention and distancing work today face the major task of becoming more deeply aware of the current situation and the processes of its emergence. In the sense of a joint retrospective reappraisal, it will always be necessary to reflect on one's own role and, if necessary, one's participation in it. This task basically also arises below the threshold of consent to joint case conferences. For it is possible that in other contexts and to a smaller and less noticeable extent, consent was given or no objection was raised, even though there were professional and ethical doubts. For further impetus of historical thinking back on this complex issue, reference could possibly be made to the history of the usurpation of social welfare functions by state regimes (Cf. e.g. Leinenbach 2020).

Beyond the appropriate pathos of democratic-logical moral obligation, however, such a reappraisal could also result in very promising and pragmatic perspectives on new methods and strategies of specific self-reflection, intervention and quality assurance. These would be similar, as expected, to the methods and strategies we use in our client work. They would, in any case, be very beneficial for the comprehensive organizational further development and systemic consolidation of work done. And also to the effectiveness of a national, cross-actor prevention program.

A farther-reaching, systematic study of the first two decades of policy and practice design of radicalization prevention in Germany (and possibly also in Europe) by independent academic research is additionally desirable. On a complementary level, a constitutional review would certainly also be helpful. In any case, independent research would—in addition to the formats of self-reflection and intervention of those involved—record, reconstruct and assess the action dynamics of the cross-program processes as a whole. These could favorably take place in a participatory setting of formative evaluation. Certainly, due to the obvious urgency, this research would focus primarily on those of the so-called “cooperations with the security agencies” and the joint case conferences in the first approach. This would be followed, if necessary, by more in-depth

research and overall assessment of the first two decades of program design in the field of action of radicalization prevention. This independent research would certainly also explore the framework of the deeper German history of “cooperative” relationships between the helping professions and the security agencies, due to which the principles of civil society and subsidiarity, which are often cited here, have such great significance in Germany today (see again Cultures Interactive e. V. 2020).

### **3.6 Toward good Interaction between Civil Society Practitioners and Security agencies**

The immensely valuable goal and result of this reappraisal/research and the subsequent reconceptualization and planning for the future would be to develop a new mode of role-clarified, complementary interaction between civil society practitioners and security agencies. This mode would then represent a whole society, inter-agency approach to prevention for the protection and strengthening of democracy that could serve as an international example. As already mentioned, this is particularly true for distancing and exit work, because the security agencies as well as the judiciary, the penal system and the Office for the Protection of the Constitution can create important access points to clients who are presumed to be at risk or affected.

However, it is all the more important in the sense of this reappraisal to see and acknowledge with clarity that the topic of “cooperation” and the relationship between these two central partners is heavily burdened at this point in time. For as already described above, on the one hand, it is basically known that such joint case conferences (for presumably eight to ten years) have been carried out in some federal states, presumably in different ways each with different effects. On the other hand, as mentioned above, there is virtually no official documentation and no independent scientific analysis and assessment of these measures.<sup>20</sup> They are subject to official secrecy, although touching on the essence of civil

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<sup>20</sup>At best, classified documents from the authorities circulate on the Internet with status reports from deradicalization working groups, which give perspectives on concretizing forms of cooperation or “alliance partnerships” with civilian counseling centers and mention declarations of commitment to cooperate under duty of non-disclosure – i.e., classified documents that should not be there on the Internet, but are there primarily because an appropriate civil society and academic discourse cannot take place.

society, subsidiarity and constitutionally guaranteed personal rights. The 'cooperating' civil society colleagues must also be discreet (for the protection of official secrecy, but not for the protection of the clients).

It is therefore not surprising that the "cooperations" are currently viewed with great scepticism by the wider circle of civil society actors—and that the positions between state and civil society actors have hardened in some cases. This has also put a strain on the important collegial relationship between civil society organizations and the development of the associative structures mentioned above. A few organizations seem to have moved very close to the state actors. Although they are civil society organizations, they may have assumed a status similar to that of subordinate authorities, without this being easily recognizable to the outside world. Moreover, these questionable modes of "cooperation" and "case conferences" have also been asserted from the German side in an offensive manner at the level of European member states (see the next point below).

