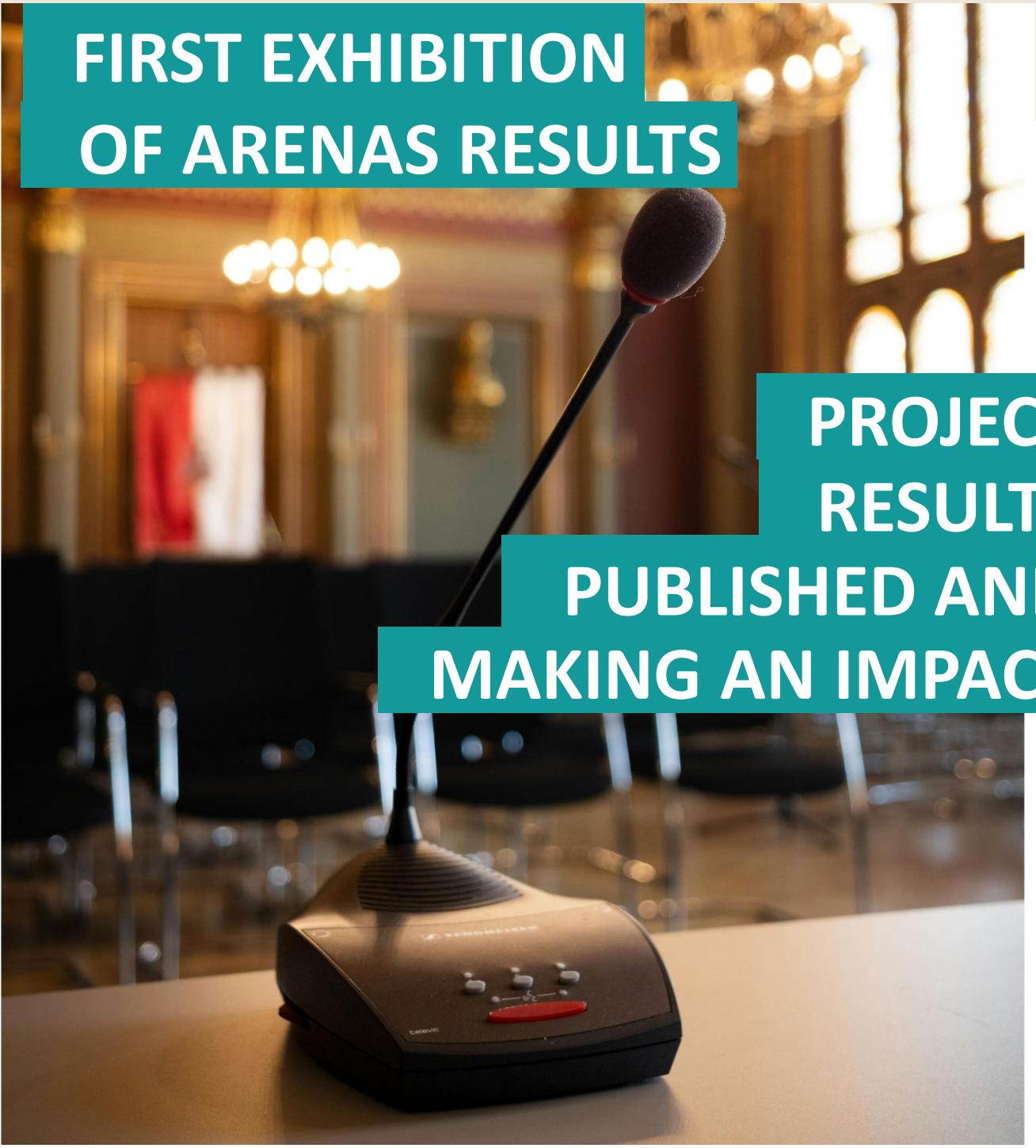


# ARENAS

ANALYSIS OF AND RESPONSES  
TO EXTREMIST NARRATIVES



**FIRST EXHIBITION  
OF ARENAS RESULTS**

**PROJECT  
RESULTS  
PUBLISHED AND  
MAKING AN IMPACT**

[www.arenasproject.eu](http://www.arenasproject.eu)



