



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

Bishkek, 10 to 11 November 2016

Opening Speech of EU Special Representative for Central Asia, Ambassador Peter Burian

Excellences, Ambassadors

Ladies and Gentlemen

A very warm welcome to our ***Regional Conference on "Preventing Violent Extremism in Central Asia – Challenges and Responses at Community Level"*** in Bishkek. I would like to thank the Kyrgyz Government for hosting this important event.

The ***updated EU Central Asia Strategy*** of June 2015 provides the basis for an advanced cooperation between the EU and Central Asia, including in the field of security. As you know, the EU substantially increased its funding for bilateral and regional cooperation with Central Asia for the programming period 2014-20 to more than 1 bn EUR.

Violent Extremism has been raised frequently as major risk in my consultations in Central Asia in the recent months, most prominently at the ***High Level Political and Security Dialogue*** between EU and the Central Asian states in May and by the five the Foreign Ministers at the EU – Central Asia ***ministerial meeting*** in Brussels in October 2016. The need for intensifying efforts to address the root causes of violent extremism, including by exchanging useful practices and lessons learned, has been stressed by our interlocutors.

In response, the ***High Representative/Vice President Federica Mogherini tasked me to follow up*** on this request, to enhance our understanding of violent extremism in Central Asia and Afghanistan and to generate ideas how the EU and other donors could best address root causes and thereby contribute to stability.

The EU is committed to security and stability of countries of Central Asia and Afghanistan. Our experience shows that only a ***comprehensive approach*** can provide sustainable solutions. A focus on repressive measures, such as restricting the space for civil society organizations and cracking down on the opposition, is ineffective and even carries the risk of fuelling radicalization. ***Instead, grievances need to be addressed as preventive measures.***



Therefore, **our programs of development cooperation** are focussed on strengthening resilience and inclusive societies - education of young people, rule of law, fight against corruption, strengthening the judicial systems, rural development, job creation - these are all important elements of stability.

The EU believes that **communities and civil society can play an important role** in building inter-ethnic trust and in making communities more resilient to internal and external threats.

I was able to attend a **workshop** organized **under Saferworld's Community Policing Programme in Osh** two days ago. Members of Local Crime Prevention Centres from Kyrgyzstan and Public Councils from Tajikistan met to discuss pull and push factors that may lead to radicalization and to exchange their experience on how to prevent such trends. I am very pleased to have a few representatives at this conference who will share with you the key findings of this workshop.

Saferworld and Search for Common Ground among others are successfully engaged in this field. Synergies and coordination between all players are essential.

The EU wants to support regional cooperation in this area. Our regional programmes **BOMCA**, including its Central Asia Border Security Initiative (**CABS**) and **CADAP** provide already a useful platform for exchange. Additionally, we support the work of **Hedayah Center** of Excellence and fund its STRIVE program on Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Today's event is a further **milestone** in the international community's engagement with the Central Asian region.

This conference aims at **discussing lessons learnt** on how best to prevent violent extremism. At the same time, we intend to **generate concrete ideas** for informing and shaping the programming of our development cooperation in this field.

Only together, we can effectively address the root causes of radicalisation and develop successful responses. This conference should be one element on this joint path.

I look forward to an interesting and fruitful discussion.

Thank you very much