

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



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UN Security Council Counter-Terrorism Committee

**Open Counter-Terrorism Committee
Briefing on “New initiatives to address the
foreign terrorist fighter challenge”**

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The Battle of Ideas

The fight against violent extremism presents many challenges.

One of the biggest is psychological.

We have to let go of winning – in the traditional sense.

You can't beat terrorism on a battlefield.

If this was a simple case of the stronger, richer, better-equipped adversary defeating the weaker...

...we'd have won by now.

Nor is it possible to negotiate a peace.

There is nothing we could offer these individuals and groups...

...that would ever be enough.

Because, ultimately, terror is about the primacy of an idea.

It is about one way of seeing the world.

One way of being.

And victory is suffocating every other view.

This is terrorism's power – it's resilience.

Ideas cannot be destroyed.

They outlive leaders, movements, military campaigns.

Even when an idea has been roundly denounced...

...it lingers, threatening to re-emerge when the circumstances are right.

And, in Europe in particular, look no further than anti-Semitism for proof of that.

So, we must understand that we are locked in a battle of ideas.

Not a battle with Islam:

Those who seek to justify violence and murder in the name of Allah are perverting a fundamentally peaceful faith: terror has no religion.

But a battle with dogma, ideology and propaganda.

And we must prove to the young, the poor, the marginalised, the fearful, the angry...

...that democracy, tolerance and pluralism...

...*our* ideas, ideas cherished by people across the world...

...are better than division and hate.

We have to render our opponents irrelevant by giving people a better, more attractive path.

No repeat of the mistakes of the past

This hasn't always happened.

Following the attack on the Twin Towers...

...during the hunt for Al Qaeda...

...too often our shared values were abandoned, in the name of national security.

Too often, on both sides of the Atlantic and around the world...

...human rights and the rule of law were set aside...

...boosting the very terrorists we sought to stop.

The question is: how do we stop this happening again?

The urge to curb liberty at times of insecurity is as old as government itself...

...and it is as tempting today as ever.

Dr Ismail Serageldin – an eminent Muslim Scholar – put it plainly.

When he came to Strasbourg to address Council of Europe member states, he said:

Your challenge is that your people want you to *prevent* acts of terror...

... *before* they happen.

That inevitably means enhanced state surveillance;

It inevitably means new police powers;

The ability of the authorities to act on suspicions of conspiracy...

...rather than evidence of guilt.

Immediately, therefore, rights and liberties come under threat.

And he's right: this is a dilemma we cannot escape.

But we *can* be smart about it.

We can make a virtue of our values.

They are not our weakness, but our strength.

Our commitment to democracy makes us more secure, not less: promoting tolerance and keeping power in check.

Our respect for the law gives legitimacy to our governments.

Our internationalism creates strength in numbers.

And our challenge is proving that our governments can stick to these principles...

...even when a different path seems more tempting.

Because, otherwise, how can we ask our citizens to do the same?

The Council of Europe

This notion – of security grounded in liberty and law – is why the Council of Europe exists.

We were created in the wake of the Second World War...

...to help Europe build peace on new foundations:

Democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

We are the guardians of the European Convention on Human Rights...

...and home to the European Court of Human Rights.

We are pan-European, stretching across the continent...

...so beyond the EU28, to include 47 member states, including the Russian Federation, Ukraine, Turkey, to name a few.

That is 820 million people.

And, today, we are helping our members – and others, we hope – tackle violent extremism...

...in two key ways.

One: by making sure they have good laws.

Two: by equipping them to prevent radicalisation before it takes root.

Good laws

First, good laws.

When the United Nations passed Resolution 2178...

...committing to stem the flow of terrorist fighters in and out of conflict zones...

...I, like many, was extremely pleased.

The number of foreign terrorist fighters has rocketed:

Syria has been a game changer.

Many are European; many are young.

Their vile crimes are beamed to our computer screens and smartphones – fuelling anxiety and mistrust. And this resolution sent a powerful message:

The world was going to act.