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# CONTENTS

**01**  
PAGE 3

ARENAS project passed  
it's halfway point



**02**  
PAGE 4

ARENAS at the XVII<sup>th</sup> Congress  
of the Spanish Contemporary  
History Association



**03**  
PAGE 5

ARENAS research published  
in the MDPI Journal of  
Behavioural Sciences



**04**  
PAGE 6

ARENAS research published  
in prestigious EMNLP  
2025 Findings



**05**  
PAGE 8

ARENAS project members  
deliver training at the Ligue  
des droits de l'Homme



**06**  
PAGE 9

Going Extreme:  
How Extremist Narratives  
Are Destroying Democracies



**07**  
PAGE 11

2025 Aleksanteri  
Conference hosted by the  
University of Helsinki



**08**  
PAGE 12

ARENAS represented at Media  
Literacy Ireland conference



**09**  
PAGE 13

Latvian Partner Creative  
Ideas presents ARENAS at  
the Riga NGO house



**MEET THE PARTNERS**

**10**  
PAGE 14

The Schools Beyond Regions and Borders (SBRB)

ANALYSIS OF AND RESPONSES TO EXTREMIST NA

2



## ARENAS PROJECT PASSED ITS HALFWAY POINT

*As the ARENAS project passed its halfway point, the months of research have now yielded some valuable results. The past six months have seen ARENAS consortium members invited to attend and speak at several conferences and seminars, conduct media interviews in Europe and beyond, and have their work published in highly respected journals. The articles in this ezine give an overview of our recent work, and you can learn more by visiting our website.*

*For the next six months, our focus will be on finalising research and delivering several key project deliverables, as well as preparing for our next in-person meeting in Helsinki in May 2026.*

# ARENAS AT THE XVII<sup>TH</sup> CONGRESS

## OF THE SPANISH CONTEMPORARY

### HISTORY ASSOCIATION



From 9–11 July 2025, the XVII Conference of the Spanish Contemporary History Association was held in Valencia. It is the leading event for Spanish contemporary historians. With 650 participants and 500 papers across 38 panels. This year's theme was **"The Contemporary World from the 21st Century: Balance and Perspectives"**, which sparked vibrant debate among scholars from Europe and Latin America.

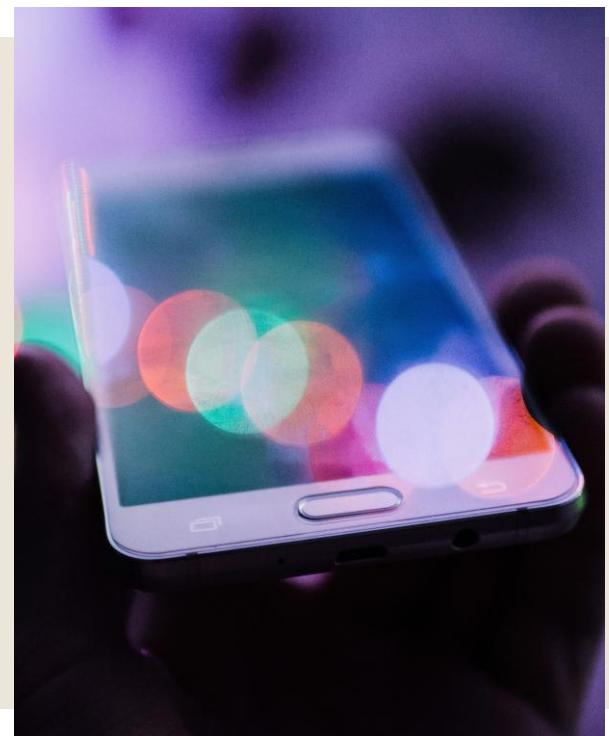
CLICK  
TO VISIT

One standout panel, **"Extremist narratives in contemporary times: a look from the past to understand the present,"** brought together experts to examine how historical roots shape today's extremist discourse. Coordinated by Steven Forti (Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona) and Claudia Jareño (Université Cergy Paris), the session featured 14 papers, including groundbreaking research from the ARENAS project.

