

UDK 37.016:659.3(497.5)  
351.74:[316.624+659.3](497.5)

Primljeno:

Izvorni naučni rad  
Original scientific paper

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## **THE POLICE PERCEPTION OF THE ROLE OF MEDIA IN PREVENTING RADICALISATION: THE CASE OF CROATIA**

This paper aimed to explore whether and how media can be involved in the process of the prevention of extremism and radicalisation from the police point of view.

This survey was conducted on a sample of 108 students from the Croatian Police Academy of the Ministry of the Interior by a questionnaire examining the participants' knowledge on radicalization, the presence of various types of radicalization in their environment, factors and conditions that affect the development of extremism and radicalization and the ability of media to prevent radicalization.

Results point out that police officers do see media as a partner stakeholder in preventing radicalisation.

The results of this survey could be used to present the importance of media in preventing radicalisation to various stakeholders to start implementing media workers training for the facilitation of this process.

This paper gives us an insight into Croatian police officers' perception of media as their partners in the prevention of radicalisation and extremism.

Future survey should include a larger sample with an equal number of participants with and without work experience in the police so that potential differences in their attitudes could be investigated.

**Keywords:** police; prevention; radicalisation; media

## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Radicalisation

In recent decades' public witnessed many mass tragedies caused by terrorist attacks. Attacks were planned by terrorists or radicalised groups. Radicalisation is a multi-faceted phenomenon which should be viewed as a complex interaction of factors that does not necessarily lead to violence (Veldhuis & Staun 2009; Borum 2011; Christmann 2012; Hug 2013; Butt & Tuck 2014; Lowe 2015; Muro 2016; Bondokji, Wilkinson, Aghabi 2017). Radicalisation is the process by which an individual is socialized into an extremist ideology that manifests itself in terrorism (Expert Group 2008; Wilner and Dubouloz 2010; Schmid 2013; Muro 2016), whether left-wing, right-wing, anarchist, ethnic-nationalist or religious (Sedgwick 2010; Schmid 2013; Bramadat, Dawson 2014; Muro 2016; Dzhekova, Stoynova, Kojouhranov, Mancheva, Anagnostou, Tsenkov 2016).

Diego Muro (2016) points out that terrorists and radicalised groups resemble an iceberg. Only a small minority of radicals use strategic violence to attract media attention, whereas the majority of extremists are not visible and use non-violent methods, which are more effective in achieving their stated goals (Muro 2016). Counter-terrorism must target the visible part of the iceberg, whereas counter-radicalisation needs to aim at the underwater section of the iceberg, which is much larger (Muro 2016).

In combating terrorism and preventing radicalisation police has a major role as a guardian of a law and order (Kozmelj 2018; Macaluso 2016). However, the police cannot act on this alone but need other associates or stakeholders for prevention to be successful (Aiello, Puigivert, Schubert 2018; Kozmelj 2018; Macaluso 2016; Prisljan, Černigoj, Lobnikar 2018, OSCE 2018).

### 1.2. Media

During the second half of the 20th century, information development reached its pinnacle and influenced the transformation of societies and communities globally and locally (Perešin 2007). That also includes the development of media. Media is a generic term meaning all the methods or channels of information and entertainment (Wilkinson 2006:195). Media today not only shape public opinion but they also con-

duct politics, and journalists, besides reporting, deal with defining a great number of various operations which are on disposal to the government, and with predicting possible public reactions on certain government moves (Perešin 2007, Hoffman 2006). Besides media, as one phenomenon, there is another phenomenon that transforms the world – terrorism (Perešin, 2007, Wilkinson 2006, OSCE 2018).

Since 9/11 a lot has been said about the role of media and global communication networks in sustaining transnational terrorism (Schmid 1989, Perešin 2007, Archetti 2015). Media was said to have a great role in fostering the process of radicalisation – „the embracing of extremist views“ (Schmid 1989, Archetti 2015: 49). Communication is critical for the embracing of extremist views which manifest themselves in the form of terrorist violence (Archetti 2015). Radicals and terrorist seek to manipulate and exploit the media for their purposes by sending messages of violence and thus gaining mass publicity (Perešin 2007, Archetti 2015).

