



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

Bishkek, 10 to 11 November 2016

- Conclusions and Recommendations -

The Regional Conference on "Preventing Violent Extremism in Central Asia – Challenges and Responses at Community Level", held by the EU Special Representative for Central Asia, Ambassador Peter Burian, was a response to frequent statements by high level officials of the five Central Asian states on the relevance and urgency of addressing radicalization and violent extremism as regional challenge, as it was highlighted during the EUs High Level Political and Security Dialogue (HLPD) with the Central Asian states in May 2016 and most recently at the EU – Central Asia Ministerial Meeting in Brussels in October 2016.

In this context, HR/VP Mogherini had tasked the EUSR for Central Asia to elaborate on this topic in more detail to better understand the global phenomenon and its dynamics in Central Asia, and to jointly generate ideas for concrete follow-up project activities in the region.

The conference has been attended by more than 100 participants, including officials of the relevant ministries and agencies from the Central Asian state and Afghanistan, several Ambassadors, UN, EU and OSCE officials as well as academics, practitioners and civil society organizations from the region and beyond. EUSR Peter Burian opened the conference by promoting a comprehensive approach to addressing violent extremism in the region, shifting the focus from repressive to preventive measures to be more effective and cost-efficient and calling for synergies and cooperation between the international actors. He was followed by Damir Sagynbayev, Head of Department of Defence, Public Order and Emergency Situations at the Administration of the Government of Kyrgyz Republic, Head of UNRCCA SRSG Petko Draganov, and Head of OSCE Centre in Bishkek Ambassador Pierre von Arx.

The conference documents are available on the website www.eeas.europa.eu/Central-Asia-PVE-Conference.

I. Conclusions

Session 1: Regional trends and root causes of radicalization

Discussants: Alexey Malashenko, Carnegie Moscow Centre; Shahrbanou Tadjbakhsh, Science Po Paris; Laurent Vinatier, Humanitarian Dialogue Centre

- Radical views always exist in any community because radicalism is one of the main sources of social movement. Current Islamic radicalism, or Islamism, is not a



deviation, but rather a trend phenomenon for people in search for Islamic alternatives. In this sense, radicalism is a reaction to government failures.

- ***There is no widespread popular support for extremists in Central Asia***, and border security is sufficiently strong to maintain control. In contrary, Afghanistan is a recruitment base for Central Asian extremists. It remains one of the main hotspots for violent extremism and radicalism in the region and seems to be developing into a new front for ISIS.
- Radical tendencies in Central Asia are less likely to turn into violent or political extremism but rather take the form of a social movement while ***militants will focus on Afghanistan first*** instead of targeting Central Asian countries. The more serious ***concern for Central Asia is the growing number of disconnected people*** who feel lost in a secular society with increasingly restricted space for religious activities.

Session 2: Assessments on root causes of violent extremism and lessons learnt from state interventions in Central Asia and Afghanistan

Discussants: Raim Salimov, Deputy Head 10th General Department, Ministry of Interior, Kyrgyzstan; Zafar Rahmonov, Department for combating extremism, terrorism and supervision of execution of laws on national security, General Prosecutor's office, Tajikistan; Abdul Wakil Wafa, National Security Council, Afghanistan

- Central Asian and Afghan governments are fully aware of the trend of increasing violent extremism and its potentially negative consequences. The officials from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan ***reported a visible rise in islamization and radicalization over the past two years***, almost exclusively driven by Islamist extremist groups that actively recruit foreign fighters and followers, in particular Syria.
- Most are young men, but also women, mainly through religious institutions (e.g. ethnic Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan) and among migrant workers who lost their jobs in Russia (especially Tajiks). The representative from the Afghan government reported that currently, most imprisoned fighters were not well-educated and would fight for economic reasons.
- The officials also refer to ***financial support from external players***, allegedly Arab countries, to construct mosques. Kyrgyzstan reported that the number of mosques increased from 39 mosques in Soviet times to approx. 3000.

Session 3: Experience at community level: Local Crime Prevention Centres (LCPC) in Kyrgyzstan and Public Councils in Tajikistan

Discussants: Larry Attree, Saferworld; Keneshbek Sainazarov, Search for Common Ground; Indira Aslanova, Expert Bishkek; Stefan Stoyanov, Saferworld Kyrgyzstan; Akmal Mamadaliev, LCPC Yrys, Jalal-Abad province, Kyrgyzstan; Tajikan Shabdanova, Foundation for Tolerance International (FTI), Kyrgyzstan; Malika Dodoeva, Community Policing Partnership Team, Public Council, Panjakent, Tajikistan



