

**YEARLY REPORT**

**BY CHAIR MAKIS VORIDIS**

**ON THE ACTIVITIES OF THE OSCE PA AD HOC COMMITTEE ON  
COUNTERING TERRORISM**



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## INTRODUCTION

At the 2018 PA Winter Meeting, when I presented to the Plenary my first report as Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism (CCT), I briefed you about our mandate, the first activities undertaken and some preliminary findings.

Today, one year later, I am proud to report that the Ad Hoc Committee has been working quite intensively in line with our ambitious work-plan, providing that specific parliamentary added value we had wished for when it was established in July 2017.

As a matter of fact, the CCT is increasingly recognized as a new reliable counter-terrorism stakeholder in the international arena. This would not have been possible without the commitment of all its members and the support of the Assembly as a whole. Currently, the Committee is composed of 14 active parliamentarians, 4 recently appointed, representing different regions of the OSCE area<sup>1</sup>.

## TRENDS

While their forms are evolving, terrorism and violent extremism continue to pose a major threat to our security and stability. At the international level, the so-called ISIL and Al Qaeda remain very active in conflict-affected zones, despite ISIL's territorial defeats in the Middle East. These significant losses of ISIL-controlled territory have limited its capacity to carry out large-scale attacks.

This fact, together with an improved intelligence work, led to a substantial decrease in the number of casualties in the last three years, with a record 52% fall in Europe (and 27% globally) between 2016-17<sup>2</sup>. In addition, the global economic impact of terrorism fell by 42% in the same period, amounting to \$52 billion in 2017. However, the overall number of terrorist acts has continued to grow. For instance, the number

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<sup>1</sup> See CCT Factsheet in Annex

<sup>2</sup> Institute for Economics and Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2018*

of terrorist attacks in Europe last year increased to 282, up from 253 in 2017<sup>3</sup>. Moreover, the impact of terrorism remains widespread, with many countries still experiencing at least one death from terrorism each year.

These trends hint to a strategic twist in both the nature and scale of terrorism, which is corroborated by the findings of the Committee. Complex operations by transnational terrorist networks have been partially superseded by less sophisticated attacks of so-called “home-grown”, or domestic, terrorists and violent extremists. Given their nature, the latter are often more difficult to detect and prevent. Irrespective, the threat to our societies remains high, regardless if it derives from large-scale bombings perpetrated by returning foreign fighters, or lone wolf attacks of violent extremists on our streets.

Against this backdrop, it seems clear that the “drivers” of terrorism are also changing, with factors related to political extremism and disenfranchisement in our societies becoming more prominent. We must acknowledge and better understand such causes and what they imply if we intend to effectively respond to the challenges we face. As highlighted by the 2018 Global Terrorist Index, *governments can no longer content themselves with existing approaches to fighting extremism*<sup>4</sup>. Strategies are becoming outdated and resources inadequate; that is why we need a greater commitment of the international community and a more strategic involvement of all layers of society. Ultimately, addressing more effectively the numerous causes of radicalization becomes imperative.

Over the last decade, the OSCE experienced increasingly diverging security perceptions among its members and, at times, even backstepping on previously agreed commitments. Although countering terrorism and violent extremism remains one of those topics with significant political convergence among our participating States, this has not translated into effective policy-making lately. A case in point is the failed adoption, for two consecutive years, of extensively negotiated draft

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<sup>3</sup> Centre for Strategic International Studies, *Report: From the IRA to the Islamic State: The Evolving Terrorism Threat in Europe*, December 2018.

<sup>4</sup> Institute for Economics and Peace, *Global Terrorism Index 2018* p71

counter-terrorism decisions at the last two Ministerial Council meetings in Vienna and Milan.

This is precisely where the PA should step in: leveraging on our comparative advantages, we can bring new impetus to the organization's efforts by creating political momentum for action through our legislative, oversight and convening powers.

