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## **PREVENTION OF EXTREMISM**

The Helsinki Committee has been working with the youth in Sandzak for more than three years, focusing on the prevention and countering of extremist ideologies. In addition to organizing youth seminars and youth-led outreach events in the local communities in Sandzak, the Helsinki Committee also conducted an opinion poll on the attitudes of the youth, assessing their susceptibility to extremist ideologies. Given that the youth in Sandzak are raised in highly conservative communities subject to strong retraditionalization, it is very important to keep raising awareness about the human rights culture, promotion of tolerance and peaceful conflict resolution. In so doing, active partnerships with educators (secondary school teachers, pedagogues, psychologists and principals) and parents of the youth are of great importance.

The findings of our research indicate that the youth trust their families the most, while they place little to no trust in other social structures and institutions. When it comes to Sandzak, the society is reduced to its smallest level – the family, and the youth are isolated. Developing activities that target families is thus a logical next step, particularly having in mind that the family is the last and the most difficult tie to break for the radicalized youth having decided to join extremist groups.

Furthermore, schools are also one of the main pillars of the youth's lives, given the important pedagogical function they have in the social and educational lives of the youth. Therefore, it is crucial that the educators are capable to adequately address the issue of radicalization and to be able to provide an alternative narrative to the youth. However, educators in Sandzak – but also in Serbia as a whole - do not receive appropriate training for addressing these issues in classrooms.

This project aim was to empower the educators and parents to adequately address increasing radicalisation of the youth caused by an ever growing dissatisfaction with the world surrounding them, passivity and isolation.

## **Parent – teachers focus groups in Novi Pazar and Sjenica**

Parent – teacher focus group discussions were organized in August 2017. with the aim to increase cooperation of educators and parents, and to bring them together in jointly developing strategies for the prevention of youth radicalization in the local communities.

A total of two parent – teacher focus group discussions were organized in Sandzak – One in Novi Pazar for 16 participants and one in Sjenica for 10 participants. Both focus groups discussions lasted for three hours.

Focus group discussions were moderated by an expert Jarmila Bujak Stanko. Also, other members of the team, Izabela Kistic, Srdjan Barisic and Anel Grboviic actively participated in focus groups in order to stimulate discussion.

### **Focus Groups Report**



*Novi Pazar, Fokus Group, 7 August 2017*

### **Methodology**

Parent – teacher focus group discussions were organised with the aim to increase cooperation of educators and parents, and to bring them together in jointly developing strategies for the prevention of youth radicalization in the local communities.

A total of two parent – teacher focus group discussions were organized in Sandzak – One in Novi Pazar for 16 participants and one in Sjenica for 10 participants. Both focus groups discussions lasted for three hours with one refreshment break.

Focus group discussions were moderated by an expert. Firstly, the situation with radicalisation and extremism in local communities was analysed and parents and educators also discussed the best mechanisms of addressing this problem, as well as a counter narrative that is best suited for the local communities.

Additionally, the participants were introduced to the mechanisms of identification of early warning signals of radicalization and raised awareness about the susceptibility of youth to extremist ideologies. A concise hand-out with early warning signs was distributed to participants, presented, explained and discussed with them. Special attention was given to aspects and causes of youth susceptibility to extremist ideologies and relevant aspects of this stage of development. This segment of focus group discussions was designed to provide parents with the capacity to anticipate and react to early warning signs of radicalization in their children and to provide a safe place for parents to voice their concerns and fears for children who are vulnerable to the influences of propagators of extremist ideologies. Moreover, these discussions were an opportunity for parents who fear their children might be at a risk of radicalization to share their experiences with other parents and discuss possible mechanisms of addressing this issue.

A semi-structured list of focus group questions

- How do they see the situation with radicalization and extremism in their local community?
- How do they see the situation with the response to radicalization in their local community?
- What do they know about the early signs of radicalization (what their peers-other parents and educators know)?
- What do they know about possible effective reactions to radicalization (what their peers-other parents and educators know)?
- Is it enough? Do they feel sure and confident that they will be able to recognize early signs
- Do they need some help/support/information/training ... about early signs and their recognition
- How they see their role in recognizing early signs
- How they see their role in responding to early signs
- Do they need some help/support/information/training ... about responding to early signs of radicalization
- Do some other (local) actors play a role in recognizing and responding to early signs of radicalization
- Which ones and what role do they have?
- Do some of them need some help/support/information/training ... about identifying and responding to early signs of radicalization?
- Who and what?
- What is the cooperation between the actors?
- What kind of cooperation should/could be? How can it be improved?
- Especially between parents and teachers?

- What strategy of joint response to radicalization should have parents and teachers?

