

9th REPORT BY THE CHAIR OF THE OSCE PA AD HOC

COMMITTEE ON COUNTERING TERRORISM,

Mr. Reinhold Lopatka

at the

OSCE PA Winter Meeting (Standing Committee)

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DRAFT

INTRODUCTION

Mr. President,

Mr. Secretary General,

Distinguished Colleagues,

It is an honour to address the Standing Committee on behalf of the Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism (CCT) and update you about our most recent efforts and vision for the future.

It has been ten months since my last report and I am proud to say that the CCT has managed to remain extremely active in this period, despite the numerous impediments posed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

I cannot emphasize enough that terrorism poses a **major threat to international security and regional stability**. The circumstances might be changing, but this multifaceted threat is adapting fast and terrorist groups are quickly finding new ways to bring their grim agenda forward. Hence, preventing and countering all manifestations of terrorism and violent extremism must always be our priority.

The chain of terror attacks in the fall of 2020 served as a stark reminder of how complex and volatile the current situation is.

Clearly, the socio-economic distress caused by the pandemic has offered new **opportunities for terrorists and violent extremists** to spread their propaganda and recruit new sympathizers, targeting the most vulnerable layers of our societies. For instance, the **COVID-19 crisis has revitalized many radical movements of right-wing extremists**, which became especially dangerous for governments and parliaments, not least because of their rejection of necessary pandemic containment measures.

Notably, both radical Islamic groups and right-wing extremists use **similar communication strategies** – especially on the social media - for recruiting new activists. All of these networks – independent of their ideologies and goals – pose a serious **threat to democracy and peace**.

Supporting well-planned **international assistance** and promoting **responsible solutions to the challenge posed by detained terrorists** - usually in extremely poor conditions in Syria and Iraq - must be a top priority in our counter-terrorism efforts. Similarly, we must actively **prevent radicalization and refine our de-radicalization programmes in Europe**. If we fail, the consequences of our short-sighted policies could haunt us for decades.

At the OSCE PA, we will continue working on promoting viable solutions to these challenges both through our official activities and more informal dialogue. If we want to effectively fight terrorism, radicalization, and violent extremism, we can only do so through **national and international partnerships** which are at least equally as strong as the terrorist networks themselves. The exchange of information, expertise and good practices are crucial in this context and we must continue to strengthen it.

WAY FORWARD

Dear Colleagues,

Thus far, I believe the CCT has been particularly successful in **promoting a greater parliamentary engagement in counter-terrorism matters** by significantly expanding our network of partnerships through concrete activities and formal agreements (e.g. MoU with UNOCT).

Building on the efforts of our Committee over the last 3 years, I am convinced that **there are 5 key thematic areas where we shall strive to bring a distinct parliamentary contribution**:

- (1) **Border security and information sharing;**
- (2) **Prosecution, reintegration and de-radicalization of terrorists and violent extremists (and their family members);**
- (3) **Preventing terrorism**, especially online and in the context of crises such as COVID-19;
- (4) Providing support to the **victims of terrorism**, and;
- (5) **Exploring the intersection of terrorism with other serious threats/crimes** (e.g. bio-terrorism, terrorism financing, nuclear proliferation and hybrid threats, etc.).

As you are aware, **in some of these domains we have already played a prominent role**. For example, in the **field of border security and information sharing**, we have promoted the implementation of key international obligations through the oversight power of national parliaments in 2018 and 2019. Hailed as a very useful and innovative contribution by all our counterparts, we are now considering a suitable follow-up initiative, perhaps as soon as next year.

We have been equally successful in developing timely policy guidance on addressing some of the top challenges stemming from the **FTF phenomena**¹, which have subsequently informed national debates and paved the ground for the development of new policies in some of our countries.

A lot of work has also been carried out on **better understanding the evolving radicalization dynamics** - for instance in the context of the ongoing pandemic, and exchanging lessons learned on the **effectiveness of de-radicalization efforts**².

