ARENAS

ANALYSIS OF AND RESPONSES
TO EXTREMIST NARRATIVES

ARENAS LAUNCHED

WHITEBOOK OF ETHICS PUBLISHED

MEET OUR PATNERS

www.arenasproject.eu

CONTENTS

THE ARENAS PROJECT IS UP AND RUNNING!

*After **the Kick-off meeting in May**, during which all partners met in **Cergy**, ARENAS project members have been working hard! With the publication of the **"Management Handbook" in Work Package 1 (WP1),** the processes for organising and implementing the tasks have been established*

Thanks to constant work within the Work Packages, and twice-monthly monitoring by the executive committee, the first major initiatives have been launched: a literature review on extremist narratives, data collection, definition of case studies, and definition of experimental protocols, among others.

In addition, two "framework" deliverables were drafted and validated collectively: The Whitebook of Ethical Guidelines, and the Data Management Plan. So, less than 6 months after the launch of the project, everything is on track to produce innovative results and provide concrete answers to the problems raised by extremist narratives. Thanks to a variety of high-performance communications tools (web and social networks), the ARENAS project is making its concerns and progress known.

We invite you to learn more about the work we have done in the following articles. Follow us on social media and subscribe to our ezine to get the latest news and updates from ARENAS.

ARENAS LAUNCHED WITH A 3 DAY MEETING OF CONSORTIUM IN PARIS

*The **ARENAS (Analysis of and Responses to Extremist Narratives)** project launched on May 9-11, 2023, with a **three-day transnational partner event in Paris**. The project is funded by the **EU Horizon Programme**, the Framework Programme for **Research and Innovation (2021-2027),** and is **co-ordinated by Julien Longhi and his team in CY Cergy Paris Université, France**. It brings together a multidisciplined consortium of nine Universities, an NGO, two SME's as well as three associated impact partners comprised of an International Association, a National Associations, and an NGO.*

Over the next four years, ARENAS puts the spotlight on extremist narratives that affect political and social life in Europe. The team will examine the nature of these narratives and seek to understand the discourses they impact, particularly with regard to 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.

The overall objective of ARENAS is to characterise, measure and understand the role of extremist narratives in discourses that have an impact not only on political and social spheres but importantly on the stakeholders themselves. Leading an innovative and ambitious research programme, ARENAS will significantly contribute to filling the gap in contemporary research, make recommendations to

policymakers, media, lawyers, social inclusion professionals and educational institutions, and propose solutions for countering extreme narratives for developing more inclusive and respectful European societies.

At the launch event, participants from across the consortium examined and validated the project's goals, methodology and activities. Each of the seven Work Package teams shared their specific research and innovation objectives, strategies and the outcomes that will emerge. Partners also put the spotlight on Project Management and Communications, the setting up of Governance bodies and an introduction to the ARENAS Ethical Board. Partners also benefitted from a highly interactive session on Data Management and Data Security and the opportunity to hear from sister Horizon Europe projects currently working on related projects.
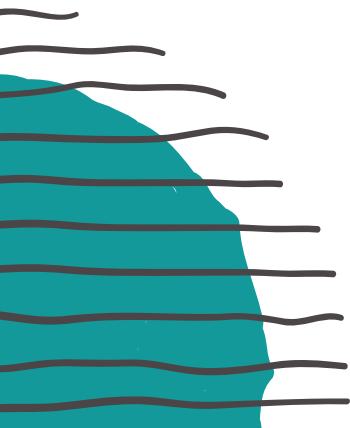
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Dynamic presentations, discussions, and breakout groups helped to build relationships and support collaboration between the partners as they embarked on this project together.

The kick-off meeting welcomed representatives from lead partner CY Cergy Paris Université (France), and The Institute of Contemporary History (Slovenia), Universidad Autónoma de Barcelona (Spain), Institut de Ciències Polítiques i Socials (Spain), University of Helsinki (Finland), CNRS (France), Heinrich Heine University Düsseldorf (Germany), Università degli studi di Genova (Italy), University of Cyprus (Cyprus), Creative Ideas (Latvia), Momentum Educate + Innovate (Ireland), Water On Mars (Italy), and Fundacio OXFAM Intermon (Spain). To learn more about the expert team assembled for the ARENAS project visit our website.

ARENAS PROJECT MANAGEMENT HANDBOOK PUBLISHED

*The **ARENAS Project Management handbook** was published and delivered to the **European Commission in July.***

Julien Longhi

It was **prepared by Principal Investigator Julien Longhi, full professor of discourse analysis at CY Cergy Paris Université**, leader of WP1, and Aude Garses, Consultant at Euronovia (who had been commissioned for the launch of the project). This internal document is one of the first deliverables of the ARENAS project.