Topics ranged from the role of media in mainstreaming extremist ideas to the use of humour and memes in identity politics. Scholars explored narratives across Spain, France, Germany, and Italy, as well as gender-focused perspectives on femonationalism and equality paradoxes. These insights reveal how extremist rhetoric evolves, and why understanding its past is key to countering its influence today. To learn more about these discussions and access all the papers, [read the full article on our website](#).

# ARENAS RESEARCH PUBLISHED IN THE MDPI JOURNAL OF BEHAVIOURAL SCIENCES

*Research by Ana Yara Postigo-Fuentes, a member of the ARENAS consortium, was published in the latest issue of the MDPI journal Behavioural Sciences. This special issue was titled *Humor Use in Interpersonal Relationships*. The article published was titled *Relational Humor and Identity Framing in the 'Virgin vs. Chad' Meme Format*.*



Extremist narratives combine two relational dynamics: the in-group is portrayed as both socially superior and simultaneously victimised by an antagonistic out-group, which legitimises hostility or defensive solutions. Despite their relevance, such narratives remain comparatively understudied.

To date, little research has examined how extremist narratives are represented through memes, and particularly how humour operates within memetic forms.

The article develops and tests a three-layered analytical framework for examining humour in extremist digital cultures. The framework integrates insights from narrative studies, multimodal discourse analysis, and humour theory to capture how memes condense antagonisms, stabilise symbolic contrasts, and calibrate affective positioning. The Virgin vs. Chad meme format is used as a case study due to its binary archetypal structure and recurrent circulation in Spanish far-right meme ecologies. The study draws on 1225 posts on X (May–August 2024), from which 17 memes employing the format were selected for in-depth qualitative analysis.

You can access the full article [here](#)



ARENAS RESEARCH

PUBLISHED IN PRESTIGIOUS

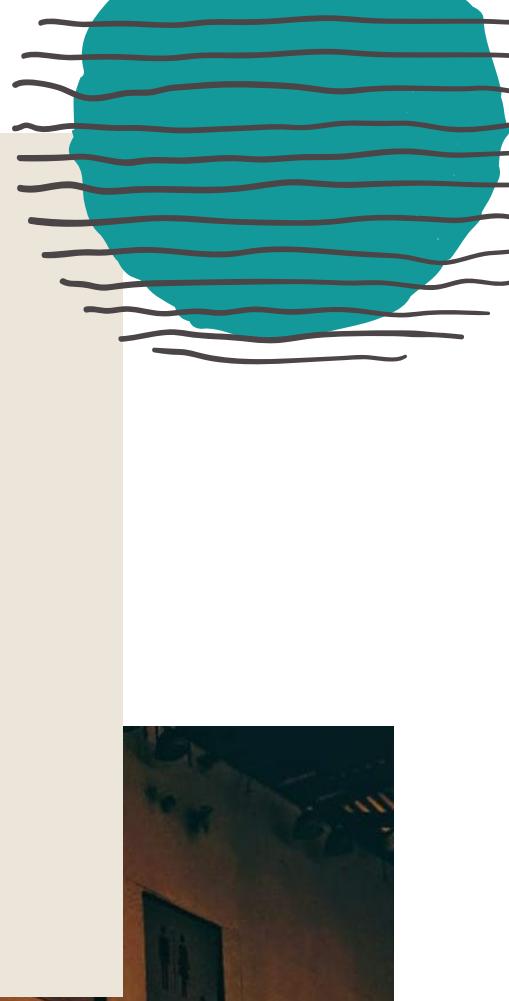
EMNLP 2025 FINDINGS

*The Conference on Empirical Methods in Natural Language Processing (EMNLP) is one of the world's premier venues for research in natural language processing and computational linguistics, emphasising empirical, data-driven, and reproducible work. Having the work of the team from CY Cergy Paris Université included in the 2025 Findings is a clear recognition of the valuable and high-quality research being carried out by the ARENAS project.*

Over 8,000 submissions were received by EMNLP, reflecting its growing global reach and influence. Following a rigorous multi-stage peer review process through the **ACL Rolling Review (ARR)** system, **1,811 papers** were accepted for the main conference and **1,417 for Findings**, corresponding to acceptance

rates of roughly **22%** and **17%**, respectively. These numbers highlight EMNLP's competitive and prestigious nature, underscoring its role as a cornerstone venue for impactful and cutting-edge NLP research.

