



Regional Conference on Preventing Violent Extremism in Central Asia – Challenges and Responses at Community Level

Bishkek, 10 to 11 November 2016

- Concept Note -

Summary

As tasked by HR/VP Federica Mogherini after the High Level Political and Security Dialogue (HLPSD) between EU and the Central Asian states in May 2016, EU Special Representative for Central Asia Peter Burian is organizing a Regional Conference on "Preventing Violent Extremism in Central Asia – Challenges and Responses at Community Level" in Bishkek on 10 to 11 November 2016 in order to reflect on previous discussions and to explore in more detail specific aspects of the phenomenon. The meeting will focus on addressing root causes and dynamics of violent extremism in the region and explore the potential for engagement at local community level and strengthening the link between community and national level. The regional conference will benefit from the results of a local workshop, organized in cooperation with Saferworld prior to the event, where representatives of Local Crime Prevention Centres (LCPC) in Kyrgyzstan and Public Councils in Tajikistan exchange experience on challenges and best practice of preventing violent extremism (PVE).

Rationale

Central Asian states frequently highlight violent extremism as one of the key challenges in their countries and in the region. At the ministerial meeting chaired by HR/VP Mogherini in Astana in December 2015 as well as at the more recent EU-Central Asia High Level Political and Security Dialogue (HLPSD) in Brussels in May 2016, ministers requested the EU to engage more actively in this field. In response, EUSR Burian has been tasked to follow up on this topic in order to better understand the global phenomenon and its root causes and dynamics in Central Asia, and to jointly generate ideas for concrete responses.

While the discussions are dominated by views of law enforcement and security agencies which call for tighter control against specific groups, e.g. religious communities or ethnic minorities, international and non-governmental national observers argue that such restrictive measures are likely to produce more grievances, which fuels radicalization and violent extremism instead of countering it. More attention should be paid to comprehensively analysing the phenomenon, including the root causes that make populations vulnerable to violent extremist approaches and ideas.

United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA), UNDP, OSCE and Saferworld have dedicated the attention to violent extremism. While UNRCCA focused on drivers and UNDP on development aspects of PVE, upcoming events will tackle financing of terrorism, youth and drugs respectively. The EUSR regional conference will shed light into local dynamics, i.e. on root causes and responses at community level, and the potential role of community leaders, women and youth councils, religious leaders but also of city administration and law enforcement in PVE.



EU and international engagement on Preventing Violent Extremism

The Central Asia Joint Action Plan, developed with EU funding and adapted by the Central Asian states in 2011, is the first regional framework designed to address the threat of terrorism through a common approach, based on the 2006 UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy. Both documents in their Pillar I call for addressing "the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism".

The UN PVE Action Plan (UNGA A/70/674 of 24 December 2015), presented by the Secretary-General in January 2016, was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 12 February 2016. The Action Plan outlines several domestic drivers conducive to violent extremism such as lack of socio-economic opportunities, perception of injustice, marginalization and discrimination, poor governance, violation of human rights and rule of law, or harsh treatment in prisons. It calls for a comprehensive approach encompassing not only essential security-based counter-terrorism measures but also systematic preventive steps to address the underlying conditions that drive individuals to radicalize and join violent extremist groups.

The EU organized a first EU-Central Asia seminar on Counter-Terrorism in Brussels in March 2015. Under its BOMCA project, EU holds annual Central Asia Border Security Initiative (CABSI) meetings in the region and discusses at D/FM level regional security challenges at its High Level Political and Security Dialogue (HLPSD).

The EU supports Hedayah International Center of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism on its research and training work, including on Central Asia. It recently launched a call for proposals under its STRIVE Global Program with the overall objective of building the capacity of state and non-state actors to effectively challenge radicalization and recruitment to violent extremism, while continuing to respect human rights and international law. EU under its prison de-radicalisation programme supports the revision of the "UNODC Handbook on the Management of Violent Extremist Prisoners and the Prevention of Radicalisation to Violence in Prison". The EU Delegation in Bishkek has recently launched a call for proposals on 'Support to in-country civil society actors in conflict prevention, peace-building and crisis preparedness' under the EU Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace (IcSP).

For addressing the violent extremism phenomenon, the EU toolbox provides a variety of further engagement options, e.g. political dialogue, human rights-based approaches to security sector reform, support to national partners in developing strategies for violent extremism, development assistance and promoting civil society.

Focus of the EUSR regional conference

As drivers of violent extremism are context-specific, resilience to extremism is also context specific, and therefore needs a shared contextual analysis and assessment of relevant pull and push factors, and local responses in all phases from prevention, to countering and reintegration. The utilization of local expertise at community level is essential.



Accordingly, and complimentary to previous and ongoing efforts that bring together officials and experts at national level, the EUSR regional conference will apply a bottom-up approach aiming at ***utilizing local knowledge and experience in order to generate lessons learnt and best practice of PVE at community level***. In this regard, a local workshop will be held under Saferworld's community policing programme prior to the regional conference. Representatives of Local Crime Prevention Centres (LCPC) of Kyrgyzstan, consisting of local administration, police, neighbourhood inspectors, juvenile inspectors, women, youth, and elderlies, and Public Councils of Tajikistan will exchange their experience on challenges and best practice of PVE.

These ***local findings will be fed into the discussion at the regional conference*** where officials and experts meet to discuss the potential and ways of applying the lessons learnt at their respective context. The conference in Bishkek will be attended by representatives of relevant ministries (Foreign Affairs, Interior, Social Affairs and Youth, Labour and Migration), state committees on religious affairs, and law enforcement from the five Central Asian countries and Afghanistan as well as by international and regional academics and practitioners. Specific relevance will be given to an exchange of views on root causes and the discussion of local responses.

The ***objectives*** of the conference are therefore

- To sensitize national level officials on local dynamics and to showcase local successful initiatives
- To initiate and promote a dialogue between local and national level to tackle common challenges
- To exchange lessons learnt on PVE and discuss the applicability in different geographical contexts, i.e. how best practice can be implemented in environments which were so far less conducive to preventive work
- To inform ongoing EU programming in the focal sectors in Central Asia and to generate idea for concrete follow-up projects to be implemented in the region

Discussion topics

The EUSR regional conference intends to contribute to better understanding of the community context in Central Asia and to identify entry points for EU engagement. The discussion sessions will be structured along the following topics:

- Regional trends of radicalization in Central Asia
- State assessment on root causes of violent extremism and lessons learnt from state interventions
- PVE experience from LCPC (KYG) and Public Councils (TAJ) at community level
- Recruitment strategies of violent extremist groups in different contexts
- Successful responses to violent extremism