Countering Radicalisation via Effective Messaging and Popular Inclusion[1]

"Civil society has a role to play in terms of narratives and messages. It can challenge the narratives of radicalisers and extremists and put forward positive alternatives. These counter-messages … go[es] hand in hand with work to strengthen citizenship, integration and a sense of belonging, and also that which seeks to create safe spaces for dialogue and discussion of contentious issues, especially among young people, to provide opportunities to explore the concerns that radicalisers seek to exploit. Part of the process of taking on divisive narratives is modelling an inclusive society that listens and responds to the needs and concerns of all citizens."

Institute for Strategic Dialogue, The Role of Civil Society in Counter-Radicalisation and De-Radicalisation, pp. 4-5.

The 2013 victory of far-right extremist Marián Kotleba in gubernatorial elections in Banská Bystrica region led to a diverse array of reactions among activists, academics and policy-makers. Besides assigning blame for the result to various factors and actors, some ventured to pursue the path of potential counterbalancing and prevention of further spread of this rising extremist political clout. This paper was originally intended as a brief introduction to Moral Foundations Theory and its assumed potential as an effective framing tool for developing persuasion interventions aimed at the so called "reluctant radicals" – segments of the electorate with solid chances to become supporters of right-wing radical policies and politicians. It turns out that what was conceived as one policy paper will develop into a small series of contributions.

In this paper, the first in the series, I will introduce the basic conceptual apparatus of dealing with issues of political (right-wing) radicalism and possible venues for its reduction and prevention. Although there is no such thing as an established "magic" counter-radicalism persuasion tool or approach, there exists a growing body of literature which points in the same direction – towards the development of effective interventions, capable of overcoming the societal polarisations and "value gaps."

Understanding Radicalisation
Instead of defining and discussing the usual suspects of radicalism and extremism, I intend to focus on countering and preventing **radicalisation**, which is generally understood as "the process through which an individual changes from passiveness or activism to become more revolutionary, militant or extremist, especially, where there is intent towards, or support for, violence" (Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2010c: 2). On the other hand, The United Nations Working Group on Radicalisation and Extremism that lead to Terrorism adopted definition of **de-radicalisation** offered by John Horgan, which refers to

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"programmes that are generally directed against individuals who have become radical with the aim of re-integrating them into society or at least dissuading them from violence" (Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2010a: 1). Such understanding of de-radicalisation stands in contrast to the concept of counter-radicalisation, which is defined as "a package of social, political, legal, educational and economic programmes specifically designed to deter disaffected (and possibly already radicalised) individuals from crossing the line and becoming terrorists" (Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2010a: 2). In other words, counter-radicalisation is meant to prevent individuals and groups from becoming radicals and is done "upstream" (ibid.).

De-radicalisation seeks to reverse the radicalisation process of those who are already committed to radicalism and is usually individually tailored. To expand the radicalism-related terminology even further, there are counter-polarisation projects, which are "aimed at reducing divisions between different groups within society" (Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2010b: 1). Counter-polarisation, counter-radicalisation and de-radicalisation create an encompassing policy spectrum (Figure 1) with ever-narrowing degree of segmentation from broad, group-level oriented, to individually targeted interventions (Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2010b: 1).

Figure 1: Policy Spectrum. Source: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2010b.

As became apparent with the concepts of counter-radicalisation and counter-polarisation, we ought to shift our focus beyond committed supporters, to "**reluctant radicals**" – "not the committed hard core but the wavering, uncertain, soft supporters of right-wing populism" (Fieschi, Morris, Cabllero, 2012: 22) – because they are the potential carriers of the long term threats to democratic legitimacy, multicultural diversity and inclusive policy-making.

The above mentioned classification of policy spectrum warrants three related observations. First, distinguishing between counter-polarisation, counter-radicalisation, de-radicalisation and introducing the concept of reluctant radicals effectively leads to **segmentation** of the public in regard to potential anti-radicalisation interventions. Second, all three levels of the anti-radicalisation policy spectrum are founded on an implicit assumption that they will foster interventions containing both **cognitive and behavioural aspects** aimed at changing the views and altering the behaviour of committed and potential radicals/extremists. Third, all three levels of the anti-radicalisation policy spectrum are understood as **process-dependent** concepts, which can only succeed (or fail) to a certain measure.

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Countering Radicalisation

Political Capital Policy Research and Consulting Institute developed Demand for Right-Wing Extremism Index (DEREX) which measures and compares the inclinations of national samples of population in 33 European countries to extreme right-wing politics (Political Capital, 2010). DEREX includes 29 items (recurring questions adopted from the biannual European Social Survey) which are divided into two indices "Public Morale" and "Value Judgements" and four categories "Prejudice and Welfare Chauvinism," "Anti-Establishment Attitudes," "Right-Wing Value Orientation," and "Fear, Distrust and Pessimism" (Political Capital, 2010). The findings of DEREX survey for 2010-2011 indicate that 10.8% of respondents in Slovakia were predisposed to support right-wing extremist politics (Mesežnikov, 2013). In a survey conducted in January 2011 by Centre for Research on Ethnicity and Culture (CVEK), 8.3% of respondents in Slovakia supported the idea of far-right extremism (Gallová Kríglerová, Kadlečíková, 2012: 17). While in the Western Europe it is the immigrants who are targeted as the most identifiable out-group, in the Eastern Europe, it is the historical minorities (especially Roma) (Voda, Spáč, 2014: 2; Stewart, 2012).

