

Towards an alliance of European cities against violent extremism

*Local authorities' conference on the prevention
of radicalisation leading to violent extremism*



Conference report » 18 November 2015, Aarhus



The Congress

Le Congrès



Organised by the **Congress of Local and
Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe**
and the **European Forum for Urban Security**

Hosted by the mayors of Aarhus and Rotterdam

Rapporteur: Mette Reinhardt Jakobsen, journalist

Conference organised in partnership with:



Note from rapporteur:

This conference was held in the shadow of the terror attacks a few days earlier in Paris, on Friday 13th of November, where 130 people lost their lives.

The same morning the conference was held, a police intervention in Saint-Denis (commune in the northern suburbs of Paris) had led to further deaths.

This meant that some speakers from France and Belgium had to cancel their participation.

A minute of silence was observed at the beginning of the conference.

Finally, nearly all speakers began their contribution expressing their sorrow for the Paris attacks; these condolences have been left out in the following report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The conference *Towards an alliance of European cities against violent extremism* took place in the city of Aarhus, Denmark on the 18th of November 2015. It was a day-long debate and exchange of opinions and experiences between almost 100 European mayors and other representatives of local authorities.

The discussions were centred around the huge potential for local authorities to participate actively in the preventive measures taken to fight radicalisation – a potential coming from the specific closeness to and knowledge of local communities that only locally implemented authorities possess, due to their daily work.

A number of municipalities presented the measures, programmes and toolkits they already put into action in cities across Europe; and the panels and participants actively discussed the different approaches, in particular how to find the right balance between prevention and repression; how to engage dialogue with closed communities; how to empower and engage local frontline workers; how to collaborate and coordinate efforts with regional, national, Europe-

an and perhaps international levels; and how to find the necessary political courage to pursue the fight against radicalisation.

The need for further dialogue between local authorities in order to exchange experiences and best practices became even more evident as the conference progressed. A need that was finally officially formulated in the 'Aarhus Declaration', a written declaration stressing the importance of recognising public, local initiatives at a European level, which was adopted by the entire conference at the end of the day.

1. OPENING SESSION: European local authorities against violent extremism



Jacob Bundsgaard, Mayor of Aarhus:

After welcoming the guests on behalf of Aarhus and Rotterdam, the Mayor pointed out that the recent terror attacks in Paris underline how desperately important are the efforts to prevent violent extremism. He invited to not lose one's rationality, emphasising that urban communities have a specific obligation to focus on preventive work. Referring to the Aarhus model, established in 2007, he put forward the importance of dialogue, between police, social services and civil society. A dialogue necessary to help young people in risk of radicalisation to choose the right solutions, instead of criticising and condemning them.

The believed success of the Aarhus model also lies in the broad political, cross-party support, giving legitimacy to the initiative. This is due to the fundamental democratic values it is supposed to defend:

freedom of expression and individual rights.

“Even if the model is based on an understanding approach, extreme violence is intolerable to society, and respect for the law should be maintained at all times. It is not a ‘get-out-of-jail-free’-card,” the Mayor stated.

“Adjusting the model and learning from others remain a focus for the city of Aarhus, such as today’s conference,” he concluded.



Jean-Claude Frécon, President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe:

“The terrorist attacks in Paris and other European cities involving armed jihadists have shed new light on the need for cities and towns to do more to effectively prevent radicalisation and tackle extremism,” the president declared. “Violence must not win; it is contrary to our human values. When they target our young generation, those who go out with their friends, in cosmopolitan neighbourhoods, where cultures intersect and mix, the terrorists attack our most fundamental rights and freedoms. We keep standing up for human rights, democracy and the rule of law,” the president continued.

Radicalisation can be best contained at the local level, by prevention initiatives, intercultural and interreligious dialogue and the reintegration

tion into society of individuals who have become radicalised.

This network of local authorities, having a specific local knowledge of their populations, will be a strong tool to combat radicalisation. “The terrorists no longer come from abroad,” the president recalled. “They are European citizens, they have grown up in our own neighbourhoods. Therefore it is incumbent upon local and regional authorities to act,” he concluded, expressing the hope that the conference would be a starting point for mobilising local authorities across Europe to combat radicalisation.



Leen Verbeek, Vice President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe:

The Vice President established that “growing radicalisation is an issue *within* our societies. Radicalisation leading to extreme violence in cities, but also increasing the risk of barbarisation through hate speech in social media and a new focus on fascism as a threat to democracy.” Radicalisation is connected to democracy’s shortcomings, where citizens lose faith in human rights. Political disengagement, coming across extremist groups or just looking for adventure; there is no typical profile for individuals who fall into extremism.

The Vice President explained the three pillars of action the Congress

has created to implement its strategy of combating radicalisation, and how guidelines to rational, well-designed anti-radicalisation measures at local and regional levels are a priority to the Congress. Guidelines mentioned were:

- » Communicating measures to the general public in a responsible way
- » Focusing on prevention since this corresponds best to local authorities' competences
- » Supporting exit opportunities for individuals wishing to leave an extremist environment
- » The importance of schools in building resilience and resistance to radicalisation
- » Raising awareness among local and regional authorities on existing practices.