The main purpose of the handbook is to support and guide ARENAS Work Package Leaders, Task Leaders and all contributors to manage and implement the project. It is also a guideline for new researchers who join the project in the course of its lifetime.

The objective of the ARENAS Project Management book is to provide an overview of the most relevant managerial aspects of the project, setting the rules and responsibilities of the partners. The document is a tool to ensure smooth management and a high-q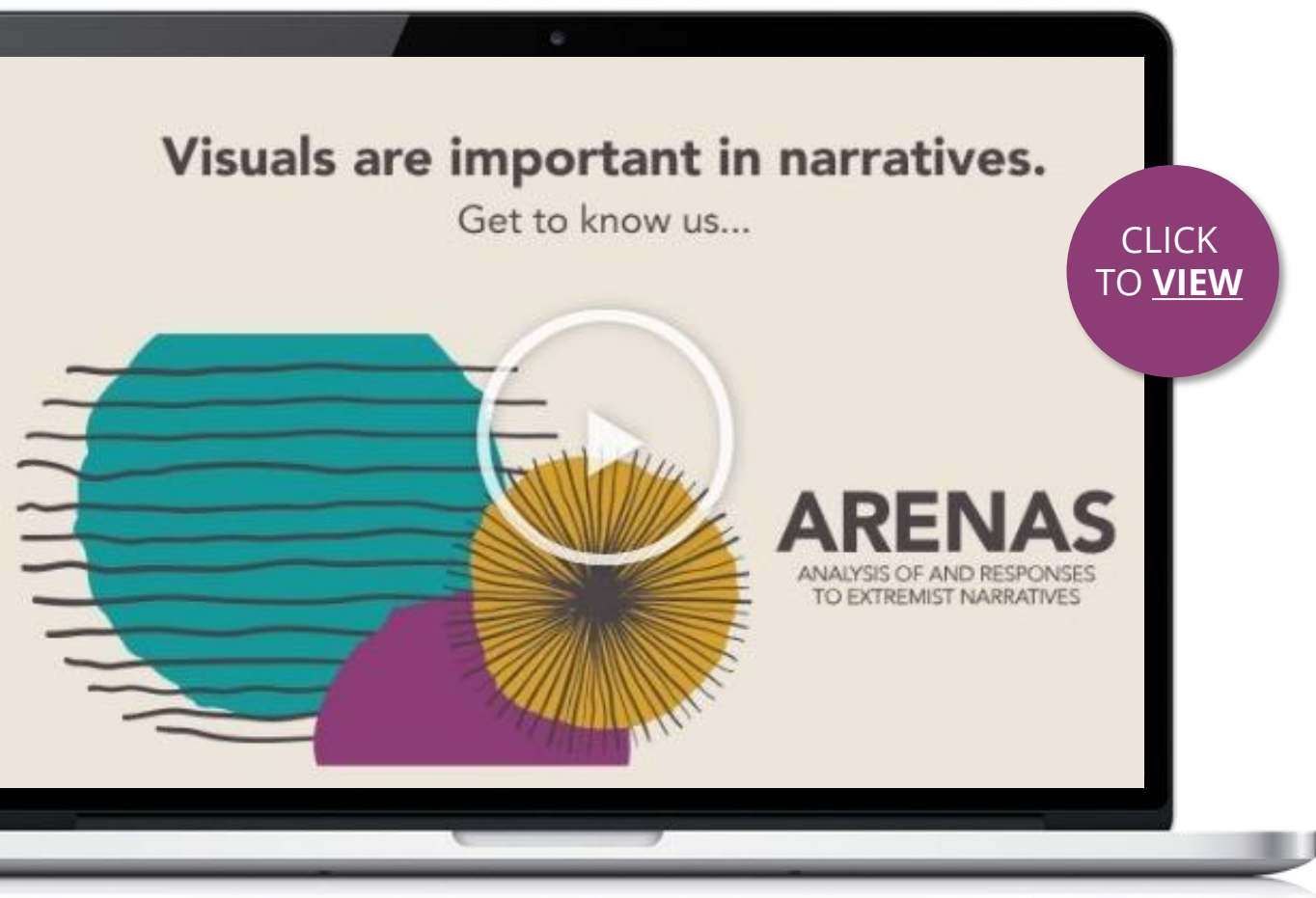uality assurance of the work progress. It summarises all the required knowledge for the project management and contains information related to the management strategy, the consortium structure, reporting issues, templates to be used, publication procedures, etc.

