

# **Racism & Extremism Monitor**

## **Deradicalisation in practice**

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### **About the *Racism & Extremism Monitor* project**

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## 1 Introduction

The problem of racist and extremist behaviour among young people became significantly more serious in around 2004, especially after the murder of Theo van Gogh on 2 November of that year. This continued into 2005, when the so-called "Lonsdale youth" were the subject of almost daily media coverage.<sup>1</sup> It was not unusual for such attention to focus on inter-ethnic confrontations.<sup>2</sup> This form of violence increased steadily from 2002 to 2006, which to a great extent was to be attributed to the rise of the "Lonsdale youth" phenomenon.

Many different attempts have been made to tackle the problem of groups of young right-wing extremists. Until the emergence of the Lonsdale problem, the Netherlands had little experience in formulating policy that was specifically aimed at right-wing extremist youth. This is understandable, since the problem was relatively small in scale. Countries that have had to deal with much larger numbers of right-wing extremist youth over longer periods of time are naturally more experienced in this regard. The decision to have a closer look at these experiences not only revealed strategies that are already well-known in the Netherlands, such as repressive and educational approaches, but they also brought to light a new element: the so-called "Exit" initiatives. These initiatives have one goal in common: to do everything possible to help right-wing extremists extricate themselves from the right-wing extremist scene; in other words, to stimulate *deradicalisation*.<sup>3</sup>

Based on these insights, an experimental project was initiated that was carried out in 2007 and 2008 in the cities of Eindhoven and Winschoten. The goal of this experiment was to see whether deradicalisation projects like the ones that existed in Germany and Scandinavia could also be applied in the Netherlands. The pilots were carried out by the municipalities themselves, with FORUM, the Institute for Multicultural Development, assuming the task of national project leader. Because it was decided that the progress and results of any deradicalisation programme should be evaluated right from the start, the pilot was linked to a Monitor study carried out by Leiden University and the Anne Frank House in the context of the *Racism & Extremism Monitor*.<sup>4</sup> The goal of this investigation is to study the development of both projects in the hope that lessons might be learned for the further application of stimulated deradicalisation in the Netherlands.

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<sup>1</sup> The name "Lonsdale youth" has a complex history behind it. Lonsdale is a British clothing label that is popular among gabbers (members of a typical Dutch youth style, Hardcore Techno enthusiasts), including those with a right-wing extremist, racist mindset. These gabbers were often so flamboyant in their habits of dress that the label began to serve as their mark of identification. Apparently right-wing extremist, racist gabbers came to exercise such a prevailing influence that a reversal took place: "Lonsdale youth" began to refer less and less to young people who wear Lonsdale clothing and instead to the right-wing extremist, racist youths among them. See: Jaap van Donselaar (ed.), *Monitor Racisme & Extremisme. Het Lonsdalevraagstuk*, Amsterdam: Anne Frank House / Leiden University 2005, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> In the *Racism & Extremism Monitor* this is understood to mean: often spontaneous but sometimes organised street violence of a more or less racist or right-wing extremist character. Confrontations can often be described as "minor race riots." They involve several parties, often consisting of young people, who come to blows at school or in a social situation. Frequently it is difficult to tell the perpetrators from the victims. Confrontations can differ in scale and ferocity. See: Willem Wagenaar & Jaap van Donselaar, "Racistisch en extreemrechts geweld in 2007," in: Jaap van Donselaar & Peter R. Rodrigues, *Monitor Racisme & Extremisme: achtste rapportage*. Amsterdam: Anne Frank House / Leiden University 2008, p. 29.

<sup>3</sup> Jaap van Donselaar (ed.), *Monitor Racisme & Extremisme. Het Lonsdalevraagstuk*, pp. 53-60; Sara Grunenberg & Jaap van Donselaar, "Deradicalisering: lessen uit Duitsland, opties voor Nederland?," in: Jaap van Donselaar & Peter R. Rodrigues (eds.), *Monitor Racisme & Extremisme: zevende rapportage*, Amsterdam: Anne Frank House / Leiden University 2006, pp. 158-178; Froukje Demant et al., *Teruggang en uitbreiding: processen van deradicalisering ontleed*, Amsterdam: IMES 2008.

<sup>4</sup> For further information on the Monitor project, see 'About the *Racism & Extremism Monitor* project' at the end of this report as well as on the website: <http://www.monitorracisme.nl>.

Naturally, the central theme of our Monitor study of the deradicalisation pilot is closely tied to the theme of the experiment itself: to develop a new and supplementary strategy for the deradicalisation of individual right-wing extremist youth. Before discussing the experiments in the two municipalities, we will first devote a chapter to the relevant underlying context and basic principles, such as right-wing extremism in the Netherlands, experiences of deradicalisation programmes in other countries and the basic principles of the pilot, such as when we can say that deradicalisation has actually been accomplished. Finally, we will take a look at our research methods.

In the next two chapters we turn to the experiments in Winschoten and Eindhoven: how was the deradicalisation strategy implemented and what were the results? In the last chapter, the outcome of the pilots in both cities will be compared and discussed. We will also deal with the question that was asked earlier: where do we go from here with stimulated deradicalisation in the Netherlands?

As in many studies, striking a balance between involvement and distance is very important. Our 'involvement' consists of a sympathetic attitude towards experimenting with deradicalisation in general, an attitude that is motivated by earlier investigative studies we have carried out in this area and in which we recommended experimenting with implementation. But in order to practise the detachment necessary for empirical research, we have maintained the appropriate distance from the implementation of the project, which lay in the hands of FORUM and the two municipalities. In addition to the work of research, our team was also involved in making knowledge and expertise available to the professionals involved.

The deradicalisation experiment as well as the Monitor study associated with it were made possible with the financial support of the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, the Ministry of Justice / Minorities Integration Policy (Co-ordination) Department (subsequently merged into the Citizenship and Integration Department of the Directorate General of Housing, Communities and Integration) and the National Coordinator for Counterterrorism. From the very beginning, the possibility of eventually focusing stimulated deradicalisation on Islamic radicals has also been taken into account. Because of their academic expertise in the area of Islamic radicalism, the Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies (IMES) of the University of Amsterdam has been called in to serve as advisor for the deradicalisation experiment.

One concluding comment on terminology. The notions of radicalism and radicalisation have become standard usage in the Netherlands. It sometimes happens that "right-wing radicalism" is used when "right-wing extremism" would perhaps be a better choice. Opinions may differ as to whether "radicalism" and "extremism" are identical or different as concepts, but such a discussion is not being carried out or repeated here. In this study, right-wing extremism and right-wing radicalism are regarded as the same and are treated as synonyms.

## 2 Background and structure of the experiment

A new problem, a new strategy. But how to go about it? This might sum up the background of the experimental deradicalisation strategy in a nutshell. In the rest of this chapter we will cover the following topics: right-wing extremism in the Netherlands, ideas about deradicalisation, experiences in other countries, lessons for the Netherlands, application in the Netherlands and the structure of the deradicalisation pilot.

### 2.1 Right-wing extremism in the Netherlands: current assessment

After the parliamentary elections of 1998, the last three representatives of the right-wing extremist "Centre" movement disappeared from the Dutch House of Representatives.<sup>5</sup> Among them was the leader of the Centre Democrats (CD), Hans Janmaat. That same year, another right-wing extremist party was banned – CP'86 – following a court ruling in Amsterdam. Defeat at the polls and repressive action by the government left the right-wing political parties with their role largely played out. Then in 2001, the Liveable/LPF movement with Pim Fortuyn made its entrance. This movement was regularly associated at the time with "right-wing extremism," "racism" and "fascism."<sup>6</sup> The same is true for Fortuyn's "heirs," such as Geert Wilders and the PVV.<sup>7</sup>

Coincident with the emergence of Fortuynism, and just after the start of the new millennium, another important development took place: the explosive growth of right-wing extremist "street variants" in the form of diffuse networks of young people of a more or less outspoken racist and right-wing extremist orientation.<sup>8</sup> One of the binding elements in these networks, which were often groups of friends, was the gabber culture ("Lonsdalers"). The appearance of these groups led to a great deal of discussion on the degree of right-wing extremism, the racist content, the ideological depth, the connection with more general juvenile crime and ties with the more organised forms of right-wing extremism.<sup>9</sup>

The "Lonsdaler" phenomenon became interwoven up with disruption, anti-social and criminal behaviour. In a number of cases there was overlapping with *racist* and *right-wing extremist* disruption, anti-social and criminal behaviour. Scores of interethnic confrontations took place involving groups of right-wing extremist gabbers.<sup>10</sup> That involvement sometimes took the form of perpetrator with regard to groups of ethnic minority young people, and sometimes it took the form of victim, with the ethnic minority young people as the aggressors. Seen in this way, the "Lonsdale problem" seemed to overlap with the broader problem of interethnic tension between young people in the public domain.

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<sup>5</sup> For the electoral demise of the CD and the prohibition of CP'86, see Jaap van Donselaar, *Monitor racism en extreem-rechts; derde rapportage*, Leiden: Leiden University 2000, pp. 33-71.

<sup>6</sup> In our Monitor research we concluded that there was insufficient evidence to qualify Fortuyn and the movement as right-wing extremist. See Jaap van Donselaar & Peter R. Rodrigues, "Het extreem-rechtse en racistische gehalte van de LPF/Leefbaarstroming," in: Jaap van Donselaar & Peter R. Rodrigues, *Monitor racisme en extreem-rechts; vijfde rapportage*, Amsterdam: Anne Frank House / Leiden University 2002, pp. 59-87.

<sup>7</sup> M. Davidović et al., "Het extreemrechtse en discriminatoire gehalte van de PVV," in: Jaap van Donselaar & Peter R. Rodrigues, *Monitor Racisme & Extremisme; achtste rapportage*, pp. 167-198.

<sup>8</sup> For a detailed discussion of this material see Jaap van Donselaar (ed.), *Monitor Racisme & Extremisme. Het Lonsdalevraagstuk*.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., pp. 10-24.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 31-34 and pp. 49-51.

The diversity of the "Lonsdale problem" could not only be seen in its manifestations but was also reflected in the reactions it evoked, which were just as varied. While one person thought he was seeing an extremely dangerous neo-Nazi group, another saw nothing more than a phenomenon that has been common throughout history: a group of young people out to cause trouble. This wide range of perceptions, or different "definitions of the situation," led to correspondingly aggressive or weak forms of response from governing authorities.<sup>11</sup>

In 2001 the problems having to do with right-wing extremist "Lonsdalers" (gabbers) began to increase in size and significance, then picked up speed at the end of 2004 – after the murder of Theo van Gogh. Right-wing extremist young people were involved in a series of racist (violent) incidents that followed the murder of Van Gogh and were broadly publicised in the news media. The media attention for this phenomenon may have ebbed away somewhat, but the problem has not lost any of its relevance. It still probably involves a few thousand more or less racist, right-wing extremist young people.

The right-wing extremist gabber scene has also given rise to processes of more advanced radicalisation. Various neo-Nazi groups have emerged in recent years that originated in these circles. These groups are more tightly organised than the right-wing extremist Lonsdalers, and their ideology is more distinctly right-wing extremist (read: National Socialist), with the use of violence often seen as a justified action method. The Dutch branch of the skinhead organisation Blood & Honour was given a powerful boost in this way.<sup>12</sup>

So the picture we have of right-wing extremism in the Netherlands in recent years differs considerably from that of ten or fifteen years ago, when the "Centre" camp were the principal actors. The situation that existed at that time left its mark on the way the problem of right-wing extremism was dealt with: the government focused primarily – and mainly repressively – on organised formations, i.e. on right-wing extremist parties, their leaders and their presence in democratically elected bodies. The strategy at that time did not address the problems caused by diffuse right-wing extremist youth networks with a low degree of internal organisation. How to tackle these new problems, however, has not been immediately clear.

Recognising the significance and threat posed by today's forms of right-wing extremism is a primary requirement, of course. In recent years, growing recognition of these problems at the local level in particular, along with concern for Islamic radicalism, greatly increased the amount of attention being paid to processes of radicalisation. Gradually more and more questions were also being asked about the reverse process: *deradicalisation*. Why do people distance themselves from the radical ideas or activities that they once had professed? How do such processes develop? And can they be supported or stimulated?

## 2.2 Aspects of deradicalisation

In order to answer these questions, we must take a close look at the individual process of deradicalisation. Which factors play a role in this process, and can these factors be influenced?

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 36-52.

<sup>12</sup> For a characterisation of Blood & Honour see Jaap van Donselaar & Peter R. Rodrigues, *Monitor Racisme & Extremisme; achtste rapportage*, pp. 51-52.

The Norwegian anthropologist Bjørgo made a study of the *entry* and *exit* of young people in Norwegian, Swedish and Danish right-wing extremist groups.<sup>13</sup> Bjørgo found that the young people he investigated rarely had ideological motives when they decided to join right-wing extremist groups. There was evidence of a vague xenophobic orientation but not of pronounced racist ideas. Most of the reasons for joining a right-wing extremist group had to do with seeking protection from the threat of other young people (ethnic minorities, for example) or acquiring a circle of friends. Others joined to escape a problematic home environment, or simply out of a need for excitement and thrills. Young people who spent more time with a group became more rooted in it. They stayed with the group because of their need for friendship, for a certain identity and for security. They also became more ideologically formed. Young people who stay for a longer period of time are also more likely to become involved in violent confrontations with others. "Successful" confrontations, such as a victory over opponents and media attention, can reinforce group coherence, but so can defeats, such as getting arrested. The group cohesion creates an impediment to leaving the group. Involvement in violent actions and contact with the police make it more and more difficult to maintain harmonious relations with the outside world. Often these relations are severed completely, whether by the outside world or by the young person himself. The longer he stays in the group, the more negative the stigma and the more difficult it is to become disengaged.

Bjørgo identifies three kinds of factors that play a role in pulling out of a right-wing extremist group: *push factors*, *pull factors* and *restraining factors*. *Push factors* are the negative forces and conditions that make it unappealing to stay in the group. A *push* factor might be that the person has changed his way of thinking, either morally or politically. *Pull factors* are the positive factors that make another environment more attractive than that of the right-wing extremist group. A *pull* factor might be that at a given moment the "ordinary" life has come to seem more attractive in the person's eyes. *Restraining factors* are factors that make it difficult to leave the group. These factors are especially strong among people whose right-wing extremist identity is well known and who have been in the group for a relatively long time. Their ties with family and the outside world are often completely severed. And without the group, the person is afraid that he will have to rely entirely on himself for his own safety.

Recently Demant et al., who completed a study of the deradicalisation processes of several radical groups in the Netherlands,<sup>14</sup> came up with an alternative division of deradicalisation factors. They built on the work of Bjørgo but from a different perspective because there were some difficulties with the existing division. For instance, it is often difficult to tell whether the disengagement from a radical group was a consequence of either "push" or "pull" factors. A person might get fed up with the exhausting life in the group and decide that a more peaceful life outside the group would be much more attractive. Is this a matter of a "push" or a "pull" factor? It seems more like two sides of the same coin. Another problem is that the terms "push," "pull" and "restraining" refer to the *direction* the person is going in but not to the *reasons* why someone becomes deradicalised. Is a person "pushed" from the group because he is disappointed with the way the leadership functions, because he has adopted different ideas or because he is being stigmatised by his environment?

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<sup>13</sup> See Tore Bjørgo, *Racist and right-wing violence in Scandinavia: patterns, perpetrators, and responses*. Oslo: Tano Aschehoug 1997.

<sup>14</sup> See Froukje Demant et al., *Teruggang en uitbreiding*.



To overcome these difficulties, Demant et al. make a distinction between *movement* factors, *ideological* factors and *practical* factors in determining reasons for deradicalisation. Movement factors are aspects of the radical movement that lead to disappointment, such as lack of loyalty within the group, internal conflict or leadership failure. Ideological factors are factors that lead the person to abandon his radical views. A person might gradually begin to doubt the feasibility of the radical objectives, for example. Practical factors have to do with the practical advantages and disadvantages connected with group membership. When disadvantages gain the upper hand, such as the threat of criminal proceedings, stigmatisation by the social environment or loss of career perspectives, deradicalisation may result.

The insights derived from the work of Bjørgo and Demant et al. suggest that processes of deradicalisation seem quite different to members of a “hard core” than to newcomers and followers, since hard core members will have had a much longer involvement in the radical organisation. Their ideological formation is more complete and there are more factors that keep them from leaving the group. This is especially true of those who have established a reputation as right-wing radicals, such as those who have appeared in the news media. Consequently, any deradicalisation effort will have to make use of a variety of strategies. In the case of newcomers, the main objective is to draw them out of the isolation in which they find themselves as a result of the radicalisation process. Here the emphasis should be on the negative aspects of the radical group and the practical disadvantages of group membership. When it comes to persons in the hard core, however, creating isolation is the answer, preferably before they are able to do any harm or to pass on their radical ideas on to others. Deradicalisation is much more difficult in their case because ideological factors play a greater role and there are more obstacles to overcome in order to leave the group.

