

11 Deradicalisation of right-wing radicals and Islamic radicals

*Froukje Demant, Marieke Slootman, Frank Buijs and Jean Tillie*¹

What makes radical movements break down? Why is it that at a certain point some radicals decide to embark on a less violent course? Why do some people bid their radical group farewell? While for a long time research on radicalism was focused on studying why certain persons become radical, more and more attention is being focused on why some groups and individuals *stop* being radical; why they "deradicalise." This is not just a matter of analysing the process of deradicalisation; it also has to do with asking how this process could be stimulated by means of deradicalisation programmes. In this chapter we will discuss the process of deradicalisation as well as the experiences with deradicalisation programmes for right-wing radicals and Islamic radicals gained abroad. In the first part, the notion of "deradicalisation" will be developed and the factors that play a role in the process of deradicalisation will be discussed. Factors that might form a barrier to deradicalisation will also be discussed. In the second part we will concentrate on experiences with deradicalisation programmes for right-wing radicals from Norway, Sweden and Germany. In the third part a number of deradicalisation programmes for Islamic radicals will be discussed. These include programmes in Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Egypt and Indonesia. Finally, the programmes for right-wing radicals and Islamic radicals will be compared, and a few points will be discussed with regard to possible application in the Netherlands.

11.1 Describing deradicalisation

Following Sprinzak,² radicalisation is regarded here as a process of delegitimation, as a process in which trust in the system declines and people withdraw further and further into their own group because they no longer feel part of society. It is therefore (partly) a political process. The legitimacy of the system is increasingly called into question and the people who are part of the system are increasingly dehumanised and seen as the enemy. This goes hand in hand with the desire and the intention to change the system profoundly. In the most extreme form of radicalism, that intention is converted into violent action.³

We regard deradicalisation as the opposite of radicalisation: it is the process of becoming less radical. This "becoming less radical" applies both to behaviour and views. As far as behaviour is concerned, this involves first of all the suspension of (violent) radical activities and the cessation of radical comments and displays. With regard to views, this involves an increase in trust in the system, a desire to be part of society once more and the rejection of non-democratic means. This is not to say that the

¹ This article is largely based on F. Demant et al., *Teruggang en uittreding: processen van deradicalisering ontleed* (Decline and disengagement: an analysis of processes of deradicalisation). Amsterdam: IMES 2008.

² E. Sprinzak, "The process of delegitimation: towards a linkage theory of political terrorism," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 1991, p. 3.

³ This most extreme form of radicalism can be called "extremism." For a discussion of the terms "radicalism" and "extremism" see: F.J. Buijs, F. Demant & A. Hamdy, *Strijders van eigen bodem: radicale en democratische moslims in Nederland* (Homegrown warriors: radical and democratic Muslims in the Netherlands). Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press 2006.

deradicalised person is no longer interested in political change, but that his goal is no longer to undermine the system – and that now the means that he desires to use fit within the democratic legal system. In general, the deradicalisation of behaviour goes with the deradicalisation of opinions; for various reasons, movements or individuals can moderate or renounce their radical ideology and can decide that radical actions are no longer in keeping with their world view. But changes in behaviour and in outlook do not always coincide. Radical behaviour can be suspended without a concomitant moderation of radical opinions (for example, when a radical individual suspends his violent activities under pressure from his partner). Radical opinions do not have to change in order for the individual to be regarded as deradicalised. Conversely, individuals who have radical views but have not yet used violence can moderate their views. Although in such a case there is no clear change in behaviour, we can still regard the individual as deradicalised.

11.1.1 Collective and individual

Deradicalisation can take place on two different levels: the collective and the individual level. The collective level is the level of the radical movement. The individual level is the level of the radical individual.

Deradicalisation at the collective level means that a radical movement ceases to exist. This can happen in a variety of ways: a movement falls apart, bleeds dry, is broken up by governmental intervention, is absorbed by a non-radical movement or is transformed into a non-radical movement. In these cases we speak of a *decline* of the radical movement.

Deradicalisation at the individual level can assume several different forms. A very clear-cut form of deradicalisation is when a violent radical suspends his violent activities. But not all radicals are violent. Another indicator of radicalism is membership in a radical movement. Although membership in a radical movement does not necessarily mean that someone shares all that group's convictions and participates in all its activities, there is a high possibility that someone who is a member of a movement does endorse (some of) its most important convictions. It can also be assumed that membership in a movement increases the chance that someone also actually participates in some of the group's most important activities. By the same token, *disengagement* from a radical movement can also be regarded as a form of deradicalisation. Disengagement may often be linked with the moderation of radical views, but as noted, that does not necessarily have to be the case. If someone drops out of a radical movement (and thereby ceases his radical behaviour) but does not moderate his radical views, we still regard this as deradicalisation.

