

EUROPEAN UNION



Committee of the Regions

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DRAFT OPINION

**Combatting radicalisation and violent extremism: prevention mechanisms
at local and regional level**

Rapporteur: **Bart Somers** (ALDE/BE)

Mayor of Mechelen and Open VLD chairman in the Flemish Parliament

Deadline for tabling amendments:

3 p.m. (Brussels time) **on 31 May 2016**. Amendments must be submitted using the online tool for tabling amendments (available through the Members' Portal at <http://cor.europa.eu/members>).

Number of signatures required: 6

Reference document

Draft opinion of the European Committee of the Regions – Combatting radicalisation and violent extremism: prevention mechanisms at local and regional level

I. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS

INTRODUCTION

1. welcomes the European Parliament's draft resolution on the prevention of violent radicalisation and recruitment of European citizens by terrorist organisations, and the opinions by the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Committee on Culture and Education;
2. stresses that efforts to combat terrorism and prevent the violent radicalisation and recruitment of European citizens by terrorist organisations remain essentially the responsibility of the Member States, but that local, European and international cooperation is also of crucial importance in addressing the issue effectively; is appalled by the most recent terror attacks carried out by radicalised and ruthless individuals and expresses its deepest sympathies to the victims and their friends and families; underlines that these events once more demonstrate the urgent need for European and international cooperation to fight violent radicalisation and international terrorism; is convinced that much stronger exchange of intelligence and cooperation between all levels of law enforcement, but also between social actors, civil society and different levels of governance are necessary to defend the values of open societies and to prevent violence;
3. urges the Commission, the Member States, the local and regional authorities, as well as civil society and notably the scientific community to intensify their efforts and in particular their cross-country/cross-sector cooperation in order to investigate the root causes of violent radicalisation, the process and the various influences and factors leading to violent radicalisation, with a view to the development of tools for Member States and the EU to develop evidence-based policies;
4. points out that violent radicalisation is an international phenomenon and that lessons can be drawn from the experiences of many other parts of the world. Welcomes in this regard the creation of multi-disciplinary networks that aim to connect cities and other local authorities on an international basis to enhance local level approaches to prevent violent extremism. Underlines the need for an EU network to be developed to help achieve stronger EU local and regional collaboration on combatting radicalisation and violent extremism;
5. notes that Europe already has a number of tools to address the violent radicalisation of European citizens, and that the EU and its Member States should make full use of these tools and work to improve them in response to the challenges currently facing the EU and its Member States;
6. underlines the importance of preventive action to tackle radicalisation and the recruitment of terrorists, mainly by monitoring the internet and holding dialogue with faith-based communities and their leaders;

7. in this connection, highlights the important role of the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) and the newly established centre of excellence;
8. calls on the European Commission to seek swift agreement on a common definition of the phenomenon of violent radicalisation, as a starting point for a more coordinated approach by the various Member States;

DEFINITION OF THE TERM RADICALISATION

9. In the absence of a commonly accepted definition of "violent radicalisation", defines "radicalisation" as a phenomenon of people embracing intolerant views, opinions and ideas which could lead to violent extremism;
10. considers it necessary to address the phenomenon of violent radicalisation, as it presents a threat to citizens in Europe as well as to Europe's universal values based on its cultural, religious and humanist inheritance;
11. sees violent radicalisation as an ideological struggle in which radicalised individuals and groups want to violently overthrow the European model, focusing on human rights, freedom of expression, freedom of religion or belief, rule of law, gender equality and non-discrimination, in favour of their own views;
12. stresses that violent radicalisation is a complex and dynamic phenomenon based on a series of global, sociological, political, geopolitical and also personal factors, and cannot be viewed in isolation; also notes that a worrying recent trend seems to be that not only radicals of different persuasions are seeking to turn more individuals towards violence, but also that some groups are purposefully seeking to recruit individuals with a criminal past who have experience in using violence, for radicalism;
13. warns that recruitment to violent radicalism is increasingly taking place behind closed doors, in online communities/forums, where persuasive messages inciting violent ideologies proliferate and where they reach many who are vulnerable to such messages;
14. emphasises that this violent radicalisation does not correspond to one specific profile, but affects men, women, and particularly young European citizens of all social origins, who share the common trait of feeling at odds with society;
15. points out that in many cases they are European citizens who were born and educated in Europe but have still chosen a violent radical ideology;
16. warns that terrorism and violent radicalisation lead to much stereotyping of religions, which in turn is used to justify radicalisation from the other side with ensuing upsurges in hate speech and hate crimes motivated by racism, xenophobia or intolerance of opinions, beliefs or religions;

