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Preventing the radicalisation of children and young people by fighting the root causes

Addendum to the report¹

Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development

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1. Introduction

1. The consideration of the above draft report at the moment of its adoption by the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development on 15 March 2016 in Paris showed the need to make certain precisions to ensure that the committee could endorse the text without reservations. The explanations below also aim to motivate the amendments to the draft resolution that I will submit myself to the committee at the beginning of the April part-session with a view to tabling them on behalf of the committee.

2. Radicalisation taking place in various contexts

2. I am fully convinced that radicalisation should not be associated with any specific country, group or religion. Processes of extreme radicalisation, often based on violence-glorifying ideology, have been observed across Europe over the past decade, both in the context of different religious sectarian movements and in the political sphere.

3. In recent years, some European countries have seen a resurgence of far-right and extremist political movements. Closely linked to this, xenophobia has been growing on the fringes of society in many countries, not least in a context of economic crisis, high unemployment rates and the fight over scarce public resources, as well as most lately as a reaction to the arrival of great numbers of migrants and refugees. Such political developments can be observed across Europe from Norway to Greece and from Germany to Ukraine. Whilst the terrorist attack perpetrated by Anders Breivik in Norway in 2011 is one of the most mediatised examples, Germany is systematically observing more than 20 000 right-wing extremists, classifying almost 10 000 of them as potentially violent. In Greece, right-wing extremism has attracted a small but dedicated following.²

3. Focus of the report

4. Already in 2014, such developments were evaluated by European commissioner Cecilia Malmström as posing the biggest threat to the European Union today³; I am convinced that they also need to be addressed at Council of Europe level. However, for my report I chose a sharpened focus taking the most recent attacks perpetrated in European and neighbouring countries by terrorist Islamist organisations as a starting point. We

1. Addendum approved by the committee on 18 April 2016.

2. "The 12 July agreement puts Greece on a slippery slope towards right-wing extremism", 14 July 2015: www.euractiv.com/section/euro-finance/opinion/the-12-july-agreement-puts-greece-on-a-slippery-slope-towards-right-wing-extremism/.

3. Vidhya Ramalingam, Institute for Strategic Dialogue: "The European far right is on the rise, again. Here's how to tackle it", *The Guardian*, 13 February 2014: www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/feb/13/european-far-right-on-the-rise-how-to-tackle.



cannot deny this violence committed by Islamist terrorists who must not be associated with Islam as a religion and the majority of the Muslim community wishing to live peacefully in co-existence with members of other religious communities and within the societies surrounding them. Also, I would like to reiterate that the question of right-wing political extremism has already been the object of Assembly [Resolution 2011 \(2014\)](#) on counteraction to manifestations of neo-Nazism and right-wing extremism and [Resolution 2069 \(2015\)](#) on recognising and preventing neo-racism.

5. As expressed by some of my colleagues at the above-mentioned Paris meeting, I am also convinced that social media and prisons are key places where radicalisation processes take place and are further fuelled, and that the media in general further contribute to creating stereotypes which reinforce suspicion and hate between different cultural and religious communities. I touched upon these crucial issues both in the draft resolution and the explanatory memorandum. However, examining these aspects in more detail would have exceeded the scope of my report exploring the root causes. The role of the media, and specific action to prevent the radicalisation of young people in prisons, are certainly worth being covered by further upcoming Assembly activities.

4. Social inclusion as one of the key responses

6. I personally believe that the social exclusion of children and young people is the main root cause for their frustration and anger, which then make them receptive to radical ideas – social exclusion therefore constitutes the central “push factor” leading young people into radical movements of any kind. For minors, radical ideology may constitute an opportunity of revenge for their own personal suffering and of carrying the “glorious” cause of the group that they have adopted as theirs, thus providing them with the recognition and sense of belonging that they do not get from the societies surrounding them.

7. Of course, the radicalisation of children and young people would not be taking place without the “pull factors”. Next to tackling the “home-made” root causes linked to the social position and role of young people, we therefore also need to fight against violent extremist groups of any kind, be they political, ideological or religious. Once again, I would like to recall that some of these issues, i.e. the “pull factors”, have already been addressed by the Assembly through its most recent [Recommendation 2084 \(2016\)](#) on foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq.

8. When we speak of “tackling the root causes”, the social inclusion of children and young people of foreign ethnic background, but also of those coming from other disadvantaged social groups, is crucial to prevent their radicalisation. Whilst I hope that this is already well reflected in my memorandum, I am trying to reinforce this idea in the draft resolution by proposing relevant amendments. Social inclusion as the key solution against radicalisation processes was also underlined at the most recent Council of Europe conference on the Rights of the Child, which I attended on behalf of the Parliamentary Assembly in my capacity as General Rapporteur on Children.⁴

4. High-Level Conference “Reaching the heights for the rights of the child”, launching the new children's rights strategy of the Council of Europe, Sofia, 5-6 April 2016: www.coe.int/en/web/children/sofia2016.