"We need to build inclusive societies in order to tackle the issue of radicalisation leading to extreme violence," the Vice President concluded.



Guilherme Pinto, President of the European Forum for Urban Security:

"What do they want? Why does this happen? And what should we do?" The President of Efus pinpointed the questions raised after the recent terror attacks. "We must not be afraid, nor let the feeling of

insecurity gain us,” he underlined. The opportunity is to go deeper into the idea of a united Europe, strengthening common, foreign policies, embracing democracy and embracing the role of cities. “Young people choose terrorism because they miss something. Explaining to them that their home is not abroad but where they actually live, is the best way of preventing others to follow the fanatics’ path,” the president put forward. In order to do so, the mobilisation of mayors and local authorities is key since they are the closest to the population. Preventing radicalisation is complementary to repression, and in this light the president presented the LIAISE training programme for local practitioners created by Efus. Originally including 10 partner cities in 6 countries, the programme will now be enlarged to 28 institutions in 12 countries. “The creation of such a network is basic, but also the most efficient way to combat radicalisation: Creating inclusive societies,” the president concluded.



Ahmed Aboutaleb, Mayor of Rotterdam (video message):

Welcoming the initiative to exchange experiences and knowledge in the domain of anti-radicalisation, the mayor of Rotterdam pointed out that a combination of prevention and repression is the best way to tackle the problem. The knowledge available in the Efus network,

as well as the network recently established in New York was praised, and the necessity to also draw knowledge from cities in Africa and Middle East was mentioned. "A lot of academic research is being conducted, investigating the phenomenon of radicalisation leading to violent extremism – this knowledge will be concentrated in papers, ending up on our European mayors' desks. It is therefore up to us to take the necessary decisions to act upon the scientists' work," M. Aboutaleb ended his video-intervention, which had been recorded days before the conference.

2. Local authorities facing the challenges of radicalisation leading to violent extremism



Elizabeth Johnston, Executive Director, European Forum for Urban Security (moderator):

The centre of this first discussion was the role of local authorities vis-à-vis national and international authorities and civil society, said Ms Johnston. She expressed how glad she was to see a diversity of cities represented at the conference, since the issue of radicalisation is a truly European one and therefore calls for a truly European methodology. Inviting the panel participants to reflect on what type of product such a methodology could be, she also invited them to consider the following specific questions. What role do you play as a locally elected politician? How do you tackle this very complicated political topic? How do you talk about this sensitive issue without discriminating? How do you ensure the social cohesion, the social fabric of your community? The answers to these questions were meant to bring forward the

obstacles mayors are facing. Finally, referring to the previous intervention of the President of the Congress, Ms Johnston asked the panel 'how do we find the political courage?' and thereby opened the debate.



Ritva Viljanen, Deputy Mayor of Helsinki, Finland:

Finland operates with three types of violent extremism, Ms Viljanen explained: The violent extreme right wing, based on neo-Nazism and skinhead traditions; the violent extreme left wing, mainly anarchists, and violent extremism justified by religion, as a consequence of the Syria/Iraq conflicts. More than 60 young people have travelled from Finland to join ISIS groups. To encompass this, Helsinki has had a Cooperation Network for the Prevention of Violent Extremism since 2013, distributing information at a local level. Additionally, a special department has been created under the Safety and Preparedness unit to gather international information. Helsinki is the only Finnish city to have these kinds of centralised operations, where a local-level strategy and an operational plan for preventive work are currently being prepared for launch in the spring of 2016.

Among other, a programme to fortify young Muslims' self-identity and minimising their feeling of social exclusion has been put in place, in-

spired by a British programme (Being British Being Muslim). Likewise, cooperation between police and social workers has been somewhat successful, the Finnish mayor explained.



Bert Bouwmeester, Mayor of Coevorden, Netherlands:

Coevorden is an average Dutch municipality with 36,000 inhabitants. The municipality only asylum centre causes no problem, and the different population groups have a quiet coexistence. Still, the mayor foresees more turbulence over the next years since the implementation of a second centre for asylum seekers has been planned. Questions are growing, he said, most of them with regards to safety issues, seen in the light of the recent terror attacks. Presently, the extreme right party has no political representation in the municipality, but the growing social segregation the Mayor has identified may translate in the next local elections. Church and state are separated in the Netherlands; nevertheless the local authorities have requested meetings with the city's mosques in order to engage in dialogue and cooperation. So far the demand has been rejected: "Probably these people's previous experience have led them to believe that contact with authorities is not a good sign," he analysed. "We are aware that something is needed to prevent future conflicts – but how can we do

it?" the Mayor asked, and presented the conference as a first step to learn from the example of other cities. The toolkit for intercultural and interreligious dialogue he is preparing as rapporteur for the Congress of the Council of Europe aims to be instrumental for him and many colleagues.



