

analys **NORDEN**

Political extremism

– a threat to the open Nordic societies?



We are used to experiencing political violence from a distance as an expression of social interaction far-removed from Nordic traditions. However, in recent years, political extremism is increasingly coming to expression in the Nordic countries too – most recently and worst in the tragedy in Norway in the summer of 2011.

This issue of Analys Norden discusses this development and the possible consequences for the open Nordic societies.

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New threats

Radical Islamics are still the biggest terror threat against Denmark. But after the tragedy in Norway there has been increased focus on political radicalism – on both the right and the left.

By Thomas Larsen

The cartoonist Knud Westergaard was attacked in his home while he was looking after his grandchild. The assailant broke down the front door with an axe but the cartoonist managed to barricade himself in a safety room.

Terrorists have planned attacks against Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten and have had plans to gun down as many employees as possible, but each time the intelligence service has uncovered the activities.

The Danish prime minister, who could previously move freely about on the street, is today tightly marked by specially trained police officers and the head of government's home is now under 24 hour surveillance.

In short, although it is not commonplace to hear about terrorists who plan attacks, most Danes are aware that their country has become a terrorist target.

Most people reacted with disbelief when it became clear that the attacker was a blond Norwegian named Anders

Participation in the wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and most recently Libya, along with the cartoons of the prophet Muhammad in Morgenavisen Jyllands-Posten, has put Denmark in the firing line when it comes to Islamic terror.

Could the same thing happen here? When the first scanty details of the bomb explosions in Oslo appeared the reaction from the Danish experts was

that it must be an attack by Islamic terror groups.

Most people reacted with disbelief when it became clear that the attacker was a blond Norwegian named Anders. Few could understand the thinking of a

young Norwegian who hated immigrants so intensely and considered his elected representatives to be so treasonable – because they had allowed immigration – that he was prepared to bomb government buildings and gun down dozens of innocent young people. With one blow everyone's eyes were opened to right-wing extremism, fed by deep nationalistic and Islam-critical attitudes.

In Denmark it made the media ask the question: Could the same thing happen here? And in the same breath the reporters asked if the authorities, after a decade of Islamic terror, had underestimated the threat from right-wing extremism?

Increased focus

The answers are not clear, but in Denmark the threat from Islamic terror movements is still assessed to be the greatest, especially because of the cartoon affair, and that threat has led to a significant build-up of intelligence services.

When it comes to right-wing extremism, many refer to the assessments from Interpol who warn that the extreme right are becoming increasingly active and professional when it comes to producing online propaganda with xenophobic and anti-Semitic content.

“Although the overall threat from right-wing extremists is thought to be decreasing, and the number of criminal



cases against right-wing extremists is low, their professionalism in both propaganda and organisation shows that right-wing extremist groups have the will to grow and spread their ideologies and therefore still pose a threat to EU member states,” was the telling statement in an analysis from Europol.

For the same reasons the intelligence service has already been monitoring the extreme right for years and there is no doubt that the attacks in Norway will sharpen awareness of the service. In the days after the attacks in Norway PET’s chief executive Jakob Scharf made it clear that PET had intensified its surveillance of relevant milieus to prevent activities that could develop into threats

again national security. The Danish media quickly revealed that there was some truth in that.

First a case emerged of a 43-year-old right-wing radical man who stored in his home chemicals that could be used to manufacture bombs. Newspapers disclosed that Russian neo-Nazis had made contact with right-wing extremists in the National Front Denmark, and that Danish nationalists had received weapon training with right-wing radicals in Russia.

This development is known to PET, which in its latest annual report has described how parts of the right-wing extremist milieu are working to establish

contact with violent extremist milieus abroad.

Who is responsible?

Apart from the fact that the tragedy in Norway threw light on new threats, the debate focused mainly on the extent to which parties that have in particular had immigration policies on their agenda have contributed to creating a climate that incites men like Anders Breivik.

Here critics especially accused politicians from the Danish People’s Party (DF) of making hateful remarks about foreigners, and several people suggest that DF indirectly was responsible for inspiring political violence among radicalised right-wing fanatics.

The leader of the Danish People’s Party, Pia Kjaersgaard, categorically rejected the criticism. Instead, she lashed out at the critics for making a false analysis. She cautioned against pouring

called for moderation in the debate on immigration.