Another purpose of the handbook is to clarify the legal and financial aspects of the Grant Agreement and Consortium Agreement that may need further clarification for beneficiaries. This guide will be regularly updated throughout the lifetime of the project according to any updates or changes that may occur.

This document will be the keystone of the project's management and coordination: it lays down the rules of the organisation, frames the relationships between the partners, and summarises the deadlines, deliverables and stages of the entire project. In short, it's the ARENAS project "bible"!

WATCH THE ARENAS INTRODUCTORY VIDEO

*The ARENAS project has created a short video to introduce the project and **inform people about its objectives**. The video outlines **the issues that the project will consider over the next four years,** and how it will **address these issues** and presents the 15 partners from 9 different countries who are working together on the project.*

Visuals are important in narratives.
Get to know us...

ARENAS
ANALYSIS OF AND RESPONSES TO EXTREMIST NARRATIVES

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TO LEARN MORE ABOUT THE ARENAS PROJECT YOU CAN WATCH THE VIDEO HERE

Katalin Miklóssy

ETHICS IN A
POST-TRUTH WORLD

By **Katalin Miklóssy**, Head of Eastern European Studies, University of Helsinki

*We are living in **societies hit by multiple crises**: in recent years, we have experienced the COVID-19 pandemic, hybrid threats, a brutal war in Ukraine, inflation, sky-high energy prices and dropping living standards.*

The consequences of these events have been significant in increasing polarisation, strengthening nationalism, impatience with different views, and the rise of extremism. Social media, which was once a promise of a democratic exchange of thought, became a hotbed of hate speech and political targeting. In these times, ethics helps us to navigate over troubled waters to find ways to tackle the simultaneous challenges that threaten the very idea of democracy.

For this journey of discussing and debating ethics, we warmly welcome you to share your ideas, comments, or criticism! Pop on Board!

Why do we need an Ethical White Book in a Research Project?

All researchers, who have ever applied for national or international funding, have faced the academic requirement to address ethics. Especially, many social scientists and scholars of humanities manufactured the necessary page, sometimes by reusing a standardised version circulated in the department or borrowing from each other, without investing too much thought into the basic idea.

But there is a reason, why ethics has become a universal academic demand lately: ethics are closely related to the practice of democracy – per se. As an embedded part of the overall society, academia mirrors the democratic conditions in a country, and at the same academics, as the core of intelligentsia, greatly affect the national discourses on values, civic freedoms, and constitutionality. The moral compass is therefore key not only in these interactive societal relations but also regarding the nature of scholarly conduct as well.

Putting more weight on the transparency of the researchers' actions is inevitable because ethics is, in fact, quality insurance of research. Following careful ethical guidelines guarantees the reliability and credibility of research results. How one gains data and source material, how one treats informants, the way the collected data is stored and secured, how those are analysed, and what are the frames of interpretations and criteria of publishing – all have a grave influence on the validity of research outcomes.

How did we create the Ethical Whitebook for the ARENAS project?

Yet, creating ethical guidelines should be perceived as a democratic legislative procedure where the most sustainable results are achieved by a socially shared process and by submitting to experts' review before a law becomes binding. In our case, we consulted eight European ethical protocols for the first draft that then we circulated to all members of the ARENAS project for comments. This participatory phase not only improved the draft but more importantly made the researchers also aware of the content details and by co-creation the ethical guidelines became also accepted as a common compulsory ground rule. Finally, we requested the expert opinion of the Ethical Board of the ARENAS project for compliance.

After this complex procedure, we are happy to publish our ethical principles! However, we acknowledge, that as in any democracy, ethical guidelines should be understood as a constantly evolving process, revising, updating, and improving in order to better fit real-life challenges.

So, it is utterly important to have your feedback! Please, take a look and download the Ethical White Book of the ARENAS project!
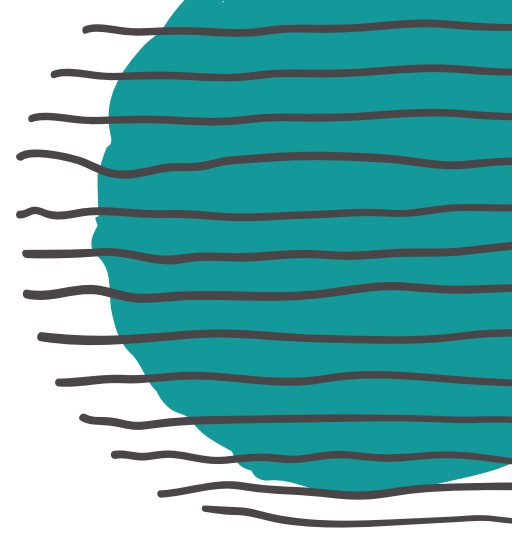
New Paper on Socially Unacceptable Discourse (SUD) Classification Published

