

NOTE TO THE FILE

OFFICIAL VISIT OF THE OSCE PA AD HOC COMMITTEE ON COUNTERING TERRORISM TO FRANCE

Fight Against Radicalization and Management of Returning Minors

Paris, 7-8 February 2019

1. Introduction

On 7-8 February 2019, the OSCE PA Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism (CCT) paid an official visit to France. Seven CCT members, led by CCT Chair Makis Voridis, gathered in Paris to exchange views with renowned French experts on the topics of **countering radicalization** and **management of minors returning from conflict-affected zones**



The visit, facilitated by CCT member Aude Bono-Vandorme and organized with the support of the French Parliament, provided the committee with the opportunity to learn more about existing French strategies, institutions and mechanisms focusing on the prevention of violent extremism and radicalization that leads to terrorism (VERLT), as well as the existing procedures in handling terrorists' children returning from conflict-afflicted zones.

During the two days, the OSCE PA delegation met with representatives of the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Health, Inter-Ministerial Committee on Prevention of Radicalization, Intelligence, the Prosecutor's Office, the Court of Paris and with various psychologists, sociologists and professors.

Overall, the visit proved instrumental to increase the understanding of the CCT on the key policy, legal, operational and ethical challenges faced by France in preventing radicalization and in managing children returnees.

2. Key Findings and Lessons Learned

- **France's strategy on counter-terrorism relies heavily on prevention**, thus focusing on impeding radicalization and thwarting terrorist attacks within its national border and abroad.
- **French radicalization-prevention programs attach high importance to the close monitoring of terrorists and radicalized individuals**, both during and after their imprisonment. This effort is carried out by **multi-disciplinary teams** of counselors, psychologists, social workers and intelligence staff, usually on an individualized basis.
- **There is no typical psychological or social profile of terrorists and radicalized individuals**, nor specific social backgrounds and health disorders that explain why a person becomes a violent extremist.
- **Religious education is a key element in the de-radicalization process**, offering a perspective towards religion that is not linked to violence.
- **Society must also play a greater role in deradicalization efforts** by changing their prejudices against former terrorists and violent extremists and by offering them a real opportunity for re-integration. In this regard, **Parliamentarians could contribute** by investing in education and awareness-raising programs or campaigns.
- **The vulnerability of women and children in terms of radicalization and indoctrination should be more central in the policy debate**, since their role is becoming increasingly important within terrorists' organizations.
- **In terms of managing returning minors, the French experience is particularly significant and should serve to inform the policy-making of other Governments** in the OSCE region. The French Government is considering repatriating about 80 children of French jihadists from Syria and Iraq. These would add to the 80 to 100 minors who are already in France upon their return from Syria and Iraq.
- While acknowledging the security challenges stemming from minors returning from conflict-affected zones, **France considers and treats returning minors first and foremost as victims of their parents' actions**.
- Rather than by the judicial authorities, **most of the children returning from conflict-affected zones are taken care of by protection services**, who accompany and monitor them for as long as it is necessary before placing them in **foster families** and **reintegrating them in schools** and in society.
- Some of the **key challenges** in this regard relate to the funding of these monitoring programs, to the relationship of children with their parents (often held in custody), to the minors' civil status and to the methods and duration of the surveillance.

3. Context

The terrorist threat in France became particularly manifest in 2012 with jihadist attacks in Toulouse and Montauban, and further intensified after the 2015 attacks against the *Charlie Hebdo* satirical newspaper. The latter set a turning point in the French strategy towards terrorism that resulted in first, a 2-year state of emergency and, subsequently, in a series of policies, strategies and programs to fight terrorism and prevent radicalization.



Figures from the Ministry of Justice show that there are currently 2573 radicalized individuals in France, out of which 511 are terrorist offenders currently serving sentence in prison. Allegedly, around 1000 people radicalized while serving their sentences in French prisons. Additionally, according to the French Ministry of Interior, in February 2018 nearly 680 French adults and more than 500 children were still in Syria and Iraq. Among the minors, only 53 are older than 13. More recent numbers indicate that about 60 women have been reported by their families to be in Syria; of that number, 40 are mothers with around 150 minors, most of whom are under the age of six.

