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ARENAS

ANALYSIS OF AND RESPONSES
TO EXTREMIST NARRATIVES



MAPPING EXTREMIST NARRATIVES IN PARLIAMENT

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NEW FROM THE ARENAS GLOSSARY

WORKSHOP AT CY CERGY PARIS UNIVERSITÉ



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ARENAS REPRESENTED AT AT THE 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*.

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

- 01** Fostering Media Freedom and Media Pluralism Through Media Literacy -convened in collaboration with Coimisiún na Meán
- 02** Promoting Information Integrity: Rising to the Challenge convened in collaboration with the Department of Culture, Communications and Sport
- 03** Making Sense of AI: Building Literacy for a New Media Landscape convened in collaboration with ADAPT (the world-leading Research Ireland Centre for AI-Driven Digital Content Technology)



The conference was attended by academics, government officials, leaders in adult education, the library services, leading international digital platforms, civil society organisations and members of the media. Each panel discussion closed by posting two questions; attendees were seated at tables and collaborated to address the two questions posed, with responses returned by a facilitator at each table.

This activity sparked huge engagement and lively discussions about the issues under consideration. It provided a wonderful opportunity to introduce the work of ARENAS to key figures in the media, media literacy, education, and government departments in Ireland, many of whom are part of wider European networks.

LATVIAN PARTNER CREATIVE IDEAS PRESENTS ARENAS AT THE RIGA NGO HOUSE



Who will lead your organisation tomorrow – respect or chaos?

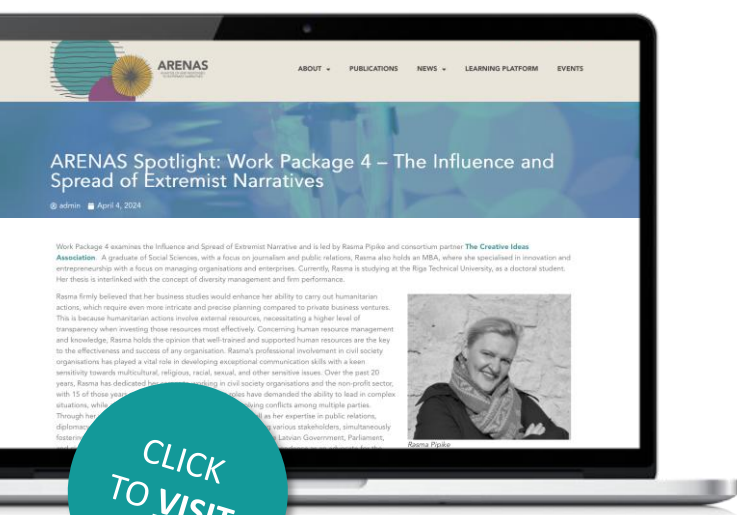
The working environment is constantly evolving, and diversity — in age, culture, experience, values, and worldview — is becoming an increasingly central element of organisational life. Yet, actual growth is only possible when leadership is grounded in respect, inclusion, and shared understanding.

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 Sigita 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.





SISTER PROJECT SMIDGE EXTENDS INVITATION TO ITS INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

Over the course of the ARENAS project, we cooperate with our Horizon Europe sister projects, building meaningful synergies for exchanging knowledge and disseminating results to boost the impact of all three projects on research, innovation and society.

ARENAS was delighted to support our sister project SMIDGE by promoting the conference on our website and social media channels. SMIDGE (Social Media Narratives: Addressing Extremism in Middle Age) is an EU-funded Horizon Europe research project exploring how online narratives shape public discourse among middle-aged individuals. As such it aligns with the work of ARENAS.

The conference, “The Invisible Middle: Understanding Online Extremism in Middle-Aged Adults in Europe,” took place on 29 January 2026 at NH Brussels EU Berlaymont in Brussels. In the keynote, Dr. Sara Wilford, who is an associate professor at De Montfort University and also the founder and co-leader of the project, highlighted the specific position of middle-aged adults, often described as the “sandwich generation”, who may feel undervalued at work, pressured by rapid social and technological change, and nostalgic for a perceived past stability.

Project findings, including survey and focus group findings on middle-aged adults’ social media engagement and the SMIDGE MOOC platform, were then presented.