## **Results of discussions**

### **Novi Pazar**

#### **How do they see the situation with radicalization and extremization of youth in their local community?**

- Entire group agrees that radicalization and extremisation are in decline. Causes are various state actions and community awareness, parent alertness etc.
- Participants estimate that the situation is no more like it was 5-6 years ago. These harmful influences have weakened. There are less of them than before. Also, many actors reacted properly to radicalisation in the past, so the radicalizer's influence weakened and even when they tried to do something.
- There were also radical football fan groups present. The youth was interested about them, but it is falling out, too.
- Some participants also stated that there is no radicalization in this sense in their knowledge. Theirs is a purely patriarchal environment and there are some qualities that are still respected there, but not the radicalisation.
- Many participants say that they do not have reliable or direct information about radicalization in the local community, but they think that this is a very important topic and that reliable information would be needed.
- Radicalization is present in paradzemats. Almost every settlement in Pazar has its paradzemat, and this is a great problem which both Muslim communities have to face. There were appeals to terminate such paradzemats, but only one was closed. Without any control people who call themselves religious people hold religious lectures there where they radicalize young people, predominantly high school students and students of the first years of college. One of these paradzemat is allegedly closed, but only their premises are closed while it continues to function and has gone online. There was one case where a child from Serbian parents received Islam and got completely radicalized because it did not receive Islam in the right way. He did not go on believing how he should have done it, but with the help of those people who radicalized him. His parents had serious problems with him. They are both educational workers. Also social services and psychologists and their colleagues had a big problem with that boy. He went to Syria. It is good that the young man managed to get out, and they returned him from Istanbul. He was returned by a relative who is in a position there in Istanbul.

- As someone who works in a religious school - Medresa, I can say that 5-6 years ago there were more interests among children for the so-called "radical Islam". However, "radical Islam" does not exist. Islam is one. What ISIL does today is not even close to Islam. We dissuaded the children from that mostly through conversation with them, with their parents ... returning to the Quranic message that whoever kills a person [unjustly]...it is as though he has killed all mankind. And whoever saves a life, it is as though he had saved all mankind. I think that such a form of radicalism in this region will not remain because we are traditionally bound to the Islam that the Ottomans left us. This is a beautiful Islam that propagates well for every man. This is our biggest trump card - the roots. If we return to the true roots, then we will live peacefully with our neighbours and we will not have problems of that kind.
- Some participants also heard of online radicalization. Some radical groups have also rented several houses from which they operate. They are working on radicalization, especially with young people through direct gatherings, not just online.
- The peer groups are very important. Young people are susceptible to the peer influence. If leaders in such groups are strong, it will affect many young people. They can also play a positive role in the fight against radicalization and this activity needs to be strengthened.
- Participants do not know that there is any local strategy that deals with issues of radicalization and extremism. There were some lectures and strategies dealing with violence and peer violence, but not with radicalization.
- How do they see the situation with the response to radicalization in their local community?
- Group has identified following actors: schools, families, neighbourhood/community, informal groups, media, civic initiatives, religious leaders, all other leaders in the community, role-models, peers, institutions.
- Different actors reacted well and these undesirable occurrences are reduced to acceptable levels.
- Participants feel that it is very important that many people get included and react to this. Concrete people, community, media. The reaction must be much stronger and everyone should be involved to completely eradicate these phenomena. Whoever wants, can contribute. First family and then everyone else. This is everyone's concern.
- All actors should be active and following events and react as needed if they notice something. Everything starts from prejudices and they should be dealt with primarily. There are also some extreme views and attitudes in the community. There are present among teachers, too. For example, there are colleagues who will not do their job-to guide children to daytrips, excursions

or celebrations because their extreme religious attitudes do not allow them to be in places where alcohol is used. But they do not do their job. They're just called teachers, but they really are not. They do not fulfil their working obligations. They will not go. This is one kind of extremism, and this kind of extremism is among adults. The problem is that always the same people come to this kind of education. We who do not have extreme attitudes and that's why we want to learn about this. Those who are already extremists will never come to such training. Hence the problems start. Because they do not even see that they are extremists themselves. What could we do if they do not see their views as extreme. Some kind of intervention is needed by the collective, some education, open dialogue. So that people have the opportunity to discuss. Tolerance, understanding ... should be developed in different ways to educate children in that area. Education of teachers is also needed. Some camps and similar gathering where they would learn about the needed topics. Additional education and information is needed. Seminars. These are recent phenomena and we should be taught about them in order to keep up with time and to know how to react and recognize them.

