

**Closing Remarks by H.E. Ambassador Vuk Žugić, Chairperson of the Permanent Council
at the Counter-Terrorism Conference on
“Countering the Incitement and Recruitment of Foreign Terrorist Fighters”
Vienna, Hofburg 1 July 2015**

Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Colleagues,

As you know, this conference was the continuation of an initiative started under the Swiss OSCE Chairmanship last year, leading to the adoption of a Ministerial Council Declaration in Basel, which Serbia decided to focus on in 2015 as part of our co-ordinated efforts with Switzerland and a joint plan of work.

Let me personally thank our Swiss colleagues and friends for their generous support of the conference including through extra-budgetary contribution. I hope that this case will be followed by other participating States.

Dear Colleagues,

We had rich and intense discussions over the past two days; discussions that have emphasized the complexity we face in trying to address the incitement and recruitment of Foreign Terrorist Fighters while upholding our values and shared commitments to human rights and democracy.

I would like to warmly thank all the speakers for their insights, and participants and moderators for their important contributions. Our special thanks go to the representatives from civil society, who greatly enriched our discussions and understanding of the issues at stake.

The Serbian Chairmanship will soon circulate a detailed Perception Paper summarizing the many recommendations that were advanced during the conference. We are confident that this non-binding document will be a significant contribution to the high-level discussions on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) at the UN General Assembly in September. Allow me to summarize several important points from our discussions.

First, participating States should strengthen international co-operation against terrorism, foreign terrorist fighters, and the spread of violent extremism under the co-ordinating role of the United Nations, based on the UN Charter and all relevant provisions of international law.

The conference made clear that more information exchange is needed; mutual assistance mechanisms can be strengthened; intelligence, law enforcement data and experiences should be more actively shared. The OSCE can be instrumental in this regard, and Serbia, as Chairmanship-in-Office, calls on all participating States to make use of the OSCE to enhance their capacities, and to resource and support OSCE activities.

Second, throughout all the sessions participants noted the need for participating States to uphold the rule of law, to promote and protect human rights in responding to the threat of foreign terrorist fighters. As the OSCE is an organization that prides itself in its comprehensive approach to security, I believe this is a message that we cannot repeat enough.

We need to work harder to ensure we live up to this imperative at all times, including when we face acts of barbarism that defy understanding – individuals who act in complete and deliberate negation of universal human dignity. Every time participating States undermine human rights, they undermine their own counter-narrative to violent extremism.

Third, state authorities should develop public-private partnerships with civil society, media, industry and the business community, to prevent and counter the radicalization, incitement and recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters.

Although state authorities have the primary responsibility to combat terrorism, they cannot be fully successful without drawing on the support of all sectors in society, at all levels of society, and in particular at the local, community-level. Everyone needs to feel they have a role, and we need to give them the space and the tools to carry out this role effectively, without furthering problems.

The more we seek to prevent and intervene early to disrupt violent radicalization, the more central state authorities should act as enablers for other stakeholders, women and men, on the frontline.

Fourth, policies can only be effective if they are based on evidence, rather than assumptions and speculations – if they are grounded in an accurate understanding of the FTF phenomenon, of the local drivers underpinning violent extremism.

It is therefore crucial to promote more and better research, especially field research, on the processes of radicalization leading to terrorism. We need to identify the key contextual and personal factors, including gender aspects, to better target our limited resources and tailor our responses. And we need to ensure that researchers are effectively interacting with practitioners and policy makers.

Fifth, there was recognition that strategic communications and counter-messaging are a key part of the solution in countering the appeal of terrorism and violent extremism, in particular for primary preventive work. Several effective practices were put forward. One is to identify and empower ‘credible voices’ from within civil society.

Another good practice is to ensure that there is no disconnect between off-line and on-line efforts, but rather that they be mutually supportive, that there be coherence between words and actions. Indeed, several participants reminded us also about the limits of strategic communications, and the need for face-to-face psycho-social engagement to help individuals already on a path to violent extremism.

Sixth, the conference underscored how essential is it to consult, involve and support young people. They should be involved inside and outside the classroom, at the level of their city, country and internationally.

Youth should actively participate in the design, implementation and evaluation of efforts to counter violent extremism. And this involvement should not be top-down or unidirectional,

but rather a two-way process through which the voices of the young are heard and valued – a process through which we empower youth-led peer-to-peer approaches.

We have a responsibility towards young generations – our future – to address the challenges they face, to provide them with opportunities to find meaning and contribute to building democratic, inclusive, safe and prosperous societies, starting at the level of their communities.

In this regard, I am pleased to announce that the Serbian Chairmanship intends to organize a specific event on youth and radicalization in September in Belgrade.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Serbian Chairmanship believes that our discussions over these two days provide a solid basis towards the adoption of an OSCE Ministerial Council Statement on Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism.

As we suggested in our food-for-thought paper before the conference, we believe such a document could emphasize the common vision of participating States, based on various existing commitments. It would raise the profile of, and support more resources for our Organization and the work of its executive structures in advance of the high level discussion on countering violent extremism in the margins of the UN General Assembly and the adoption of a UN Action Plan on Preventing Violent Extremism.

We also believe that the adoption of such a Ministerial Statement would illustrate and reinforce the campaign that we are proud to have launched with the Secretary General: OSCE United in Countering Violent Extremism.

Dear Colleagues,

On behalf of the Serbian Chairmanship I am grateful to all of you for having made this conference a success.

I would also like to thank all the people who have worked hard to help the Serbian Chairmanship organize this conference, most notably the OSCE Transnational Threats Department under the leadership of Alexey Lyzhenkov, and its Action against Terrorism Unit. I would also like to thank the interpreters for their standing support.

I wish everybody a safe return home.

Thank you.