### 2.3 Experiences of deradicalisation projects in other countries

Developments in the area of radicalisation and right-wing extremism are not limited to the Netherlands, of course. In fact, for a long time the situation in the Netherlands compared favourably with that in Germany and the Scandinavian countries, where the problem of right-wing extremist youth networks is more long-standing. Because the problem has a longer history in those countries than in the Netherlands, the experience gained there in methods of combating the problem is also more extensive. This experience – the successes *and* the failures – has a great deal to teach us in the Netherlands.

Policy to combat extremism comes in all shapes and sizes. The “target groups” may differ – Islamic radicals, right-wing radicals, members of a hard core or mere followers<sup>15</sup> – and so may the methodologies. A preventive approach is one possibility, with information campaigns and education for high-risk groups such as young people; at the other end of the spectrum is a repressive approach.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Here we can draw on the experiences of persons who have pulled out of sects or gangs. For example, see Stuart A. Wright, *Leaving cults: The dynamics of defection*. Washington, DC: Society for the Scientific Study of Religion 1987; Susan Rothbaum, ‘Between two worlds: Issues of separation and identity after leaving a religious community’, in: David G. Bromley (ed.), *Falling from the faith: causes and consequences of religious apostasy*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications 1988; Scott H. Decker & Barrick Van Winkle, *Life in the gang: family, friends, and violence*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1996.

<sup>16</sup> According to Van Donselaar, Western European countries have tackled the problem of right-wing extremism in a variety of ways that can be grouped into three general categories: (1) influencing public opinion, (2) focusing on the perceived causes, (3) influencing outward expressions of right-wing extremism. The first is aimed at changing attitudes, the second at removing the breeding ground. What both have in common is that they make use of an

Repressive action against radicals or persons who are becoming radicalised can take place in a variety of ways. The principal way is criminal prosecution, but another possibility might involve direct interference.<sup>17</sup> Besides preventive and repressive methods there are projects that employ a different approach. These consist of attempts to offer assistance and alternatives so that persons who are radicalising or are already radicalised can be reintegrated into democratic society. This is a curative approach, but one that is not based on repression. Several European countries have experience with these curative, individually focused deradicalisation projects for right-wing extremists. In earlier discussions of these projects we have already noted that no evaluations or outcome assessments have been made of them as far as we are aware, so it is not easy to determine how helpful they have been. There are other significant insights to be obtained, however. We will examine projects from three countries: Norway, Sweden and Germany.<sup>18</sup>

### 2.3.1 Norway

The study by Bjørge on processes of radicalisation and deradicalisation that was discussed above prompted Norway to develop a so-called "Exit" model. Municipalities struggling with problems of young people on the path to radicalism were assisted in gathering information and setting up a local programme. The programme had three components: prevention, intervention and reintegration.

The *prevention* component consisted of conducting *empowerment conversations*: structured talks in which a professional (such as a police officer or a youth worker) would talk with a young person who was attracted to the right-wing radical environment, and to his parents. The goal was to warn the young person of the possible negative consequences of membership in a right-wing radical group. The *interventions* consisted of a combination of emphasising the disadvantages of membership in a right-wing radical group and offering an attractive alternative. *Reintegration* was aimed at providing support to persons who left the right-wing radical scene by finding work and housing, and carrying on discussions with the disengager.

In the Norwegian approach, a parents' network was set up for parents of right-wing radical youths. These networks were also partly seen as a form of intervention since attempts were made through the programme to ease the young persons out of the scene via their parents.

### 2.3.2 Sweden

A modified form of this programme was then adopted in Sweden. In this country a central organisation was set up that would guide a potential disengager through a five-phase plan.

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indirect approach to right-wing extremism. The third category is a direct approach, usually in the form of repression, whether it involves criminal prosecution or not. In addition to repressive measures there is (4) designating barriers in the political system that directly influence electoral expressions of right-wing extremism in particular, such as the apportioning of seats. See Jaap van Donselaar, *De staat paraat? De bestrijding van extreem-rechts in West-Europa*, Amsterdam: Babylon De Geus 1995, pp. 14-15.

<sup>17</sup> Interference may target a group or an individual and involves harsh and far-reaching methods that are intended to put an end to radicalisation processes or preparations to commit punishable offences. See, among others, *Beleidskader aanpak radicaliseringshaarden*, NCTb 22 December 2005.

<sup>18</sup> Froukje Demant et al., "Deradicalisering van rechtsradicalen en islamitische radicalen," in: Jaap van Donselaar & Peter R. Rodrigues, *Monitor Racisme & Extremisme; achtste rapportage*, pp. 255-277.

- Motivation phase. The person is still in the group, but he is beginning to have second thoughts and establishes contact with the Exit team. The team gives him information and offers him a contact person, someone who has gone through this process himself.
- Disengagement phase. The person has made a decision to leave the group. This is a chaotic period during which the Exit programme provides mental and practical support.
- Establishment phase. The break is now complete. The person has a place to live, financial resources and sometimes a job or a course of study. But he is often socially isolated.
- Reflection phase. The person begins to free himself from past issues such as violence, crime, radical ideology and hatred. Some experience problems like anxiety, depression and sleeplessness, or they take up alcohol abuse. Often they are sent to a therapist.
- Stabilisation phase. The person is back to leading a "normal" life with work, education and sometimes a family of his own. He is still afraid that his past will ruin his future, and he often experiences feelings of guilt and shame. The Exit programme is no longer actively involved with the person, but many continue to maintain contact.

It should be noted that this five-phase plan is an ideal type: in practice the disengagement process is not a systematic succession of steps.

The Swedish programme was not concerned with changing the minds of disengagers but with strengthening their personal will to enable them to pull away from the right-wing radical scene and to establish a normal life. The focus is on the personal negative consequences of remaining in the right-wing radical movement and on the possibilities and alternatives associated with disengagement.

### 2.3.3 Germany

In Germany there are a great many different deradicalisation projects. At the end of 2006, our *Racism & Extremism Monitor* research project published a study of German experiences with deradicalisation projects involving right-wing radicals.<sup>19</sup> The study clearly showed that there were significant differences between the various German initiatives. Some projects were set up by the government or the intelligence service, for example, while others were connected with NGOs. The target groups also differed. In some projects the focus was on the hard core, in others it was on followers and in still others it was on both groups. The kinds of demands placed on the disengagers also differed. While one project required them to be totally open about the punishable offences they had committed, others were less rigorous in this regard. Another difference was that coordination – the role of director, if you will – was not always in the hands of the same actor and could differ from project to project.

Another striking thing about the projects we looked at was that most of them were mainly focused on practical adjustments. Persons involved in a project were counselled so they could adjust to leading a "normal" life. What that meant in practical terms was that contacts with right-wing extremist organisations were avoided, the person got a "normal" job or went back to school and no longer engaged

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<sup>19</sup> Sara Grunenberg & Jaap van Donselaar, "Deradicalisering: Lessen uit Duitsland, opties voor Nederland?"

in violent activities. No efforts were made at ideological adjustment, although it could occur, of course. This approach is based on the idea that ideological beliefs play only a marginal role in disengagement: most disengagers decide to leave the right-wing extremist group not for ideological reasons but to get away from the problems caused by their right-wing extremist behaviour.

The *Exit-Deutschland* project, which is conducted by an NGO, seems to be an exception: its goal is not only to provide the disengager with practical support but also to tackle right-wing radical ideas and to stimulate a democratic mentality. It is not clear how this is done in practice, however, or whether it has been a success.<sup>20</sup>

## 2.4 Application in the Netherlands

Deradicalisation projects such as those in Scandinavia and Germany are new to the Netherlands, although the country does have a long tradition of coping with right-wing extremism. The most notable reaction to the phenomenon is perhaps the promotion of social and political isolation.<sup>21</sup> In past decades, right-wing extremists whose convictions became publicly known often found themselves isolated, a condition that opponents consciously tried to bring about. There are many known examples of problems within the social environment (friends, family, children) and threats of job dismissal or suspension from organisations. There was also a constant succession of strategies,<sup>22</sup> with new policy often going hand in hand with the firm rejection of an earlier approach. And there was a political variant of the practice of social isolation: the tendency to keep things under wraps, whereby attempts were made to avoid any form of debate on right-wing extremism. This variant can also be seen in the way the news media have often dealt with right-wing extremists.

Several preventive and repressive approaches do exist for dealing with the radicalisation of potentially right-wing extremist young people. At schools, for example, teaching methods are available that are meant to instil tolerance or impart a sense of connection with democratic society. When a radicalisation process develops into dangerous or criminal activities, repressive means can be brought to bear, including criminal law. In many cases, however, these two options – preventive and repressive – are only invoked after problems have become evident. Moreover, there is still a "gap" in the scale of options for dealing with individual processes of radicalisation: when preventive actions fail, in a certain sense it's just a matter of time before someone goes off the rails and a repressive approach comes into play. It is often said that because of this gap the need has arisen for an approach among local organisations such as youth work, the police and schools, to deal with young people who are in a radicalisation process. Non-repressive curative programmes, such as the projects in Scandinavia and Germany described above, do not exist in the Netherlands as far as we know. So it is important to look into the possibility of adding such a curative approach to the array of existing instruments in the Netherlands.

Because the situation in Scandinavia and Germany differs from that in the Netherlands in so many respects, adopting an approach verbatim is not advisable.

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<sup>20</sup> Froukje Demant et al., "Deradicalisering van rechtsradicalen en islamitische radicalen."

<sup>21</sup> Jaap van Donselaar, *Fout na de oorlog; fascistische en racistische organisaties in Nederland 1950-1990*. Amsterdam: Bert Bakker 1991, pp. 194-195.

<sup>22</sup> For a detailed compilation of strategies, see Hans De Witte (ed.), *Bestrijding van racisme en rechts-extremisme: Wetenschappelijke bijdragen aan het maatschappelijk debat*. Leuven: Acco 1997.

There are a number of points taken from experiences abroad, however, that may be useful in introducing such a programme in the Netherlands.<sup>23</sup>

- In the general perception of deradicalisation, great value is attached to relinquishing radical ideas. But existing deradicalisation programmes are much more interested in eliminating the practical disadvantages that a radical experiences when connected with a right-wing extremist group. When deradicalisation policy is initiated, therefore, attention should be paid to the point at which deradicalisation can be said to have succeeded. Is it enough when someone modifies his behaviour, or should his ideas change as well?
- In the deradicalisation process, attention should be paid to creating another social environment as well as to leaving the radical milieu.
- For a deradicalisation programme to function well, sufficient financial resources and a good network of chain partners are necessary conditions. In the Netherlands we would have to determine to what extent collaborative efforts can be arranged with related, existing fields of activity, for example, such as youth work, social services or probation and after-care services.
- Supervisors must have a thorough knowledge of the right-wing extremist milieu and they must also have the skills necessary to guide a radical along a certain track.
- Both the progress of individual tracks and the progress of the project as a whole must be properly monitored.
- The main impact of the Scandinavian and German projects is on young people who are in a radicalisation process, but who have still no clear political-ideological framework for their activities.

## 2.5 Design of a deradicalisation pilot

### 2.5.1 Starting points

To see whether a curative approach could contribute something to combating radicalisation in the Netherlands, at the very least a test had to be carried out "in the wild:" a pilot project. If the test was reliable enough to conclude that such a project would be effective in the Dutch context, a description would have to be written that could be implemented in other localities. The possibility of applying the method not only to right-wing radicals but to other groups as well, such as Muslim radicals, could also be investigated.

As was noted in the introduction, this project took shape in late 2006 as a collaborative effort among FORUM, IMES and the *Racism & Extremism Monitor*. The idea was to introduce an individual deradicalisation strategy in a few municipalities where there were problems having to do with radicalisation. The results of that project would be used to determine whether and how this strategy works. FORUM assumed the role of project leader in these experiments and supervised the municipalities in the introduction, implementation and execution of the project. The *Racism & Extremism Monitor* looked closely at the development of the pilot and its effect on radical structures within the various municipalities, on the basis of which an evaluation was carried out. The *Racism & Extremism Monitor* also bore responsibility for providing knowledge of right-wing extremism. Finally, IMES fulfilled the role of observer and advisor with an eye to later application among Muslim radicals.

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<sup>23</sup> Sara Grunenberg & Jaap van Donselaar, "Deradicalisering: lessen uit Duitsland, opties voor Nederland?", pp. 171-176.

The strategy, presented in broad outline, is aimed at young people who are in a radicalisation process and are thereby part of (or are at risk of becoming part of) a radicalised group, and not at persons who belong to the hard core of such a group. This naturally brings with it a whole range of definition problems: who belongs to the hard core and who does not? Specifically, the proposed deradicalisation pilot would mainly involve looking at Lonsdale youth who find themselves in a radicalisation process. The young people in this group must be given opportunities and guidance in dealing with problems. As part of this strategy, it was intended that attempts would be made to remove the young person from the radical context. A possible corollary of this, so the reasoning went, is that such attempts might ultimately lead to the defragmentation of an extremist group.

In addition to these basic points, a number of questions also arose concerning the structure of a pilot that have to be answered within the local context.

- When can a person be admitted to a deradicalisation tracking programme? Is it a voluntary choice or can someone also be compelled to do so (as part of a penalty, for instance)?
- When is someone considered deradicalised?
- What local organisations should be involved in the project?
- What working methods should be followed in the tracking programme? Are persons in the programme to be intensively supervised, or are they given a mentor or contact person with whom they have occasional talks? What practical and legal options are there for dealing with problems of individuals in the programme?
- What interventions can be applied?
- How is the supervision of a person in the tracking programme to be formalised and what are the consequences if expectations are not met?
- What are the costs and who is responsible for them?

### 2.5.2 Approach

Once these basic points and questions were set down, a practical application could take place. The idea was to conduct an experiment in one or two municipalities. A pilot in two municipalities was preferred, since that could provide material for comparison and thereby produce a clearer picture of what would and would not work. This also meant building on the "German experience:" initiatives would not be developed in a single way but would be allowed to develop "on their own," in different regions with different accents.

The search for a suitable municipality was started at the end of 2006. "Suitability" was measured by the following criteria.

- It had to be a community where problems with right-wing extremism already existed.
- People in the municipal "apparatus" had to be aware of the existence of these problems and interpret them in the proper way. This is because differences of opinion may arise within a municipality concerning how the problems are to be *labelled*. Some may regard radicalisation problems as "adolescent behaviour" or "anti-social behaviour by a group of loiterers." In such cases, the chance is great that support for a deradicalisation strategy will be insufficient because the problem is not perceived as urgent.

- The municipality's public administration must be willing to use the proposed working method for tackling the identified problem. The municipality may find that the proposed strategy is not a suitable addition to existing policy for radical groups.

With these criteria in hand a number of municipalities were approached. These were municipalities that were known to have had problems in the recent past with radicalising Lonsdale youth. In addition to these Lonsdalers there were also right-wing extremist structures in these communities that were accessible for these young people, such as a branch of Blood & Honour.

It soon became clear that two municipalities that seemed to meet these conditions were interested in taking part: Winschoten and Eindhoven. Eindhoven was known to also have a problem with radical Muslims. That would make it possible to study the extent to which the pilot could be carried out with this target group in mind. At the same time, the deradicalisation programme as formulated above was adapted to the Dutch situation and put down on paper. Financial support for this experimental phase was provided by the national government.

### *2.5.3 Research methods*

Data for our Monitor investigation of the strategy as applied in the two municipalities were collected in different ways. The first involved perusing relevant publications having to do with deradicalisation processes in general and right-wing extremist youth in particular. We also monitored the strategy in both communities during the entire course of the pilot. This meant that we were present at all the community meetings during the initial phase of the projects and at about half the meetings and discussions during the later phases. We obtained the minutes of all the meetings as well as the intermediate and final reports from the municipalities and from FORUM. One or more interviews were held with the main players in both communities and with players from FORUM.<sup>24</sup> Consultations were also carried out on a regular basis with individuals from FORUM on the process and the progress of both projects.

In order to obtain insight into the results and the effects of the programme, we were given the chance to follow the tracks taken by the individual young people involved in the project. We also interviewed one deradicalised young person after the project was completed. This method resulted in a great deal of direct empirical material, on which our analysis and evaluation are based. In many cases this explains the absence of additional source material.

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<sup>24</sup> For most of these individuals this involved two interviews: one held during the project and one after the project was completed.

### 3 Winschoten

One of the municipalities that was approached by FORUM to take part in the deradicalisation experiment was Winschoten. Winschoten has been dealing with problems of right-wing radicalisation for a number of years. Local authorities became aware of the problem, and attempts were being made to formulate a suitable policy in response. The municipality was willing to make use of the deradicalisation strategy as proposed by FORUM. In this chapter we will describe what the situation was like in Winschoten before the pilot project was started, how the programme was worked out and what the results of the project were.

#### 3.1 Basic context

What did the problem of right-wing extremism in Winschoten consist of? Was there a local policy on radicalisation already in place? And was the problem of right-wing extremism recognised by the municipal authority and by the various agencies within that authority?