By **Bruno Machado Carneiro, Michele Linardi, Julien Longhi,** CY Cergy Paris University**.**

*(This paper was accepted for publication in the International Conference on CMC and Social Media Corpora for the Humanities – 2023) . In this article, we review **the main aspects of our study about state-of-the-art Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology** applied to automatic **Socially Unacceptable Discourse (SUD)** detection.*

The first author of our research outcome is Bruno Machado Carneiro (master's student of ENSEA – graduate school of Electrical Engineering and Computer Science in Cergy – France). Michele Linardi (Assistant Professor of Cergy-Paris Université – France) and Julien Longhi (Professor at the Cergy-Paris Université) supervised this work in the context of Working Package (WP) 2 of the ARENAS project. The objective of such WP is to design AI models that aid the detection and characterisation of Extremist Narratives in Social Media corpora. Julien is also the leader of ARENAS, for which he is responsible for coordination and project management.

Socially unacceptable discourse (SUD) is an umbrella term adopted to represent any communication considered harmful or inappropriate in a particular social context. It can include a variety of behaviours, such as abusive, obscene, and aggressive language. In this last decade, we have witnessed a tremendous effort from the Machine Learning (ML) and Computational Linguistic (CL) community to propose automatic SUD detection techniques in annotated online corpora.

We note that, in all the available corpus, no standard or common guidelines for SUD annotation exist despite the adoption of the same terminology and tags. It derives that different SUD definitions may potentially share overlapping characteristics, or on the other hand, a single category may cover text instances with divergent features depending on the context.

In our paper, we first build and present a novel corpus that contains a large variety of manually annotated texts from different online sources used so far in state-of-the-art ML SUD detection solutions. This global context allows us to test the generalisation ability of state-of-the-art SUD classifiers based on the BERT Artificial Intelligence (AI) model proposed by Google. In the proposed environment, the solutions we test acquire knowledge around the same SUD categories from different contexts. In this manner, we can analyse how (possibly) diverse annotation modalities influence SUD learning.

Specifically, our goal is to stress-test the capability of cutting-edge SUD detection technology in facing two critical challenges: (1) adapting to different domains that follow shared linguistic definitions and (2) how to transfer knowledge from one domain to another. This exercise has permitted us to discuss several aspects that concern the current capability of AI technology to identify SUD texts, highlighting several limitations. Following our empirical results, we are firmly convinced that to build more general and reliable models, the ML community should consider formal guidelines provided by language experts (mostly neglected so far), which can sensibly reduce local bias (e.g., annotation policy, context, etc.). Our results have also highlighted inter-domain mismatches that negatively affect the model detection performance.

*Such findings enable us to carve out our **research directions,** which concern the **improvement of textual feature learning and will permit us to define effective communication** with expert and non-expert annotators (about requirements and expectations).*

Such findings enable us to carve out our research directions, which concern the improvement of textual feature learning and will permit us to define effective communication with expert and non-expert annotators (about requirements and expectations).
We furthermore note that the results and the insights we obtained also have the potential for the research linguists, discourse analysis, or semantics, as they show, from a knowledge base constituted by the main works on SUD corpora, the semantic links, and conceptual relationships, between several labels or tags. In fact, over and above terminology, it is crucial to clearly state and understand the specific features of hate speech, offensive speech, or extremist speech.

These initial results are necessary to foster several research discussions in the ARENAS project. In fact, in WP 2 of ARENAS, understanding the various mechanisms behind the text modelling and annotation principles adopted in SUD detection literature represents a crucial step. First of all, to detect the similarities between SUD and Extreme Narrative textual features, and in the second stage, to define and address open research questions that concern the peculiarities of Extreme Narrative.

To read the full paper, and learn more about the authors and their work follow the links on our website.
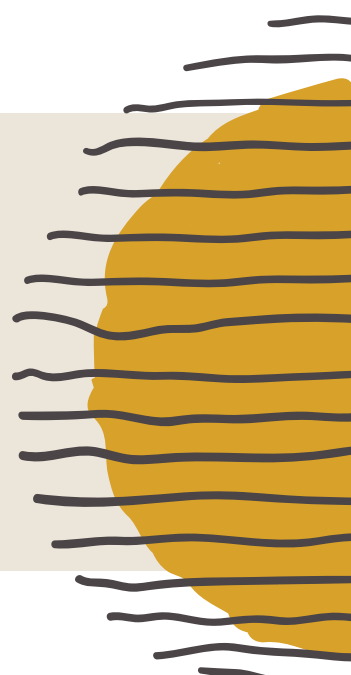
Dr. Steven Forti Speaks at Congress of the Association of Contemporary History

The XVI Congress of the Association of Contemporary History took place from **September 7 – 9 2023** at the University of La Rioja. The Congress title this year was **"Looks at the past, looks at the present. New horizons of contemporary historiography"**.

