

Austrian Prison Service Action Plan on Prevention of Extremism and De-Radicalisation

The terrorist attacks in Europe from 2004 to 2017 brought the topic "Violent Extremism and Radicalisation" back to the agenda. All European States were called to reinforce their actions to prevent all types of extremism that leads to violence. In the relevant debates prisons are often described as "breeding grounds" for radicalization and violent extremism. This is not surprising as prisons are "places of vulnerability", which offer nearly optimum conditions for the prospering of radical often religiously orientated ideologies. Concerns have been repeatedly raised about the problems of radicalisation in prisons, and preventive measures and de-radicalisation and resocialisation programmes have been initiated. The Austrian Prison Administration has taken a plethora of measures to effectively counter this phenomenon.

54 persons are currently in detention for (being suspected of) membership in a terrorist group or for supporting such a group (Sections 278b & seqq. Criminal Code). To be prepared for the challenges connected with the increasing number of convictions, already in summer 2015 an interdisciplinary Task Force "De-Radicalisation in Prison" was established, which was preparing strategies and implementation proposals, and coordinating and supervising all activities in this area. In the framework of the overall strategy developed a comprehensive package of measures for the prevention of extremism and for de-radicalisation in prisons has been developed; a number of measures, in particular in the areas of security, care, training and further education have already been implemented.

The most essential measures are briefly described below:

- Internally Agreed Rules for Dealing with the target group

Persons detained for the suspicion of being members of terrorist groups or of supporting such groups are subjected to special security measures. There are individually adapted and internally coordinated rules in accordance with the conditions in a particular prison, which for instance provide uniform provisions for issues of accommodation (such as solitary confinement, isolation detention, etc.) or for security standards for accompanying prisoners (e.g. when appearing at court, being transported to a hospital).

- Establishing Liaison Services between Prisons and Regional Offices for the Protection of the Constitution

In each prison, two suitable prison staff members were selected and trained as experts. They form the respective communication interface with the terrorism experts at the regional offices for the Protection of the Constitution (Regional Security Services of the Ministry of Interior) Moreover, they counsel the prison management on issues of radicalisation.

- Guideline for designing Mandatory Sentence Plans

It is mandatory to set forth an individual sentence plan for persons detained - in remand or sentenced by court - for terrorist or attempted terrorist acts, "hate-crimes" etc. at the very

beginning of their detention. For this purpose a multi-professional team has developed detailed process designs, promoting professional individual sentence and support plans for the inmates of the target group.

- **Expansion of special Dialogue Offerings by DERAD**

Since February 2016, additional measures in the areas of preventing extremism and de-radicalisation are being taken in all prisons in cooperation with the organisation DERAD (social cohesion network for dialogue, prevention of extremism and for democracy; active in Austria and Germany). Through specially developed Dialogue and discussion formats prisoners who are committed to an extremist ideology based on religion and glorifying violence and/or are ready to promote such ideology are being approached. In the subsequent discussions, ideological goals, construed enemy stereotypes and the espousal of violence are being critically examined. As a rule, one mandatory orientation interview must be conducted, further intervention interviews shall follow, if needed; also group discussions are being offered.

- **Risk Assessment Screening**

Work is underway on a screening process adapted for the purposes of Austrian correctional facilities, which is oriented towards international risk assessment tools (ERG 22 and VERA). Properly trained psychologists are using a checklist to be able to assess the risk emanating from individual prisoners of the specific group of offenders.

- **Establishing a De-Radicalisation Programme**

In 2010, a specially adapted anti-violence training for prisoners in Austrian correctional facilities was developed consisting of twelve modules concerning violence and the handling of conflicts. The Violence Prevention Network (VPN) constitutes a similar concept in Germany. These two programmes were synchronised, and the existing anti-violence training has been expanded by specific de-radicalisation modules (such as ethics/value system, political education, etc.). 20 Austrian psychologists and social workers already got the training on the new De-Radicalisation Programme.

- **Transition Management and Aftercare**

It is most important to prepare prisoners having been detained for the suspicion of being members or supporters of a terrorist group, for their release together with their social environment (if any). The “**Conferences of the Social Net of Benefits**” which have been conducted for juveniles nation-wide in cooperation with the organisation NEUSTART (carrying out the Probation Service in Austria) have proven a usable instrument of resocialisation also in this area.

- **Training and Further Education: Training by the Federal Security Services of the Ministry of Interior (BVT)**

In the framework of an annual training and further education programme, correctional service employees are being trained appropriately. Since 2015, also awareness lectures are held by

representative of BVT and the regional offices of the Security Services and by Islam experts.

- **One-day Training Schedule for prisons and correctional facilities: Regional Training Events**

The Correctional Services Academy developed a specific programme format for regional training events in the prisons. It includes presentations both by qualified lecturers from the Correctional Services Academy and by external experts.

- **Special Training Design and Educational Formats**

The educational subject “dealing with radicalised and extremist prisoners” is embedded in the basic training of correctional service employees. In this context a specific training design and specific educational formats were developed and integrated in the initial training and further training of all kinds of prison staff.

- **Staff Recruitment**

Increased attention is paid to language skills and awareness of religious and cultural diversity, to provide such diversity of correctional staff members. Experience indicates that the cooperation with personnel with a background in various faiths can prevent radicalisation in prisons.

- **Internal Cooperation based on Partnership – Regular Staff Meetings of Prison Managers in the Justice Ministry on the topic “prevention of extremism and de-radicalisation”**

At least twice every year staff meetings with all prison managers take place at the Directorate General for PS for the executive staff to exchange experiences and for establishing uniform best practices.

- **Cooperation with other Ministries affected and with external Partners**

There is close cooperation with the organisation NEUSTART (carrying out the Probation Service in Austria), there is institutionalised cooperation with the Federal Ministry of Interior/Federal Security Services and the Federal Ministry for Family and Youth in the framework of the “Interministerial Advisory Body of the Counselling Centre against Extremism” established in 2015.

- **Research and Evaluation**

An **accompanying research study** conducted by the Institute for the Sociology of Law and Criminology (IRKS) examined in 2016 and systematically evaluated the impact of all introduced measures on the de-radicalisation of prisoners.

- **Cooperation on European and International Levels**

Such cooperation exists with EuroPris as member of the expert group “Radicalisation”, with the Middle Europe Corrections Roundtable (MECR) in the framework of jointly organised training workshops on de-radicalisation, and with the International Corrections and Prisons

Association (ICPA) as member in the “Sub Committee on Counter Radicalisation” of the “Training and Development Committee”, furthermore with the EC’s Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) of which the Austrian PS is a member since 2014.