

2020 Chairmanship OSCE-wide Counter-Terrorism Conference

Effective Partnerships against Terrorism and Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism

Vienna, 14-15 September 2020

Perception Paper

Summary

The 2020 OSCE-wide Counter-Terrorism Conference on ‘Effective Partnerships against Terrorism and Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism’ was convened by the Albanian OSCE Chair, in co-operation with the OSCE Transnational Threats Department’s Action against Terrorism Unit, in Vienna on 14-15 September 2020. Due to the situation with regards to COVID-19, the Conference was organized in the blended format.

The event gathered 538 participants (242 women; 296 men) including practitioners, academics and civil society representatives. The Conference was attended by Delegations from 56 OSCE participating States and 8 OSCE Partners for Co-operation, 20 international and regional organizations, including various United Nations agencies, and 58 representatives of civil society organizations, academic and business entities.

Terrorism remains a serious threat to peace and security to OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation. The dynamic nature of terrorism and violent extremism poses continuous challenges. The evolving threats posed by terrorist and violent extremist groups require collaborative and innovative approaches by stakeholders at the international, national and community levels. Engaging with different partners and embracing openness to a multitude of perspectives is fundamental for an effective response to such challenges.

This is why effective responses require a web of partnerships, strengthening and utilising capabilities and expertise both within and outside government structures. This premise is reflected in the OSCE counterterrorism commitments as well as the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

The objectives of the 2020 OSCE-wide Counter-terrorism Conference were therefore the following:

- To foster continued international and regional co-operation on counter terrorism matters;
- To support multi-agency co-ordination at the national level to address terrorism and VERLT and to encourage all OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation to mainstream partnerships in their national strategies and actions plans;

- To underline the importance and added-value of effective partnerships with a broad spectrum of civil society, the media and the private sector in P/CVERLT.

Discussions throughout the Conference highlighted that collaboration with civil society, the private sector and the media are essential for devising, implementing and refining successful national counter-terrorism strategies and measures that include an emphasis on prevention, protection and response. It was also underscored that partnerships drive innovation and strengthen the design, development and implementation of ideas, projects and innovative and technological solutions to counter terrorism and to P/CVERLT.

In order to cover the different aspects of partnerships, with an aim to identify existing gaps, possible improvements, and best practices, the Conference was structured into five thematic sessions:

- Session I: International Co-operation in Addressing Terrorism and Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism;
- Session II: Building a Broader Community Network to Support the Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism;
- Session III: Tackling Terrorist Use of the Internet through a Comprehensive Approach;
- Session IV: Enhancing Public-Private Partnerships to Restrict Logistical and Financial Support to Terrorists, and Protect Vulnerable Targets;
- Session V: Promoting Effective Approaches to Prosecution, Rehabilitation and Reintegration.

In addition to the plenary sessions, participants had the opportunity to attend and contribute to seven side-events on the margins of the conference, dealing with the following topics:

- Human Rights and Counter-Terrorism at Borders: Information Gathering and New Technologies to Detect Terrorism-Related Travel;
- Rehabilitation and Reintegration Challenges for Returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters in North Macedonia;
- Comprehensive Security of Critical Infrastructure: CIS Experience;
- Current and Future Terrorist Threats and Trends. An Analysis of Online and Offline Threats and Future Trends;
- Racially and Ethnically Motivated Terrorism in the Time of COVID-19;
- Using Social Media to Prevent Radicalization;
- Partnerships in Strengthening the Use of the Technology in Criminal Justice Responses to Terrorism during and in the Aftermath of Pandemics and Disasters.

Session I: International Co-operation in Addressing Terrorism and Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism

During this session participants explored ways to strengthen international, regional, and sub-regional co-operation and effective crisis communication, in particular among law enforcement agencies, intelligence, criminal justice and other relevant institutions. The session underlined that effective counter-terrorism measures and the protection of human rights, including gender equality, are complementary and mutually reinforcing. Co-operation frameworks, instruments and tools – including those offered by the OSCE – were addressed to advance a shared understanding of current challenges and of appropriate holistic and multifaceted actions and responses through transnational partnerships.

