Europe has seen significant and varied terrorist activities in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, ranging from the Provisional Irish Republican Army through the German Red Army Faction to al Qaeda- and Daesh-inspired individuals and groups. These episodes have provided European states with a wealth of experience in combating terrorism (Chalk, 1996). Although there has been continued concern over separatist groups in some states and growing unease about the activities of far-right groups in others, jihadist terrorism has been the primary focus of counter-terrorism efforts in many Western states since the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001. Moreover, since 2013, against the backdrop of the Syrian civil war, the issues of radicalisation and foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) have become focal points in counter-terrorism debates in Europe and on the EU’s policy agenda.

Actually, the EU had already begun to reflect on how to address radicalisation a few years before. As early as November 2005, following the terrorist attacks in Madrid and London, it had published a ‘European Union Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism’ (Council of the European Union, 2005b). Preventing radicalisation was also an important dimension of the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy, which was adopted around the same time (Council of the European Union, 2005a). The EU Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism was subsequently revised in 2008 and 2014, which demonstrates the continued salience of this issue on the EU’s policy agenda.

This chapter examines the EU’s efforts to tackle radicalisation. The specific formulation of its title (i.e. ‘preventing radicalisation and enhancing disengagement’) reflects the EU’s emphasis on preventing radicalisation. Most of the radicalisation-related measures adopted by the EU belong to the ‘Prevent’ dimension of its Counter-Terrorism Strategy, whilst ‘disengagement’ has become more prevalent in recent years, in contrast to ‘deradicalisation’, which is rarely used in EU official documents. The chapter begins by locating the EU’s efforts to address radicalisation in the wider context of its counter-terrorism policy. It briefly presents the evolution of EU counter-terrorism cooperation in both its policy and
institutional dimensions for the benefit of readers who may not be familiar with the EU’s role in counter-terrorism. The following section reflects on the controversial concept of ‘radicalisation’ and how it has been used by the EU. The chapter then delves into the EU’s activities aiming to prevent or counter radicalisation. In that respect, it begins by examining the EU’s strategic thinking towards addressing radicalisation, before examining the main policy measures that it has adopted. The chapter concludes by offering some reflections on assessing the effectiveness of the EU’s measures aiming to address radicalisation.

**EU counter-terrorism cooperation**

It is only relatively recently that EU Member States began to cooperate in combating terrorism. Some observers may point out that some degree of European counter-terrorism cooperation could be observed as early as the 1970s within the so-called ‘Trevi Group’ (Kaunert and Léonard, 2019: 264). However, these early efforts, which took place on an intergovernmental basis, yielded only modest results. This pattern continued to repeat itself even after counter-terrorism became a formal competence of the EU with the entry into force of the Treaty of Maastricht in 1993 (Argomaniz, 2011; Bossong, 2013; Reinares, 2000). This considerably changed in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 (European Council, 2001a). Although those took place in the United States, they had a profound impact on the development of EU counter-terrorism cooperation (see notably Argomaniz, 2009; Baker-Beall, 2016; Bures, 2011; Kaunert, 2005, 2010a; O’Neill, 2012; Zimmermann, 2006). This was because they were interpreted by European governments as signalling that Islamist terrorism was a global problem and that fundamentalist terrorists could strike again, not only in the United States, but in Europe as well (Kaunert and Léonard, 2019: 265). As a result, EU Member States decided to develop their cooperation on counter-terrorism on the basis of the so-called ‘Anti-terrorism Roadmap’ (European Council, 2001b), which was adopted very shortly after 9/11.

Over the years, although the Member States have remained the principal policy actors in the fight against terrorism, an EU counter-terrorism policy has gradually taken shape. Its development has been underpinned by the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy, which was adopted in 2005 (Council of the European Union, 2005a). This has four pillars, namely ‘prevent’, ‘protect’, ‘pursue’ and ‘respond’ (Council of the European Union, 2005b). ‘Prevent’ concerns all the measures aiming to ensure that individuals are not drawn into terrorism; ‘protect’ refers to improving the security of critical infrastructure, transport and borders; ‘pursue’ mainly concerns the investigation of terrorist activities; and ‘respond’ relates to dealing with the consequences of terrorist attacks.