CY CERGY PARIS UNIVERSITÉ HOSTS WORKSHOP: THE CIRCULATION OF ANTI-GENDER EXTREMIST NARRATIVES

*On Thursday, March 19, 2026, scholars, researchers, and practitioners from across Europe will gather at CY Cergy Paris Université for an in-depth workshop exploring **The Circulation of Anti-Gender Extremist Narratives**.*



This full-day event, part of the ARENAS Project, combines keynote talks, expert panels, and roundtable discussions to examine how these narratives emerge, spread, and influence societies. The workshop is in a hybrid format, allowing participants to join on-site or online at this [registration link](#). For those attending in person, the event takes place at the Salle de Congrès 1, Maison SHS Annie Ernaux, CY Cergy Paris Université. The full programme and schedule are available below.

Anti gender messaging and extremist narratives are on the rise globally. These discourses shape public debate, fuel discrimination, and increasingly intersect with political, social, and digital dynamics.

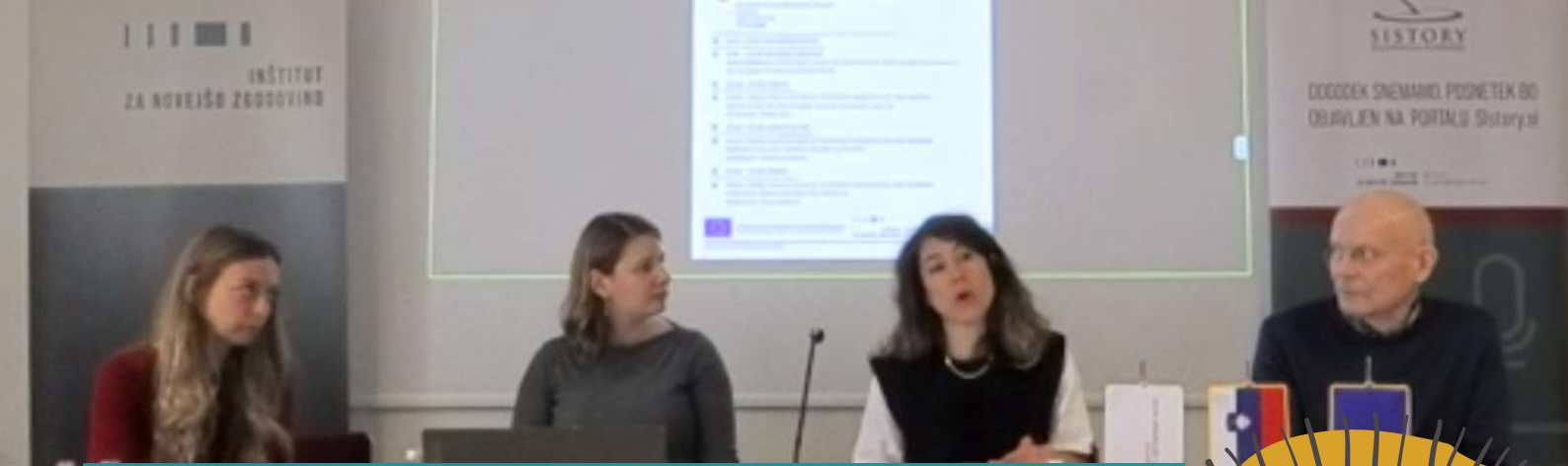
- 01 How extremist narratives are created and framed
- 02 How they circulate across borders and media
- 03 The actors and networks sustaining them
- 04 Their links to misogyny, anti-intellectualism, and neofascist ideologies
- 05 Gendered impacts, including violence against women in politics

By exploring these intersecting areas, the workshop aims to foster critical insight and contribute to broader democratic resilience. Understanding how extremist narratives circulate is more crucial than ever. Join us for a day of knowledge sharing, discussion, and collaborative reflection with experts across Europe. The opening keynote address will be delivered by **Éric Fassin (Université Paris 8)**, a leading scholar of gender, politics, and society. His keynote will address anti-gender and anti-intellectual movements, tracing their evolution “from reactionary to neofascist”, and exploring their ties to political and religious mobilisations.

There will be two panel discussions; the first will consider Anti-Gender Narratives and Discourses. It will be followed by a Roundtable on Anti-Gender Narratives in Circulation. The second panel addresses Actors and Mobilizations with the final session of the day being a Roundtable on Actors and Networks. These panels and Roundtables feature consortium members from seven Universities that are participating in the ARENAS project. Details of the participants and the topics they will address can be found in the Programme below.