##### 3.1.1 *Right-wing extremism in Winschoten*

In East Groningen the history of organised right-wing extremism was minimal until the emergence of the "second generation" of gabbers in 2001. The original gabbers were active in the mid-1990s. In 2002, problems having to do with asylum-seeker centres in this region first gained attention. In 2003 the unrest began to grow: throughout the eastern part of Groningen – from Eemsmond to Stadskanaal – there was an increase in the number of right-wing extremist Lonsdale groups and in the number of related incidents.

In Winschoten in around 2004-2005, a group of radical-leaning Lonsdale youth emerged that called itself Skinheads Groningen. They came in contact with a few older skinheads and fell under their supervision. One of these had been active since the mid-1980s, and in the early 1990s he became the founder and head of the skinhead organisation Hou Kontakt. In past years he played an important role in the Dutch Blood & Honour network and was able to mobilise the Lonsdale youth of Winschoten to become active in it. He arranged for a meeting room and secured funds and facilities, and occasionally he organised a party or concert.

Winschoten forms an important social and economic hub for the region: the shopping centre is located there as well as secondary schools and the nightlife centre. This makes Winschoten a relatively rich source of young people for those interested in recruitment. A Winschoten, East Groningen branch of Blood & Honour took root there. In the spring of 2005, some of these young people showed up at a training camp run by Blood & Honour and the National Alliance in the Ardennes.<sup>25</sup>

In April 2005 the group ran into problems after some members, decked out in Nazi symbols and flags, took group photographs in front of a Jewish monument in Winschoten. Some also urinated against the monument. Bar patrons who saw this reacted with anger, resulting in a fight in which damage was done to the bar. The police later arrested five persons and found two fake guns during house searches. The arrested persons were ultimately fined.

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<sup>25</sup> For more information on the National Alliance, see Jaap van Donselaar & Peter R. Rodrigues, *Monitor Racisme & Extremisme; zevende rapportage*.



In November 2006 a group of seven Lonsdale youth between the ages of 13 and 23 were arrested for aggravated assault and attempted homicide in Winschoten. The group that these young people belonged to had been known to the police for quite some time on account of intimidating behaviour and incidents. This group of right-wing extremist youth were in touch with like-minded young people from the entire East Groningen region and held a great attraction for them.<sup>26</sup> Some of them were also involved in the Blood & Honour network.

In March 2007 a series of confrontations took place in Winschoten between Lonsdalers and young people from the local asylum seeker centre, resulting in vigorous police action. Here, too, young people from the Blood & Honour group were involved. A number of families from the asylum seeker centre were transferred by the COA (Central Agency for the Reception of Asylum Seekers) to other cities or towns in the Netherlands. This came to the attention of the local and national media. During the course of 2007, the Winschoten Blood & Honour group also became increasingly visible outside its own region after participating in several right-wing extremist activities.

To sum up, there was a two-pronged problem. On the one hand there was a general "Lonsdale problem," in the region as well as in Winschoten: groups of right-wing and right-wing extremist young people from the "hard core gabber" scene. These young people were responsible for the kind of criminality typical of juveniles and loiterers, but they were also involved in more serious forms of racial violence. Then there was a Blood & Honour group in Winschoten whose membership was derived mostly from Lonsdale circles but who were inspired and coached by older and more experienced right-wing extremists. This group was becoming better organised and was nationally and even internationally active. It also exerted attraction on young people from the outlying areas.

### *3.1.2 Existing policy and recognition of the problem by the municipal authority*

Although right-wing extremism had been developing in Winschoten for a number of years, the problem was not put on the agenda of the local governing authorities, agencies and institutions until early 2007. Before that time no municipal policy existed for right-wing extremism, radicalisation or deradicalisation. The police did observe anti-social behaviour and incidents but did not formulate them in terms of "problems of right-wing extremism." Consequently, they did not take any specific measures to deal with them. Youth workers took note of various things, such as young people who wore certain types of clothing to express their right-wing extremist sentiments. This led to discussions about the whether to tolerate "right-wing extremist" clothing at the youth work location, but no structural measures were taken.

The police initiated an investigation<sup>27</sup> in response to the incidents at the asylum seeker centre of late 2006 and early 2007, and the media became very interested in right-wing extremism in Winschoten, which brought the problem more sharply into focus.<sup>28</sup> During this period two college students launched an

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<sup>26</sup> Specifically: Vriescheloo, Oude/Nieuwe Pekela, Bellingwolde, Veendam, Zuidbroek, Nieuw Scheemda, Eemsmond and Uithuizen

<sup>27</sup> Groningen Regional Police, *Polarisatie onder jongeren in Groningen*, Groningen 2007.

<sup>28</sup> Including: <http://www.netwerk.tv/node/1400> ;

[http://www.tweevandaag.nl/index.php?module=PX\\_Story&func=view&cid=2&sid=32040&nav=34351,32040,31942,31889,31643,31079,25198,26718,0#](http://www.tweevandaag.nl/index.php?module=PX_Story&func=view&cid=2&sid=32040&nav=34351,32040,31942,31889,31643,31079,25198,26718,0#) ; "Werkstraf voor 'walgelijke' aanval op joods monument," *Dagblad van het Noorden*, 11 November 2006; "Lonsdale-jongeren aangehouden na mishandeling," *Trouw*, 22 November 2006; "Extreemrechts ronselt in provincie," *Dagblad van het Noorden*, 29 March 2007.

investigation of the followers of various youth cultures in Winschoten.<sup>29</sup> This research revealed that Lonsdale youth constituted the largest youth culture in Winschoten by far. In addition, young people from other groups reported that they often came into conflict with these Lonsdalers.

During the same period FORUM sought contact with the municipal authorities to find out how much interest there was in participating in the "Deradicalisation" pilot. Both the mayor and the Councillor for Youth Affairs reacted positively: they were quite concerned about radicalisation among a segment of the youth population, and taking part in the pilot would provide guidelines for formulating policy.

## 3.2 Implementation and execution

In the spring of 2007 preparations began in Winschoten to get the pilot project up and running, and in the autumn of that year the project was actually launched. Initially the experiment was planned to run through June 2008, but it was extended through September 2008. Here we will discuss the objectives of the pilot and the way the strategy was articulated. We will also look at various aspects of the implementation and execution processes.

### 3.2.1 Objectives

The objectives of the pilot project are described in the local action plan, which was drawn up in mid-2007 by FORUM in collaboration with the municipal authorities. The most important objective of the project is:

"to carry out this strategy in order to prevent the further radicalisation and social isolation of individual young people and thereby to prevent and/or to combat participation in and/or support of socially undesirable behaviour such as vandalism, acts of violence and threats."

The strategy is aimed at "individuals who already show signs of being attracted to the group and in some cases have even acted as followers." The strategy emphasises avoiding further involvement in the group: resisting the desire to move to the "hard core" and possibly even withdrawal or disengagement from the group. This goal is to be reached by supporting individual young people in their effort to pull away from radicalised groups. After the young person's situation is evaluated, he might be offered assistance in calling social services, for example, and finding a place to live, a job and schooling. This help would have to take place as part of a deradicalisation tracking programme, to which conditions might also be attached.

The *Action Plan* noted that Winschoten had a potential target group of about 25 young people. This formed the primary target group for the proposed strategy.

"In view of the size of this primary target group [...] the aim of the strategy is to embark on a tracking programme with 20 young people during the pilot period [...]. At the very least this tracking programme will reach a stage of support

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<sup>29</sup> M. Ben Miloud & D. Stubbe, *Project Maatschappelijke Dienstverlening. In opdracht van Stichting Welzijn Oldambt. Een onderzoek gericht op de verschillende subculturen onder jongeren in de gemeente Winschoten*, Groningen: Hanze University Groningen, Academy of Social Studies 2006.

and guidance. The intention is to have an impact on at least 50 percent<sup>30</sup> of these young people such that during the follow-up to the pilot period (starting with the initial contact) they will no longer actively contribute to the behaviour or public displays of the group concerned, either individually or collectively.”

Another aim of the strategy is to make every effort to undo the adverse effects that the young disengagers experienced as participants in the radical group.

”These adverse effects, as well as the method used to put a stop to them, are more closely spelled out per individual. The aim here is to turn observed problems, such as employment, school, social services, housing, etc. into positive advancements on behalf of/with the disengager.”

### 3.2.2 Implementation of the pilot project

During the implementation stage of the strategy a number of practical matters had to be addressed. In this section, the structure of the pilot organisation, the action plan, the financing of the pilot project and the relationship between FORUM, the *Racism & Extremism Monitor* and the municipal authorities will be discussed.

- Structure of the pilot organisation

To implement the strategy, a steering committee was set up at the administrative level as well as a core team and a broader collaborative network of involved agencies and professionals at the operational level. The steering committee was created to make sure that all parties at the administrative level were pitching in and giving the project their support. The group was chaired by the mayor and consisted of the heads of the agencies involved (including the police, youth work, general social services, school attendance officer, various schools and Opmaat, the foundation for unemployed young people) and the Councillor for Youth Affairs. This group met once every couple of months to see how things were progressing and to draw up agreements on such matters as the participation of staff from the several agencies.

The core team was the project’s actual coordinating and operational organ. Members of this team included a contact person from youth work, a juvenile police officer and two municipal officials. At a later phase (spring of 2008), the size of the team was increased by the addition of a contact person from general social services and a staff person from Opmaat. The work of this team consisted of identifying the target group and carrying out interventions. The plan was to get together once every three weeks, but in practice this pattern of consultation was not followed until early 2008. The project coordinator from FORUM and a representative of the *Racism & Extremism Monitor* participated regularly in core team discussions.

Working around the core team was a broader collaborative structure of chain partners who were involved in spotting potential candidates for the strategy. The chain partners were also asked to assist actively in interventions. At the start of the pilot two meetings were held with the chain partners, and a third meeting was held in the spring of 2008. Two other gatherings were also organised to increase the expertise of the chain partners with regard to right-wing extremism.

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<sup>30</sup> The decision to pick 50 percent as a target figure was a pragmatic choice made in the working agreement of the *Action Plan* – pragmatic because no examples of reasonable target figures were known, not even after examining experiences in other countries.

The existence of the steering committee had a positive effect on strategy implementation, especially the fact that the pilot was actively supported by the mayor. Because of this, the administrative levels of the most important chain partners became actively involved in the pilot, and the agency heads were stimulated to give their staff persons in the core team the time and opportunity they needed to devote themselves to the pilot. It should be noted here that some core team members said they were still having trouble getting enough time and support for the project. In addition, a number of chain partners were reluctant to become involved in the pilot, among them a few schools. These schools initially were not convinced of the need to focus more attention on right-wing extremism, and they were guarded about identifying potential candidates for the strategy. As the project progressed they did devote more time to right-wing extremism in their curricula.

- The Action Plan

The *Action Plan* mentioned above was drawn up by FORUM in collaboration with the Winschoten municipal authorities in the summer of 2007. As noted, the objectives of the project were formulated in the *Action Plan*. This was followed by an explanation of how these objectives could be reached. The strategy's most important aspects are listed below.

First of all, the strategy is explicitly directed at individual young people who are involved in the right-wing extremist milieu. The idea is to respond to the practical drawbacks of taking part in a right-wing extremist group as experienced by the individual. Those drawbacks, which constitute intervention points for the strategy, must be evident in the first contact with the individual, possibly supplemented by information from the broader collaborative network. In the following contact, options for support and guidance are provided. If possible, this support is accompanied by conditions that can be formalised in a covenant: concrete agreements on guidance and reciprocity. Professionals from various institutions are central to the support, guidance and – if necessary – coordination of the disengagement process. It is therefore necessary to form a pool of potential contact persons (professionals and volunteers) before the strategy is actually set in motion.

The *Action Plan* consists of three steps: identification, establishing contact and intervention. Although it can be pointed out that these are schematic steps, the time allocation assumes that they will follow each other chronologically in the project.

- Financing the pilot project

In June 2007, the national government said it was prepared to contribute to the costs incurred by the municipality on the basis of a 50% co-financing scheme. So in October 2007 the municipality submitted a request to the national government to pay for half the expenses. This request was honoured.

- Relationship between the project leadership, Monitor and municipal authority

FORUM served as project coordinator and the *Racism & Extremism Monitor* as monitor of the project. This meant that FORUM was actively involved in the implementation and execution of the project, while the *Racism & Extremism Monitor*, working more at a distance, would study the workings of the strategy and its effects. Although FORUM helped write the *Action Plan* and implement the strategy, the

leadership was in the hands of the municipality. Initially this allocation of tasks was not entirely clear to all the parties involved, however, creating different sets of expectations and confusion of roles. Because of this, it was some time before the municipality assumed its leadership role, but that changed in early 2008.

### 3.2.3 Execution of the pilot project

In actual practice, the three steps that make up the *Action Plan* – identification, establishing contact and intervention – did not follow each other chronologically but tended to overlap.

- All during the pilot, the development of the target group was under constant review and young people who might be eligible for inclusion in the programme were being identified. As a result, the size of the target group increased over the course of the programme to a total of 22 persons.
- A number of young people were already in contact with the department of youth work or with the juvenile police officer after having been in trouble with the police. Other young people were involved in programmes run by Opmaat or by the department of social services.
- Because contact had already been established with many young people, an intervention was undertaken fairly quickly with a number of them. However, most of the interventions took place during the second half of the pilot programme, starting in the spring of 2008. As a result, some of the young people were involved in the pilot at a rather early phase (along with an intervention), after which contact ceased, while for other young people the pilot ended before an intervention could even take place.

Now we will describe the execution of the pilot project based on a number of themes, attempting to do so in chronological order.

- Designating the target group and defining radicalisation and deradicalisation

Initially, the selection of the target group was an unstructured process. On the one hand this had to do with the fact that up until then the responsible core team members were mainly looking for persons who exhibited pronounced right-wing extremist behaviour: young people who had committed offences in a right-wing extremist setting or who wore right-wing extremist clothing in public. At the same time, the core team members were applying different selection criteria for the creation of the target group. Consequently, the persons who were first considered for the target group were mainly hard core Blood & Honour members, while according to the *Action Plan* the strategy was supposed to be aimed at young people outside the hard core.

Nor did the core team members have the same definition of radicalisation and deradicalisation. As noted in chapter 2, "deradicalisation" can mean many different things. The most important underlying question is whether deradicalisation is seen as a process in which radical behaviour and the expression of radical ideas is suspended, or as a process in which radical ideas and ideology are abandoned (perhaps in addition to the first). The Winschoten action plan opted for a practical approach aimed at changes in behaviour and expression. This tactic was not adopted by all core team members, however. A few members argued that young people from the target group could be said to have been deradicalised if they no

longer created a public nuisance. Others were of the opinion that you could only speak of deradicalisation if the young people had also turned their backs on the right-wing extremist group in the social and ideological sense. These different viewpoints led to confusion and delay.

As the spring of 2008 passed, the target group grew steadily due to the addition of young people from the "followers" category and young people who manifested right-wing extremism in other ways. A total of 22 persons were singled out for the target group. At the same time, a more unambiguous definition of deradicalisation came to emerge that was aimed at behavioural change: if a young person stopped wearing right-wing extremist clothing, stopped expressing himself like a right-wing radical and cut off all contact with the right-wing radical group, the effort was regarded as a success. A number of core team members said they would consider the work a real success if the young person were also to change his way of thinking, but they saw this mainly as a utopian hope.

- Knowledge of the target group

At first there was no effective method of gathering information on the young people in the target group. Knowledge of the target group was mainly based on what the core team members already knew. In order to structure the information and to make it more accessible, it was decided after several months to set up a registration system. The idea was that the various core team members would report any relevant information and developments to one member of the team. One of the team members responsible for policy was made responsible for keeping the registry up to date. Collecting the information in an accessible format continued to be a problem, however. The system was not compatible with the practice of verbal information exchange, so it never really got off the ground.

- Making contact with the target group

The *Action Plan* suggested that contact with the young people from the target group could be maintained via the professionals in the core team, but that it might sometimes be preferable for the initial contact to be made by someone in the young person's immediate vicinity (such as a teacher or a football coach). This would require searching for volunteers. Core team members spent quite some time looking for such "buddies," but in the end the search produced meagre results. Finding suitable people proved difficult, and core team members could not agree on the role and necessity of buddies. As noted, the professionals in the team were already in touch with many young people. They wondered what the added benefit was of having buddies and whether it would not be better to let professionals handle the contacts and interventions.

This search for buddies partly contributed to a period of uncertainty about the allocation of tasks. It involved questions such as: who *actually has* contact with a particular young person, or who *is making* contact; next: who is carrying out the *intervention*? As time passed, this division of tasks became more and more firmly set. In the spring of 2008 the young people from the target group were structurally assigned to the various core team members: each member had a number of persons "under his wing." This division was based on existing contacts and the opportunities that core team members had to establish contact with particular young people.

- The interventions

Most of the interventions were carried out by core team members themselves. In a number of cases a colleague of a core team member was called in, such as another youth worker or another police officer. Interventions were also carried out in collaboration with the young person's school: in that case, the young person's supervisor or the headmaster joined in the conversation.