17. notes that despite the fact that the main security concern reported by EU Member States is, quite rightly, the phenomenon of jihadists travelling to and from conflict zones, violent radicalisation is not limited to any one ideology or belief, but may occur within various ideologies and in any belief, and that efforts to combat violent radicalisation must therefore not focus solely on violent Islamic radicalisation;
18. emphasises that political commitment at all levels of governance is a key tool in addressing violent radicalisation;

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

HUMAN RIGHTS AND DIVERSITY AS A STARTING POINT

19. takes the view that human rights must be at the core of the Union's policies on counterterrorism and prevention of violent radicalisation;
20. calls for it to be ensured that all measures undertaken by the Member States and the EU to combat violent radicalisation fully respect fundamental rights and civil liberties, namely the right to private life, the right to data protection, the presumption of innocence, the right to a fair trial and due process, freedom of expression, freedom of conscience and freedom of association;
21. stresses that a society in which the human rights of all groups in the population are fully guaranteed and that complies with international and legal standards, including with regard to combatting discrimination and racism, will play a central role in preventing and combatting violent radicalisation;
22. in this context, sees the European Union's democratic values not as something that can be used against people, but as a way of emancipating citizens;
23. points out that it is important to remove factors that can provide fertile ground for violent radicalisation, starting with racism and discrimination. Although there is no one-to-one link between racism, discrimination and violent radicalisation, and racism and discrimination can be no excuse for violent radicalisation, a society in which everybody can participate actively can only be guaranteed if there is a consistent policy of equal opportunities and non-discrimination;
24. calls on the Commission to encourage the Member States and their local and regional authorities to pursue more active and more interventionist anti-discrimination policies, especially in education and in the labour and housing markets, inter alia taking their cue from the policies already put in place by regions which have implemented integration measures, such as the distributed reception approach;
25. urges the Commission to support efforts in the Member States to catch up with regard to diversity in the police, education, administration and the labour market in general;
26. calls on the EU Member States and their regional and local authorities to join forces with the EU institutions in promoting the European model as one in which the diversity of Europe is an

essential element of its social structure and a key cultural asset. The European Union's fundamental rights that safeguard this diversity, such as freedom of expression, the rule of law and the separation of church and state, must not under any circumstances be called into question, either by the totalitarian thinking of radical groups or as part of the steps taken to fight violent radicalisation;

27. calls for EU initiatives, in close cooperation with the Member States, to tackle neighbourhoods and regions where various forms of organised crime are rife. These specific areas should be identified on the basis of consultations, and prioritised and given additional support on the basis of quantitative and qualitative criteria; illegal networks where money can be laundered and where the rule of law is undermined should be tackled effectively by the police and the judicial system. This will prevent the development of neighbourhoods where the rule of law is absent, where lawlessness and a lack of moral standards prevail, and where the foundations of democracy and the rule of law are no longer a visible part of people's social reality and individual lives. This vacuum gives extremist networks every opportunity to obtain financial resources from illegal activities, to recruit, and to undermine the legitimacy of democracy and the rule of law;
28. highlights the importance of preventing the emergence of deprived non-diverse neighbourhoods dominated by one ethnic-cultural community. The European Commission should assist the Member States in promoting social cohesion as a tool in the prevention of violent radicalisation, and encourage Member States to make the necessary means available to take this work forward;
29. urges that real opportunities be given to refugees and newly arrived migrants to get started in our society, and that they be advised on tailored naturalisation courses in each Member State, which could focus more actively on issues such as gender equality, the separation of church and state, the importance of democracy and tolerance and their consequences for society, using practical examples, and in which knowledge of the national language is crucially important;
30. urges the Commission to seriously address unemployment and school drop-out rates among ethnic minorities in regions dealing with these issues, because they too can act as a major breeding ground for violent radicalisation;
31. encourages Member States to develop a policy approach in which the tools of social policy (including employment, education and training, integration and anti-discrimination), humanitarian aid and other policy areas are combined with specific measures in order to prevent and counter violent radicalisation;

