



Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst
German Academic Exchange Service



The EU, Civil Society and Local Ownership in Kyrgyzstan: Evidence from the Field of Preventing Violent Extremism (PVE)

Chiara Pierobon, PhD



Volkswagen**Stiftung**

CASE-STUDY: Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP) in Kyrgyzstan

- ✓ Replacing Instrument for Stability (IfS)
- ✓ **2014-2020: EUR 2,3 billion**
- ✓ 3 types of assistance
 - **Article 3:** response to situations of crisis or emerging crisis to prevent conflict (short-term response)
 - **Article 4:** conflict prevention, peace-building and crisis preparedness (long-term)
 - **Article 5:** addressing global and transregional threats and emerging threats (long-term)

KYRGYZSTAN

2017 - 2022:

- ✓ **9 projects** (€ 12,748,100)
- ✓ **3 projects STRIVE**

CASE-STUDY: IcSP and its program „Strengthening Resilience to Violence and Extremism” (STRIVE) in Kyrgyzstan

- Implemented by Hedayah Center: €5 million for supporting local partners in designing, developing, and implementing initiatives against radicalization and recruitment to terrorism
- Four main types of activity:
 - 1) capacity building
 - 2) civil society empowerment
 - 3) media professionalization
 - 4) research

“working with local communities to create conditions conducive to development and resilience towards violent extremism”

Preventing Violent Extremism: the international framework

UN PLAN OF ACTION TO PREVENT VIOLENT EXTREMISM (2016)

- PVE as global priority
- **systematic preventive measures** which directly address the **drivers** of violent extremism
- Importance of education and the promotion of tolerance, „respect for life“, „practice of non-violence, moderation, dialogue and cooperation“



- ✓ Between 2016 and 2020: 35+ projects conducted (€ 42 million)
- ✓ Projects implemented with the help of CSOs

CASE-STUDY II: IcSP and STRIVE in Kyrgyzstan

Strategy “EU and Central Asia: New Opportunities for a Strong Partnership”

- prevention of VE and radicalization and in addressing the issue of returning terrorist fighters are priorities
- “exchange of good practice on the prevention of violent extremism, including research on the drivers of violent extremism, preventive measures and counter-messaging”
- “to strengthen the resilience of the local communities towards violent extremism (...) in line with the *UN Action Plan on Preventing Violent Extremism*”
- “whole-of-society approach” and civil society seen as better placed to address underlying conditions conducive to terrorism and VE through consistent outreach to vulnerable population