“Denmark is a free and open society, and a mass murderer is not going to change that. That is exactly what will

In a sensational case five young men were charged under the terrorism act in conjunction with carrying out or planning arson attacks on everything from fur companies to political institutions and the police

cold water on a debate which openly discusses the negative consequences of immigration, and she put massive distance between herself and the leader of the Norwegian Progress Party, Siv Jensen, who, after the terrorist attacks,

happen if the Norwegian police begin to search their consciences despite the fact that there is only one person – the mass murderer – who can be blamed,” said Pia Kjaersgaard.

For the same reason she turned against the message in a feature article by the parish priest Sørine Gotfredsen, who suggested using the tragedy in Norway to understand the danger of a multicultural society.

“I absolutely do not agree. I do not believe that one should give in to a mass murderer to the extent that you try to understand why he has done this”, said Kjaersgaard.

The left-wing on trial

Since the tragic attacks against Norway the debate has taken a new and surprising twist in Denmark.

In a sensational case five young men were charged under the terrorism act in conjunction with carrying out or planning arson attacks on everything from fur companies to political institutions and the police. The case laid bare a new uncompromising and violent left-wing extremism.

In connection with the Danish general election on 15 September, in which the left-wing party the Red-Green Alliance had a fantastic result, there was a renewed focus on left-wing radicalism. Several media zoomed in on the Red-Green Alliance’s relationship with the extreme left-wing. Jyllands-Posten described how several of the party’s MPs had supported movements that are on the EU’s terror list. Other newspapers reported that one of the five young people charged under the terrorist act for conspiracy to arson had been a member of the party’s youth organisation, the Socialist Youth Front, up until 2009.

This time it was the turn of the Red-Green Alliance to reject the comments. The experienced left-wing politician Frank Aaen dismissed all allegations that the Red-Green Alliance has links to militant groups.

“All our parliamentary candidates are against terror and violence. If we have members who advocate violence or make statements advocating violence, they will be excluded”, said Frank Aaen.

Overall, there has been increased focus on radicalism to the right and the left. But if you listen to the signals from the intelligence services, the threat against Denmark is still greatest from exogenous Islamic terror organisations.

The views expressed are those of the author.



PHOTO KARIN BEATE NØSTERUD/NORDEN.ORG

Something has changed in Finland

PHOTO JOHANNES JANSSON/NORDEN.ORG



The last political assassination at ministerial level in Finland was in 1922. The organised far right is a very marginal group in the country. The extreme left has not been heard from in a long time. We have not seen any major political demonstrations for something or against something for a while. No suspicion of terrorism directed against Finland has emerged. Nevertheless, during the autumn, the waves in the debate of extreme political movements have surged high in the country and a new aggressiveness has emerged in the debate climate.

By Markku Heikkilä

Not long ago the words “hate speech” were unknown in Finland. Now it is a familiar concept to anyone who endeavours to read the anonymous discussions and comment threads on the Internet.

There immigrants, people who defend immigration, Finland-Swedes, Russians and other minorities all get their share – and increasingly also the politicians who openly support the European Union, Finland’s active policy in Europe and assistance for the euro countries which are in difficulties.

It is difficult to make an estimate of how widespread this hate rhetoric really is. It seems that some people devote entire days to expressing their dissatisfaction in a steady stream on various forums and topics on the Internet. Aggressiveness on discussion threads online is sometimes so tangible that you can almost touch it.

After the massacre in Norway more care has also been taken in Finland to tone down the discussion columns, especially in the media. Elsewhere on the Internet there are plenty of places that are not monitored by anyone.

Towards an uncompromising climate

In Finland, there is no widely known right-wing or left-wing group that could without doubt be described as an extreme movement. There has been no experience of any politically motivated violence, and the school massacres in Finland did not have political motives. However, many people of foreign origin have talked about increasing everyday racism. Protection of the Prime Minister has been tightened in recent times and security guards are now far more visible than before. The police have been investigating a number of cases of death threats against politicians.

The Prime Minister, Jyrki Katainen, cautioned in late September about the changing climate in society: the traditional spirit of mutual understanding has shifted to a black and white and uncompromising attitude. This breach is easy to understand, but it is more difficult to analyse the reasons behind it. In Finland, the general election was held in April. Many of the candidates talked about a changed, hardened climate during the election campaign. The winds of change in the air also showed themselves in practice in the actual election,

when the True Finns Party achieved a historic election victory by Finnish standards. The party received almost 20 per cent of the vote in the election and has since competed with the National Coalition Party for the position of the largest party in the opinion polls. It is impossible to talk about extreme political movements in Finland without including the position of the True Finns in the equation.