**[MASK]ED – Language Modelling for Explainable Classification and Disentangling of Socially Unacceptable Discourse** is the paper that will be presented at the conference. It is the work of ARENAS consortium members Dimitra Niaouri Mohamed Rayane GHILENE, Michele Linardi, and Julien Longhi of CY Cergy Paris Université who propose a novel training method that teaches AI models to pay extra attention to certain linguistic patterns (called artifacts) that strongly signal unacceptable and extremist content



By guiding the model's learning around these patterns, state-of-the-art AI approaches can better classify harmful online speech, helping also (non-expert) users to understand the decision-making process of Large Language Models, and identifying training data outliers. The 2025 conference, held in Suzhou, China, marked the 30th anniversary of EMNLP and continues its hybrid format to welcome

participants worldwide. Over the years, EMNLP has mirrored the remarkable evolution of NLP, from early statistical methods to today's large language models and generative AI. It serves as a dynamic forum for researchers, practitioners, and students to share innovations and shape the future of language technologies.

# ARENAS PROJECT MEMBERS

## DELIVER TRAINING AT THE

## LIGUE DES DROITS DE L'HOMME

*Members of the ARENAS consortium from project Partner CRNS delivered training and a workshop at the headquarters of the Ligue des droits de l'Homme (League of Human Rights), in Paris in October*



**Beatrice Fracchiolla** of the University of Lorraine and **Louise Burté**, a doctoral student at CREM is both on a CNRS contract for ARENAS and delivered a 90-minute training lecture, followed by a two-and-a-half-hour workshop related to the work they are doing as part of ARENAS. Their presentation was on the construction of narratives in the discourses of extremist movements. The lecture and workshop were attended by key member of the Ligue des droits de l'Homme including the Chairwoman of the LDH, **Nathalie Tehio**, Member of the National Board, Sophie Giroud and Lionel Brun Vallicon, Treasurer of the organisation.

The Ligue des droits de l'Homme was founded in 1898, and since then has been at the forefront of multiple fights for civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, and for justice and freedom, and stands against racial discrimination and anti-Semitism. Its long history has seen it engaging in a wide range of activities.

One of the main goals of the LDH is to stand up against all kinds of discrimination and push back against the growing influence of the far right in France and across Europe. They're also committed to defending human rights as laid out in the EU's constitution, working closely with the FIDH and other European leagues to make that happen.

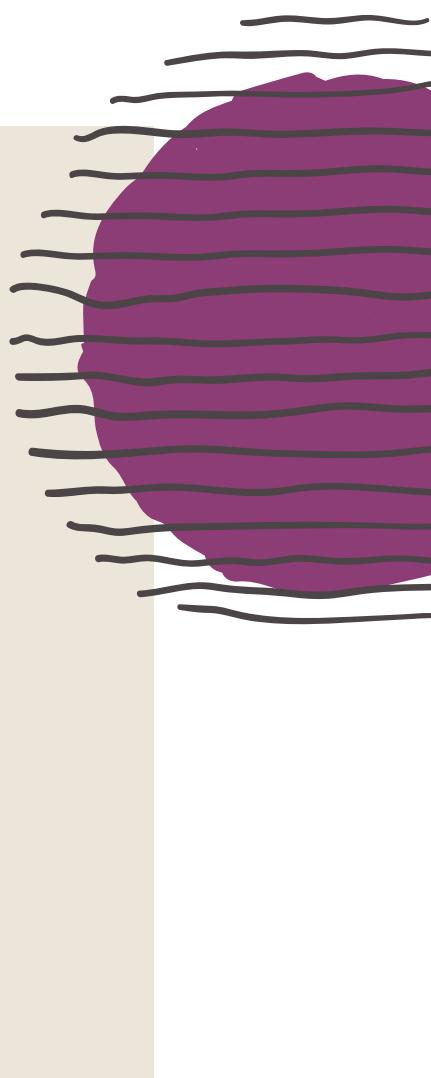


## GOING EXTREME: HOW EXTREMIST NARRATIVES ARE DESTROYING DEMOCRACIES

From November 12 to December 18, the Autonomous University of Barcelona hosted a new exhibition **Going Extreme: How Extremist Narratives Are Destroying Democracies**.