Dr. Steven Forti

The world in which we live, especially in times of increasing uncertainty, looks to history for clues to understand itself, its past, its present and even its possible future. Dr Steven Forti of Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona, and leader of Work Package 3 of ARENAS which Analyses the Circulation of Extremist Narratives, delivered a paper titled "Metapolitics and right-wing gramscism. The penetration and influence of neo-rightist ideas in Italy and Spain (1970-1990s)" at the Congress.

The key theme addressed in Dr. Forti's paper is the diffusion in Italy and Spain of the neo-rightist ideas raised at the end of the sixties in France. Forti offers a novel overview of the neo-fascist organisations, groups and intellectuals who were most active in this work of appropriating the ideas of Alain de Benoist and the Nouvelle Droite and their adaptation to the Italian and Spanish political context. Likewise, the author highlights the porosity of the borders of these

political sectors that developed the so-called "right-wing gramscism" understood not only as a metapolitical strategy but also as an operation of ideological parasitism.

Finally, in a work attentive to the comparative and transnational perspective, Forti highlights analogies and differences between Italy, Spain and France in the roots of these ideas that, after the sowing of the 1970s and 1980s, allowed far-right parties and groups to reap the first fruits, that is, to have a not inconsiderable degree of influence on politics and public opinion, spreading extremist narratives and discourses that are beginning to have a greater degree of acceptance in the society.

The paper will be published with the entire proceedings of the Congress in due course, but for now, you can click here to learn more about Dr. Forti and his published work

NGOS INVITED TO SUPPORT ARENAS IN FOSTERING DEMOCRACY & SAFE SPACES

*The **ARENAS** (Analysis of and Responses to Extremist Narratives) project, invites **Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs)** to **unite in its mission to combat political extremism, analyse extremist narratives and tackle online hate speech***

A call for lay definitions is being launched among NGOs across Europe. These lay definitions will be compared with the definitions by experts of different disciplines to develop an operational definition.

The participation of NGOs is not only encouraged but is crucial for the success of this noble undertaking. NGOs serve as a direct link to grassroots communities, acting as the eyes, ears and voices of these localities. This close connection empowers NGOs to swiftly identify emerging extremist narratives and help assess their impact. They can help to develop counter-strategies. NGOs bring a wealth of experience in implementing practical solutions to societal challenges. ARENAS seeks to bridge the gap between academic research and real-world impact. The insights of NGOs can be instrumental in translating research findings into actionable policies and initiatives. NGOs have the capacity to advocate for policy changes that support ARENAS' objectives effectively. To participate NGOs can click on this link to access a survey and the deadline for submitting completed surveys is November 15th 2023.

Democracy thrives when it embraces a spectrum of voices. NGOs, drawing from diverse demographic groups, ensure that strategies developed under ARENAS are inclusive, equitable and capable of addressing the concerns of all citizens. Trust forms the bedrock of democracy. NGOs, enjoying the trust of the communities they serve, are a valuable asset in promoting constructive dialogue and reducing extremism.