### THE OSCE PA AD HOC COMMITTEE ON COUNTERING TERRORISM

Last year, I pointed out that the Committee was primarily focusing on learning more about existing terrorism trends and corresponding policy needs, as well as on promoting strategic partnerships both inside and outside the OSCE framework. Today, building on such efforts, the CCT has started developing policy guidance and promoting innovative parliamentary initiatives. Moreover, we have looked more closely at many of the recurring themes we had identified at the beginning of our work. Namely, the importance of coordination and information-sharing, the need for more understanding of the underlying causes of radicalization, threats related to the return of FTFs, challenges stemming from the use of digital technologies by terrorists, and the role of victims of terrorism.

As much as the topics addressed may have been different, although clearly inter-linked, there is one aspect which has emerged vividly throughout our work and which we have been keen on mainstreaming in all our efforts: we should never compromise on human rights and fundamental freedoms in our counter-terrorism action. In the CCT we are very conscious that this, especially now-a-days, requires enduring vigilance and extreme diligence.

I will now walk you through the main activities we have successfully implemented over the last year, conveniently clustered around the Committee's mandated tasks.

## *Assessing trends and exploring innovative approaches in the OSCE region*

The Committee performs these tasks primarily by conducting targeted field visits, where it meets with numerous stakeholders who share their experience and concerns. In my first report, I had touched upon the visits to Morocco, where the focus was on youth radicalization and understanding its causes, and Belgium, where we learned about effective systems for information-sharing and innovative instruments to prevent radicalization at grass-root level.

In June, in Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>5</sup>, we learned about the challenges and recent efforts to bring criminal legislation in line with international standards, and we discussed issues linked to effective border management in a region which is witnessing significant movements of people. The visit also focused on the challenges stemming from the return and relocation of FTFs and the urgency to develop effective de-radicalization and rehabilitation programmes, especially in prisons. Moreover, we hailed the efforts of state authorities, religious communities and civil society devoted to preventing violent extremism and radicalization. Finally, we held meetings with the OSCE Mission both at the headquarters in Sarajevo and in its field office in Travnik, which proved instrumental to better understand the important role our organization plays on the ground.

In November, following a public briefing before the US Helsinki Commission, I had the opportunity to exchange notes on terrorism-related trends with several stakeholders, both governmental and non-governmental, in the United States of America. As expected, the terrorism threat perception on the two shores of the Atlantic Ocean does not diverge. “Homegrown” terrorism is considered as one of the most pressing security challenges in the USA, together with returning FTFs. As elsewhere in the OSCE region, prevention of terrorism and violent extremism at grass-root level poses significant challenges both in terms of resources and legal framework. Finally, the timely collection and sharing of passenger information

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<sup>5</sup> See full report at: <http://www.oscepa.org/documents/all-documents/ad-hoc-committee-on-migration/3755-note-to-the-file-visit-of-the-osce-pa-ad-hoc-committee-on-countering-terrorism-to-bosnia-and-herzegovina-5-8-june-2018/file>

(API/PNR/Biometrics) is considered pivotal to counter and prevent international terrorism. While co-operation in this field remains a top priority, several legal and operational hurdles unfortunately persist, especially at the international level.

Just two weeks ago, during an official visit to France facilitated by our member Aude Bono-Vandorme, the Committee noted the exceptional challenges posed by de-radicalizing children returning from foreign conflict zones. Managing these minors triggers complex policy dilemmas, where-by the best interests of children and of society need to be carefully balanced. As the French experience has shown, it is paramount to invest in law enforcement and develop effective security measures while at the same time promoting inclusive education and specialized social services. France's special procedure for children returning from conflict areas revolves around a multi-disciplinary approach which involves state authorities, health professionals, social services and national education authorities, to name but a few. Ultimately, it is up to policy makers to ensure that the traumatic experiences that these children have experienced do not impact their future, nor that of those around them.

***Promoting inter-parliamentary dialogue and the exchange of best practices and lessons learned.***

Throughout the year the Committee actively contributed to numerous expert events and conferences, addressing different aspects in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism and sharing important lessons learned. *Inter alia*, our members intervened in the following events:

- *International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law Workshop on the Nexus of Parliamentarians and Criminal Justice Actors in Countering Terrorism*, Malta, March 2018<sup>6</sup>. CCT member Ignacio Cosido briefed on how Parliaments can promote public confidence in counter-terrorism by duly monitoring the work of the security providers, including the intelligence services.