*The exhibition presented the initial results of the ARENAS, and was curated by Steven Forti, Professor of Contemporary History at the Autonomous University of Barcelona, who is a Work Package Leader on the ARENAS project.*

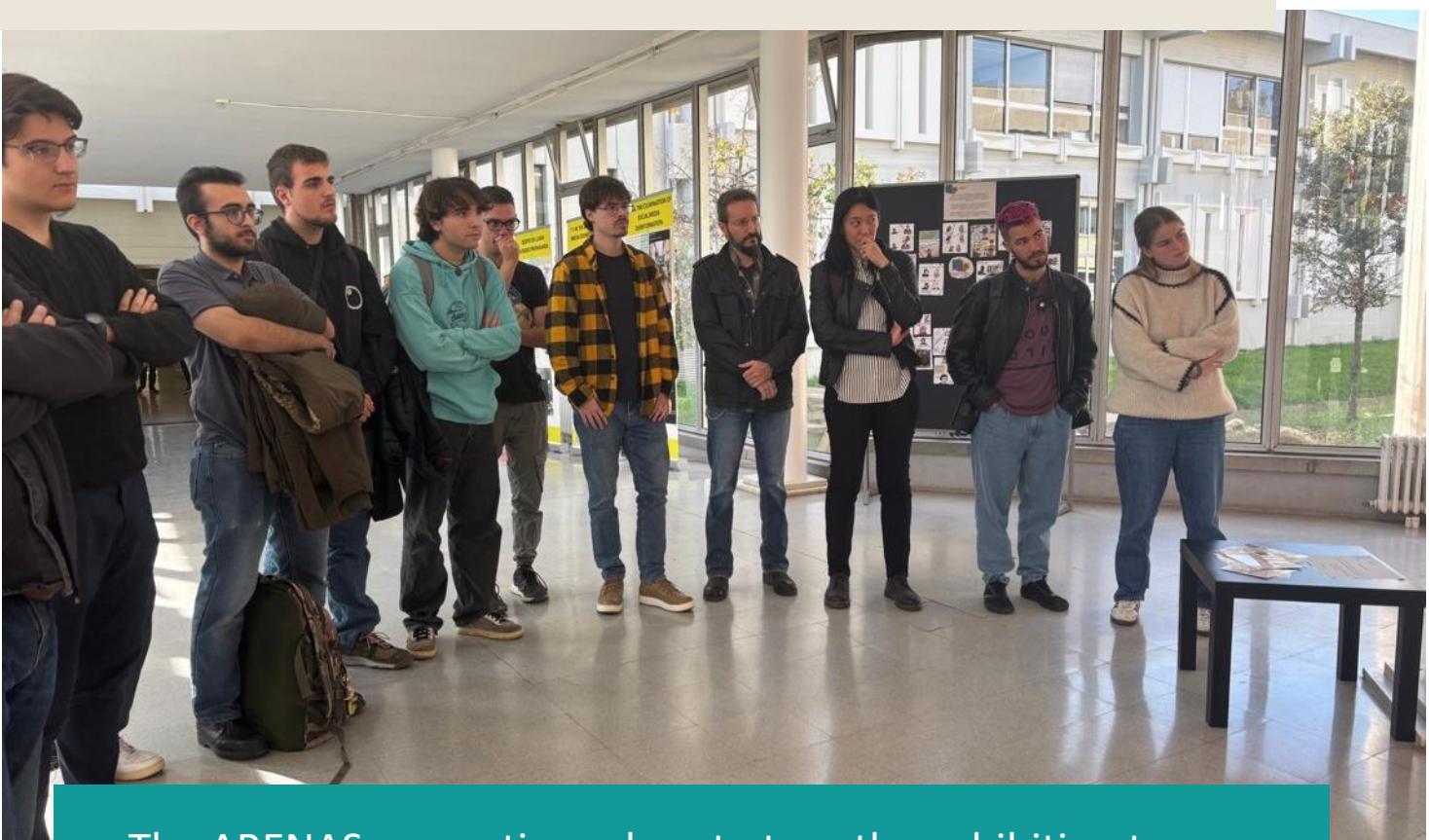
*The exhibition was coordinated by researchers Sergi Soler and Nathalie Paris and has been produced in collaboration with a group of students from the UAB's Contemporary History, Politics and Economics degree programme.*



The exhibition presents an overview of the extremist narratives currently circulating in Europe and warns of their influence, impact and consequences.