ARENAS recognises that sustainable change often starts at the grassroots level. NGOs can engage citizens directly, creating initiatives that promote tolerance, diversity, and democratic values within their communities. Awareness is a potent tool. NGOs are adept at organizing awareness campaigns, educating the public about the dangers of extremism and online hate speech, and mobilizing communities to stand against these threats. The ARENAS project transcends academia; it's a call to action for all who champion democracy's core principles and advocate for safe, inclusive spaces for everyone.
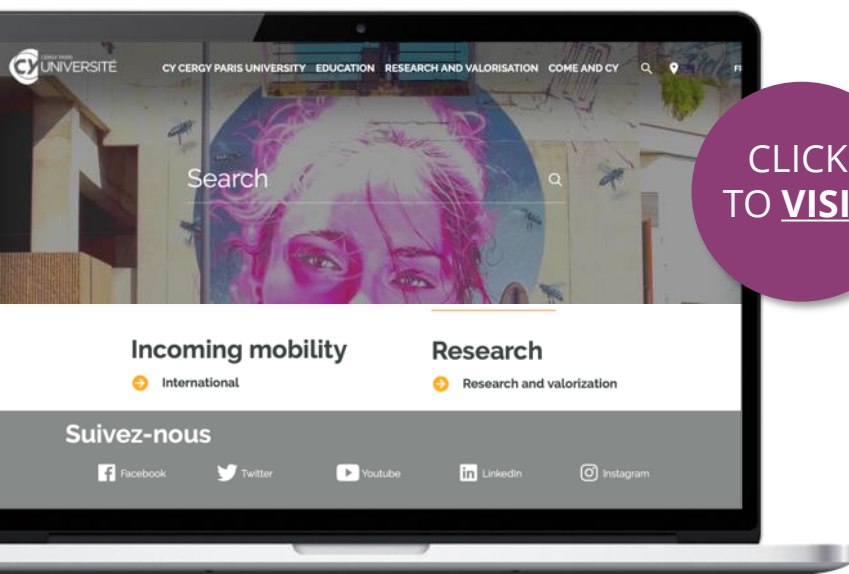
ARENAS is a Horizon Europe project funded by the European Commission. This cutting-edge initiative aims to create safer digital spaces while nurturing democratic ideals. Together, we can build a future where democracy thrives and online spaces become safer and more constructive. Join us in transforming this vision into a reality.

MEET OUR PARTNER - CY CERGY PARIS UNIVERSITÉ

CY is on the map of training excellence and high-level research; *and aims by 2030, to be one of the top 200 universities in the world by reorganizing academic power with one undergraduate university college (CY Sup) and four graduate schools (CY Tech, CY Arts and Humanities, CY Education, CY Law and Political Science).*
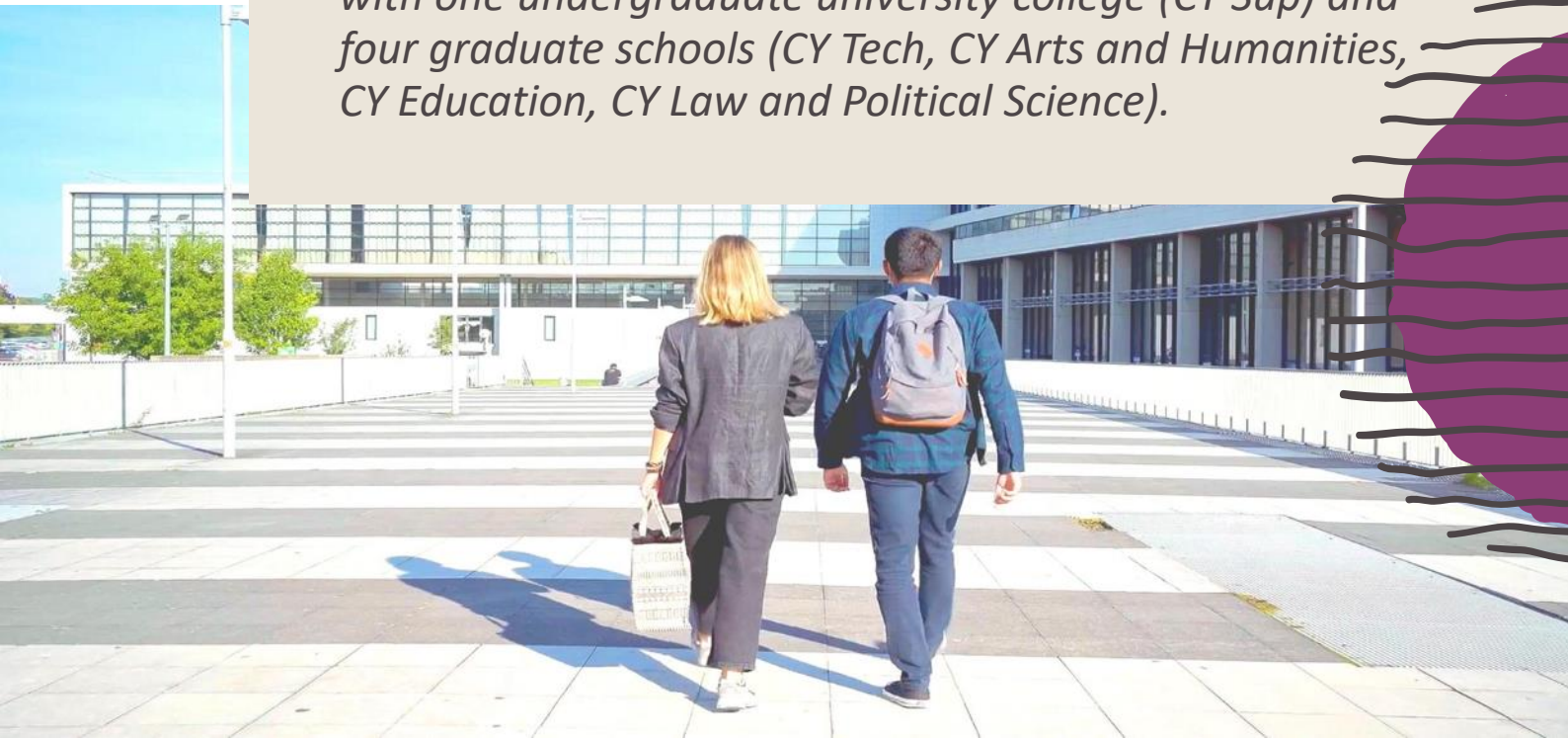
ESSEC Business School is associated by decree with CY Cergy Paris University as the fifth graduate school, a member of CY Alliance and CY Initiative. The Team at CY Cergy Paris Université, led by Julien Longhi, are Leaders of the Work Package 1 of ARENAS. WP1 covers all aspects of the project management, in particular technical, administrative and financial project management, data management plan and quality assurance. Visit our website to meet the ARENAS team from CY Cergy Paris Université, and learn about the range of skills and expertise they bring to the project.