What were the interventions like? Based on an inventory that we carried out the following interventions emerge:

1. The police conducted one or more discussions with the young person in question about right-wing extremist ideas and the consequences that such ideas might have for him and for future expectations;
2. The police established contact with the young person's school, and the school authorities then talked to him about his right-wing extremist activities.
3. The department of youth work carried out one or more talks with the young person in question about right-wing extremist clothing and other expressions of right-wing extremism, and about the consequences and expectations for the future. This sometimes carried with it the threat of being barred from youth work activities.
4. The Opmaat foundation had a talk with the young person in question about his right-wing extremist clothing and threatened dismissal as a sanction.
5. Social services talked with the young person in question about right-wing extremist activities and ideas, and supported him in his search for a place to live, a job, a new social environment and debt repayment.
6. The municipal authorities, along with the relevant housing association, agreed to refrain from evicting the young person in question in connection with non-payment of rent. In return, the young person was expected to sever his ties with the right-wing extremist group and begin psychological treatment.
7. In a number of cases the parents were involved in the intervention: talks were carried out with them or they were otherwise involved in the talks with the young person in question.

A few members of the core team ran into a snag regarding the investment of time. They did not take or were not given enough time for the project. As a result, some of the activities that they wanted to engage in with some of the persons from the target group did not take place. Some members also said they did not have the kind of specific experience necessary to properly see a particular intervention through. This mainly had to do with knowledge of right-wing extremism and having the necessary conversational skills for establishing contact with the young people from the target group.

Because a number of core team members indicated during the course of the project that contact with the young people from the target group was sometimes difficult, a training session was held for core team members in the spring of 2008 that dealt with communication between the professional and the young people from the target group. Not all members were equally enthusiastic about the contents of this training session: some found that it did not fully correspond with the actual situation, while others found contents too simplistic.

One important component in the method as described in the *Action Plan* was drawing up specific agreements with the young people concerning help, support and reciprocation, and formalising this in a covenant. This part of the strategy never materialised in practice. The fact that it did not succeed was largely due to the way the target group was constituted. The idea of drawing up a contract comes from the experiences with deradicalisation programmes in other countries where the target group often consists of persons who register for the programme on their own. They themselves come to the realisation that they want to pull out of a particular group, and they seek help to do so. In this pilot project, however, it was decided not to direct the strategy at persons who step forward and ask for help but at young people who are actively approached by people in the pilot organisation. It was also decided not to inform the young people that they were part of a programme because it was feared that if they knew they would pull out before the programme was over. The result of this plan is that no 'reciprocation' could be expected for the help that was offered.

An additional reason was that some professionals, because of way their job is understood in their line of work, could not refuse help if a young person failed to manifest the desired change or development. This is true of social services, for example.

- A continuation of the pilot

The pilot was wrapped up at the end of September 2008. Because there was a strong desire to continue along this path, the decision was made to include the core team in the regular consultations of Zorgnetwerk 12+ (a care network for young people). The theme of "radicalisation" will now be a separate agenda point. In addition, monitoring the development of young people with radical tendencies and coordinating interventions is being continued as part of these consultations.

We have now gained a bit of insight into how the strategy works: the objectives, the implementation and the actual execution. In the next section we will look at the results of the pilot: what did the strategy accomplish? Were the objectives achieved? To what extent were persons from the right-wing extremist milieu deradicalised? In covering these issues we will deal with the individual level first, then the group level.

### **3.3 Results: the individual level**

The objective of the pilot as described in the *Action Plan* is as follows:

"to prevent the further radicalisation and social isolation of individual young people and thereby to prevent and/or to combat participation in and/or support of socially undesirable behaviour such as vandalism, acts of violence and threats."

The goal was to begin a tracking programme involving 20 young people, both followers and those who felt attracted to the right-wing extremist milieu, and to have an impact on 50 percent of this group – that is, 10 young people – such that they would no longer contribute to expressions of right-wing extremism or exhibit right-wing extremist behaviour.

As the objective in the Winschoten *Action Plan* suggests, a practical definition of deradicalisation was chosen with the focus on changes in behaviour and public



displays. In the core team, however, a bit of confusion arose during the first phase with regard to what "deradicalisation" was supposed to mean (see § 3.2.3). But as time passed a consensus emerged that corresponded with the pilot's basic principles, i.e. a young person can be said to be deradicalised when he has modified his radical *behaviour*. The team members did agree that it would be very good indeed if the young people were to change their ideas as well, but that in most cases this was not a realistic goal.

From this definition of deradicalisation, a number of criteria could be derived for evaluating whether someone is involved in a deradicalisation process or is fully deradicalised:

- participation in the Winschoten Blood & Honour group (or some other right-wing extremist group),
- wearing clothing that bears right-wing extremist symbols,
- making public displays of right-wing extremist sentiments at school or on the internet,
- committing offences in right-wing extremist settings,
- celebrating right-wing extremist ideas.

Success is defined according to local standards: a person is regarded as deradicalised when he has suspended or abandoned at least the first four of these points.

The initial confusion with regard to defining deradicalisation coincided with a lack of clarity on the criteria for selecting the target group. As a result, a few persons from the hard core of the Blood & Honour group were included in the target group at first, despite the decision to aim the strategy at followers. Because the core team retained this target group all through the pilot project, along with persons from the hard core, these persons are included here in the discussion of the results. In evaluating the results, it is important to keep in mind that the strategy in Winschoten was never set up to deradicalise persons from the hard core.

The pilot target group consisted of a total of 22 young people: 21 men and 1 woman.<sup>31</sup> Most of them were between the ages of eighteen and twenty.<sup>32</sup>

### *3.3.1 The young people in the target group at the start of the pilot*

Four of the 22 persons in the target group were part of the Blood & Honour hard core. These young people wore right-wing extremist clothing and were quite frequently in trouble with the police on account of vandalism and acts of violence. They were also involved in recruiting new members of the group. Examples are Tom and Benny.<sup>33</sup> Tom had been recruited by acquaintances of a friend back in 2004 and for years had been involved in right-wing incidents that sometimes went hand in hand with acts of violence. He wore clothing bearing right-wing extremist symbols and forbade followers of the group to speak with the police. Benny was also constantly in

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<sup>31</sup> Van Donselaar and Grunenberg write that the German deradicalisation programmes they studied are not properly set up to include women and girls, even though many women are involved in right-wing extremism (see: Sara Grunenberg & Jaap van Donselaar, "Deradicalisering: lessen uit Duitsland, opties voor Nederland?"). Only one woman was involved in the Winschoten project. The impression is that this had more to do with the target group than with the structure of the programme.

<sup>32</sup> With a few low-end exceptions (fourteen, fifteen years old) and one at the high end (24 years old).

<sup>33</sup> All the names of involved individuals have been changed.

trouble with the police and was actively involved in approaching potential new members.

Six persons were followers of the Blood & Honour group: they wore right-wing extremist clothing and maintained contact, but they were rarely involved in criminal activity, if at all. One of them was Nina. She was going out with one of the members of the group and wore right-wing extremist clothing. She also attended meetings, but was not involved in organising activities. Another follower was Lars, who wore clothing with right-wing extremist symbols and was a good friend of Benny's. He had been expelled from school and was quarrelling with his former friends. Lars did not have clear right-wing extremist convictions but he really wanted to belong to the group.

Three of the persons were known to belong to the group, but it was not clear whether they were to be identified as hard core or as followers. These persons were not involved in offences committed by the group, but they either exhibited right-wing extremist behaviour or recruited new members. Rick was involved in the group, for instance, but he was not known to the police. He had suspended all contact with the department of youth work since becoming involved with the group, and he recruited fellow students at school.

The other nine persons did not belong to the group, but they did express right-wing extremist ideas in a variety of ways. A number of them wore right-wing extremist clothing and a number expressed right-wing extremist ideas at school or on the internet. One example is Maarten, who used to attend Blood & Honour parties and was present at a fight between right-wing extremists and residents of the nearby asylum seeker centre. Although he claimed to have distanced himself from Blood & Honour at the time of the pilot, it was interesting to note that at work he would put on clothing with right-wing extremist symbols. Another example is Joey, who entered the core team's radar after uploading photos of swastikas and SS signs on the internet. He was also friends with Rick, and there were indications that Blood & Honour had tried to recruit him.

### *3.3.2 The young people in the target group at the end of the pilot*

Two of the four persons from the Blood & Honour hard core, one of whom is Benny, were still in the hard core as of November 2008.<sup>34</sup> The two others were no longer involved in the group. Tom left the group entirely. He began looking for work and frequently began getting into fights with his old comrades when he met them in the street. The other, Sander, left the group after an internal disagreement.

One of the six followers ended up in the hard core. This is Erik, a young man who was involved with the group when the pilot began but rarely committed crimes. After the group lost access to its meeting room (for reasons unrelated to the pilot project), he became the group's "host." Group meetings were held in his home. The other five followers stopped exhibiting right-wing extremist behaviour. Nina put aside her right-wing extremist clothing and stopped attending the meetings of the group. Lars greatly reduced his contact with Benny and stopped wearing right-wing extremist clothing. He went back to school.

Two of the three persons whose identity as hard core members or followers was unclear both left the group. Rick was still in the group by the end of the project,

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<sup>34</sup> The project in Winschoten ended in late September 2008. In November 2008 the last interviews with the members of the core team were held and one of the deradicalised young people was interviewed. Any references to the present in this account of the situation at the end of the pilot refer to this point in time.

and it was learned that he had joined the hard core. Although he did not commit many criminal offences, he was involved in group activities and in recruiting young people.

As for the rest of the young people, six stopped exhibiting right-wing extremist behaviour. They no longer wore right-wing extremist clothing, nor did they engage in right-wing extremist communications on the internet. Maarten stopped wearing right-wing extremist clothing, for instance, and Joey ended his friendship with Rick. Joey deleted the photos of right-wing extremist symbols. To what extent the other three continued to exhibit right-wing extremist behaviour is unknown. These are young people who were singled out for the target group because they had manifested right-wing extremist behaviour at school or on the internet but who had had little or no contact with the core team. Consequently the development of these young people was not closely followed and little was known about their situation at the end of the pilot.

To summarise: fifteen of the 22 persons involved in the pilot put an end to their right-wing extremist activities or behaviour, four were still manifesting right-wing extremism and in the case of three their continued engagement with right-wing extremism was unknown.

### *3.3.3 Analysis: impact of the pilot*

In Winschoten, the goal of the pilot was to admit 20 persons to the pilot programme and to have such an effect on at least 50 percent of them (10 persons) that they would be deradicalised according to the five aforementioned criteria. If we now compare the initial situation of the involved individuals at the start of the pilot (September 2007) with the final situation at the end of the pilot (September 2008), we see that a great deal has changed: almost three-quarters (15 persons) of the target group (22 persons) satisfy this objective. But it is not possible to draw unambiguous conclusions about the success of the pilot based on these changes alone. First we will have to ascertain to what extent a connection exists between the observed changes at the individual level and the pilot programme. In other words: are the changes a consequence of the deradicalisation experiment?

This is not a simple question. Obviously the experiment with deradicalisation did not take place in a social vacuum. The young people in the target group may have been involved in quarrels among themselves during the period in which the pilot was taking place, for example. Love affairs may have started or ended. Relationships with parents may have changed. It is difficult to determine how these factors relate to the influence of the pilot: they may be unrelated but there may also be an indirect correlation, as when a young person, influenced by the pilot, begins to doubt his involvement and seizes an opportunity to engage in an internal dispute in order to break with the group.

In evaluating the results it is also important to note that not all persons were members of the target group from the very beginning of the pilot. The target group increased over the course of the pilot, and consequently some of the young people were monitored by the core team over a longer period than others. This means that when the pilot came to an end some of the young people were still in the midst of a tracking programme, which makes it difficult to determine to what extent the programme was effective in their case.

With all these reservations in mind, we will now analyse the interventions that were carried out with the 22 young people of the target group and use this analysis to attempt an inventory of the probable impact of the pilot on each individual.

As we said earlier, the following interventions emerge from our inventory of the individual tracking programmes.

1. The police conducted one or more discussions with the young person in question about right-wing extremist ideas and the consequences that such ideas might have for him and for future expectations;
2. The police established contact with the young person's school, and the school authorities then talked to him about his right-wing extremist activities.
3. The department of youth work carried out one or more talks with the young person in question about right-wing extremist clothing and other expressions of right-wing extremism, and about the consequences and expectations for the future. This sometimes carried with it the threat of being barred from youth work activities.
4. The Opmaat foundation had a talk with the young person in question about his right-wing extremist clothing and threatened dismissal as a sanction.
5. Social services talked with the young person in question about right-wing extremist activities and ideas, and supported him in his search for a place to live, a job, a new social environment and debt repayment.
6. The municipal authorities, along with the relevant housing association, agreed to refrain from evicting the young person in question in connection with non-payment of rent. In return, the young person was expected to sever his ties with the right-wing extremist group and begin psychological treatment.
7. In a number of cases the parents were involved in the intervention: talks were carried out with them or they were otherwise involved in the talks with the young person in question.

In assessing the interventions it is important to note that the intensity of the intervention differed greatly from one young person to the next. Nine young people were only involved in one conversation each, or the conversations were brief and superficial. One conversation was held with Joey, for example, about the photos he had edited with right-wing extremist symbols. Nina was addressed a couple of times with regard to the meaning of right-wing extremist clothing and the possible negative consequences of wearing it. And the juvenile police officer talked to Benny a number of times about his behaviour and right-wing extremist ideas.

For seven young people the tracking programme was more intense, involving the close supervision of a young person by one of the agencies involved, or contact between a young person and several agencies. An example of this kind of "combination" tracking is the intervention conducted with Erik. Someone from Opmaat had discussions with him about his clothing (with threat of dismissal). The juvenile police officer also made contact with him and talked to him about his clothing and ideas. Lars's intervention is an example of an intensive tracking programme. One policeman maintained very frequent contact with Lars and his parents during the pilot, built up a relationship of trust and talked with him about his behaviour, ideas and future.

In the case of six young people there was little or no contact. These were individuals who were not singled out for the target group until after the pilot had started. One example is Ivo, who supposedly hung out with Benny. He was not

known by the agencies involved, however, and was not a visible presence in the Blood & Honour group. No contact was made with him during the pilot. Another example is Ruben, who was selected for the target group at quite a late stage. He was discussed within the core team and the police were supposed to contact him and his parents, but no other such attempts were made during the pilot period.

When we look at the individual tracking programmes and individual results, we can make the following conclusions.

The interventions had a direct, positive impact (in terms of either deradicalisation or prevention) on four individuals. These were persons who did not belong to the hard core of the right-wing extremist group. In the case of five individuals, the interventions had some impact. These also were persons who did not belong to the hard core of the right-wing extremist group. Four individuals were not influenced at all by the interventions. Three of them did belong to the hard core, and in the case of one it was not clear whether he belonged to the hard core or not, although he certainly does now. There were nine individuals on whom the impact of the interventions was unclear. These were persons who belonged to the hard core, were followers or exhibited right-wing extremist behaviour in other ways.

The interventions had *direct impact* on four persons. In two cases this meant deradicalisation: these young people have left the Blood & Honour group. One of these is Lars. As noted earlier, Lars was a follower who turned his back on the group and has gone back to school. The intensive supervision stimulated both Lars and his parents to make a fresh start. It is interesting that Lars's reasons for being involved with the group were more social than ideological: he had fallen out with his former friends, had struck up a friendship with Benny and wanted to belong to the Blood & Honour group. The conversations with the policeman and with his parents made him aware of the negative consequences of his membership in this group and prompted him to go back to school and start a new training programme.

The pilot also had a deradicalising effect on Thomas. Thomas exhibited problem behaviour on many fronts and was also involved with the Blood & Honour group. He received intensive supervision from social services, which included discussions about his ideas, and he was given assistance in solving his financial problems and building up an alternative circle of friends. Thomas severed his contacts with the group, and by the time the pilot came to an end he was making plans to go back to school. Although the project had obviously helped Thomas get launched on a new life, and in so doing had had a deradicalising effect, the relationship with his girlfriend had also been an extremely influential factor in his development. He decided to stop getting into trouble for the sake of that relationship.

In two cases, the impact of the pilot was not so much deradicalising as preventive: these persons did not end up in the Blood & Honour group. They are Joey and Maarten. As noted, there were indications that Joey had been recruited for the Blood & Honour group. The conversation that was conducted with him seems to have had a positive effect. We must be a bit cautious when drawing conclusions in this case, however, because little is known about other factors that may have played a role. The main impact of the pilot on Maarten was that it helped keep him from slipping back into the right-wing extremist group. Social services helped him find a place to live and talked with him about his ideas and his future. Maarten still has right-wing extremist ideas, but he is willing to discuss them and he does not express his ideas in terms of outward behaviour.

In the case of five persons the interventions had *some impact* in the sense that the young people in question agreed to stop wearing their right-wing extremist clothing at work or at school. We have little knowledge of any change in the way these individuals think or express themselves in their private lives, however. For instance, we know that one person – Erik – modified his habits of dress at work but went on to join the Blood & Honour hard core nevertheless. As far as the other four are concerned, however, nothing is known. An example is Johan, who worked at Opmaat and wore clothing with right-wing extremist symbols. After talking with Opmaat – with threat of dismissal – he no longer wears this clothing at work. It is not known how he expresses himself during his free time, however, or whether he was or is connected with the Blood & Honour group. The same is true for Oscar, who came to school with right-wing extremist symbols on his clothes and had contact with Rick. After a discussion between the police and his parents, and a talk with his school supervisor, Oscar put aside his right-wing extremist clothing. But whether he still has contact with Rick or with others associated with the Blood & Honour group is unknown.