4. Day I: Radicalization and Counter Radicalization



The CCT delegation was welcomed by the Secretary of State to the Minister of Interior, **Mr. Laurent Nuñez**, and CCT Member, **Ms. Aude Bono-Vandorme**, who explained the relevance of the topics in focus during the two-day visit. Mr. Nuñez offered an overview of the French counter-terrorism situation and discussed the package of measures adopted since 2014 to counter terrorism and radicalization more effectively, including a communications network established at a national level. These measures are both preventive – such as the Interministerial Plan on Countering Radicalization - and

repressive. Mr. Nuñez finally underscored how the exchange of information must engage all possible stakeholders within the French territory, as well as international co-operation with organizations like Europol.

The first set of presentations was divided in three panels focusing on radicalization from a 1) security, 2) judicial and 3) sociological perspective.



The Secretary General of the Interagency committee for the prevention of crime and radicalization (CIPDR), **Ms. Muriel Domenach**, presented the French counter-terrorism strategy, comprised in the 2016 Plan of Action against Radicalization and Terrorism and the 2018 National Plan against Radicalization. Ms. Domenach emphasized that this strategy is designed as a preventive tool aimed at protecting the State, local institutions

and civil society by engaging a wide range of sectors: education, legal, sports, business, etc.

Moreover, CCT members learned about the Anti-Terrorist Co-ordination Unit (UCLAT) from its Head, **Mr. Amin Boutaghane**. The UCLAT, reporting to the French Minister of Interior, is responsible for both the centralizing and processing of all information, intelligence and administrative police measures on radicalization and terrorism, and also raising awareness on the matter through different activities. *Inter alia*, Mr. Boutaghane asserted the importance of long-term monitoring of inmates, as one of the main objectives of UCLAT is to prevent radicalization of individuals both during and after their incarceration. Finally, he explained the French Government's plan to repatriate around 80 children (out of roughly 150) from Syria and Iraq.

Mr. Guillaume Monod, psychiatrist, **Mr. Laurent Bonelli**, sociologist, and **Mr. Bernard Rougier**, political scientist, provided an interesting sociological analysis of the phenomenon. Mr. Monod and Mr. Bonelli concurred that traditional psychological or social patterns do not always apply when trying to elucidate the reasons for radicalization in many individuals. In particular, Mr. Monod spoke about a monitoring process of 6-24 months for 14 radicalized individuals. According to different surveys and experiences, the radicalization process is not very lineal and there are multiple factors that come into play, especially when looking at young individuals (e.g. family, social background, psychological issues, relationship with religion, relationship with violence, etc.). Notably, radicalization might occur even in persons who are relatively well integrated into society. Special attention was drawn to the importance of changing both society's and terrorists' mentality in order to, on the one hand, eliminate the



social stigma that former prisoners face when they are released; and, on the other hand, to teach radicalized people a way of living in harmony with the rest of society.

The Deputy Director of Counter-Terrorism at the Directorate-General for Internal security (DGSI), Ministry of Interior, **Mr. François Septours**, referred to the past and ongoing terrorism related challenges in France, including the spreading of jihadist propaganda and the emerging capacity to perpetrate a large-scale attack with a simple knife. Mr. Septours stressed the need for international co-operation at multilateral and bilateral levels.

Subsequently, **Mr. Nicolas Renucci**, Vice-Prosecutor, **Mr. David de Pas**, Investigative Judge, **Ms. Émilie Thubin**, Enforcement Judge and **Mr. François Toutain**, Head of the Fight against violent radicalization Mission of the Ministry of Justice, described the French criminal justice system, where all terrorism-related cases are centralized in the Paris Prosecutor's office and Court, both composed of specialized professionals with a national jurisdiction. The main

criminal offenses for which an individual can be prosecuted are “public apology of terrorist acts,” “direct provocation of terrorist acts,” “criminal conspiracy in connection with a terrorist enterprise” and “regular search of jihadist sites.” By the end of 2018, the Paris Prosecutor's Office dealt with approximately 280 preliminary investigations and 404 judicial investigations. Currently, 442 criminal cases are being handled by



the enforcement judges, with 240 of them having been convicted (among which 180 defendants were convicted for Islamic terrorism). Interlocutors mentioned key challenges in their respective field of work: the legal situation of women and their increasingly prominent role in terrorist activities, and of lone wolves. The session also focused on the monitoring programs implemented in prisons carried out by the Radicalization Assessment Units. Multidisciplinary teams of counselors, psychologists and social workers actively engage with radicalized inmates to promote their deradicalization and then opt for the most suitable detention condition depending on the degree of dangerousness.