Even though there is no significant difference in the measured social distance of the majority population in Slovakia towards ethnic minorities and foreigners, "in connection with Roma, the respondents … strongly support restrictive policies that might even deny fundamental equality of rights to this minority and be openly discriminatory" (Gallová Kríglerová, Kadlečíková, 2012: 15), making it effectively its most strongly rejected out-group. In regard to the electoral success of Marián Kotleba, analysts warn against the further proliferation of "ethnocentric perceptions of society" via extremist rhetoric into the mainstream political discourse, leading to "further radicalization of public opinion" (Gallová Kríglerová, Kadlečíková, 2012: 16; Vicenová, 2013: 4). This warning rests on the observation that "**the increasing toxicity of political discourse**" (Fieschi, Morris, Cabllero, 2012: 20) could successfully appeal to the different segments of (radically reluctant) Slovak electorate.

Since radicalisation and polarisation are highly complex social phenomena, policies aimed against them in practice focus on a wide array of inter-related factors such as divisions, grievances, narratives and means (Table 1).

Divisions	lack of integration, ghettoization, polarisation, internal community divides, identity crises
Grievances	under-employment, poor education, political/democratic disenfranchisement, discrimination
Narratives	faith, political movements, ideologies
Means	social/family/criminal networks, vulnerable/risky institutions and places, vulnerable individuals, charismatic individuals

Table 1: Factors in Radicalisation. Source: Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2010b.

The first in the list of recommendations and counter-strategies against the far-right proposed by the think-tank Political Capital is to bring back the policies of far right and its electorate into the democratic mainstream (Political Capital, 2010: 6). In their call for reducing the demand for far-right policies, they stress the importance of "the development of counter-narratives" as a means for strengthening the rhetorical clout of the democratic order (Political Capital, 2010: 7). In a similar vein, the analysts from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue stress the purposefulness of anti-radicalisation interventions in overcoming **divisions** to "create a sense of belonging and shared identity" (Institute for Strategic Dialogue, 2010b: 4) with the possible help of **narratives** to "increase resilience of key institutions vulnerable to radicalisation" (ibid.: 5).

Creation of the common sense of belonging and safeguarding of institutions against radicalisation in practice means increasing of popular participation and inclusion of those segments of the public, which might be prone to react positively to extremist appeals. If, as Vidhya Ramalingam observes, the narratives of far-right extremist movements "have resonance with public emotions," it is important to "fill a gap" and touch upon the "subjects that have not been discussed in a frank way by mainstream politicians or local leaders" (Ramalingam, 2014: 11). As she poignantly notes, "far right supporters are not always anti-social 'outsiders'; in some places they are integral parts of the community" (Ramalingam, 2014: 11). The authors of Recapturing the Reluctant Radical: How to Win back Europe's Populist Vote also stress the importance of popular inclusion and participation: "If mainstream wants to win back Europe's reluctant radicals, it is no good treating them as pariahs. We must reach out to reluctant radicals by seeing them as co-citizens. Only by listening and understanding their concerns and grievances can mainstream activists and policy-makers hope to turn them away from right wing populism" (Fieschi, Morris, Cabllero, 2012: 22).

This could mean that effective anti-radicalisation interventions would begin with learning to understand the language (messages), grievances and emotions (fears) of reluctant radicals in order to rephrase and overcome the "value gap" or ideological divide. It comes close to what Péter Krekó meant by redefining "**populism**" as a less pejorative political communication alternative – an approach which should be adopted by mainstream political representatives, employing "emotional mobilization and formulating messages that are more efficient in addressing the general electorate" (Political Capital, 2010: 11). This is a kind of populism that would allow, in András Bozóki's words "to connect with the public effectively" (Political Capital, 2010: 13).

Jonathan Haidt, the main author of **Moral Foundations Theory** (MFT) decided to add to the title of the book The Righteous Mind, a subtitle Why Good People are Divided by Politics and Religion, which would help the readers to identify the main added value of MFT. Understanding the plurality of moral foundations and value judgements is helpful for overcoming various types of societal divisions and value gaps (Haidt, 2012). As the ongoing research inspired by MFT attests, re-framing prosocial, inclusive messages via appeals to relevant conservative, right-wing moral foundations leads to effective persuasion and more widespread social acceptance of policies aimed at the protection of environment or vulnerable minorities (Feinberg, Willer, 2013; Day, Fiske, Downing, Trail, 2014).

Conclusion

The purpose of this article was to introduce the basic framework for understanding the process of radicalisation and de-radicalisation. This can further serve not only as a basis for exploring the development of voting behaviour in Banská Bystrica region in the past gubernatorial elections or any upcoming elections, but in practice it can also help us to design possible interventions in order to shape people's perceptions and narratives. The design and potential impact of interventions developed according to the MFT findings will be the subject of the upcoming policy paper.

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