Andreas Schönström, Deputy Mayor of Malmö, Sweden:

A town of 300,000 inhabitants but comprising 177 different nationalities, Malmö has always taken pride in being an inclusive community, the deputy mayor affirmed. Still, the recent wave of refugees from Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan has challenged the city's capacities; since January 2015, approximately 10,000 unaccompanied children and 11,000 asylum-seekers have arrived in Malmö. "This does mean problems, especially the emergence of a growing right-wing extremism," Mr Schönström admitted. Therefore the city has taken new measures aiming at a successful integration of these newly arrived citizens. These measures are:

- » The creation of a socially sustainable city, enforcing the Swedish welfare-system by investing in employment and schooling
- » A close collaboration with religious communities, enabling dialogue
- » A special task force of social services, school and police, trained

to identify early signs of extremist behaviour and able to take action on these signs.

To succeed, a careful preparation is necessary, Mr Schönström said; the risk is that certain groups will feel stigmatised when subject to this specific attention. Also, the cooperation with the police is delicate, since the Swedish police are the State's responsibility. Therefore, the strongest effort local authorities can do is at a preventive level, the Swedish mayor concluded.



Mouloud Haddad, Deputy Mayor of Bagneux, France:

A Parisian suburb, Bagneux is also a city of solidarity and cultural diversity, the deputy mayor explained in his introduction. After the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks in January 2015, a public event was organised in the name of mutual respect, in which different sides of the community expressed a wish to collaborate. But nothing formal followed that evening – most likely “everyday life took over again,” Mr Haddad said. Nevertheless, the municipality has since worked on three themes to combat radicalisation: Prevention, protection and social cohesion.

- » Prevention is about balancing individual, civic freedom with a common culture; public schools are key in this matter.
- » Protection raises the topic of local versus national authorities.

France has both a municipal and a national police force and the two should cooperate; the community police forces in particular have a unique ability to resolve local conflicts, the Deputy Mayor said.

» Social cohesion is about urban renewal in order to put an end to the worrying ghettoization in certain suburbs

“The terrorists want to kill, frighten and divide,” Mr Haddad stated at the end. “They might have succeeded in the first two, but they will not succeed in dividing us.”



Liz Dixon, Councillor, Brent, UK:

Preventive work against radicalisation in Brent first became a point of attention after the attacks in London in 2007. At that time, most of the work was done in schools, to reassure and prevent extremist behaviour. In 2011, the city council adopted a more comprehensive strategy to work across sectors; more than 200 young people were then known for having attempted to reach Syria. The local authorities’ response was to train frontline-workers – nurses, teachers and community groups–, providing them with a toolkit for engaging in dialogue about these issues. “We needed to develop their confidence, empower them to have these necessary conversations, teaching them how to challenge radical thinking,” Ms Dixon explained. “We needed to

teach them how to recognise people who have been groomed for violence. Training is key, but also who does the training. We collaborate with people who are close to the Muslim communities, who know who the recruiters are." The toolkit has proven to be strong, because it is based on a strong strategy and a willingness from the local authorities to curb any sign of radicalisation leading to extreme violence.



Adina Durback. Vice Mayor of Brasov, Romania:

Brasov is a city that has a history of multi-ethnicity; about 1/3 of the inhabitants are Christian, the rest are from other religious backgrounds. The city has found a balanced approach to this diversity, with multiple mixed marriages and native languages taught in schools, Ms Durback said. Also multiple multi-cultural events are organised from the city's side. But "even with a tradition of tolerance, destabilisation can occur in the case of major transformations in society," Ms Durback said, recalling events after the Romanian revolution in 1989, where troubles arose with Hungarian minorities in Transylvania. "Extremism is a phenomenon that seems to indicate that cultural traditions cannot offer all the solutions," the vice mayor pointed out, adding that the identification of a society's cultural values might nevertheless be a useful

tool in order to stand stronger in the fight against radicalisation.



Hans Bonte. Mayor of Vilvoorde, Belgium (video message):

Seen in the light of that same morning's police intervention in Brussels, the Mayor began by underlining the necessity to exchange experiences on how to deal with radicalised young people trying to escape from European societies. In Vilvoorde, 28 young people left for Syria already 19 months ago. Choosing a 'soft' approach, the city put in place a strong system of support for affected families and families at risk, helping them to create a good environment and providing them with solid information on how the radicalisation process rolls out. In addition to this, the city has monitors tightly the 8 youngsters who returned from Syria; 5 are currently in prison and the remaining 3 are followed closely. Finally, police and social workers collaborate to help radicalised people who wish to reintegrate society, helping them to find an alternative to violence and making them feel they are part of the local society and history. "We need an injection of warmth around these people," Mr Bonte concluded.

2. 1. Discussion

Moderator Elizabeth Johnston resumed the previous posts:

“The role of cities in the proactive fight against radicalisation leading to extreme violence seems to be primordial. It seems that all the speakers in this panel are currently exploring strategies aiming at partnerships with local and national institutions, and with civil society. And the difficulty seems to be how to engage in a sustainable, long-lasting dialogue, in particular with specific communities that reject collaboration. The previous presentations underline the necessity of developing a European strategy to deal with the issue of radicalisation,” Ms Johnston summarised.

