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## Opinion – Fighting radicalisation: supporting public service workers

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### Adopted by the Presidium

The terrorist attacks of 2015 and 2016 have highlighted the dramatic extent of the challenges raised by terrorism for the entire European Union. The member states' main objective is to prevent future attacks, hence why it is fundamental to quickly focus on prevention and fight radicalisation upstream.

Indeed, while it is true that not all individuals expressing radical religious or political opinions commit violent acts, some perpetrators of terrorist attacks do make their radical positions known before acting on them. This is why there is an important and urgent need to fight against the complex phenomenon of radicalisation, during which individuals adopt a radical ideology that is likely to lead them to commit terrorist acts.

However, CESI is convinced that this goal cannot be reached by means of security measures alone. It is indeed crucial that multi-disciplinary and complementary policies integrating social, educational and preventative security components be implemented alongside repressive policies.

As many studies on the subject have demonstrated<sup>1</sup>, the fight against terrorism requires strengthened policy coordination on a European level, as well as the support, protection and rebuilding the image of all workers in the public sector in charge of implementing them (namely social workers, educators, teachers, healthcare workers, police officers, firefighters, prison officers and probation officers).

CESI wishes to highlight its deep commitment to the rule of law. CESI believes that respecting the rule of law is a pre-requisite for the establishment of adequate policies to fight radicalisation and terrorism. To achieve this aim and support the European Union and its member states in the drafting and implementation of adequate policies within the shortest timeframe possible, CESI has identified various challenges that should be addressed:

### I) Challenges in the security sector

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<sup>1</sup> For some time now, CESI has been interested in radicalisation and the challenges it presents for public services. The subject was addressed at a CESI@noon session in May 2015 and at a conference in Paris on 15 December 2015.

a) **On the level of legal challenges:**

1. **CESI supports the adoption of a directive concerning the fight against terrorism incriminating acts of preparation**, including training, travelling abroad for terrorism-related purposes, acting as an accomplice to terrorist acts, inciting others to perform or attempt to perform such acts.
2. **CESI supports a reform of the Directive of 1991 on the weapons trade**, with the aim of strengthening checks linked to the acquisition and possession of firearms.
3. **Following many months of negotiations, CESI supports the adoption and urgent implementation of a directive on passenger data (PNR – Passenger Name Record)**, which would force airlines to communicate passenger data for the prevention and detection of serious crime forms and acts of terrorism, while respecting established personal data protection and proportionality principles.
4. **CESI supports moves towards the improvement of the legal protection of security agents**. For example, it strongly encourages a European debate on self-defence and identity protection.

b) **On the level of practical and technological challenges:**

1. **Improved protection of first respondents is urgently required**, including the protection of soldiers, police officers and firefighters, as well as the provision of **the necessary material and financial means** to do so, on both the European and national levels. To attain this objective, it is important to do the following:
  - **Employ greater numbers of police officers,**
  - **Modernise protective equipment**, which is often very heavy and cumbersome, as well as count dressing and undressing time as working time,
  - **Provide personnel with cultural awareness training** so that staff may better understand cultural differences and deal with sensitive situations,
  - **Strengthen or establish psychological support systems.**
2. **Soldiers** are increasingly being deployed in the fight against terrorism despite the fact that this was not initially part of their mission, so it is important to provide them with the **necessary training**.
3. Budget cuts in some member states have had a severe impact on the fight against cybercrime, which is often related to terrorism. There is therefore an urgent need to remedy this situation by means of **high investments in order to purchase the necessary equipment, recruit IT technicians and train police force personnel**.
4. Although national strategies are important, CESI underscores the crucial nature of **coordinated support on a European level**. In this context, CESI welcomes the creation of bodies such as the European Counter-Terrorism Centre and the role of European Coordinator, but calls for **closer**

**cooperation between the various member states' public administrations and the European and international institutions (e.g. Europol, Interpol and Frontex).**