- **Key push/pull factors of radicalization** are perceived injustice, marginalization and discrimination of parts of the population, social and political exclusion, lack of job opportunities and income, wide-spread corruption, repression by law enforcement agencies, and poor prison management.
- Specific additional factors are **ongoing inter-ethnic tensions**, in particular in the south of Kyrgyzstan; the **ban** as an extremist group **of the former opposition** party IPRT and subsequent detention of its members, lawyers and relatives; and the loss of jobs of thousands of **migrant workers** in Russia due to the current economic decline.
- **Repressive policies** should be avoided at all costs since those can only be short term measures but have negative effects in the long run. Instead, good governance should be the priority to overcome security issues. However, government officials believe the use of repression is necessary but admitted that the respect of human rights by police force was crucial. In order to solve this security dilemma, not only political will is necessary but also a “political way” needs to be elaborated. It is crucial to develop, demonstrate, and systematise effective practical responses that can deliver real results through enhanced collaboration between security, civilian authorities, and communities.
- **Families**, in particular mothers, should play a central role in countering and preventing violent extremism. Parents often do not realise that their children became militants abroad.
- The role of **religious leaders** is decisive and should be recognized as such. Imams and Atyncha (women religious leaders) can be very influential on their community. Alongside the search for spiritual enlightenment, religions offer adherents a sense of structure, belonging, and an opportunity to serve a higher purpose, a need which is also instrumental in recruitment by violent extremist organizations. Therefore, Imams and Atyncha should be engaged and supported in their capacity to work with vulnerable youth. Thereby, assistance should target their interests and concerns as community leaders to serve their constituency, rather than be based on our judgment of their theological perspective. Examples are training activities to improve public speaking, managerial or mediation skills.

Session 4: Recruitment strategies and tactics in specific contexts

Discussants: Tatiana Hadjiemmanuel, IOM Central Asia; Koen Marquering, UNODC Central Asia; Inga Sikorskaia, School of Peacemaking and Media Technology, Bishkek; Deirdre Tynan, International Crisis Group; Almadan Orozobekova, Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle

- **Migrant workers** from Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in particular Russia but also in Kazakhstan are a vulnerable group. Many have lost their jobs in Russia due to the current economic crisis, many do not return to Central Asia as the chances for generating income in their home countries are even smaller but also of fear to be on Russia's "re-entry ban list". Among the Kyrgyz migrant workers, the number of



women has been increasing over the past years. Many are frustrated with little links left to their home communities but also alienated from the host state and society, and therefore an easy target for Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF) recruiters.

- **Prisons** are a favoured recruiting source for potential terrorists. Nevertheless, the number of convicts of violent extremism, e.g. in Kyrgyzstan, is relatively low (328) compared to a total of 10,436 prisoners in the country. Challenges are related to lack of resources and lack of qualified staff with sufficient socio-psychological experience to work with VE prisoners. Prison infrastructure and living conditions are often poor, and security provisions not adequate. Prisons suffer from the absence of a proper classification system, lack of social rehabilitation programs, and lack of possibilities to engage in meaningful activities while imprisoned. This can lead to tension and violence in prisons and high level of recidivism following the release. Extremist groups in Kyrgyz prisons have a strict command structure and act similar to organised crime groups.
- Specific content in **internet and social media** is created to recruit FTF. A correlation between internet hate speeches and radicalism has been observed. Between 2014 and 2016, the amount of such content has increased from 7 to 39 percent. The main tools are public communications and hate groups.
- Radicalization also takes place in **families**. Traditional families, e.g. in Kyrgyzstan, are characterized by patriarchal norms. Repressive masculinity and male leaders are a reason for lack of motivation and curiosity for women. Females might go to Syria to escape their desperate situation in Kyrgyzstan. When husbands migrate for work, wives are left exposed to religious ideas, especially since there is often no secular education available. Children of migrants are left without certain opportunities. In this sense, Islam often substitutes for lacking state services in rural areas and its growing influence is connected with the government's failure to solve the most pressing problems.
- Research classifies **two types of recruitment** of people to radical organisations – **institutional (top-down)**, where recruitment is planned and established by an organisation with a hierarchical command structure, and **individual (bottom-up)**, where people radicalize by themselves and self-organise their travel. Empiric evidence shows that fighters from European countries such as France and UK were recruited by the individual model, whereas fighters from Middle East and North Africa are mostly mobilized institutionally.

Session 5: Successful responses to violent extremism: What works and what doesn't? – Experience from EU, UN and OSCE

Discussants: Birgit Loeser, EEAS Counter-Terrorism Division; Zack Taylor, UNDP Istanbul Regional Hub; Fejzo Numanaj, OSCE Office in Tajikistan