Bert Bouwmeester mentioned the city of Brent as an example of the importance of training and asked how the toolkit would be useful to other cities.

Liz Dixon stressed that two kinds of people are necessary in such a training process; those in charge of the strategy and those working within the city, having legitimacy and authority within the concerned communities.

Thomas Andersson, Councillor in the Region of Jämtland Härjedalen, Sweden asked Mr Haddad how he reaches the people who don't care about radicalisation.

Leen Verbeek pointed out how the present debate showed that “many roads leads to Rome; a mayor in Romania does not have the same concerns as a mayor from another country. Each situation needs a different answer.” He encouraged to not talk about what others should do, but about what each local community can do in their own, specific context. Simply copying tools from others will not work. But what can be done in common is a form of methodology, to build programs, to build discussions with the people who reject our societies, in order to “send a signal that we, as local authorities, take the issue seriously,” Mr Verbeek stated.

Jean-Claude Frécon raised the question (in relation to Mr Andersson) about the lack in some countries of a strong political representation of those immigrants who arrived a generation ago – and whether a new political engagement in this respect could be something to consider.

Ritva Viljanen invited to not create problems that don't exist: “Hate

speech is based on intolerance, grounded in the fact that people don't know each other." She pointed towards the media as responsible for creating a specific picture of Muslims, even if these communities are very diverse, and she endorsed the conference's initial claim for political courage to change this.

Andreas Schönström also addressed the topic of minorities' representation in politics. "A local representation should always mirror the population of a city, but democracy already ensures this – we wouldn't be elected without a mixture of candidates," he explained. "It would be a problem in Malmö if seats were reserved to specific communities, since it would send the signal that they are a minority. We believe in natural integration," he concluded.

Mouloud Haddad answered (*to Mr Andersson's previous question*) that he had noted a certain 'social fatigue' in the city's popular neighbourhoods, where life is already difficult as it is. The topic of anti-radicalisation therefore becomes secondary, once the emotional reactions to acts of terrorism evaporate. It is a democratic challenge, Mr Haddad added, also since ethnic representation in politics is a taboo in France: the political tradition comprises only one united commu-

nity, and if certain populations do not wish to participate, nothing can be done. “There are such fractures in our society, there are such contradictions. It’s a choice between security versus individual liberty – which one should be dominant?”

Bert Bouwmeester addressed Mr Bonte’s idea of ‘an injection of warmth’ with an interrogation. Considering there is also a need for repressive tools, Mr Bouwmeester saw this as a possible dilemma: “How can one be a trusted person with good influence for the concerned people, at an individual level, and at the same time have the ability to escalate to more repressive measures, if necessary? It is probably a question with no answer,” he said.

Adina Durbaca said, reacting to Mr Frécon’s suggestion of political representation for minorities, that multiple people of foreign origin are already part of her local city council; “This means that in all aspects of the city’s social and cultural life, we are all together,” she said.

Liz Dixon said, in response to Mr Bouwmeester’s dilemma, that the development of solid relations to prevent radicalisation, and the ability to enforce if necessary, is not only a matter of individuals but also

a common effort, from local authorities, social services, parents and all other relevant parties. "Such a common effort should be part of an overall strategy in order to succeed," she said.

3. How other stakeholders see the role of local authorities in fighting violent extremism



Marie-Madeleine Mialot Muller, Chairwoman, Governance Committee, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (*moderator*):

Ms Muller recalled the actual circumstances, resulting in two cancellations from this panel, due to security reasons. She then introduced the two following speakers.



Jonathan Birdwell, Coordinator of the Strong Cities Network, Institute for Strategic Dialogue:

Mr Birdwell told about the Strong Cities Network and his organisation, the British think tank Institute for Strategic Dialogue (ISD), which evaluates interventions against radicalisation in cities across the globe. "An iterative process," he explained, since ISD also designs

interventions based on the research, measures them, refines them and redesigns them. Primarily, ISD facilitates best-practice through network meetings in different cities several times a year, the next gathering being in Oslo in February 2016, uniting both local, national and global actors. He also mentioned the Strong Cities Network collaboration with Efus and the LIAISE programme, and expressed hope that the two organisations could build an even stronger collaboration in the future around training and the design of support structures and communication strategies for local authorities. “What SCN can also provide in that sense is a global expansion of the work,” he said. “Since not only European mayors are looking for ideas and innovation in this area, we need to share insights across the world; we should favour two-way communication between Europe and the rest of the world,” he concluded.



Kelly Simcock, Co-chair of the RAN Working Group on Youth, Families and Communities, EU Radicalisation Awareness Network and Director of Commissions of the Tim Parry Jonathan Ball Foundation for Peace:

Foundation for Peace was created after the killing of two young boys by an IRA bomb 20 years ago, said Ms Simcock, presenting her or-

ganisation. "We wanted to create a legacy and therefore we mainly do preventive work for young children. The terrible current circumstances remind us why we do what we do: engaging local authorities to create a safety net for youth. Firstly, we do not want to adopt a top-down approach but wishes for a genuine dialogue to create true change," she explained. "Secondly, we try to solve the issue of reaching out to those who are difficult to reach – in order to do so, a strategic focus is to engage dialogue with isolated communities as early as possible. Thirdly, we intend to create communication platforms on difficult topics. This goes through schools, teachers, local people, and there is an urgency to scale this activity up, and massive training sessions of these members of civil society is important." As a final comment, Ms Simcock called for sustainable solutions against radicalisation, even when there is an urge for a quick fix. "The preventive end is perhaps the softer end, but this is where the sharpest tools are needed," she stated.