CASE-STUDY II: IcSP and STRIVE in Kyrgyzstan

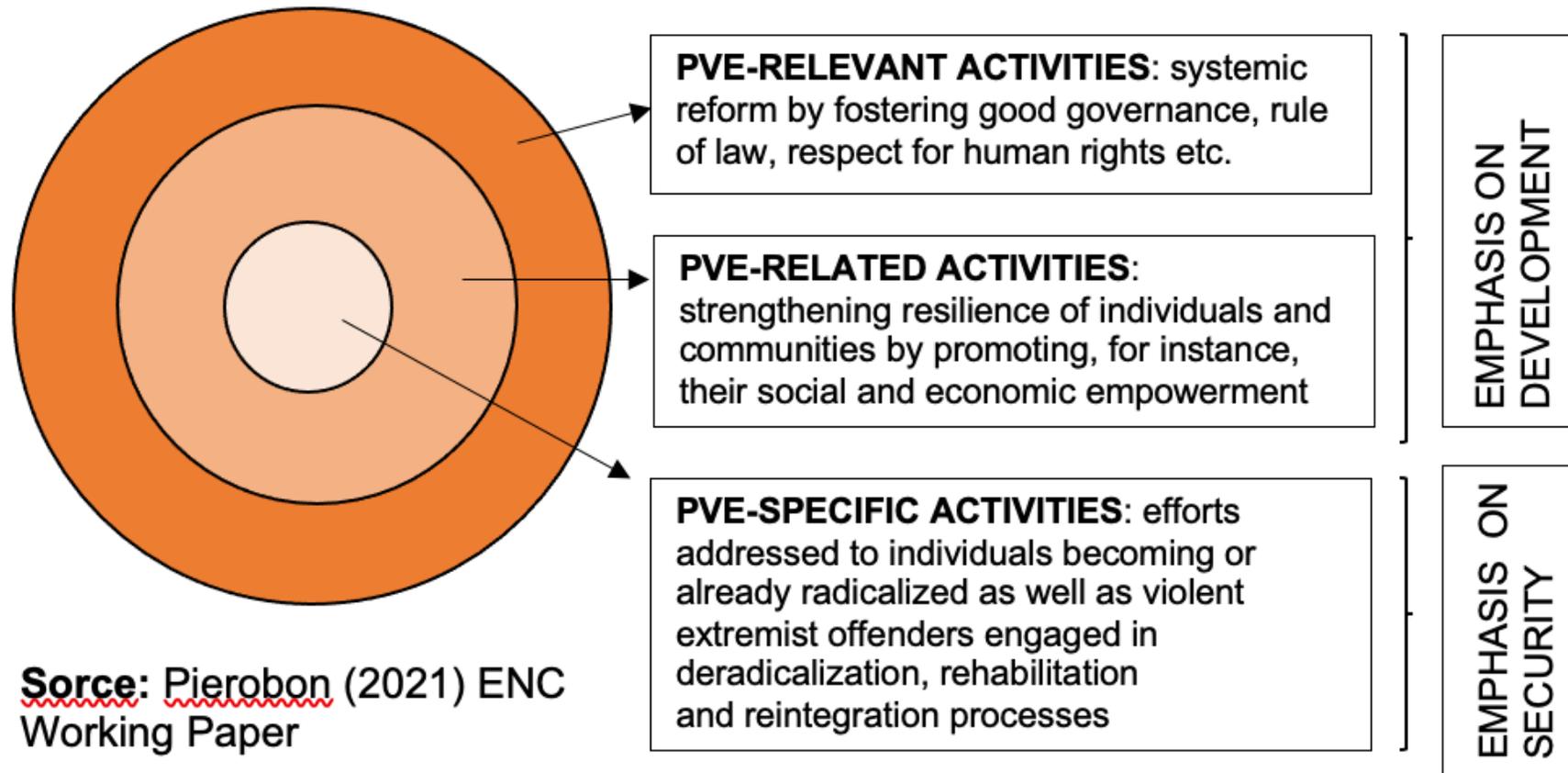


Source: Chiara Pierobon (2021) “EU efforts to prevent violent extremism (PVE) by engaging civil society in Kyrgyzstan”, *Central Asian Affairs*, 8(2), 150-174

<p>(1) Developing and delivering capacity-building seminars and trainings</p>	<p>(2) Establishing mechanisms of dialogue, consultation and advocacy</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - capacity-building for youth, women and local CSOs on gender, conflict sensitivity and mediation, and on religious and media literacy - developing and testing new PVE training programs and materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Establishment of dialogue platforms through which local communities could monitor work of local authorities and keep them accountable - Establishment of dialogue platforms at national level to promote dialogue between different religious groups and leaders 	
<p>(3) Conducting research and research-capacity building</p>	<p>(4) Producing and circulating counter-narratives and alternative narratives</p>	<p>(5) Subgranting smaller-scale and/or community-level projects</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - civic identity in Kyrgyzstan and the role of religion - role of religious leaders at local and community level - growing Islamophobia in Bishkek - factors and trends characterizing women radicalization - judicial practices in cases related to extremism and terrorism - role of CSOs in CVE <p>→ Participatory approach</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - PVE specific counter-narratives and alternative narratives were produced and circulated online 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - gender equality - youth participation in local decision-making processes - legal aid for vulnerable communities

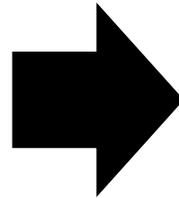
EU's PVE engagement through civil society

Figure 1 – CSO engagement in PVE: PVE-specific, -related and -relevant activities



Processes of Reappropriation

“Idea-recipient’s adjustment to the shape and content (or both) of foreign ideas to make them more congruent with the recipient’s prior beliefs and practices” (Acharya 2004, 245)



“Development projects travelling down the length of a chain of implementing organizations that, through interaction and practices of reappropriation, contribute to translating these projects in ways that fit their objectives and categories at different levels”

Pierobon, C (2021) European Union, civil society and local ownership in Kyrgyzstan:, Central Asian Survey, DOI: 10.1080/02634937.2021.1905608)

Processes of Reappropriation

ADAPTATION

“external norms are reconstructed to fit with local beliefs and practices” (Acharya 2004, 251).

REINTERPRETATION

“local actors borrow and frame external norms in ways that make them relevant for the local audience but that can render them significantly different from their original meanings” (Acharya 2004, 251).

CONTESTATION

“local actors question the utility and applicability of new norms, ideas and paradigms, fearing that the latter might undermine existing beliefs and practices” (Acharya 2004, 251)

Processes of ADAPTATION

“They [Hedayah staff] actually provided us with capacity-building in PVE and CVE, and explained to us what it is [...] and they were very supportive in sharing knowledge. [...] They developed the tools and shared them, taught us, and they sent us to other trainings (...) They were very supportive of our, let’s say, creativity of doing what we can do best. We were given freedom in deciding what to do, but it was always agreed with them. They always asked us, ‘What do you think is better?’ They did not impose anything by saying, ‘You should do it like that’. They asked, ‘Could you explain to us?’ And so we were explaining and they accepted it”

(Interview conducted in Bishkek on 8. April 2019)

Processes of REINTERPRETATION

“We decided to apply for the project because we analysed the situation in Kyrgyzstan, studied many different documents, made enquiries and talked to people. And we recognized that Islamization is progressing in Kyrgyzstan, not only in the southern regions, as was the case before, but also in northern parts of the country. The decision to apply was also related to the results of our previous projects.” (Interview conducted in Bishkek on 26. March 2019)

