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WORKING DOCUMENT

on prevention of radicalisation and recruitment of EU citizens by terrorist organisations

Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs

Rapporteur: Rachida Dati

I. Preliminary remarks: reasons for drawing up this report

It is estimated that more than 5000 EU citizens have left to fight alongside terrorist organisations in Iraq and Syria. While the problem is much more serious in some Member States than in others, the challenges and issues posed by these ‘foreign fighters’ affect the EU as a whole.

It is difficult to put an exact figure on the number of people leaving to fight for terrorist organisations, as there is no common EU definition of ‘foreign fighter’.

The radicalisation of EU citizens, which can culminate in their departure to fight for terrorist organisations such as ISIS, poses a very real security threat to the EU, its Member States and its neighbours. The level of threat is increasing in line with the number of ‘foreign fighters’.

Although the radicalisation of EU citizens has reached a scale never seen before, the phenomenon itself is not a new one. It would make sense, therefore, to refer to existing studies and measures which have been taken before to combat the radicalisation of EU citizens.

Given the sheer speed at which the phenomenon is growing, repressive measures are no longer enough. The EU must adopt a new strategy based more on prevention. This report will emphasise the need for a proactive approach to preventing the radicalisation and recruitment of EU citizens by terrorist organisations.

The attacks in Paris, Copenhagen and Tunis which took place in the first few months of 2015 and the increasing number of terrorist attacks which have been thwarted and terrorist networks which have been dismantled in the Member States show just how pressing this need it.

While the fight against the radicalisation of EU citizens is, above all, a matter for the Member States, a concerted EU approach is necessary to tackle the threat posed by radicalised EU citizens who are free to roam anywhere in the EU.

We must also remember that the radicalisation and recruitment of citizens by terrorist organisations is a global phenomenon which affects our partner countries as well, including Canada and the US, and countries in the Maghreb, the Near East and the Middle East. The problem therefore calls for a response at EU level, at international level and locally.

II. Approach taken in this own-initiative report

The aim of this report will be to put forward recommendations on an EU strategy to prevent the radicalisation and recruitment of EU citizens. This can only be done by analysing the various ways in which people are radicalised. A study of the ways in which ‘foreign fighters’ are recruited will help us to develop effective counter methods, wherever and however radicalisation takes place.

A broad approach must therefore be taken in order to present a comprehensive analysis of the methods which can be used to prevent the radicalisation and recruitment of EU citizens. The sociological profile of foreign fighters and the scale of the phenomenon as it stands in Europe today must be studied in detail.

Your rapporteur will endeavour to make sure that her colleagues' recommendations are taken into account as and when they are put forward, and hopes to work in a spirit of cooperation so that Parliament can take a strong, united stance on the issue.

The subject of this report is preventing the radicalisation and recruitment of EU citizens by terrorist organisations. This is not the place to list the counter-terrorist measures already in force in the EU; instead, this report will focus on new ideas on how we can prevent unwelcome developments and security threats on EU soil. The rapporteur will work closely with the shadow rapporteurs to make sure that the report confines itself to this specific topic.

The EU is far from helpless in the face of the radicalisation of its citizens: it already has instruments to cope with the growing number of citizens leaving to fight for ISIS or other terrorist organisations. This report will call for better use to be made of the instruments already at our disposal. The EU and its Member States can, in particular, draw on the EU funds set aside for this purpose and seek support from the EU's Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN).

Your rapporteur would like to reiterate her commitment to protecting the fundamental freedoms. In its proposals, Parliament must under no circumstances call into question the imperative need to uphold EU citizens' fundamental rights and freedoms, in particular freedom of expression. Your rapporteur will endeavour to make sure that the recommendations in this report are in line with the principle of proportionality and that none of proposals set out in it goes beyond what is necessary to achieve its objective. She is also determined to uphold the principle of subsidiarity.

III. Key aspects of the report

Preventing radicalisation in prisons: Prisons are a hotbed of radicalisation in Europe. While prison issues are essentially a Member State matter, the EU can promote exchanges of good practice and publish guidelines on how to tackle radicalisation in EU prisons.