Populism and immigrant opposition

In essence, the party is a populist movement whose basic message is to defend “forgotten” citizens and to oppose Finland’s EU policy. The crisis in the eurozone has come as if ordered by the True Finns, and the other parties have been forced to take account of the situation. The tone of the debate has changed, the government has aggressively demanded guarantees for supporting Greece, and Finland’s role in Europe has changed.

Finland now has a government made up of six parties, from the National Coalition Party to the Left Alliance. This unnatural political combination can only be explained in that there was no other

alternative after the rise of the True Finns and the corresponding fall of the former Prime Minister’s Centre Party.

The True Finns can be regarded as a right-wing populist movement. Using the word “extreme” is more problematic, since the leader of the party Timo Soini cannot be put into this box. For his part, you can talk about nationalism, which emerges in the form of opposition to the EU line that Finland has chosen.

As a group the True Finns are, however, more complicated. Among the party’s parliamentary caucus of 39 people, there are a dozen MPs who follow a core political line of opposition to Finnish immigration policy, multiculturalism and political Islam. These aims also include, amongst other things, the idea that Finland should become monolingual.

The figurehead of this group is not Soini, but the Helsinki resident Jussi Halla-aho, whose writings on the Internet have raised eyebrows many times. He has, for example, been taken to court for breach of freedom of religion and incitement to racial hatred. Jussi Halla-aho was elected to parliament with a

large number of votes and became chairman of the Administration Committee.

Post on the military junta was too much

Halla-aho has a very active following on the Internet. A very well-organised discussion forum is linked to this, which has opposition to immigration as its central idea but also revolves around other policy areas. There is not much room for traditional Nordic values here. When you talk about the extreme right in Finland, this is the group that is meant.

Halla-aho’s name was also found among the borrowed texts in Anders Behring Breivik’s online manifest. No connection between them has been found. After the events in Norway, however, a blog post written by Halla-aho in 2006 was unearthed, written in response to Sweden’s policy at that time: “I cannot think of a more inferior creep in the universe than a Nordic social democrat.”

At the time of writing, Halla-aho has been suspended from the True Finns Party parliamentary group for two weeks. In a Facebook post he recommended a Greek military junta as a solution to the problems that cannot be solved by democratic means. Following the great stir that immediately arose as a result, Halla-aho removed his post and explained it all saying it was meant to be funny, but was, as usual, misunderstood by the media.

The humour did not hit home with Timo Soini, who immediately announced that Halla-aho would be suspended from the parliamentary group for a month. “Enough is enough”. But when the group met, it was decided that the suspension would only be for two weeks. This saved Soini taking it to the vote and was a measure of the real balance of power in the party.

Many other politicians have called on Soini – who himself is not considered by anyone to be a representative of extreme views – to distance himself clearly from the extreme elements and contempt for democracy in the party. On the other hand, the other parties have a clear need to undermine the rise of the True Finns and create divisions within the movement, leading to a tougher tone on both sides.

In fact, the situation is now changing so quickly in both Finnish politics and across Europe that the two weeks that pass between the writing of this article and its publication may seem like a very long time. The old stability has gone and has been replaced by sudden changes. What is remarkable under these conditions is that while Europe is moving towards greater instability, in Finland a strong populist EU-critical movement has arisen that includes a group that appears to have a very uncompromising attitude. This grouping is very new in Finland and will, in all probability, be in evidence in the local authority elections and the presidential elections which are now approaching.

The views expressed are those of the author.



Time of political dissolution

There has been considerable political turmoil in Iceland after the financial collapse in October 2008. After the banks went bankrupt there were mass protests in Reykjavik for days. They reached their peak in January 2009 in what came to be known as the 'household revolution' when fires were lit in the city, stones thrown at the Parliament (Altinget) and the police used tear gas against the angry crowd.

By Egill Helgason

After these events the broad coalition government made up of the big right party, the Independence Party (Sjálfstæðisflokkurinn), and the Social Democratic Alliance (Samfylkingin) collapsed. The protests led to the Social Democrats having no alternative but to form a minority government with the socialists in the Left-Green Party (Vinstri-Grænir). The left-wing parties won the majority in the Parliament at the election which was called shortly afterwards. These are historic events – for the first time mass protests in Iceland led to a change of government.