It also, however, exposed a major problem:

We didn't have the right laws.

From the point of view of international law...

...foreign terrorist fighters was a black hole.

We criminalise the recruitment, financing and training of terrorists...

...in fact, the Council of Europe first drafted these standards in 2005.
But there has been no equivalent for the act of seeking out these things;

No international legal standards by which to prosecute the
individuals seeking to join foreign wars...

...before committing acts of terror abroad and at home.

Nationally, the legal landscape was also weak.

Many states do not have effective legislation in place...

...and, even if they do, it's not much good if their neighbours don't.

It's true that some European governments have been updating their legislation...

...particularly following this year's attacks in Copenhagen in Paris...

...and they should be commended for taking action.

But, even if one country can stop its nationals from heading to Damascus to join Da'esh...

...and, by the way, I say Da'esh because they are neither Islamic, nor a state...

...we haven't solved the problem if those individuals can simply travel to another European capital...

...to catch their plane or train from there.

In Europe our nations are like the links in a chain:

We are only ever as secure as our least secure state.

Without shared legal concepts, effective co-operation has also been extremely difficult.

Some states have well-developed systems for sharing information and working together...

... particularly within the EU.

But many do not.

Police officers, border guards and courts frequently operate under completely different systems to their counterparts...

...massively slowing things down...

...and allowing individuals to slip through the net.

Turkey, for example, shares a border with Syria and has told us repeatedly:

“When we get a call from a European ally asking us to immediately stop someone from travelling through our territory...

...we want to co-operate, we want to help...

...but *on which legal basis* can we act?”

So, in September 2014, when Jean Paul Laborde...

...the Executive Director of the UN’s CTED, whom you all know...

...asked me if the Council of Europe could help fill these gaps...

I, of course, said yes.

We set ourselves a challenge:

Could we, in Europe, pioneer the legislative reforms needed to turn the political hopes contained in Resolution 2178...

...into a reality on the ground?

I am pleased to tell you that we have.

On the 19th of May...

...the Council of Europe adopted an Additional Protocol to our Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism.

It criminalises *for the first time in international law*, the early preparations for acts of terror:

“the participation in an association or group for the purpose of terrorism”...

...as well as “travelling abroad for the purpose of committing a terrorist act”.

It will enable European states to co-operate much more quickly and effectively...

...aided by a new network of 24/7 contact points...

...so that border guards confronted with suspicious travellers, for example...

...know exactly who to call, at any hour.

And it sets out clear human rights safeguards:

In particular for the rights to freedom of movement, expression, association and religion.

Of course, there are many other things we must do to stop foreign terrorist fighters...

...improving our framework for mutual legal assistance and extradition;

...disrupting the financing of terrorist groups;

...establishing how to best deal with terrorists acting outside of traditional cell structures – “the lone wolves”;

And we are working on all of these.

But these laws have been a vital, missing piece of the jigsaw...

...and I am extremely pleased by the support the Protocol has received across Europe’s states.

The fact that it was negotiated in just 7 weeks speaks for itself – that may well be a world record for producing an international legal instrument of this kind.

Even the small number of states who have not yet ratified the mother Convention are now looking to do so.

And so I urge governments to swiftly adopt these standards – in Europe and beyond:

The Convention and Protocol are not only open to Council of Europe member states.

In doing so we will make it clear that we will not fall into the trap set for us by terrorists:

Instead our nations will combat this threat together, in with the law, and in keeping with our values we share.

Preventing Radicalisation

Good laws, of course, are only half of the solution.

The battle of ideas is taking place at every minute, of every day.

And it is being lost in the spaces that are too often neglected by the state.

The prison yards.

The schools in poor neighbourhoods.

The darker corners of the Internet.

The places in which young men and women are being preyed on, lied too, radicalised.

In Europe, we have been slow to understand this.
But our nations are finally waking up to the indoctrination taking place in plain sight.

And we must, I believe, show a new self-confidence in asserting ourselves to challenge hateful ideologies...

