

**International Conference on Terrorism and Organised Crime**

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**Opening Speech**

**by**

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to the International Conference on Terrorism and Organised Crime!

Threats by terrorism and organised crime are both very serious and global. No State is left untouched by organised crime activities and, sadly, only few States can say today that they are not facing threats to their security from various terrorist outfits.

Though we are usually thinking of organised crime and terrorism as two separate concepts, it may nevertheless prove rewarding for policy makers, strategists, and practitioners alike to reconsider this approach.

Organised crime and terrorist groups pursue different goals: organised crime groups are mainly motivated by seeking financial profit, whereas terrorists seek to disrupt society and bring about disorder for political gain. Therefore, some say that one cannot compare them, nor apply lessons learned from fighting organised crime when suppressing terrorism and *vice versa*. But does this really stand up to closer inspection?

In fact, there are many situations where terrorist groups operate in ways very similar to organised crime groups. They also share many common characteristics: Firstly, activities are often transnational and revolve around a clandestine organisation; secondly, financing is mainly obtained through the commission of criminal/illegal activities; thirdly, the success of both types of organisations depends on their ability to install fear.

As to fear, we are all aware that the Internet is being used by many terrorist groups to spread their messages of hatred, violence and fear. The recent videos published by the self-declared "Islamic State" showing the horrible murders of hostages are but one example. But also organised crime groups make use of this method to send blood curling messages to other groups and the general public. In October 2013 a video was uploaded on Facebook, allegedly by the Mexican organised crime group called "Los Zetas", showing the decapitation of a woman. A man standing behind the

victim with a knife says: “Well gentlemen, this is what happens to all those of the Gulf Cartel [*another Mexican organised crime group*]. On behalf of Los Zetas.”

Though the exact motivations behind these horrors may differ, the methods and the results are clearly the same: To spread fear – and hence gain the upper hand over your adversaries – through the use of extreme violence.

How then, should we deal with the spreading of radicalising messages on the Internet without interfering with the right to freedom of expression and access to information? These are fundamental questions related to the protection of values in our liberal democratic societies, when rights guaranteed under these very values are being abused to undermine them. We need to identify balanced and well-reasoned answers to these important questions; otherwise we would do the work of the terrorists, for then, we would undermine and destroy democracy.

When it comes to the financing of many terrorist groups and organised crime groups, the links are even more obvious: In fact, the *modi operandi* are almost identical: Production and smuggling of narcotic drugs, illegal trade in weapons, human trafficking, dealing in stolen goods, extortion, kidnapping for ransom, robbery, money laundering etc. In that respect, I want to praise here the excellent work carried out by our group of experts dealing with money-laundering issues (MONEYVAL) who are currently assessing how effectively financial institutions identify and freeze accounts of “Islamic State” supporters, recently designated by the UN and EU, as well as other subsets of Al-Qaeda.

The FARC of Colombia is an example of a terrorist organisation which is known to be deeply involved in organised crime. The “Islamic State” of Syria and Iraq is another such example. Professor Howard J. Schatz of the US think tank the RAND Corporation, who has been researching the finances, management and organisation of the “Islamic State” and its parent groups, in particular “Al Qaeda in Iraq”, from late 2006 till today, has characterized it as follows: “Although supposedly religiously inspired, its actions are more like those of an organized criminal cult.”

And make no mistake: Crime pays! In the case of the “Islamic State”, the group is estimated by Iraqi intelligence sources to have assets worth US\$ 2 billion, making it the world’s richest terrorist group. Tellingly, as little as 5% of the operating budget of the “Islamic State” is estimated to be derived from donations. Where does the bulk of the rest come from?

The aim of this Conference is hence twofold:

To examine similarities and links between terrorist groups and organised crime groups and to explore to which degree, and how, lessons learned in the fight against organised crime can be applied in fighting terrorism, and the other way round.

The outcomes of this Conference will be fed into the deliberations of our two steering committees in the field of counter-terrorism measures and criminal law: The European Committee on Crime Problems (CDPC) and the Committee of Experts on Terrorism (CODEXTER). Both steering committees take a leading role at European level in formulating policies and establishing legal standards in their respective fields, and this Conference offers yet another excellent opportunity for the Council of Europe to draw on the collective expertise of the members of CDPC and CODEXTER to bring forward new and efficient initiatives in the fight against terrorism and other forms of serious organised crime.

Here I would like to mention that CDPC and CODEXTER this year will initiate work, in cooperation with other committees and bodies, including our Steering Committee on Media and Information Society (CDMSI) and MONEYVAL, on updating the recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on the use of “special investigation techniques” in relation to serious crimes, including acts of terrorism from 2005. More specifically, in the field of terrorism, CODEXTER will at its next plenary meeting in November hold a thematic debate addressing the issues of radicalisation via the Internet and “foreign terrorist fighters”. The Council of Europe expects that these activities will, in the short and medium terms, lead concretely to the establishment of new international legal standards and the formulation of pan-European policies dealing with radicalisation and the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters returning to Europe.

Finally, there is another, more political, reason to challenge the traditional viewpoint that terrorism and organised crime are two entirely different phenomena. For far too long, terrorists have been able to masquerade in the public discourse as righteous soldiers combating the forces of oppression by States. We must deny them this pathetic excuse! The fact, that far from being “gallant heroes” fighting for a just cause, terrorist groups like the “Islamic State” are nothing but murderers and criminals, who operate in the same way as other Mafiosi and who will eventually also be brought to justice, should be a strong warning to anyone who would feel tempted to join them.

Session IV of the Conference will deal with the preventive aspects of combating terrorism and other forms of serious organised crime. The Internet is currently being used by a number of terrorist groups, not least the “Islamic State”, to recruit new members – and regrettably these groups are quite successful in their endeavour. We need to examine carefully the options open to States to put an end to this flagrant abuse of the freedom of expression, including by looking into how the use of “counter-messaging” can assist us. The role of prisons as “incubators” and recruiting grounds for terrorist groups and organised crime groups also deserves to be examined in detail. Here again, the outcomes of this Conference should be taken up by the various specialised bodies of the Council of Europe dealing with penitentiary issues and conditions of detention, including the Committee on the Prevention of Torture (CPT) and the expert group on penitentiary issues under the CDPC, the PCCP.

Since its founding in 1949, the Council of Europe has been at the forefront in the promotion of human rights, the rule of law and democracy in Europe, and increasingly also beyond the geographic boundaries of Europe. I am therefore particularly pleased to welcome participants from outside Europe here today! Terrorism and organised crime are transnational problems and no region of the world can deal with them on its own. We need your experience and your cooperation to be efficient. I hope that all participants will take this obvious chance to network. I would also like to invite all participants to enter into a constructive dialogue on how the Council of Europe can further improve its work in the field of suppressing terrorism and other forms of serious organised crime.

Finally, I would like to express my deep gratitude to our partners in organising this Conference, namely the University of Malaga, the UMA- Observatory of conflicts, and last – but not least – the City of Malaga, which is graciously hosting the Conference in these beautiful surroundings!

I wish you all a fruitful Conference and look forward to seeing the outcome of your deliberations.

Thank you for your attention.