

2021 Chairpersonship OSCE-wide Counter-Terrorism Conference:

“Reinforcing a Comprehensive Approach to Preventing and Countering Terrorism and VERLT in a Changing Landscape”

20-21 April 2021, via Zoom

Informal Readout

Background

2021 OSCE-wide Counter-Terrorism Conference on “Reinforcing a Comprehensive Approach to Preventing and Countering Terrorism and VERLT in a Changing Landscape” was organized on 20 and 21 April 2021 by Sweden’s OSCE Chairpersonship with the support of the Action against Terrorism Unit (ATU) of the OSCE Transnational Threats Department (TNTD). It brought together more than 500 participants from across the OSCE area, focusing on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the rise of far-right violent extremism, and the increased abuse of the internet for terrorist purposes. High-level representatives and experts from governments, state agencies, the United Nations (UN) and other international organizations, as well as representatives from the public and private sector, civil society, and academia engaged in dialogue, shared good practices and lessons learned and explored ways to reinforce a comprehensive approach to preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism (VERLT).

Tuesday, 20 April 2021
(first day)

Opening Remarks

Keynote: **H.E. Ann Linde**, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden, Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE; **H.E. Helga Maria Schmid**, OSCE Secretary General; **Mr. Vladimir Voronkov**, Under-Secretary-General, United Nations Office of Counter-Terrorism; **Mr. Gilles de Kerchove**, Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, European Union; **Mr. Andrey Novikov**, Head of the Commonwealth of Independent States Anti-Terrorism Center. **Moderator:** **Ambassador Alena Kupchyna**, Co-ordinator of Activities to Address Transnational Threats, OSCE.

Key points include:

- Terrorism remains one of the most significant threats to security, social and economic development, and the enjoyment of human rights.
- The recent developments pertaining to the latest terrorist attacks in Europe are a stark reminder that preventing and combating terrorism requires a multifaceted approach among multitudes of stakeholders at all levels of society.
- States need to unite and concert in preventing and countering terrorism (CT), as well as stand up for human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.
- Within the context of CT online, EU Digital Services Act¹ presents a valuable tool aimed at creating a safer and more open digital space in which the fundamental rights of all users of digital services are protected and guaranteed.
- The COVID-19 pandemic offered growing opportunities for terrorists and violent extremists to boost their propaganda online, and to recruit and radicalize vulnerable and young generations.

¹ European Digital Strategy, Digital Services Act and Digital Markets Act. More info available at <https://digital-strategy.ec.europa.eu/en/policies/digital-services-act-package>.

- Sustained, reinvigorated, and well-networked multilateral responses, as well as strong partnerships and strengthened interagency co-operation is critical to effectively counter terrorism and VERLT.
- States should focus more on repatriating FTFs and their families – especially women and children held in overcrowded camps for years – from Syria and Iraq.

High-Level Segment

Keynote: **H.E. Alexander Schallenberg**, Federal Minister for European and International Affairs, Austria; **Rt Hon James Cleverly** MP, Minister of State for the Middle East and North Africa, United Kingdom; **H.E. Oliver Spasovski**, Minister of Interior, North Macedonia; **H.E. Sergej Sekulović**, Minister of Interior, Montenegro; **H.E. John T. Godfrey**, Acting Coordinator for Counterterrorism and Acting Special Envoy for the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, United States; **H.E. Artak Apitonian**, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Armenia; **Mr. Yalchin Rafiyev**, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Azerbaijan. **Moderator:** **Ambassador Alena Kupchyna**, Co-ordinator of Activities to Address Transnational Threats, OSCE.

Key points include:

- The increase in radicalization and violent extremism exacerbated by the ongoing health crisis proves that no country is immune to this threat spanning across borders.
- Extremist groups continue to exploit isolation and fear caused by the COVID-19 to prey, radicalize and recruit young people, impose hatred, and divide societies.
- New regulations are urgently needed to ensure users' safety and build the resilience of young generations to terrorist content online.
- It is critical to eradicate the drivers of violent extremism while finding the right balance between CT and systematic prevention, including by placing human rights and the rule of law at the core of any CT strategy.
- CT efforts require a comprehensive and integrated approach based on strong partnerships, between governments, but also between and within societies, including the CSO, private sector, local and religious communities.
- Special attention should also be paid to the reintegration and rehabilitation of repatriated FTFs and their families which is critical in preventing resurgence and returns to the battlefield.