Finally, **Mr. Maarten van de Donk** cited the mandate and key features of the Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN), a platform linked to the European Commission in which practitioners, researchers, policy makers, health professionals, teachers, civil society, etc. exchange expertise and experience related to radicalization. After offering his views on the reasons why FTFs and their children return from war zones (e.g. disenchantment, wish for better life

conditions, desire to be more useful to the cause from Europe, etc.) and outlining key challenges in this field, such as lack of effective assessment tools and limited social acceptance, he stressed the relevance of education and radicalization prevention efforts, areas where parliamentarians could provide useful contributions.

5. Day 2: The Management of Returning Minors

The second day of the visit focused entirely on the policy, legal, social and ethical challenges linked to the management of minor returnees from conflict-affected zones, with one panel looking at relevant French procedures and another one at the Seine-Saint-Denis experience.

Ms. Léonor Sauvage, from the Interagency Committee for the Prevention of Crime and Radicalization (CIPDR), and **Ms. Laure Neliaz**, from the Childhood and Adolescence Office of the Ministry of Solidarities and Health, explained that France, while recognizing the potential security threat, treats all returning children first and foremost as victims. Allegedly, this is one of the reasons why the French Government is planning to bring them back from war zones. Between 80 and 100 minors allegedly returned to France from Syria and Iraq so far, 15 % of which were born in conflict zones.

Both interlocutors discussed the current procedures for the care, monitoring and reintegration of such minors within France, as well as on the responsible social, health and judicial bodies. In this regard, judicial procedures are initiated only in a limited number of cases, while most minors are taken over by the protection services, which, following initial medical tests, place them in foster families. Around 70 children are currently under the Ministry's supervision, with two-thirds of them already integrated in schools. Key challenges encountered in this delicate process of reintegrating minors back into society include the lack of information





on their previous life conditions in war zones, lack of targeted education of the professionals involved (for instance on religious issues) and the psychological traumas of the minors. Other crucial issues discussed in this panel included the challenging

relationship between these children and their parents (often imprisoned) and with their foster families, their treatment on an individualized basis, their satisfactory reintegration and schooling, the methods and duration of the whole monitoring process, the civil status assigned to children upon their arrival, etc.

Concerning the actions undertaken by the Paris department of Seine-Saint-Denis, parliamentarians heard the practical examples shared by **Dr. Thierry Baubet**, Professor and Head Physician at Avicenne Hospital, who, from a medical perspective, reiterated the importance of integrating children as normally as possible, while also fulfilling their special needs. In turn, the Head of the Judicial Protection for Young People Department in Seine-Saint-Denis, **Mr. Jean-Christophe Brihat**, reaffirmed the importance of actively reaching out to these minors, offering them a concrete opportunity to start a new life, rather than stigmatizing and criminalizing them for the responsibilities of their parents.

6. List of Participants

- Mr. Makis Vouridis (CCT Chair, Greece)
- Mr. Kamil Aydin (CCT member, Turkey)
- Ms. Aude Bono-Vandorme (CCT member, France)
- Ms. Lisa Chambers (CCT member, Ireland)
- Mr. Ignacio Cosidó (CCT member, Spain)
- Mr. Paolo Grimoldi (CCT member, Italy)
- Mr. Abid Qayyum Raja (CCT member, Norway)
- Mr. Guy Teissier (CCT member, France)
- Ms. Marie-Pierre Besnault (France)
- Ms. Anne-Cécile Blauwblomme-Delcroix (France)
- Ms. Hatice Eras (Turkey)
- Ms. Laura Lai (Italy)
- Mr. Marco Bonabello (International Secretariat)
- Ms. María Teresa Yagüe (International Secretariat)