This event is of particular interest to:

- 01 Researchers in gender studies, sociology, political science, or communication
- 02 Policy makers and NGO professionals
- 03 Students interested in extremism, digital narratives, or gender issues
- 04 Journalists covering politics or social movements
- 05 Anyone wishing to understand the rise and impact of anti-gender discourse



MAPPING EXTREMIST NARRATIVES IN PARLIAMENT: ARENAS SEMINAR IN LJUBLJANA



*On Monday, 23 February 2026, the Institute of Contemporary History (Inštitut za novejšo zgodovino, INZ) in Ljubljana hosted a seminar titled "**Circulation of Extremist Narratives through the Parliaments: Current National and European Contexts.**"*

The event brought together researchers, NGO representatives, and other stakeholders both in person and online via Zoom, and marked a significant milestone in the ongoing work of the ARENAS project (Analysis of and Responses to Extremist Narratives), funded by the European Union's Horizon Europe programme.

The seminar was organised as part of the work of Work Package 3 (WP3) of ARENAS, which focuses on mapping how extremist narratives circulate across historical, national, and transnational political contexts. One of WP3's core tasks, led by INZ, is the collection and analysis of parliamentary discourses produced by extreme right-wing and populist parties across a range of European countries, from Slovenia and Croatia to Spain, France, Finland, Hungary, and Germany. The ultimate goal is to chart how these narratives travel across languages, borders, and institutions, and eventually to produce a comprehensive report on their translinguistic and transnational circulation in national parliaments and the European Parliament. The Ljubljana seminar was planned for precisely this purpose.

The day was structured around three thematic sessions that reflected the three main subject areas ARENAS investigates: nation, gender, and science. The opening keynote was delivered by Ines Soldwisch, who examined radical right narratives in the European Parliament between 2015 and 2024. The subsequent sessions featured presentations by researchers from the ARENAS consortium, including Steven Forti, Ana Yara Postigo Fuentes, Gwenaëlle Bauvois, Nathalie Paris, Simo Määttä, Claudia Jareño Gila, Sergi Soler, Tjaša Konovšek, and also by Filip Dobranič, a researcher at INZ and an NGO activist in Slovenia. The seminar was moderated by Marko Zajc, Isidora Grubački, and Jure Gašparič.

Discussion throughout the day was grounded in a report currently being prepared by the ARENAS team, and due for publication in the coming months. It also drew on the broader expertise that participants brought from their own research. This combination of structured analytical work and wider scholarly exchange gave the seminar a dual character: it was both a working session for the team advancing the WP3 deliverable and an open forum for critical discussion about one of the most pressing challenges facing European democracies today.

THE GROUND IS SHIFTING:

THE EFCSN'S "GREAT RETREAT" REPORT

ALIGNS WITH ARENAS RESEARCH

A new white paper published this month by the European Fact-Checking Standards Network (EFCSN) makes for sobering reading for anyone working on the challenge of extremist narratives in Europe. *The Great Retreat: How Platforms Deprioritised Information Integrity and What to Do About It* arrives at a critical moment, and its findings speak directly to the work at the heart of the ARENAS project.

Over the past two years, the world's most powerful technology platforms (Meta, Google, X/Twitter, TikTok and others), have quietly and not-so-quietly walked back their commitments to fighting disinformation. Safety teams have been scaled down, third-party fact-checking partnerships wound up, and references to "misinformation" scrubbed from official risk assessments. On one leading platform, the word appeared 77 times in its 2023 report; by 2025, just once.

The consequences are measurable. Research cited in the paper found that roughly 20% of posts on public-interest topics on TikTok contained misinformation, with Facebook at 13% and X/Twitter at 11%. More alarmingly, low-credibility accounts consistently generated more engagement per follower than high-credibility ones, a dynamic the authors call the "Misinformation Premium." Meanwhile, the rapid rise of generative AI is adding new threat vectors faster than existing safeguards can adapt.

The ARENAS project was funded under the Horizon Europe programme precisely because extremist narratives do not exist in isolation. They spread. They circulate through media, social media and political discourse, and their power depends on the infrastructures through which they travel.

The EFCSN white paper documents in real time what ARENAS has been studying structurally: the conditions that allow extremist and misleading narratives to gain traction and go unchallenged. Where ARENAS works to characterise the linguistic and semiotic mechanics of extremist narratives, their roots, their circulation patterns and their influence on perceptions, the EFCSN paper shows the platform environment in which those narratives now operate is becoming increasingly permissive.

