



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

International Terrorism and Violent Extremism as Global Challenges

**Speech by Rolf Ekéus
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Terrorism has struck our communities with an unprecedented force and anger. Obviously, terrorism has for decades been part of our reality. OSCE states, not the least Western Europe, suffered violent attacks on innocent civilians. However inexcusable these actions, they were driven by some sort of articulated political rationale. Frequently, the perpetrators announced their responsibility as well as their motives. Those were certain definable politico/ideological goals or attainable and specific demands.

The violence we now see emerging is different – its goals are abstract, its instigators do not always seek publicity – we give it to them – and they use stealth to cover their activities. The instruments of terror are now the civil aspects of society – public transport and the postal system. The new terrorism is not confined to a specific area or region in geographical terms, it is in that sense truly global.

The ideas of democracy, freedom of expression, free trade and respect for human rights have after the end of the Cold War expanded and gained ground with a breathtaking speed. Some groups feel threatened by this challenge. The new terrorists have acted in what they perceive as a defensive mode and as a counter-attack. The selection of target has been calculated to have an optimal and symbolic effect. With the choice of the World Trade Center the message was clear – it was and is the market economy, the liberal political system, the freedom of the press and media in general which constitute the challenge against the forces of absolutism and fundamentalism. And now they felt that it was time to strike back. The depth and seriousness of this assault is underlined by the preparedness of those involved to sacrifice their own lives for the cause.

Freedom, democracy – respect for the dignity and worth of the human being, these are the values which are under attack. These are values to which all the participating States of the OSCE have subscribed and which we all have undertaken to uphold. These are values that we must continue to defend and promote.

The new terrorism, as manifest through the attacks of 11 September, is more violent, is metaphysical in its motivation and embodies the ultimate sacrifice by its perpetrators. The terrorist acts were realized by secretive terrorist networks with global reach. The attacks on southern Manhattan and on the Pentagon were low-tech but high concept. Such an approach requires a highly sophisticated response.

We, the international community, must match the sophistication of the enemy with the superior quality of our response and of our defence. We must outwit him and we must outthink him. Our strategy should be proactive not be reactive. We must deprive the terrorists of their potential constituencies and dry up their support.

Terrorism is a multifaceted phenomenon with political, economic, social, criminal and military components. A number of international organisations and agencies have developed a high degree of expertise in the fight against aspects of terrorist activities, the United Nations Office of Drug Control and Crime Prevention should be especially mentioned as an agency of responsibility in this context. The focus of much of the work of these organisations is on intelligence gathering, surveillance, interdiction, and the fight against crime. These are critical activities.

But if the struggle with terrorism is to be truly effective it must have a far broader scope. The Bucharest Plan of Action for Combating Terrorism provides a starting point for such activities. Furthermore, it is crucial to strengthen existing approaches and activities within the OSCE directed towards the sources of conflict and such political extremism, which inspires or is invoked to justify terrorism.

It is through enhancing its comprehensive concept of security, linking politico-military, human and economic dimensions, that the OSCE can make its unique contribution to the struggle against international terrorism. Prevention of terrorism is intimately connected to the task of preventing violent conflict. Those who engage in terror rely upon a set of circumstances that allows them to operate, and to gain support and legitimacy amongst broad communities. Environments that allow terrorism to thrive include difficult socio-economic conditions, systematic exclusion, alienation and a lack of opportunities for more moderate voices to emerge in order to counter extremism. Such an environment can, if the existence of persistent tensions and disputes are not properly addressed, serve as a hothouse for the cultivation of radical ideologies, extremism as well as terrorism.

The central task of the OSCE should be to isolate the people of violence by dealing directly with the social and political environments where terrorism can flourish. The dissemination of ideologies that justify hatred and violence must be met with an effective display of countermeasures and counter arguments based upon the philosophy of tolerance and respect for the worth of the human being.

We in the OSCE are obliged to act and should do so by building on our strengths – the richness of our nations' national, cultural and linguistic diversity. This diversity should not be regarded as a problem but as an opportunity. If we were to suppress diversity, we would contribute to internal tension, weaken the stability of states and harm international cooperation.

