

Contribution of the Republic of Slovenia to the fight against Foreign Terrorist Fighters and Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans

At the outset let me commend the Government of Spain and the Counter Terrorism Committee for organising today's meeting. It is timely and opportune. We have seen in the recent months and weeks that terrorism continues to represent real threat to our societies and values in different parts of the world. Moreover, the threat of the foreign terrorist fighters is on the rise. Our response must be in line with the very same values we are striving to protect from terrorism. This is of paramount importance when responding to terrorism, violent extremism and radicalization and addressing conditions conducive to their spread.

Slovenia has so far stayed safe from the direct harm caused by the dreadful acts of terror and their consequences in Europe and its neighbourhood. At the same time, as a country bordering the Western Balkans, we remain aware of the dire threat of terrorism and violent extremism, as well as of the growing threat posed by Foreign Terrorist Fighters, who are often travelling from the EU through the Western Balkans to Syria and other areas of conflict. The Western Balkan region namely represents a bridge between Syria and the EU, and this therefore presents severe security challenges to global security, has an impact on the internal security of the EU, and a direct threat to the security of the Western Balkans.

Being committed to share the responsibility for common security and also solidarity, Slovenia acts based on what it deems to be the possible contribution on its part to the stemming of the flow of Foreign Terrorist Fighters, and to countering violent extremism in the region. Based on its experience and knowledge of regional security, in 2014, Slovenia proposed an initiative for an integrative and complementary approach in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism in the Western Balkans.

During the same year, EU Member States, Western Balkan countries and the EU Intelligence Analysis Centre presented relevant Council working structures with a number of threat assessments, all demonstrating that besides a high number of Foreign Terrorist Fighters from Europe, an equally severe threat is posed by the growing violent extremism in the Western Balkans, by the existing, very closed radical communities inspired by charismatic extremists, which are spreading violent extremist ideas to the EU.

Furthermore, Slovenia recognised the need for a **coordinated approach of all the stakeholders active in the region**, as well as the importance to **address targeted priorities identified together** with strategic partners and countries of the region, with an **efficient use of resources**. **This** represents the core of the proposed. Also, the need for integration of existing regional activities of EU stakeholders as well as international strategic partners in the region is fully considered.

The EU Member States (Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Spain and Slovenia) with the support of the European Commission, European External Action Service, Europol, EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator and the Presidency to the Council of the EU, joined efforts in 2014 to develop the Slovenian Initiative further as the EU Western Balkans Counter-Terrorism Initiative, equipped with a corresponding Integrative Plan of Action.

The Integrative Plan of Action is to consist of a list of needs and priorities, identified together with the countries of the region and strategic partners active in the region, actions addressing the needs, attached matrix of all on-going and planned activities and funding available with deadlines for application.

The EU invited the Western Balkan countries, international strategic partners and representatives of civil society to provide additional input to the list of needs and

priorities via bilateral cooperation and through the existing regional initiatives and events.

The Integrative and Complementary Approach to Counter-Terrorism and Violent Extremism in Western Balkans, which is followed by this initiative, is aimed at reduction of further duplications and overlapping in countering terrorism and violent extremism activities in the Western Balkan region through a new cost-effective concept, which in a responsible way builds upon the needs and priorities identified jointly by the Western Balkan countries and strategic partners active in the region, and uses a combined bottom-up and top-down approach taking into account on-going and planned activities as well as available funding, offered by strategic partners active in the region.

The Integrative Plan of Action is meant to be a non-binding document which invites Lead Partners and Partners identified to implement agreed activities but also recommends to the EU Member States, EU institutions and agencies as well as to strategic partners active in the region, to consider it further, before planning or funding a new counter-terrorism activity in Western Balkans in order to be aware of the needs and priorities identified jointly with the region as well as to prevent duplication and overlapping.

In this respect, the matrix of on-going and planned counter-terrorism activities in the region, accessible on-line, is expected to be another useful tool produced by the Integrative Plan of Action, which will eliminate duplication and overlapping.

As concerns the regional scope, the Integrative Plan of Action, foreseen to be adopted in early autumn of 2015, will cover all the countries of Western Balkans.

From the policy point of view, the Integrative Plan of Action takes into account activities which address jointly identified needs at the area of countering terrorism,

foreign terrorist fighters, as well as countering violent extremism, including the earliest stages of prevention and promoting partnership between public and private sector and close cooperation with civil society. Particular emphasis is given to early detection of violent extremism and to setting up a radicalisation awareness network in each Western Balkan country.

At the end, let me also underline, that important aspect of our future activities is the perspective for young people in the Western Balkans. The young people are one demographic group which is – not only in Western Balkans, but globally – the most vulnerable. Special attention should be paid to them. To this end a "Positive agenda for the Youth in the Western Balkans" was launched at the meeting of the Brdo Process Foreign Ministers (23/4/2015, Slovenia) – organised in cooperation with France - aiming on reflecting on specific tools, actions and programs already in place within the EU for the Western Balkan's youth, and how they could be made more visible and effective.