- The parents expect and suggest to teachers to give them the freedom to come to a talk whenever they need to. And that parents respond to calls from teachers. To increase the trust and respect of children towards teachers, which is now very low. This comes both from home and from school.
- What else would it teachers need to do? They first need to behave the way they want children to learn to behave. For example, I had a colleague of other religion, and it happened that we would sometimes go home together, cooperate nicely and communicate well, and the children saw it. Teachers need to be the role models for children for those behaviours they want to teach them.
- Teachers do not keep up enough with all the happenings on social networks and it would mean a lot to them to get any education in this field.
- There are schools that are not ready to embark into more open cooperation with civil society organizations and with parents on these issues. It depends a lot on the school leaders. This is a matter of personal responsibility for each of us teachers, parents, schools and civil society organizations.
- The most needed thing is to work at the level of school directors, so that the directors then pass it to the lower levels in their schools. Work should be done with the director's association in Pazar, and then the director will form a team to deal with these issues in each school. There will be trainings and everything needs in this way. It is also necessary to have an institutional mechanism at the school level that would monitor how much

everyone meets the demands of the profession and perform its duties.

- In order for this conversation and such a topic to be successful in each school, you (Helsinki Committee) should enter each school if possible. That would be a full effect. The best way is this. Because if each school only delegates someone to go to such seminars, as it was till now, they are always the same people who usually already have such knowledge and attitudes. But if such a seminar would be done in every school for all the teachers, then things would actually be happening and all teachers would be trained. Always the same teams go to the same educations, because those who disagree will not go.
- Parents recommend to schools that co-operation with parents should be as good as possible.
- Teachers are telling parents that it's difficult to work with parents because they are very different and many will not cooperate. Cooperation can only be established with a certain percentage of parents. The hardest students are the ones with the hardest parents because they do not even come to schools nor cooperate with them. First the parents do not agree with school, and so they educate their children, and then children do not cooperate with school.

**What do they know about the early signs of radicalization (what their peers-other parents and educators know)?**

- The group listed the basic early signs by which they recognize that something happens with a young person. Then they pay more attention, examine and watch to find out more.
- The student withdraws or makes sudden out of character changes in his or her behaviour, loses interest in grades, for socialising, school, and environment. Mostly based on these signs participants you notice that something is happening. Changes in behaviour occur, attitudes, change of friends, everyday routine changes.
- The mother is telling a story of her child who was completely fine before the radicalizers did not begin to influence him. Then he started attending religious rites in a mosque that was far from home without explanation. He began to stay longer and longer. Until late. Then he declared that he would go to the madrasa. That was all a shock to mother. He was in the eighth grade. I did not let him stay late. I was fighting; I began to follow who he was hanging out with. For the madrasa I told him that for the madrasa he must be very strong religiously, not to begin with it, than to leave and be without this and without a regular school. Then he began to tell me that he would not go to madrasa here but that he found how to go to the madrasa in Turkey. Then we all started to talk to him more in the family about it. To question him

and turn him away from radicalisers. It all was for me very surprising. And that they give it all for free. Both language learning and religious instruction and organize them. Radicalisers do all of it for free with children and they are really working to attract them. He learned everything super easy and quickly. Then we as a family reacted. I like a mother. We did not allow him to go there anymore. To hang out with those kids, and to go to that other mosque. I told him that I was ready to go there as his mother to confront them. I told him: You need to be a believer, not brainwashed. It's okay to go to the madrasa, but in our city, and if it's really for you, not to go from here to another country. Then he changed. He is still a believer, but ... Firstly parents need to follow the child and be aware of how the child behaves and dresses, what changes. These things are present here. Such mosques, to call them so. I'm not familiar with that. It was a shock to me, but the child changed a lot and I saw what was happening. Thank God now it's good and all has been settled, but the family and their reaction were very important. Sometimes I asked him what was said in those religious lectures and he always told me different story. I prevented it all. I did not allow him any more to go there at all. He was promised everything there that he would learn languages and even get full education. Fairy tales were told to him, and he believed them. It was a shock to the family as it went so quickly and drastically. And how they went all the way to the distant mosque so that we cannot know what's going on there and what are they talking about. And he hid all that from us. He tried to hide everything. He did not want to say anything when I asked him. I could not find out.

- I taught this student in the 7th and 8th grade and he really changed a lot in the 8th grade. The mother was really very persistent and she was constantly coming to talk about it with us. It is very important that she noticed and accepted what is happening to the child and that she reacted. She was alone. The husband was on the road, and she fought alone in that critical period. If they did not do it, who knows what would happen to him. The mother played a key role. Cooperation with the school was important, where they also noticed that the kid changed a lot. The son was complaining at his mother going to school for that reason. He accused her of behaving like a police officer and said that he was ashamed of the other students because of her. To avoid this, she communicated with the teacher over the telephone, and the teacher took care of him. He became very withdrawn and changed a lot in school as well.
- Young people are particularly vulnerable and open to external influences because they are in such a development period, and some negative influences want to take advantage of that. The time of adolescence is the time of rebellion and the search for ideology, so it is easy to use those things. If a radical



ideology is the only one offered, many young people will be attracted to it.