- **What is an extremist narrative?**
- **What are its patterns and formats?**
- **How have they evolved and adapted throughout the history of the last century?**
- **How can we detect them?**

These are some of the questions that the exhibition attempts to answer, focusing on the themes of nation, gender and science.



The ARENAS consortium plans to tour the exhibition to other countries, hosted by consortium Partners during 2026

# 2025 ALEKSANTERI

## CONFERENCE HOSTED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF HELSINKI



*ARENAS partner, University of Helsinki, recently hosted the 2025 Aleksanteri Conference. This year's conference theme was **Extremisms: Ambiguities, Ideologies, Agency**, and featured presentations from several members of the ARENAS Consortium.*

The conference brought together researchers to discuss and present the latest research on countering extremism, how authoritarian societies label minorities as extremists, far-right extremism, information warfare, and academic freedom

Conference organiser Katalin Miklóssy (University of Helsinki) leads Work Package 6 on Ethics Norms and Politically Sensitive Science for ARENAS. She participated in a panel discussion on *“Knowledge Production in Crisis: Constraints on Academic Freedom in Finland, Hungary, and Poland”* and in two roundtables, Roundtable 2C-1: “The nexus of illiberalism and migration in today’s Russia, Central Asia, and Eastern Europe”, and Roundtable 3B-1: “Discussion of Linda J. Cook Welfare Nationalism in Europe and Russia: The Politics of Exclusionary and Inclusionary International Migrations”.

Other members of the ARENAS consortium who spoke at the conference were Louise Burté from CNRS-CREM- University of Lorraine, who gave a presentation titled, *“Is this a Fair Story?: Using alternative narratives to remediate extremist attitudes with a young audience”* Gwenaëlle Bauvois from the University of Helsinki, delivered a presentation titled *“Closing the Policy Gap: Feminist Security Frameworks to counter radical far right mobilisation”*. Later, ARENAS member Ana Yara Postigo Fuentes from Heinrich Heine University in Düsseldorf spoke on the topic of *“From Structure to Circulation: a Framework for the Analysis of Extremist Narratives.”*

It was wonderful for ARENAS to have our work presented at this prestigious conference and to share our research with so many other experts in this field.



## ARENAS REPRESENTED AT MEDIA LITERACY IRELAND CONFERENCE

*Denise Callan, from Irish Partner Momentum, recently attended the Media Literacy Ireland conference in Dublin, where she shared information about the ARENAS project with attendees.*

Media Literacy Ireland is an informal alliance of individuals and organisations who work together on a mainly voluntary basis to promote media literacy in Ireland. The organisation invited ARENAS to display a poster at the event, and ARENAS promotional flyers were also distributed at each table.

The theme of this year's conference was *Media Literacy – Supporting communities, fostering citizenship, promoting democracy*. The conference was opened by Aoife MacEvilly, Broadcasting and Video on Demand Commissioner at Coimisiún na Meán, Ireland's media regulator. The keynote speaker at the conference was Roslyn Kratochvil Moore from Deutsche Welle Akademie, who addressed the topic of *Democracy's Missing Infrastructure: Why Community-based Media Literacy Matters*.