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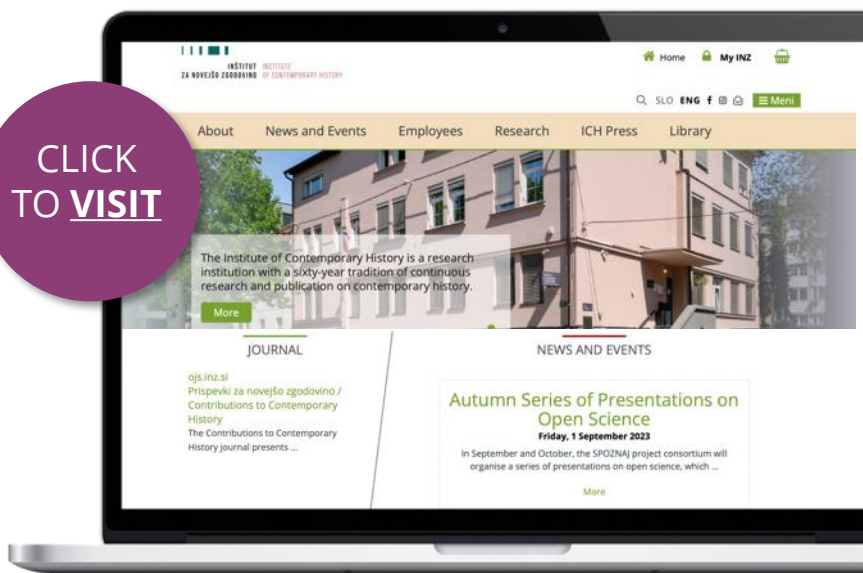# MEET OUR PARTNER - INSTITUTE OF CONTEMPORARY HISTORY

It is a modern historical institute that follows the development of historiography and takes into account the achievements of other humanities and social sciences. It strives for the permanent verification of the scientific foundations, influences of the environment, and national scientific policies.

For ARENAS the team at INZ is led by Jure Gašparič, a historian focused on parliamentarism and contemporary political history of Central and South Eastern Europe. While contributing to a number of Work Packages (WP), the primary focus of INZ is WP 2 and WP3. WP2 examines the Characterisation and Detection of Extremist Narratives, while WP3 investigates the Circulation of Extremist Narratives.

Visit our website to meet the ARENAS team from the Institute of Contemporary History, and learn about the range of skills and expertise they bring to the project.

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MEET OUR PARTNER - UNIVERSITAT AUTONOMA DE BARCELONA

*The **Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona (UAB) is a young, public and leading university**. A leader in international rankings and a benchmark in research.*

Barcelona, Catalan and International. A transformative, supportive, diverse and egalitarian university, sustainable and healthy, participatory and cultural. It is a campus university with faculties and schools, research institutes and services in a natural environment where you can live unique experiences.

The UAB team for ARENAS is led by Steven Forti, a historian focusing on fascism, nationalism and the extreme right in the XX and XXI centuries. While contributing to several Work Packages (WP) in the ARENAS project Steven is the leader of WP3. This WP examines the circulation of extremist narratives. He will also lead the work on Task 3.2, examining the historical roots of extremist narratives in European contexts.