In addition, the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy has been complemented by other programmatic documents that have built on the above-mentioned Anti-terrorism Roadmap, including the EU Plan of Action on Combating Terrorism (Council of the European Union, 2004) and the Revised Strategy on Terrorist Financing (Council of the European Union, 2008a). Against this backdrop, various EU counter-terrorism measures have been adopted, such as rules to prevent money laundering and terrorist financing (Léonard and Kaunert, 2012), a directive to harmonise the use of passenger name record (PNR) data in the EU for the prevention, detection, investigation and prosecution of terrorist offences and serious crime (Directive (EU) 2016/681), as well as the measures to prevent and counter radicalisation that are at the heart of this chapter.

As observed by various scholars, the development of the EU counter-terrorism policy has not been linear, but has rather been characterised by periods of inertia followed by accelerations, usually in the aftermath of significant terrorist attacks (Argomaniz, 2009; Bossong,
In addition, the implementation by Member States of measures adopted at the EU level has often lagged behind (Argomaniz, 2010; Monar, 2005). This has frequently led scholars to question the effectiveness of the EU counter-terrorism policy (Bossong, 2008, 2013; Bures, 2006, 2011; Coolsaet, 2010; De Londras and Doody, 2015). Nevertheless, the fact that any significant terrorist attack in Europe nowadays tends to lead to questions about possible EU failings and calls for reinforced cooperation amongst Member States testifies to the recognition of the EU as an established policy actor in counter-terrorism (Kaunert and Léonard, 2019).

Before considering the EU’s activities concerning radicalisation in greater detail, a few words on the institutional arrangements currently in place in that policy area are in order. From an institutional point of view, it is important to note that there is a wide range of actors involved in the development of the EU’s counter-terrorism policy, including the measures relating to radicalisation. At the EU level, the European Commission makes legislative proposals, which are then negotiated and adopted by the Council, in which each Member State is represented, and the European Parliament. The Commission is also responsible for managing a range of EU funds supporting activities aiming at countering and preventing radicalisation. Within the Juncker Commission (2014–2019), terrorism was dealt with by the Directorate-General for Migration and Home Affairs (DG Home). In addition, from 2016 onwards, in the context of the development of the Security Union, the Commissioner for the Security Union supported the Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship. The European Council – which gathers the Heads of State or Government of the Member States, the President of the European Council and the President of the European Commission – also plays a significant role by defining the EU’s political priorities. It usually does so by issuing ‘Conclusions’ during European Council meetings.

Various EU agencies are also active in counter-terrorism, including radicalisation-related activities. The most important is arguably Europol, the EU’s law enforcement agency (Kaunert, 2010b). It releases various annual reports, including the EU Terrorism Situation and Trend (TE-SAT) reports. Those present an overview of terrorism within the EU in a given year, including a significant amount of information concerning radicalisation. Since January 2016, Europol has also hosted the European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC) (European Commission, 2015), which presents itself as ‘a central hub in the EU in the fight against terrorism’. All of its priorities concern radicalisation to some extent, including ‘providing operational support upon a request from an EU Member State for investigations’, ‘tackling foreign fighters’, ‘sharing intelligence and expertise on terrorism financing (through the Terrorist Finance Tracking Programme and the Financial Intelligence Unit)’, ‘online terrorist propaganda and extremism (through the EU Internet Referral Unit)’, and ‘international cooperation among counter terrorism authorities’ (Europol, 2019). Eurojust, the EU’s Judicial Cooperation Unit, is another European agency dealing with terrorism, notably through its publication of the ‘Terrorism Convictions Monitor’ (TCM) three times per year. This report provides an overview of concluded court proceedings, amendments to relevant legislation at European and national levels, as well as a selection of upcoming and ongoing trials across the EU.