- Particularly there is the influence of social networks now on which young people are constantly active, and they are also used for radicalization. Sometimes it is seen that young people go astray by seeing the changes to social networks on their profiles. Posts on social networks can give parents a very good indication of what is happening to children, because much of it is online now. It can be an alarm. One case form here is B. who was radicalized by looking at You tube and Facebook and there he found those contents. He began to tell around that he would go to Syria to defend that something. "If we do not defend ourselves, who will defend us", he was saying. Such posts were made by him. Today, Bato is our member of the youth group and a successful man, and it seemed earlier that he had fallen under these extremist influences.
- Young people are searching for themselves at that time and the worst thing we can do is to sanction their experience, knowledge and learning. A young person should have knowledge and experience of both good and bad in order to make choices. If they don't learn to recognize bad because they don't know anything, it will even be easier to oppose what their parents say only from the rebellion because they do not know what is bad and there is no negative experience. So if they have both experience and knowledge, they can make independent decisions. They cannot know what a hooligan is, what is discrimination, violence if they never see it, if it is not presented to them and keep being hidden, if they are overprotected. We prepare the child in such a way that we teach it in advance all what is there, what is good and what is bad. The information falls differently in a finished frame than in a completely blank one. If you give them all the information they will immediately identify what is happening and will not fall into manipulation.
- Prohibitions make sense only if things are severely dangerous and if someone is saved in this way and only until a person gets better. It's just saving lives and health, but then it has to be followed with work with that person to get back to previous setting.

**What do they know about possible effective reactions to radicalization (what their peers-other parents and educators know)? Is it enough? Do they feel sure and confident that they will be able to recognize early signs? Do they need some help/support/information/training ... about early signs and their recognition? How they see their role in recognizing early signs? How they see their role in responding to early signs?**

**Do they need some help/support/information/training ... about responding to early signs of radicalization? Do some other (local) actors play a role in recognizing and responding to early signs of radicalization? Which ones and what role do they have? Do some of them need some help/support/information/training ... about identifying and responding to early signs of radicalization? Who and what? What is the cooperation between the actors?**

- The family plays the most important role. Not only the primary one, but also all members of the extended family. If we allow only one person to fight radicalization, then it will be a fight one on one, and if everyone says differently, then a young person realizes that the problem is in him. It is also important that the school and the community can see much more than the family, because this is usually hidden from the family as a rule. Especially in the school in the informal part of the school much is seen because of the lack of adult supervision. Informal peer groups are also important, which can have both positive and negative influence depending on their goals. It is also important to offer the youth alternatives to radicalization through informal groups of civil initiatives, etc. If young people are looking for ideology then they have to be offered healthy ideologies, not just extremist ones. If young people have those needs that are important needs, we cannot ignore them because somebody will satisfy them in a way without our control.
- The media should offer information, an alternative to negative messages. Especially to ensure that they do not spread hate speech, nationalism, prejudice, violence ... and these are the most common news in our country. If you imagine that people are reading for days that someone is the greatest enemy of this and that, then it is not hard to imagine that soon there will be someone who will grab the ossuary and attack those who were satanised. The role of the media can be positive, and that is to offer a healthy alternative. That part is missing - instead of a scandalistic approach to offering success stories, an inspiring story that will ease us and give us faith in humanity.
- One negative experience with the media. A few years ago, we had some adult people coming to from school and injuring some of our children. We responded immediately and took them to the hospital to treat them. I even gave blood. I contacted the media for the first time - RTS and I had to give a statement in front of the hospital. Last year when the school won the first prize as the best in the region I called the same reporter to come, and he did not even want to respond. I said to him: "do not ever call me again". When something positive happens, you will not report on it. The scandal is selling the newspaper.
- Schools can give a healthy alternative to bad influences by organizing extracurricular activities. Not allow for

someone else to be the only one who provides something important and necessary to our child. It is important to have an open communication on these difficult issues. Nurturing a culture of open communication, respect for diversity, this is the first part of the offering of alternatives.

- CSOs can also offer alternatives, raise awareness in the community, monitor the work of other actors, educate, research, draw attention, publish data, develop contacts with their target groups, recognize needs, everything that no one else does.
- Religious leaders have the role in education, explanation, pointing to the right path, voice in public, fencing from false ideologies and theologians, offering young people alternative content, being visible in the community, attracting and animating young people, being present in the media and pointing to the dangers, showing the model of good behaviour, cooperation and tolerance in the public and the media, to send positive messages continuously. They must also speak about these topics, and not just about their religious topics. They have to work with the community.
- The peers certainly influence one another, and if it is organized and positive, the prevention of radicalization will be done. They are one of the strongest influences on young people. If not the strongest they are in the first place in importance.
- These are all agents of socialization. And if negative influences come from all of them, we will not be able to recognize our own child. We as parents parent offer one thing and a lot of other things come to the child and we cannot control everything. Institutions also play a role. Each actor in a local community has his own role in such important and broad social happenings.