In Germany, therefore, an important current framework condition for good practice in program design is to take sustainable measures to rebuild or restore cross-actor trust between security agencies and civil society organizations as well as among civil society organizations. The latter in particular have been seriously compromised as a result of the program design of the last decade and implicitly positioned against each other or put in avoidance positions. In the process, the damage to the field of trusting interaction between actors is likely to be considerable.

An indispensable prerequisite for this rebuilding of trust would, of course, be to set out together, at least at this point in time, to catch up and to fully implement the basic principle of civil society and subsidiarity in programs of so-called extremism prevention. For this principle consists first and foremost in the democratic guideline of subsidiarity. This, as aforementioned, implies that the state should not do or determine what civil society itself is capable of doing or can be put in a position to do.

From the point of view of the practice of distancing work, it must be emphasized all the more that this catch-up trust-building will have to be done above all with regard to those colleagues who worked in the prevention of so-called Islamism. This is because those "cooperations" have so far exclusively concerned this area—and they had obviously not been considered in the prevention of right-wing extremism and terrorism, which is a decade older. So to speak, as a German and European version of the "war on terror" after 9/11, these measures were de facto directed exclusively against persons from population groups with Muslim connotations.

### 3.7 A New European Path

The path to good interaction between civil society practitioners and security agencies in the future must and can also be advanced at the European level. Particularly with regard to prevention and distancing work in the area of right-wing extremism, Germany has a very special responsibility from a historical perspective toward the countries of Central Eastern Europe. There is, however, a current well-known factual necessity for this. That is, as these countries have partly become areas of retreat, regeneration and development for right-wing extremist movements and organizations from the West since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union (Melzer and Serafin 2013).

Much lost trust must also be rebuilt at the pan-European level though. For, as already indicated, great damage has most certainly been done in Central Eastern Europe in particular. At the pan-European level though, it is mainly the Muslim population groups that are directly affected (Kossack and Weilnböck 2018).<sup>21</sup> While the above-mentioned “cooperations” have been established in the past years in this non-transparent dark area, German actors have not recoiled from proactively promoting these “cooperations” together with the “case conferences” at the European level. Nor from setting them as a mandatory standard for civil society colleagues and NGOs throughout Europe and thus also in the countries of Central Eastern Europe, e.g., by means of a European “Rehabilitation Manual”.<sup>22</sup>

To emphasize this once again with clarity: This authoritative setting of a—highly problematic—professional standard for the European colleagues took place without the actual practice of those “cooperations” and “case conferences” being publicly known among the German colleagues in the field of radicalization prevention. Let alone were they approved by them in a professional debate. This is because, as noted before, these “cooperations” have so far been handled in

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<sup>21</sup> A detailed summary of the same can be found in Kossack and Weilnböck (2019).

<sup>22</sup> In particular, the “RAN Rehabilitation Manual” contains explicit recommendations on cooperation and information exchange with the security authorities, some of which are identical in wording to the formulations in non-public papers of German security authorities (see Weilnböck and Harald 2021g). De facto, this would imply that, starting from Germany, within the framework of the EU Commission, the Eastern European civil society colleagues in Hungary or Poland, for example, are also called upon to cooperate with their security authorities and to exchange data and assessments about clients – or that the security authorities there are encouraged to demand this cooperation and exchange of information from the civil society actors in their area of control.

Germany primarily at the level of classified official information. Even in the run-up to a belated professional debate, which is currently emerging in a welcome manner, serious professional and ethical objections are to be noted.

But even before the publication of the RAN Rehabilitation Manual (2020), one must make similarly worrying observations in the publications that RAN has produced in cooperation with individual NGOs since 2016 on issues of good practice in distancing and exit work. One notes that the basic principle of good practice, which has always been one of the most important for practitioners and is always mentioned first in any professional discussion, has not been included in these RAN publications.<sup>23</sup> Alternatively, it seems to have been proactively deleted. More precisely the principle of unconditional confidentiality of the work with clients and the required social work confidentiality regarding personal information about them. Remarkably, this deleted principle of confidentiality is precisely the element of good practice that is also suspended in the “case conferences” or whose suspension is necessary in order to be able to carry out these at all under the suspension of data protection. Thus, the conception and editing of both the RAN Manual and those of other RAN papers preceding it on exit and distancing work seem to conform to a common logic and ambition—aiming at the implementation of “collaborations” and “case conferences” EU-wide (Weilnböck 2021g).

