[**Albanian recipe**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1697290/albanian-recipe)

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ALTHOUGH geographically Albania is a small country, its commitment to the fight against violent extremism and radicalisation carries significance for its neighbourhood.

Albania is the 18th smallest country in Europe, sharing borders with Montenegro, Greece, North Macedonia and Kosovo. Spread over 28,748 square kilometres, it is a little larger than erstwhile Fata. It is inhabited by Albanian (82 per cent), Greek, Macedonian, Montenegrin, Serb, Roma, Egyptian and Bosnian ethnic groups.

To keep Albania and its neighbourhood free of extremism and terrorism, the country has signed and ratified all United Nations anti-terrorism conventions and protocols relating to terrorism.

In 2014, Albania adopted a National Security Strategy which outlined constitutional obligations to guarantee national security and strengthen fundamental freedoms, human rights and the rule of law. Albania focused on improving its legislative framework to criminalise all forms of violent extremism as well as the recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters. Building the capacity and expertise of law enforcement agencies was marked as another priority area.

Here’s how Albania countered extremism.

The Albanian plan was based on the promotion of the engagement of state institutions with local communities, religious representatives and other stakeholders to identify vulnerable groups that are or may be targeted by violent extremism.

To counter radicalisation, a package of social, political, legal, educational and economic programmes was recommended. Many countries fail to define violent extremism (VE). Albania sought clarity by defining it as, “the use of violence to pursue political goals”.

In the age of globalisation, encouragement of critical thinking, civic participation and promotion of tolerance is not possible without education. In the Albanian plan, the school was described as a community centre. The initiative sought to encourage partnerships between schools, families and the community. The concept had the potential to respond to the threat of violent extremism by offering counselling services through schools, which would also act as focal points in designing preventive programmes and reaching hotspots. Teachers were made important front-line workers to serve as liaisons with communities and diagnose and react to signs of radicalisation.

The strength of the Albanian plan was its bottom-up approach, through which communities would serve as focal points for formulation and implementation of policies. To this end, communities were empowered to develop partnerships with government departments, media, the business community and CSOs.

Building community resilience is not possible without community empowerment, and that is not possible without community policing. In 2007, Albania introduced a seven-year CP strategy based on a proactive and collaborative problem-solving approach.

Reducing the impact of propaganda and discouraging recruitment by extremists through social media was another priority area. In developing societies, communication barriers often affect the implementation of plans. Thus, the engagement of bureaucracy, academia, media, social media companies, civil society and the clergy is inevitable. The Albanian plan attached great importance to communication with the public.

The Albanian plan also identified the need for the promotion of local research, as extremism cannot be tackled in an effective manner without developing knowledge of and expertise on CVE. A combination of local research and international best practices may be an effective recipe.

Since extremism does not know geographical frontiers, countering VE requires partn­e­rships at international and regional levels. The development of such partnerships is one of the top priorities of Albanian policy.

A few developing countries have developed plans to counter extremism, but evaluation of implementation and identification of gaps has usually been found to be missing. Albania intends to periodically evaluate CVE policies and apply and share lessons learnt.

In developing societies, financial constraints mar implementation of plans. Even engagement of volunteers requires funding. States which have CVE plans often ignore funding and, consequently, have found their relevant departments burdened further with responsibilities. The Albanian plan tried to address this issue and highlighted the need for exploring funding options, including the possibility of seeking help from international donors.

Kinetic measures may be effective in defeating terrorists, but countering extremism requires more inclusive approaches, including deradicalisation and reintegration. Extremism is a cancer which infects followers of different religions, cultures and ethnicities. However, it is a curable cancer. A living state which is protective and humane can act as a protective shield between extremists and innocent citizens.

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*Published in Dawn, June 29th, 2022*