



## **FUTURE – From Understanding To Countering Religious Extremism**

### **Summary of the proposal**

- Brief write up of the key points.
- Background and rationale of the proposal.
- Objectives, activities, main outputs, outcomes and impact including indicators of achievement.

#### **– Brief write up of the key points**

The overall aim of the proposed project is to develop a multi-disciplinary approach to prevent and counter religious-based radicalisation and extremism.

Starting from the comprehension of transitional processes of radicalisation, the FUTURE project (From Understanding To Countering Religious Extremism) promotes a new approach to the issues related to religion-inspired terrorism, fostering counter-narrative and encouraging integration.

The proposal aims to activate a 42-hour teaching Module which increases knowledge of the legal tools and good practices to prevent violent radicalisation in particular in prisons and on the Internet, taking into account the principles and values of EU in this field: democracy, human rights and freedoms, equality and rule of law.

#### **– Background/rationale**

In recent years the documents on radicalisation and prevention of religious extremism have been multiplied. The strategy adopted by the EU Council in 2005 focuses on 4 pillars: prevent, protect, pursue and respond (<https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/fight-against-terrorism/eu-strategy/>).

In 2011, the European Commission established the European Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN), which aims to help member states to create de-radicalisation programs, promote dialogue and cooperation with civil society.

The European Parliament Resolution of 25 November 2015 on the prevention of radicalisation dedicates the second point to prevention in prisons, the third to radicalisation on the Internet and the fourth to the importance of education in prevent extremism and promote social inclusion. To this end, it urges the establishment of academic courses aimed at strengthening comprehension and tolerance and at teaching the values of the Union, such as the respect of fundamental rights.

According to this call, the project will strengthen the belief that the understanding and the exercise of these rights can represent an essential resource to promote integration and fight against radicalisation. In particular, FUTURE focuses on religious freedom as an indispensable tool in a comprehensive strategy against jihadist extremism (as affirmed by the Special Rapporteur on freedom of religion and belief of United Nations in his Report published in January 2017). See also "Religion and Security-Building in the OSCE Context. Involving Religious Leaders and Congregations in Joint Efforts" ([http://osce-network.net/file-OSCE-Network/Publications/Religion\\_and\\_Security-Building\\_in\\_the\\_OSCE\\_Context\\_final.pdf](http://osce-network.net/file-OSCE-Network/Publications/Religion_and_Security-Building_in_the_OSCE_Context_final.pdf)).

#### **– Objectives, activities**

Within the University of Milan there isn't a course that addresses the issue of religious fundamentalism by focusing on the counter-narrative strategies necessary to prevent and deradicalise these processes. The different skills possessed by the professors of the teaching staff, all involved in different ways in the analysis

and management of phenomena generated by religious and cultural diversity, offer the necessary tools to promote counter-narrative and to encourage integration taking into account the principles and values of EU.

This module is innovative also because it will enhance cooperation between different actors involved in understanding and countering radicalisation: prison and police authorities, cybercrime experts, lawyers, judges and leaders of religious communities. The staff indeed is already committed to provide training courses addressed to prison administration, public security personnel and teachers in the framework of PriMed (Prevention and Interaction in the Trans-Mediterranean Space) and Simurgh (Understanding and managing religious diversity in prisons) projects. PriMed is a national project financed by MIUR – Ministero dell'Istruzione, dell'Università e della Ricerca; Simurgh is a local project financed by a bank (Cariplo).

– **Main outputs, outcomes and impact including indicators of achievement**

Firstly, students will be introduced to the topic and will be able to discuss it. Secondly, professionals and civil society are expected to benefit from the project results either by their participation in the planned events (e.g. roundtables), by visiting the website [www.olir.it](http://www.olir.it), and by reading and discussing the papers.

The results of the project, in line with the performance indicators and the expected impact, are the achievement of the number of students (minimum 150: see F.2.1.) and of participants in planned events (minimum 180 for the roundtables, 100 for the final event: see F.2.4).

The most relevant documents will be posted on an open access well-known website focused on religious freedom directed by Prof. Daniela Milani ([www.olir.it](http://www.olir.it)) which will contain a dedicated section for this project. Students will be invited to develop opinions or arguments on specific issues and the best ones will be published on this website in order to initiate a debate open to civil society.

Such methodology allows students to have easy access to resources and to ensure dissemination of the project beyond university classrooms, thus raising awareness on one of the most urgent problems currently questioning societies across Europe.

## Methodology

The teaching activity – prepared and supported by an in-depth research activity - consists in the introduction of a new course to the law school programmes. It is structured in 42 hours (6 credits) of lectures.

It will be organized in 4 hours per week scheduled in the second semester of each academic year. Classes will be taught by the Module Leader, Professor Milani, teacher of Canon Law, Religious Pluralism and Rights Localism. Moreover, 24 hours a year will be taught by a team of experts: professors, researchers and lecturers who, as attested by CVs and skills, guarantee a multidisciplinary teaching on the subject of the course. Some lectures will be held by staff members with the cooperation of external experts, such as prison and police authorities, cybercrime experts, lawyers, judges, public authorities, local authorities, and leaders of religious communities.

The present proposal represents, indeed, an innovative teaching method within a law school, traditionally known for very specialized courses.

Students will be required to actively participate in all activities proposed, to analyze practical cases in teams and to prepare short texts presenting the results of their activities. Cases will be discussed during the classes and with experts in the final roundtable specifically focused on the key issues addressed. The aim is not only to provide students with appropriate knowledge of the field, but also to provide them with the tools to discern and deal with legal issues from a practical point of view.

In addition to students and researchers, policy-makers and representatives of civil society, will be invited to the final roundtables. Creating synergies between academics and civil society is one of the main outcomes the course aims at achieving.

The most relevant documents will be posted on a well-known public website focused on religious freedom ([www.olir.it](http://www.olir.it)) in a dedicated section for the project. Students will be invited to draw up opinions or arguments on specific issues and the best results will be published on this website in order to initiate a debate open to civil society. A link to such pages will also be available on the university course website.

To sum up, the methodology adopted aims at increasing interest in a topic not usually linked to EU studies, thus raising awareness on one of the most serious issues European democracies have to deal with, building a bridge between the university and civil society, as well as provoking a public debate.