To add to the institutional complexity, the EU also has a Counter-Terrorism Coordinator (CTC), who is appointed by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy (previously, the High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy). This post was created in the aftermath of the 2004 terrorist attacks in Madrid, but its scope has never been clearly defined (MacKenzie, Bures, Kaunert and Léonard, 2013). Broadly speaking, the office of the CTC mainly aims to promote the EU’s role in fighting
terrorism, both internally (i.e. cooperation amongst Member States) and externally (i.e. cooperation between the EU and third countries). The CTC notably does so by monitoring the implementation of the EU’s counter-terrorism measures, making policy recommendations and suggesting priority areas for EU action in regular reports, including in relation to preventing and countering radicalisation. Finally, as the EU has increasingly cooperated with third countries in order to address the terrorist threat, terrorism has also been on the agenda of the European External Action Service (EEAS), which is the EU’s diplomatic service headed by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. For example, the EU holds Counter-Terrorism Political Dialogue meetings with various countries, which notably address the issue of radicalisation.

The EU and the concept of ‘radicalisation’

Although there had long been a scholarly interest in matters relating to ‘radicalisation’, it is only in the aftermath of 9/11 that this concept gained popularity amongst policy-makers and researchers alike. As observed by Sedgwick (2010: 480),

[b]efore 2001, ‘radicali[si]ation’ was rarely referred to in the press, although the term was occasionally used in academia (...). The greatest increase in frequency of use of ‘radicalisation’ in the press was between 2005 and 2007, timing that strongly suggests that the term’s current popularity derives from the emergence of ‘home-grown’ terrorism in Western Europe, notably the London bombings in July 2005.

However, as is so often the case with concepts, there is no single, universally accepted definition of ‘radicalisation’. Coolsaet (2019: 29) describes ‘radicalisation’ as a multi-layered concept with a ‘twisted history’, whilst Sedgwick (2010: 479) notes that ‘the term is understood and used in a variety of different ways, which in itself produces confusion’. Scholars generally agree on the basic understanding that ‘radicali[si]ation can be defined as the process whereby people become extremists’, although there are differences amongst the various conceptualisations of the specific factors and dynamics at play in this process (Neumann, 2013: 874). However, there is no agreement over the definition of ‘extremism’ and, more particularly, whether this refers to political ideas or methods. Thus, as summarised by Neumann and Kleinmann (2013: 362),

like terrorism, radicali[si]ation remains a contentious concept, and there continues to be no consensus definition, with some scholars rejecting the concept altogether, others using it exclusively to describe processes that culminate in the use of violence, and yet others including both violent and nonviolent forms of extremism.

Unsurprisingly, this means that the related concept of ‘deradicalisation’ also lacks clarity, despite its frequent use. According to Horgan and Altier (2012: 86), ‘[b]roadly speaking, de-radicali[si]ation includes any effort to change or re-direct views that are supportive of – and thereby, the assumption goes, conducive to – violent action’. They also observe that, to make matters even more confusing, a lot of programmes and initiatives aiming to tackle radicalisation actually do not contain any mention of ‘deradicalisation’ in their formal description (Horgan and Altier, 2012: 86).

When it comes to the EU, the idea of ‘radicalisation’ initially did not occupy a prominent place in its conceptualisation of terrorism and in its counter-terrorism policy. The understanding of terrorism that underpinned the first phase of the development of the EU counter-terrorism
policy following 9/11 was that it was largely an external security threat. The European Security Strategy, which was adopted in 2003, depicted terrorism as a consequence of ‘regional conflicts’ and ‘state failure’. It also argued that ‘[t]he most recent wave of terrorism is global in its scope and is linked to violent religious extremism’ (European Council, 2003). The document also identified the causes of terrorism as comprising ‘the pressures of modernisation, cultural, social and political crises, and the alienation of young people living in foreign societies’. It is not entirely clear what was meant by ‘foreign societies’, although it seems to refer to societies outside the EU, as it was noted in the next sentence that ‘[this] phenomenon is also part of our own society’. Nevertheless, the European Security Strategy mainly presented terrorism as a threat external to the EU.