Finally, people may have had radical views without having exhibited the related behaviour, such as violence or membership in a radical movement. In the case of such individuals it is difficult to determine to what extent they were radical. Yet they may have undergone a process in which their radical views have been moderated, so this also constitutes a process of deradicalisation. In the rest of this chapter we will focus our attention on deradicalisation at the individual level.

11.1.2 Motives for radicalisation and deradicalisation

Why do individuals deradicalise? Persons who radicalise have certain needs that radical movements can fulfill. The radical movement constitutes a suitable "supply" to meet the individuals' demand. When the supply is no longer adequately suited to the individuals' demand, the appeal of the movement will diminish and the individuals will drop out. To understand why the appeal of a radical movement diminishes for an individual, we first have to know what that appeal involves. What motives prompt individuals to radicalise, or in other words: what functions do radical movements fulfil for individuals? In the literature on the motives for radicalisation, three fundamental motives can be distinguished: the response to perceived injustice, the need for bonding and the need for fulfilment.⁴

The response to perceived *injustice* is linked to a perception of injustice that can be deeply painful. The injustice can manifest itself in many areas such as the economic, the ethnic, the political, the religious and/or the social realm. An individual may feel that he has been unjustly treated either as a person or as a group. Some people feel the need to take an active response to the perceived injustice and may become increasingly radical as they do so. Buijs et al.⁵ call this the political-activist dimension of radicalisation.

The need for *bonding* implies that people not only want to achieve something but they also want to belong to a group that they regard as valuable. The members feel a sense of connection with the movement, the people in the movement or the group leadership. The group also provides the individual with a subculture in which he can feel at home and from which he derives a positive social identity. The subculture forms an alternative to the present society and is the manifestation of the views of the group's members with regard to the ideal life, be it an adventurous and free life or a highly structured and orthodox life. Buijs and his associates call this the social-cultural dimension of radicalisation.

The need for *fulfilment* is linked to a search for personal meaning and purpose. Some people search for an unambiguous explanation for the world they live in and the role they play (or are expected to play) in that world. Radical movements offer an ideology that provides the clear-cut answers these people need. Buijs and his associates call this the religious dimension of radicalisation.

Klandermans and Mayer⁶ call attention to a fourth factor that plays a role in becoming active in a (radical) social movement: the so-called "selective incentive." Selective incentives include all the advantages from which the individual participant benefits, such as a career in the movement or profiting from the network. These selective incentives, which have to do with the practical aspects of the way someone organises his life, is an important addition to the more "substantive" motives of responding to injustice, the need for bonding and the need for fulfilment.

Individuals will deradicalise when their needs and motives no longer correspond with what the radical movement has to offer. Here the ideology of the movement plays a crucial role. The ideology formulates the movement's outlook on the established order

⁴ See for example: F.J. Buijs, F. Demant & A. Hamdy, *Strijders van eigen bodem* (Homegrown warriors).

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ B. Klandermans & N. Mayer (eds.), *Extreme right activists in Europe: through the magnifying glass*. New York & London: Routledge 2006.

and describes how we can move from the established order to an ideal society. Thus the ideology can help impart meaning (which meets the need for fulfilment) and can motivate people to do something about the present situation (which meets the need to respond to injustice). Doubt may arise if the ideology is insufficiently convincing on any one of these points. But other aspects can also cause someone to doubt as to whether he still wants to belong to the radical organisation. For example, if the movement no longer satisfies the need for bonding, or if there are no longer enough selective incentives to stay with the movement: the movement fails to provide any personal advantages or even offers personal disadvantages.

To summarise, there are three types of factors that may play a role in deradicalisation:

1. A failing ideology: the analysis of the present world that is being provided no longer appears convincing to the individual. Or the individual is no longer attracted by the image being sketched of the ideal society. Or the proposed strategy for getting from the present to the ideal world is no longer desirable or effective. In the last case this often concerns doubt about the use of violence. Factors that are linked to a failing ideology are here called *normative* factors.
2. A failing movement: some radical group members become disillusioned with the group dynamic and the activities of the movement. Limited loyalty among the members themselves can also weaken ties with the group. Such factors that have to do with a failing movement are here called *affective* factors.
3. Adverse practical living conditions: active members may begin to feel that they are too old for what they are doing. They long for the freedom of an "ordinary" life. Another important aspect that may play a role here is formed by negative social sanctions imposed by the surrounding environment, such as stigmatisation or threats of criminal proceedings. Factors that are linked to such practical living conditions are called *continuance* factors.⁷

Disengagement from a radical movement is just one form of deradicalisation at the individual level. Individual deradicalisation can also consist of moderating one's radical views and radical (violent) behaviour. Whenever someone is not a member of a radical group, deradicalisation is therefore unrelated to the group aspects. In such cases, deradicalisation will mainly be the result of a failing ideology.