To further our engagement in these fields, we plan to hold a **special debate on “Assessing the terrorist threat and existing deradicalization efforts amidst the COVID-19 pandemic”** together with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM) and the Interparliamentary Assembly of CIS Member Nations (IPA CIS) at the **Parliamentary Conference on Countering Terrorism** on 15 April 2021 in St. Petersburg. This conference, a follow-up to similar events held in 2017 and 2019, is a prime example of good collaboration between parliamentary assemblies (IPA-CIS, PAM, PACE, etc.) and a perfect opportunity to extend the reach of our parliamentary action.

In other areas of our counter-terrorism agenda, we are still actively engaging with the hope of being equally impactful. This is the case with **supporting the victims of terrorism**. Building on findings of the 2018 Madrid Conference and the expert consultations with the United Nations in late 2020 and early 2021, we are now considering a **dedicated resolution on Support, Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Victims of Terrorism** at our next **Annual Session in Bucharest**. Such a text would offer valuable policy guidance at the international level on an issue often neglected by national legislators.

Finally, in the future we might be called to do more on complex issues such as the **repatriation of FTFs, preventing terrorism and radicalization online and bio-terrorism** - just think of what would happen if a virus like COVID-19 could be used by extremists to trigger a new pandemic, de facto crippling our society on **terrorism financing** and perhaps even on **nuclear terrorism**.

Dear Colleagues,

While the challenges in the field of countering terrorism are so many, it is imperative that we strive to narrow down our focus to maximize our parliamentary impact and provide a tangible contribution within the international community.

¹ For instance, the Supplementary Item adopted in 2019 in Luxembourg 2019, or the CCT visit to France conducted on the same year.

² For instance, the 2018 Supplementary Item on Preventing and Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism, or the CCT visits to Morocco (2017), Belgium (2018), Bosnia & Herzegovina (2018), Norway (2020), as well as contribution to numerous conferences and expert events.

To do so, we will continue to **build on our strategic partnerships** with those who know more and have more resources (i.e. OSCE, UNOCT etc.), **leverage on our unique parliamentary assets** (i.e. policy-making, oversight and bridging functions) and **strive to keep abreast of key developments to promptly tackle key threats as they emerge.**

ACTIVITIES

Concerning the **work carried out by the CCT since my last report in April 2020**, our **Committee has engaged in numerous initiatives** to further our Assembly's counter-terrorism efforts, mostly **together with our key partners.** Please allow me to elaborate further.

With PAM and UNOCT, we **successfully organized a Parliamentary Web Dialogue on “Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic” on 30 June 2020.** The event allowed parliamentarians to exchange views on how to keep counter-terrorism efforts high on the international agenda during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. *Inter alia*, participants concurred that Governments should:

- I. Address **cyber and internet security** issues as a matter of priority;
- II. Counter the **flawed narratives and disinformation** spread by violent extremists, focusing especially on the **most vulnerable layers of society**
- III. Limit the **use of emergency powers** and ensure that counter-terrorism responses endorse a **whole-of-society approach** and remain **human rights-compliant.**

Building on the MoU signed in February 2020, CCT Member Ms. Teresa Jiménez Becerril Barrio actively engaged in **UNOCT expert consultations to develop Model Legislative Provisions to Support and Protect the Rights and Needs of Victims of Terrorism.** As a keynote speaker in two distinct sessions³, she reiterated the vitality of victims' associations in sensitizing all societal actors to the needs of those affected by terrorist attacks, and their important role in shaping a wide range of national policies and processes in this regard. Teresa also reminded of the OSCE PA's efforts in this regard - such as the 2018 "Madrid Conference on Victims of Terrorism", hosted by the Senate of Spain in co-operation with the OSCE PA - as well as the 2020 visit of the CCT to Norway, signaling our determination to further work on this topic and develop timely policy guidance.

