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Counter-narratives to terrorism

Reply to Recommendation[1]: Recommendation 2131 (2018)
Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers has carefully examined Recommendation 2131 (2018) – "Counter-narratives to terrorism", which it has communicated to the Counter-Terrorism Committee (CDCT) for information and any comments.

2. Combating terrorism has been one of the Organisation's priorities for many years, as reflected in the many legal instruments it has adopted, the main ones of which are the 1977 Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism (ETS No. 90), the 2005 Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism (ETS No. 196) and its 2015 Additional Protocol (ETS No. 217). The Council of Europe's activities in this area focus not only on strengthening the applicable legal framework and international co-operation but also on devising prevention tools fighting the root causes of terrorism.

3. At its 125th session, in May 2015, in response to a resurgence of terrorist attacks in Europe, the Committee of Ministers adopted an Action Plan on the fight against violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism. A large number of activities have been carried out in this context. With regard to hate speech, and incitement to violence in particular, a mention should be made of the No Hate Speech Movement, which has put the emphasis on human rights education, participation of young people and media training. As part of this campaign, two handbooks have been drawn up and widely disseminated: "Bookmarks – A manual for combating hate speech online through human rights education" and "WE CAN! Taking Action against Hate Speech through Counter and Alternative Narratives". Details of all the measures taken in the context of the Action Plan can be found in the final report which the Secretary General presented to the Committee of Ministers on 2 May 2018 (SG/Inf(2018)7). It can also be reported that the links between terrorism and the internet are one of the subjects investigated by the CDCT in accordance with its terms of reference for 2018-2019.

4. The Committee of Ministers is fully aware that hate speech, and incitement to violence in particular, undermine democratic security, cohesion and pluralism in society. Nonetheless, the question of counter-narratives to terrorist ideology and propaganda is still a very delicate one requiring a balanced, cautious and all-embracing approach on the part of member states. Research on counter-narratives also shows that there is a need for more in-depth analysis about the effectiveness of this kind of preventive measure. There is also a need for an ongoing mapping and analyse about the content of violent extremist and terrorist propaganda and what role propaganda plays in radicalisation, including lone-actors. In this connection, the Committee of Ministers would reiterate that all measures taken to prevent or punish terrorist offences must respect the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression, otherwise these counter-narratives will not be credible or efficient.

5. The Committee of Ministers shares the Parliamentary Assembly's concerns about radicalisation. It agrees that it is very important to improve factual knowledge and understanding of the processes of radicalisation and the various political, social and psychological factors which trigger them, along with the "internal and external" factors which can be part of what makes people with vulnerable characters turn to terrorism, and identify means of countering these processes and triggers effectively. The Committee of

1. Adopted at the 1330th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (28 November 2018).

Ministers welcomes the Assembly's proposals in paragraphs 2.1 and 2.2 and notes that it will be possible to incorporate these measures into the Council of Europe Strategy against Terrorism (2018-2022), particularly in the context of activities 1.1 ("Preventing and countering terrorist public provocation, propaganda, radicalisation, recruitment and training") and 1.2 ("Preventing and countering terrorist public provocation, propaganda, radicalisation, recruitment and training on the internet").

6. As to the proposals in paragraphs 2.3 and 2.4 of the Recommendation, the Committee of Ministers considers that they warrant more in-depth discussion before any measure is decided on, but wishes to emphasise from the outset that terrorism should not be associated with any particular religion, or ethnic or cultural group. Consequently, the Committee of Ministers invites the CDCT to look into the possibility of presenting it with potential action to be taken on these two proposals when considering the next programme of activities for 2020-2021.