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<sup>6</sup> See OSCE PA press release at: <http://www.oscepa.org/news-a-media/press-releases/2837-ad-hoc-committee-member-ignacio-cosido-participates-in-counter-terrorism-event-in-malta>

- *OSCE PA Conference on Digital Resilience of a Democratic State*, Lisbon, May 2018<sup>7</sup>. In a session on cyber-security and terrorism, I delivered a keynote address on the importance of developing effective strategies to counter the exploitation of digital technologies and of the internet by terrorist organizations, for example for planning terror attacks or radicalizing new individuals. This is a domain where global efforts are still lagging and where we should engage more actively with the private sector.
- *OSCE-wide Counter-Terrorism Conference on the Challenges Posed by the Reverse Flows of FTFs*, Rome, May 2018<sup>8</sup>. My presentation - as well as the participation of several CCT members in the conference - raised the visibility of the PA's work in this field and conveyed increased attention to the issue of the return of FTFs. It was also useful to better coordinate with the OSCE executive structures and to hold several bilateral meetings with key external counterparts.
- *Regional Conference on Addressing Violent Extremism and Radicalization that leads to terrorism while sharing good Prison and Probation Service Management and Practices on rehabilitation and Reintegration Programmes*, Tirana, October 2018. The conference focused on FTFs and on religious radicalization in South East Europe. CCT member Fatmir Mediu actively advocated for greater parliamentary engagement on these important topics.
- *2<sup>nd</sup> OSCE Wide-Seminar on Passenger Data Exchange*<sup>9</sup>, Vienna, November 2018. I used this opportunity to inform participating States about our innovative efforts to mobilize national parliaments on border control and information sharing issues, as well as to learn directly from practitioners the key challenges they are facing in this field.

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<sup>7</sup> See OSCE PA press release at: <http://www.oscepa.org/news-a-media/press-releases/2853-protections-against-cyber-threats-must-build-trust-and-uphold-fundamental-freedoms-say-osce-parliamentarians-at-lisbon-conference>

<sup>8</sup> See OSCE PA Press Release at: <http://www.oscepa.org/news-a-media/press-releases/2855-countering-the-foreign-terrorist-fighter-phenomenon-requires-greater-parliamentary-involvement-say-ad-hoc-committee-members-at-rome-osce-conference>

<sup>9</sup> See OSCE PA Press Release at: <http://www.oscepa.org/news-a-media/press-releases/press-2018/chair-of-ad-hoc-committee-on-countering-terrorism-makis-voridis-discusses-osce-pa-recommendations-on-foreign-terrorist-fighters-at-vienna-conference>

- *Conference on Victims of Terrorism*, Madrid, November 2018<sup>10</sup>. The Spanish Parliament organized a very timely initiative which saw the active engagement of victims' associations from across the OSCE region. The event provided an excellent venue to discuss ways to adequately support victims, both in the aftermath of a major attack and in the longer-term, and explore their prominent role in countering terrorists' flawed narratives.
- *Briefing with the U.S. Helsinki Commission*, Washington D.C., December 2018<sup>11</sup>. This briefing, organized by our Vice-Chair Richard Hudson, enabled me to profile our work and exchange views with key experts on a range of burning topics, such as domestic terrorism, radicalization, information-sharing, financing of terrorism, the role of local communities and rehabilitation issues.

***Developing forward-looking policy recommendations for the attention of the OSCE Governments and Parliaments.***

Last July in Berlin, during our Annual Session, the OSCE PA adopted unanimously a comprehensive resolution on *Preventing and Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism and Radicalization that lead to Terrorism (VERLT)*<sup>12</sup>. The resolution, which represents a solid example of strategic convergence between the parliamentary and executive structures of the OSCE, consolidates many findings of the CCT in a comprehensive text and paves the ground to more targeted future initiatives.

