



Bart Somers (BE/ALDE)

Combatting radicalisation

You began drafting your report immediately after the Paris attacks, and since then, just a few dozen kilometres from your home in Mechelen, 32 people were killed in Brussels. How did you set about the task?

I began with the knowledge that there is no silver bullet to the problem of violent radicalisation. There are three areas identified by experts: prevention, intervention and repression. I have focused, though, on prevention, because that is where local and regional authorities can help most. And it is also the most effective area in which to work; you have to start by looking at root causes.

Is there a guiding principle for prevention efforts?

The starting point are our values. We need to use our values as a bridge to connect with one another. Values such as the rule of law, human rights, and gender equality.

The battle against racism and discrimination has to be seen as a priority. Discrimination – perceived or real – is no excuse for violent radicalisation, but it makes a breeding ground for radicalisation. So we have to embrace and strengthen diversity, which also includes making police forces more diverse.

You sound very liberal, but people want security.

I am not a soft politician. There is no city that invests so much in police as Mechelen. We have a lot of public cameras because I believe that the rule of law needs to be invested in. We need to deal with the grey economies where governments are absent and where criminality rules. A criminal area is a potential recruiting ground for violent extremists. We also know that people are vulnerable when they feel isolated from society. So we need to bind people to society.

You mentioned gender equality. What role does that play in countering violent radicalisation?

We know that more and more women are becoming radicalised. So prevention efforts need to include both genders. I am calling for an emphasis on gender equality because it is a fundamental principle of the European model of society, but I also think that strengthening our young women will bind them more strongly to our society.

How would you assess Mechelen's record?

Mechelen has one of the largest Muslim communities in Belgium, in relative terms, but no one has left for Syria. This is partly because we are investing in the public area, but also because of a close, inclusive social network in our city. We are building a climate of trust. This is long-term work and needs constant care. As we say in Dutch, trust arrives on foot, and rides away on a horse. ■



Juan Vicente Herrera Campo (ES/EPP)

EU response to demographic challenges is limited and poorly developed

Demographic change is one of the biggest challenges facing European regions and cities. Projections for 2060 point to an ageing Europe with big demographic disparities among territories. These issues will have a major economic, social, budgetary and environmental impact and they will be felt at all levels of government.

European regions and cities have reacted by adopting measures within the framework of their competences and participating in strategies for horizontal cooperation. Such a big change cannot be tackled without vertical cooperation initiatives, which enhance local and regional actions through national and supranational interventions.

The present EU response to the demographic challenges is partial and poorly developed. Furthermore, it is almost exclusively focused on ageing. Many policies that could contribute to helping us face these problems lack specific approaches. If we focus on cohesion policy, Articles 174 and 175 have not been sufficiently developed and implemented, and