Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Resolution 2221 (2018)[1]

Counter-narratives to terrorism

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The Parliamentary Assembly reiterates in the strongest terms its condemnation of all acts of terrorism, recalling its previous resolutions in relation to terrorism, in particular Resolution 2090 (2016) on combating international terrorism while protecting Council of Europe standards and values, Resolution 2091 (2016) on foreign fighters in Syria and Iraq and Resolution 2113 (2016) "After the Brussels attacks, an urgent need to address security failures and step up counter-terrorism co-operation". It also refers to its recent Resolution 2190 (2017) on prosecuting and punishing the crimes against humanity or even possible genocide committed by Daesh.

2. The Assembly notes that, to date, the international community's response to terrorism has mainly taken the form of security-based counter-terrorism measures. But such measures have not been sufficient to prevent the phenomenon of "foreign fighters", radicalisation or the spread of violent extremism, including by terrorists acting alone. The creation of new measures, in the form of positive alternative narratives to extremism, is necessary to combat this evolving threat.

3. The radicalisation process is changing as the terrorist threat evolves, and as technology advances. The Assembly stresses that "real world" exposure to violent extremist discourse continues to pose a threat and should not be overlooked. The internet has transformed the way terrorist organisations reach and radicalise people with terrorist narratives – used to convey violent extremist ideology, values and justifications – easily accessible to a large global audience through the use of expansive communication strategies.

4. The Assembly recalls its Resolution 2091 (2016) and the 2015-2017 Action Plan on the Fight Against Violent Extremism and Radicalisation Leading to Terrorism adopted by the Committee of Ministers in May 2015, and reiterates the need to create positive alternative narratives to the misuse of religion, aimed at exposing extremist discourse and dissipating illusions about the real situation in the territories held by Daesh and the fate of its recruits.

5. Counter-narrative strategies are often criticised as being too removed from the everyday lives and experiences of those targeted. The Assembly emphasises the importance of creating effective and positive alternative narratives, aimed at specific target audiences, which confront, challenge and contradict the themes intrinsic to the terrorist narrative through ideology, logic, fact or humour. Where possible, counter-narrative content should be developed in co-operation with the members of the target audience.

6. Merely reacting to terrorist narratives is not enough. Counter-narrative efforts should focus on creating proactive, positive and alternative narratives, including a positive call for action and a clear articulation of the "overlapping consensus" and ethical traditions which unite diverse communities that are committed to the common values of non-violence, tolerance and democracy.

7. Given that many of the recent terrorist attacks which have occurred in Council of Europe member States – Belgium, France, Germany, Spain, Sweden, Turkey and the United Kingdom, but also in other countries – have been claimed by or may be attributed to Daesh or its followers, the concept of shared values,

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1. *Text adopted by the Standing Committee*, acting on behalf of the Assembly, on 1 June 2018 (see Doc. 14531, report of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, rapporteur: Mr Liam Byrne; and Doc. 14558, opinion of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy, rapporteur: Mr Jordi Xuclà).
See also Recommendation 2131 (2018).

namely the shared ethical traditions common to both the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5, "the Convention") and Islam, should be explored and actively promoted. The Assembly welcomes, at European Union level, the creation of a strategic communication task force to work with European Union delegations in Arab countries, and with the Global Coalition against Daesh, to identify shared values and plan concrete actions; and, at the United Nations level, the United Nations Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism, which highlights the importance of fostering a global dialogue to unite countries, people and communities on the basis of universally shared values and principles.

8. The Assembly recognises that it is not possible to develop a single, overarching counter-narrative. A complex construction of a multitude of different types of messaging and media, articulated around local issues and narratives is required in the creation of effective counter-narratives.

9. The Assembly reiterates that all measures taken to combat terrorism must comply with States' obligations under national and international law and the fundamental principles of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, and that it is important to avoid both undermining the values and standards of democracy which terrorists seek to destroy and creating disproportionate restrictions to fundamental freedoms. The Assembly strongly condemns all incidents of hate speech by any State or government official or political figure that may lead to further radicalisation and propagate hate and violence.

10. The Assembly therefore calls on the Council of Europe member and observer States and the States whose parliaments enjoy observer or partner for democracy status with the Parliamentary Assembly to:

10.1. where they do not already exist, draw up national strategies for the prevention of radicalisation;

10.2. prioritise the creation of tailored, flexible positive alternative narratives to terrorist propaganda and violent extremism, to undermine and detract from the authority of terrorist leadership and expose the hypocrisy of the violent extremist narrative and the reality of life as a terrorist;

10.3. work in collaboration with communities and members of priority audiences, as well as civil society, religious leaders and community leaders, using credible messengers, including women, victims of terrorism, repentant former terrorists and ex-prisoners, and a variety of media (including electronic messages, television, radio, print media and the internet) to dispel the terrorist narrative;

10.4. challenge all incidents of hate speech and strongly condemn all those who preach or propagate hate and violence;

10.5. take measures, including legislative measures, to counter violent extremism and hate speech on the internet and in social media that may lead individuals towards violent radicalisation;

10.6. explore and promote the concept of "shared values", examining the ways in which the values that inspire both the Convention and Islam can create positive alternative narratives emphasising respect for the universal scope of rights and equality before the law, the right to life, the right to justice, the right to liberty and security, and the fundamental freedoms of plural societies, including freedom of thought, conscience and religion (Article 9), freedom of expression (Article 10) and freedom of assembly and association (Article 11);

10.7. promote positive alternative narratives with local community outreach activities, engaging with members of the target audience face to face;

10.8. establish monitoring and evaluation practices to assess the impact of counter- and alternative-narrative strategies;

10.9. strengthen international co-operation through the sharing of best practices and information exchange, evaluating the efforts of States and better co-ordinating approaches;

10.10. review the situation in education systems, promote inclusive education and ensure that schools fully play their role in preparing active citizens with a sense of responsibility and critical thinking skills, and who are prepared to live in a diverse society and defend the values of democracy;

10.11. sign and ratify the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism (CETS No. 196) and its Additional Protocol (CETS No. 217), along with other relevant Council of Europe legal instruments, if they have not already done so.

11. The Assembly deems of the utmost importance the articulation of the "overlapping consensus" in order to unite diverse communities on the basis of common values, and is determined to contribute to it. It therefore asks its relevant committees to make concrete proposals for action in this direction.