The paper's call for rigorous Digital Services Act enforcement, hybrid verification models combining crowd-sourced community notes with professional fact-checking expertise, and sustainable EU funding for information integrity work all align closely with ARENAS's own recommendations for policy makers, journalists and educators. It reflects the same underlying conviction as ARENAS: that the "battle of stories", not merely the debate over facts, is where democratic resilience is won or lost. As the platforms retreat, the need for research-grounded tools, educational resources and policy frameworks to counter extremist narratives becomes more urgent, not less.





ARENAS GOING EXTREME EXHIBITION OPENS IN DÜSSELDORF

On Tuesday, May 5th, the ARENAS Exhibition Going Extreme: How Extremist Narratives Are Destroying Democracies, opened at the Heinrich Heine University (HHU) in Düsseldorf, Germany. This is the first time the exhibition has been hosted outside Spain, so it marks another important milestone in the dissemination of the ARENAS project results.

Professor Dr Heidrun Dorgeloh, Vice President for University Culture and International Relations at HHU, officially welcomed the arrival of the exhibition. Next, Ana Yara Postigo Fuentes, who leads the project Work Package researching the Characterisation and Detection of Extremist Narratives, outlined the work she and the team

responsible for the Work Package have carried out on the project. She was joined by her colleagues Stefan Hartmann and Alexander Ziem, who, together with Rolf Kailuweit, co-authored one of the early significant project resources, Defining Extremist Narratives, which is available to download from the ARENAS website

The development and expected impact of the exhibition were outlined by Steven Forti from the Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB), who was responsible for creating the Going Extreme exhibition initially in Spain.

It was great to meet so many students and University staff who attended the exhibition opening, and the ARENAS teams look forward to sharing these ARENAS results with many more people from now to its closing date of June 7th.



NEW FROM THE ARENAS

GLOSSARY: UNDERSTANDING

"WOKISM" AS A POLITICAL NARRATIVE

The ARENAS project has published a new contribution in its ongoing glossary of right-wing extremism, this time examining one of the most contested and rapidly evolving terms in contemporary political discourse: "wokism."

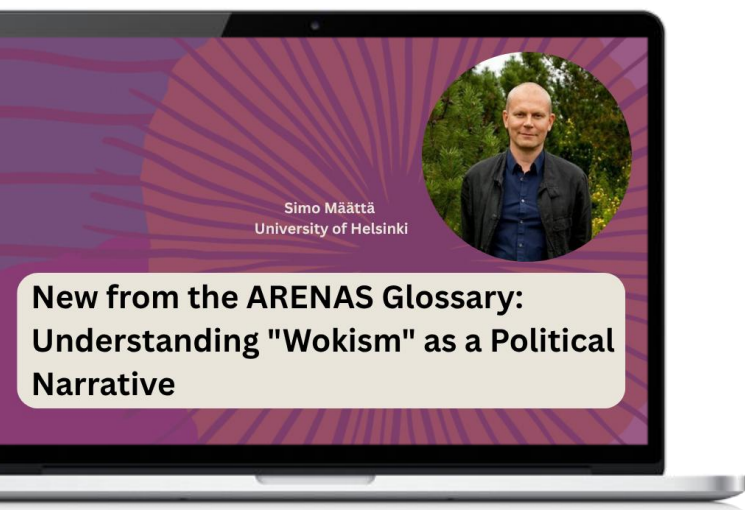


The article is written by Simo K. Määttä, a researcher at the University of Helsinki, one of ARENAS's twelve partner institutions. The team at the University of Helsinki plays a significant role within the project, leading Work Package 6 on ethics and politically sensitive science, and contributing substantially to Work Package 3, which examines how extremist narratives circulate across languages, borders, and political contexts. This broader focus on circulation is central to understanding how a term like "woke" can travel from African American vernacular English into the rhetorical arsenal of far-right politicians across Europe.

In his contribution, Määttä traces the historical roots of the word "woke" from its earliest recorded uses in pan-Africanist writing in the 1920s, through its renewed prominence during the Black Lives Matter movement, to its current incarnation as a political catchall deployed by figures ranging from Ron DeSantis to Matteo Salvini. Drawing on sociolinguistic frameworks, including Sara Ahmed's concept of "sticky emotions" and the notion of floating signifiers, he shows how the term has been systematically distorted to serve as a tool for those seeking to dismiss campaigns for social and racial justice, while presenting that dismissal as a principled defence of free speech.