3. 1. Discussion

Marie-Madeleine Mialot Muller said, summarising the previous interventions, that both panel participants seem to have developed a series of useful tools for local authorities. “These local actors always seem to be in the frontline of the fight against radicalisation,” she said, asking the panel what their suggestion would be to solve the sometimes very lonely position expressed by local authorities.

Jonathan Birdwell replied by enumerating the concrete measures that the Institute for Strategic Dialogue is currently working on:

- » Connecting city officials and practitioners across the world;
- » Informing through online training hubs and case-studies;
- » Translating knowledge to/from African and Middle Eastern countries;
- » Multiagency strategies for empowerment – investigating how local organisations can successfully cooperate;
- » Building and facilitating dedicated city-to-city exchange, and through this giving sense to details;
- » Encouraging innovation by creating grants to cities;
- » Helping challenged cities to communicate on a national level.

He also emphasised the importance of the narrative in schools:

“It’s important to create counter-narratives to extremist discourse,” Mr Birdwell emphasised, mentioning a recent project mobilising networks of ‘credible voices’ to provide young people tempted by radicalism with a more positive vision of their cities and local communities.

Kelly Simcock added that she saw some similarities with her work within the Radicalisation Awareness Network, even though RAN is more focused on EU Member States’ exchanges and on how to operate on a practitioner’s level. As an example she mentioned how an educational working group is currently considering a manifesto on how to empower teachers.

RAN also develops thematic papers but “the devil is in the detail – one size will not fit all,” she recalled, even if at a higher level there may seem to be many similarities. “RAN is trying to identify best practices for local communities but we are also looking to extend the network, creating links with new neighbours. Extremism doesn’t stop at the borders, and therefore we are also keen to work on connectivity across member states.”

Marie-Madeleine Mialot Muller asked the panellists which difficulties they seem to meet – apart from the obvious question of financial resources.

Kelly Simcock pointed to impact assessment as a crucial tool in making national authorities see the quality of work on the ground. But many of RAN's collaborators are 'low-level-infrastructures' as Ms Simcock described them, without the ability to fill out eloquently written reports. Paradoxically, bureaucracy may therefore create an important barrier for the most well-connected local actors within anti-radicalisation.

Jonathan Birdwell also encouraged the local authorities' representatives present at the conference to express what they saw as major challenges. He agreed with Ms Simcock that even if everybody wants evidence, the current initiatives are extremely difficult to evaluate, since one has to look at the difference made over a person's lifetime. As another challenge, he saw "the difficulty for local authorities to navigate between the impact of national politics on one hand, and the local Muslim communities on the other, who may find that politicians are targeting them in a specific manner."

Leen Verbeek joined the debate by mentioning a different type of problem. Recently all mayors in his province were interviewed on how to manage civil servants who don't have the courage to handle

a topic as difficult as radicalisation. “The conclusion was that every mayor seems to be alone on this topic,” Mr Verbeek said. “Therefore guidelines should also include where to find this courage, where to find the exact information, and how to avoid misinformation, how to identify the real experts. Therefore, we should reflect on how to support our fellow mayors,” Mr Verbeek said.

Farid Bounouar, Prevention Director, City of Sarcelles, France intervened. The Parisian suburb Sarcelles has around 60,000 inhabitants, composed of 1/3 Jewish people, 1/3 Muslims and 1/3 Christians and/or atheists. Since the anti-Semite events in France in 2012, the city is more attentive on the possible link between criminal behaviour and radicalisation. As an example, the mayor mentioned an illegal demonstration in favour of Palestine in July 2014. “This demonstration turned into a riot,” he said. Participants came from three different groups: Those who were indeed fighting for the Palestinian cause; but also participants from a local Salafi mosque and ‘regular’ local criminals otherwise engaged in money and drug issues. “This mixed population illustrated how those who trip into radicalised behaviour will always be people from de-structured backgrounds, perhaps even with slight mental troubles. In France, authorities know these people and keep a

file on them. And the role of cities in this matter is to support with the specific inside information you can only obtain when you live closely together," Mr Bounouar said.

Claudine Bansept, Project manager at the National Council of Cities, France presented the views of her organisation, which is tasked among other with coordinating activities to prevent urban violence. "Ever since the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks we have worked on the issues of terrorism, violent radicalisation and fundamentalism to understand better how suburbs deal with these questions," she said. She added that apart from the work conducted by the National Council of Cities, numerous reports and studies have been published in France in 2015 on these issues.