A turning point came with the Madrid terrorist attacks in March 2004, in which 193 people died and nearly 2,000 were injured. Those came to be widely seen as a case of ‘homegrown terrorism’, which led to a new emphasis in the EU’s official discourse on addressing radicalisation. Actually, as pointed out by Reinares (2009: 16), ‘a closer look at the individuals involved in the network behind the attack reveals a more complicated picture’. Although most of the members of the network became radicalised while in Spain, none of them had been born in Spain (or in Europe, for that matter) or held the citizenship of one of the EU Member States. Moreover, several group members had strong links to international terrorist groups, such as al Qaeda and the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group (GICM) (Reinares 2009: 17).

Nevertheless, in the ‘Declaration on Combating Terrorism’ issued on 25 March 2004, the European Council emphasised the importance of ‘combating the threat posed by terrorism and dealing with its root causes’ (European Council, 2004: 1; emphasis added). This marked a departure from the previous emphasis on the external origin of terrorism. Nevertheless, although this was the first time that it was mentioned in an EU official document made public, the idea of understanding and tackling the root causes of terrorism had already entered national security debates in some of the EU Member States, especially following 9/11. In particular, in Belgium and in the Netherlands, security and intelligence officials had begun to notice a growing number of individuals acquiring ‘radical’ or ‘fundamentalist’ Islamic beliefs and, in some cases, being recruited by foreign ‘Islamist fighters’ (Coolsaet, 2019: 30–31). In the run-up to the Iraq War, they had become increasingly concerned that the so-called ‘War on Terror’, rather than increasing the security of Western states by defeating terrorism abroad, might actually be fuelling resentment and bottom-up radicalisation processes in some communities in Europe (Coolsaet, 2019: 32).

A document entitled ‘European Union Objectives to Combat Terrorism (Revised Plan of Action)’ was appended to the March 2004 Declaration on Combating Terrorism. It identified seven key objectives, the sixth of which was ‘[t]o address the factors which contribute to support for, and recruitment into, terrorism’ (European Council, 2004: 16). An important aspect of this process, the document further argued, was to ‘[c]ontinue to investigate the links between extreme religious or political beliefs, as well as socio-economic and other factors, and support for terrorism, building on work already undertaken in this area, and identify appropriate response measures’ (European Council, 2004: 16). Thus, in that way, addressing the causes of radicalisation – although the specific term ‘radicalisation’ had not been used yet – became an important part of the EU counter-terrorism policy from March 2004 onwards.

With regard to the issue of the precise meaning of ‘radicalisation’ in the EU, it is noteworthy that the EU’s first strategic document on radicalisation – the 2005 EU Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism – did not explicitly define
‘radicalisation’. In the document, it appears to be understood as the process through which ‘people are drawn into terrorism’ (Council of the European Union, 2005b: 2). The document on which the Strategy built, namely the 2005 Communication of the European Commission on Terrorist Recruitment, was more precise in that respect. It started by defining ‘violent radicalisation’ as ‘the phenomenon of people embracing opinions, views and ideas which could lead to acts of terrorism as defined in Article 1 of the Framework Decision on Combating Terrorism’ (Commission of the European Communities, 2005: 2). It can also be noted that ‘deradicalisation’ is rarely used in EU documents. Those far more frequently mention ‘preventing radicalisation’, as well as ‘countering radicalisation’, which is in line with the fact that most radicalisation-related measures in the EU are part of the ‘prevent’ pillar of its Counter-Terrorism Strategy (see also Martins and Ziegler, 2018). The concept of ‘disengagement’ also appears in EU official documents. Following the adoption of Council Conclusions in 2012 (Council of the European Union, 2012), the 2014 Revised EU Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism defined ‘disengagement’ as a process ‘through which a radicalised individual can come to renounce violence, leave a group or movement, or even reject a worldview supporting or promoting an extremist ideology linked to terrorism’ (Council of the European Union, 2014: 11).