Session I: Addressing the Root Causes of VERLT

Keynote: **Prof. Fionnuala Ní Aoláin**, Special Rapporteur on the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms while Countering Terrorism, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. **Panelists:** **Mr. Matteo Mecacci**, Director of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights; **Ms. Joanneke Balfort**, Director, Security and Defence Policy, European External Action Service, European Union; **Dr. Pavel Mareev**, Associate Professor, Executive Secretary of the Commonwealth of Independent States Anti-Terrorism Center's Scientific and Advisory Board; **Dr. Khalid Koser**, Executive Director, Global Community Engagement & Resilience Fund; **Mr. Nico Schernbeck**, Senior Advisor for International Affairs and Transnational Cooperation, Violence Prevention Network. **Moderator:** **Ms. Georgia Holmer**, Head, Action Against Terrorism Unit, OSCE.

Key points include:

- There are many causes to VERLT – from the place of birth, family, religion, the lack of employment or education, to the weak and fragile States and polarized societies.
- The co-drivers of VE include failing security, socio-economic and political exclusion, corruption, the impact of global policies, etc.
- P/CVERLT efforts need address its development causes - such as injustice, socio-political exclusion, economic inequalities, human rights violations - and provide solutions to the phenomena - such as improving deradicalization programs, or developing new policies.

- Ensuring human rights and countering terrorism are mutually reinforcing parts of comprehensive security – human rights violations must not be seen as collateral damage to the CT efforts.
- Building strong partnerships in CT requires long-term efforts by all and co-operation despite differences – including inter-religious and inter-ethnic communication and protection of human rights, anti-terrorist education, or exchange of information.
- Youth remains a key objective for terrorist recruitment, hence pS should invest more efforts in building societal resilience instead of focusing solely on security responses.
- Both security and non-security actors must work together to put forward well-coordinated responses to VERLT.

Wednesday, 21 April 2021
(second day)

Session II: Tools for Preventing Terrorism and VERLT online within a human rights framework

Keynote: **Ms. Teresa Ribeiro**, OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media. **Panelists:** **Ambassador Vladimir E. Tarabrin**, Director of the Department on New Challenges and Threats, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Russian Federation; **Mr. Oliver Wilcox**, Acting Director, Office of Countering Violent Extremism, Counterterrorism Bureau, State Department, United States; **Mr. Adam Hadley**, Director, Tech Against Terrorism; **Dr. Erin Saltman**, Director of Programming, Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism; **Ms. Tattu Mambetalieva**, Director, Public Foundation “Civil Initiative on Internet Policy”, Kyrgyzstan; **Mr. Denis Džidić**, Executive Director, Balkan Investigative Reporting Network, Bosnia and Herzegovina. **Moderator:** **Ambassador Neil Bush**, Head, UK Delegation to the OSCE in Vienna, Chair of the OSCE Security Committee.

Key points include:

- Managing dissemination of illegal and harmful content online while respecting freedom of speech is crucial – the abuse of anti-terrorist legislation to restrict freedom of the media is an issue that should be addressed by all pS.
- Countering terrorism in human rights context is a complex issue which requires a whole-of-society approach, including voluntary and collaborative engagement with tech companies – not to only to counter online threats but to address their offline causes.
- Terrorist organizations are improving in getting around internet restrictions, as they often use a whole network of online platforms and they easily migrate between them if one is removed.
- International organizations, technology companies, government, civil society, and academia should work together to establish effective strategies to address harmful and illegal content, while protecting human rights.
- Small companies and initiatives dealing with CT online must receive infrastructure and mentorship, as they carry great potential to leverage social media to drive the dissemination of positive narratives that challenge hate speech, intolerance and the promotion of violence.
- Many countries, particularly in Central Asian region, are undergoing digital transformation, while there is danger that terrorist groups will try to exploit the new online space, as much of their recruitment and propaganda efforts are being implemented through virtual outreach.