The recommendations to OSCE participating States, Partners for Co-operation and OSCE Executive Structures from this session, as perceived by the Chair include:

To OSCE participating States and OSCE Partners for Co-operation:

- International co-operation and co-ordination are fundamental elements in effective counter-terrorism efforts and in P/CVERLT. Although terrorist motivations and ideologies may vary, the transnational nature of all these groups highlights the need for effective partnerships at the international and regional levels.
- It is also imperative for states to advance “whole-of-government approaches” and to develop effective and trust-based partnerships with non-governmental actors, including civil society, academia and the private sector.
- Terrorists and violent extremists use the Internet for recruitment and fundraising. Conspiracy theories targeting ethnic and religious groups have been spun around the current pandemic and the economic crisis resulting from it. Such messages undermine the values of the OSCE and need to be tackled in co-operation with the private sector including the Tech-Industry, and civil society.
- Efforts to prevent and counter terrorism and VERLT need to fully uphold human rights and fundamental freedoms, as they otherwise risk being counter-productive and support the conditions conducive to terrorism.
- Specifically, the lack of a universally accepted definition of the concepts of “terrorism” and “violent extremism” should not lead to overbroad applications of related national laws and policies, risking human rights violations and the discrimination of certain communities.
- A meaningful inclusion of relevant groups and actors within communities that may be particularly vulnerable to VERLT is therefore necessary in order to avoid stigmatization and risking alienation and radicalization.
- Moreover, it is imperative to include women and youth in the development and implementation of strategies to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism. They should not be treated as mere instruments in a security agenda, but must be included in a meaningful, safe and age- and gender-sensitive way.

- Apart from the aforementioned Tech-Industry, public-private partnerships with a range of other business sectors need to be established and nurtured to effectively address terrorism and violent extremism. This includes the financial sector, travel/transport industries, and businesses involved in larger sports or entertainment events.

To OSCE Executive Structures:

- The OSCE should continue providing a platform for regional and sub-regional dialogue and co-operation on this important area of policy.
- They should keep working with participating States and Partners for Co-operation as well as civil society and the private sector in striving for a comprehensive and sustainable approach to security.
- The OSCE should continue offering assistance to requesting participating States and Partners for Co-operation in the implementation of OSCE commitments in the field of preventing and countering terrorism and VERLT, within existing mandates and resources.
- Such assistance can include the identification and sharing of good practices and measures to prevent and counter terrorism and VERLT in the OSCE area, as well as other types of technical assistance.

Session II: Building a Broader Community Network to Support the Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism

This session elaborated on key elements for successful “whole-of-government” and “whole-of-society” approaches in P/CVERLT. Discussions highlight the importance of developing and maintaining effective and trust-based partnerships between government and civil society actors to foster constructive engagement and advancing good governance. Experts showcased positive roles played by civil society and other non-governmental actors, who are often the first responders in the prevention of VERLT in societies across the OSCE area. Participants also examined ways to strengthen multi-agency co-ordination, including actors such as Ministries of Education, Labour, State committees on youth, women, or religious affairs, and other public actors beyond law enforcement, security services and criminal justice institutions.

The recommendations to OSCE participating States, Partners for Co-operation and OSCE Executive Structures from this session, as perceived by the Chair include:

To OSCE participating States and OSCE Partners for Co-operation:

- To address the complex threat of terrorism and violent extremism, a holistic approach is needed. Such “whole-of-government” efforts must involve all relevant government agencies, beyond law enforcement, security services and criminal justice institutions, including for instance health, social welfare and education sectors.

- In addition, effective engagement with civil society, academia, educators, media and the private sector is needed. Only by establishing trusted partnerships with all these actors, a successful “whole-of-society” approach in P/CVERLT becomes possible.
- Building such partnerships requires time, trust and adequate resources. As for P/CVERLT programmes themselves, establishing and maintaining these partnerships is a long-term effort. However, an inclusive approach appears vital for successful P/CVERLT.
- Apart from being inclusive, these efforts also need to consider potential negative impacts to ensure a do-no-harm approach. Poorly conceived strategies and programmes can cause harm, marginalize, and stigmatize vulnerable communities, further exacerbating potential drivers of VERLT.
- Developing successful prevention strategies is therefore rooted in listening to communities, long-term trust building and strengthening local security infrastructures.
- Including non-governmental actors already in strategy development not only expands the pool of expertise and makes the process more inclusive, but also creates opportunities for meaningful engagement between government and local stakeholders.
- Among civil society partners, women, youth and community leaders can play a unique role in P/CVERLT efforts because of their influence, long-term presence and ability to foster social change.
- Families often detect first signs of radicalization to violence, and trusted interlocutors are needed to convey such information to. Such interlocutors can be community police officers or government help lines, but also civil society representatives.
- To safeguard communities and individuals, whose vulnerability may be exploited by violent extremists, time, trust and resources are needed to strengthen critical thinking, media literacy and to promote tolerance, including through interfaith dialogue.
- Efforts to prevent and counter VERLT need to be underpinned by credible and reliable research Drivers to VERLT are complex and cut across ideological, political and religious lines and thus require holistic strategies that build on a comprehensive understanding of the variety of factors contributing to radicalization to violence.
- In addition, such research can shed light on how violent extremist groups interact and influence each other and what links they might have to other criminal activities.