Thus, even apart from the RAN Rehabilitation Manual and far before it (e.g., through that EU Directive from 2016, which enabled the legal abrogation of data protection and thus this form of “cooperations” in the first place, cf. note 18), it has obviously gone very far in terms of “cooperation” and “case conferences” at the level of the EU Commission and the RAN network. Also, on the part of ‘cooperating’ NGOs. Some of the NGOs ‘cooperating’ in Germany seem to have approached the status of subordinate authorities at the EU level as well. All the more reason to ask how and by whom the final editing of key European texts of distancing work by security agencies is actually legitimized (see Jörg Unkrig in Deutschlandfunk Nova 2020; also Tepper 2020).

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<sup>23</sup>This independent “Declaration of Good Practice” of the practitioners from an EU context seems to be the only survey in the context of the RAN, which corresponds to standards of scientific procedure, insofar as it was not edited by an authority. However, the Declaration was not included in the RAN’s web pages, although it was produced in the context of RAN workshops (see note below regarding the RAN Derad Declaration of Good Practice, Weilnböck et al. (2015) and Weilnböck (2021g)).

However, the fact that this ambiguous use of ‘cooperating’ NGOs was possible at all in this manner in 2020 is due to another form of “cooperation” that was established by the European Commission’s Home Affairs DG as early as 2011: namely, the Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN) mentioned above.<sup>24</sup> On the one hand, the RAN network has always been promoted by DG Home Affairs as a European practitioner network on the so-called grassroots level, established as a bottom-up network by practitioners for practitioners, mainly in the civil society sector. The main objective of the network has always been to collect and consolidate the original practice expertise of practitioners in the field, to process it in an authentic way for joint, open exchange, and ultimately to feed it into policy advice. Numerous practitioners of distancing work in Germany and Europe were invited to attend the event.

What, on the other hand, was and is not visible to the naked eye—and could therefore only be documented in a makeshift way on the basis of informal exchange among participating colleagues (cf. note 64): The practitioners of the NGOs basically have no real independent voice or creative rights at RAN. They are more effective there in the role of attendants, possibly those who provide impulses or professional input. Thus, RAN itself actually represents a “cooperation” defined by the security agencies. The most problematic consequence of this lack of real participation and design rights is that the publications that the RAN increasingly produced from around 2015 onward are not really attributable to or the responsibility of the participating RAN practitioners in the usual sense. This is what seems to be the case. Rather, the RAN publications are outlined with the help of the employees of the RAN secretariat (or with the help of individual RAN participants), in order to then be approved and, if necessary, edited by the EU authority DG Home Affairs. This editing process, however, is not documented and thus cannot be traced.<sup>25</sup>

This is also regrettable as dozens of European NGOs, trusting in a good interaction with the EU authority, have substantially helped to build up RAN since 2011. They have approached and included many NGOs known to them from the

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<sup>24</sup>Weilnböck (2018a). The construction of the RAN seems to have taken place around the same time that the aforementioned EU Directive No. 2016/680 on options to suspend data protection of clients was also being prepared, with both likely taking place within DG Home.

