

**Remarks for the Head of Presence at the Conference
“Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to
Terrorism in Prisons and Probation Service in Albania”
MAK Albania Hotel, Illyria I, 5 April 2018, 10:00**

Dear Minister Gjonaj,
Dear Colleagues,
Dear Guests,

It is a pleasure to be here today at this Conference on "Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism in Prisons and Probation Service in Albania". The OSCE Presence is delighted to jointly organize this conference with the Ministry of Justice and the Coordination Centre on Countering Violent Extremism, key partners of the Presence in tackling such an important issue. I would also like to thank the Governments of Austria, Sweden and Germany for financially supporting this project.

Radical Islamist extremists in prisons – this is a problem many OSCE participating States are facing. And experts in many of these countries agree: the risk of “infection” of normal prisoners is high. The well-known French expert Oliver Roy stated that prisons are the first place for radicalization; the Head of the Muslim Council in my country, Germany, confirmed: “It is a fact that radicalization is taking place in prisons”.

To me this makes a lot of sense: prisoners are in a frustrating situation, bored most of the time, often in search for external culprits to diminish their guilt. So, some become easy prey.

There are points where radicals can join in:

- They offer scapegoats: they pretend that the West is in a war against the Muslim World;
- They pretend against better knowledge that Muslims have no chances in Western societies, alleging that therefore there is no wonder that they are gliding into crime;
- They pretend that secular powers may not punish, that this is only up to God.

And the radicals offer alternatives: be the adventures of djihad or the pleasures of paradise for martyrs or just the feeling of power.

Albania has a limited problem with radicalized extremists which are ready to use violent means. But the problem exists. Even in my own country Germany we estimate the number of highly radicalized prison inmates only at about 300 – counted on the entire population a similar percentage as in Albania.

Their numbers are – slowly – increasing: returnees from the so-called “holy war” will mostly stick to their convictions, will try to win others over.

How to deal with this problem in Albania and in other countries? The OSCE Presence wants to help with this process. We want to bring here international best practises. First of all we want to help prison and probation staff to identify hardliners and people at risk.

Then we have to find out which of the manifold best practises developed and identified in other countries that can help in Albania to increase the resilience of normal people in detention against the seducing hardliners.

Lastly, we have to find ways to win back as many radicals as possible.

Many different approaches have been tested how to deal in prisons

- with convicted salafists and other hardliners
- with people whom they have tried to win over for their cause.

The prison staff can explain to inmates at risk how radicals seduce people with the aim of abusing them afterwards. Mainstream representatives of Islam can provide pastoral care and spiritual guidance. Even some hardliners have been convinced in Western Europe to renounce violence, even publicly.

On the other hand, it is crucial that any efforts in prisons to address violent extremism must not lead to undermining human rights to which all people, including violent extremist prisoners, are entitled. In fact, violation of their human rights may contribute to increased radicalization.

Many countries have developed strategies and lessons learnt to counter violent extremism, including Albania. We welcome the National Strategy and Action Plan on that; we work closely with the National Co-ordinator. We welcome the establishment of a Co-ordination Centre on countering violent extremism last December, and we would like to express our full support in ensuring that the Centre is fully operational.

In the context of prisons, the Presence has prepared a Baseline Report on the current situation of violent extremism and radicalization in prisons and probation that will serve as the basis for a Needs Assessment of this phenomenon. In addition, in partnership with the General Directorate of Prisons, the Probation Service and the CVE Centre, the Presence developed first Basic Training Modules for prison and probation staff. About 110 first-line prison staff have already gone through this training.

To conclude, understanding the complexities of violent extremism and radicalization, and their root factors and conditions, is where preventive work should start. In addition, rehabilitation and reintegration of violent extremism offenders is a very complex issue and requires a multi-disciplinary approach and broad engagement from practitioners, local government, civil society, academia, and other stakeholders.

I would like to thank you all for joining us and wish you a fruitful conference.