The interventions had *no impact* on four persons. Two of them, Benny and Simon, were in the hard core of the Blood & Honour group when the pilot was started, and they still are. Although it was not the pilot's aim to deradicalise persons from the hard core, a number of these young people were singled out for the target group anyway (see § 2.3). The juvenile police officer was in contact with both Benny and Simon in the context of the pilot, but this contact was not intensive. The juvenile police officer had one conversation with Simon and his mother and he spoke with Benny a number of times regarding his behaviour and his ideas.

Rick was already involved in the group and evolved into a member of the hard core, despite the talks he had with the juvenile police agent and the assistance offered him by his school to find a work placement position. The fourth person, Arjen, was found to have pulled out of the Blood & Honour when the core team got in touch with him. So the pilot did not play a role in his decision to leave the group.

In the case of nine persons, it is *unclear* as to whether the interventions had any impact on them or not. There are many reasons for that lack of clarity. Little information is available on four of those individuals, and no direct contact was ever made with them. What their situation is at the present time is not known, so it is not possible to speak of deradicalisation. These are the persons described earlier who were not selected for the target group until the pilot was underway – people such as Ivo and Ruben.

In the case of five persons we know that other factors besides the interventions may have played a role in their deradicalisation. It is not easy to judge how the impact of the interventions compares with that of these factors. One example is Nina. As we noted, she put aside her right-wing extremist clothing and no longer associates with the group. It is not clear, however, whether this is a result of the conversations that were conducted with her or the fact that she broke off her relationship with a boy from the group. Another example is Tom, who left the hard core and is now in the midst of a row with his old comrades. All this happened at the time of the pilot, but very little contact actually took place between Tom and the core team. His only contact was the occasional talk with the juvenile police officer. It is quite possible that the pilot had an indirect impact (because the group came under

pressure and Tom decided he had had enough), but it is also easily conceivable that his girlfriend, who left the group along with him, had a decisive impact on him.

### **3.4 Results: the group level**

Although the strategy in Winschoten was aimed at individual young people, changes also took place at the group level during the course of the project. In this section we will look at the extent to which those changes coincide with the pilot project. When analysing the results at the group level, the same caution should be observed as when the results at the individual level are discussed: the developments took place within a particular context, and it is difficult to determine whether and how that context was influenced by the pilot. At the group level it is even more difficult to analyse the possible impact of the project than at the individual level, because more factors can play a role that are yet unknown (such as developments within the group itself, within the radical right-wing in general and at the social-community level). Moreover, the developments at the group level were not followed and registered in such detail as the developments at the individual level.

#### *3.4.1 The radical right-wing group at the start of the pilot*

The situation outlined in § 3.1.1 provides us with the following picture of the radical right-wing group in Winschoten at the start of the pilot: there was a group of Lonsdale youth with a right-wing extremist orientation. This group was responsible for engaging in anti-social behaviour and for juvenile crime. The group was also involved in a few serious incidents involving racial violence. Many young people in Winschoten did not feel safe because of the group's existence. At the same time, the group held a certain attraction for certain young people – from Winschoten itself as well as from the broader East Groningen region – and acquired new followers. There was also a network of Blood & Honour in Winschoten, which was better organised. This network was coached by older, experienced right-wing extremists. The group was active both nationally and internationally. The group of Lonsdale youth provided a source of new growth for the Blood & Honour network, which also actively recruited among the local youth.

#### *3.4.2 The radical right-wing group at the end of the pilot*

By the time the pilot project came to an end, the right-wing radical group had almost entirely disappeared from Winschoten.<sup>35</sup> A quarrel had broken out within the group that led to a split: on the one hand there was the depleted hard core of the Blood & Honour group and on the other a group of friends who had left the radical milieu. Disruptive behaviour in Winschoten had shrunk to a minimum. While a number of violent incidents had taken place, these concerned an "inside" fight between the two factions that had arisen after the quarrel within the group.

After the group's regular hangout spot was pulled down, the hard core of the Blood & Honour network, which still exists, moved to Nieuw-Scheemda where they found a new place to hang out. The hard core itself comprises only six persons. Attempts were also made to gain entrance to the regional youth centre.

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<sup>35</sup> The project in Winschoten ended in late September 2008. In November 2008, the last round of interviews with the members of the core team were held and one of the deradicalised young people was interviewed. Any references to the present in this account of the situation at the end of the pilot refer to this point in time.

Now that a large group of followers has pulled out and the hard core has left Winschoten, the group is less of a threat to the other young people of the city and no attraction is being exercised on new recruits. Both the youth workers and the police have noticed that members of the group are regarded as "losers" by other young people.

At the same time, there is evidence of a 'waterbed' effect, albeit on a limited scale. The pressure on the group in Winschoten resulted in the transfer of the problem to Nieuw-Scheemda and to youth centres in the area. The numbers involved are quite small compared with the former situation in Winschoten. In addition, the young people of Nieuw-Scheemda have so far reacted negatively to the Blood & Honour group, and the group in the surrounding youth centres have by no means been accepted.

### *3.4.3 Analysis: impact of the pilot*

Major changes took place in the radical right-wing group during the course of the pilot project. The most important impact that the project seems to have had in this regard is the literal and figurative limitation of the group's space. Because of the project, the local authorities and various agencies and institutions became alert to evidence of the extreme right in Winschoten. This caused pressure to be exerted on the group from many different sides simultaneously: the police kept an eye on persons from the hard core of the group and occasionally engaged them in conversation, and followers were called to account for their right-wing extremist behaviour at school, at work at Opmaat or in contacts with the department of youth work. In addition, attention from the municipal authorities went hand in hand with a considerable amount of attention from the media, which increased the group's visibility. One of the older, more experienced persons from the Blood & Honour network, who played an important role in keeping the group going, withdrew from the group during this period, possibly as a result of the increased visibility and attention.

All this attention sent a clear message to the group: "Be careful. We know you're there and we've got our eye on you." At the same time, the individuals involved were made aware that there were opportunities to leave the group and to set out on a new path. It is quite possible that because of this attention, the other young people of Winschoten received an indirect message: that the group could no longer count on doing as it pleased unnoticed, and that it would be dealt with. This may have reduced the group's threat and with that its force of attraction, because it became less "macho" to belong to the group.

Other factors also seem to have played an important role in the changes within the group, and it is difficult to determine whether and to what extent these factors had anything to do with the pilot. First of all is the aforementioned internal quarrel that ended up splitting the group. The cause of the conflict was the fact that one of the young people involved had entered into a relationship with a dark-skinned girl. The hard core did thin out, but it did not disappear. The group relocated from Winschoten to Nieuw-Scheemda, leaving the group in Winschoten less visible and the source of fewer problems.

It is also unclear to what extent the group was consciously "bothered" by the attention. As was noted earlier, the young people involved were not told that they were part of the pilot, and for this reason it is not possible to determine how the increased attention affected them. We did interview one person who had left the hard core. He showed no sign of having noticed a change in attitude on the part of the



local authorities. He was aware of all the media attention, but he did not say that this had played a role in his deradicalisation. Of course, the increased attention and pressure may have had an impact on the group without members of the group being aware of it, but this is almost impossible to trace.

### 3.5 Final remarks

What can we conclude about the implementation and execution of the deradicalisation experiment in Winschoten and the results at the individual and group levels? And what are the lessons for the future?

In reviewing the implementation and execution process, we note that the experiment needed a long starting phase. In the first period of execution (September 2007 – March 2008), the core team began a search in a number of different areas. There was a lack of clarity with regard to the allocation of tasks among the municipal authorities, FORUM and the *Racism & Extremism Monitor*. Nor did the core team have a focused picture of who should be part of the target group and how deradicalisation should be defined. While interventions were imposed on some young people at an early phase, for others there was a long period of uncertainty before it was decided how the intervention would be carried out and by whom.

A pilot is always preceded by a search-and-discovery period. In this case there were no specific experiences in this area in the Netherlands that could be referred to, nor any clear, structured examples of deradicalisation programmes. The project was based on programmes from other countries, but these could not simply be adopted in the Netherlands as is. It is not surprising that it took so long to work out the practical details of the approach in terms of the Dutch situation, but time was also lost when the strategy was carried out due to a lack of structure. For a long time there was no clear allocation of tasks and responsibility within the core team. In addition, knowledge of and information about the target group was not shared in a structured way. As a result of the confusion and the resulting lack of clarity, the core team's initial attitude was one of wait-and-see.

In the spring of 2008 the situation changed and things began to move, which seems to have been the result of a few adjustments having been made during that period. For example, it was decided that during the meetings of the core team, the development of each young person from the target group would be discussed in depth. In addition, each member of the core team was assigned a number of young people to make contact with, to observe and to engage in an intervention. Two persons were also added to the core team during the same period: a staff person from Opmaat and a staff person from general social services. This broadened the team's scale of professional background and experience, which was much to the advantage of some interventions. This expansion – and the fresh outlook that came with it – had a positive effect on the collaboration and dynamics within the team. A training programme for the core team members was also provided at this time to teach team members how to structure communication with the young people from the target group. Although not everyone was unreservedly enthusiastic about the training programme, it did create momentum: the realisation that it was high time to actually get to work with these young people.

In view of the project's long initial phase, it was a good decision to extend the project from June to the end of September 2008. It was precisely during that period – from March to late September 2008 – that most of the tracking programmes with the

young people were started. The result that was finally achieved would not have been possible during the brief period from March to late June.

What did these tracking programmes for the young people of the target group look like, and what did the strategy accomplish at the individual and group level? The plan of the deradicalisation pilot was to involve a group of young people in a tracking programme, providing them with assistance in their decision to withdraw from a right-wing extremist group. This would include assistance with practical problems like finding a job, a school, social services or a place to live. In practical terms this mainly boiled down to a great many discussions between the various agencies and the young people. Most of these were talks about the behaviour and ideas of the young person in question, the meaning of certain right-wing extremist symbols and how this behaviour and these displays would affect the young person's future. In five cases assistance was offered in finding work, schooling or a place to live. In four cases the conversation was accompanied by a threat of dismissal if the expressions of right-wing extremism (clothing in all cases) did not stop.

From the discussion of the results it was learned that conversations with the young people can have a very positive effect: the young people are made aware of the possible consequences that their behaviour can have for their future and are stimulated to look for an alternative social environment. However, this only applies to young people who do not belong to the hard core of the group – young people who dress according to right-wing extremist fashion, are followers of the right-wing extremist group or are developing contacts with that group. These young people can really benefit from engaging in a good conversation on the meaning of their behaviour and the consequences that it can have for the future. Since the project was aimed at deradicalising precisely these kinds of young people – not the hard core but the group of hangers-on – the fact that nine of the eighteen young people from the target group were positively influenced by the project is an extremely positive result.

At the same time it should be noted that the interventions would have reached even more young people if they had been more comprehensive. As we said earlier, some of the young people were singled out for the target group but then never contacted, let alone started on a tracking programme. In addition, the interventions had little or no impact on the four persons from the hard core. On the one hand it can be argued that this is not problematic, since the pilot was not intended for persons from the hard core. On the other hand, these four persons from the hard core were singled out for the target group and were included in the project. They also represent lost opportunities. Talks were held between most of them and one of the agencies involved in the pilot, but no attempt was made to seize the opportunities that arose. In two cases, cooperating with the probation services after release from detention could have produced results. One of the young men hinted that he was not happy in the group but did not know how to extricate himself from it. No one picked up on these hints.

The discussions of the individual results clearly reveal problems having to do with how the development of each of the young people was recorded (see § 3.2.3): for many of the young people we simply had too little information to be able to make useful observations about their development and possible deradicalisation.

As far as tackling the problem of right-wing extremism is concerned, many positive changes at the group level took place during the pilot. This change seems to be connected with the increased attention and pressure focused on the group.

Because several agencies were concentrated on picking up right-wing extremist signals, the space for the group was reduced. At the same time there were factors at work whose correlation with the pilot is not at all clear. Of particular importance is an internal dispute, which seriously weakened the group. It is not clear whether this dispute was connected with the pilot project (i.e. with attendant pressure and attention), or whether it was entirely separate. So keeping a finger on the pulse is very important. The final results were very positive. The important thing now is to continue producing the same results and to maintain the same level of attention so as to limit the group's space and influence.

What lessons can we learn from this? First of all, commitment and well-organised management at the administrative level are indispensable for a deradicalisation project like this one, in which the collaboration of several agencies is required.

It is also important to obtain a clear picture of what is meant by deradicalisation, and to do so at an early stage: are we talking about reducing anti-social behaviour, easing individuals away from the radical group or changing radical ideas?

When designing the strategy, it is very important to create a good structure so the project functions properly. This would include coming up with a clear division of tasks and responsibilities, establishing a meeting routine and maintaining a regular and structured exchange of knowledge and information. Staff members are also needed who combine a variety of skills: persons who work independently and have insight into the target group and into specific problems, who can also engage in "difficult" conversations with young people and can form bonds of trust.

It is recommended that in the case of a project like this one, the registration be organised in a different manner. This might mean gathering relevant information during team meetings and recording it at the same time. Of course it is important that personal information concerning the individuals involved be treated with care.

When a deradicalisation project is set up, the target group should be considered not only in terms of their position in the right-wing extremist milieu (hard core, followers, attracted by right-wing extremism) but also in terms of enlistment in the target group. Is the project aimed at persons who have put themselves forward (and are therefore prepared to leave the right-wing extremist milieu) or at persons who must be actively enlisted?

Finally, it is recommended that when beginning such a project for these kinds of young people, more of an effort be made in terms of cooperating with probation services and holding in-depth conversations about their behaviour, ideas and opportunities.

## 4 Eindhoven

As explained in chapter 2, a number of municipalities were asked if they would like to participate in an experimental deradicalisation project. One of those municipalities was Eindhoven. In order to take part in that project, three criteria were of importance. First, it had to be a municipality that already had problems with right-wing radicalisation. Second, people in the municipal authority had to be aware of the existence of these right-wing extremist problems and interpret them as such. Third, the municipality had to see the working method proposed in the pilot as an extension of existing policy and be ready to use it to tackle the identified problem.

The first part of this chapter will discuss to what extent Eindhoven met these criteria. The second part of the chapter will deal with the introduction of the project in Eindhoven. The structure of that part differs from its counterpart in the Winschoten chapter, since in Eindhoven the project did not advance to a stage in which there actually were individual tracking programmes.

### 4.1 Basic context

To describe what the situation in Eindhoven was like at the start of the deradicalisation project, the three aforementioned criteria will be discussed one by one: the situation with regard to right-wing extremism, the observation and interpretation of the problem, and the existing policy.

#### 4.1.1 *Right-wing extremism in Eindhoven*

To obtain a clear picture of the problems of right-wing extremism that Eindhoven was facing, FORUM and the *Racism & Extremism Monitor* drew up a fact sheet. This fact sheet, summarised, provided the following picture.

Within the past decade, right-wing extremism in the Eindhoven region was strongly defined by the presence of a "free zone," which lasted three years. In 2000 some deserted army barracks in the woods to the west of Eindhoven were squatted. The grounds around the barracks became a gathering place for right-wing extremists from the entire region, soon followed by those from the rest of the Netherlands. Concerts and gatherings were organised there, which occasionally attracted visitors from other countries. The "free zone" had a mobilising effect on young people for miles around.<sup>36</sup> The situation continued until the complex was abandoned at the end of 2003. By then there was national consternation about the openly Nazi activities that were taking place there. The mayor of Eindhoven responded by threatening to intervene, after which the actual squatters left. The groups that were active at the barracks continued to exist, but as time went by they changed in size and composition.

During the same period a great many groups of Lonsdale youth formed in and around Eindhoven, causing considerable problems here and there. Our definition of "Lonsdale youth," as indicated earlier, is right-wing extremist young people from the gabber culture.<sup>37</sup> Starting in mid-2003 the alarm was regularly sounded in response to these problems, mainly by the department of youth work. Eindhoven itself was a gathering point for these groups because of the city's nightspots. Some of these

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<sup>36</sup> Jaap van Donselaar & Peter R. Rodrigues, *Monitor racism en extreem-rechts; vijfde rapportage*, p. 53.

<sup>37</sup> For a detailed discussion of this problem, see Jaap van Donselaar (ed.), *Monitor Racisme & Extremisme. Het Lonsdalevraagstuk*.

young people frequented the squatted barracks and grounds. A group of Eindhoven youth from the Lonsdale circuit became radicalised and were active on the right-wing extremist website "Holland Hardcore."<sup>38</sup> A few young people from this group set fire to an Islamic primary school.