**What kind of cooperation should/could be? How can it be improved? Especially between parents and teachers?**

- Family and school cooperation is very important. Without this, teachers cannot do anything. The fact is that it is not on the satisfactory level. We often encounter a parents' closedness for anything that needs to be done. We can make a few steps with parents, after which we often encounter the wall, and this cooperation is very important. The school on itself cannot do anything. There is no legal possibility to do so. Parents' council that works only for pro forma should be strengthened. Since the electronic diaries have been introduced, this collaboration is falling even more. They just look at the ratings and they are not interested in anything else. No further communication. In order to strengthen cooperation this year, we have abolished the electronic diary and we have regular individual consultations. There should be a pleasant corner at school to talk to parents. And to establish a

regular parent consultation day. Co-operation with the teachers is mandatory, as well as cooperation with the pedagogical service.

- There is a lack of understanding between teachers and parents. Some parents are overprotective. Children are overprotected and their parents do not allow them anything. Children do not have contact with the society, but parents do not give up though they are wrong and will not cooperate with school, and children have problems and we warn them about it.
- There is also a lot of shortages for parents and schools and for everyone for a long time. And some of these situations are the result of this. Parents do not have time for children. Overburdened by jobs, survival, they do not have enough knowledge about these things, and they do not have relevant education.
- We have material problems. For example, parents who give large donations to schools then demand that their children have a special treatment, so schools cannot always react. Especially if the parent does not agree with the school's view. Institutions are in crisis and are not systemically supported, so they have these problems.
- There were public mentioning of the possibility that all teachers should have some pre-training for work with children, regardless of their profession. It is important to have a decent salary for teachers, but this is not enough. There are various codes of conduct for teachers, but they are not implemented or are only pro forma. Essential competencies are not being taken into account for a very long time. There is also nepotism with the change of political structure, party employment ... everything is reduced to the enthusiasm of individuals, and the institution cannot be based on it.
- Before the ethical role of the school was considerably stronger. The school has worked on the development of children values system. Each teacher was called and authorised to deal with this, and this educational role almost completely disappeared from school work now. Educational part - education and information are the only ones present. One of the basic interventions in the prevention of radicalization - open discussion on important topics - is now questionable. Is anyone dealing with it today? And how much is it now slippery for teachers?

**What strategy of joint response to radicalization should have parents and teachers? What are the next steps?o Preventive action is the most important and the best. The first thing we do in school is to work with better students, to promote everything they have achieved, a fashion show where good students win, to represent a school, we also included children with special needs, promotion of positive values, sections, sports, content offering,**

**excursions, daytrips, pupils' parliaments, various teams, peer teams, mobilizing driving actors among the pupils.**

- The synchronization of schools, parents and other institutions is the key. Joint action and strengthening of cooperation
- The value system is in crisis and this needs to be reacted upon
- The family carries the greatest responsibility with the greatest power to react. They need to deal with the child. The child needs to be a good person.
- It is necessary to identify and engage children who can be young leaders and the school should work with them and with other children through them.
- Those who do not meet the requirements should not be isolated in any way, as the state only worsens this way, but should also be included.

**Sjenica**

**How do they see the situation with radicalization and extremization of the youth in their local community? How do they see the situation with the response to radicalization in their local community?**

- I do not have a big comment. It depends on the person. It cannot be generalized. There are many anomalies in our society, although it is a small community. Children all have phones and social networks. Different ideas than we do. Rather neglected generation. There is no respect for authority. There is no radicalization. This is a small community.
- Technology has destroyed children. Disrespect is widespread. Children are not sociable, they use phones extensively, and they are not interested in direct contacts.
- There is obvious aggressiveness in young people. It is quite pronounced. Any problem, even the smallest, is solved by the fight. They even use meleeweapons for everything. Youth is allowed much. The law protects them and children become untouchable. This stimulates the situation that if a minor outburst goes unpunished after comes a real bigger problem because they see that they can act that way. The current situation is alarming. We should be serious about it. At least to introduce some measures that will at least limit the behaviour of young people.

They are allowed a lot. If they get more and more rights, this does not lead to a better future.