"But all this expertise seems to remain inaccessible; it is neither published nor made available to the public in any other way. The documents remain for internal use, and there seems to be no discussion around the many propositions made in the reports." Ms Bansept regretted that the locally elected representatives were not given access to this knowledge: "There are already many responses to these complex and associated problems in our cities, and it would be beneficial if we included local strategies in this work," she said.

Ms Bansept presented one of the proposals of the National Council of Cities on this issue, which is to put in place small local laboratories for observation, analysis and design and development of prevention actions on radicalisation and violent extremism. “This project is coherent with the objective of this regional and local authorities’ conference in Aarhus, which is to set up an Alliance of European cities against violent extremism,” she added.

André Vervooren, Director of the Public Safety Department, City of Rotterdam, Netherlands followed up on the previous remarks by advising mayors to make the work of local authorities visible to the public. “Give a statement with the local Imam next to you; show your community what you are doing so they know that action is being taken,” he said, this being the final point of the panel debate.

4. Local and regional strategies and their link to national and European levels of governance



Andreas Kiefer, Secretary General, Congress of Local and regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (moderator):

The Secretary General referred to the situation in Austria, a country that in the current refugee crisis needs to balance its efforts between being a transit and a destination country. “There is a strong need to collaborate between local authorities and national police forces,” he told; and he recalled the focus of the present conference being that of learning and adopting from each other in order to be able to take action.



Thomas Medom, Alderman, Dept. of Employment and Social Affairs, City of Aarhus, Denmark:

Mr Medom explained the foundations of the Aarhus Model for which he is responsible. “The basis of this multi-agency approach goes

back to the 1970s where the first experiences with the SSP-network (School, Social services and Police) were created. SSP is a collaboration built on both trust and political and ideological commitment," Mr Medom explained. The SSP work is not only created with anti-radicalisation in mind, but is part of an overall crime prevention strategy. In the 90s for example, the City of Aarhus had great problems with a group of supporters of the local soccer club, going by the name of White Pride and showing racist behaviour. "The SSP worked well with this group. Recently the methods have been further developed to deal with the issue of Syrian volunteers," Mr Medom said. An early intervention is key, and it goes through a number of parameters; risk-evaluation, advising, mentoring, social services, employment and education. Police prosecution remains possible and social services can remove a child if needed. Additionally, a dialogue has been engaged with a local mosque known for its extreme Islamic rhetoric. "We believe it's better to integrate these people than to leave them outside," the alderman concluded.



André Vervooren, Director, Safety Department, City of Rotterdam, Netherlands:

With close to 610.000 inhabitants, Rotterdam is an international city

where “diversity creates diversity”, said Mr Vervooren, opening his presentation. Taking pride in being “raw and unpolished”, the city authorities detect limited social tension, but are aware that international conflicts may influence this. Therefore the Mayor, Mr Aboutaleb, has launched a 4-year programme, running until 2018, to counter tension and prevent polarisation. The programme builds on the city’s 10-year experience with preventive work and includes existing measures, strengthened measures, and all new measures. Mr Vervooren presented its four lines of action:

- » countering tensions within society and preventing polarisation ;
- » broadening resilience against jihadism;
- » increasing awareness among professionals through training and information;
- » providing a tailored approach to radicalised individuals

“Rotterdam wants to be a ‘WE’-society,” Mr Vervooren explained, “a society where moral leadership and capacity of self-reflexion is constantly developed.” In this sense, even small initiatives against violent ideologies are encouraged.

At the national level, the Netherlands will co-chair the Global Counterterrorism Forum with Morocco from September 2016, the director also explained, but still, more attention should be given to local level

measures. "More than 50% of the European population now live in cities, so this is where a European framework should be stimulated," Mr Vervooren concluded.



Diana Schubert, Crime Prevention coordinator, City of Augsburg, Germany:

Of the 285,000 inhabitants in Augsburg, 42 % have a migration background, Ms Schubert said. There are issues with radicalism: in 2011 two students travelled to an Afghan training camp, and one mosque is under specific surveillance as well. Several measures have been taken to strengthen democratic values and tolerance. One example is a programme focusing on gender equality, including young men between 14 and 18, with migration background, who in weekly sessions discuss manhood, gender equality and German society values. The project is currently being evaluated, Ms Schubert said. She then spoke about Augsburg's history as a city of Peace, mentioning the law enacted in 1555 to ensure peaceful coexistence between Protestants and Catholics. This focus on peace is in the city's DNA, and a basis for the continued work on cohabitation. The most recent example is the city's collaboration with the State of Bavaria, establishing a network against Salafism, to be presented in December 2015. It includes both

preventive and de-radicalisation measures, and also is to be run by two NGOs one of which will have their office in Augsburg. Mrs Schubert finally expressed the need to engage dialogue with Muslims and migrants not just when facing problems, but as an inclusive, preventive dialogue.



Erich Marks, Director, Crime Prevention Council of Lower Saxony, Germany (video):

The director introduced a work group under the Ministry of Justice and summarised the three areas to help counter radicalisation leading to extreme violence:

- » Criminal persecution – “We need to take our rule of law and our state of law seriously,” Mr Marks said.
- » Preventive measures, hereunder providing advice for municipalities, since “prevention is not only at a state level, but also on regional and local levels since this is where close contact can be best obtained,” Mr Marks explained;
- » A range of solution for de-radicalisation or exit possibilities for people who actually want to get out of their situation.