But apart from these more or less organised networks, a problematic situation arose in the Eindhoven region that was related to right-wing extremism. Many interethnic incidents and acts of violence were taking place in the region. After the murder of Theo van Gogh, anti-Islamic incidents also occurred in Eindhoven, including the bombing of an Islamic primary school that has never been solved.<sup>39</sup>

So there did seem to be a large enough right-wing extremist problem in Eindhoven and surroundings, which was an important criterion for starting a deradicalisation project there. It must also be noted that by the time the pilot was launched (mid-2007), many of these facts were dated.

#### 4.1.2 *Recognising the problem*

In the spring of 2007, FORUM approached the mayor of Eindhoven with the proposal that the municipality participate in the deradicalisation experiment. Part of this proposal was a description of the problem of right-wing extremism in Eindhoven as observed by FORUM and the *Racism & Extremism Monitor*. The mayor reacted positively to this plan.

Quite soon after the project got started, discussions arose concerning the existence of a right-wing extremist problem in Eindhoven. For the municipal authorities and the police, who would have to carry out the project, the problem of right-wing extremism barely existed, if it existed at all. At the same time, voices from the municipality pointed out that there were problems with radical-leaning Muslim young people, and that the method could be adapted to deal with these problems.

From the point of view of the police there was no relevant problem of right-wing radicalism, at least not in Eindhoven itself. Such problems were known in the areas surrounding Eindhoven, however. The same kind of picture was painted by chain partners involved in the project, especially the department of youth work. They said they were not experiencing any urgent problems with right-wing extremism in Eindhoven itself.

It was not immediately clear why Eindhoven's impression of the situation was so different from that of FORUM and the *Racism & Extremism Monitor*. Questions arose whether our picture was dated, whether the problems of right-wing extremism had disappeared from Eindhoven in this case. Perhaps the problems did still exist but were not being recognised as such by people on the ground? There was no direct answer to these questions. The last police analysis of right-wing extremism in the region had been in 2005; no study of right-wing extremist activity in the area had been undertaken since then. Whatever the answer, if there was a problem of right-wing extremism in Eindhoven, it had to do with recognising the problem in the first place.

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<sup>38</sup> Kafka, "Onder de loep: Holland Hardcore," *Alert!* 2006-1.

<sup>39</sup> For an overview of events that occurred after the murder of Theo van Gogh, see Jaap van Donselaar & Peter R. Rodrigues, *Monitor Racisme & Extremisme: zesde rapportage. Annex: Over ontwikkelingen na de moord op Van Gogh*, Amsterdam: Anne Frank House / Leiden University, 2004.

### 4.1.3 Existing policy

The third criterion required that the municipality had to be willing to use the proposed strategy as an extension of its existing policy.

A central feature of the Eindhoven radicalisation and polarisation policy is the Veiligheidshuis – the Safety House. This is an organisation in which eighteen institutions, represented by liaisons, work together on various themes having to do with safety and security in the city of Eindhoven. A number of initiatives dealing with polarisation and radicalisation have already emerged from the Safety House.

Those initiatives are mainly focused on radicalisation within the Muslim community. One of the most important reasons for this was the presence of the Al Fourqaan Mosque in Eindhoven. This mosque, according to several concerned individuals in Eindhoven, was regarded nationally as a so-called "hotbed of radicalisation." The initiatives were mainly preventive: projects to involve Muslims in Eindhoven community life and attempts to make the local Muslim community co-responsible for signalling undesired radicalisation processes and fighting against them. In addition, the Safety House was alert to "high-risk youth:" young people who slide into criminality and others who are becoming radicalised. This sometimes resulted in individual cases of problematic radicalisation. These problems were dealt with, but not according to a fixed tracking programme. Here, too, the focus was exclusively on Muslims.

Another initiative of the Safety House, which does share some common ground with the problem of right-wing extremism, is the implementation of a so-called "sfeermonitor" – a social climate monitor. The purpose of that project is to sound out the Eindhoven community for areas of tension where action should be undertaken by the local public administration. Here, too, a training programme was developed by the Safety House to teach people how to detect signs of radicalisation.

There was as yet no preventive or curative policy specifically aimed at right-wing radicalisation, so the proposed deradicalisation project could serve as extension of existing policy. The idea was to introduce the project within the framework of the national Polarisation and Radicalisation Action Plan.<sup>40</sup>

## 4.2 Introducing the project

In the spring of 2007, the city of Eindhoven agreed to the plan to implement the experimental deradicalisation project. The project ran until the end of January 2009. The introduction involved a number of facets:

- the structure of the pilot organisation,
- singling out the target group,
- writing an action plan with objectives and an elaboration of strategy,
- collaboration with relevant chain partners,
- collaboration with FORUM, the national project leader of the pilot project in Winschoten and Eindhoven.

These facets will be discussed in the following sections.

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<sup>40</sup> Actieplan Polarisation en Radicalisering 2007-2011, see [http://www.justitie.nl/images/actieplanpolarisatieenradicalisering\\_tcm34-82141.pdf](http://www.justitie.nl/images/actieplanpolarisatieenradicalisering_tcm34-82141.pdf) (9 March 2009).

#### 4.2.1 Structure

After the mayor had responded positively to the project proposal, he delegated further decision-making to the Councillor for Integral Security. After a discussion was held between FORUM, the municipal authorities and the police, the decision was made to participate and to develop an action plan.<sup>41</sup> The execution of this plan was placed in the hands of the Safety House.

The Safety House put together a three-member project group in which the municipality, the police and the department of youth work were represented.<sup>42</sup> This project group was primarily a consultative body consisting of a few partners of the Safety House. Representatives from FORUM (as national project leader) and from the *Racism & Extremism Monitor* (as observer) attended the meetings on a regular basis. The representative of the municipal authority was given primary responsibility for execution. Other agencies could be added to the project group when there was reason to do so.

#### 4.2.2 Search for a target group

After the project group was formed, it became apparent almost immediately that knowledge of the problem of right-wing extremism in Eindhoven was insufficient. Both the department of youth work and the police said they were not aware of any problems with right-wing extremism and that they actually doubted the existence of such problems. At the same time, the project group argued that the project could be carried out if the target group were to be composed of radical Islamic youths. At first, FORUM and the *Racism & Extremism Monitor* insisted that there would *also* have to be a right-wing extremist target group in order to enable a comparison of the projects in Winschoten and Eindhoven.

The Brabant-Zuidoost regional police were asked to analyse the situation with regard to right-wing extremism in the region. The goal was to find out if indeed there was no problem of right-wing extremism, or if the problem did exist but had not yet been brought into focus. This analysis produced a clear picture of the situation in Eindhoven.

- A few dozen young people with a history of right-wing extremism were known.
- Two groups that were labelled right-wing extremist were active in Eindhoven. This characterisation was based on the extreme right-wing clothing and tattoos that had been spotted in the two groups. A few members of the two groups also had police records for criminal acts, some of which were right-wing extremist in character.
- Two persons who had exercised a decisive influence on right-wing extremism in the region had recently moved away. For this reason, part of the problem of right-wing extremism that had been observed earlier was gone.
- It was also concluded that the police were insufficiently aware of the existence of "Lonsdale-like" young people

When the analysis was presented, the police recommended that the pilot project concentrate on the two groups that had been labelled right-wing extremist. One

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<sup>41</sup> Representatives of FORUM and a representative of the city's executive council have never met to discuss the project.

<sup>42</sup> The Lumens Group, see <http://www.lumensgroep.nl/> (5 March 2009).

group concerned a group of friends having contacts with Blood & Honour. The other group consisted of young loiterers with right-wing extremist sympathies.

- Right-wing extremist friendship network

This group showed up repeatedly in police reports in connection with incidents of a right-wing extremist nature, including brawls. A number of the group's members were also active nationally in Blood & Honour activities.

In the period following the analysis the project group realised that including members of this group in a deradicalisation process would not be easy for a number of reasons. The main problem became evident after visits were made to the various chain partners in Eindhoven. Unlike the regional police, it seemed that the department of youth work, the probation service, the addiction services and the local police were not acquainted with the individuals in the group. The group members all had jobs, and beyond their contacts with the police they were not on the Eindhoven radar. This problem led to an urgent question: Through which agency should they be approached?

A second problem had to do with the radical nature of the group. Was the group not already too radicalised? Their activities on the national scale in particular suggested that they might fall outside the pilot's actual target group. The target group was intended for young people who were in a radicalisation process but did not yet belong to the hard core.

A third problem was that the department of youth work, which was the most suitable for approaching members of the group, had a number of objections. As noted, the department of youth work was not familiar with the members of the group. In addition, some individual youth workers objected to labelling persons as "radicals" because the consequences of such a label were not sufficiently transparent. Finally, objections had been raised with regard to actually approaching the members of the group: on what grounds was that supposed to occur, given the fact that they themselves were not known to the department of youth work? Was this not an invasion of privacy? And would it not for that reason be ethically irresponsible?

Because no satisfactory answer for these questions and objections was forthcoming, the group was not included in a deradicalisation scheme.

- Loiterers

The second group to emerge from the police analysis was a group of young people who hung around at a fixed spot. They appeared in the police files as a group of Lonsdale youth, one or two with racist sentiments. In addition, a few incidents of a racist character had occurred in connection with the group.

Two problems quickly emerged with regard to approaching this group as well. The first problem became apparent when the community youth worker who had this group in his charge was asked for further information. He provided a very different picture of the group. According to him, this was a group of young people with a range of problems such as vagrancy, drug and alcohol addiction and creating a general nuisance as loiterers. But he said there was no evidence of right-wing extremist thinking. He was convinced that such a label would only make it more difficult to deal with the group. A second problem was that the group had been driven away from their regular hang-out spot shortly after the police issued its analysis. As a result the



group broke up, and some of them were now totally out of the picture. This alone made it impossible to include members of the group in a deradicalisation programme.

- Islamic group

In the spring of 2008, when it became clear that finding a suitable right-wing extremist group within the time constraints of the deradicalisation project would be extremely difficult, it was decided to look for a suitable group with radical Islamic tendencies. After all, the intention of the project was to apply the method to radical-leaning Muslims as well. The project group felt that this would be more compatible with the situation in Eindhoven, because Muslim youth with radical tendencies would be more familiar to various agencies. The Safety House also received frequent reports of radical-leaning Muslims. One important advantage of this choice was that finding access to such a group would not be difficult, as it would be in the case of the right-wing extremist friendship network. That was because the reports made to the Safety House mostly came from the young person's own neighbourhood, which meant that the person making the report automatically constituted a point of access to him. The Safety House also had a better network in this regard – through the mosques, for one thing.

A few individual cases were then proposed by the Safety House. But as it turned out, all the cases had to do with problems that did not lend themselves to the pilot strategy. Most of the cases were not concerned with radicalisation but with an orthodox interpretation of the Islamic faith, or there were other problems involved such as an Islamic marriage not sanctioned by parents or the behavioural problems of a primary school pupil.

Later on, those involved in the pilot came to disagree on whether changing the target group would have been an effective solution. Some felt that there was clearly a problem of Muslim young people with radical inclinations, unlike the situation with the right-wing extremists, with good intervention points for a deradicalisation strategy. Others argued, however, that problems of Muslim youth with radical tendencies were not visible either: neither in the street nor in the registries to which the project group had access.

- A new group

In the spring of 2008, a report from the police to the Safety House revealed the existence of a new group, one that was possibly suitable for inclusion in the deradicalisation experiment. This was another group of friends who hung around the same spot in their free time. A few group members made racist and right-wing extremist remarks to the police. In addition, a few members of the group were suspected of having been involved in applying graffiti of a right-wing extremist nature.

The project group proposed that a little time be spent obtaining a better picture of this group, to be followed by the introduction of a concrete strategy. The police made an assessment but the information it produced was insufficient. The group was not known to the department of youth work or to social services, either. In addition, the discovery was made that a member of the group also had contacts with ethnic minority young people. Finally, the project group concluded that "there are no concrete indications that might lead to conflict or violence against people with an ethnic background." This group, too, was not deemed eligible for the project.

It should also be noted that the project group did not have any more meetings during the period in which this group was being investigated, so whatever status can be attached to this investigation is up in the air. One member of the project group later admitted to not knowing why no pilot strategy was further pursued for this group.

- Another location

In an attempt to launch the deradicalisation project anyway, a search was made for other places where it might be implemented. One idea was to link up with a project of the Discrimination Advisory Centre, but that failed because the project was not scheduled to start until the end of the pilot period. Then a meeting with municipalities in the region was going to be organised to see if any relevant problems were occurring there. For reasons unknown to us this meeting never took place.

In the end, not a single suitable target group was found to which the experimental project could be applied. Later on the project group argued that obviously the proposed methodology was not compatible with any of the specific problems. The groups that were found were simply not suitable.

#### 4.2.3 Action plan

It was important that an action plan be drawn up right from the start in order to provide guidance and focus to the deradicalisation project and to obtain co-financing from the national government. After the police had made the aforementioned analysis of right-wing extremism in Eindhoven and had recommended that two groups be included in the deradicalisation project, it was time to write the action plan. This would be done by the project group, with support from FORUM. But the action plan never got off the ground. The reason why is not clear to us because members of the project group and the representatives of FORUM kept pointing the finger at each other.<sup>43</sup> According to the project group, FORUM was supposed to make the first move, which never happened. According to FORUM, the project group was supposed to make some important decisions first, which never happened. This, according to FORUM, led to constant confusion about which groups were supposed to be included in the project.

Because no action plan was drawn up, nothing was written down about the objectives of the pilot in Eindhoven. The only concrete objective, which was formulated repeatedly, is that the city of Eindhoven wanted the pilot target group to be expanded.<sup>44</sup> The municipal authority stipulated that the project be opened to both a right-wing extremist target group and to Islamic radicals.<sup>45</sup> Besides this augmentation, the city of Eindhoven also intended to increase its own expertise with regard to deradicalisation.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Interviews with core team members of the deradicalisation project on 23 April 2008 and 2 February 2009; interview of FORUM staff person on 7 May 2008; notes of the meeting of 3 March 2008.

<sup>44</sup> Notes of the meeting of 3 March 2008; conversation with FORUM staff person, 7 May 2008.

<sup>45</sup> Interview of core team member, 23 April 2008.

<sup>46</sup> Report of discussion of deradicalisation pilot, Eindhoven, 10 May 2007.

#### 4.2.4 Working with chain partners

Carrying out the deradicalisation pilot would require collaborating with professional partners. The municipality depended on their cooperation, both for gaining insight into the problem of radicalisation and for getting through a deradicalisation tracking programme. The first to be considered were the police and the department of youth work. Both organisations were initially part of the project group, but things did not run smoothly. Initially, collaboration with the police seemed as if it might become problematic. When the project group asked the police to make an analysis of right-wing extremism in the region, the police force admitted to being surprised that the pilot was being set up in Eindhoven at all, since no problem of right-wing extremism had been identified in the city.<sup>47</sup> When the police then carried out their own analysis, it appeared that indeed there was a significant presence of right-wing extremist activism. After this observation, the police said they would be willing to cooperate, which solved the problem of police collaboration with the deradicalisation experiment.<sup>48</sup>

At the same time, the department of youth work was also asked to lend a hand: to see whether there were problems with right-wing extremism and to approach the persons who had been singled out for the project. This proved problematic, however, for the reason noted above (§ 4.2.2): the group members were not known to the department of youth work. There were also potential problems with the protection of privacy. The upshot of all this was that there was little basis of support for cooperation in the department of youth work.<sup>49</sup> This insufficient basis of support was exacerbated by the notion that there were no major problems with right-wing extremists in Eindhoven. Where this notion came from is still unknown. Some of the persons involved regard the multicultural orientation of the department of youth work as an additional problem. Because of this, young people who are potentially active right-wing extremists tend to fall off the radar.<sup>50</sup>

After some time, the representative of the department of youth work disappeared from the project group. Why this happened is not clear. Later on he said he was not aware that this was an experimental project.<sup>51</sup> He thought the purpose of the group had merely been to search for a right-wing extremist group, for which a project might be set up at a later stage. This gives us reason to suspect that little guidance had been provided by the project leadership.

A FORUM staff person later concluded that the pilot project was delegated too quickly and without any conditions having been laid down by the local public administration. That led to two problems, according to FORUM. First, the project group was presented with a *fait accompli* – participation in a pilot project – without any local objectives being linked to it by the administration. Second, the project group received insufficient support and leadership from the local public administration. Another problem was that FORUM could not turn to a higher level in the hierarchy when problems arose in the execution of the pilot.

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<sup>47</sup> Interview with police staff person, 18 April 2008.

<sup>48</sup> Interviews with core group member, 23 April 2008 and 2 February 2009.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with FORUM staff person, 7 May 2008; interviews with core team member, 23 April 2008 and 2 February 2009.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with core team member, 2 February 2009; notes of the meeting of 3 March 2008.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Lumens Group staff person, 2 February 2009.

Several people who were directly involved later concluded that even though the chain partners were eager to work on the project, they did not feel enough urgency to put together a concrete strategy.