The attack on Parliament

The riots did not have major consequences for the participants. There were definitely groups of extremists among them who were willing to risk everything, but neither the police nor the courts came down hard on the activists. A group of nine activists, however, was charged with “assault” on the Parliament. They had managed to force their way into the building and got into physical fights with the police and security guards. The charges were met by many with anger – which led to protests – since there are very strict penalties for attacking Parliament. The case ended with five of the so-called ‘nine cousins’

being acquitted; only four received mild sentences for public unrest. So it can almost be said that the system has accepted that the protests of 2008 and 2009 were justified. The community was upset – the general opinion was that those who ruled the country had failed the nation.

After the collapse large rallies were held in many places, and those ministers and MPs who were brave enough to show up were booed out. Confidence in politicians fell, and it has not been won back. Nevertheless, the traditional parties are still going strong in Parliament, where they do their usual bickering.

Difficult political debate

There is a general perception in society that the level of debate in Parliament has been rather low in relation to the danger Icelanders were in. This is perhaps not only the fault of the politicians. For a long time Icelanders have been unable to debate politics without going straight into the trenches and engaging in personal mud throwing and quibbling. In the settlement and reconstruction after the collapse, it has emerged that Icelanders have a hard time dealing with disagreements.

It would perhaps not have been surprising if the great distrust of the political system had led to a wave of radicalism and extremism. The result has instead been impotence. The Icelandic political system is very resilient, interest groups have great influence, and some of the system is impossible to understand without analysing the cliques that are formed and special interests. What gives the most cause for dissatisfaction is how most people are left as victims of debt while many of the financiers, who caused the nation’s misfortune, are getting away with it all relatively easily, and the rebuilt banks have begun to deliver excellent results again. There is also a widespread perception that the left-wing government has revived the old system instead of making changes.

No military tradition

Iceland does not have a history of much political extremism. Class warfare began late in Iceland, but by then, in fact, the Communists were very powerful. Unlike what happened in Scandinavia, there were more Communists than Social Democrats in Iceland. Most of them, however, were practical men who knew that a revolution was not imminent, and by 1944 they already participated in

government. There was a movement of National Socialists following the German model before the war – members marched through the streets of Reykjavik in uniform – but it never got widespread support. Icelanders have never had an army and have no military tradition – uniforms are considered bizarre and very few are able to walk in step. The National Socialists disappeared when Great Britain occupied Iceland in 1940 – it is worth noting that during the war, Iceland was the only country in Europe, apart from Switzerland and Sweden, where democracy was maintained.

So the history of extremist groups in Iceland is quite limited, although, of course, there were small left-wing groups around 1970. Most of them followed the line of similar groups in the Nordic countries. It says something about society that a top figure in one of these groups is now Governor of the Central Bank.

Immigration hardly a theme

Immigration – which can definitely be a breeding ground for right-wing extremism – started quite late in Iceland. The immigrant population grew rapidly larger in the financial bubble that started around 2000. Most came to work in the boom period when there was a

lack of manpower. The Icelandic authorities have always been reluctant to accept political refugees and asylum seekers. Iceland became a multicultural society in a short time.

There was some discussion about the flow of immigrants for a while – that there was now a large group of people that could not be integrated into Icelandic culture and that would destroy the labour market for the locals. However, the debate was not even close to being as filled with tension as some places in the Nordic region. One party that called itself the Liberal Party (Frjálslyndi flokkurinn) tried to cash in on immigration issues during the election campaign in 2007. It did not go well, the other parties would not go along – and now support for the party has almost dried up. Since the collapse immigration issues have barely been mentioned – there are threats from other and bigger problems.

Nationalism and lack of faith in the market

There is, however, political dissolution. It can be said that politics have moved towards increased nationalism and distrust of the market economy. Even on the right the question is being raised of whether it was the free market that failed Icelanders – one of the leading right-wing ideologues, Styrmir Gunnarsson, speculated recently on whether private management was more suitable than government management. The financial crisis, and in particular the controversy surrounding the Icesave deposit bills, intensified nationalism.