The glossary of right-wing extremism is coordinated by Steven Forti and brings together historians, sociologists, political scientists, and sociolinguists from across the ARENAS consortium. Entries are designed to be accessible to broad audiences, making complex ideological phenomena legible without oversimplifying them.

Määttä's piece is a timely and rigorous contribution to this effort, and a clear demonstration of the kind of cross-disciplinary, transnational analysis that lies at the heart of the ARENAS project.



MOMENTUM'S MEMBERSHIP

OF CEC STRENGTHENS

THE ARENAS PROJECT'S IMPACT

Momentum's recent admission as a member of CEC (Comité Européen de Coordination – Acting for Social Inclusion) opens a significant new channel for the ARENAS project to reach the communities its research is designed to serve.



ARENAS is investigating extremist narratives across 15 European countries, with a focus on three core themes: Science, Nation, and Gender. The project does not simply study these narratives in the abstract; it aims to produce practical tools and recommendations that help individuals and communities recognise, resist, and respond to them. To do that effectively, ARENAS needs robust pathways to the people and organisations who work directly with those most affected. The CEC network provides exactly that.

Founded over 20 years ago, CEC connects 19 national and regional member organisations across 15 EU countries, linking more than 1,600 local associations and structures. Together, these organisations support 100,000 young people and adults annually, focusing on social and professional integration for those who are most disadvantaged in the labour market. As a connector, advocate, and knowledge-sharing hub, CEC operates at the precise intersection of frontline delivery and European-level policy influence.

This alignment is particularly meaningful for two of ARENAS's core research themes. Extremist narratives linked to the Nation, encompassing attitudes towards migrants, questions of identity, and anti-immigrant sentiment, disproportionately affect the very groups that CEC member organisations support daily. Similarly, Gender-based extremist narratives, which generate hate speech and discrimination while shaping legislative and political debates, have a direct and tangible impact on the lives of marginalised young people and adults across the EU. CEC's member network reaches these populations in ways that academic and policy channels often cannot.

Through Momentum's membership, ARENAS now has a route into this network. The consortium's training materials, educational tools, and remediation strategies can be shared with organisations that are already embedded in communities where extremist narratives cause real harm. Equally, the lived experiences of CEC's member organisations and the people they serve provide invaluable grounding for ARENAS research, ensuring that findings remain connected to the realities they seek to address.



Momentum's participation in the CEC General Assembly in Brussels in June 2025, and the connections forged there with social inclusion organisations from across the EU, mark the beginning of what promises to be a productive relationship.

As ARENAS moves into its final phase and focuses on exploitation and impact, the CEC network offers a meaningful bridge between research outputs and the communities that stand to benefit most.



ARENAS CONSORTIUM ANNUAL MEETING HOSTED IN HELSINKI

The ARENAS consortium gathered in Helsinki last week for its Annual Meeting and General Assembly Meeting. The University of Helsinki hosted the meetings, and the three days of activities were excellently planned and coordinated by Katalin Miklossy, Gwenaëlle Bauvois and Simo Määttä.

The meeting was opened by Katalin Miklossy, who welcomed the project participants to Helsinki and the University, and by Julien Longhi, Project Co-ordinator from CY Cergy Paris University. They set out the schedule for the event and introduced the theme for the day – Knowledge.



During the first day of the meeting, the ARENAS consortium heard from a series of excellent speakers, each addressing a specific topic or theme related to the work of the ARENAS project.

01

Roundtable: Saija Benjamin (Radia Knowledge Centre: Prevention of Violent Radicalisation and Extremism) and Niko Pyrhönen (researcher of misinformation and propaganda, scholar of religion)

02

Extremist Think Tanks interconnected: Annastiina Kallius (Institute of Advanced Studies, social anthropologist)

03

High School teacher's experience: Hanna Toikkanen-Maher (Eira High School) about extremism amongst students

04

Attacks on the Freedom of Academia: Oula Silvennoinen (University of Helsinki, historian)

Day two of the meeting began with a walking tour of Helsinki, learning about the history of Finland, Helsinki and the impact of that history on the city's architecture and on present-day Finland. The walking tour concluded at the University, where the consortium broke into Work Package groups and worked together for the rest of the morning.

After lunch, the members of the General Assembly gathered for their meeting, joined online by the external representatives of the General Assembly. Each work package leader presented an overview of the work done in the past six months and the planned work for the next six months, identifying challenges and highlights that occurred.