11.1.3 Barriers to deradicalisation

In addition to the factors that are conducive to deradicalisation, there are factors that impede deradicalisation. These are barriers that movements erect to prevent members from disengaging. The barriers are closely related to the deradicalisation factors mentioned above. Essentially they are the reverse impulse of deradicalisation motives: they ensure a dominance of the ideology in the individual's perception of the environment (normative barriers), social dependence of the individual on the group

⁷ The classification "normative, affective and continuing" is taken from B. Klandermans, *The social psychology of protest*. Oxford: Blackwell 1997. Klandermans writes about the concept of involvement in a movement (movement commitment) and distinguishes between normative, affective and continuance involvement. Also see F. Demant et al., *Teruggang en uittrekking* (Decline and withdrawal).

(affective barriers) or practical circumstances which all but force the individual to remain in the group (continuance barriers).

One important *normative* barrier is the individual's psychological dependence on the group. When an individual is involved in a community as demanding as a radical group, the group's influence reaches further and further into every area of his personal and moral judgement formation. Because of this, the individual loses faith in his own impressions and ability to make judgements. So disengagement is seen as a sign that someone is not strong enough to live according to his ideals. Before they leave, most people go through a fierce internal struggle. The outside world has become the great unknown where they no longer know how to make their way, and they are afraid of landing in a moral vacuum.⁸

An *affective* barrier is the individual's social dependence on the group. Radicals often break all ties with the past and therefore run the risk of ending up in a social vacuum if they were to leave the group.

An important *continuance* barrier is formed by investments that have been made previously (in terms of money, time, energy and/or in the social realm). Realising the costs that one has made as an individual for the movement can make it more difficult to leave. This mechanism is related to processes of cognitive dissonance, which cause one to feel as if he has to justify his efforts and sacrifices. So if one has a change of opinion, or in this case if one disengages from the movement, it feels as if the costs have been "for naught." Other continuance barriers are the fears, whether realistic or not, of physical reprisals after leaving the group or of the marginal social position that one will occupy after deradicalisation. Many radicals have status and a position within their group and are afraid of losing it if they to return to "normal" society.

Barriers can be overcome in various ways. Doubts about leaving can be overcome by seeing a clear discrepancy between what the leaders teach and what they do in practice. Breaking out of isolation is also an important step; getting involved in new activities, for instance, can be a first step in a process of pulling away. Doubts about leaving can also be overcome by maintaining a relationship with someone outside the group who offers a new frame of reference. Such factors can have an effect on different barriers at the same time. Breaking out of isolation can reduce both the psychological and the social dependence of the individual on the group. And a new relationship can result in breaking through both the psychological and the continuance barriers: the disengager realises that the previously made costs may be high, but that he may also regain a great deal when he disengages from the group.

A little light has now been shed on the factors and barriers that play a role in the deradicalisation of individuals. In this chapter we will continue building on this basis and we will look into the extent to which the process of deradicalisation among individuals can be stimulated and/or supported. Although the Netherlands has had to deal with many different forms of radicalism, and still does, it has little experience with initiatives

⁸ For a description of this process among right-wing radical young people, see: B. Rommelspacher, *Der Hass hat uns geeint: junge Rechtsextreme und ihr Ausstieg aus der Szene*. Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag 2006.

for stimulating or supporting the deradicalisation of individual radicals.⁹ For this reason we will look past our borders in order to find deradicalisation programmes to investigate.

11.2 Deradicalisation programmes for right-wing radicals

In several Western European countries, deradicalisation programmes have been developed that are intended to simulate individual followers of radical movements to disengage and to change their way of thinking. The Norwegian researcher Bjørgo is one of the founders of a programme to help right-wing radicals disengage. This so-called Exit Programme was developed in the mid-nineties and adopted in Norway. After this, a somewhat tailored version of Exit was adopted in Sweden and Germany. In the sections that follow, the programmes in these various countries will be discussed.

11.2.1 Norway¹⁰

There are only about 100 to 200 active right-wing radicals in Norway, and they are scattered across five to ten locations. The members are young, and their careers in the movement are relatively brief. Few remain active after the age of twenty. Most members have no more than a basic education and struggle with social problems. This makes the organisation weak, and the movement stands or falls with a few individual leaders. The Exit programme was developed between 1995 and 1997 and has three components: prevention, intervention and re-integration.

1. *Prevention* consists of conducting "empowerment conversations:" structured conversations in which a professional (such as a police officer or a youth worker) talks with a young individual who has already set off in the direction of the right-wing radical milieu, and their parents. The goal is to tell the youth about the possible adverse effects of right-wing radical membership.
2. *Intervention* consists of a combination of magnifying the drawbacks of membership in a right-wing radical group on the one hand and offering an attractive alternative on the other. Parental networks have been established for the parents of young people who are involved in a right-wing radical group. These networks are partly seen as a form of intervention because the programme tries to pull out young people out of the right-wing radical milieu by way of their parents.