If we instead treat all people, indeed the minorities, with respect and encourage their ambitions to maintain and develop their culture and language within a framework of integration we enhance stability, prosperity and harmony. The High Commissioner on National Minorities has a critical role in this context. The mandate of the High Commissioner establishes the HCNM as an instrument of the OSCE for conflict prevention. As High Commissioner, I am tasked to provide "early warning" and as appropriate "early action" at the earliest possible stage in regard to tensions involving national minority issues, which have not yet developed beyond an early warning stage but which have the potential to develop into a conflict within the OSCE area, affecting peace, stability or relations between participating states.

The philosophy on which this mandate is based is the fundamental idea that tensions and friction between national groups, majorities and minorities, frequently carry a potential for violent conflict. In such a situation members of different communities may be convinced that they are victimized and subject to unfair treatment. They may, in desperation, search for violent means to rectify what they consider wrong. If such sentiments are left unaddressed, terrorist temptations may not be far away. Terrorists or terrorist networks may try to exploit grievances and bitterness to garner support and recruit extremist elements amongst disaffected groups. Our common interest and goal must be to prevent such situations arising.

As regards terrorist acts my mandate is clear. It states that "The High Commissioner will not consider national minority issues in situations involving organized acts of terrorism" and even stipulates that "The High Commissioner will not communicate with and will not acknowledge communications from any person or organization which practices or publicly condones terrorism or violence".

The mandate obliges me to focus on the prevention of violent conflict. In fulfilling this task, I must address perceptions of discrimination, injustice or exclusion – either real or perceived. Over the last decade, my predecessor and I have, therefore, concentrated on countering the conditions that precipitate violent conflict. In fact, these are precisely the situations that can breed extremism and terrorism. Thus, to prevent situations that can lead to violent conflict is also to combat the emergence of terrorism.

The High Commissioner's task is not a deskjob. In carrying out my mandate as High Commissioner I spend most of my time in the field. Here I not only meet with public officials but also talk to representatives of national minorities and many ethnic groups in order to come to grips with a multitude of concerns, worries, grievances and, indeed, hope and expectations. Thus, the High Commissioner acquires unique insights in the specificity of potential conflict areas.

The High Commissioner's concrete proposals aiming at assuring participation for all groups in the public affairs on all levels, national, regional as well as local are elements in the work to create harmony in relations between different groups. By developing practical solutions to existing problems in regard to, *inter alia*, education and use of minority language, the High Commissioner strives towards strengthening the cultural identity of minorities and easing the pressure for assimilation, all with the ambition to facilitate the integration of minorities in their societies, without sacrificing their identity.

Now, more than ever, the work of the High Commissioner in the field of conflict prevention is a necessary and urgent activity. The mandate is created as a reflection of the security dimension of the OSCE, but many of the means to realize it are those of the human dimension. The High Commissioner has a significant role and specific opportunities with regard to promoting dialogue and policies for integrating communities into public life, of giving voice to those who advocate moderation and conciliation, and of fostering among all communities tolerance of cultural differences.

In the struggle against extremist values that are used to justify terrorism, the OSCE has been in the vanguard of international society. OSCE documents make clear that certain values are central to the development of secure, stable and prosperous societies. The development of good governance, including full regard for the place of minorities in society, must be the cornerstone of any long-term and effective challenge to terrorism. In this way, the fight against terrorism must include the promotion of civil society and pluralism. International instruments that follow this line are the Copenhagen Document, the European Convention on Human Rights and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, and not least the United Nations standards. Without a commitment to certain minimum international standards, which aim to respect the rights of persons belonging to minorities and give them perspectives within a democratic state, combating violent extremism and preventing violent conflict will not be possible.

The struggle against terrorism through policies aimed at countering the emergence of conflict situations is clearly a priority for the OSCE. We must, however, be aware that excessive and unfocused counter-terrorism activities can be counter-productive. Anti-terrorist policies cannot be directed against entire religious or ethnic groups. In the current fight with terrorism it is important not to compromise our core values and thereby establish the conditions for future terrorists to thrive.

In the months and years to come, the challenge of terrorism is likely to test us in the most fundamental ways. We must be vigilant against extremists. We must seek to counter violence but this must not be achieved at the expense of the rights of the individual, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. Above all, recent events have shown that we must think more about the future, seeking to identify situations and policies that can foster extremism. Early engagements and early action where tension is brewing is now more vital than ever before.