The resolution addresses a wide range of topics with a strong emphasis on safeguarding human rights and endorsing a whole-of-society approach in our counter-terrorism efforts. In particular, after emphasizing the need for joint and

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<sup>10</sup> See OSCE PA Press Release at: <http://www.oscepa.org/news-a-media/press-releases/press-2018/victims-must-remain-central-to-discussions-on-international-counter-terrorism-efforts-say-osce-pa-participants-at-madrid-conference>.

<sup>11</sup> See OSCE PA Press Release at: <http://www.oscepa.org/news-a-media/press-releases/press-2018/in-meetings-in-washington-osce-pa-s-voirdis-says-that-effective-counter-terrorism-strategies-require-co-ordinated-action-across-the-osce-area>

<sup>12</sup> Full text of the Resolution: <http://www.oscepa.org/documents/all-documents/ad-hoc-committee-on-migration/3757-resolution-on-preventing-and-countering-terrorism-and-violent-extremism-and-radicalization-that-lead-to-terrorism-adopted-at-the-27th-annual-session-berlin-7-11-july-2018/file>

coordinated approaches, it deals with issues such as border control and information-sharing, FTFs and the challenges emerging from their return, radicalization and de-radicalization, countering extremist narratives, the pivotal role of civil society, religious leaders, media, youth, and of the private sector, the centrality of education in promoting tolerance, the urgency to counter the financing of terrorism and disrupt the links between terrorist networks and organized crime, as well as terrorist threats stemming from cyberspace. Importantly, the resolution also underscores the prominent role of national Parliaments in this field and calls upon them to act as a driving force to advance counter-terrorism efforts, and to ensure oversight through the active monitoring of the implementation of relevant laws and commitments by the national authorities.

As mentioned, this document aims at giving more coherence to the PA action in this field and provides a framework for the future activities of the Committee, effectively integrating it in the wider spectrum of the OSCE. Against this backdrop, it is now our intention to move forward on more specific topics requiring urgent attention. In the coming months, we will be discussing relevant themes that could be brought to the attention of the Assembly in Luxembourg.

***Promoting the implementation of relevant OSCE PA recommendations and international commitments***

This is the ultimate, and possibly most challenging goal of our Committee. We recently launched an ambitious initiative calling upon all Parliaments in the OSCE region to inquire – in accordance with their national procedures - their respective Governments on the status of implementation of international standards on border security and information sharing in the context of the fight against terrorism and, more specifically, the return of foreign terrorist fighters.

With this project we are shifting our action from international to national arenas, building on the oversight function of each parliament in a coordinated manner to push for the full implementation of critical obligations stemming from United

Nations Security Council Resolutions 2178 and 2396: most notably, the establishment of API (Advance Passenger Information), PNR (Personal Name Record) and biometric systems. According to the OSCE Transnational Threats Department, despite such obligations being legally binding and universally recognized as instrumental to curb terrorism, to date only 48% of OSCE participating States have set up an API system, while just 31% collect PNR data<sup>13</sup>. Implementation of biometric systems is instead still in its earliest stages.

As of today, 16 national Parliaments - or approximately 30% of the OSCE participating States - have successfully responded to our “call for action” by organizing structured question-times with their governments and by sending back their consolidated findings to our International Secretariat. Several other Parliaments are in the process of doing so, and I would like to thank all delegations for taking this initiative very seriously.

Over the next months, we plan to review all the replies together with the OSCE Secretariat, which will then stand ready to offer its technical support to interested participating States. Ultimately, this is a critical example of effective co-operation and complementarity between the executive and parliamentary structures of the OSCE. While parliamentarians are no experts, they do have the power of fostering political momentum for action. If we can combine such power to the expertise of the OSCE Secretariat, then the added value of the OSCE family will grow exponentially, with our distinct contribution to the effective implementation of the global counter-terrorism framework becoming more tangible.

