

ECTC ADVISORY NETWORK CONFERENCE

14-15

MARCH 2023

AUDITORIUM



**CONCEPTUALISING
TERRORISM TODAY:
EXPANDING THREAT
OR WIDENING THE NET?**

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TUESDAY 14 MARCH

08.30	Registration and coffee
09.30	Housekeeping remarks
09.40	Welcome remarks - Jean-Philippe Lecouffe, Deputy Executive Director Operations, Europol

Roundtable discussion

Moderator: Maura Conway

10.00	<p>Conceptualising terrorism today: expanding threat or widening the net?</p> <p>The conference starts with a round table to discuss the current terrorism and violent extremism scenario and set the scene for the subsequent sessions.</p> <p>Participants: Rumyana Grozdanova van Ark, Asser Institute Thomas Renard, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism Moustafa Ayad, Institute for Strategic Dialogue</p>
11.30	Coffee

11.45	<p>Keynote: Anti-government extremism: a new threat? - Tore Bjørgo, University of Oslo</p> <p>In recent years, intelligence and security agencies have identified 'anti-government extremism' as an emerging threat to democracy, political processes, institutions and elected politicians. We have witnessed large mobs storming democratic institutions to overturn elections; plots to murder or kidnap elected politicians or public officials; social movements and groups rejecting the legitimacy of the state; and conspiracy theories claiming that evil cabals are behind the ruling elites. Thus, anti-government extremism finds different expressions in terms of organisational formations, conspiracy theories, collective action and violence and threats against politicians and government</p>
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representatives. This presentation will provide a brief historical overview of anti-government extremism as well as discussing some current manifestations and challenges.

12.45

Lunch break

Panel 1: Post-organisational terrorism and hybrid ideologies

13.45

Societal exclusion, governmental trust and radicalisation: new trends of extremism in the Netherlands and Northern Europe - **Richard McNeil-Willson, Leiden University**

New trends of radicalisation have developed in the Netherlands and Northern Europe, linked to societal exclusion. The rise of an atomised far right, Islamophobic and anti-migrant mobilisations and the spread of conspiracy theories online have emerged as new concerns in recent years, fuelling polarisation and extremism. Extreme Islamic and far-right milieus have also been observed borrowing ideological or tactical elements from each other, or even acting in solidarity against authorities. These movements are drawn together under the common thread of declining trust in government, the media and liberal democracy. This suggests that an effective response must address both the changes in activism by extremist movements – such as the replacement of membership-based, street organisations with loose online communities – as well as acting to challenge the legitimisation of far-right tropes and continued securitisation of Islam within mainstream European politics and society.

School shootings and martyrdom: debating the limits of terrorism - **Leena Malkki, Helsinki University**

During the 2000s, changes in organisational forms have made it virtually impossible to consider terrorism as inherently a group activity. This has raised new questions about how to define and understand terrorism. When mapping violent attacks by lone individuals or small groups, one encounters entire universes of violent acts that remain largely unaccounted for when the focus is on group-based terrorism. It is not clear which of these acts could or should be considered terrorism (or violent extremism) – and what kind of criteria should be used to make that call. Existing definitions of terrorism are only of limited help here. This talk maps the boundaries of terrorism by discussing school shootings and the related subculture. It discusses whether school

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shootings should be considered terrorism and whether it is time to update some of the long-standing conceptions of terrorism and what makes a violent act politically motivated.

Gender inequality and violence in jihadist, far right and male supremacist - Joana Cook, Leiden University

This presentation examines recent cases of terrorist violence by jihadist, far right, and male supremacist actors who share a common, yet underexplored feature – the aim to impose extreme patriarchal political and social orders which are anti-feminist and even misogynistic. It describes the similarities between these actors, and considerations for practitioners seeking to counter them.

15.15

Coffee

Panel 2: Terrorism getting onlife

Moderator: Matteo Cantarello

Onlife radicalisation: understanding the online/offline nexus - Joe Whittaker, Swansea University

15.30

Policy, academia and the media have all repeatedly expressed concern over what has been termed 'online radicalisation'. At the same time, research has articulated that the concept lacks clarity and the extent to which individuals are radicalising online is over-emphasised. Moreover, in many cases, it is no longer possible to discern whether an individual acted 'online' or 'offline' – contemporary technology has inseparably enmeshed the two. This presentation seeks to reset the parameters for this debate: rather than questioning whether individuals radicalise online, one should attempt to understand how an individual's information environment (which includes their online and offline communications, their environment and their personal predispositions) affects their willingness to engage in terrorist activities. It draws from individual case studies to develop this framework.