While there is a possibility that people will be exposed to extremist messages in the media, this does not mean that radicalisation will occur (Archetti 2015). Cristina Archetti (2015) claims that strategic communication approaches to counterterrorism tend to demonize the Internet and social media unnecessarily, so there are accusations against Internet and media for recruitments among Western audiences; those allegations, against the Internet and the media, are based on a lack of historical perspective, because what seems to us as a media revolution is really just a manifestation of the latest changes that come with the implementation of new technologies - from the invention of the printing press to the present (Archetti, 2015: 50).

Even though many hold media responsible for radicalisation, development of extremism and terrorism, there are claims equal to the myth that media can be useful in predicting terrorist acts (Archetti 2015). Archetti continues that radicalisation is “a temporal and context-specific outcome” (2015: 54) which depends on an individual’s unique position within a configuration of relationships at any given time.

“In a democratic society, a good and efficient public intelligence policy which would limit as much as possible the enormous clout that the mass media wield is an element of vital importance for a successful strategy of combating terrorism” (Perešin 2007: 13).

Countries, by all means, also have to include both national and international media into their counterterrorism strategy (Perešin 2007). Since the majority of countries in World are democratic countries with free media, it is not likely to expect that the media will react upon a direct request of the country following the expectations of the national safety mechanism (Perešin 2007).

Governments and media should be more aware that both verbal rhetoric and non-verbal signalling matter; greater care should be taken in the use of language and other symbols in public discourse and in all counter-radicalisation and counter-terrorism communication efforts (Nacos 2007, Schmid 2013).

Government and civil society should encourage the media and Internet providers not to give terrorists and their supporters free access to publicity in return for producing atrocities; editors and other gatekeepers in the media and on the internet ought to reconsider some of their news values in the light of the fact that publicity is the lifeblood of terrorism and that terrorist violence primarily serves to access the news system to intimidate or otherwise influence targeted audiences (Nacos 2007, Schmid 2013). Instead of solely following a repressive, take-websites-down approach, governments and civil society should try to engage with extremists online to counter the violent extremist narrative (Schmid 2013).

There is a series of important means by which responsible media in a democratic society or country can resist to terrorists' aims and objectives (Wilkinson 2006, OSCE 2018). By broadcasting objectively, the cruelty of terrorist violence and the killings of the innocent the media can contribute significantly to the destruction of the myth on fighters for justice and freedom as terrorists usually describe themselves (Wilkinson 2006, Archetti 2015).

In an open society with free media, it is impossible to guarantee that police anti-terrorist operations will be safeguarded against being compromised or disrupted by irresponsible media activity, claims Wilkinson (2006).

Wilkinson notes some practical forms of help, or notes what else can the media do in a positive way to aid in the struggle against radicalisation and terrorism:

- "responsible and accurate reporting on incidents may increase vigilance among the public (e.g., concerning unusual parcels, suspicious persons and behaviours);
- the media may transmit warnings issued by the police to the public as well as for instructions on how to behave in dangerous situations;
- the media with international reach may offer valuable data on foreign movements, relations between various persons and terrorists and different terrorist organisations, new types of weapons and possible future threats, such as the planning of an international terrorist spectacle or signs warning of a novel threat;
- the media also constitute an indispensable forum for quality discussions on terrorism's social and political implications as well as for the development of appropriate procedures and countermeasures;

- the media will remind authorities that the response to terrorism should comply with the rule of law, basic rights and requirements for social justice” (2006:195).

Journalist communities should create special recommendations related to the media self-control when covering the terror-related events or individuals, as one of the indispensable conditions of a successful counterterrorist struggle, claims Perešin (2007, OSCE 2018). OSCE (2018) Guidebook suggests the implementation of Internet safety education and media literacy programmes to teach students to recognise and reject violent extremist narratives while promoting narratives founded on human rights, tolerance and democratic values.

Contributions by the media to the war against terrorism are so valuable that they outweigh the disadvantages and risks and the undoubted damage caused by a small minority of irresponsible journalists and broadcasters (Wilkinson 2006, Perešin 2007). By adopting a well-thought-out approach by the governments and security agencies in Western liberal states, the media may become a weapon which could be used as an important means for defeating terrorists (Perešin 2007, Hoffman 2006). Anti-terrorist struggle should not be used to violate the freedom and independence of the press. The need to develop and implement strong moral and ethical principles but also legal norms in journalism is still present.