Moreover, the CCT has been actively contributing with comments and expertise to **UNOCT consultations on the draft Parliamentary Manual on Facilitating the Implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.** These consultations are still ongoing.

Finally, we closely followed the **United Nation's 2020 Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week**, held in June and July of last summer, and participated in a **Focal Points Meeting with UNOCT** on 17 September 2020 to discuss the modalities of a possible new co-ordination mechanism between different interparliamentary assemblies under the UNOCT umbrella.

With regards to our **work with the OSCE Executive Structures**, the co-operation has been outstanding throughout the last ten months. To begin with, I have personally met with the

³ Namely, on the “Role of victims' associations and non-governmental organizations” (3 December 2020) and on “Recognition and Remembrance of Victims of Terrorism” (18 January 2021).

OSCE Chairmanships and the Co-ordinator of Activities to Address Transnational Threats on multiple occasions, and they have both contributed to several CCT events and meetings.

The CCT has also worked closely with the OSCE Action against Terrorism Unit (ATU) to develop a new project aimed at building counter-terrorism awareness among parliamentarians in the OSCE region. In this context, we hope to co-organize a **Regional Expert Dialogue for Legislators from South Eastern Europe and interested EU countries** in the second half of 2021. This would represent a great chance to engage and share experiences on key counter-terrorism issues with legislators from a broad number of OSCE countries.

In addition, we are continuously consulting and exchanging plans with **OSCE ODIHR**. Notably, our parliamentary expertise was sought during **ODIHR's expert consultations on human rights challenges related to information gathering and sharing in border management in the counter-terrorism context**. One of such meetings took place on 15 June 2020, and we are currently exploring new possibilities for joint action, for instance on facilitating the review of national counter-terrorism legislation.

During this period, we have also **contributed to several high-level international events**. I personally participated in the **OSCE-wide Counter-Terrorism Conference on "Effective Partnerships Against Extremism and Terrorism"**, which took place in Vienna on 14-15 September 2020. Notably, we also plan to play a similar role at the next **OSCE-wide Counter-Terrorism Conference**, tentatively planned for 20-21 April 2021.

Just a few days ago, I also intervened at the **PAM-UNOCT high-level meeting on the "Challenges of the post-territorial ISIL context"**. This was yet another opportunity to remind ourselves that countering terrorism should be a priority for all countries and highlight the importance of closely monitoring developments regarding radical right-wing extremist groups in our region.

Finally, since my last report, **our Committee held three official meetings** on 5 June 2020, 25 November 2020 and just a few day ago, on 18 February 2021. Notably, our meeting in November focused on the latest terror attacks in Europe. Together with renowned experts, our members pondered new radicalization trends, assessed the effectiveness of current de-radicalization efforts, and further explored the impact of the pandemic on violent extremism.

As with most events nowadays, **all these activities were held online** due to pandemic-induced restrictions. They were, however, **very well-attended and inspiring**. While meeting online is clearly less attractive than meeting in person, it does allow us to reach a larger audience of parliamentarians, partners, and high-level experts. This is a modality we should also keep in mind when, hopefully soon, we will revert to our more traditional way of working.

CONCLUSION

Dear Colleagues,

As illustrated, in the coming months the Committee will continue to explore the latest trends, develop targeted guidance, share lessons learned and engage in well-coordinated projects with our strategic partners. I encourage all of you to stay tuned and actively engage!

The **fight against terrorism and violent extremism is an area of the international security agenda that brings us all together**, even in cases where hostility or divergence marks the relations of certain participating States. As such, it should be treated as a **prime confidence-building topic** and spearhead our parliamentary diplomacy efforts. We simply cannot allow our different security perceptions and national interests to play in favor of the terrorists and violent extremists!

To conclude, I would like to **thank our President and Secretary General**, whose steady support has been critical to the success of our Committee, **as well as all my fellow CCT members**, whose personal commitment has been exemplary over the past year.

Thank you!