

10th REPORT BY THE CHAIR OF THE OSCE PA AD HOC

COMMITTEE ON COUNTERING TERRORISM,

Mr. Reinhold Lopatka

at the

2021 OSCE PA Remote Session (Plenary Session)

DRAFT

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INTRODUCTION

Mr. President,

Mr. Secretary General,

Distinguished Colleagues,

I am honored to address you on behalf of our Ad Hoc Committee on Countering Terrorism (CCT). After such a long time, I am really pleased to see many of you in person! I truly hope that we shall be able to go back to “regular” business soon.

In view of the latest trends, over the next few minutes I will try to convey our priority lines of work while also updating you on our most recent efforts.

Dear Colleagues,

Terrorism and violent extremism continue to pose a major threat to the security and stability of the OSCE region. As we know, terrorists use ANY opportunity to erode democratic structures, spread fear and polarize society.

The prolonged health, economic and social distress triggered by the pandemic exacerbated already existing vulnerabilities, thus providing the ideal ground for violent extremists to promote societal divisions and foster radicalization, especially on-line.

With an increasingly large amount of disinformation disseminated online, jihadists, right-wing extremists and left-wing terrorists have all exploited social dissatisfaction to reach out and propagate their ideologies to new, often very young, individuals.

According to the latest EUROPAL data, there have been 57 completed, failed and foiled terrorist attacks in the European Union in 2020, with 21 casualties. Most of these attacks were perpetrated by lone actors with rather rudimentary, but still very deadly, techniques.

With the increased use of the internet during the pandemic, virtual communities have become ever more important in the dissemination of extremist and terrorist propaganda.

Yet, the use of new technologies by terrorist groups, to date, remains an area that is very poorly regulated.

What really must be understood, in this context, is that not all social media platforms have the same capacity to monitor content for signs of inappropriate or illegal use: larger platforms will do so proactively – smaller ones, quite simply, won't. It is these smaller ones that are thus more exposed to abuse.

The effective prosecution, rehabilitation, and reintegration of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) and their families - including women and children – stranded in conflict-affected areas remains key to our security. Terrorist groups exploit the precarious conditions in detention centres in conflict-affected regions as a breeding ground for the next generation of ISIL supporters. Many of the children detained in such camps face the risk of war-related trauma, persistent radicalization, and the issue of statelessness.

Dear Colleagues,

To address these set of complex challenges efficiently, it is paramount to stand united and focus on where we - as parliamentarians - can bring a distinct contribution, thereby complementing the work of the international community.

Despite the limitations posed by the pandemic, I am pleased to report that the CCT has remained very active since our Winter Meeting. More in general, we have used the last 18 months to better understand the evolving trends and refocus our efforts where we can add more value.

Firstly, we should pursue to play a leading role in promoting the successful prosecution, rehabilitation and reintegration of Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs), which remains a TOP priority in the agenda of all our countries.

In this context, parliamentarians should work hard on incorporating into national law requirements of international and regional legal instruments, including with due regard to human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as on shaping relevant national institutions and procedures. Moreover, we should ensure effective oversight for counter-terrorism activities performed by law enforcement, intelligence and other security services. Finally, we should find effective ways to deal with the FTFs stranded in Syria and Iraq.

Ultimately, what we need is comprehensive strategy to ensure that regional and local instability in the African continent and the Middle East does not foster terrorism and violent extremism.

To advance our engagement in this field and share important lessons learned, on 18 May 2021 we held a dedicated **Parliamentary Hearing to examine the experience of Kazakhstan in repatriating, prosecuting, rehabilitating and reintegrating FTFs**, together with the OSCE Programme Office in Nur-Sultan.

On a similar note, we are planning for 14-15 October 2021 a “***Counter-Terrorism Policy Dialogue with Legislators from South-Eastern Europe***”, together with the OSCE Transnational Threats Department (TNTD). The event will allow parliamentarians to exchange views and experiences on prosecuting,

rehabilitating and reintegrating FTFs in their respective countries, with the aim to generate policy convergence on a wide range of interlinked challenges.

Secondly, we should continue to support our countries in developing and implementing sound Advance Passenger Information (API), Passenger Name Records (PNR) and biometric data management systems, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 2396. Also in this context, parliamentarians should play their important legislative and oversight functions.

COVID-19 has certainly made the terrorists' travel more difficult. However, as border restrictions are being lifted and international travel encouraged again, also terrorists will resume travelling and plotting attacks across our region. Hence, we are now considering **a follow-up parliamentary oversight initiative** for 2022 to re-evaluate national efforts in this context.

Thirdly, we shall enhance our prevention efforts, especially on-line. Against the backdrop of growing on-line radicalization, it is paramount to develop sensible global parameters and guidance to counter violent content, both offline and online.

More specifically, we should consider effective strategies to counter the abuse of social media and new technologies for terrorist purposes – including financing, recruitment, and propaganda – in close partnership with the private sector.

Finally, as parliamentarians we should develop strong counter-narratives, reaching all vulnerable members of societies.

To further explore all these issues and consider joint strategies with our partners, we have organized a **special debate on “*Assessing the terrorist threat and efforts to prevent violent extremism*”** together with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM) at the **International Parliamentary Conference on Countering Terrorism** on 15 April 2021. While I addressed the opening

segment of the conference, Vice Chair Aude Bono-Vandorme provided an exhaustive overview of the online radicalization phenomena and stressed the need for more coordinated legislative responses.

Fourthly, supporting the victims of terrorism is another field where we can play a strong role. National parliaments should develop sound legislation and strengthen victims' associations' role in this field, which play a critical role in terms of advocacy and awareness-raising on the rights of victims.

Building on the findings of our 2018 Madrid Conference and of our Official Visits to Belgium and Norway, we took a leading role in **several expert consultations with the United Nations in late 2020 and early 2021**. Likewise, my colleague and CCT Member Ms. Jiménez Becerril Barrio has contributed as an expert to the UNOCT Session on *“Promoting and Protecting the Rights of Victims of Terrorism and Addressing Their Needs”* on 15 April 2021. We were hoping to promote policy convergence on this issue through targeted resolution already at this Annual Session, but it will have to wait until 2022.

Dear President,

to bring this ambitious plan forward, the CCT shall continue to build on selected partnerships.

Keeping abreast of major terrorism-related developments helps us shape our responses better - this is the key message I delivered at the Closing Session of the **2021 OSCE-wide Counter-terrorism Conference** on *“Reinforcing a Comprehensive Approach in Preventing and Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism and Radicalisation that Lead to Terrorism (VERLT) in a Changing Landscape”*.

In this context, I am glad to report that our **co-operation with the OSCE** is excellent. We regularly contribute to each other's events, share views, and engage

in joint planning. The joint project to bring together legislators from South Eastern Europe in October 2021 is a clear example.

Our **collaboration with the United Nations Office of Counter-terrorism** is equally outstanding. Building on the MoU signed in February 2020, we have co-organized several activities and co-operated on a wide range of issues during the last year, including radicalization & deradicalization efforts, supporting the victims of terrorism, FTFs, to name just a few.

Before concluding, I would like to **thank our President and Secretary General**, whose support has always been instrumental to our work, **as well as all my fellow CCT members**, whose personal commitment proved remarkable also during the last challenging months.

Thank you!