Willingness to look more critically at the role of the media and the internet is notably absent in current counter-terrorism efforts in most democratic states, claims Schmid (2013). Respect for freedom of speech and fear of censorship are powerful obstacles to efforts to reduce terrorist and extremist access to mass media and the Internet.

This survey seeks to examine the extent to which media can prevent extremism and radicalization and the factors that affect their occurrence, and to examine the association of four factors with the possibility of preventing the onset of radicalization.

## **2. DESCRIPTION OF THE METHOD, SAMPLE AND INSTRUMENT**

### **2.1. Sample Description**

In December 2018, during the student’ courses, a sample of 108 students from the Croatian Police Academy of the Ministry of the Interior participated in this study. The two-thirds of the participants (66.7 %) were working at the local level in police

stations, and 28.1% were regular students without any work experience in the police. The participants who were working in the police had, on average, 5.7 years of work experience ( $SD=2.93$ ), with the minimum length of service of 1 year and a maximum of 11 years.

The idea that police officers and citizens collaborate and solve actual problems, such as radicalisation, on the local level was the reason why this survey was conducted on police officers. Therewithal, since the police is a crucial stakeholder for preventing radicalisation, the police must be conscious of the capacities and limits of other stakeholders, such as media.

## 2.2 Instrument

The questionnaire developed in the *First Line*<sup>1</sup> project was used for conducting this survey. Aim of projects was to train various stakeholders (e.g. representatives of the police, local governments, NGOs, education, and health) to address the problems of radicalisation and to strengthen de-radicalisation/disengagement processes in the Western Balkans (Prislan et al., 2018). Parts of the questionnaire were modified to adjust the questionnaire to the Croatian sample. The first set of items included participants' estimates of the extent of their knowledge on radicalisation and the presence of various types of radicalisation in their local environments. The second set of 13 items referred to the factors and conditions that affect the development of extremism and strengthening of the radicalisation on an individual level. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient for this set of items is  $\alpha=.729$ . The last set of items consisted of 13 items that assessed the ability of various stakeholders to prevent radicalisation through adequate and professional conduct. The Cronbach alpha reliability coefficient for this set of items is  $\alpha=.898$ . All the items were assessed on a five-point scale, ranging from 1 – completely disagree to 5 – completely agree.

The participants filled the paper-pencil questionnaire before and after the 4-hour training session about the latest trends concerning terrorist attacks in Europe and the different approaches to preventing and disengaging from radicalisation. In this survey, only the results collected before the training were analysed.

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<sup>1</sup> *FIRST LINE* Practitioners Dealing with Radicalisation Issues – Awareness Raising and Encouraging Capacity Building in the Western Balkan Region, project No. HOME/2014/ISFP/AG/RADX/7533 (2016-2018), funded by the Internal Security Fund (ISF), European Commission.a

### 3 RESULTS

#### 3.1 Descriptive results

Table 1 shows arithmetic means, standard deviations, minimum and maximum values for asserting whether the media can effectively prevent the process of radicalisation in Croatia by appropriate/professional activities in their area and for particles related to which conditions or factors influence the development of extremism and strengthening the radicalisation of the individual.

**Table 1.** Descriptive indicators for claims about the media's ability to effectively prevent radicalisation processes and factors that influence the development of extremism

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Arithmetic mean (M)	Standard deviation (SD)
<b>The extent to which the media can prevent radicalization processes</b>	108	1	5	3,83	1,046
<b>Factors influencing the development of extremism and radicalization</b>	107	1	5	3,34	1,009
Injustice in the World	108	1	5	3,69	,848
Financial/economic crisis	108	1	5	3,67	,976
Political disagreements in the world	108	1	5	3,13	,908
Political disagreements in the local environment	108	1	5	3,67	1,059
Religious or other ideological indoctrination of people	107	1	5	3,73	1,005
Promotion / incitement of hatred by political leaders	107	1	5	3,64	1,030
Propagation of religious leaders	108	1	5	2,96	1,022
Powerless feeling of an individual	108	1	5	2,93	1,030
Individuals characteristics / personality	108	1	5	3,69	,870
Media coverage (magazines, TV)	106	2	5	3,80	,877