⁹ In September 2007, a pilot of a deradicalisation programme for right-wing radical youths was started in the Netherlands. The programme was developed at the initiative of FORUM, the Anne Frank House / Leiden University and the Institute for Migration and Ethnic Studies (Instituut voor Migratie en Etnische Studies; IMES). It is being carried out in the cities of Winschoten and Eindhoven and will run until early 2009. At the time of this writing the pilot is still in full swing and therefore cannot be included in the discussion.

¹⁰ The discussion of the programme in Norway is based on: T. Bjørgo, "Reducing recruitment and promoting disengagement from racist groups," *Journal für Konflikt- und Gewaltforschung*, 2002, p. 4; T. Bjørgo (with Y. Carlsson & T. Haaland), "Conflict processes between youth groups in a Norwegian City: polarization and revenge," *European Journal of Crime, Criminal Law and Criminal Justice*, 2005, p. 13; and K. Warchold, *Konzepte gegen Rechtsextremismus in Norwegen und Schweden: das Beispiel "Exit"*, Magisterarbeit Humboldt-Universität, Berlin 2003.

3. *Re-integration* is aimed at offering support to individuals who leave the right-wing radical milieu by finding them a job and a place to live, and by carrying on conversations with the person in question.

The Norwegian Exit programme has chosen not to establish its own organisation to deradicalise people but to support local parties (mainly municipalities and the police) in increasing the knowledge of right-wing radicals and developing deradicalisation methods at the local level. So in Norway the Exit programme is not so much a contact point for individuals who want to disengage as it is a model that local parties can use to deradicalise people.

11.2.2 Sweden¹¹

In Sweden the right-wing radical milieu consists of approximately 3,000 individuals and can justly be called a social movement. There are several thousand sympathisers, and the movement has developed its own organisational, economic and media infrastructure. It has grown beyond a youth scene, moreover; many of the activists are in their twenties or thirties and have been involved in the movement for ten years or more. Because of its size the movement is not vulnerable; if any of the leaders are imprisoned, new leaders rise up.

The Swedish ex-neo-Nazi Kent Lindhal established the Swedish Exit programme in Stockholm in 1998. The Swedish programme had the same goals as the Norwegian programme but with a somewhat different structure. For example, a large section of the staff itself is from an right-wing radical background. Support to parents is individual, in contrast to the parents' networks in Norway. The Swedish project has also developed a five-phase model based on assistance to alcoholics. This model involves drawing up a "needs profile" and an individual plan with rules.

- *Motivation phase.* The individual is still in the group but is having doubts and contacts the Exit team. The team provides information and offers a contact person who has gone through the process himself.
- *Disengagement phase.* The individual has taken the decision to disengage from the group. This is a chaotic period during which the Exit team helps by talking with him. Sometimes a person has to move or needs financial help. The contact person is always available by telephone and serves as the intermediary with the authorities. The contact person also provides personal support.
- *Settlement phase.* The break is now complete. The individual has a place to live, financial resources and sometimes a job or a course of study. But he is often socially isolated and feels empty and lonely. The contact person tries to establish ties with "normal" life. Group discussions are often useful at this stage.

¹¹ The discussion of the programme in Sweden is based on: National Council for Crime Prevention (brÅ). *English summary. Exit: a follow-up and evaluation of the organisation for people wishing to leave racist and nazi groups.* Stockholm 2001; T. Bjørge & Y. Carlsson, *Early intervention with violent and racist youth groups.* Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs 2005; T. Bjørge, J. van Donselaar & S. Grunenberg, "Exit from right-wing extremist groups: lessons from disengagement programmes in Norway, Sweden and Germany," in: T. Bjørge & J. Horgan (eds.), *Leaving terrorism behind: individual and collective disengagement,* New York & London: Routledge 2008; and K. Warchold, *Konzepte gegen Rechtsextremismus in Norwegen und Schweden.*

- *Reflection phase.* The individual begins to free himself from things from the past such as violence, crime, radical ideology and hatred. Some people experience problems such as anxiety, depression, sleeplessness or alcohol abuse. They are often referred to a therapist. This is the phase in which they abandon their radical and racist ideas.
- *Stabilisation phase.* The individual now has a "normal" life again with work, a course of study and sometimes a family of his own. He is still afraid that the past will ruin his future, and he often experiences feelings of guilt and shame. The Exit programme is now no longer active, but many people maintain contact with their contact person.

The Exit programme generally covers a period of between six and twelve months. The conversations that are held are not attempts to change the disengager's mind ideologically but to strengthen his will to extricate himself from the right-wing radical milieu and to build a normal life. During these conversations, the negative personal consequences of remaining in the right-wing radical movement are examined as well as the possibilities and alternatives that are associated with disengagement. Things have not gone so well for Exit Sweden in recent years. It has become more and more difficult to raise funds, and a number of regional sections of the programme have had to close.