To OSCE Executive Structures:

- Especially during the times of uncertainty provoked by the ongoing global health crisis, the OSCE is well-positioned to promote inclusive, meaningful, and human rights compliant approaches to P/CVERLT.
- Therefore, the Organization should continue developing and implementing projects that assist States with the co-operation and co-ordination between governments and civil society, taking into account a need for region specific and tailor made approaches.

- The OSCE should furthermore increase capacity building for community policing programmes as well as for human rights-based and holistic approaches to P/CVERLT, in order to strengthen civil society-led activities.

Session III: Tackling Terrorist Use of the Internet through a Comprehensive Approach

This session addressed how governments, the private sector and civil society can collaborate to prevent and counter violent extremism and terrorism online while protecting freedom of expression and digital rights. Experts also discussed technical issues pertaining to communication through the Dark Web, encrypted channels and anonymous sharing portals, aimed at inciting, recruiting and fundraising for terrorist and violent extremist groups. The session furthermore highlighted the importance of an open and pluralistic debate as well as of strategic communications involving and empowering civil society organizations to use counter and alternative narratives, both on- and offline.

The recommendations to OSCE participating States, Partners for Co-operation and OSCE Executive Structures from this session, as perceived by the Chair include:

To OSCE participating States and OSCE Partners for Co-operation:

- The increase in social media activity during the COVID-19 pandemic included terrorist and violent extremist exploitation of online platforms. Consequently, there is a growing need to have in place effective and human-rights compliant approaches to prevent and counter such spreading of terrorist content online.
- While protecting users from harmful content and ensuring a safe, peaceful and secure Internet, States need to ensure respect for the freedom of expression.
- The lack of a universally accepted definition of terrorism and violent extremism places the responsibility on States to avoid overbroad national definitions that risks undermining human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- Acknowledging this responsibility, States should increase transparency, accountability and fundamental rights safeguards for actions aimed at countering the use of Internet for terrorist purposes.
- While the removal of terrorist content online remains important part of effective action against terrorism, an exclusive focus on blocking and removing content is no solution. Perpetrators will find ways to circumvent such efforts if actors work in silos. Public-private partnerships involving government actors, the Tech-industry and civil society partners are needed to promote a more holistic approach that increases awareness of relevant actors and fosters community resilience online;
- Internet companies should work with governments in removing illegal content, identifying terrorist tactics, and disrupting groups that disseminate terrorist content.

- Moreover, the private sector should continue developing duty of care policies for the use of its platforms, thereby creating tracking and automated tools to stop the spread of terrorist messaging, with related safeguards protecting freedom of expression online.
- To promote counter and alternative narratives, a holistic approach to prevent VERLT is needed once again. Involving civil society online can ensure these efforts have an impact at grass roots level, by ensuring broad dissemination.
- In creating such narratives, dichotomies such as “We against them” messaging should be avoided. Instead, critical thinking should be encouraged.
- Investments in strengthening civil society capacities to develop counter and alternative narratives, as well as in tools to evaluate if such programs reach target audiences and objectives are needed. Creating digital libraries and education platforms are possible steps in this regard.

To OSCE Executive Structures:

- The OSCE should continue promoting implementation of the international legal framework against terrorism, particularly important in countering the use of the Internet for terrorist purposes.
- Upon request, OSCE Executive Structures should continue offering tailored capacity building, trainings and technical support, including through supporting legislative and policy reviews, in accordance with their respective mandates.
- The OSCE should also develop/update guidebooks and tools to inform practitioners about lessons learned and good practices, and continue to offer platforms for related dialogue among governments, companies, civil society and academics.

Session IV: Enhancing Public-Private Partnerships to Restrict Logistical and Financial Support to Terrorists, and Protect Vulnerable Targets

This session focused on the advantages of a “whole-of-government” approach as well as public-private partnerships, particularly in preventing terrorist travel, suppressing terrorist financing, and protecting vulnerable targets. Discussions highlighted good practices in cooperating with financial institutions, the implementation of API/PNR systems jointly with the airline industry and the protection of vulnerable targets involving private sector partners, such as the transport-, event-, and tourism-sector. At the same time, human rights impacts of such measures and consequences on different segments of society were addressed.