5. In addition, it is important to **cooperate with third countries (i.e. non-EU) presenting high risk levels for radicalisation**, because the process begins and ends both within and outside EU borders, namely in terrorist training camps and conflict zones.
6. The member states should also harmonise and make greater use of joint databases, such as the **Schengen Information System (SIS)**. Indeed, although some believe that there are approximately 5,000 individuals who are likely to commit terrorist acts in Europe, only 2,000 of them are listed in the SIS.
7. Access to information via new communication technologies represents an additional challenge in the fight against radicalisation. That is why it is imperative to adopt **efficient fighting strategies to counter heinous discourse and propaganda online**. CESI welcomes the contact initiatives made by public administrations and internet service providers and hopes that a balance will be struck between respect for freedom of expression and the taking down of as many websites promoting radicalisation as possible.

## II) Challenges linked to the social, educational and healthcare sectors:

1. **Urgent support and training is required for the various public sector workers who are in direct contact with individuals at risk of being radicalised.** Indeed, although not all these professionals perform duties in the security sector, their training and knowledge of the needs of at-risk individuals mean that they are often the in the best position to identify those who are becoming radicalised.
2. It is fundamental that education should become a **social integration channel and a value transmission tool, a vector for values such as civil rights, democracy, fundamental rights, tolerance and respect**, with the aim of giving youths in the process of becoming radicalised a solid feeling of identity that would enable them to rebuild themselves and give them stable reference points.
3. **To achieve this goal, teachers must receive more support from schools, and the schools must receive more support from the state in order to better guide students when shaping ideas and their identity.** Indeed, it is true that teenagers and young adults are often those who are the most impressionable and vulnerable to radical propaganda. The education, training and employment sectors who deal with the young are often in the best position to help young people develop their critical analysis abilities. However, many teachers confronted with this issue believe they are not able to perform their teaching duties anymore, and disturbances to students' schooling may lead to them to drop out, thus making those students more vulnerable to radical discourse.

4. Failure at school and unemployment are often the root of frustrations ultimately leading to the radicalisation of some youths, hence why it is **crucial to quickly resolve problems linked to the integration of young people on the job market**<sup>2</sup>.
5. Students who isolate themselves, close up and present symptoms of mental illness must be identified and taken care of sooner. To do so, it is very important **to improve collaboration between educational staff and other public services, namely healthcare professionals**.
6. **It is important to establish disengagement and deradicalisation programmes**. These programmes must be extensive and adapted to the specific situations and individuals at hand. They must include psychological, social and economic support, as well as involve specialists, the families and the communities at large, in order to support reintegration efforts<sup>3</sup>.
7. Finally, CESI is of the opinion that it is fundamental to set up a greater number of **informal educational programmes, volunteering opportunities, sports activities and intercultural dialogue fora** that actively include young people, enabling them to access a wide range of experiences and exchange with other cultures. It is also important to encourage cooperation with religious centres that can provide a counter-narrative to certain religious beliefs.

### III) Challenges in the justice sector:

Several of the attackers were radicalised in prison, which is why it is crucial to do the following:

1. **Fight against the privatisation of penitentiary systems because it often leads to decisions based on profit rather than on good governance.**
2. **Strengthen and support penitentiary personnel**, namely by training them to better understand and detect the signs of radicalisation as well as respond to such situations.
3. **Increase follow-up services and educational alternatives suggested to repeat offenders.**
4. **Increase investments in rehabilitation programmes.**

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. CESI's opinion: "*For the successful reception and integration of migrants, support public sector workers*".

<sup>3</sup> Here, the policy implemented by the Mayor of Aarhus (Denmark) can serve as an example. Indeed, this policy – known as the *SSP Method* – follows up young people at risk of radicalisation in neighbourhoods affected by this problem. It also provides support for the parents of youths who have become radicalised or who are in the process of doing so. Finally, psychological help is given to returnees from extremist groups.