

ARENAS

Analysis of and Responses to Extremist Narratives

Julien Longhi, Professor of Discourse Analysis and Digital Humanities, Cergy Paris Université

The ARENAS project looks at extremist narratives that affect political and social life in Europe. It examines the nature of these narratives and seeks to understand the discourses they impact, particularly about science, gender, and the nation. By understanding how these narratives work, ARENAS will empower people to resist them. To foster a spirit of people living together in harmony across Europe, policy recommendations will be made as to how to prevent such narratives from taking hold in the future.

Funded by the EU Horizon Programme (2021-2027), ARENAS is coordinated by Julien Longhi and his team at CY Cergy Paris Université, France. It brings together a multidisciplinary consortium of nine Universities, an NGO, two SMEs as well as three associated impact partners comprised of an International Association, a National Association and an NGO.



INNOVATIVE ASPECTS

ARENAS fosters interdisciplinary collaboration across specific fields such as law, journalism, history, linguistics, semiotics, secondary education, and policymaking as well as among partners and stakeholders. We have associated partners who assist in content provision and collaboration with educators. For instance, we are hosting a series of conferences with a network called School Beyond Borders, engaging high schools across approximately 10 European countries. This provides educational and institutional propositions, helping to anticipate future challenges in terms of the construction and circulation of extremist narratives, particularly among young people, and professions oriented towards the processing or production of information.

WINNING ELEMENTS

We used a national funding scheme for networking, enabling us to convene potential partners, foster relationships, and explore collaboration opportunities. Our approach included thorough preparation, spanning a 10-month period, during which we utilized all resources made available by both the university and the National Contact Points (NCPs).

CHALLENGES

One of the main challenges we faced was the size of the consortium, which comprised 12 partners from 9 different countries. Coordinating and organising such a diverse group presented logistical hurdles, particularly since our interactions were initially limited to Zoom meetings. Managing communication among a large group of people with varying backgrounds and preferences proved to be challenging. Another challenge we encountered was in selecting project topics due to budget constraints. With limited funds, we had to prioritise certain areas and make tough decisions about which topics to pursue. However, this constraint also forced us to focus on specific themes, which ultimately enhanced the quality and visibility of our proposal.

Ensuring that all partners were aligned and committed to the chosen topics was crucial, as it required their active participation and dedication to the project. Keeping everyone engaged and motivated amidst competing priorities was essential, as partners could have chosen to pursue other endeavours instead. Overall, managing communication and ensuring alignment on project topics were the key challenges we faced during the project.

LESSONS LEARNED

Our experience taught us the importance of early preparation, with a lead time of at least 10 months before submitting the proposal. Additionally, we recognised the value of adopting an interdisciplinary approach. Specifically, we learned the significance of selecting countries that could serve as pertinent case studies. In our case, Hungary emerged as a particularly relevant example.

PROJECT'S IMPACT

Collaboration with journalists, lawyers, state administration, conflict mediators, and social media platforms is crucial for refining our understanding of extremist narratives and their effects. Currently, efforts are focused on refining the definition of extremist narratives and developing tools to analyse data. This includes:

- (a)** multi-level policy recommendations to help counter extremist narratives, both at the institutional and political level, and at the level of associations and citizens,
- (b)** providing educational and institutional propositions, to anticipate future challenges in terms of the construction and circulation of extremist narratives, particularly among young people, and professions oriented towards the processing or production of information,
- (c)** defining remediation actions for individuals and groups affected by extremist narratives
- (d)** measuring and mapping the spread of extremist narratives, particularly in the media and social media, and providing actors in these fields with the means to grasp their impact and the issues at stake for information.

NCPs ASSISTANCE

The National Contact Point (NCP) provided us with a good evaluation and offered valuable advice tailored to our consortium and the objectives outlined in our proposal. They suggested that we pursue a specific call related to democracy and extremism, which they believed aligned well with our project's and research focus. Initially, during a call, they clarified how our project could better fit within the European Union's framework, prompting us to reconsider our approach and switch calls accordingly. This decision not only improved our alignment but also meant that we would have six whole months to prepare for the alternative call.

The support from the NCP was crucial, as it not only provided financial assistance for networking, but also offered guidance, training, and other resources essential for our proposal's success. Thus, their support proved invaluable, in securing funding for our project. Without their support, navigating the application process would have been significantly challenging, particularly for first-time coordinating applicants like us.

“

Our experience taught us the importance of early preparation, with a lead time of at least 10 months before submitting the proposal.

TIPS for proposal preparation

- Start the preparation process well in advance to ensure a successful application. Initial funding can provide motivation and facilitate early decision-making, such as selecting potential partners and laying the foundation for the proposal.
- Begin with smaller tasks, like filling out initial application forms, to build confidence and familiarity with administrative processes.
- Collaborate with partners who share a common goal and vision, fostering unity and purpose even in the face of disagreements.
- Success relies on effective teamwork and collective responsibility towards achieving the project's goals.
- Involve experts from diverse disciplines and partners from different countries to enhance the project's scope and impact.
- Ensure coherence and alignment across partners while streamlining the preparation process to maximize efficiency without sacrificing thoroughness.