“We are a peacebuilding and conflict prevention organization. All our activities are focused on applying different tools and instruments in order to prevent violent or non-peaceful conflict resolution. [...] Through the project, we’re not really targeting radicalization and terrorism, but contributing to development of an environment through which radicalization can be prevented, by applying different sort of peacebuilding instruments.” (Interview conducted in Bishkek on 18. March 2019)

Processes of CONTESTATION

“As an organization, we’re quite critical of PVE and CVE, and we call them CPVE, because, essentially, they’re the same on the ground. And what we’re doing through this project, I believe, is not preventing violent extremism. I don’t see it that way. (...) “Some organizations are changing and are actually doing a lot of work on these issues [PVE] and are displacing the focus on a range of fundamental issues, or they are working in fields where they used to work, be it democracy or education. But they have a violent extremism lens and they’re trying to justify this by saying, ‘Oh, look at all those results we’ve had!’ And this reinforces the whole cycle, and then people [donors] want to invest more money in this field.”

Interview conducted in Bishkek on 25. March 2019)

Processes of Reappropriation

STRONG AGENCY of Kyrgyz civil society

local environmental and youth-oriented NGOs use donor-created spaces for activities that were moulded to the target groups' specificities and needs rather than to the donors' priorities, even diverging from the purposes originally stated in their applications for funding (Petric 2005; Kirmse, 2008)

“work in ways they considered appropriate” and feel “fully justified in pursuing training and activities in a way that realized the organizations' goals” (Faux de la Croix 2013, 224)

“use the available resources to realize what they [saw] as their missions” and see “one of their roles to be translating their activities into a language that is acceptable to donors” (Paasiaro 2009, 63)

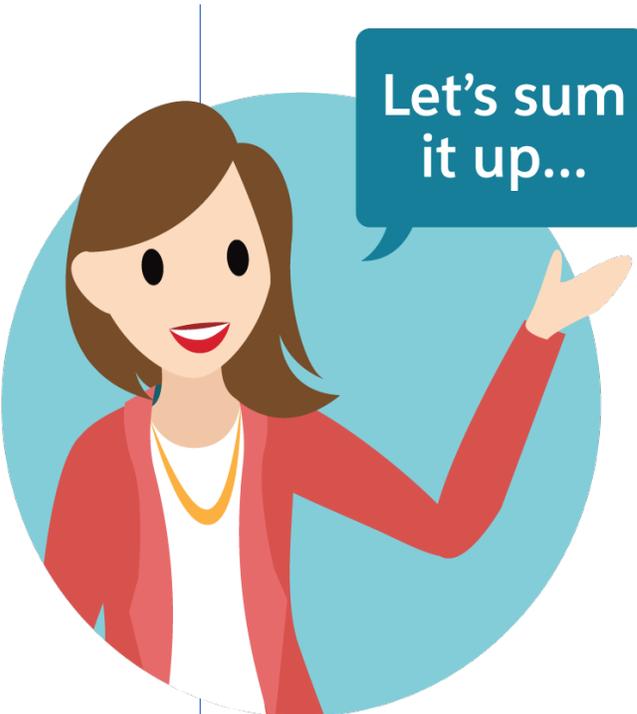
STRATEGIC AMBIGUITY

international donors “build consensus and operational support from a diversity of partners and implementing partners to interpret and re-case objectives according to self-interests” (Thiessen, 2019)



1. CONTRIBUTION OF CIVIL SOCIETY TO PVE

- ✓ Through PVE-specific, PVE-related and PVE-relevant activities
- ✓ Through 5 different functions:
 1. Developing and delivering **capacity-building seminars and trainings**
 2. Establishing mechanisms of **dialogue, consultation and advocacy**
 3. Conducting **research** and research-capacity building
 4. Producing and circulating **counter-narratives and alternative narratives**
 5. Sub-granting smaller-scale and/or **community-level projects**



Let's sum
it up...

2.1. PROCESSES OF ADAPTATION, REINTERPRETATION & CONTESTATION

- ✓ EU-funded civil society exercises ownership & further realizes its potential
- ✓ If undisclosed, perpetuation of inappropriate interventions
 - **Example 1:** watered-down peace-building activities too unspecific to help radicalizing/radicalized individuals and not relevant for the rest of the community
 - **Example 2:** PVE fatigue in target communities at risk (cross-border areas): capacity-building activities for increasing cognitive resilience BUT no schools, no factories, no streets, no potable & irrigation water etc.



2.2. PROCESSES OF ADAPTATION, REINTERPRETATION & CONTESTATION

- Same CSOs receiving different EU funding (EIDHR, CSO/LA, IcSP):
 - ✓ Reappropriation mechanisms as functional and necessary to
 - facilitate EU's assistance to civil society
 - cope with "redundant, overlapping and detached from realities on the ground" international donor agenda
 - From *ownership* to *local ownership*:
 - CSOs as intermediaries to **bridge aid-givers / aid-receivers**
 - Need of **open dialogue / evaluation**
 - Need of spaces for local communities and "**real**" people to make their **voices** heard and articulate "**good life**"