[Visit our website](#) to meet the ARENAS team from Universitat Autonoma de Barcelona, and learn about the range of skills and expertise they bring to the project.

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UAB
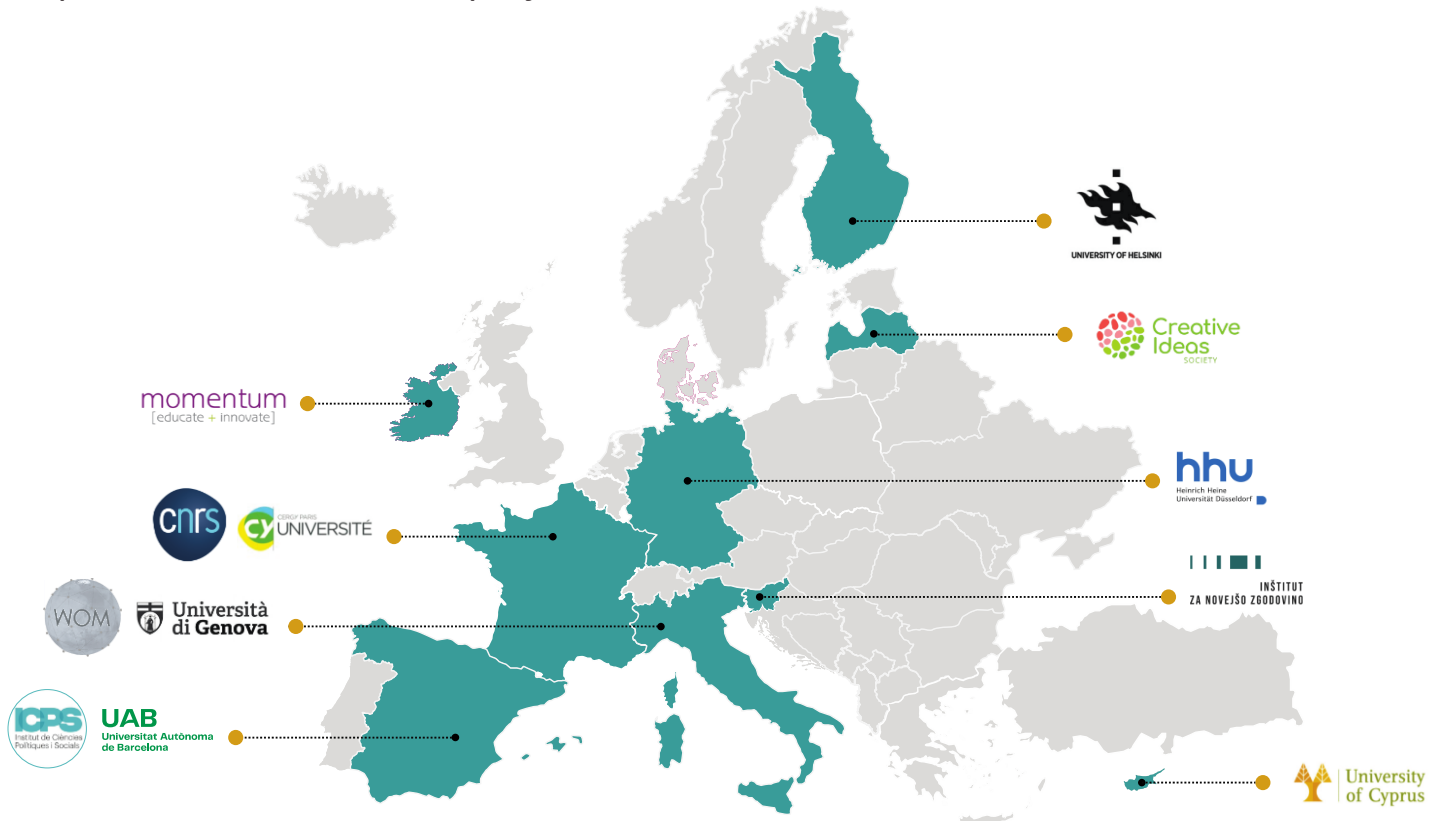Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona

ARENAS

ANALYSIS OF AND RESPONSES
TO EXTREMIST NARRATIVES

OUR PARTNERS

Our **partnership consists** of **12 organisations from 9 countries**, each bringing unique experience, expertise and skills to the project.

UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI

Creative Ideas SOCIETY

momentum [educate + innovate]

cnrs

CY CERGY PARIS UNIVERSITÉ

hhu
Heinrich Heine
Universität Düsseldorf

INŠTITUT
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WOM

Università di Genova

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