The next two sections elaborate upon the EU’s efforts at preventing and countering radicalisation, considering first their strategic aspects, before turning to the policy measures that have been adopted over the years.

### Preventing and countering radicalisation in the EU: strategic aspects

As previously mentioned, the first key EU document on radicalisation was the EU Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism, which was published in November 2005. This drew on work that had been carried out since the adoption of the Declaration on Combating Terrorism in March 2004. In particular, two EU working groups (Council Working Group on Terrorism – International Aspects (COTER) and the Terrorism Working Group (TWG)) had produced a confidential document on the ‘Underlying factors in the recruitment to terrorism’ in May 2004. It concluded that:

> [in the] context of sometimes real grievances [in Europe], a lack of any real opportunities to effect change or vent frustration and a consequent sense of anger and helplessness, the unambiguous messages of extremist propaganda can become very attractive, particularly to the youth population.

(Coolsaet, 2019: 34)

Moreover, in September 2005, the European Commission had published a Communication on radicalisation. Bearing the title ‘Terrorist recruitment: addressing the factors contributing to violent radicalisation’, it identified a series of ‘core areas of immediate focus’, namely ‘broadcast media, the internet, education, youth engagement, employment, social exclusion and integration issues, equal opportunities and non-discrimination and inter-cultural dialogue’ (Commission of the European Communities, 2005: 3). It also highlighted the importance of supporting the sharing of knowledge and further research into radicalisation in order to inform policymaking. The idea of developing an external dimension to these activities in collaboration with third countries and regional partners was also included, although it appeared to be viewed more as an idea for the future than an immediate concern.
The Commission’s Communication was followed by the adoption of the EU Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism in November 2005. It identified three priorities for the EU, namely: (1) ‘[disrupting] the activities of the networks and individuals who draw people into terrorism; (2) [ensuring] that voices of mainstream opinion prevail over those of extremism; and (3) [promoting] yet more vigorously security, justice, democracy and opportunity for all’ (Council of the European Union, 2005b: 3). In addition, the Strategy emphasised the importance of respecting fundamental rights whilst countering radicalisation. It is also noteworthy that the 2005 Strategy focused on al Qaeda and the terrorists inspired by al Qaeda and made various references to the Muslim communities (see Martins and Ziegler, 2018). This was markedly different to the 2008 Revised Strategy, which adopted a broader approach and highlighted ‘Europe’s desire to combat all forms of terrorism, whoever the perpetrators may be’ (Council of the European Union, 2008b: 2). Nevertheless, the three main priorities for the EU remained the same in that document. Thus, the 2008 version of the Strategy did not fundamentally differ from the 2005 version.