- The **European Union's** strategy on countering radicalisation, going back to 2005, points out the guiding principles in EU's work: the need for specific knowledge about the local situation to conduct tailor-made measures, a balanced mix of repressive and enabling measures and a holistic approach including all levels of society. In 2016, the strategy was updated and called for action in the following fields: the need to understand local problems, bringing justice and security to all, helping mainstream voices and common values to prevail, supporting governments to enhance their communication, offering counter narratives, engaging with front line professionals such as teachers or psychologists, building resilience, countering online radicalisation and reinforcing rehabilitation and disengagement programmes. In practice, the EU has created the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) of around 2,400 practitioners; a concept, which can easily be replicated in other elsewhere. Furthermore, a strategic communication cell and an Internal Referral Unit at Europol have shown good results.
- **UNDP** reminded that problems of group grievances, identity, and economic exclusion existed for centuries and are also today among the factors that can lead to violence. The representative reminded that we need to understand the broader political context in which the violence taking place before designing programmes. Therefore, UNDP with its presence across the region is engaged in dialogue with the community level to better understand radicalization and to provide tangible solutions to government counterparts. This qualitative research needs to be linked to concrete policy recommendations. Another powerful tool that guides UNDPs work is dignity and justice. UNDP invested heavily in supporting programmes that strengthen participation in local decision making and in this way consolidating social capital in communities. Additionally, very inclusive models of citizenship need to be supported where no groups is excluded. For the implementation, better donor coordination is needed as well as national leadership and local counterparts who can work flexibly and practically.
- The **OSCE** representative shared the organisation's programs and activities on prevention of extremism, including countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that lead to Terrorism (VERLT), OSCE Counter-Terrorism Network (CTN), Public-Private Partnerships (PPP), and Countering Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs). OSCE actively fights extremism in Tajikistan by conducting training, enhancing the knowledge of the local population, highlighting the role of mothers, gathering bottom-up feedback, and establishing fostering links between key stakeholders. OSCE will remain engaged, in particular in the areas of border control capacity, share of information and improving states' identification management system, including via its Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe.

II. Recommendations

1. Communication between EU and IOs on increasing **synergy and complementarity of action** promoting a comprehensive approach to addressing root causes of



radicalization leading to VE needs to continue, and the role of OSCE as a key actor in this field should be promoted, in particular in a situation where other players like SCO and CSTO try to become more prominent in the region but do not advance the values and approaches shared by the EU.

2. These conclusions and recommendations need to be presented and further elaborated during the **2017 EU- Central Asia HLPSPD**. Ideas and suggestions have to be **translated into concrete projects** within existing and new programmes of development cooperation.
3. Central Asian governments emphasized the need for tailor-made interventions and for a **holistic approach, comprising gender issues, youth affairs, socio-economic conditions, cultural aspects, civil society, and labour migration**. The officials reported on dedicated national programmes to address this threat, including training of government officials and preventive awareness campaigns at high school and universities, which should continue.
4. International observers emphasized that governments and donors should **focus on domestic issues to address root causes** of violent extremism. Dialogue and trust building between all parts of society and law enforcement, reinforcing social networking, respectful exchange of views with religious leaders, educating religious communities and integrating vulnerable groups, e.g. non-elite youth, are core elements of preventing violent extremism.
5. Complementarily to targeted support, **good governance and wider administrative reforms**, including independent judicial systems, anti-corruption measures, the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms as well as economic inclusion, are need.
6. **Local communities and civil society** are key for initiating changes. Those players know the specific circumstances and challenges best, some are established authorities and opinion leaders. Experience shows that listening to and supporting local ideas is most effective. Further opportunities for collaboration between state and citizens should be created, including based on UNSCR 2250 which provides a framework for governments to provide greater resources and space for **youth** to engage and mobilize for peace-building within and across their communities. Here the relevance of further empowerment, in particular of (non-elite) youth, but also the positive roles **women** can play, was emphasized.
7. (Young) **Imams**, often educated abroad, should be approached for an exchange of views (rather than for instructions) on the risks of radicalization. Dialogue and support should address their concerns as community leaders who serve their constituency (rather than religion and ideology). Dialogue should be held at personal level.
8. **Targeting migrant workers**, information campaigns and awareness raising, strengthening employment centres and organise pre-departure orientations can help reducing the vulnerability of migrant workers.



9. **Prison reforms** should be supported in terms of comprehensive training for prison staff to deal with VE prisoners and to enable staff to differentiate between religious practices from radicalism. Support into infrastructure and security is also needed. The application of the Nelson Mandela's rules (reference to respect of human dignity, prohibition of torture, decent living conditions) should be promoted when designing intervention for VE prisoners.
10. **Media** should be better monitored, self-regulation in online communities promoted and counter narratives to oppose hate speeches created. Training for media professionals on how to report on VE and how to control their platforms has been suggested. **Cooperation with the private internet sector** was proposed to control online propaganda material, e.g. Google's "re-direct programme".
11. Representatives of governments highlighted an interest in **strengthening cross-border and regional cooperation**. The immanent and shared treat as well as new dynamics in Uzbekistan since September 2016 might provide an opening in this regard. The regional Joint Action Plan for the Implementation of the UN Global Counter-Terrorism (CT) Strategy in Central Asia, adopted by the Central Asian States in November 2011 and prepared with EU funding, could serve as a basis for further actions.
12. There was a consensus that further engagement is needed and a clear **expression of interest to work with the EU and Member States on existing best practice** in prevention and countering of violent extremism and in rehabilitation of returning foreign terrorist fighters. Concrete needs for assistance have been expressed, e.g. advanced equipment for CT forces, advanced training for CT experts and security bodies, sensitivity training for mass media representatives, and contributing to a culture of tolerance in the religious sphere.
13. A responsible and well-targeted approach, including coordination among donors, partnering with local actors, and national leadership is needed to be most effective. The **creation of national PVE focal points** should be further promoted.
14. **More qualitative research** is required to ensure informed policy recommendations and programme design.