In the final session of the meeting, Denise Callan of Momentum, who leads Dissemination and Communications for the project, updated the consortium on the success to date of the project in reaching its target audience with the research published to date, and outlined the communications strategy for the final year of the project to ensure ARENAS maximises its impact.

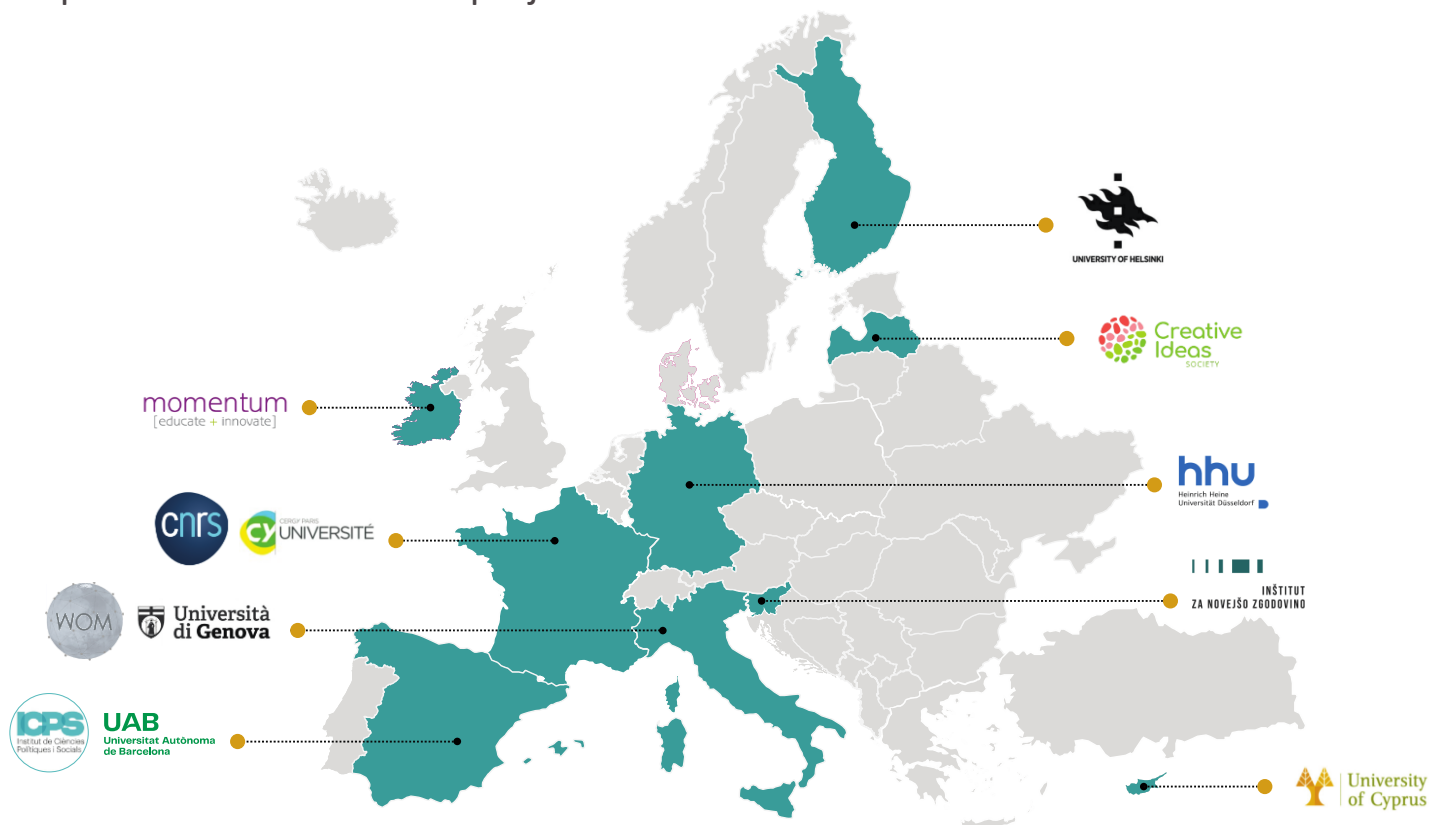
The day finished with a final dinner together with wonderful views overlooking Helsinki. The dinners and lunches together provided opportunities for all the consortium members to interact informally and strengthen relationships. There was unanimous praise for the organising team from the University of Helsinki for the excellent programme, and the marvellous selection of restaurants selected and the success of the meeting.

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.



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Follow our journey



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