<sup>25</sup>Also, the minutes of the RAN workshops and the professional exchange among practitioners are not written by the participants themselves and cannot be proofread, but are written by RAN employees and approved by the EU authority (see note here below).

collegial European field for trustful participation. And the initiative of RAN at that time seemed to be convincingly supported by the political will (of the then Commissioner from Sweden, Cecilia Malmström) to counter the 'War on Terror' on the part of the USA with a counter-concept of civil society prevention (which is why the RAN was founded on the tenth anniversary of 9/11).<sup>26</sup>

These contextual conditions RAN pointed out explain how one of their recent publications entitled "Rehabilitation Manual", which was written for the EU level by an NGO 'cooperating' with German security agencies, uses questionable and not publicly documented modes of "cooperation" and "case conferences" as European standard. This also makes it understandable that the organization of this manual, although appearing as an NGO, could basically act unnoticed as an extension of the German and European security agencies (Weilnböck 2022, in preparation). Presumably a cultural change within RAN towards "cooperations" with 'cooperating' NGOs close to the authorities can possibly be dated to the years 2015/2016 (see Meilicke and Weilnböck 2021a and 2021b; also Alliance for a Right to Refuse to Testify in Social Work 2020).

For the civil society practitioners of distancing work—whom we would like to address with this handout!—and whom we would like to involve in the framework of the federal program "Democracy Live!", we believe it is of great importance to be able to understand these problematic processes here as precisely as necessary. We need to know where we stand! It is important to be very aware of the problematic nature of such official-civilian forms of action of "cooperation"

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<sup>26</sup>A symbolic caesura with regard to such a change of institutional culture may have been the publication of the "RAN Derad Declaration" already mentioned above (Weilnböck et al. 2015), which did not include "cooperations" and "case conferences" of this sort at all, but – quite the contrary and in agreement with all of the independent European practitioners who participated in RAN workshops at that time – stated that full protection of the personality and data protection of the clients, hence the unalienable confidentiality of all derad/distancing work are a key good practice quality standard. This "Declaration" was published in 2015 by a 'non-cooperating' NGO, in which the main author was and is active as scientific director, after it was not included on the websites of the RAN (cf. Weilnböck. 2021g and Weilnböck et al. 2015). Shortly thereafter, the leadership of the then-lead RAN Derad working group was also reshuffled, with the controlling EU agency, DG Home, removing the 'non-cooperating' NGO and appointing a 'cooperating' NGO to lead the working group, which would then publish the aforementioned Rehab Manual in 2020. (During this time, the EU authority leadership of the RAN had also changed from a Belgian to a German lead, who also was a seconded employee of the German Ministry of Interior (BMI); and the aforementioned Swedish Commissioner, Cecilia Malmström, who had originally conceived and launched the RAN, had also taken on a new role).

and to participate in the development of alternative and sustainable forms of interaction with the authorities. What has become apparent here is quite the opposite of what can be considered good practice in inter-agency interaction between security agencies and civil society. And this is the case if one really wants to take the principles of civil society, subsidiarity and sustainable social resilience completely seriously and set them consistently as a standard. It is also unquestionable that no small damage has been done in this regard in the last decade; and it becomes immediately understandable why such “cooperations” should be avoided in Germany and Europe at all costs and the current mode and should be profoundly restructured.

The emerging observation that currently the situation on the European level is in one respect even more alarming and worthy of criticism than the situation in Germany described above. This is important for clarifying the situation. No one hides the fact that the security agencies in Germany have set up these joint case conferences precisely in the way that authorities usually work, namely through non-public service channels. That is, here in Germany, no one is currently suggesting that these “cooperations” must necessarily take place in this way. Or even more so, that civil society partners from all over Europe explicitly approve of these “cooperations” and declare them to be standard. Rather, as already mentioned above, there is currently a great deal of scepticism and well-founded criticism in civil society, which is currently also increasingly being articulated. And this is only beginning to be formulated at this late point in time due to these facts are only now being brought into public attention.<sup>27</sup> Initial discussions with representatives of security agencies at the state and federal level have additionally revealed understanding for this scepticism on the part of NGOs, as well as a willingness to explore this issue in greater detail and discuss it together. In contrast, however, at the European level it is aggravated by the fact that there the appearance is created that the RAN network is a bottom-up network of

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<sup>27</sup>Cf. Möller and Schuhmacher (2013). Subject to precise research, the authorization and funding of which is still pending, it is becoming apparent in the internal discussions currently underway among practitioners that the “case conferences” are receiving little support there; only in external communication and lobbying vis-à-vis the funders are isolated ‘cooperating’ civil society partners recognizable as supporters calling for the expansion and deepening of the existing “cooperations,” which was then ultimately also reflected in the recent governmental cabinet committee’s catalog of measures (2020) (cf. Mücke and Korn 2020).

practitioners—and that the above-mentioned RAN Manual has resulted directly from the exchange of practices, which is by no means the case (cf. note 66).