THE ROLE OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

32. stresses that it is crucial for all stakeholders at European, national, regional and local levels to be aware of their responsibilities in preventing and combatting violent radicalisation, and sees the Commission as having a role in bringing this to stakeholders' attention;
33. highlights the crucial role played by local and regional authorities in preventing and combatting violent radicalisation, since they are the authorities first and hardest affected by this issue, and

have the authority to cooperate with other stakeholders who have an important role in addressing this phenomenon;

34. is aware that the extent to which Member States assume responsibility for counteracting the risk of violent radicalisation and preventing recruitment by terrorist organisations can vary greatly from one Member State to another and that some of them have already taken effective measures, but that others are lagging behind;
35. agrees that there is a need to step up information sharing and operational cooperation and to make progress in curbing illicit firearms trafficking and the financing of terrorism, as well as to beef up external border controls on the basis of risk indicators;
36. asks the Commission to assist Member States in the coordination of their strategies, by sharing the information and experience gained by local and regional authorities, gathering good practices and skills, evaluating the measures taken, and working together to take new initiatives to combat violent radicalisation;
37. calls on the Commission to highlight the coordinating role of local authorities in preventing violent radicalisation and violent extremism, and to support this pivotal role by prioritising the establishment of a European framework for action to combat violent radicalisation at local, regional and national levels, which would give the Member States recommendations for (further) developing their own policy;
38. urges the Commission to focus on further collecting and publicising best practices in a workbook of guidelines of the kind already available, for example, from the RAN Centre of Excellence, in order to support local authorities – who often have limited capacities – in developing their own local approach;
39. considers it necessary for the Commission to support local and regional authorities in developing local and national prevention strategies to counter violent radicalisation, for example by providing experts from the RAN Centre of Excellence for the relevant authorities to consult; underlines the importance of exchange of experiences between local and regional authorities such as best-practices and lessons-learnt;
40. believes that an integrated policy for tackling violent radicalisation comprises three strands: prevention (preventing violent radicalisation, for example by eliminating its breeding grounds), intervention (specialised mentoring for people who are at risk of violent radicalisation), and punishment (a decisive judicial response to the phenomenon of violent radicalisation);
41. considers it important for national and local authorities to invest in specific preventive and intervention measures to counter violent radicalisation, rather than pursuing a solely reactive, punitive policy; it is also important to fund research programmes to enable better understanding of the roots of radicalism and how to combat it;

42. stresses that it is important to take a participation and consultation-based approach involving multiple partners and sectors, as violent radicalisation is a multidisciplinary problem that requires multidisciplinary solutions;
43. encourages close cooperation between all civil society stakeholders at all policy levels and closer cooperation between the parties working on the ground, such as associations and NGOs;
44. stresses the need for intercultural dialogue with the various communities, leaders and experts in order, in the first place, to gain a better understanding, and thus to improve the prevention of violent radicalisation;
45. considers civil society organisations and local stakeholders to have a significant role in developing projects to prevent and combat violent radicalisation that are tailored to their community or organisation;
46. in this respect, sees a clear need to provide specialised training for front-line and field workers so that they can recognise worrying changes in behaviour and act appropriately in supporting young people who are susceptible to violent radicalisation;
47. also considers it essential to provide specialised training for policymakers and politicians working in the various levels of government, to make them aware of the importance of effective preventive action and the need for collaborative communication on this issue;
48. does not, however, consider the provision of knowledge to be enough, but also calls for specific measures to be implemented to prevent and combat violent radicalisation;
49. urges the Commission to support Member States in conducting information campaigns to make young people and young adults more aware of the issue of violent radicalisation and to encourage them to think critically;
50. considers it necessary to set up a special unit in each Member State, to be responsible for strategic communication and counter-narratives adapted to the reality of each country and its people;
51. considers it essential, in each Member State, to develop structures at local or regional level to provide individual mentoring to people who are becoming radicalised;
52. considers it necessary for individual mentoring programmes to fit in properly with the life and environment of the individual being mentored, which makes it essential for local and regional authorities to be involved in developing these programmes; feels, in this connection, that sporting and cultural events can provide a framework for breaking down barriers to integration;
53. believes that the Commission should support local and regional authorities in creating structures for mentoring young people in particular, but also for discussion with families, schools, hospitals, universities, etc.;