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Exploring extremists' on/offline practices: Siege accelerationist network building strategies - Ashley Mattheis, Swansea University

Neo-Nazi accelerationist groups, particularly those identifying with 'Siege' culture, seek to use chaos and violence to speed up (accelerate) societal and governmental collapse. These groups have been identified in multiple national contexts as domestic terror threats. Importantly, these groups, while local, utilise digital networking (social and online media) as a framework for developing transnational affiliations and interconnections. The features of such online interactions (e.g. digital modes of engagement and communicative practices) undergird the groups' continued formation as a larger network but remain underexplored. This talk presents research findings showing how Siege culture groups affiliated with the meta-brand of Atomwaffen Division engage online to increase their networks offline despite increased scrutiny and law enforcement disruption in local contexts. Such continued development highlights Siege accelerationism as a digitally networked, transnational culture. It is an organising structure that provides resilience to traditional policy and law enforcement approaches. Addressing this threat requires insight into the on/offline practices that Siege culture groups use to interconnect their now multi-nodal, supranational organisation.

Al-Muntasir: offline effects of an online investigation - Jaime Izco, CNP

In this talk, the team leader of the OSINT group of the al-Muntasir investigation in Spain will present insights into the dismantling of the largest Spanish-language jihadist propaganda network. Open source intelligence techniques that led to the arrest of three people on different continents will be highlighted. The award-winning investigation involved several counter-terrorism investigators during two years, analysing an unprecedented amount of seized digital data.

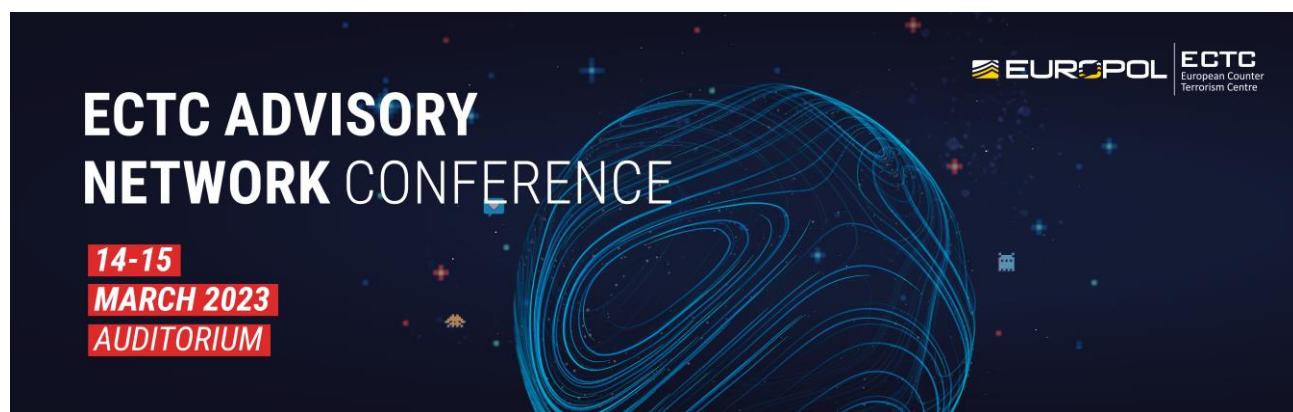
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End of day I

17:30 – 19:30

Reception at Brasserie Berlage - on invitation by VOX-Pol Network of Excellence





WEDNESDAY 15 MARCH

08.30	Registration and coffee
09.30	Keynote: Disinformation and extremism - Carme Colomina Saló, CIDOB
10.30	Coffee

Panel 1: Addressing terrorist and extremist content online: the role of regulation

Moderator: Antonios Samouris

10.45	<p>EU approach: the Terrorist Content Online Regulation - Yolanda Gallego-Casilda Grau, DG HOME, European Commission</p> <p>The continued presence of terrorist content on the web poses serious risks to citizens and to society at large. While not the only factor, the presence of terrorist content online has proven to be a catalyst for the radicalisation of individuals, which can lead to terrorist acts. In addition, terrorists use the internet to spread their messages to intimidate, recruit and facilitate carrying out terrorist attacks. The presentation will focus on the EU Regulation on addressing the dissemination of terrorist content online (the 'TCO Regulation'), which is applicable since June 2022. The regulation sets out clear rules and obligations for hosting service providers offering services in the EU to remove terrorist content within an hour from receiving a removal order from EU Member States' competent authorities. At the same time, it includes strong safeguards to guarantee that freedom of expression and information are fully protected.</p>
	<p>Advancing cross-platform tooling and incident response frameworks in countering terrorism online - Erin Saltman, GIFCT</p> <p>In the last year there have been, and will continue to be, critical advances in cross-platform tooling to counter terrorism and violent extremism online. This includes tools and infrastructure managed by the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism (GIFCT)</p>