**Table 2.** Percentage of participants concerning evaluations of media claims to effectively prevent radicalisation processes and factors affecting the development of extremism

		nothing	2	3	4	very much
<b>The extent to which the media can prevent radicalisation processes</b>	N	5	6	21	46	30
	%	4,6	5,6	19,4	42,6	27,8
		No impact at all	2	3	4	distinctly affecting
<b>Factors influencing the development of extremism and radicalisation</b>						
Injustice in the World	N	3	19	38	33	14
	%	2,8	17,8	35,5	30,8	13,1
Financial/economic crisis	N	2	3	39	46	18
	%	1,9	2,8	36,1	42,6	16,7
Political disagreements in the world	N	3	10	27	48	20
	%	2,8	9,3	25,0	44,4	18,5
Political disagreements in the local environment	N	3	22	48	28	7
	%	2,8	20,4	44,4	25,9	6,5
Religious or other ideological indoctrination of people	N	4	10	30	38	26
	%	3,7	9,3	27,8	35,2	24,1
Promotion / incitement of hatred by political leaders	N	1	13	27	39	27
	%	0,9	12,1	25,2	36,4	25,2
Propagation of religious leaders	N	1	15	31	34	26
	%	0,9	14,0	29,0	31,8	24,3
Powerless feeling of an individual	N	5	33	41	19	10
	%	4,6	30,6	38,0	17,6	9,3
Individual characteristics / personality (Karakteristike / osobnost pojedinca)	N	8	28	45	18	9
	%	7,4	25,9	41,7	16,7	8,3
Media reporting (magazines, TV)	N	1	7	35	46	19
	%	0,9	6,5	32,4	42,6	17,6
Network propaganda (internet, FB, Twitter)	N	0	6	35	39	26
	%	0,0	5,7	33,0	36,8	24,5

Based on the results in Table 1 shows that students of the Police Academy, on average, more believe than not believe that the media can be appropriate or professional conduct in its territory effectively prevent radicalisation processes in Croatia ( $M = 3.83$ ,  $SD = 1.046$ ). Specifically, 4.6% of participants considered that the media could not do anything to prevent radicalisation, while 27.8% of participants considered that the media play an important role in this process.

Average estimates of the role of factors that influence the development of extremism and the strengthening of radicalisation of the individual are above the midpoint of the scale, indicating that the participants consider that these factors play role in the development of extremism and the strengthening of radicalisation to a greater extent than not. The factors that the largest proportion of participants consider to have



a significant impact on the development of extremism and the strengthening of radicalization are: incitement of hatred by political leaders (25.2%), online propaganda (24.5%), propaganda by religious leaders (24.3%), and religious or other ideological indoctrination of people (24.1%). Of the factors examined, the largest share of participants (7.4%) felt that the characteristics, that is, the personality of the individual, did not influence at all the strengthening of extremism and radicalisation.

It can be concluded that the participants are more inclined to believe that the media can prevent the processes of radicalisation in Croatia, and the sources of extremism and radicalisation are mostly seen in the propagation of such views by influential public figures.

### 3.2. The relationship between the extent to which media can prevent the emergence of radicalisation and the factors that influence its emergence

To determine whether certain factors influence the occurrence of extremism and radicalisation, which the trainees think may be prevented or acted upon in the media, a correlation analysis was conducted. The results are shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.** Correlations between the extent to which media can prevent extremism and radicalisation and the factors that affect their occurrence