The recommendations to OSCE participating States, Partners for Co-operation and OSCE Executive Structures from this session, as perceived by the Chair include:

To OSCE participating States and OSCE Partners for Co-operation:

- The private sector owns, operates and runs many of the services that are abused or targeted by terrorists. That is why States need to build sustainable partnerships with these actors.
- To this end, States should follow the guidance provided *inter alia* by UN Security Council Resolutions 2462 (2019) on Countering Terrorist Financing, and 2396 (2017) on Improving Border Security and Protection of Vulnerable Targets.
- Differences in the capacities and interests of public and private stakeholders require tailored and long-term approaches in establishing such partnerships. It is recommended to formalize these processes to improve their effectiveness.
- Although legal compliance is an important aspect of government relations with the private sector, partnerships against terrorism need additional joint efforts that foster a resilient network of public-private actors for effective prevention, protection, and response. Developing human rights compliant information-exchange mechanisms is key.
- Internationally, the exchange of Advance Passenger Information and Passenger Name Record (API/PNR) can be efficient tools for information exchange and public-private co-operation, if the necessary human rights safeguards are established.
- Similarly, intergovernmental bodies as the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) could play a critical role in assessing whether in the implementation of commitments on countering the financing of terrorism, States observe applicable human rights standards.
- Terrorists are constantly developing new operational capacities and selecting new targets of opportunity. Public-private partnerships are therefore critical for developing effective measures to enhance the protection of vulnerable targets.
- Early engagement with private sector entities can also bring about innovative solutions to increase the resilience of critical infrastructure and other vulnerable targets, including through trust-building and information sharing.

To OSCE Executive Structures:

- The OSCE should continue promoting the aforementioned global instruments and mechanisms, to assist States in building partnerships with the private sector, by sharing good practices, information and expertise, and by leveraging networks.
- Upon request, OSCE Executive Structures shall continue related technical assistance efforts, e.g. through the existing training on improving implementation of global standards to counter the financing of terrorism, on the establishment and implementation of API/PNR systems, or on promoting public-private-partnerships in protecting critical infrastructure and “soft” targets.

Session V: Promoting Effective Approaches to Prosecution, Rehabilitation and Reintegration

The final session discussed effective partnerships in fostering community resilience and building networks to support a sustainable reintegration of former terrorists and violent extremists. Such efforts were deemed crucial to complement criminal justice efforts, visible in particular in the need to link custodial and non-custodial programmes with each other, in order to carefully prepare post-release rehabilitation and reintegration measures. The role of social, health, and education services in informing a comprehensive approach was emphasized once more, as was the need for appropriate oversight and human rights assessments in the implementation of criminal justice as well as rehabilitation and reintegration measures.

The recommendations to OSCE participating States, Partners for Co-operation and OSCE Executive Structures from this session, as perceived by the Chair include:

To OSCE participating States and OSCE Partners for Co-operation:

- Discussions during this session identified the need for States to establish and implement both, custodial as well as non-custodial rehabilitation programmes.
- Moreover, rehabilitation efforts in the prison setting need to be linked with post-detention reintegration work and continued assistance in order to be successful and to avoid recidivism.
- The importance of the role of social, health, and education services and other stakeholders in a “whole-of-government” approach remains crucial – traditional counter-terrorism actors need the support of these experts to develop sustainable long-term strategies.
- Moreover, the inclusion of civil society experts, often with unique access due to established relationships within the communities in question. Such “whole-of-society” strategies are particularly important in rehabilitation and reintegration efforts.
- In order to enable all these actors to work together, co-ordination mechanisms should be established and tested ahead of time – only this way an efficient and trustful cooperation in stress situations will be possible.
- Long term and institutionalized partnerships are needed – instead of ad-hoc and single-actor interventions. Corresponding strategies are also needed with regard to funding, staffing and other resources.
- States need to ensure that criminal justice responses are implemented in compliance with the rule of law and that rehabilitation and reintegration programmes are subject to appropriate oversight and human rights assessments.
- Specifically in this regard, gender-sensitive criminal justice approaches should be considered and implemented. While avoiding gender-stereotypes, the particular situation of women associated with terrorist groups needs to be taken into account.
- Moreover, children with links to terrorist groups should primarily be treated as victims. There is a growing need to develop and apply a comprehensive approach that aims at preventing further stigmatization of children based on a diverse range of measures, including through political engagement, rehabilitation and reintegration and

appropriate access to psychological expertise and support services. Criminal justice measure, where appropriate, should be based on juvenile justice standards.

- A gender focus is also important when devising appropriate rehabilitation programmes, so far mainly aimed at male clients. The inclusion of women in developing as well as in implementing rehabilitation and reintegration programmes can increase the positive impact of such programmes and avoid related pitfalls.

To OSCE Executive Structures:

- On P/CVERLT and related Rehabilitation and Reintegration efforts, the OSCE will continue to be a “centre of excellence” and “clearinghouse of good practices”, through the production of regionally tailored and human rights compliant guidelines and tools.
- Upon request, the OSCE will also continue to provide technical support to national policymakers and other practitioners through capacity building on P/CVERLT, as well as on human rights compliant criminal justice responses.

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