Many Icelanders thought that otherwise friendly nations used superior force against them and, not least, President Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson accused the Nordic and other European countries of being hostile towards Iceland after the collapse. Iceland is now negotiating membership of the EU, but only the Social Democratic Alliance is united in support of the application. The other parties are opposed to different degrees – and most of them indicate that there will be no EU membership.

The Best Party – no longer a joke

As previously stated, there has been no major breeding ground for political extremism in Iceland. It has rather been the tedious arguments and tugs-of-war, faction formation and violation of interest groups which have been an obstacle to social development. It seems that it is difficult to reach reasonable solutions to issues; much has been said about the level political culture, and it has not got any better.

The crazy party the Best Party (Besti flokkurinn) had a roaring win at the local elections in Reykjavik last year and the mayor, Jón Gnarr, represents that party. It looks like the Best Party will now turn its attention to national politics. The joke is actually not funny any longer, the party is struggling with cuts and heavily debt-ridden municipal companies, and it is not without reason that the traditional parties fear that they will lose votes.

Tolerance

Religious fanaticism has not been prominent nor has racial hatred. It is perhaps in the Icelanders’ favour that they are a very tolerant nation – sometimes even indifferent. The Gay Pride Festival is one of the highlights of the year for Icelandic family entertainment – tens of thousands of men, women and children gather in the centre of Reykjavik. When Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir took over as prime minister, the fact that she is gay was not mentioned in Iceland. No one cared, and that is still the case. It was the foreign media that had to point out this fact to the Icelanders.

The views expressed are those of the author.

Is it naive to be open?

When Jens Stoltenberg committed us all to meet terror with more openness and democracy, he added in the same sentence that we should never be naive. In the months that have elapsed since the 22 July, it has become clearer how difficult it is to weigh these promises up against each other. It has also been surprisingly difficult to assess whether Norwegian society has become more divided or more united after the terror attacks, and whether there are grounds for more or less extremism.

By Aslak Bonde

In the first two months after the mass killings on Utøya and bombing of government buildings in Oslo the Police Security Service (PST) received 700 tips about other extremists who might sympathise with terrorists, or maybe do a similar thing themselves. It is difficult to say for certain if that number is high

or low. Not just because unfounded tips are always received after terror and shocking crime, but also because it is so difficult to assess what is extremism, and whether it is dangerous or not.

To take the last one first: Anders Behring Breivik, the terrorist whose name many people in Norway will not utter,

was one of many on the Internet. He is an opponent of immigration, believes in the Eurabia theory and wants to return to the time of the Knights Templar, but it is still not possible to separate the terrorist's network posts and opinion threads from a number of others, some of whom have even had their posts and

chronicles published in major newspapers such as Aftenposten. What set him apart was the need to use violence and his ability to carry out his intention. This is untraceable in the public sphere.

Therefore the Police Security Service face a difficult job in the future to try to distinguish dangerous from harmless extremism, and to know when to separate politically acceptable utterances from potentially criminal extreme attitudes. After 22 July, the PST have been given an increase in funding so that emergency response and internet surveillance can be intensified, but there has been no real discussion about PST's tools.

Political Registration?

In the last decade before the millennium there was, in fact, a tightening of the practices of the security police. A commission headed by Supreme Court Judge, Ketil Lund, documented that during the Cold War many people had been under surveillance solely because of their political opinions. It was probably illegal during the Cold War, but it was only after the Lund Commission released its report that the last remnants of political surveillance were weeded out.

Now many people are demanding political surveillance again. They don't say so as such, but it is considered a matter of course that the PST not only follow what is being written online, but that they also take note of who is writing what, and examine whether there might be a network or activity that gives cause to fear crime. If the PST is to do this systematically and over a long time, it will be difficult to avoid registration. The promise of democracy is apparently in contradiction to the obligation not to be naive.

The question of whether there is a conflict between openness and lack of naivety has been the subject of much

ter 22 July, it is this: "Stoltenberg promised more openness, but there has been less of it".

Some of this criticism is related to the government's evaluation of what did happen and what did not happen on 22 July. A lot of criticism of police emergency preparedness has come out, and it seemed for a long while as if the Government would not respond to this criticism before next summer, when the recommendations of a special commission of inquiry are expected to be ready. During the autumn, in different ways, there have been some assessments from responsible politicians about what did not work, and it is probably most appropriate to look at the criticism of the Government's openness as part of the regular party-political debate.