In contrast, the 2014 Revised Strategy was significantly different from its predecessors. It notably built on the Communication on Preventing Radicalisation to Terrorism and Violent Extremism, which the European Commission published in January 2014 and which drew itself notably upon the work of the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) (see below). The revision of the Strategy was prompted to a large extent by significant changes in the EU’s environment. Amongst those was the rise in the number of European foreign fighters travelling to Syria. It was feared that they could use the experience acquired in the conflict zones in the Middle East and carry out terrorist attacks in Europe in the short term, as well as ‘[acting] as catalysts for terrorism’ in the longer term (European Commission, 2014: 2). Other changes identified included ‘the roles of public communications, the Internet and Social Media’, particularly how ‘the Internet and social media present a new potential for mobilisation and communication’ (Council of the European Union, 2013: 3–4). In its Communication, the Commission identified ten types of ‘actions that Member States and the EU could take to prevent and counter radicalisation more effectively’ (European Commission, 2014: 12). Those were largely echoed in the 2014 Revised Strategy. This document emphasised that ‘the means and patterns of radicalisation and terrorism are constantly evolving’, which makes it necessary for the EU ‘to consistently revisit [its] priorities and ensure that [its] security approach can address emerging forms of threats’ (Council of the European Union, 2014: 4). As a result, ten priorities were identified: (1) ‘[promoting] security, justice, and equal opportunities for all’; (2) ‘[ensuring] that voices of mainstream opinion prevail over those of extremism’; (3) ‘[enhancing] government communications’; (4) ‘[supporting] messages countering terrorism’; (5) ‘[countering] online radicalisation and recruitment to terrorism’; (6) ‘[training], [building] capacity and [engaging] first line practitioners across relevant sectors’; (7) ‘[supporting] individuals and civil society to build resilience’; (8) ‘[supporting] disengagement initiatives’; (9) ‘[supporting] further research into the trends and challenges of radicalisation and recruitment to terrorism’; and (10) ‘[aligning] internal and external counter-radicalisation work’ (Council of the European Union, 2014: 5). One may object that ten is too large a number of priorities. However, this can be explained by the nature of the role of the EU in this policy area, which is mainly to support the efforts of the Member States. Those remain the main policy actors when it comes to addressing radicalisation. Since then, although further documents relating to radicalisation have been released by the EU institutions, such as a Communication of the European Commission (2016) on Supporting the Prevention of Radicalisation Leading to Violent Extremism, the EU Strategy for Combating Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism has not been further revised.
Nevertheless, some discussions have been held within the Council to that effect. In 2017, it was noted that a ‘revision of the guidelines should duly reflect the changed threat picture and recent policy developments’, including ‘the growing challenge of European returning foreign terrorist fighters, including women and children, from Syria and Iraq’ (Council of the European Union, 2017: 3).

**Preventing and countering radicalisation in the EU: policy measures**

In line with the priorities identified in its key programmatic documents, the EU has adopted a wide range of measures aiming at addressing radicalisation over the years. As previously mentioned, it is important to emphasise that the Member States remain the main actors in this policy area, whilst the EU mainly seeks to support their efforts and to facilitate their cooperation. An important exception in that respect is Directive (EU) 2017/541 on Combating Terrorism, which obliges Member States to criminalise various terrorism-related acts, including recruiting for terrorism, providing or receiving terrorist training, as well as public incitement to commit terrorist offences or advocating terrorism, including online.

This section focuses on three key aspects of the EU’s activities relating to radicalisation, namely sharing knowledge and experience within the EU RAN, countering online radicalisation and recruitment to terrorism, as well as supporting research on radicalisation.

**Sharing knowledge and experience relating to radicalisation: the EU RAN**

One of the EU’s main achievements in preventing and countering radicalisation has been the establishment of the RAN. This network finds its origins in the decision of the European Commission in 2006 to establish the Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation, which, as suggested by its name, was a group of experts providing policy advice to the Commission on fighting violent radicalisation. This group was succeeded by the European Network of Experts on Radicalisation (also referred to as the ‘European Network of Experts on Violent Radicalisation’) from 2009 and then the RAN from 2011 onwards.

RAN is an EU-wide umbrella network (or ‘network of networks’), which brings together local actors and practitioners involved in preventing and countering radicalisation, such as teachers, youth workers, social workers, healthcare professionals, prison officers, non-governmental organisations, local authorities, researchers and law enforcement officers. As of 2019, the activities of RAN are organised around nine thematic working groups, as follows: Communication and Narratives (RAN C&N); Education (RAN EDU); EXIT (in the sense of moving away from violence) (RAN EXIT); Youth, Families and Communities (RAN YF&C); Local Authorities (RAN LOCAL); Prison and Probation (RAN P&P); Police and Law Enforcement (RAN POL); Remembrance of Victims of Terrorism (RAN RVT); and Health and Social Care (RAN H&SC). Within each working group, participants exchange their knowledge, experience and practices relevant to the specific dimension of radicalisation. As a result, a large number of guidelines, handbooks, recommendations and reports on best practices have been produced over the years, such as a manual on ‘Responses to Returnees’ aiming to support Member States in addressing the challenges posed by returning FTFs, which was presented in June 2017 (European Commission, 2017c: 8). There are ongoing debates as to the inclusion of more categories of practitioners in future (European Commission, 2017a: 15). All working-group leaders also sit on the Steering Committee of RAN, which is chaired by the European Commission.
Also represented on the Steering Committee is the RAN Centre of Excellence (CoE), which the European Commission has presented as ‘the main policy tool in countering and preventing radicalisation’ (European Commission, 2017a: 15). It has developed state-of-the-art knowledge about radicalisation and has supported both the European Commission and the Member States in their efforts to counter and prevent radicalisation. Nevertheless, it has its limitations, as it is a virtual entity that provides its services under a five-year procurement contract (2014–2019) (European Commission, 2017a: 17).