Session III: Moving away from Violent Extremism

Keynote: **Mr. Robert Örell**, Independent expert PCVE/CT. **Panelists:** **Ambassador Kathleen Kavalec**, Head of Mission, OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina; **Ms. Alexandra Martins**, Head of Global Programme to End Violence against Children, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime; **Dr. John McCoy**, Executive Director, Organization for the Prevention of Violence; **Ms. Jamilya Nurkanova**, Founder, Center for Gender Security in Central Asia; **Dr. Peter Neumann**, Professor, King’s College. **Moderator:** **Ambassador Katrīna Kaktiņa**, Permanent Representative of Latvia to the OSCE

Key points include:

- Appropriate rehabilitation, reintegration and exit programmes represent a key step in breaking the vicious “cycle of violent extremism” – both custodial and post-custodial approach is needed.
- When designing rehabilitation and reintegration programmes, it is paramount to keep in mind age and gender of targeted individuals, and pay special attention to the distinct need of children.
- While ensuring individually-tailored programmes, it is vital to address discrepancies in how criminal justice systems and rehabilitation and reintegration efforts treat men and women – the current state of affairs points out that, while women sometimes might receive milder sentences when prosecuted (due to gendered presumptions), they also tend to receive less rehabilitation and reintegration support.
- Programmes to rehabilitate and reintegrate radicalized individuals must be human rights-compliant, at all times.
- A holistic, whole-of-society approach is crucial in the process of designing and carrying out rehabilitation and reintegration programmes – criminal justice institutions, other relevant government stakeholders, parliaments, local authorities and CSOs all need to be involved.

High-Level Closing Session

Panelists: **H.E. Mikael Damberg**, Minister for Home Affairs, Sweden; **Ms. Michèle Coninx**, Assistant Secretary-General and Executive Director, United Nations Counter- Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate; **Ms. Aude Bono-Vandorme**, Vice-Chair of the Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly; **H.E. Johannes Matyassy**, Deputy State Secretary, Federal Department of Foreign Affairs, Switzerland; **H.E. Peter Sztáray**, State Secretary for Security Policy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Hungary; **H.E. Benedetto Della Vedova**, Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Italy. **Master of Ceremony:** **Ambassador Tobias Lorentzson**, Deputy Permanent Representative of the Delegation of Sweden to the OSCE

Key points include:

- Terrorism and violent extremism represent a threat to all, which is why it can only be addressed through a joint and well-concerted approach, by all – we must unite across countries and organizations to counter terrorism.
- Terrorist organizations rarely operate in a vacuum, and often their acts also imply different offences (e.g. terrorism financing, arms smuggling, trafficking in human beings etc.), which is why it is crucial to further explore links between terrorism and other crime.
- It is important to keep abreast of new developments at all times, as terrorist threats are constantly evolving – most recent trends to be further explored include the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the rise of far-right violent extremism, and the increased abuse of the internet for terrorist purposes.
- The COVID-19 crisis has exacerbated already existing vulnerabilities and laid the conditions through which terrorists and violent extremists can more easily spread their destructive ideologies and promote further divisions and radicalization.
- Addressing violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism and all related efforts must always be in full compliance with international law and international human rights standards.
- It is vital to keep counter-terrorism high on the agenda of all OSCE pS at all times (particularly during the crises) and continue policy dialogue in good faith, as ensuring safe and secure environments is a widely-shared priority that all authorities should tackle together.
- A holistic, whole-of-society approach is absolutely crucial in all CT efforts, and all relevant actors must be involved, including governments, law enforcement, policy-makers, judiciary, civil society, religious leaders, public-private partnerships and experts in the field.
- International organizations, through events such as this one, contribute greatly to exchange ideas and to strengthen the ability to act together, which is all States are encouraged to make use of such platforms.