	The extent to which the media can prevent radicalisation processes
<i>Injustice in the World</i>	,009
<i>Financial/economic crisis</i>	,111
<i>Political disagreements in the world</i>	,137
<i>Political disagreements in the local environment</i>	,072
<i>Religious or other ideological indoctrination of people</i>	,203*
<i>Promotion/incitement of hatred by political leaders</i>	,062
<i>Propagation of religious leaders</i>	,134
<i>Powerless feeling of an individual</i>	,195*
<i>Individuals characteristics / personality</i>	,145
<i>Media reporting (magazines, TV)</i>	,344**
<i>Network propaganda (internet, FB, Twitter)</i>	,240*

p<,01\*\*; p<,05\*

The results in Table 3 indicate that the extent to which the media can prevent radicalisation processes is statistically significantly positively related to the four factors that influence the occurrence of radicalisation. More specifically, trainees who think that the media can do a great deal to prevent the process of radicalization are more inclined to believe that religious or other ideological indoctrination of people ( $r = .203, p < .05$ ), an individual's sense of powerlessness ( $r = .195, p < .05$ ), media reporting through magazines and TV ( $r = .344, p < .01$ ) and online propaganda via the Internet, Facebook and Twitter ( $r = .240, p < .05$ ) all significantly influence the phenomenon the process of extremization and radicalization.

It is necessary to consider the role of the media in the prevention of radicalisation by acting on four factors (religious or other ideological indoctrination of people, feeling of powerlessness of the individual, media reporting and online propaganda) that act on the appearance of extremism and radicalisation.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Recent terrorist attacks have brought the process of radicalisation into the limelight of both the public and the media. Police have a major role in combating terrorism and preventing radicalisation (Kozmelj 2018; Macaluso 2016). Even so, police cannot act on this alone but need aid and collaboration with other stakeholders, such as media (Aiello, Puigivert, Schubert 2018; Kozmelj 2018; Macaluso 2016; Prisljan, Černigoj, Lobnikar 2018, OSCE 2018 ).

In addition to being heavily involved in shaping public opinion, the media, through journalists, deals with defining a large number of different operations that are disposed of by the governments, and with predicting possible public reactions to certain government moves (Perešin 2007; Hoffman 2006). Even though many hold media responsible for radicalisation, the development of extremism and terrorism, there are some claims equal to the myth that media can be useful in predicting terrorist acts (Archetti 2015).

A sample of 108 students of Croatian Police Academy of the Ministry of the Interior answered about their perception of the role of media in radicalisation prevention. The results indicate that the respondents, to a greater extent, consider that the media can effectively prevent radicalisation processes in Croatia by appropriate or professional activities ( $M = 3.83, SD = 1.046$ ). Only 4.6% of respondents believe that the media can do nothing to prevent radicalisation, and 27.8% of respondents think that the role of the media in preventing radicalisation is important.

Statistical analysis has indicated that the extent to which the media can prevent radicalisation processes is statistically significantly positively related to four factors that influence the occurrence of radicalisation. There is a need to explore further the role of the media in preventing radicalisation by influencing four factors (religious or other ideological indoctrination of people, feelings of the powerlessness of the individual, media coverage and online propaganda) that influence extremism and radicalisation.

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## **KAKO POLICIJA PERCIPIRA ULOGU MEDIJA U PREVENCIJI RADIKALIZACIJE: PRIMJER HRVATSKE**

### **Sažetak:**

Svrha ovog rada bila je istražiti mogu li se i kako mediji uključiti u proces prevencije ekstremizma i radikalizacije sa stajališta policije.

Ovo je istraživanje provedeno na uzorku od 108 studenata s Policijske akademije Ministarstva unutarnjih poslova putem anketnog upitnika kojim su ispitana saznanja sudionika o radikalizaciji, prisutnosti različitih vrsta radikalizacije u njihovom okruženju, faktorima i uvjetima koji utječu na razvoj ekstremizma i radikalizacije i sposobnosti medija da spriječe radikalizaciju.

Rezultati ukazuju na to da policajci u medijima vide partnera u sprječavanju radikalizacije.

Rezultati ovog istraživanja mogli bi se upotrijebiti za predstavljanje važnosti medija u sprječavanju radikalizacije različitim dionicima kako bi se započelo s provedbom obuke medijskih radnika za olakšavanje ovog procesa.

Ovaj nam rad daje uvid u percepciju medija među hrvatskim policijskim službenicima kao njihovih partnera u prevenciji radikalizacije i ekstremizma.

Buduća istraživanja trebaju uključivati veći uzorak s jednakim brojem sudionika sa i bez radnog iskustva u policiji, kako bi se mogle istražiti potencijalne razlike u njihovim stavovima.

**Ključne riječi:** policija; prevencija; radikalizacija; mediji

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