Prevention of radicalisation and recruitment of European citizens by terrorist organisations

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The Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs adopted an own-initiative report by Rachida DATI (EPP, FR) on the prevention of radicalisation and recruitment of European citizens by terrorist organisations.

The report noted that more than **5000** European citizens have joined terrorist organisations and other military formations in Iraq and Syria. This phenomenon is speeding up and taking on significant proportions in certain Member States. The recent terrorist attacks highlight the security threat which is posed by the presence and movement of these **'foreign' fighters** who are often EU nationals, in Europe and in its neighbourhood. Given the acceleration of this phenomenon, the aim of this report is to make **recommendations for a European strategy** for preventing radicalisation and recruitment of EU citizens by terrorist organisations.

The report focused on the following issues:

European added value in the prevention of terrorism: emphasising that terrorism cannot and should not be associated with any specific religion, nationality or civilisation, the report called for a comprehensive study on the effectiveness of national and EU measures aimed at preventing and combating terrorism. The Commission is invited to:

- establish as a priority an **action plan to implement and evaluate the EU strategy for combating radicalisation and recruitment to terrorism**, on the basis of the exchange of best practice and the pooling of skills within the European Union, the evaluation of measures undertaken in the Member States and cooperation with third countries and international organisations;
- contribute to and support the development by Member States of an **effective and intensive communication strategy** on preventing the radicalisation and recruitment of European citizens and of non-EU nationals residing in the EU by terrorist organisations.

Member States should coordinate their strategies and share the information and experience at their disposal, to implement good practices at both national and European level, to cooperate with a view to taking new steps in combating radicalisation and recruitment to terrorism.

Preventing violent extremism and terrorist radicalisation in prisons: stressing that prisons remain one of several environments which are a breeding ground for the spread of radical and violent ideologies and terrorist radicalisation, the report called on the Commission to **encourage the exchange of best practices among the Member States** in order to counter the increase of terrorist radicalisation in Europe's prisons and called on Member States to take immediate action against **prison overcrowding**.

The Commission is called upon to propose **guidelines** based on best practices on measures to be implemented in European prisons aimed at the prevention of radicalisation and of violent extremism, on a basis of full respect for human rights. Members encouraged the establishment of **educational programmes with adequate funding** in European prisons in order to promote critical thinking, religious tolerance, and reintegration into society of inmates.

Preventing online terrorist radicalisation: recalling that the internet and social networks are significant platforms for the fuelling of radicalisation and fundamentalism, Members underlined the role of

education and public awareness campaigns in preventing radicalisation online. They called for an **effective strategy for the detection and removal of illegal content** inciting to violent extremism, while respecting fundamental rights and freedom of expression, and in particular for contributing to the dissemination of **effective discourse** to counter terrorist propaganda.

The competent authorities should ensure that websites that incite hatred are **monitored more strictly**. Members supported the introduction of measures enabling all **internet users to easily and quickly flag illegal content** circulating on the internet and on social media networks and to report it to the competent authorities, including through hotlines. Every Member State should set up a **special unit** tasked with flagging illegal content on the internet and with facilitating the detection and removal of such content. Members called for a reinforcement of the tools available to the EU to **combat cybercrime**.

Preventing radicalisation through education and social inclusion: Members recalled the **crucial role that schools play** in helping to promote integration within society and develop critical thinking, and to promote non-discrimination. They called on the Member States to encourage educational establishments to provide **courses and academic programmes** aimed at strengthening understanding and tolerance, especially with regard to different religions, the history of religions, philosophies and ideologies. They stressed the need to **teach fundamental values and democratic principles** of the Union such as human rights.

Member States are urged to ensure that **educational programmes on internet use exist in every school**. Furthermore, teachers should be empowered to take an active stand against all forms of discrimination and racism.

The report highlighted the importance of combining deradicalisation programmes with measures such as **establishing partnerships with community representatives, investment in social and neighbourhood projects** aimed at disrupting economic and geographical marginalisation, and mentoring schemes for alienated and excluded young people considered at risk of radicalisation.

Members considered it vital to set up an **alert system** for assistance and guidance in every Member State which would allow families and community members to obtain support or to easily and swiftly flag the development of sudden behavioural change that might signal a process of terrorist radicalisation or an individual's departure to join a terrorist organisation.

Stepping up the exchange of information on terrorist radicalisation in Europe: whilst reiterating their commitment to work towards the finalisation of an **EU directive on passenger name records (PNR) by the end of 2015**, Members suggested that a holistic, ambitious and comprehensive strategy on counterterrorism and the fight against organised crime, involving foreign policy, social policy, education policy, law enforcement and justice, is required.

The report insisted on the absolute necessity of stepping up the expedient and effective exchange of relevant information between the law enforcement authorities in the Member States and between Member States and the relevant agencies, in particular by optimising the use of and contributions to the Schengen Information System (SIS) and Visa Information System (VIS).

Strengthening deterrents against terrorist radicalisation: Members believed that measures aimed at preventing the radicalisation of European citizens and their recruitment by terrorist organisations will not be fully effective until they are accompanied by an **effective, dissuasive and articulated range of criminal justice measures** in all Member States. Through effectively criminalising terrorist acts carried out abroad with terrorist organisations, Member States will equip themselves with the tools needed to eliminate terrorist radicalisation among European citizens.

Members called for **reinforced capacities for Eurojust's Coordination Centre**, which should play a critical role in promoting the joint action of Member States' judicial authorities in the collection of evidence and enhance the effectiveness of prosecutions of crimes related to terrorism. They also called for the EU to work on the setting-up of **judicial and law enforcement cooperation agreements with third countries** to facilitate the collection of evidence in said countries, provided that fundamental rights are safeguarded by all parties.

Preventing the departure and anticipating the return of radicalised European citizens: Members reiterated that the EU should **improve the effectiveness of its external border controls**, whilst making good use of existing instruments such as the SIS and the VIS. Member States should share good practices with regard to exit and return checks and the freezing of financial assets of citizens, in the context of preventing citizens from taking part in terrorist activities in conflict areas in third countries and of how to manage their return to the EU.

Strengthening links between internal and external security in the EU: Members stressed the vital importance of the EU establishing close **cooperation with third countries**, **notably transit countries and destination countries**, in order to be able to identify EU citizens and non-European residents leaving to fight for terrorist organisations or returning thereafter.

The EU should increase its cooperation with regional partners in order to **curb arms trafficking**, targeting in particular the countries where terrorism originates, and to follow closely the export of armaments that could be exploited by terrorists. Members also called for foreign policy tools and engagement with third countries to be strengthened with a view to **countering the financing of terrorist organisations**.

Dismantling terrorist networks: the report underlined that money laundering, tax evasion and other fiscal crimes are in some cases major sources of terrorism funding. **Tracking and combating crimes affecting the EU's financial interests** must therefore be a priority.

Members called for a **harmonised approach** to the definition as a criminal offence of hate speech, online and offline, whereby radicals incite others to disrespect and violate fundamental rights.