- Both parents and children know the law well and how to protect against all sanctions and we cannot do anything to them. They get more information about it than about their obligations.
- Most of this is manifested as peer violence. Every year there are quite a few cases of fights and the use of melee weapons. Everyone thinks violence is a solution.
- Verbal violence is also present, especially under the influence of social networks. This is again peer violence, only verbally. And this is dangerous violence, too. No less than physical. It begins as a mockery, and continues as a torture. Targets are children that are different in any way. The peers are then terrorizing them. And they themselves are under the influence of social networks where somebody spreads this hatred.
- This rise in tendency towards violence is a consequence of adolescence, a desire to prove, and the environment that justifies and instigates violence. On the other hand, they are unpunishable and schools are powerless without co-operation with their parents.
- There is no radicalization as such. This is a small town and we know nothing is happening. We would know it if there is. There is not too much prejudice, either. The greater problem is that the young are apathetic and interested in nothing.
- On social networks, negative content is the most popular. They are not used by children for learning, but for personal promotion, the likes. Often there is violence. There are various groups that incite violence. They adversely affect the youth because young people absorb it all. These are peer groups, but there are others who put negative content. National hatred is very popular here, but also all the others. There are groups to support war criminals, to kill, to slaughter exactly. Such content is popular. It was also a case of support to Kristijan Golubovic and such a negative example is positive for the young. Many support it. There are always these individuals and those smaller groups who never give up on such content.
- Children have little confidence in the entire system. Old values have all been lost. Children look at older people who are disappointed and do not believe in it anymore. They are not interested. The only thing that is important to children is social networks, money and getting out of here.
- Everybody wants to go abroad, earn money in a short time and come back here. Our education system ignores it. That's why children are not interested in school. They do not see that they will use it. Their goal is just to finish school anyhow and to get out of here. Professors and teachers are not examples or role models any more. Children do not want such a life. New values for

them are a lot of money in a short time. Their role models are from the Grand Stars. It does not matter how they got rich. Just to be fast and easy.

- They just want to finish anything and get out of here. They do not even have the will to live here because they know that what they earn in a month's time here, abroad can earn in as much as one day.
- The problem is the lack of interest of parents to come to school, too. They will not even come to talk to a teacher. They are not interested in solving the problem, and they are the only ones who can solve it with their children. They always have some justification, but they are not really interested actually.
- A large part of responsibility is borne by parents. Parents cannot allow themselves not to know where their children are and what they do. This is where the main problem begins. Then it is understandable that teachers cannot do so much when parents do not cooperate and do nothing. They do not even care.
- Cooperation between parents and school is necessary for this issue. While the problem develops, parents are not interested and do not respond. Only when something is already happening they come. Everything is corrective, and nothing preventive. Parents will not get involved and respond. They are a little interested and very rarely come in, and only when something has already happened. Only then do they come to take the blame away from their child and close the story. The more these problems are suppressed, the greater they become in time.
- There should be good cooperation between the teacher and the pedagogical service and the parents with them. There is a good cooperation within the school, but parents do not respond.
- Sometimes, teachers are late to informing. If the response in time, everything can be solved.
- It would be better if the educational system is different. To engage and involve children all day. If children are offered more, then they will not wander around and deal with negative things.
- There should also be various organizations dealing with children both for mental and physical development. And that's not present in Sjenica. In the west, this works in schools and children have content.
- There are also offices for youth and municipalities and sports associations sometimes organize something, but this is not enough and it is not systematic. And when something is organized children are not responding. Very few sign up when something is organized.
- No positive values or successful people, good students, are promoted in the media anymore. Criminals, drug addicts are promoted ...

- It is everybody's job to fix this situation. First parents, but then the whole community to work together to change the awareness.
- Old values have been lost. Not only in our country but in the whole world. Everything that comes from the West is accepted as being better, but it is not. The old values are better. Everything worked better before. Under these new laws, no one can do anything to children. He can neither punish them nor be an authority. Therefore, neither the parent nor the teacher can educate them.
- Parents do not have time because they have a lot to do. Previously, women were housewives and sat home and educated their children. These children of such mothers are much better. Mother can best educate children. And now we cannot live like that because we have to do 10 jobs to survive.
- However, parents must find time for their children or they will lose them. Otherwise why they had them if they cannot make the time for them.
- Earlier, there was the subject Upbringing and behaviour in the schools at which they just learned about values, about being a better person. All teachers have talked about values and upbringing things, and now nobody is doing it. The educational role of the school has now disappeared. Due to lack of funds, the work of the school has now been reduced to a minimum. Nothing is organized as it was before. There is no competitions, no excursion, winter, summer vacations. Schools organized everything. And for the past 7-8 years there has not been any excursion, and the reason is money. For a minimum of 8 years, not a single generation has gone to the excursion because parents do not have money. And this is just a generational final excursion for the entire high school, let alone an annual excursion.
- More importance is given to bad than to good students. In those orders that are read in a circle by school in all classes. It reads all those who have been punished and who have done something bad and do not mention good students. So, what is good is losing significance, and those who are bad are somehow promoted.

