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Combatting radicalisation at grassroots level: the role of local and regional authorities

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Summary

The recent terrorist attacks in European and other cities require effective responses, in particular in the field of prevention of radicalisation, and concerted action at all levels of governance for the conception, preparation and implementation of measures to counter terrorism. Local and regional authorities are in direct contact with diverse communities and have therefore a special role and added value with regard to public policy in this respect.

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe has been working over the last decades on subjects which are pertinent to the fight against radicalisation at grassroots level. This includes fostering inclusive communities and urban development, intercultural and inter-faith dialogue at local level, education for democratic citizenship in Europe's cities and regions, tackling extremism and radicalisation, urban security and crime prevention. The Congress' strategy to combat radicalisation at grassroots' level proposes a series of local and regional activities, comprising awareness raising, synergies and partnerships with Council of Europe bodies and other institutions.

Accordingly, the Congress commits itself to revising its legal arsenal on anti-radicalisation texts, devising guidelines and toolkits for local and regional elected representatives and developing training modules on human rights. It requests that local and regional authorities actively participate in concerted national action against extremism and radicalisation and invites member states' governments, in particular, to allocate complementary appropriate means and resources for the implementation, at local and regional level, of the Council of Europe Action Plan 2015-17 on countering terrorism.

1. L: Chamber of Local Authorities / R: Chamber of Regions
EPP/CCE: European People's Party Group in the Congress
SOC: Socialist Group
ILDG: Independent Liberal and Democratic Group
ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists Group
NR: Members not belonging to a political group of the Congress

RESOLUTION 381 (2015)²

1. The recent attacks in European and other cities have brought home once again the fact that terrorism is still a threat to peace and security, undermining democracy and its institutions and the fundamental values defended by the Council of Europe. Among the responses being developed from the Council of Europe perspective, the prevention of radicalisation is one of the most relevant components to the Congress' work and one which provides scope for local and regional authorities to act.

2. The Congress has been working for the last two decades on subjects aiming at establishing inclusive and resilient communities as a protective shield and element to prevent and fight radicalisation at local and regional level. In this context, it has produced recommendations on tackling terrorism, the integration and participation of people of immigrant origin, intercultural and interfaith dialogue as well as resolutions on urban crime prevention, on the fight against racism at local and regional level and on education for democratic citizenship.

3. Responding to the invitation from the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to contribute to the Council of Europe effort in this field and guided by relevant Congress texts, the Congress Bureau adopted, on 2 February 2015, a "Strategy to combat radicalisation at grassroots level" which proposes a series of activities to be carried out in the short, medium and long term at local and regional level, based on three pillars of action, namely awareness raising, synergies with Council of Europe bodies and synergies with other institutions.

4. The Congress supports the approach put forward by the Council of Europe's Parliamentary Assembly in its resolution on the terrorist attacks in Paris adopted in January 2015, which proposes a concerted, democratic and measured response from all levels of governance to radicalisation leading to terrorism. The Congress also takes note of the statement made by the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe to the effect that policies which respect human rights undermine support for radicalism among potential recruits and increase public trust in the rule of law.

5. In the light of the above, the Congress commits itself to:

a. compiling and updating the relevant texts of the Council of Europe and the Congress which promote citizen participation, living together in diversity, social inclusion and cohesion, intercultural and interfaith dialogue, in particular the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207);

b. establishing guidelines for local and regional authorities on preventing radicalisation and manifestations of hate at grass-roots level, to be adopted at its 29th Session in October 2015, based on the present resolution;

c. creating a pedagogical toolkit for use by local elected representatives when organising intercultural and inter-faith activities;

d. developing training modules on human rights issues tailor-made for the needs of local and regional elected representatives and to make the Human Rights Forum, the first of which will take place in Graz on 28-29 May 2015, an annual or biennial targeted event, organised in co-operation with cities, regions and relevant institutions;

e. building on existing co-operation established with relevant networks such as the European Forum for Urban Security (EFUS) and the European Coalition of Cities against Racism (ECCAR);

f. drawing up a roadmap to carry out the Congress strategy in 2015-2016, ensuring the allocation of sufficient financial resources for its implementation in collaboration with possible partners, including a pilot phase and assessment scheduled for the end of 2015 and evaluation of the strategy's implementation in 2016.