Learn more about the conference and the topics addressed [here](#)

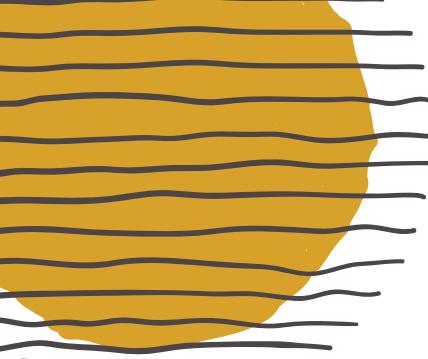
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Following the Keynote address, the conference continued with a series of excellent panel discussions:

1. *Promoting Media Freedom and Media Plurality Through Media Literacy* – convened in collaboration with Coimisiún na Meán
2. *Promoting Information Integrity: Rising to the Challenge* convened in collaboration with the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport
3. *Making Sense of AI: Building Literacy for a New Media Landscape* convened in collaboration with ADAPT (the world-leading Research



# LATVIAN PARTNER CREATIVE

## IDEAS PRESENTS ARENAS

### AT THE RIGA NGO HOUSE

**Who will lead your organisation tomorrow – respect or chaos?**

*The working environment is constantly evolving, and diversity - in age, culture, experience, values, and worldview - is becoming an increasingly central element of organisational life. Yet, actual growth is only possible when leadership is grounded in respect, inclusion, and shared understanding.*



As part of the ARENAS project, the team from the Latvian partner **Creative Ideas** participated in a thought-provoking discussion hosted by the Riga NGO House. The team is comprised of Rasma Pīpiķe, Researcher at Riga Technical University, together with her colleagues Sigitā Zankovska-Odiņa, Senior Expert on Diversity Management at the Department of Diversity Management and Sustainability, and Inese Dāvidsone, Acting Research Assistant and PhD Candidate at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Latvia.

The meeting explored the importance of diversity management in organisational leadership, the societal changes emerging from migration, causing misunderstandings between different groups, and the concept of systemic diversity as a foundation for sustainable and inclusive organisational cultures and top management teams.

During the session, Rasma Pīpiķe, who leads **Work Package 4** of the ARENAS project, invited participants to discuss and agree on what the core competencies in civil society organisation leadership should be. Participants concluded that values and education are essential components for strong, inclusive, and forward-thinking leadership teams.

**CLICK TO VISIT**

ARENAS Spotlight: Work Package 4 – The Influence and Spread of Extremist Narratives

Admin April 4, 2024

Work Package 4 examines the Influence and Spread of Extremist Narratives and is led by Rasma Pīpiķe and consortium partner Ideas Association. A graduate of Social Sciences, with a focus on journalism and public relations, Rasma also holds an MBA specialised in innovation and entrepreneurship with a focus on managing organisations and enterprises. Currently, Rasma is a student at Riga Technical University, as a doctoral student. Her thesis is interlinked with the concept of diversity management and firm performance.

Rasma firmly believed that her business studies would enhance her ability to carry out humanitarian actions, which require even more intricate and precise planning compared to private business ventures. This is because humanitarian actions involve external resources, necessitating a higher level of transparency when investing those resources most effectively. Concerning human resource management and firm performance, Rasma holds the opinion that well-trained and supported human resources are key to the success and growth of any organisation. Rasma's professional involvement in civil society organisations has played a vital role in developing exceptional communication skills with a keen sensitivity towards multicultural, religious, racial, sexual, and other sensitive issues. Over the past 20 years,

# SCHOOLS BEYOND BORDERS AND REGIONS

***The Schools Beyond Regions and Borders (SBRB) project is proving that collaboration can reshape learning for the next generation. Over the past four years, this initiative has grown into a dynamic network of 32 high schools across 12 European countries, supported by universities and institutions committed to fostering global citizenship.***



Led by Giuseppe Zorzi and Daniela Ferrari, SBRB offers students and teachers a unique opportunity to engage in monthly webinars on pressing topics—from EU policies and Agenda 2030 to social media and extremism. These sessions spark classroom discussions and cross-border projects, culminating in an annual in-person event where ideas turn into action and friendships flourish.

The project's impact hasn't gone unnoticed. In 2024, the Assembly of European Regions awarded Trentino-Alto Adige/Südtirol the MYFER prize for its youth-friendly approach, highlighting SBRB's role in promoting peer learning, mobility, and inclusion—even for linguistic minorities and students from remote areas.