**What do they know about the early signs of radicalization (what their peers-other parents and educators know)?**

- What do they know about possible effective reactions to radicalization (what their peers-other parents and educators know)? Is it enough? Do they feel sure and confident that they will be able to recognize early signs? Do they need some help/support/information/training ... about early signs and their recognition? How they see their role in recognizing early signs? How they see their role in responding to early signs?



- Most of the group says they are not familiar with the phenomenon of radicalization in their community. Some say it's a very important issue and they would like to have accurate and verified information if something like that happens. Others claim there are no such occurrences in Sjenica. It's a small community and they know what's going on. They know that radicalization has been more present in Novi Pazar because it is a bigger and different environment.
- There is only one mosque that is not registered anywhere and operates privately, but there are no activities on radicalization. And there are no private houses with such events. Here is one member of this mosque present. He is not in Syria. This mosque does not do that. They are only specific in their own religious learning.
- Any possible conversation on these topics in the community is avoided. These themes are secreted and hidden from the eyes of the public. The group does not know about it and they think they would know they have it.
- There are no radical groups that recruit people to go to war. Here it is more a dogmatic question of accepting one conviction or another, but there are no radical groups.
- There may be individuals who are radical in various ways, but there are no radical groups or groups that radicalize others. The global problem is that, in all Western countries and all media, every terrorism and extremism is connected with Islam. It says Islamic terrorism. And there is not one word in the Quran that calls for terrorism and extremism. This is so served to the people who do not know the true truth about Islam. There are also individuals who are really radical and are financed by the West to create a negative image of our religion because Islam is spreading rapidly in the West and it does not suit them. It is a media war against a particular religion. There are also Christian individuals who have committed various acts of violence, but this does not relate to Christian terrorism, and here it is called Islamic terrorism. In fact, it is an individual who is radicalized and has nothing to do with religion. Syria is potentiated and going to Syria. It's not right, of course, and we have to fight it. But they also have to fight against going to Ukraine to fight there. That's not right either. Freedom of the people of the Islamic faith is very limited precisely because of this kind of presentation of terrorism. Today in the West, anyone can kill anyone with a beard and say that he is a terrorist and to go unpunished.
- Young people are not interested in religious communities, nationality ... they are only interested in money and how to earn money. In Germany, everyone works together, and here they cannot. Here, the system is to blame, not the people.
- They know only one example of a neighbour from Sjenica who took that so called faith and left for Syria. The family

knew he will go. He sold everything he had and left. Everyone tried to talk him out of it but failed. He was about 40 years old. That was his decision. There was only one case in Sjenica and nothing more. It's not so much of a problem here so that we have to talk about it so much.

- Radicalization is not a problem here. There are a lot more people from Austria and Germany in Syria. Serbia is very small and irrelevant here. And the fact that we are near Kosovo and Bosnia is the new question. It's also a very complicated question to solve it here. We think we talk too much about it.
- If they know that someone wants to go to war, it's hard to influence it when it's already reaching that level. It should be influenced earlier in order to prevent this. It's very hard to get someone to turn it off if he has already decided it. The same as when a young woman wants to marry. If she extremely wants to marry, then you cannot stop her. She'll escape if she's banned. It depends on the stage we are noticing that something is happening. The sooner the better, and the prevention is the best.
- It seems that our mentality is such that preventive measures do not work. Only penalties work.
- More needs to be done on attitudes rather than on information. It's not worth the other values are adopted.
- It is much easier to discover when it is done by the group, and when it is held by an individual in the head it is almost impossible to discover. For example, when it comes to some sites and social networks where there are no physical encounters. How to find out then. In Turkey they have now restricted access to some sites that spoil the youth. Why would Serbia not prevent the youth from looking at such websites where there is violence and wars? It would be a way of preventing radicalization.
- This is a matter of human rights and the restriction of freedom, so it cannot be just banned. And even if information is barred, no one even knows about them. Children should see what is bad in order to know what is bad. It's a better approach. To teach them what is bad, and not to hide everything from them, and when they come into contact with it, they will act positively. It's better to prepare our children.
- When it comes to public interest, then human rights may be restricted in order to protect the public interest. If someone watches a baby who is slaughtered, it will leave a trace on his soul and some content could be banned. So, all content that is violent, immoral, and inappropriate. They could be restricted for public interest.
- What schools can do and what some schools have done is to restrict access to social networks while children are at school. Further than that, schools have no authority. More, it is the duty of the parent. If parents allow it all, then the school does

not achieve anything because children compensate it all before and after school.

- As far as religious extremism is concerned, this is easily solved - introduce the same religious literature at all classes of religious education. Everybody here took their own religion and everyone teaches their faith only. This does not solve the problem, but only an even bigger problem arises.