Mr Marks underlined the importance of having several organisations, ministries and bodies involved in such work in to avoid a mono-di-

mensional approach to the issues. As an example, in Lower Saxony a special police force operates, and the Ministry of Social Affairs have a special offer for families and relatives of radicalised citizens.

Mr Marks next introduced a triangle model, including Police, Research and Practice. "It is vital that these areas work closely together but also that they define their responsibilities at a regional, national and international level." As a final remark, Mr Marks customised a popular expression: "Keep calm and keep on preventing," he told the conference.

4. 1. Discussion

Laetitia Nolet, Project Manager, Belgium Forum for Prevention and Urban Security, Belgium spoke as a representative of Belgian municipalities. She said there are numerous Belgian nationals who are radicalised or at risk of being so, or even at risk of leaving for Syria. Indeed, some 500 people are being monitored at the national level.

For the past two years, the Belgian Forum for Prevention and Urban Security has been coordinating a network for the exchange of good practices for preventing radicalisation leading to extremism. This network gathers 10 municipalities and their local partners, as well as representatives of the three levels of governance (regional, communal and federal). This multi-sectoral network, which is inspired from the Quebec model, resulted in the publication of a directory of resource persons and of training programmes, thus allowing municipalities to exchange information.

Furthermore, several municipalities have contacted the families of individuals who are radicalised or at risk of radicalisation. The idea is to communicate with the entourage in a neutral, enlightened and transparent way, said Ms Nolet. Lastly, the network created a charter detailing the rights and responsibilities of the prevention services and

the local police zones, as well as their respective missions in terms of preventing and fighting against violent radicalisation. “With this type of cooperation between the local and supra-local levels, the competence of each level is clearer and everybody knows who intervenes when and with what objective,” she explained.

Philippe “Francois”, Sous-Préfet, Interministerial Committee on Crime Prevention, France said that his entity is currently developing training tools on the factors that make a person ‘tilt’ into radicalism. The initiative is based on delocalised action, Mr “Francois” said. “Local prefectures will be dedicated to, firstly, evaluate danger and secondly, put in place a proper accompaniment of the person in question. Working closely with families is key in this regard, and this further points to the necessity for close, local programmes,” he said. Together with the French Mayors’ Association, a collaboration with psychologists and psychiatrist has therefore been established, in order to understand “the entire life story of the concerned person.” Preventing radicalisation thereby becomes a lifelong project, Mr “Francois” explained, a project requiring multi-disciplinary teams in order to understand at what exact point the shift in personality takes place. Therefore Mr “Francois” was keen to learn more about how to be better at bridge building with local authorities.

Muhammed Cevdet Orhan, Mayor, City of Aziziye, Turkey said that two elements were to be considered in this debate, racism and religion. He therefore asked Mr Medom what were the results of the collaboration with mosques in Aarhus. Were there things coming to light that the municipality was not aware of before?

Thomas Medom replied that choosing dialogue had been hard and had been carefully discussed with the city council but also with police forces and social services. The initiative begun when the city authorities realised that many of those traveling to Syria had been attending a particular mosque and therefore this dialogue was needed. Did this initiative bear fruit? Mr Medom thinks it has, given that fewer people travel today than two years ago. "Before we began, the mosque wouldn't take responsibility in this regard, but now they say that they try to stop them," Mr Medom said, adding that the municipality had chosen to trust this statement. "We cannot say what would have happened if we didn't talk - would there have been more radicalised persons in our city?" Mr Medom asked.

Diana Schubert asked who made the first step for this dialogue.

Lotte Henriksen, Director Social Affairs, City of Aarhus, Denmark, replied that the local authority initiated the contact together with the police and the local community. The first step was a visit to the mosque's youth club and later parents were also invited. "No parents want their children to go to war, and the dialogue has given the parents arguments to stop their children," she explained.

Manuel Comeron, Project manager, City of Liege, Belgium explained how his city, which by has had in the past severe problems with hooliganism, now faces growing radicalisation. He noted the need for very concrete tools and a way to get better understanding of a phenomenon in which many self-appointed experts seem to intervene. "What I see is that our cities are on the front line. They are the ones who are subject to terror attacks – but also those who produce these same terrorists," he said. He also mentioned a point as of yet unexplored: the victims of terror attacks who also live in the cities. An attack in Liege in December 2013, leading to 8 deaths, also resulted in hundreds of traumatised survivors, and Mr Comeron called for experiences on how to deal with this particular collateral effect of extreme violence.

Liz Dixon recalled the necessity to look at the narratives a society

produces in order to prevent radical behaviour. “You cannot just tell a drug user to stop,” she said, as a metaphor for the work and discourse needed. She therefore encouraged local authorities to find the counter-narratives that can show young people alternative routes, but as she also stated, it takes both skills and technique to do so.

Andreas Kiefer reacted to this by asking the panel to reflect on any low budget solutions to engage audiences through proper communication channels.