To learn more about how this initiative is shaping Europe's educational landscape and empowering Gen Z, [read the full profile on our website](#)

A screenshot of a website for 'Introducing Schools Beyond Borders and Regions' on a laptop screen. The website features a teal header with the ARENAS logo and navigation links for ABOUT, PUBLICATIONS, NEWS, PODCASTS, and EVENTS. The main content area shows a group of students in a snowy landscape. A purple circle with the text 'CLICK TO VISIT' is overlaid on the bottom right of the laptop screen.



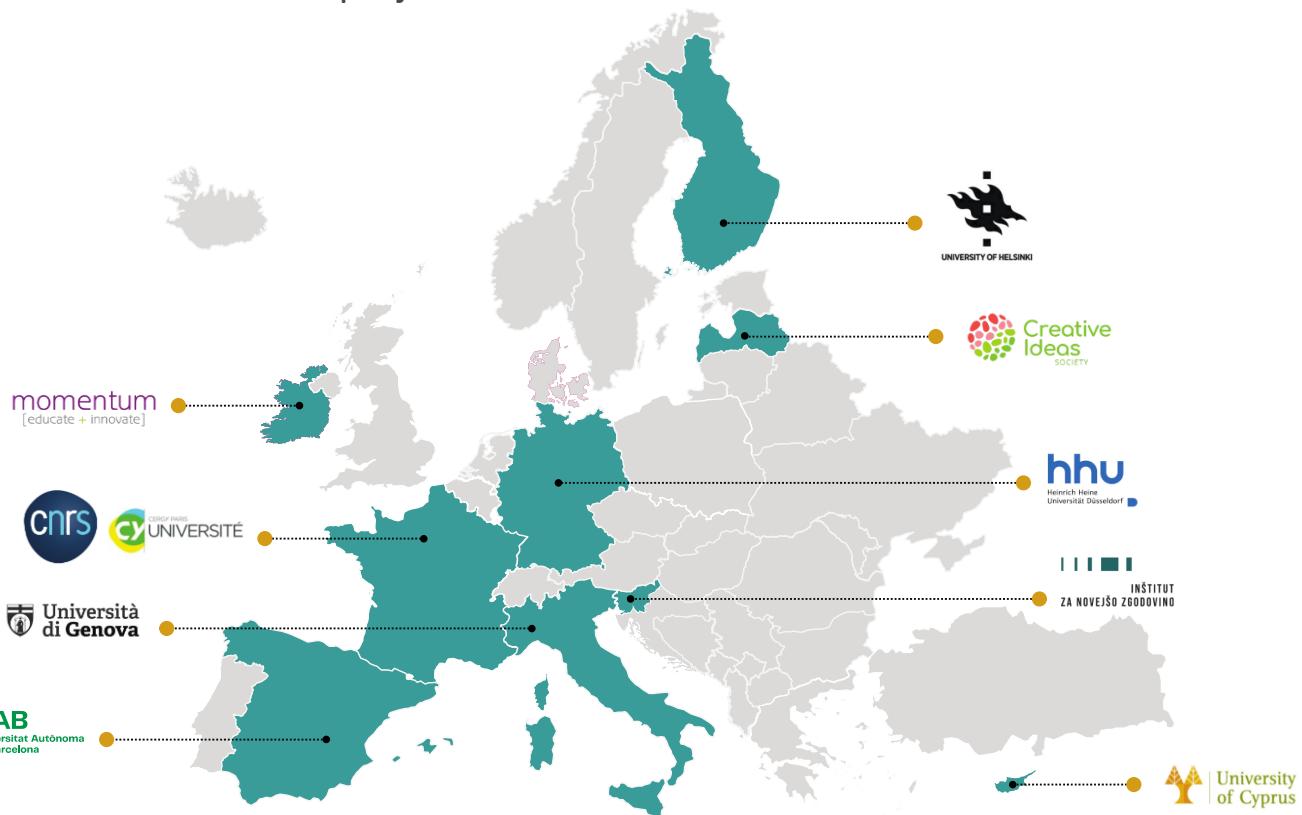
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TO EXTREMIST NARRATIVES



## OUR PARTNERS

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



[www.arenasproject.eu](http://www.arenasproject.eu)



This project has received funding from the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation programme under grant agreement No 101094731

Follow our journey