11.2.3 Germany¹²

Germany has been struggling with right-wing radical youth groups for a long time. At the end of 2007 there were about 31,000 right-wing radicals in Germany, around 10,000 of whom are regarded as being prepared to resort to violence (predominantly from skinhead groups).¹³ Consequently Germany has a whole range of programmes for combating and preventing right-wing extremism. Around the year 2000 several different deradicalisation programmes were launched. At the moment there are about fifteen to twenty projects that are aimed at the deradicalisation of right-wing radicals. These programmes differ from each other in terms of target group (key persons, experienced activists, hangers on or sympathisers), methodology and organisational structure. There are projects that operate at the state level and national projects. Grunenberg and Van Donselaar¹⁴ have investigated four of these projects: the national NGO-based "Exit Deutschland" programme, the national government programme of the *Bundesverfassungsschutz*; and two government programmes that operate at the state

¹² The discussion of the programmes in Germany is based on: T. Bjørge, J. van Donselaar & S. Grunenberg, "Exit from right-wing extremist groups: Lessons from disengagement programmes in Norway, Sweden and Germany;" Exit Deutschland. *Letzter Halt: Ausstieg. Wege aus der rechtsextremen Szene*, 2007; S. Grunenberg & J. van Donselaar, "Deradicalisering: lessen uit Duitsland, opties voor Nederland?" (Deradicalisation: lessons from Germany, options for the Netherlands?), in: J. van Donselaar & P. R. Rodrigues (eds.), *Monitor Racisme & Extremisme: zevende rapportage* (Racism & Extremism Monitor: seventh report). Amsterdam: Anne Frank House / Leiden University 2006, pp. 158-178; and B. Rommelspacher, *Der Hass hat uns geeint*.

¹³ <http://www.verfassungsschutz.de/de/arbeitsfelder/af_rechtsextremismus/zahlen_und_fakten.html> (28 July 2008).

¹⁴ S. Grunenberg & J. van Donselaar, "Deradicalisering: lessen uit Duitsland, opties voor Nederland?"

level (Noordrijn-Westfalen and Hessen). The "Exit Deutschland" programme was also studied by Rommelspacher.¹⁵

The Exit programme uses the Swedish five-phase model and draws up a general profile in order to get a better idea of the disengager's views and his reasons for wanting to disengage. The assessment of the disengager's safety is given high priority. The government programmes seem more strict in their approach than the Exit programme: the demands for admission are higher and contracts are drawn up with the disengagers that must be carefully observed. Contact with old friends from the radical right-wing milieu, or a failed attempt to kick the habit, are reason enough to be expelled from such a programme. The Exit programme, on the other hand, is more accessible because it operates independently of the government. For this reason, many disengagers do not see it as part of the "enemy" camp.

An interesting outcome is the relatively low significance which ideological considerations appear to have in the German programmes studied by Grunenbergh and Van Donselaar. Many of those programmes are mainly aimed at the resocialisation of the disengager and not at reflecting on radical right-wing ideology. A break is often regarded successful if the disengager just gets out of bed on time, shows up for work and does not immediately raise fists when someone disagrees with him. The Exit programme is an exception in this regard: its aim is not only to provide the disengager with practical support but also to tackle radical right-wing ways of thinking and to stimulate a democratic mentality. It is not clear, however, to what extent the programme gets around to this in practice (in addition to providing a safe environment and new social contacts). Nor is it clear whether such efforts have been successful.

11.2.4 Discussion of the programmes for right-wing radicals

One striking feature of the Exit approach is its "depoliticised" character: radicalisation is regarded as a psycho-social problem that stems from a weak social background. Aspects of political activism and a radical ideology play a minimal role. This vision of the radical as "social dropout" is particularly dominant in Norway. Here the Exit programme concentrates on getting young people who have come in contact with the radical right-wing milieu back on the right track as soon as possible. The underlying idea is that initially the young people have hardly been shaped ideologically, but seek out the radical right-wing group because of a need for bonding and identity. Once they find themselves in the group, this will gradually shape them ideologically and they will be steamrollered into committing violent crimes. This must be avoided at all costs. In the Norwegian vision, young people who feel attracted to right-wing radicalism must be assisted with the basics such as an education, a place to live, social contacts and activities. These are young people who say they particularly miss friends and who benefit enormously from developing an alternative social network. For this reason, Exit focuses on social help in combination with cooperating with the police. So the Norwegian Exit program mainly responds to the role played by continuance factors and works on breaking through continuance barriers (helping out with practical living conditions). A modest amount of attention is also paid to affective factors (providing another social environment), but no consideration is given to normative factors. This approach appears to work well in Norway. The Exit programme has managed to change the thinking of a large number of

¹⁵ B. Rommelspacher, *Der Hass hat uns geeint*.

young people who were gravitating towards the radical right, and has established a number of successful parents' networks.

In Sweden and Germany, too, the focus is on practical living conditions and affective factors. The German Exit programme is aiming at tackling normative factors as well, but it is unclear to what extent that is actually happening.