***Building strategic partnerships with OSCE executive structures and external stakeholders.***

None, or very little, of what I reported could have been accomplished without the support of our partners. First and foremost, we continued to work closely with the

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<sup>13</sup> OSCE TNTD, *Overview of the use of Advance Passenger Information (API) and Passenger Name Record (PNR) in the OSCE Area*, January 2019.

OSCE executive structures in line with our mandate. To this end, I was often in Vienna to enhance synergies with the OSCE Chairmanship in Office, the participating States and with different departments of the OSCE Secretariat. On the last occasion, in November, I presented our recently adopted Resolution to the OSCE Security Committee and informed about the parliamentary initiative on border control and information sharing. Overall, I was very pleased to record a genuine and growing interest towards our work and full support for our initiatives, which are all intended to complement and enrich the OSCE governmental efforts. The CCT is now broadly recognized as a valuable contributor to the OSCE-wide counter-terrorism efforts, and this is quite remarkable considering it was created merely 18 months ago. This is certainly due to our active engagement, but also to the fact that we managed to bring a genuine and rather distinct contribution.

We have established goal-oriented cooperation also with a wide range of external stakeholders. For instance, during my trip to the United States in November I visited the UN Office for Counter Terrorism (UNOCT) and the UN Counter Terrorism Executive Directorate (UNCTED) in New York<sup>14</sup>. UN Undersecretary General Vladimir Voronkov strongly praised the CCT's initiative on border control and information sharing, welcoming the public outreach of parliamentarians in this domain and their ability to exercise political pressure on governments to implement key international commitments. The possibility of signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between our two entities to formalize and deepen our interaction is currently being explored. Meanwhile, I invited UNUSG Voronkov to address one of our next statutory meetings to inform us about the United Nations counter-terrorism agenda and witness first-hand the commitment of our members to countering and preventing violent extremism.

Another example of strategic partnership is our interaction with the International Institute for Justice and Rule of Law (IIJ), based in Malta. By actively engaging in several expert meetings, we contributed to better conceptualize the role of

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<sup>14</sup> See OSCE PA Press Release at: <http://www.oscepa.org/news-a-media/press-releases/press-2018/building-co-operation-between-osce-pa-and-un-on-counter-terrorism-focus-of-voridis-s-visit-to-new-york>

parliamentarians in countering and preventing terrorism. This knowledge is currently being consolidated in a practical handbook for parliamentarians, which will be published soon, and that we hope to distribute widely.

Finally, we are in the process of co-organizing a major international parliamentary conference on countering-terrorism in April in St. Petersburg, together with IPA-CIS and other parliamentary fora active in our region, such as IPU, PACE, and PAM. I was recently informed that, following my personal invitation, USG Voronkov is also planning to attend and contribute in person. I believe the untapped potential of inter-parliamentary co-operation in this field is considerable and it is indeed time to further explore it, perhaps under the auspices of the United Nations.

#### WAY FORWARD

To conclude, I am proud to report that within these first 18 months our Committee significantly strengthened the engagement of OSCE parliamentarians in countering terrorism, including by exploring several topical issues with renowned experts, sharing important lessons learned in bilateral and multilateral fora, sharpening its co-operation with the OSCE and other key international partners, developing comprehensive policy guidance which sets the scene for our future work, promoting human rights-compliant counter-terrorism responses and mobilizing over 15 national parliaments to improve the implementation of relevant international commitments on border control and information sharing. Given our non-permanent nature and limited resources, I believe a lot has been achieved.

Our intention is to proceed along this path. With the strong support of the PA President, Secretary General and International Secretariat, we will spare no effort to bring the engagement of parliamentarians in countering terrorism to a distinct new level, including through greater interaction with relevant inter-parliamentary fora. For instance, an important topic which might require more focus in the future is the pervasive link between organized crime and terrorism.

Moreover, we will continue to strengthen our strategic partnerships with the OSCE and other international partners - possibly also through targeted MoUs - building on our respective strengths, fully aware that only standing united we can make a difference.

The goal remains utterly clear: we are committed to bringing a distinct parliamentary contribution to the fight against terrorism, violent extremism and radicalization for the benefit of our citizens.

Thank you.