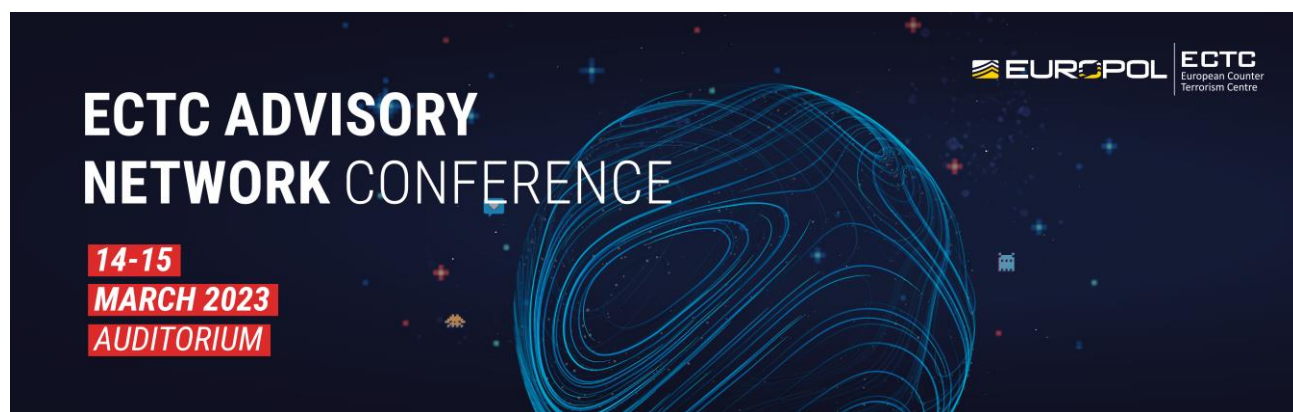
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through the Hash Sharing Database as well as a series of interoperable incident response protocols. This talk will discuss how counterterrorism efforts online have had to evolve with adversarial threats, such as the need to diversify what signals are shared and how 'content' is understood, including livestreaming, URL sharing and attacker manifestos. The discussion will involve a review of where further collaboration between law enforcement, technology companies and global experts is needed.

Moderating borderline content whilst respecting fundamental values - Stuart Macdonald, Swansea University

Since the so-called 'golden age' of the self-declared Islamic State terrorist group on Twitter, much progress has been made in the identification and removal of online terrorist and violent extremist content (TVEC) – such that today the major platforms state that over 95% of TVEC is proactively removed by the platforms themselves before being flagged by Internet Referral Units or users. At the same time, concern has grown about 'borderline' content that deliberately falls just short of violating platforms' terms of service, and so is not liable to be removed, but nonetheless has the propensity to cause harm. This includes extremist content that falls short of inciting violence. Various options have been touted for reducing the visibility of such content, including removing it from search and recommendation algorithms, downranking it, redirecting those who search for it and demonetising it. This presentation will contribute to this discussion by considering the moderation of so-called 'lawful but awful' content, in terms of three sets of values. First, definitional clarity: this is necessary to provide users with fair warning of what content is liable to moderation and to place limits on the discretion of content moderators. Yet, at present, definitions of borderline content are vague and imprecise, and also differ across platforms, resulting in inconsistency and a lack of interoperability. Second, the right to freedom of speech: whilst downranking and removal from search and recommender algorithms should be distinguished from deplatforming – and free speech does not mean free reach – there remains concern that tech companies' policies on borderline content, coupled with governmental efforts at regulation (such as the UK's Online Safety Bill), will have a chilling effect on the speech of some users. Third, transparency and accountability: whilst a number of platforms now publish transparency reports, these focus on TVEC, not borderline content. Moreover, questions remain as to whether the data contained in these reports is sufficient to ensure meaningful oversight.