The Swedish and German programmes are especially successful with young people who are not yet deeply entrenched in the radical right-wing milieu and with older individuals who no longer have any prospects because of threatening court cases, pressure from the outside and/or alcoholism and drug addiction. But in Sweden, many right-wing radicals, unlike the "social dropouts" in Norway, have political activist backgrounds. Likewise in Germany, right-wing radicalism is not just a problem of marginalised youth but constitutes a serious movement. It seems that in these countries right-wing radicals with a different, more politically motivated profile do not feel drawn to the existing deradicalisation programmes. So the programmes are successful, but only with people with a certain profile.

It can be concluded that the programmes would benefit from paying more attention to normative factors. Research conducted on individual deradicalisation¹⁶ shows that for many dropouts, normative factors play a major role in setting the process of deradicalisation in motion. Doubts about the feasibility of the desired future and changes in the world visions can cause a person to lose interest in the radical movement. By incorporating normative factors into deradicalisation programmes persons who are now out of the picture can also be reached.

11.3 Deradicalisation programmes for Islamic radicals

Now that we have described a number of deradicalisation programmes that are aimed at helping people pull out from right-wing radical groups, we will now turn to a series of deradicalisation programmes that are specifically focused on Islamic forms of radicalisation. These programmes are being conducted in Saudi Arabia, Singapore and Egypt. They are based on a re-education programme that according to reports was first used in Yemen but was discontinued in 2005, according to Montlake,¹⁷ on account of high recidivism. We will also discuss an Indonesian programme.

11.3.1 Saudi Arabia¹⁸

In Saudi Arabia in 2003 a programme was launched that was supposed to make radical ideas less attractive. The programme is aimed at people in prison. Individuals who successfully take part in the programme are given early release. The aim of the programme is to give prisoners a different view of Islam. This is done by means of intensive religious conversations and psychological support. The first conversation consists mainly of listening to the prisoner, and as the contact progresses this develops

¹⁶ F. Demant et al., *Teruggang en uittreding* (Decline and disengagement).

¹⁷ S. Montlake, "U.S. tries rehab for religious extremists. Singapore has reduced its detainee ranks with Islamic reeducation," *Christian Science Monitor*, 9 October 2007. <www.csmonitor.com/1007/1009/p01s04-woap.htm>.

¹⁸ The discussion of the programme in Saudi Arabia is based on C. Boucek, "Extremist reeducation and rehabilitation in Saudi Arabia," *Terrorism Monitor*, 16 August 2007 and J. Burke, "Saudis offer pioneering therapy for ex-jihadists," *The Observer*, 9 March 2008.

into a two-way discussion. Attempts are made to show the prisoner that his ideas and motives are not really Islamic but are based on an incorrect interpretation of Islam. The assumption is that the suspects have been misled and abused, and that the state is going to set them straight. The prisoner is supposed to come to realise that he was enticed to follow an incorrect interpretation of Islam and that the version being supported by the state is the best. The programme gains legitimacy because a number of former militants are taking part in it, and they enjoy a great deal of credibility among the other participants.

Another part consists of a six-week group training programme in which subjects such as *takfir*,¹⁹ jihad and terrorism are dealt with and in which psychological courses are given to promote self-confidence. The programme ends with an examination, and if the prisoner fails to pass it he must repeat the course.

Attention is also paid to the social needs of the prisoner and his family. That may consist of paying an allowance to the family if the prisoner was the breadwinner, or covering school and health care costs. The family is involved in the deradicalisation owing to the fact that they have permission to visit on a regular basis, for example. The socio-economic support is continued after release if the prisoner completed the re-education course satisfactorily and renounced his former way of thinking. He is provided with sufficient financial resources, a job and sometimes even a dowry of about ten thousand euros, enabling him to get married. The socio-economic help is offered as a form of "inclusion," since the government believes that otherwise the help will be offered by radical organisations.

Since the beginning of 2004 more than two thousand prisoners have taken part in the program. Seven hundred have renounced their ideas and have been released. Boucek²⁰ rightly points out that it is difficult to gauge the success of the programme, partly because it has not been running very long. According to the Saudi authorities, of all those who have completed the programme and have been released, only nine have been arrested for violations of security regulations.

11.3.2 Singapore²¹

In 2003, the Religious Rehabilitation Group was established in Singapore. Twenty clergymen participate in this programme on a voluntary basis, carrying out one-on-one conversations with imprisoned radicals in order to correct their vision of Islam. In this programme, too, the main assumption is that the jihadists have been "misled" and that they have to learn the proper interpretation of Islam. The families are given psychological, social and financial support so they do not feel marginalised. When the ex-radicals are released they are given assistance in finding work. Unlike most other programmes in which there is hope for the prisoner even without participation in the

¹⁹ *Takfir* involves declaring other Muslims and people of other religions as nonbelievers. In fact it boils down to an informal shunning of everyone who does not observe the strict laws of a radical version of Islam.

²⁰ C. Boucek, "Extremist reeducation and rehabilitation in Saudi Arabia," *Terrorism Monitor*, 16 August 2007.