...entering into these forgotten arenas...

...and unashamedly promoting democracy, pluralism and tolerance societies instead.

The Council of Europe is helping our members do exactly that.

We are bringing together prison and probation services from across the continent to agree new guidelines for countering radicalisation.

We know that prisons are a hot spot.

We know that the most extreme inmates can be the most sociable, causing few problems for their guards.

And we therefore know that our interventions must be intelligent.

So these guidelines will be a practical tool...

...drawing on real successes and failures from the people who deal with this every day...

...empowering their fellow prison workers to detect and deal with radicalisation...

...while putting proper focus on mentoring prisoners...

...preparing them for release...

...as well as the follow-up which takes place once they have exited the prison walls.

This work will be ready by the end of the year.

Second, we're helping our governments intervene online.

This is extremely tricky territory – it's true.

We must, at all times, protect freedom of expression as well as the right to seek information.

The Council of Europe has, in the last decade, sponsored a range of treaties to help governments get this balance right.

Today I want to highlight just one:

The Additional Protocol to our Cybercrime Convention...

...which outlaws using computer systems to peddle racism and xenophobia.

When the Protocol was originally conceived, over a decade ago...

...the drafters were thinking more of crimes like holocaust denial.

But it is extremely relevant today...

...giving states careful but effective guidance in how to combat the abuse of the Internet for the dissemination of hate and bigotry.

So we are relaunching the Protocol, and I urge you to look at it.

Finally – and perhaps most importantly – we are helping our states counter radicalisation in our schools.

Because not only is this a battle of ideas...

...it is a battle for young minds.

At President Obama's anti-extremism Summit in Washington earlier this year...

...I took part in a session chaired by Secretary of State John Kerry on this very subject.

Everyone who spoke – from nations and institutions across the planet – agreed that education is key.

Yet, in Europe, while most states have some form of civic education...

...we don't – as standard practice – teach our children what it means – explicitly – to be a democratic citizen;

How to live with others, as equals, in mixed societies.

And too often 'national citizenship' has been conflated with 'democratic citizenship' – but the two are not the same.

The whole point of the latter is it is *borderless*:

There are skills that *all* democratic citizens must share.

This is a problem.

We are not born with our democratic abilities, we learn them.

Democracies are not God-given, they are man-made – and they need to be constantly maintained.

Many educators and governments see this gap.

And many have asked for our help.

So the Council of Europe is now developing a new model for teaching democratic culture – which we want to see applied across the continent.

Can students resolve conflicts by understanding the different perspectives of each party?

Do they grasp the inalienable nature of certain rights, and their relationship with religious beliefs?

Are they able to work with peers who do not share their views...

...making sure that every member of the group is involved?

These are the kinds of competences we are developing.

We have now received the first round of feedback from a range of international experts.

The first teaching pilots will begin over the summer in countries such as Georgia, Montenegro, Poland and Estonia...

...with the help of the Pestalozzi Programme for teacher training and the European Wergeland Centre in Oslo.

The results will be published in the coming months.

Again, I have been very encouraged by the enthusiasm shown among our member states.

I know, however, that a minority of people see this work as a step towards some kind of social engineering or cultural imperialism.

I'm afraid I flatly disagree.

If we believe in our democratic principles, then let us stand by them.

This is not about teaching young people *what* to think...

...it is about teaching them *how* to think.

Only the extremists should be afraid of that.

On that note, I'll conclude to leave some time for questions.

Before I do, however, I'd like to return to the thought on which I began.

None of this is about winning – not in the classic sense.

Those who wish to destroy our way of life are not just using guns and bombs.

They are armed with easy answers and seductive promises too.

Fortunately for us, our answers are better.

Democracy.

Human Rights.

The rule of law.

Security built on freedom.

Hope rather than fear.

They know that.

We just have to remember it too.

Advancing, at all times, together;

Supported, always, by the law;

Stronger because of the values we hold dear.

Thank you.