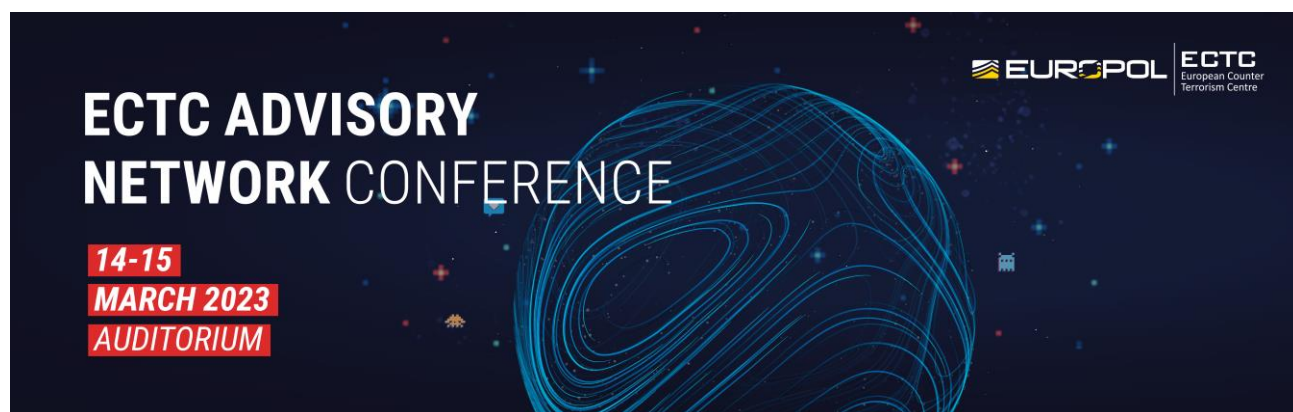


	<p>What are the risks and opportunities for fundamental rights from the EU Digital Services Act (DSA)? - Ben Wagner, TU Delft</p> <p>The EU Digital Services Act (DSA) presents a milestone for fundamental rights online in its attempt to safeguard both freedom of expression online and platform users fundamental rights. How it formalises and standardises platform transparency, data access and trusted flagger mechanisms also has an impact on how states and not just citizens engage with platforms. This talk will look in detail at the DSA and how it reshapes the relationships between platforms, citizens, state actors and fundamental rights.</p>
12.15	Lunch break

Panel 2: Current technologies and trends

Moderator: Lisa Kaati

13.15	<p>Circumvention techniques employed by extremists to remain online - Laurence Bindner, JOS Project</p> <p>Fighting the battle of the ‘weak against the strong’ in asymmetric warfare, extremist groups consider the media as a ‘battlefield’, and sometimes refer to it as a form of combat. They rely on it to threaten or intimidate their enemies; mobilise their followers; amplify their actions; announce their strategy; provide tactical and operational advice; and recruit. It, therefore, is crucial for them to be present online. After social media platforms intervened and took action, these groups had to remain resilient, and this resilience manifested in several capacities. In particular, extremists migrated to more secure and confidential platforms, but also set up a range of evolving tactics to keep a presence on social media and circumvent platforms’ intervention. This talk will explore this resilience and the guerrilla-like tactics that extremists employ to remain online.</p>
	<p>Video gaming and violent extremism: exploring current trends and threats - Claudia Wallner, RUSI</p> <p>Video-gaming is one of the most consistently and fastest growing sectors, with online gaming representing one of the biggest industries globally, reaching an all-time high</p>



	<p>during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, a growing concern within policy, security, and counter-terrorism circles is the increasing intersection between video-gaming and (violent) extremism. From neo-Nazis and far-right groups to the self-declared Islamic State terrorist group, those seeking to instigate hate and violence for their ideological ends are finding new platforms to do so, as traditional social media platforms crack down on their content. Video-games in themselves are not the problem, but there is real and pressing evidence of radicalisation and recruitment through socialisation inside gaming-related spaces. This presentation will explore this intersection, examining the current threat landscape and emerging trends in extremist exploitation of games and gaming spaces online.</p>
14.45	Coffee

Panel 3: Future trends in technology

Moderator: Beatrice Berton

15.00	<p>Deepfakes and extremism - Graham Meikle, University of Westminster</p> <p>Synthetic media are videos, images, audio or other texts that are created or significantly altered using artificial intelligence (AI) technologies. Deepfakes are the most prominent examples so far of synthetic media. They have been used in satirising the powerful; in reimagining histories; in conscripting women into non-consensual pornography; and in resurrecting the dead. This talk will give an overview of some key uses of deepfakes to date, including examples of deepfakes used for: advocacy, puppetry, reputational attacks, fraud, satire, disinformation, alternative histories and reanimating the dead. It will invite the audience to reflect on how each of these uses can be adopted and adapted by extremist political actors.</p>
	<p>Terrorverse: de-centralised metaverses - Ismael Alvarez, EU IRU</p> <p>‘Terrorverse’ is an immersive presentation, in which different possibilities for the abuse of virtual worlds will be showcased. In this interactive talk, the concept of ‘decentralised metaverses’ will be presented, i.e. virtual worlds based on blockchain technologies in which content is spread across the network.</p>

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Extremism @ Web3: analysing far-right extremism on Non-Fungible Tokens across different blockchains - [Louis Jarvers, P20](#)

Non-Fungible Tokens are what comes closest to 'Property on the Internet' as they represent ownership of unique digital items. Containing pictures, videos, animations or audio, most NFTs rank around digital art or Internet humour. But: When filled with extremist content, they can also be abused for propaganda purposes and to finance extremism. To better understand the connection between NFTs and (far-right) extremist content, we collected 7.5k NFTs and their metadata from 11 blockchains. Categorising the NFTs by their title, description, details and visual assessment of the downloaded images/GIFs/videos, we conclude that far-right extremist content is spread via NFTs on different blockchains.

16.30

Closing remarks - [Jean-Philippe Lecouffe](#), Deputy Executive Director Operations, Europol