²¹ The discussion of the programme in Singapore is based on S. Montlake, "U.S. tries rehab for religious extremists. Singapore has reduced its detainee ranks with Islamic reeducation," *Christian Science Monitor*, 9 October 2007. <www.csmonitor.com/1007/1009/p01s04-woap.htm>. Also see the website of the Religious Rehabilitation Group <www.rrg.sg>.

programme and the programme itself is voluntary, it is not possible to be released in Singapore without taking part in the programme. Moreover, these are prisoners who do not know if or when they are going to be released, so for them there is no light at the end of the tunnel. In all likelihood such compulsion undermines the purpose of the programme, since in a situation like this prisoners will be prone to pretend that their beliefs have been changed in order to get out of jail.

11.3.3 Egypt²²

In Egypt, an approach involving dialogue with the group Gamaat Islamiya has born fruit – so much so that the group foreswore violence in 1997 and even made an attempt to establish a political party. The approach of the Egyptian government is comparable to the programmes described above and stemmed from the insight that the hard, repressive course which previously had been followed was counterproductive. Islamic scholars who registered with the government engaged in debates with the prisoners of the Gamaat Islamiya in order to change their minds about the use of violence. This introduction to other ways of thinking and other insights gradually changed their views, even though they had little else to gain from it. There was no prospect of release, they received no recognition and they were not allowed to talk to people from outside. The leaders have officially foresworn violence. Still, some reserve must be exercised when evaluating success: the Gamaat Islamiya is "still in an inner search stage."²³

11.3.4 Indonesia²⁴

In Indonesia it was the police who set up a deradicalisation programme. The programme is only carried out within the police organisation because the situation in the prisons is so corrupt that it is unsuitable for conducting such a programme.

The programme actually consists of two steps: first deradicalise influential leaders, and through them exercise influence on the radical group (thus from the individual to the collective). The basic assumption of the police programme is that jihadis do not listen to moderate people from outside their own group, but that the debate on the strengths and weaknesses of violent strategies must be carried out within the movement itself. The programme focuses on apprehended members of the Jemaah Islamiya (JI), the largest radical organisation in Indonesia. The police select people from the JI who are in prison. They choose people who have prestige within the movement, who know it well and are willing to lend their assistance. These people then try, in informal discussions, to make other radical prisoners aware of what is good and what is bad about their approach to jihad. Because there remains a major risk that jihadis who change their thinking in prison will join up with their old radical networks (which function as intensive social networks) as soon as they are released, attempts are made to neutralise the networks by stimulating internal discussion.

The prisoners' approach is regarded as a success. Already more than twenty members of the JI and people from other organisations have offered to cooperate. One of the

²² The discussion of the programme in Egypt is based on: C. Goerzig & K. Al-Hashimi, "Change through debate - Egypt's counterterrorism strategy towards the Gamaa Islamia," *Paper for the Sixth Pan-European Conference on International Relations*, Turin, 12-15 September 2007.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ The discussion of the programme in Indonesia is based on: International Crisis Group, "Deradicalisation" and Indonesian prisons. *Asia Report no. 142*, 2007, <www.crisisgroup.org>.

factors that contribute to this success is the friendly treatment by the police. By maintaining a sympathetic attitude, the police refute the jihadis' assumption that the police are un-Islamic; they also hope to plant doubt in their minds concerning other convictions. To a great extent, however, the programme's success depends on economic support, especially after release, which according to the International Crisis Group²⁵ appears to be more important than religious arguments in changing a prisoner's attitude. The programme focuses at least as much on socio-economic factors as it does on ideological factors. It responds to personal needs, which usually are related to the economic situation of the family, communication and attention.

11.3.5 Discussion of the programmes for Islamic radicals

It is striking that in the deradicalisation programmes for Islamic radicals the emphasis is placed on ideology and re-education. The Saudi government even speaks of a "war of ideas" when talking about combating radicalism. The programmes use discussion and education to try to show radicals that their views are based on an incorrect and incomplete interpretation of Islam. The idea behind this approach is that the jihadis are naïve and easily influenced young people with an underdeveloped capacity for reasoning and few communication skills. Their religious knowledge is minimal and they have let themselves be "seduced" into embracing a violent interpretation of Islam by charismatic leaders. The deradicalisation programmes focus on correcting this interpretation.

Such an ideological approach raises a number of questions. First of all, what alternative should be offered when contending with incorrect interpretations of Islam? What is the "correct" Islam, anyway? In Saudi Arabia and Singapore, the programmes try to replace radical Islam with an interpretation of Islam that has been approved by the state. The Indonesian programme makes use of ex-jihadis, whose views are not that far removed from those of the present radicals: they still approve of jihad but argue that the radicals act too rashly. They think the radicals should assess their own strengths and weaknesses, and first win the support of their own Muslim community. By means of this reasoning, many radicals become convinced of the efficacy of abandoning violence, but they do not reject violence in principle.