André Vervooren pointed out how “dialogue begins with listening, which may be a difficult task – especially when the two sides don’t even speak the same language. There should also be a distinction between dialogue and discussion,” he said.

Thomas Medom added that even though dialogue is part of a clear strategy in the Aarhus Model, there are still doubts about how to handle it.

Diana Schubert observed that the panel discussing this dialogue only consisted of “white people” and that this might be the biggest challenge for engaging in dialogue. “We are talking *about* communities,

but we need to talk *with* them” she said.

Andreas Kiefer thanked the contributors and introduced the closing session.

5. CLOSING SESSION: Strengthening local authorities and implementing a human rights-based approach within a European alliance against violent extremism



Jacob Bundsgaard, Mayor of Aarhus:

The host-city's Mayor expressed how the day's debates had clearly emphasised how essential political leadership is when it comes to putting violent extremism on top of the agenda. "Administrations need resources, energy and hope, as well as sharing across borders," he emphasised. But not only visions should be shared; exact knowledge about successful programmes will make a difference. Committing to long term strategies was also part of Mr Bundsgaard's recommendations: "We need to be open to new approaches, confront our opponents and reach out to local communities because there is

no easy solution,” he said. Finally, he drew attention to the conference planned for the next two days where practitioners from across Europe likewise would meet to exchange experiences “for safer and more secure cities,” he said.



Guilherme Pinto, President of the European Forum for Urban Security:

The President thanked all the participants for the number of ideas and initiatives presented; he said that some details were new and would be included in future reflections on the topic. As an example he said that victims of extreme violence are often forgotten, an idea expressed earlier in the day's debates.

Mr Pinto said that three main conclusions could be drawn:

- » The central role of local authorities in fighting radicalisation leading to extreme violence is important. “There is a need to strengthen local powers since preventive work is best done at a local level. Radicalism is best contained at a level close to vulnerable individuals in the most affected communities,” he said.
- » Forcing human rights based approaches: there is a need to guarantee individual liberties in order to avoid dividing communities. It is crucial to maintain both freedom and security in local societies

since the two are mutually dependent. “Political reactions must not be based on emotion but rather must be rational,” Mr Pinto stated.

» The value of European local authorities joining forces to counter violent extremism must be considered. “We must work together and spread the word that cities can also fight this phenomenon efficiently, at the local level, Mr Pinto said.

Finally, the President thanked the Congress for the close collaboration and in particular commended Mr Leen Verbeek’s outstanding work as rapporteur.



Leen Verbeek, Vice President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe:

Mr Verbeek thanked Mr Pinto for the compliments but also emphasised that all the work done was indeed the job of a large team of people, not one person.

He next mentioned the necessity to look forward after the day’s conference. “We have the toolkit, but each of us has to find a way to adapt it to their particular situation,” Mr Verbeek said. Among the possible measures presented during the day, Mr Verbeek put forward the possibility to approach mosques or to approach angry youngsters

within the local society. However “how to do it depends on the local context.” The search for answers on how to solve the very complicated topic of radicalism will continue, and the Vice President therefore recommended that European cities demonstrate solidarity and form broad alliances in order to help each other. ‘This will be the goal for Efus and the Congress in the upcoming years, and I will put my efforts into reaching this goal. I therefore ask you to do so too, so we will find ways for success together,” Mr Verbeek said.

Finally, he read aloud the paper that would be named the Aarhus Declaration, which reflects the exchanges and conclusions of the conference. The text, as it was read out, is the following:

We, mayors and representatives of cities and regions from 22 European countries meeting in Aarhus, Denmark, at the initiative of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, the European Forum for Urban Security and the cities of Rotterdam and Aarhus,

Shocked by the monstrous attacks that took place in Paris on Friday, 13 November 2015, which have come in the wake of numerous terrorist acts all over Europe and beyond,

Aware of the serious threats posed by radicalisation leading to violent extremism to our societies and to their proper democratic functioning with full respect of human rights,

Convinced that the fight against these threats must be conducted at all levels of government be they European, national, regional or local:

Emphasise that local authorities have a key role to play, through their huge network of millions of local elected representatives;

Stress that this unique network of elected representatives can contribute, through its members' knowledge of their area and population, to an early warning system for any drift towards radicalisation;

Ask national authorities to systematically include local decision makers in the drawing up and implementation of strategies that are being developed at European and national levels;

Commit themselves to adopting integrated approaches at local level in order to ensure that all stakeholders: civil society, faith-based organizations, social, educational, security and justice services are involved;

Endorse the proposal to launch an alliance of cities for the prevention of radicalisation leading to violent extremism;

In this perspective, suggest to develop capacity-building activities and to underpin this network by establishing a digital platform to exchange the initiatives, experiences and resources that are already in place for the fight against radicalisation;

Decide to pursue this initiative and therefore invite local elected representatives to meet in Rotterdam in 2016 in the context of a European summit of mayors.

The conference participants applauded in agreement with the text, which was thereby adopted.

Following this, the conference officially ended.

<http://citiesagainstextremism.eu>