#### 4.2.5 Working with FORUM

As in Winschoten, the intention was that FORUM would supervise the project in Eindhoven. This supervisory role was not a clear-cut task that was carefully defined beforehand. It would be up to FORUM and the project group to give it shape. In the case of Winschoten, we have already seen that while attempts at coordination could lead to uncertainty and misunderstandings, relations did shape up nicely over time. This did not happen in Eindhoven.

After the project group was put together and the police analysis was presented, the responsibility for formulating an action plan lay in the hands of the project group and FORUM. As we have seen, this effort failed. Joint agreements were also drawn up to see to the further co-financing of the project by the national government. This also failed because an action plan was needed for such financing. Later on, the people involved came to see this as an important period in the course of the project. Misunderstandings and the failure to meet commitments led to irritation. The parties kept blaming each other for having a passive attitude.

In January 2008 an attempt was made to start anew. The parties agreed to find another target group and to come up with an action plan. They also agreed to look into the possibility of including an Islamic target group. At the same time, the project was extended by a number of months.<sup>52</sup> As noted earlier, however, no suitable target group was ever found (§ 4.2.4).

- Islamic radicalism

Upon being asked, both parties later said that incorporating Islamic radicals into the project remained an important discussion point. According to the core group, FORUM initially was too attached to the idea that the target group had to be a right-wing extremist group, even when it became apparent that such a group was not compatible enough with the situation in Eindhoven. FORUM countered by saying that the experiment only made sense if a right-wing extremist group was *also* included, otherwise no comparison could be made with the project in Winschoten.

According to FORUM, there was insufficient willingness to recognise the problem of right-wing extremism in Eindhoven, so that the perceived problem of Muslim radicals kept being shoved forward. The project group denied this, however. They claimed that enormous efforts had been made to identify the problems of right-wing extremism and to create a basis of support for this strategy among the partners. Neither of these was fully successful, however. What is striking, though, is that when the space was finally created to apply the method to radical-leaning Muslim youth, the project group proved to be unaware of any group suitable enough.

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<sup>52</sup> Initially the project was supposed to run until September 2008, but problems during the run-up to the project and problems having to do with the subsidy decision by the national government caused a serious delay. To keep the project from failing due to lack of time, the decision was made in the spring of 2008 to extend it by a number of months.

### 4.3 Final remarks

We ought to start out by saying that obviously the project in Eindhoven failed to meet the expectations of everyone involved despite the efforts made by a great many people. The above description is reason enough to argue that a number of things did not go well right from the start. After being introduced to the pilot, the city of Eindhoven agreed to participate. One condition, however, was that the method also be used for the deradicalisation of radical Muslims. The agreement also concerned the criteria that were highlighted at the beginning of this chapter. But that is where the problems arose.

Initially, the first criterion – the presence of a right-wing extremist problem – was disputed. This was countered, however, by an analysis carried out by the police, which demonstrated that such a problem did exist. Then the other two criteria were put to the test. There was a considerable difference of opinion among important partners within the project regarding how the different groups should be identified. Were these really groups of right-wing extremists, or not? Or had they not become too thoroughly radicalised? Then the identity of the problem *as a whole* came up for discussion. Because no serious right-wing extremist problem had been observed or recognised in the field, especially by the department of youth work, there was little basis of support for the project from this quarter. Then the third criterion – the practicability of the method – was called into question by the department of youth work. No conclusive answers were formulated in response to all these questions and different ways of thinking, and as a result the pilot got bogged down at an early stage. The various parties all differed in their explanation of how this could have happened.

The most important reason according to the project group was that the proposed method obviously was not compatible with the problems in Eindhoven. The groups that were found were simply a bad fit. That analysis seems too simple. FORUM countered this with two points. First, it argued that the city had been too quick to agree to the pilot without having a clear understanding of the three criteria: the presence of right-wing extremism, correct identification and awareness of the problem, and the supplementary effect of the proposed method. In the course of the pilot, when the decision was made to participate, it became apparent that there was an insufficient grasp of the extent to which the criteria corresponded with the Eindhoven situation.

Second, FORUM said the pilot project had been too easily delegated by the local public administration. That led to two additional problems. First, the project group was presented with a *fait accompli* – participation in a pilot project – without the administration linking it to local objectives. Second, the support and guidance that the local administration gave to the project group was insufficient.

The picture that emerges from these different views is one of an excessive lack of clarity at the beginning of the whole project that was never properly dealt with. First there was the presence of a right-wing extremist problem. This was a recurring point of discussion throughout the entire project: is there indeed evidence of such a problem, and if so, what does it look like? This question should have been answered conclusively at the beginning of the pilot.

There were also many misunderstandings and irritations during the project having to do with responsibilities, commitments and involvement. These, too, seem to have been caused by the failure to make unambiguous agreements. It would have been good if a formal decision had been made in which FORUM and the city of

Eindhoven had indicated exactly what they were agreeing to. Because that did not happen, all the parties were able to interpret the project as they saw fit. One of the many areas where this was quite evident was the recurring discussion on the application of the method to Muslim radicals.

The lack of clarity that all this produced made it possible for differences of interpretation, misunderstandings and different priorities to arise. This seems to have been the factor that precipitated the subsequent problems having to do with drawing up an action plan and with the difficult collaboration between FORUM and the project group. The fact that an action plan could not quickly be written exacerbated this bewildering situation even more. In any event, all the parties later said that after this period the project lost all its momentum.

What are the lessons to be learned from this experience?

To begin with, it is clear that in a project like this one, the problem being dealt with should be properly and widely acknowledged. When several different organisations have to work together to supervise one or more individuals in a particular tracking programme, they should share a common vision of the problem and a common sense of urgency. This was not sufficiently understood in Eindhoven.

This problem could possibly have been overcome or tackled if there had been agreement and management at the administrative level. The impression is that this did not occur in every case. At the beginning of the pilot, the police leadership expressed surprise that Eindhoven had embarked on such a project. In addition, the department of youth work was evidently able to more or less withdraw from the project group during a later stage without being challenged.

What was missing from this project was a clearly formulated and written decision and a resulting plan. This would seem to be a precondition for the successful introduction of a complicated project like this one.

All that remains to be said is that there is still an active group of right-wing extremists in Eindhoven. One project group member later said that there was no viable alternative strategy available for this group. No change is expected in this regard in the near future.

## 5 Summing up: conclusions, reflection and lessons

The right-wing extremist landscape of the Netherlands in the year 2009 differs considerably from that of ten years ago. The old right-wing extremist parties (the so-called "Centre" movement) suffered what was largely an electoral collapse at the end of the 1990s. They were followed by the so-called "street variants" – more or less organised networks of right-wing extremist youths. This was closely related to the rise of the Lonsdale problem: the rapid increase in the number of gabbers who adhered to some form of right-wing extremist or racist ideology. This new problem triggered many discussions: about the racist or extremist content of the problem, about the problems associated with anti-social behaviour and criminal activity, but also about the problems having to do with involvement in right-wing extremist organisations and right-wing extremist violence.

This new, complex and diffuse phenomenon was interpreted in many different ways, which led to just as many definitions of the situation,<sup>53</sup> or different estimations of the seriousness and exact character of the problem. But the fact that problems were being caused by this new phenomenon was strongly felt in several regions. The existing approach to the problem of right-wing extremism, however, was still firmly rooted in the "old" right-wing extremist parties. That approach, such as the repression of formally organised associations, was no longer adequate for dealing with the problems that had begun to appear in conjunction with these new street variants. The new problems gave rise to the need for a new approach.

The problems associated with right-wing extremist street politics are not an exclusively Dutch phenomenon. In fact, a number of European countries have been grappling with such problems for years. So the next logical step was to see whether an approach existed in those countries that could complement existing Dutch policy. No sooner said than done. This search resulted in an overview of deradicalisation projects in Scandinavia and Germany, projects that were aimed at individual disengagers and offered them support and practical assistance. Further examination of these projects revealed that this strategy, when adapted to the Dutch situation, could serve as a useful addition. In the previous chapters, we described an experiment with such a "Dutch" strategy. In this concluding chapter we will look back at the experiments in Winschoten and Eindhoven. We will then compare the results of those experiments and cast a glance at the future: How should we proceed?

### 5.1 Dutch experiments

Two important questions emerged that were related to applying foreign programmes to a Dutch situation. First, would it really be a meaningful addition to Dutch radicalisation policy? Second, what kinds of adjustments would have to be made for an application in the Netherlands? To answer these questions it was necessary to conduct an experiment so the strategy could be tested in practice. It was decided to conduct this experimental project in two municipalities: Winschoten and Eindhoven. Choosing a local rather than a national experiment was based on experiences in

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<sup>53</sup> By "definition of the situation" we refer to the well-known Thomas theorem, named after the sociologist William I Thomas (*The child in America: Behavior problems and programs*, 1928). The core of the Thomas theorem is formed by these definitions of the situation. A definition of the situation is not so much concerned with whether a particular view is *true* as whether it is *held to be true*. What is very important in this regard is that people are inclined to attune their behaviour to their own definition of the situation. In the words of Thomas: "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences."

Germany and on the knowledge that the problem of right-wing extremism differs strongly from region to region.

In Winschoten this led to a successfully completed project in which a substantial number of right-wing extremist young people were deradicalised. The conclusions from the experiment in Winschoten were discussed in chapter 3 and will not be repeated in detail. Here the most salient conclusions will suffice.

- The individual approach contributed to the deradicalisation of young people who did not belong to the hard core of the right-wing extremist group.
- The right-wing extremist group was decimated, probably due to increased pressure from the pilot *among other factors*, and the present group members have lost contact with the young people in Winschoten for the most part.
- An action plan with a structured focus and a broad recognition of the problem is no guarantee that the project will run smoothly. In the collaboration among the various chain partners it was necessary repeatedly to discuss and confirm the recognition and definition of the problem, as well as any mutual agreements and responsibilities. The close involvement of local public administrators in the project was important in this regard.

In Eindhoven the project ran aground in an early phase. Conclusions can be drawn from the outcome of the failed experiment, however, which are discussed in chapter 4. We will limit ourselves here to the most important findings.

- The problems related to right-wing extremism in the region must be known to both the local public administration and the project implementers. There should also be a certain measure of agreement that what is being observed is actually a problem and that it is a *right-wing extremist* problem – in contrast to the problems caused by groups of loiterers, for example, or juvenile crime. In other words: divergent definitions of the situation contributed to the failure.
- For a complicated project such as a deradicalisation strategy, a clear administrative decision and an action plan are necessary conditions – but they are not the only conditions.

## 5.2 A comparison

In the preparatory phase of the experimental project, it was decided to conduct pilot projects in two cities. The thinking behind this decision was twofold: (1) the entire experiment should not be run on too small a scale, and (2) it should be possible to compare the outcomes. Because of the partial failure of the project in Eindhoven, neither goal was fully met. Comparing the course of events in Winschoten and Eindhoven is possible only up to a certain point because in Eindhoven no individually oriented operational phase took place. For this reason, the comparison will focus only on the structure and implementation of the projects.

### 5.2.1 Objectives

In Eindhoven, none of the parties involved had a clear understanding of the goal they were supposed to be working towards – other than the very broad outlines of “deradicalisation” – or of who was in the target group. Because of this, discussions of the same topics kept cropping up throughout the course of the project. Was there a problem of right-wing extremism or not? If there was, how would they know when a group was suitable for inclusion in the experiment’s target group? In the end, these



questions were never dealt with satisfactorily and the project ran aground. But what if the questions had been answered? That might have proven to be a necessary but still insufficient condition for successfully moving on to the next phase. Indeed, the experience in Winschoten shows that clearly defining the objectives at the start is no guarantee of successful advancement. In Winschoten there were also discussions of the ultimate goal: when is someone sufficiently deradicalised, and when can the strategy be regarded as successful? Is it a matter of correcting explicit behaviour or of correcting ideas as well? This was partly because for the implementers the action plan was an abstract notion in the beginning. It was not until they got down to doing practical work that the questions, which they thought had been dealt with, really came to life. But at the same time it also became clear that because of their different backgrounds, the implementers often looked at the problems and possible solutions in different ways. For this reason it became necessary on a number of occasions to reaffirm the initial consensus regarding the problem and the action plan.

What emerges from all these experiences is that clear goals are necessary for a successful programme, because otherwise discussions can arise concerning such fundamental matters as who is in the target group and what should deradicalisation be in practice. On the other hand, agreeing on these goals does not automatically result in a smooth process. Nor can agreement be forced by means of an action plan. It would be a good idea, therefore, to involve the various relevant authorities in the action plan at the earliest possible phase, and to check the pulse of the project at later phases or compare views of the objectives. It is also very important that the implementers be motivated, and that they stay motivated in order to keep up with the demands of a new and hence difficult and unorthodox strategy. This may be stating the obvious, but that does not make it any less true.

### *5.2.2 Local public administration*

In Winschoten, both the mayor and the Councillor for Youth Affairs were involved in the project. The mayor chaired a steering committee that was made up of public administrators and chain partners. At this level, too, there was a high degree of consensus regarding the existence of a right-wing extremist problem and the wisdom of the experimental strategy, just as there was among the implementers. Administrative involvement was occasionally necessary to make sure the project implementers were given enough room within their own organisations so they could continue working with the strategy.

In Eindhoven there was much less administrative commitment and guidance, let alone motivation. Although the mayor<sup>54</sup> reacted positively to the proposal to carry out the project in Eindhoven, the municipal administration was not involved in the planning and implementation of the project. Responsibility for the project was placed in the hands of the Safety House. Apparently the Safety House had neither the authority nor the ability to enlist the necessary agencies in the pilot. The police leadership expressed surprise *at the start* that the city had embarked on the project. In addition, the department of youth work was able to more or less withdraw from the project group at a later stage, evidently without being challenged.

We suspect that there is a connection with problems in Eindhoven's security policy, as was pointed out by a review committee led by the criminologist Fijnaut at

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<sup>54</sup> This was Mayor Sakkers. In the relatively brief pilot period there were three mayors in Eindhoven. Mayor Sakkers left office in September 2007 and was succeeded by the temporary mayor, Braks. After a referendum, he was followed by the present mayor, Van Gijzel.

the end of 2008.<sup>55</sup> That committee reported a number of problems in the administrative hierarchy and in the coordination of responsibilities. Because of these problems, according to the committee, the Safety House not only implemented policy but set policy as well.<sup>56</sup> In short, the municipal administration exercised too little control. The committee also concluded that in the person-centred approach to problems employed by the Safety House, activities were developed without deciding in advance which efforts were to be made in pursuit of which objectives.

”Without such agreements the collaborative structure is too informal, making it impossible for those involved to call each other to account with regard to meeting commitments or to the content, quality and punctuality of the efforts being made.”<sup>57</sup>

Far-reaching agreement on the problems, and a widely shared sense of urgency about tackling them, are therefore of great importance. This is true at both the administrative and the operational levels.

Research on the reaction of governmental authorities to right-wing extremism has shown that government action can be stimulated to a considerable degree by ”trigger events” – events that are experienced as shocking – and the subsequent media attention.<sup>58</sup> This is all the more true when the news media convey an image of a passive government that has apparently chosen to ignore certain abuses. Such ”trigger events” took place in both in Winschoten and Eindhoven; these were, respectively, problems with the Blood & Honour group and the ”squatted barracks affair.” The problems in Eindhoven, however, were further removed in terms of time than those in Winschoten. It may be that in the case of Eindhoven, the stimulating effects of media attention had disappeared for the most part by the time the pilot was started.

In Winschoten such ”trigger events” were clearly influential. A few incidents having to do with the Blood & Honour group gained national attention due to widespread media coverage. Because of this, the sense of urgency that was already present among the implementers from the department of youth work and the police was finally felt by the local public administration.

### 5.2.3 *Approaching the target group*

In both Winschoten and Eindhoven, actually approaching members of the target group proved difficult. In Winschoten this was because the allocation of tasks was unclear: who was supposed to approach which young people, and what sort of intervention should then be applied? In addition, there was some uncertainty at the beginning and the specific experience of the professionals was not always good enough to proceed to the most appropriate intervention. In Eindhoven, as we saw, the fact that no young people were approached was caused by other problems. One of those problems was the lack of consensus regarding how to protect privacy.

So it is important to carefully consider how implementers can be properly equipped for this step in the strategy. An action plan that indicates how responsibilities are to be allocated and what interventions the implementers might

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<sup>55</sup> C. Fijnaut et al., *Veel te winnen!*, Eindhoven: [s.n.] 2008.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29, 30, 36, 53.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 52.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Jaap van Donselaar, *De staat paraat?*, p. 287.

apply can serve as a helpful tool in this regard. Another prudent move would be to preclude discussions about the protection of privacy, perhaps by dealing with this topic in the action plan.<sup>59</sup>

#### 5.2.4 Size of the municipality

The question is: why did the problems in Winschoten amount to little more than bumps in the road, while in Eindhoven they brought the strategy to its knees at an early stage? We have already seen that a lack of clear goals, a sense of urgency and administrative involvement all played a role. But there may be one more significant factor: the size of the municipality and – deriving from this – the size of the local public administration. Winschoten is a small municipality in which problems with right-wing extremists were soon visible to many people. In addition, because of the small size of the municipality, most of the young people involved were already known to the local agencies. In Eindhoven, on the other hand, the problem was much more “hidden” (and less the subject of critical media attention). Incidents of right-wing extremism only occurred in certain districts of the city. And because of the size of the city, the persons involved could remain “anonymous” much longer than in a small community. The size of the municipality cannot entirely explain why the problem of right-wing extremism was not very urgently felt in Eindhoven, but it probably does play a role, along with other aspects.