Countering online radicalisation and recruitment to terrorism

Modern communications technologies can be used for terrorism purposes. The Internet may be employed for spreading radicalising propaganda, which can then be easily accessed by individuals in their own homes (European Commission, 2014: 8). For example, the European Commission (2018a: 1) noted that ‘in January 2018 alone, almost 700 new pieces of official Da’esh propaganda were disseminated online’. The acknowledgement of this major problem has led the EU to take several initiatives aiming to address online radicalisation.

One of the key actions for tackling online terrorist content has been the establishment of the EU Internet Forum in 2015, which gathers participants, notably online platforms, on a voluntary basis. It has two main objectives, namely decreasing the accessibility of online terrorist content and supporting civil society in increasing the volume of effective, alternative narratives online. The EU Internet Referral Unit at Europol has played a key role with regard to the first objective by flagging terrorist content for removal to the Internet companies (European Commission, 2017c: 8). The second objective has been supported since December 2016 by the Civil Society Empowerment Programme (CSEP), which has a budget of EUR 10 million. The European Strategic Communications Network (ESCN), which gathers representatives of the EU Member States and is funded by the European Commission, has also contributed to this second objective through the sharing of knowledge and good practices concerning the use of strategic communications in countering and preventing violent extremism. The ESCN emerged from the Syria Strategic Communications Advisory Team (SSCAT), which had been set up in January 2015 with the aim of discouraging EU citizens from travelling to Syria or other conflict zones in order to participate in terrorist activities (Council of the European Union, 2016: 32).

Another noteworthy development has been the ‘Code of conduct on countering illegal hate speech online’, which was launched by the European Commission in May 2016. Facebook, Microsoft, Twitter and YouTube were the four platforms that initially signed up to the code of conduct, before being joined by others, including Instagram, Google+, Snapchat and Dailymotion (European Commission, 2018a: 2). The code of conduct has set out several public commitments aiming to help users notify illegal hate speech on these platforms, as well as improving the support to civil society and the coordination with national authorities.

Moreover, in July 2017, the members of the EU Internet Forum adopted an Action Plan to combat terrorist content online. As explained by the European Commission (2017b: 9),

[This] includes measures to step up the automated detection of illegal terrorist content online, share related technology and tools with smaller companies, achieve the full implementation and use of the ‘database of hashes’ [which aims to prevent terrorist material removed from one platform being re-uploaded on to another], and empower civil society on alternative narratives.

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In addition, in March 2018, the European Commission (2018b) made several recommendations to Member States and companies in order to address online radicalisation more effectively. Having considered that progress had not been swift and sufficient enough, the European Commission (2018a) tabled a proposal for new rules in September 2018. Those aim at ensuring that online terrorist content is swiftly removed (i.e. within an hour from the time of notification by the national authorities).