### **What strategy of joint response to radicalization should have parents and teachers? Future steps? Conclusions**

- We are not able to do much work there. This is in the jurisdiction of the state. It is also a question of the state's power what it wants to provide. If the state invested more than schools could give more to the children, children would be more interested and would not have time or need for negative values and content. But when the situation is like this, we cannot do anything here. We as individuals cannot change that.
- Such lectures are helpful and we are pleased with your contribution. They are still needed, so should be continued.

### **Conclusions**

- Participants were always sitting separately, both during the work sessions and during breaks. However, this was not a barrier to their participation in discussions.
- It is a strong impression that the topic of radicalisation and extremism is almost a taboo in both the communities. All participants Both focus groups were held in adequate and well equipped restaurants" rooms. Due to the location, both halls were somewhat noisy, though.
- Both groups were well selected and during the discussions their commitment and will for active participation was obvious. Throughout the discussions spontaneous feedback from participants has confirmed that they are very satisfied and interested for these discussions and for possible future activities, too. Several participants in both groups have directly said that they want to be called for any future trainings, gatherings etc. that might be organised.
- Due to the summer vacations it was quite difficult to gather groups of participants of sufficient size and required composition, especially in Sjenica which is a much smaller community. This is why only one woman was present in the Sjenica group while Novi Pazar group had sufficient gender balance.
- It was very visible that both communities are very traditionalist and conservative especially regarding the gender

issues and it was even visible in the way that male and female were visibly aware of the existence of these problems, but were very hesitant to talk about them directly. It took a lot of encouragements and appeals to get them to open up about these problems. On the other hand many of them recognised that it is important to start talking about these issues openly, both on this kind of gatherings and also in the community.

## **FOCUS GROUPS IN NOVI PAZAR AND SJENICA, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Following recommendations are based on findings of focus groups (educators and parents of high school students) held in Novi Pazar and Sjenica in August 2017. Educators and parents discussed the best mechanisms of addressing the issue of radicalization and violent extremism in local community. It is a strong impression that the topic of radicalization and extremism is almost a taboo. All participants were visibly aware of the existence of these problems, but were very hesitant to talk about them directly. It took a lot of encouragements and appeals to get them to open up about these problems. On the other hand many of them recognized that it is important to start talking about these issues openly, both on this kind of gatherings and also in the community. Participants say that there are no radical groups that recruit people to go to war in Sandzak considering it as more a dogmatic question of accepting one conviction or another.

### **Recommendations:**

- Education programs for students, teachers and parents regarding prevention and countering violent extremism are welcomed and helpful for the community. Participants (parents and educators) demonstrated the strong willingness to participate in such kind of activities in future and they consider that each school should be included. Several participants in both groups have directly said that they want to be called for any future trainings, gatherings etc. that might be organized. The board of directors of schools in Novi Pazar is recognized as focal point for future cooperation.
- The family plays the most important role in prevention radicalization among youth. (Not only the primary one, but also all members of the extended family.) Parents' council in schools that works only for pro forma should be strengthened.
- Family and school cooperation is very important. Considering that student's trust in schools and teachers is very low, it is needful to increase the trust and respect of children towards teachers. This comes both from home and from school. The synergy of schools, parents and other institutions is the key for prevention radicalization. Joint action and strengthening of cooperation is necessary. Without support of parents, teachers cannot do anything.

- Informal peer groups are one of the strongest agents of radicalization, as well as agents of deradicalization. It is necessary to identify and engage children who can be young leaders and the school should work with them and with other children through them. The peers certainly influence one another, and if it is organized and positive, the prevention of radicalization will be effective.
- To engage and involve children all day through extracurricular activities, as sport, and cultural workshops and events. If children are offered more, then they will not wander surrounded with negative things. Those students who do not meet the requirements should not be isolated in any way, as the state only worsens this way, but should also be included.
- Communication about controversial issues through different channels is crucial for prevention. Nurturing a culture of open communication, respect for diversity is the substantive for creation of alternatives. Dealing with prejudices in local communities is the first step in preventing radicalization. Participants concluded that the value system is in crisis and this needs to be reacted upon.
- Prohibitions make sense only if things are severely dangerous and if someone is saved in this way and only until a person gets better. It's just saving lives and health, but then it has to be followed with work with that person to get back to previous setting.
- Civil society organizations are recognized as important partners in joint actions (schools, parents and students) against radicalization. They are perceived as collaborators in prevention's programs which can offer alternatives, raise awareness in the community, monitor the work of other actors, educate, research, draw attention, publish data, develop contacts with their target groups, recognize needs, everything that no one else does.



*Novi Pazar, Fokus Group, 7 August 2017*