It is different with the public debate in which several participants say that they express themselves in a different way than before 22 July. The anthropologist Unni Wikan is among those who say that she is now reluctant to enter into debates about various Muslim cultures, because she is afraid of having suspicion thrown on her. In principle, everyone agrees that it should be just as easy to talk about problems with immigration and integration now as before the summer, but in practice some people feel that there are such strong demands on the level of nuance that they would rather pull away from the public debate arena. It is not possible to say how many people interpret it in this way.

Whether the group is large or small, it can at least seek the support of the Progress Party's leading politicians. In the campaign leading up to local elections in mid-September, the Progress Party was also exposed to public scrutiny for its political rhetoric on immigration. The party leader, Siv Jensen, is-

Therefore the Police Security Service face a difficult job in the future to try to distinguish dangerous from harmless extremism, and to know when to separate politically acceptable utterances from potentially criminal extreme attitudes.

discussion in recent months. Again, it is necessary to go back more than a decade. When the so-called freedom of speech commission presented its report the main premise was that witchcraft explodes when it gets out in the sun. So: murky and/or extreme attitudes are made safe once they are exposed in public. As a result of this attitude, extra-strong protection of free speech is given to anyone who writes or talks about politics and society.

Post 22 July there have been objections to this approach. Several academics and the organisation Centre against Racism argue that the public does not function in the way that the freedom of speech commission thought. Experience now is that extreme and xenophobic attitudes can be reinforced on the Internet because public groups of peers are formed. For a time a kind of order was sent out to all liberals that they had to sign up to the extreme right debate forums online, but the result has seldom been a more open debate. To a much greater extent, the liberals' attempts to counter the extreme right-wing have led to websites being closed down or subdued.

Less openness?

This in turn has provided the basis for a more familiar, but no less important, discussion – namely that of political correctness and meaningful assessment. If there is a claim that has been promoted with increasing intensity af-

sued a warning about stealth Islamisation in Norway a year ago. The former party chairman, Carl I. Hagen, said a few years ago that "almost all terrorists (...) are Muslims." In the election campaign these two were repeatedly asked to apologise for these statements because they were generalisations and threw suspicions on people.

Left-wing radical opinion monopoly

Jensen and Hagen regretted nothing and the party dropped from almost 18 to just under 12 per cent. We do not know if there is a connection, but the Progress Party's leadership has certainly concluded that the liberal press is out to get them, and that there is pressure to conform in the public debate.

The feeling that the general public is controlled by left-radical liberals has been very widespread in the extreme-right groups on the Internet. Anders Behring Breivik wrote, for example, that he saw a gathering of investigative journalists as a suitable target for terror. The notion that a left-wing radical opinion monopoly exists in newspapers and broadcasting could obviously in itself inspire extremism. The result in each case is that the conditions for community dialogue are poor.

The views expressed are those of the author.



Swedish police uncertain

To follow the Swedish debate on terrorism and political extremism you have to understand the concept of the roundabout dog. It might seem frivolous in such a serious context but the fact is that the security police's latest crackdown was based on such a dog.

By Eva Franchell

The roundabout dog is a form of street installation that appeared here and there in Sweden in 2006. Anonymous people placed homemade dog sculptures on roundabouts. Some of the dogs were great works of art, others more home fabrications in different fanciful materials.

Muhammad cartoon an artist

For a few years roundabout dogs were a quite harmless but charming social movement.

In August 2007 the Örebro newspaper "Nerikes Allehanda" published a cartoon of the prophet Muhammad as a roundabout dog. The cartoon was drawn by the artist Lars Vilks and used as an illustration for an opinion piece about freedom of expression. Lars Vilks' Muhammad cartoon had been rejected by several art galleries because of the exhibitors' fear of retaliation.

Since the publication of the cartoon in Nerikes Allehanda Lars Vilks has lived under constant threat.

He himself has spoken at great length about the threats and has posed for a photo with an axe in his hand.

"I will use it if it's a matter of life or death", he told invited journalists from the Swedish tabloids. Lars Vilks is obviously enjoying the attention he is creating and he writes regularly about his art and threats in his blog. In late summer this year he blogged that he might go to the Biennial for Contemporary Art at Röda Sten in Gothenburg on 10th September.

He never did.

However, on the night before 11th September the Swedish police task force arrested four young men who thought that Lars Vilks was going to Gothenburg.

