Prevention of radicalisation and recruitment of European citizens by terrorist organisations

2015/2063(INI) - 25/11/2015 - Text adopted by Parliament, single reading

The European Parliament adopted by 548 votes to 110 with 36 abstentions, a resolution on the prevention of radicalisation and recruitment of European citizens by terrorist organisations.

Parliament noted that more than 5000 European citizens have joined terrorist organisations and other military formations, particularly ISIS (Daesh), Jahbat al-Nusra and others outside the European Union, especially in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The recent terrorist attacks in France, Belgium, Tunisia and Copenhagen highlight the security threat which is posed by the presence and movement of these foreign fighters who are often EU nationals, in Europe and in its neighbourhood.

1) European added value in the prevention of terrorism: Parliament condemned the terrorist attacks that killed and wounded hundreds of people in Paris on 13 November 2015, highlighting once more the urgent need for coordinated action by the Member States and the European Union to prevent radicalisation and fight against terrorism.

At the same time, emphasising that terrorism cannot be associated with any specific religion, nationality or civilization, it condemned the use of stereotypes and xenophobic and racist discourse and practices by individuals and collective authorities which, directly or indirectly, link the terrorist attacks to the refugees who are currently fleeing their countries in search of a safer place, escaping from war and acts of violence which occur in their home countries.

Parliament invited the Commission to:

- establish as a priority an action plan to implement and evaluate the EU strategy for combating radicalisation and recruitment to terrorism, on the basis of the exchange of best practice and the pooling of skills within the European Union, the evaluation of measures undertaken in the Member States and cooperation with third countries and international organisations on a basis of full respect for international human rights conventions
- contribute to and support the development by Member States of an effective and intensive communication strategy on preventing the radicalisation and recruitment of European citizens and of non-EU nationals residing in the EU by terrorist organisations.

Members called on Member States to coordinate their strategies and share the information and experience at their disposal and to cooperate with a view to taking new steps in combating radicalisation and recruitment to terrorism. They stressed the importance of strengthening cross border cooperation among law enforcement authorities to this regard, and of providing adequate resources and training to police forces working on the ground.

2) Preventing violent extremism and terrorist radicalisation in prisons: stressing that prisons remain one of several environments which are a breeding ground for the spread of radical and violent ideologies and terrorist radicalisation, Parliament called on the Commission to encourage the exchange of best practices among Member States in order to counter the increase of terrorist radicalisation in Europes prisons and called on Member States to take immediate action against prison overcrowding.

The Commission was called upon to propose guidelines based on best practices on measures to be implemented in European prisons aimed at the prevention of radicalisation and of violent extremism, and to consider the separation of inmates recruited by terrorist organisations from other inmates as a possible measure to prevent radicalization.

Members encouraged the establishment of educational programmes with adequate funding in European prisons in order to promote critical thinking, religious tolerance, and reintegration into society of inmates.

3) Preventing online terrorist radicalisation: recalling that the internet and social networks are significant platforms for the fuelling of radicalisation and fundamentalism, Members underlined the role of education and public awareness campaigns in preventing radicalisation online. They called for an effective strategy for the detection and removal of illegal content inciting to violent extremism, while respecting fundamental rights and freedom of expression, and in particular for contributing to the dissemination of effective discourse to counter terrorist propaganda.

Competent authorities should ensure that websites that incite hatred are monitored more strictly. Member States should consider legal actions, including criminal prosecutions, against internet and social media companies and service providers which refuse to comply with an administrative or judicial request to delete illegal content or content praising terrorism on their internet platforms. Refusal cooperate should be considered an act of complicity that can be equated to criminal intent or neglect.

Members supported the introduction of measures enabling all internet users to easily and quickly flag illegal content circulating on the internet and on social media networks and to report it to the competent authorities, including through hotlines. Every Member State should set up a special unit tasked with flagging illegal content on the internet and with facilitating the detection and removal of such content. Members called for a reinforcement of the tools available to the EU to combat cybercrime.

4) Preventing radicalisation through education and social inclusion: Parliament recalled the crucial role that schools play in helping to promote integration within society and develop critical thinking, and to promote non-discrimination. It called on the Member States to encourage educational establishments to provide courses and academic programmes aimed at strengthening understanding and tolerance, especially with regard to different religions, the history of religions, philosophies and ideologies. It stressed the need to teach fundamental values and democratic principles of the Union such as human rights.

Member States are urged to ensure that educational programmes on internet use exist in every school. Furthermore, teachers should be empowered to take an active stand against all forms of discrimination and racism.