Preventing radicalisation on the internet: The internet is one of the main platforms used to propagate hate speech and advocate terrorism with the aim of radicalising EU citizens. Terrorists use social networking sites and other internet fora to make contact with EU citizens, in particular young people, and persuade them to take up arms. Combatting internet radicalisation is therefore a key issue in this report. Digital giants will therefore be called upon to take greater responsibility – and may be held criminally liable – when it comes to removing illegal content and taking down websites used to draw EU citizens into terrorism. With that aim in view, EU citizens must have the opportunity to flag up illicit and illegal content on the internet and on social networking sites.

Developing new weapons in the fight against cybercrime: To prevent the radicalisation of EU citizens, the EU must add to its arsenal of weapons against cybercrime so that it can detect illicit content and pro-terrorist rhetoric online. The European Cybercrime Centre thus has an important role to play in preventing online radicalisation.

Preventing radicalisation through education: Young people are particularly susceptible to radical and terrorist propaganda. If school makes them feel part of society they are very unlikely to be recruited by terrorist organisations. It is vital, therefore, that we develop awareness-raising campaigns targeted at pupils and students, and train teaching staff to

recognise early warning signs of a change in their pupils' behaviour.

Radicalisation in places of worship: The EU can lead an awareness-raising campaign to draw Member States' attention to the importance of training religious leaders, in particular those who preach in public places such as schools or prisons, whilst taking care not to violate religious freedoms.

Cooperation with all civil society actors: With a view to drawing up a comprehensive strategy to prevent the radicalisation and recruitment of EU citizens by terrorist organisations, the Member States will be encouraged to cooperate with all civil society actors, in particular associations, local authorities, NGOs, etc.

Promoting information exchange between law-enforcement agencies: In addition to setting up an EU PNR system, it is essential that law-enforcement agencies and the judicial bodies step up exchanges of information and operational cooperation, in particular with the help of the EU agencies Europol and Eurojust. This will make it possible to monitor the movements of EU citizens and prevent them from leaving to join ISIS and other terrorist organisations.

Strengthening political cooperation: The EU should encourage judicial cooperation between the Member States so that citizens who are at risk of being radicalised can be identified and their recruitment by terrorist organisations prevented. The EU could consider reforming the ECRIS system to make it easier to exchange information via criminal records systems.

Preventing recruitment by terrorist organisations by introducing criminal law measures: An effective set of criminal law measures would enable the Member States, supported by the EU, to deter EU citizens from leaving to join terrorist organisations. Making certain terrorism-related acts criminal offences in all the Member States and harmonising the penalties imposed on the perpetrators would be a first step towards that objective.

Using more rigorous external border checks to prevent radicalised EU citizens from leaving: Making external border checks more rigorous must be a priority for the EU so that it can detect and prevent the departure and return of radicalised EU citizens. Parliament could thus call for systematic checks to be carried out at the EU's external borders, if necessary as a prelude to a revision of the Schengen Code. The Member States will also be called upon to consider confiscating the passports of radicalised citizens in an effort to prevent them from leaving the EU to travel to conflict areas. The EU must commit to creating a border security force to help it deal more effectively with the departure and return of radicalised EU citizens.

Preventing the recruitment of EU citizens by working more closely with third countries: Likewise with the aim of spotting citizens who may be about to depart, the EU must work more closely with the third countries – destination countries, transit countries, neighbouring countries and countries participating in the fight against terrorism – which, like the EU, suffer the consequences when EU citizens are radicalised and end up fighting for ISIS and other terrorist organisations.

Stepping up deradicalisation efforts: In response to the scale of the 'foreign fighters' phenomenon, a growing number of Member States are establishing deradicalisation centres to prevent EU citizens from leaving and to deal with radicalised citizens who return to the EU. The EU could therefore promote exchanges of good practice so that more deradicalisation centres can be set up and developed. As part of the deradicalisation process, putting

radicalised citizens in touch with organisations representing victims of terrorism could be an effective way of stripping radical rhetoric of its religious appeal. This method could be supplemented by awareness-raising campaigns drawing on the experiences of ‘ex-foreign fighters’ who are traumatised by the time they spent fighting alongside terrorist organisations. These exchanges and first-hand accounts could help to deter EU citizens from joining terrorist organisations and open their eyes to their real nature.

Weakening terrorist organisations in order to loosen their hold over EU citizens: The radicalisation of EU citizens could be prevented by destabilising terrorist organisations. When terrorist networks are dismantled, their ability to attract and radicalise EU citizens is diminished. The Commission should therefore reconsider measures which can be used to detect sources of terrorist funding.