The prosecutors and security police made a big issue out of the arrest of four suspected terrorists. Today three of them are detained on suspicion of conspiracy to murder. Suspicion of terrorist activity has been dropped and attempted murder has been reduced to the purchase of a pocket knife by one of the men shortly before the biennial.

Christmas shopping bomb

This was not the first time that the police were forced to reduce suspicion of terrorist activity to more ordinary crime. For the third time in a short time people have been arrested on suspicion of terror in Gothenburg. In all cases the suspicions have proved to be exaggerated.

Perhaps the police in Gothenburg are particularly zealous. Possibly there has been a tendency to raise the level of the crime when the suspects are Muslims.

Sweden has actually only experienced one significant terrorist act with Muslim overtones and that took place on Drottninggatan in central Stockholm at the height of Christmas shopping.

On 16th December last year two bombs exploded with an interval of a few minutes. The culprit, Taimour Abdulwahab, was killed in the last explosion. He had turned off Drottninggatan and stood on a deserted side street when parts of his bomb vest went off and therefore no one else was injured.

Taimour Abdulwahab was born in Baghdad but moved as a young child to Tranås in Småland in Sweden and had

moved in a right-wing world at home on his computer.

He scared the whole city to death before he was caught last November. Malmö has a long immigrant tradition and many residents have their roots in other countries. When the shots rang out, therefore, a large percentage of Malmö's population – all those with dark hair really – were encouraged to stay indoors. Under Swedish law terrorism is "serious intimidation of a population or section of the population".

But the crime for which Peter Mangs is now remanded in custody awaiting trial next year is not classified as terrorism. Many question whether the Swedish police differentiate between threats to native Swedes and threats to immigrants, but, naturally, the security police deny all such insinuations.

The Swedish security police actually monitor three explicit extreme groups: the white-power Nazi movements which persecute people of Jewish origin, the autonomous groups on the very far-left, and the extreme Islamic groups. It seems that Peter Mangs was close to the first-mentioned while Taimour Abdulwahab can be linked to extreme Islamism.

Slippery threat

The shootings on Utøya shook the whole of Sweden. Norway is country that is close to us and many Swedish social democrats have spent their summers on Utøya. The massacre could just as easily have happened in the Swedish summer idyll. In the script Anders Behring Breivik published on the Internet he directed his hatred against both Norwegians and Swedes.

Extremism becomes a slippery threat on the Internet, hard to catch and not so easy to measure according to police threat norms.

a perfectly normal upbringing. After school he moved to Luton in England to study naprapathy. It was here that he began to devote much more time to religion and became a fundamentalist Muslim.

Just before he blew himself up he had sent a recorded message to the security police and the news agency TT: "Now your children, daughters and sisters will die like our brothers and sisters are dying". In the message he gave the reason for the bomb attack: Swedish troops in Afghanistan, Swedish oppression against Muslims – and Lars Vilks' roundabout dog.

Now at the end of September Lars Vilks appeared at the large book fair in Gothenburg. This time he showed up in his bullet proof vest.

"Hit here. Hit me hard in the chest", he said to the journalists.

In Sweden the war against terrorism has been helped by a solid, mobile, human art installation.

Differences between people?

At the same time in a completely different part of Sweden, Peter Mangs was remanded in custody charged with three murders and a large number of attempted murders in Malmö. The people who were shot were almost exclusively immigrants doing quite ordinary things like waiting for the bus, sitting in the car or going about the town. Peter Mangs was born in Växjö, a recluse who

But where does Anders Behring Breivik belong, seen from the Swedish security police's groupings? Those that direct their hatred against Muslims are hardly an identified group on Säpo's website.

And if truth be told, Taimour Abdulwahab, Peter Mangs and Anders Behring Breivik all moved across borders on the Internet. Extremism becomes a slippery threat on the Internet, hard to catch and not so easy to measure according to police threat norms.

An indulgent interpretation is that it is this uncertainty that also characterises the different assessments by the police.

One thing we know for sure: the breeding ground for extremism and terrorism is to be found in exclusion. Recently on the radio programme Konflikt youth unemployment was described as that which "gives birth to revolutions, feeds wars and tears communities apart". Sweden has the highest youth unemployment in the Nordic region and one of the highest in the whole of Europe. In the large city suburbs there is increased overcrowding and poverty. Perhaps this is where the work against extremism should start. Anyone who is welcomed into the community has no reason to hate.

The views expressed are those of the author.



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