6. The Congress invites the local and regional authorities of the member States of the Council of Europe to:

a. actively participate in concerted national action against extremism and radicalisation including the drawing up, preparation and implementation of relevant policies in the prevention of and the fight against terrorism;

² Debated and adopted by the Congress on 25 March 2015, 2nd sitting (see Document CG/2015(28)14FINAL) rapporteur: Leen VERBEEK, Netherlands (R, SOC).

- b.* consider drawing up and implementing urban policies to combat radicalisation addressing both urban development and security issues, taking inspiration from Congress Resolution 205 (2005) on cultural identity in peripheral urban areas and Resolution 57 (1997) on crime and urban insecurity in Europe;
- c.* engage, through their associations of local and regional authorities, with primary and secondary schools in order to foster citizenship education through curricular and extracurricular activities including mentoring programmes, taking into account Congress Resolution 332 (2011) on “Education for democratic citizenship: tools for cities” and by investing in youth (civil) service;
- d.* develop a specific strategy concerning youth and to involve young people systematically in the work of the cities and regions to fight discrimination, exclusion and to promote dialogue, tolerance and freedom of expression, online and offline, notably via the social media, drawing on Congress Resolution 346 (2012) on the changing face of youth political engagement and the Council of Europe campaign on No Hate Speech;
- e.* organise events fostering intercultural and inter-faith dialogue and better relations between community groups, for example in the framework of the Congress' European Local Democracy Week, taking into account Congress Resolution 323 (2011) on meeting the challenge of inter-faith and intercultural tensions at local level and to meet regularly with local religious leaders, taking inspiration from the Council of Europe Annual Exchange on the Religious Dimension of Intercultural Dialogue;
- f.* develop projects involving disadvantaged neighbourhoods and detention centres under local authority responsibility, and ensure that humanitarian, social and security consequences of social segregation and institutional discrimination are an integral part of said projects;
- g.* encourage social cohesion and inclusion through local initiatives such as neighbourhood councils or foreign residents' councils and co-operate closely with civil society organisations in order to tackle manifestations of social exclusion, discrimination and racism with particular attention to disadvantaged groups, and to transform the challenge of living together in diversity into an advantage for the entire community, taking into account Congress Resolution 375 (2014) on “Promoting diversity through intercultural education and communication strategies”;
- h.* define and introduce policies to protect and enhance the value of the cultural heritage of different social groups through citizen participation, drawing on the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (CETS No. 199, the “Faro Convention”);
- i.* encourage cities to develop policies against terrorist attacks while ensuring that such policies do not infringe upon citizens' fundamental rights nor hinder in any way the democratic agenda for social inclusion and cohesion.
- j.* share their experiences in existing or yet to be created networks in order to ensure the best possible dissemination of good practices.

RECOMMENDATION 371 (2015)³

1. The Congress refers to its Resolution 381 (2015) on combatting radicalisation at grassroots level: the role of local and regional authorities in which it underlines the importance of concerted action, at all levels of governance, for the prevention of radicalisation which might lead to terrorism and the specific role of territorial bodies in this respect.

2. The Congress considers inclusive communities grounded in pluralistic democracy, intercultural and inter-faith dialogue at local level, the fight against racism and education for democratic citizenship in Europe's cities and regions as particularly relevant. At the same time, it attaches great importance to crime prevention and inclusive urban development. While protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, the overall aim is to foster solidarity, diversity and security in Europe's cities and regions and identify the causes of extremism and radicalisation which might lead to terrorism.

3. The Congress therefore invites the Committee of Ministers to:

a. foster co-operation and concerted action between all levels of government for the conception, preparation and implementation of anti-radicalisation policies and the fight against terrorism, taking specific note of Congress Resolution 381 (2015);

b. allocate complementary appropriate means and resources for the implementation, at local and regional level, of the Council of Europe Action Plan 2015-2017 on countering terrorism;

c. take into account, in the framework of national action against extremism and radicalisation which might lead to terrorism, the specific role and added value of local and regional authorities for security at grassroots' level.

³ See footnote 2.