Second, almost all the projects follow two tracks in which the ideological approach is combined with an approach aimed at improving the person's practical living conditions. The underlying assumption is that someone in a distressing situation will easily be drawn back into the radical circuit. But because of the interweaving of the two tracks within the programmes it is difficult to determine how much of the success is owing to the ideological approach. Do the prisoners become deradicalised because they reject the jihadi ideology or because they and their families are being supported in the effort to build up a new life? This interweaving reinforces the existing criticism that it is impossible to say for sure whether someone has really foresworn his radical ideas. People can easily feign a change of views, a situation that is probably compounded by a system of high rewards such as generous financial support.

In any case, no firmly substantiated claims can be made at this time concerning the success of the programmes. Too little is known about the effectiveness of the re-education programmes described here to say whether they have really been a success

²⁵ Ibid.

or not. This is because they have only been running for a few years and relatively few academic studies on this topic have been published.

11.4 Conclusion

In the interest of possible application in the Netherlands, analysing the experience of deradicalisation among right-wing radicals and Islamic radicals in other countries is a worthwhile exercise. When the programmes for right-wing radicals are compared with those for Islamic radicals, the striking feature in the programmes for right-wing radicals is their emphasis on cancelling out the disadvantages connected with membership in a radical right-wing group. These disadvantages are found mainly in the area of practical living conditions (career, drug addiction, threatening court cases) and on the social plane (dependence on the right-wing radical group). So the programmes focus mainly on continuance and affective factors and attempt to eliminate barriers in those areas by offering social alternatives. They do not focus on the group's ideology. Programmes that target Islamic radicals on the other hand, place their accent on ideology. They use discussion and dialogue in an attempt to transform radical thinking and to help the radical understand that violence is not the right way. They also pay attention to the radical's practical living conditions, mainly in the socio-economic sense. So these programmes mainly focus on normative and continuance factors, but do not deal with the radical's affective involvement in the group.

The two kinds of programmes supplement each other well: each one lacks a factor that is important for disengagement. The programmes for right-wing radicals have much to gain by introducing the normative factor. This would involve entering into a discussion with the right-wing radical about his or her world view, and doing it in a constructive way. The methods applied in the programmes for Islamic radicals can be of help here. An addition like this would make it possible to address even the more politically motivated radicals. The programmes for Islamic radicals too, might profit from an addition: the affective factor. Right now, the matter of bonding with and being dependent on the radical group is barely dealt with, even though this can constitute a major barrier to disengagement. By counselling individuals (in the case of prisoners, after they have served their time) in the search for social alternatives, the bonding with the group can be severed. The Indonesian police programme does focus on affective factors to a degree by stimulating internal ideological discussions, but this is more a method on a collective, rather than an individual level.

A few more general remarks can be made with regard to the content of the programmes. First, it is questionable whether disengagers should be given financial support. As already noted, such a decision can increase the risk of feigned ideological change. But the justice of such treatment is questionable as well. The Saudi government argues that socio-economic assistance is a form of inclusion because otherwise such help would be derived from radical organisations. But where is the fairness of preferential treatment for ex-radicals with regard to other prisoners, and especially with regard to the victims of terrorist attacks?

Second, with an ideological approach – certainly with a religious ideological approach – it is necessary to take a look at the alternative that is offered or that ought to be offered. We saw that in the countries being discussed, the official state Islam serves as the

alternative. But in secular countries like the Netherlands this is a much more difficult question. To what extent can the governments in those countries express a preference for one religious ideological interpretation and oppose another religious ideological interpretation? And how radical or orthodox can the alternative be?

In the discussion of the programmes for Islamic radicals, we saw that radicals are sometimes receptive to people whom they see as credible conversational partners. This credibility has to do with the fact that the conversational partner is seen as "us" and not as the hostile "them." And on the other hand, it also has to do with content-based authority and legitimacy, since the conversational partner is equipped with profound ideological knowledge and is able to argue in a way that appeals to the radical. This insight can be valuable for application in the Netherlands, but it immediately raises questions about who could act as a credible conversational partner. Can the role be played by non-orthodox, perhaps even non-religious persons? Or are the only people who are credible for radicals the ones whose ideas coincide largely with their own, i.e. persons who themselves are relatively radical and orthodox? For some radicals the latter is quite possible the case, which makes the choice of an alternative religious body of thought a complex one. After all, the goal is to offer an alternative body of thought that has as deradicalising an effect as possible.

All in all, the experiences with deradicalisation programmes in other countries provide good entry points for application in the Netherlands, although the organisation of the programme, the alternative being offered and the role of the government must be well thought out. It is essential that the programme be tailor-made, combining general expertise with knowledge of the local situation and the target group. This local knowledge is mainly developed by gaining experience – because establishing a successful deradicalisation programme is ultimately a process of falling down and getting up again, where scholarly insights must be paired with stubborn practical realities.