Thus, the extent of the current challenge becomes clear, which unquestionably consists in carefully rebuilding that inter-agency collaboration and in realizing good practice in program design. It is all the more important, however, that the readers of this handout for distancing work are aware of the more precise context of the current situation, so that they can then participate in a better manner. For it is precisely the distancing work that is most affected by these “cooperations”—and would gain a lot in effect and sustainability through good inter-agency cooperation with the authorities.

A worthwhile goal in meeting this challenge is hence to jointly design a new architecture of trustworthy, well-corresponding, but also well-founded, demarcated interaction between civil and state actors, in particular with the security agencies. Such a contemporary mode of corresponding and demarcated interaction with the security agencies could then perhaps actually come to bear in a beneficial sense as a shining example of good practice in inter-agency program design from Germany in Europe. It would make up for the damage done and effectively remind us that the prevention of and intervention with radicalization is by no means only about de-radicalizing clients. It should actually primarily be about how we wisely reposition ourselves as a self-protecting democratic society. And how to “do democracy” and practice it, even in the face of its enemies, without at the same time becoming anything like them.

### **3.8 Niches of Good Cooperation Practice**

Fortunately, in the small, regional police-civilian interaction niches of good practice can be found and good, demarcated inter-agency interaction with security agencies is on the rise. And this exists beyond the politically highly occupied field of action of so-called Islamism and Islamist terrorism. In this regional field, it is the police or the security agencies who have a sound understanding of prevention work—and who provide a consistent “one-way street” concept in the exchange of information. This means that after the initial contact with a person who is presumed to be a risk to themselves and others, the security agencies inform a qualified professional distancing practitioner regarding the initial contact, suggesting an educational or counselling intervention—but do not expect any personal information or risk assessments back from this independent professional. Jörg Unkrig, Director of Criminal Investigation in North Rhine-Westphalia, summarizes the inter-agency prevention and exit

program against phenomena that are described by the fuzzy term of clan crime: "... the police officer first talks to the young person; then comes back and talks to the educator; he gives all his data to the educator; vice versa, it is a one-way street, i.e., the educator does not give any data back to the police"<sup>28</sup>. So, there is definitely a collegial, inter-agency relationship of systematic interaction here, but it is deliberately based on a "one-way street" with regard to client-related information exchange, as an apparent agreement exists for it being essential for the effectiveness of the program.

It is easy to see that this well-defined and well-demarcated mode of inter-agency interaction with security agencies is entirely able to dispel all concerns of civil society practitioners cited above. This is because no personal rights are suspended here, so that client-related data protection is guaranteed. This way, the above-mentioned do-no-harm principle of all pedagogical and helping services towards clients in need of protection is upheld (cf. note 49). Furthermore, the credibility and functionality of distancing/exit work as an important social instrument of resilient democracies is not compromised. Ultimately, the subsidiary division of functions and tasks with the democratic, civil society constitutional state remains intact in an exemplary manner. This is because the differentiation of roles between the police's initial approach of preventively addressing a person of concern and the confidential educational-counselling work by an independent practitioner is maintained. From a pedagogical-methodological point of view, it is hard to see why the work with so-called extremist threats should not be set up in this way.