Parliament recommended:

- combining deradicalisation programmes with measures such as establishing partnerships with community representatives, investment in social and neighbourhood projects aimed at disrupting economic and geographical marginalisation;
- engaging in an intercultural dialogue with the various communities, with a view to helping achieve better understanding and prevention of radicalisation;
- drawing attention to the issue of the training of religious leaders which should take place in Europe where possible - with regard to preventing incitement to hatred and violent extremism in places of worship in Europe, and ensuring that those leaders share European values;
- setting up an alert system for assistance and guidance in every Member State which would allow families and community members to obtain support or to easily and swiftly flag the development of sudden behavioural change that might signal a process of terrorist radicalisation or an individuals departure to join a terrorist organisation;.

5) Stepping up the exchange of information on terrorist radicalisation in Europe: whilst reiterating their commitment to work towards the finalisation of an EU directive on passenger name records (PNR) by the end of 2015, Parliament suggested that a holistic, ambitious and comprehensive strategy on counterterrorism and the fight against organised crime, involving foreign policy, social policy, education policy, law enforcement and justice, is required.

The resolution insisted on the absolute necessity of stepping up the expedient and effective exchange of relevant information between the law enforcement authorities in the Member States and between Member States and the relevant agencies, in particular by optimising the use of and contributions to the Schengen Information System (SIS) and Visa Information System (VIS) and reinforcing the role of EU entities such as Europol, Eurojust and the European Police College (Cepol).

6) Strengthening deterrents against terrorist radicalisation: Members believed that measures aimed at preventing the radicalisation of European citizens and their recruitment by terrorist organisations will not be fully effective until they are accompanied by an effective, dissuasive and articulated range of criminal justice measures in all Member States. Through effectively criminalising terrorist acts carried out abroad with terrorist organisations, Member States will equip themselves with the tools needed to eliminate terrorist radicalisation among European citizens.

Members called for reinforced capacities for Eurojust's Coordination Centre, which should play a critical role in promoting the joint action of Member States judicial authorities in the collection of evidence and enhance the effectiveness of prosecutions of crimes related to terrorism. They also called for the EU to work on the setting-up of judicial and law enforcement cooperation agreements with third countries to facilitate the collection of evidence in said countries, provided that fundamental rights are safeguarded by all parties.

7) Preventing the departure and anticipating the return of radicalised European citizens: Parliament reiterated that the EU must step up its external border controls as a matter of urgency, on a basis of full compliance with fundamental rights. However, it stressed that it will be impossible to effectively track entry and exit in the EU unless Member States implement the mandatory and systematic controls at the EUs external borders.

In these circumstances, Member States should:

- make good use of existing instruments such as the SIS, SIS II and VIS systems, including with reference to stolen, lost and falsified passports;
- give their border guards systematic access to the Europol information system, which may contain information on people suspected of terrorism;
- share good practices with regard to exit and return checks and the freezing of financial assets of citizens;
- be able to confiscate the passports of their citizens planning to join terrorist organisations at the request of the competent judicial authority, according to their national laws and in full compliance with the principle of proportionality;
- ensure that foreign fighters are put under judicial control and, where necessary, in administrative detention upon their return to Europe, until such time as due judicial prosecution takes place.

8) Strengthening links between internal and external security in the EU: Members stressed the vital importance of the EU establishing close cooperation with third countries, notably transit countries and destination countries, in order to be able to identify EU citizens and non-European residents leaving to fight for terrorist organisations or returning thereafter.

The EU should increase its cooperation with regional partners in order to curb arms trafficking, targeting in particular the countries where terrorism originates, and to follow closely the export of armaments that could be exploited by terrorists. Members also called for foreign policy tools and engagement with third countries to be strengthened with a view to countering the financing of terrorist organisations.

9) Dismantling terrorist networks: Parliament underlined that money laundering, tax evasion and other fiscal crimes are in some cases major sources of terrorism funding. Tracking and combating crimes affecting the EUs financial interests must therefore be a priority.

Terrorist organisations such as IS/Daesh and Jabhat al-Nusra have accrued substantial financial resources in Iraq and Syria from smuggling oil, selling stolen goods, kidnapping and extortion, seizing bank accounts and smuggling antiquities. Members called, therefore, for the countries and the intermediaries contributing to this black market to be identified and their activities brought to a halt as a matter of urgency.

Members called for a harmonised approach to the definition as a criminal offence of hate speech, online and offline, whereby radicals incite others to disrespect and violate fundamental rights.

Lastly, Parliament called on the Council to create a blacklist of European jihadists and jihadist terrorist suspects.