**Supporting research on radicalisation**

The EU institutions, the European Commission in particular, have regularly expressed the belief that research plays a crucial role in preventing and countering radicalisation. The research evidence generated by various projects helps Member States develop new practices and programmes and fine-tune existing ones. Several research projects on radicalisation were supported by the Seventh Framework Programme for European Research and Technological Development (FP7). These projects mainly aimed to better understand the dynamics at play in radicalisation processes and to establish methodologies to assess the effectiveness of the measures taken to address radicalisation (European Commission, 2016: 4). The recent terrorist attacks in Europe have led the European Commission to conclude that there are ‘new trends in the process of radicalisation which need to be further investigated’ (European Commission, 2016: 4). Research topics on radicalisation have therefore been included in the Horizon 2020 Programme. Priorities for the future, according to the European Commission (2016: 4), include further bridging the gap between researchers and practitioners in the field of radicalisation, as well as harnessing the power of big data for better understanding the communication practices of violent radicalisation. Research on radicalisation is not only funded by these research budgets, but is also supported by security funds, such as the Internal Security Fund – Police, which supports the efforts of Member States in tackling terrorism, including countering radicalisation and supporting civil society in disseminating alternative narratives. It is noteworthy that there has recently been more emphasis on better exploiting the findings of research projects that have already been completed.

As underlined by the Expert Group ‘Steering Board for Union Actions on Preventing and Countering Radicalisation’ that advises the European Commission,

> [w]hile we need to deepen discussions on a closer interaction between researchers and policy-makers within the context of the different actions (e.g. undertaken by the RAN or ESCN), it is equally important to increase the accessibility of what is already available, both on EU and national level.

*(Expert Group ‘Steering Board for Union Actions on Preventing and Countering Radicalisation’, n.d: 3)*

**Conclusion**

This chapter has shown that the EU has assumed an increasingly important role in preventing and countering radicalisation. After a first phase in the development of its counter-terrorism policy shaped by a view of terrorism as a largely external security threat, heightened concerns about homegrown terrorism have led the EU to give more importance to the issue of radicalisation, in particular understanding the dynamics at play in radicalisation processes and identifying the most effective measures to prevent and counter radicalisation. Since 2005, preventing radicalisation has been an important dimension of the ‘prevent’ pillar of the EU Counter-Terrorism Strategy. In addition, in the same year, the EU adopted a dedicated Strategy for Combating
Radicalisation and Recruitment to Terrorism, which has been regularly updated since then. Given that each Member State remains responsible for national security, the EU mainly aims to support the efforts of Member States and to facilitate cooperation amongst them. As a result, various EU initiatives aiming to prevent and counter radicalisation have been developed. Amongst the aspects of radicalisation that have received particular attention in the EU, one can mention sharing knowledge and expertise through initiatives such as setting up the RAN, addressing online radicalisation and supporting research into radicalisation. The EU’s activities in this area are set to further grow in future, as the report of the High-Level Commission Expert Group on Radicalisation has identified a series of priority areas where, in its view, ‘further action at EU level could offer significant benefit’ (European Commission, 2018c: 5; see also High-Level Commission Expert Group on Radicalisation, 2017).

Against the backdrop of this flurry of activities, a crucial question has been that of the effectiveness of these measures. A study for the European Parliament (2017: 63) published in 2017 emphasised that:

[n]o mechanisms or reporting obligations are in place to monitor follow-up and implementation of the policy objectives that are formulated in the Strategy documents. In that sense it is impossible to measure the formal effectiveness in this policy field, let alone the material effectiveness.

Difficulties are compounded by the fact that this is a very wide and fragmented policy area, given that, with the exceptions previously noted, the EU has mainly sought to encourage the initiatives of Member States, rather than legislating in order to oblige them to take specific measures. In 2018, the European Court of Auditors (2018: 4) conducted a performance audit of the Commission’s policy on the prevention of radicalisation and concluded that ‘the Commission addressed the needs of Member States, but there were some shortfalls in coordination and evaluation’. It notably noted that ‘[t]he Commission has not sufficiently developed its framework for assessing whether its support is effective and offers value for money’ and that there was a tendency to focus on the amount of activities, rather than their effectiveness (European Court of Auditors, 2018: 5).

One can therefore conclude that the EU’s role in preventing and countering radicalisation has undoubtedly grown to a very significant extent in recent years. Nevertheless, the question of the effectiveness of all its activities will remain largely unanswered until reporting and evaluation tools are more systematically used.

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