### **3.9 The Right to Refuse to Testify for Distancing and Exit Work**

From all of the above, the last and presumably most important framework requirement for good practice in the programming of the field of preventive interventions/distancing work becomes apparent. In order to guarantee the indispensable confidentiality and independence of the work with clients, anchored in civil society based and quality-assured procedures, the introduction of the right to refuse to testify, which has been demanded for a long time, is fundamentally indispensable for distancing and exit work. This, in fact, being for social and

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<sup>28</sup>Jörg Unkrig in Deutschlandfunk Nova (2020), from minute 9. Cf. also Tepper (2020).

intensive educational work and counselling interventions in general. There are several reasons for this. First, based solely on the right to refuse to testify, can the above-mentioned need for steadfast confidentiality for the pedagogical counselling processes really be met. For only if distancing work has the same confidentiality status as, for example, psychotherapy—to which it is completely equal in terms of its need for confidentiality—can counselling and distancing work take place in the true sense of the word. Only then would the practitioners finally be freed from the unacceptable maneuvering around their clients, having always to precariously convey the following: “With us, everything of course is confidential, and you can trust and tell me anything—but not completely, because in a court of law it will be difficult. There, I may not, however, have to say and remember everything, but of course you never know ...”.

Secondly, depending on the right to refuse to testify, we can really achieve the desired relationship of trust and cooperation with official actors. This, in turn, determines whether we succeed in convincingly implementing our concept of a democratic constitutional state based on civil society and subsidiarity. Then we can offer it as exemplary and worthwhile, especially to enemies of the state and extremists. Being convincing to the clients would not mean “Well, in court—and in case conferences—I might have to reveal a little bit, but that won’t be so bad”, etc. It would be much more convincing and exemplary if the practitioners of distancing work could say unambiguously and unequivocally right from the start: “I represent a free and democratic society with a solid division of powers in place. Our policy is that you can talk to me in complete confidence and that I will not disclose information about you to anyone under any circumstances, not even to a court—and certainly not to the security agencies (except there is imminent danger ahead). And as a democratic society and a state under the rule of law, we’re proud that that’s the way it is.” Anything less than this will not convince our addressees. Therefore, if you really want distancing work and preventive interaction to be an instrument of democratic resilience, you absolutely have to grant the right to refuse to testify.<sup>29</sup> Incidentally, this also applies to those who really strive to sustain public security. After all, distancing and exit work is an essential factor of sustainable internal security.

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<sup>29</sup> See Meilicke and Weinsböck (2021a) and (2021b); also Alliance for a Right to Refuse to Testify in Social Work (2020).

**Brief conclusion**

What emerges overall from our contextually broad handout on the methodology of distancing work is this:

The great challenge for good practice in policy-making/good governance in German and European radicalization prevention will be to stop the “securitization” and to revise it with great political determination. This means that the “securitization” and security-logical overhaul of prevention, civic education, upbringing/youth-work as well as the counselling client relations needs to be critically reviewed, researched and amended. However, this securitization process currently seems to be advancing in an unstoppable pace. In doing so, it relentlessly implements the fatal legacy and logic of terrorism, whose implicit intention and typical effect is always that fundamental rights, divisions of power, and civil society structures dissolve. Democracy-weakening and terror-shaped developments continue to advance. In concrete terms, the securitization drives us, willy-nilly, into a kind of prevention-authority state, which will always in part be a police state, however preventively it seems couched—in other words, a postmodern police state, so to speak.

The basic prerequisite for an effective shift away from “securitization” is that the aforementioned design flaw in the policy-making of European extremism prevention is consistently revised: The responsibilities for the prevention of anti-democratic hostility and anti-human rights attitudes must be disconnected from the interior ministries and security agencies to the maximum extent possible. This goes for the rehabilitative work of distancing and deradicalisation of clients, including the work with so-called “endangerers” as well. For, all work of preventive interventions is psychosocial client work (and civic education is not primarily prevention but education!). Client work, however, belongs to the departments of social affairs, health, etc.—and there, too, the state connection should be only as much as necessary and as little as possible. As in psychotherapy or youth protection, psychosocial client work belongs to its own politically independent professional associations, along with equally independent academically based (formative) evaluation.

Only then, when this fundamental constructional flaw in governmental programs of preventing anti-democratic hostility and anti-human rights attitudes has consistently been revised, can a new architecture of interaction between civil society and state actors (and especially with the security agencies) be jointly established which is based on truly trusting, well-corresponding, but also demarcated procedures. Before then, this will be fundamentally impossible—and can only ever be simulated.

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