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INTRODUCTION

The EU Counter Terrorism Strategy and the action plan adopted in 2005 for combating radicalisation and recruitment into terrorism have the objective to prevent people from turning to terrorism by tackling the factors which can lead to radicalisation and recruitment, both in Europe and elsewhere. Over the years, the EU's efforts to implement the strategy have primarily focused on countering radicalisation and recruitment to terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda and the groups it inspires. Although the legacy of Al Qaeda's single narrative may endure and inspire others to act in its name, the tragic events in Norway brought to light once more the importance of pursuing efforts to counter the phenomenon of radicalisation in all its forms, including right-wing extremist behaviours.

There is a range of conditions in society which may create an environment in which individuals can become more easily radicalised into violence. These individuals or groups can come from different socio economic backgrounds, ethnic and religious communities, making it difficult to predict where violent extremist narratives will resonate. To tackle this phenomenon the EU must rely on a broad range of tools and capacities, including empowering local partners.

1. Level of interventions

The challenge of combating radicalisation and terrorist recruitment lies primary with the Member States, at a national, regional and local level. However, the range of experience of Member States is very different and EU work in this field, including the contribution of the European Commission, can provide an important framework to help co-ordinate national policies, share information and determine good practice. Addressing this challenge is also beyond the sole responsibility of public authorities. Fighting against and preventing extremism is frequently best achieved by engaging and empowering individuals and groups at local level to build resilience against the message of violence. All actors in a democratic society, front line responders, civil society, victims, communities, local actors, have to gather their efforts and commitment to help in ensuring an open political atmosphere free of intimidation and preventing more people being radicalised into violence. Thus, close cooperation with local authorities and civil society, and the empowerment of key groups in vulnerable communities is an important success factor in addressing the roots of violent radicalisation.

There is also a more general need to pursue the fight against radicalisation in the media, including on the internet. How we communicate on issues related to terrorism can have a significant effect on radicalisation. This is recognised in the EU's media and communication strategy on counter terrorism, and is also the subject of extensive international discussion including in the United Nations framework. The correct implementation of the Framework Decision on combating terrorism (2008/919/JHA) - which covered aspects of radicalisation such as the provocation to terrorist offenses, recruitment into terrorism and training also when committed through the internet - could help in this regards.

As terrorism is often accompanied by political propaganda, it is also important to develop a positive counter narrative based on EU values such as the rule of law, fundamental rights, peace and liberty.

Nevertheless, efforts at EU-level to address factors conducive to radicalisation go beyond mere counter-terrorism activities. Other policies in place for years have positive spill-over effects in containing radicalisation such as the EU-policies against discrimination and xenophobia and promoting integration and social cohesion.

In each Member State there are already a number of local authorities and organisations attempting to address radicalisation phenomena and to foster a safer and more resilient society. Member States are in the best position to understand the existing structures and their capabilities to strengthen their role in addressing radicalisation. Previous work on this subject has included the handbook on radicalisation in prisons, and the six work-streams initiated by the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator on countering the single narrative, terrorist use of the internet, the training of religious leaders, the role of local authorities, community policing and how to de-radicalise people who have joined groups which advocate violence.

Points for discussion:

1. To what extent is radicalisation a growing threat for the EU? How should the EU strengthen efforts to tackle all forms of violent extremism which may lead to acts of terrorism?

2. How can Member States support local authorities and organisations and motivate them to be active in radicalisation issues and contribute to build a more resilient society?

2. EU level of cooperation

Preventing terrorism and addressing radicalisation and recruitment is one of the priorities of the EU Internal Security Strategy adopted on 22 November 2010. The Strategy commits to support and empower communities and key groups in their grassroots efforts to prevent violent radicalisation and recruitment.

To this end, the European Commission emphasised the importance of upstream actions, by shifting the approach of policies addressing violent radicalisation to tackle the phenomenon at the level closest to the most susceptible individuals in the most affected communities. To promote more cross fertilisation between local actors, the Commission officially launched on 9 September 2011 the EU Radicalisation Network ('RAN'), which aims at facilitating cooperation and sharing experiences and practices amongst the groups of actors closest to the most vulnerable individuals and communicating techniques for challenging terrorist narratives.

The Network will build on the existence of local authorities and other organisations capable and willing to be active in the area of radicalisation and to share their lessons learnt.

In addition, the RAN will contribute to developing various aspects of the EU strategy and the Action Plan on countering radicalisation and recruitment. It is meant to be a practical tool assisting Member States in the formulation of their policies as well as the implementation of programmes and activities to address the issue of violent radicalisation and recruitment. In this context, the RAN could support and reinvigorate Member States' important existing activities eg the work streams mentioned above and new projects in priority areas.

In 2012 the Commission will organise a high level conference on the prevention of radicalisation and recruitment at which Member States will have the opportunity to take stock of their interventions and present examples of successful actions to counter extremist ideology. Furthermore, the Commission, with the support from/of the RAN aims to develop best practices and experiences to support Member States' efforts, from upstream prevention of radicalisation to disrupting recruitment and how to enable disengagement and rehabilitation.

Addressing conditions conducive to violent radicalisation in the EU will of course need to take also into account the continuous connection with the external aspects of the phenomenon. Past experience of extremism has shown that these connections can be a major vulnerability which good international coordination can exploit. Diaspora communities in particular have a positive role to play in making bridges between countries and societies, which needs to be taken account of in efforts to combat radicalisation.

Positive results have been already achieved with the joint EU-US expert meeting on Somalia organised by the Commission in January 2011, with the support of EEAS and Counter Terrorist Coordinator. The involvement of representatives of the Somali diaspora community has particularly contributed to highlighting new areas of cooperation in the area of countering extremist narratives and Al Shabaab recruitment efforts. Another joint EU-US expert meeting on Pakistan is under preparation and will involve also representatives from EU Pakistanis diaspora.

Points for discussion:

1. How can the Radicalisation Awareness Network contribute to help Member States in their efforts to counter radicalisation and violent extremism?

2. Are some Member States willing to take the lead on specific priority topics to be examined deeper and to present results during the high level conference organised in 2012?