

Negative consequences of antiterrorism policy in Europe

February 5 2020



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"It's right and proper that we have policies to prevent terrorism," says Francesco Ragazzi, university lecturer in International Relations at Leiden's Institute of Political Science. "But the way the policies are

designed and implemented can have unintended consequences. For example, when teachers are asked to report signs of radicalization."

Francesco Ragazzi is one of the experts advising the Council of Europe on radicalization and antiradicalization. He also works on behalf of the European Parliament, together with other European researchers, on reports on the consequences of antiterrorism policy. The present policy assumes that as well as being a political or criminality problem, terrorism is also a societal problem that calls for societal solutions. That is why [social workers](#), healthcare professionals and teachers are involved. "But the way these professional groups are involved in current terrorism policy can have [negative consequences](#) for fundamental human rights, such as privacy, freedom of religion and freedom of expression," Ragazzi says.

Reporting radicalization

All the NATO countries have been asked to implement terrorism policies. In the UK, for example, since 2015 teachers have been required by law to report signs of radicalization. In the Netherlands, Denmark and France there is no compulsory reporting, but many teachers do report their suspicions anyway. France has a contact point for reporting radicalization. "The databank held by that agency lists over 20,000 names, around a quarter of which have been reported by people working in education," Ragazzi explains.

Relationship of trust

"But teachers and interest groups in the UK are critical of this policy," Ragazzi says. And it comes as no surprise to him. "If you give [police work](#) to people who aren't themselves part of the police force, you're asking for trouble. Teachers and [healthcare professionals](#) have to have a

relationship of trust with the people they are working with. But, with the present counterterrorism policy, these same groups of people are suddenly expected to start mistrusting the people they deal with, and that generates an atmosphere of suspicion. This kind of conflict means they can no longer do their jobs properly."

"Most teachers I speak to feel responsible and they worry that if they miss signs of radicalization, something bad could happen at their schools. But they're also concerned about their pupils," Ragazzi explains. If you report someone wrongfully, that can have far-reaching consequences for the pupil and his or her family.

Taking a critical approach

In the reports, Ragazzi and his colleagues therefore recommend other ways teachers can contribute to counterterrorism [policy](#). "They can teach pupils to be critical and to recognise false rumours and fake news," he explains. Teachers can also help their pupils to understand cultural differences. "That way they're using their professional skills without damaging that relationship of trust."

If teachers are concerned about a pupil's radical tendencies, Ragazzi believes it would be better if they did not have to report it immediately. "They ought to be able to talk to an intermediary from one of the security agencies, maybe without even having to mention the pupil's name." Antwerp and Norway already have these kinds of contact points. It's the job of the police and information services, not teachers, to be suspicious of people."

Provided by Leiden University

Citation: Negative consequences of antiterrorism policy in Europe (2020, February 5) retrieved 4 June 2024 from

<https://phys.org/news/2020-02-negative-consequences-antiterrorism-policy-europe.html>

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