

Working Session 15 (specifically selected topic): Economic, social and cultural rights as an answer to rising inequalities (cont.)

Rapporteur: Ms. Tanja Milin Horvat, First Secretary, Permanent Mission of the Republic of Croatia to the OSCE / EU Delegation to the OSCE

No of statements: 16

Delegations: 4

Civil Society: 11

OSCE Institutions: 0

International Organizations: 0

Media: 1

Rights of reply: 7

Working Session 15 was open by Moderator, Mr. Pavel Chacuk, Deputy Head of the OSCE/ODIHR Human Rights Department who stressed the importance of the economic, social and cultural rights and their relevance in countering violent extremism.

Ms. Anna Neistat, Senior Director of Research at Amnesty International, in her introductory address emphasized that participating States have to frame the discussion on preventing violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism. If social, economic and cultural rights do not address this issue, measures undertaken to fight against it and prevent it, start to be counterproductive, and fuel the trend of radicalization itself.

Existing practices show that participating States need to analyse drivers of terrorism if they want to achieve tangible results, said Neistat. She referred to the latest UNDP report, which shows that the parameters observed in regards to the most vulnerable groups to be caught by terrorism organisations networks, are globally applicable. The report in question was based on African context but it showed that people born into a marginalized neighbourhood and poorly educated would be prone to point religion as one of the reasons they join the terrorist organization. They usually live in poor economic conditions, are in search of employment and have a sense of grievance towards Governments who are perceived by them as not caring.

According to Neistat, impact of counterterrorism measures and violation of rights have great impact on enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights while measures to fight terrorism usually encompass redistributing of financial resources from social and education programmes to security sector and the pretext of terrorism leads to shrinkage of space for civil society, minorities and other vulnerable groups. The impact is even more visible in countries that have systemic problems. Targeted sanctions do not come without counter effect neither, shares Neistat, while they can be very effective, they often lack transparency and affect negatively the family of the individual they are targeting. Last, but not least she pointed out that construction of physical barriers to prevent movement of certain individuals or even groups can have devastating impact on communities like the practice shows in Israel or south-east Turkey.

The introducer ended her intervention by pointing out the OECD key entry action points in regard to minimizing the effect of counterterrorism measures to the exercise of social, economic and cultural rights:

- States should conduct analyses in accordance with interpretative principles of social, economic and cultural rights before putting measures into place;
- Measures implemented should support capacities to resist extreme ideologies, being political or religious, that already exist in community;
- States should provide help to build effective and responsible media and public information strategies which represent also a tool for prevention of violence;
- States should put more emphasis on the donor programs for young people and provide young people with job opportunities in order to prevent creation of vulnerable and disenfranchised youth;
- States should put increased focus on people that are transitioning out of poverty;
- States should strive to make the fight against violent extremism and radicalisation an inclusive process which will reduce support to terrorism.

In the discussion that followed, participating States emphasized that terrorists cannot be associated with race, religion or nationality and that poverty might be a driver for violent extremism – along with the feeling of injustice (real or perceived). Participating States also stressed the importance of respecting economic, social and cultural rights when countering violent extremism and its long-term benefits. They pointed out that migrations led to new threats. The role of the family and the interaction between state and family was highlighted as crucial for economic, social and cultural rights to be correctly implemented and interpreted, including in education. Few mentioned that root causes of violent extremism and radicalization could be linked to lack of future perspective and economic set back.

In their interventions civil society representatives pointed out that language skills can provide better understanding, poverty can lead to economic migrations further leading to radicalization. They highlighted the negative effects that non-transparent government policies can have on society and its vulnerability to violent extremism and radicalization leading to terrorism. Interventions included references to withdrawal of children from their families and the adoption procedures, discriminations in regard to national minorities, and minority groups in general, including in the area affected by conflicts, participation of sport professionals in international contests, domestic violence and sexual violence in the family and freedom of movement of human rights activists. Some of the interventions focused on the theme as pointed out in the annotated agenda and streamlined by the moderator and the introducer, other addressed economic, social and cultural rights in general, while a number of interventions remained outside of the scope of the working session discussions.

The session was closed by Ambassador Christian Strohal, Special Representative of the Austrian OSCE Chairmanship who informed about the appointed special representative on violent extremism with a role is to assist the Chairmanship in formulating recommendations aimed at tackling issues related to the topic. The work carried out by the special representative will help with the formulation of recommendations to be proposed for adoption during the forthcoming OSCE Ministerial Council in December

Recommendations made by participants during this session include (non-exhaustive list):

Recommendations to the OSCE participating States:

- Participating States should implement targeted measures aimed at fostering economic opportunities to prevent further radicalization in society;
- Participating States should ensure that there is adequate education in religion providing for clear understanding of religion and cultural background;
- Laws regulating rights of minorities should encompass commitments undertaken in international fora and be duly implemented;
- Rights of populations must not be dependent on territory or places where people live. Every person should be free in exercising her/his rights.

Recommendations to the OSCE institutions, executive structures and field operations:

- ODIHR should continue to follow closely the destiny of the civil society representatives taking floor at HDIM especially when there are signs that the person might be held accountable for exercising freedom of expression.