54. notes that associations and organisations in this field that are free from government interference can obtain very good results in the social reintegration of citizens who are becoming radicalised;
55. believes that educational programmes should be promoted fostering critical thinking and intellectual openness and promoting the knowledge and principles on which democracy and the rule of law are based;
56. takes the view that supportive measures should also be provided to help returnees reintegrate into society following trial and release from prison; an effective strategy should also be developed for identifying and combatting radicalisation inside prisons;
57. strongly urges the Commission to investigate how these individual mentoring programmes can be validated as a measure in the fight against violent radicalisation, thus ensuring that attention is focused not only on detecting violent radicalisation, but also on reintegrating people into society;
58. stresses the importance of combining individual deradicalisation programmes with measures such as establishing partnerships with community representatives, investing in social and neighbourhood projects to break down economic and geographical marginalisation, and running mentoring schemes for disaffected and excluded young people who are at risk of violent radicalisation;
59. stresses the importance of family support in the fight against violent radicalisation. Some experts suggest that there is often too much focus on working with the individuals instead of working with families. Families could help prevent radicalisation and help to reintegrate people who are becoming radicalised, including those returning from conflict areas, reconnected with society; urges therefore the Member States and their local and regional authorities to recognise the importance of this support and the need to assist families in this situation by developing appropriate programmes;
60. highlights that recent research indicates that more and more women are being radicalised and recruited by terrorist organisations, and believes that the EU and Member States should take at least some account of the gender dimension when developing strategies to prevent violent radicalisation; urges the Commission and the Member States to develop a more proactive policy of gender equality on the basis that it is a cornerstone of our European social model; calls in this connection for tougher preventive and punitive action against sexual intimidation and violence;
61. urges the Commission to provide support for general programmes to encourage young women in their struggle for greater equality;
62. considers it essential for an alert system to be set up in each Member State for support and guidance, so that acquaintances or family can quickly and easily make a report or get help if a person suddenly starts acting in a way that could indicate that they are becoming violently radicalised or leaves to join a terrorist organisation;

63. notes in this regard that "hotlines" have been successful, but that a distinction should be made between lines for reporting violent radicalisation (tip lines) and those for supporting friends and families dealing with these disruptive situations (helplines);
64. calls on the Commission to examine whether it is possible to set up such a system in all European Member States;
65. finally, notes that these measures can only be implemented through long-term social investment programmes, strongly urges both the Commission and the Member States to follow this vision in developing a policy for preventing and combatting violent radicalisation, and calls on the Commission to pay close attention, when developing measures to combat violent radicalisation, to the long-term impact that these measures could have on the future of Europe's inclusive society.

Brussels,

II. PROCEDURE

Title	Combatting radicalisation and violent extremism: prevention mechanisms at local and regional level
Reference document	Not applicable
Legal basis	Articles 82(2), 83(1) and 307 TFEU
Procedural basis	Rules 41(b) and 44 RP
Date of Council/EP referral/Date of Commission letter	Not applicable
Date of Bureau/President's decision	3 December 2015
Commission responsible	Commission for Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs
Rapporteur	Bartolomeus (Bart) Somers (BE/ALDE)
Analysis	3 December 2015
Discussed in commission	5 February 2016
Date adopted by commission	19 April 2016
Result of the vote in commission (majority, unanimity)	Majority
Date adopted in plenary	Scheduled for 15-16 June 2016
Previous Committee opinions	Opinion on stepping up the fight against terrorism, CONST-IV-016, adopted in October 2008 (Lord Tope) The Stockholm Programme and Action Plan, CdR 201/2009 (Ms Terrón i Cusí) and CdR 170/2010 (Mr Poppenhäger); Internal Security Strategy, CdR 407/2010 (Mr Varacalli)
Date of subsidiarity monitoring consultation	