The size of the municipality is also important in the contacts between chain partners. In Winschoten, the staff persons in the agencies involved knew each other well, so the lines of communication were very short. Although the means of distributing information within the core team was not adequately structured at first, core team members did exchange a great deal of information among themselves. This often happened in the context of their ongoing contacts.

In Eindhoven the contacts among the chain partners were much less closely-knit. The administrative and the operational levels were also much farther apart. While the mayor of Winschoten was personally involved in the pilot project via the steering committee, in Eindhoven it was unclear who at the administrative level was responsible for the project on the ground. Another complication was that in a city of this size, it takes a long time before certain information reaches the right person. In addition, it is not always clear whether information at the operational level has actually made its way to the administrative level and vice versa.

From all appearances, the distances in Eindhoven were partly reinforced by the problems in the hierarchical structuring that were reported by the visitation committee at the end of 2008 and by the defining of responsibilities in the area of security in Eindhoven.

### 5.3 Deradicalisation in practice

Comparing the two projects provides us with a number of insights that are important in the *designing* of a local deradicalisation strategy. But what insights has the experiment provided as far as the *working* of such a strategy is concerned? To what extent can the deradicalisation of right-wing extremists be stimulated and supported?

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<sup>59</sup> One way to deal with these questions and arrive at a privacy protocol is described in detail in: L.B. Sauerwein, *Handreiking voor gemeentes over privacyaspecten bij criminaliteitspreventie*, The Hague: [s.n.] 2003. See: [http://www.justitie.nl/images/Handreiking\\_privacyaspecten2003\\_tcm74-37798\\_tcm34-95632.pdf](http://www.justitie.nl/images/Handreiking_privacyaspecten2003_tcm74-37798_tcm34-95632.pdf) (10-3-2009).

It can be said that deradicalisation (like radicalisation) is a complex process with many different, intermingled factors and indistinct causal relationships. A deradicalisation strategy never takes place in a social vacuum. Other factors, such as attention from the news media, the dynamic within the radical group, personal considerations and developments in national and international politics, play just as great a role in the decision to abandon a radical group. For this reason it is not easy to determine what the role of such a strategy is in the process of deradicalisation. Nor is it clear how lasting the effects of a strategy will be: Have the deradicalised persons left the radical group for good, or will they come back to the group after a period of time or express their right-wing sentiments in some other way?<sup>60</sup> Even so, a number of important insights can be distilled from the results of the project in Winschoten.

The strategy that was the basis of the experiment in Winschoten was aimed at emphasising the negative aspects of the right-wing extremist group and the practical disadvantages of group membership. In the discussions that were carried out with the young people in question, repeated references were made to the negative impact that radical behaviour would have on contacts with his surroundings and future prospects. So the strategy was mainly aimed at what Bjørge and Demant et al. have described as movement-oriented and practical *push* factors: the negative things that "push" a person out of a radical group. The plan was also to employ *pull* factors by helping the young people solve the problems that were associated with group membership. In actual practice, however, this only happened a couple of times. The strategy was explicitly not aimed at ideological factors, i.e. at changing radical ideas. This did not mean, however, that these ideas never came up for discussion in the conversations that were held with the young people.

This practical strategy seems to have had a positive effect on newcomers and followers. Often a serious talk about the disadvantages and consequences for the future was enough to make these young people see that they were not going down the right path. This resembles the aforementioned Norwegian method with its *empowerment conversation*, involving a professional and the young person in question. For the youth who are actually having problems at work, school or in their housing situation, the use of *pull* factors also helps in their deradicalisation.

The strategy was also used with a few persons from the hard core of the right-wing extremist group. Looking back, it can be concluded that the deradicalisation method did not have any decisive effect on them: they are still active or have left the group for other reasons. The question is, why were these young people not affected? On the one hand, it can be said that the strategy was not set up for these young people and therefore did not delve far enough into the factors that might have been important for them in deradicalisation. The strategy did not touch on ideological factors and obstacles that might occur in disengagement – aspects that can play a major role in deradicalisation for persons from the hard core. On the other hand, relatively little effort was made to intervene when members of the hard core were involved, while opportunities to do so presented themselves quite regularly. For instance, the opportunity to begin a tracking programme with two young men who had been released from detention was passed over in both cases. The discussions that were carried out with these young people concerning their radical ideas were never taken to a deeper level either because the professional involved did not have the experience to do so.

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<sup>60</sup> Interruptions, sometimes for years, in an otherwise right-wing extremist career are not unusual. See Jaap van Donselaar, *Fout na de oorlog*.

Thus there are indications that the deradicalisation strategy is not inevitably doomed when applied to members of the hard core. They, too, can benefit from receiving support for their problems and having attention focused on their future. At the same time, a strategy for this target group will require more of an effort than a strategy for newcomers: in many cases, support for problems will have to be combined with actively breaking down the barriers that keep the person in question from leaving the group, barriers that are relatively high. Members of the hard core find themselves in greater social isolation than followers as a rule, and they find it much more difficult to be accepted by the non-extremist outside world. In addition, the radical ideas held by these persons can be more deeply rooted than among newcomers and followers. This raises the question whether a deradicalisation strategy that is aimed at persons in the hard core should not also concentrate on guaranteeing safety and offering actual social alternatives as well as on ideological change. All in all, a strategy for these persons is an even more complex exercise than a strategy for newcomers.<sup>61</sup>

It can be concluded that the deradicalisation method that was the object of this experiment produces good results when applied to the previously chosen target group of newcomers and followers. The strategy also seems to produce the desired results at the group level: the group in Winschoten is as good as eradicated. So the strategy also appears to be a viable addition to existing policy aimed at right-wing extremism.

#### 5.4 Lessons for the future

In conclusion, a few key points can be mentioned that will be of importance in the planning of any future deradicalisation policy.

A fundamental aspect of the deradicalisation method investigated here is the *collaboration between chain partners*. That collaboration stands or falls on the efforts and loyalty of these partners. The partners are responsible for calling attention to problems, suggesting persons who qualify for a tracking programme and carrying out interventions with persons involved in such programmes. The chain partners all have differing interests and insight into problems and solutions, however, which are likewise derived from their own individual perspectives. It is no simple matter getting the various agencies round the table, getting them to reach consensus on the definition of the problem and the solution, and getting them to work together on the basis of this definition. It is clear, moreover, that once this collaboration is up and running, there is no guarantee that now everything will proceed smoothly. In Winschoten this collaboration proved to be in need of constant maintenance. As the project progressed, previously made agreements and definitions had to be reviewed again and again because the chain partners' different backgrounds and insights required new discussions in the daily course of events.

Another key point is the *professionalism* required of those who make contact with the target group and are responsible for performing interventions. Community workers from the police force or the department of youth work, for example, seem quite capable of building up a large body of knowledge about individuals and groups. They were also well-equipped to make contact with the young people from the target group; that, after all, is part of their daily routine. This was much less true for social

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<sup>61</sup> The difference between members of the hard core and followers is diagrammatic in a certain sense and can be arbitrary. Not all chain partners will agree as to exactly where the borders should be drawn. The difference should not be understood too rigidly. A newcomer, for instance, can move very quickly into the hard core.

workers and people from the employment services. But these professionals – especially the social workers – are well-equipped to engage in deeper conversation with the young people and to offer support. There was no single function in which all these skills were combined, however. With closer cooperation this problem was overcome in many cases. But for a successful deradicalisation programme, workers from the various agencies would do well to possess these different skills – certainly if the strategy is also aimed at the ‘tougher cases’ from the hard core of a radical group. As we observed, a great deal depends on the performance of these contact persons.

A third theme deserving of attention is the *role of the municipality*. The standard *norm* in most municipalities is that right-wing extremism is reprehensible and should therefore be suppressed. The national government has recently added a concrete obligation to this norm: that the primary responsibility for combating radicalisation – and polarisation – lies with the local administration. The government contends that managing this responsibility is the job of the local authorities.<sup>62</sup> Our study shows that discharging this management role is no easy matter. It’s true that only two municipalities were involved, but the observed pattern is consistent with the results from other research projects. Earlier we referred to the general notion that governing authorities often do not spring into action until certain *trigger events* have taken place that are paired with a great deal of publicity.<sup>63</sup> This phenomenon was reported by researchers from the police academy in a study of the “Lonsdale problem” in Zoetermeer, Aalsmeer and Venray.<sup>64</sup> The picture of a difficult management role that cannot be taken for granted has been confirmed in three studies undertaken by students of public administration at Leiden University that focus on how various municipalities deal with public expressions of right-wing extremism.<sup>65</sup> Another case of governing authorities failing to act adequately was described in detail by FORUM in the study *Racistische overlast in Waspik*.<sup>66</sup> All these studies show that the role of manager does not come naturally to local administrative authorities, and that these authorities are more “followers” than ‘driving forces’: often they do not act of their own accord but have to be prompted by others. In many cases, municipal administrations react with caution to right-wing extremist incidents out of fear that their image might be seriously damaged due to media exposure. A result of this cautious attitude is that even bigger problems may arise. The media attention that this triggers then compels the local administration to finally assume the role of manager at a later date.

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<sup>62</sup> Actieplan *Polarisatie en Radicalisering 2007-2011*, see

[http://www.justitie.nl/images/actieplanpolarisatieenradicalisering\\_tcm34-82141.pdf](http://www.justitie.nl/images/actieplanpolarisatieenradicalisering_tcm34-82141.pdf) (9 March 2009).

<sup>63</sup> Jaap van Donselaar, *De staat paraat?*, p 287. For the problem of “agenda setting,” see also Rob Witte, *Racist violence and the state: A comparative European analysis*, dissertation, University of Utrecht, Utrecht 1995 pp. 12-20.

<sup>64</sup> A.Ph. van Wijk, E.J.A. Bervoets and R. Boers, *Trots op Nederland: achtergronden, kenmerken en aanpak van het Lonsdaleverschijnsel in Venray, Zoetermeer en Aalsmeer*. The Hague: Elsevier Overheid 2007, pp. 125-126, 176-180.

<sup>65</sup> K. Wilms van Kerbergen, *De aanpak van “Lonsdaleproblematiek” en extreemrechts. Een vergelijkende studie naar de aanpak van Zoetermeer, Aalsmeer en Eindhoven*, MA thesis, Science of Public Administration, Leiden University 2007; Andrea Bakker, *Aansluiting of kloof? Een onderzoek naar de lokaal-bestuurlijke aanpak van interetnische spanningen en de rol van het interventieteam Interetnische Spanningen daarbij*, MA thesis, Science of Public Administration, Leiden University 2008; René van Delft, *Extreemrechts aan de ketting: Over de gemeentelijke regierol bij de aanpak van ‘Lonsdale-jongeren’ in Zoetermeer, Winschoten en Eindhoven*, MA thesis, Science of Public Administration, Leiden University 2008.

<sup>66</sup> Research commission “Liberiaans gezin,” *Racistische overlast in Waspik: analyse van de aanpak en lessen voor gemeenten*. Utrecht, FORUM, Institute for Multicultural Development, April 2008.

At the same time, we have to accept the fact that in a complex local collaborative network, it may be even more difficult for another institution to take on the role of manager than the municipality. It is our opinion that this stubborn problem deserves speedy attention, especially by the national government – which, after all, has been so insistent in giving the primary responsibility for combating radicalisation to the local administrative authorities. That attention should be aimed at becoming immersed in the *background* of the problem, and then at the question how the role of "follower" can be converted into the role of "driving force." This is important for the local fight against radicalism in general and, in conjunction with that, for the further development of the deradicalisation strategy.

One last question that is not a direct consequence of the experiences acquired but is nevertheless important now that the experiments are over: when is a strategy *completed*? In other words: When does stimulating deradicalisation become unnecessary? The period of the pilot project was too short to provide a decisive answer about a specific time frame. When we look at the situation Winschoten, we see a vast improvement compared with the situation prior to the pilot project. At the same time, not all the problems have been solved. A remnant of the right-wing extremist group is still active. In early 2009, this remnant was able to organise a political gathering that attracted a few dozen visitors, including national heavyweights from the neo-Nazi circuit.<sup>67</sup> Problems can also arise with regard to the relapse of disengagers (actual or threatened) or the reappearance of comparable difficulties. Naturally, winding up a project first means taking a local assessment of pluses and minuses. But at the same time, it has been shown that reaching a "successful" conclusion prematurely does not provide any long-term solutions. The choice made by Winschoten to incorporate the project into existing structures for the time being therefore seems like a wise decision.

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<sup>67</sup> "Politie verjaagt rechts-extremisten," *Dagblad van het Noorden*, 26 January 2009.

## About the *Racism & Extremism Monitor* project

The aim of the *Racism & Extremism Monitor* is to track several forms of racism and extremism – as well as reactions to these phenomena – and to publish the results in periodical reports. These reports look at forms of expression, such as politically organised racism, and forms of exclusion, such as discrimination in nightlife establishments. Various kinds of victims and perpetrators are also identified, whether native Dutch or foreign, with the latter further subdivided into the various ethnic minority groups. The response to racism and extremism can vary, in terms of the nature of the response, such as educational, legal, administrative or political, and in terms of actors, such as governing authorities, media, politicians and civil society.

The periodical monitoring of racism and extremism, as well as the response to these phenomena, serves several purposes. It attempts to contribute to insight into the problem itself and into finding solutions to racism and extremism as social issues. Longitudinal research and the ensuing periodical reports result in an accumulation of knowledge, producing a picture of developments over the longer term.

The Monitor project was launched in 1996 at Leiden University and the first report came out in 1997. Since 2001 the study has been carried out jointly by Leiden University and the Anne Frank House.

All research reports can be found on the project website: [monitorracisme.nl](http://monitorracisme.nl). The reports differ in nature. Some are comprehensive, general reports that are published approximately every two years and whose subtitles are numbered, such as *Racism & Extremism Monitor, eighth report*. Then there are more concise special reports – cahiers – with interim up-dates on special sub-topics, such as discrimination of Roma and Sinti, and the ‘Lonsdale problem’. Also featured on the website is a wide range of documentation dealing with Monitor project subjects.

The following publications in this series have already appeared:

### REPORTS

*Monitor racism en extreemrechts: eerste rapportage*. Jaap van Donselaar, 1997.

*Monitor racism en extreemrechts: tweede rapportage*. Final editing: Jaap van Donselaar, 1998.

*Monitor racism en extreemrechts: derde rapportage*. Jaap van Donselaar, 2000.

*Monitor racism en extreemrechts: vierde rapportage*. Jaap van Donselaar, Peter R. Rodrigues, 2001.

*Monitor racism en extreemrechts: vijfde rapportage*. Jaap van Donselaar & Peter R. Rodrigues, 2002.

*Monitor racism en extreemrechts: zesde rapportage*. Jaap van Donselaar & Peter R. Rodrigues, 2004.

*Monitor racism & extremisme: zevende rapportage*. Edited by Jaap van Donselaar & Peter R. Rodrigues, 2006.

*Monitor racism & extremisme: achtste rapportage*. Edited by Jaap van Donselaar & Peter R. Rodrigues, 2008

### CAHIERS

*Racistisch en extreemrechts geweld in 2002*. Jaap van Donselaar & Peter R. Rodrigues, 2003.



*Opsporing en vervolging in 2002.* Jaap van Donselaar & Peter R. Rodrigues, 2003.  
*Roma en Sinti.* Peter R. Rodrigues & Maaïke Matelski, 2004.  
*Het Lonsdalevraagstuk.* Final editing: Jaap van Donselaar, 2005.  
*Racistisch en extreemrechts geweld in 2006.* Jaap van Donselaar & Willem  
Wagenaar, 2007.  
*Opsporing en vervolging in 2006.* Marija Davidović & Peter R. Rodrigues, 2007.

## About the authors

**Froukje Demant** is a political scientist, social psychologist and researcher with the Anne Frank House. She conducts research on processes of radicalisation and deradicalisation and on how deradicalisation programmes operate. Demant is co-author of the book *Strijders van eigen bodem: Radicale en democratische moslims in Nederland* (Amsterdam, 2006) and the report *Teruggang en uittreding: Processen van deradicalisering ontleed* (Amsterdam, 2008).

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**Jaap van Donselaar** is a cultural anthropologist, associate professor at Leiden University and senior researcher with the Anne Frank House. He has spent a great deal of time conducting research on racism and radicalism, and on the response to these phenomena. In 1991 he obtained a doctorate with the thesis *Fout na de oorlog*, a study of the history of post-war right-wing extremism in the Netherlands. In 1996 Van Donselaar founded the *Racism & Extremism Monitor*. He has also conducted research on combating racism and extremism in the Netherlands and in Europe. Since March 2009 Van Donselaar has held a guest position at the Centre for Terrorism and Counterterrorism at Campus The Hague of Leiden University.