European Economic and Social Committee

Brussels, 22 April 2008

OPINION

of the
European Economic and Social Committee
on the
Prevention of terrorism and violent radicalisation
(exploratory opinion)

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By letter of 17 December 2007, Ms Margot Wallström, Vice-President of the European Commission, asked the European Economic and Social Committee, under Article 262 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, to draw up an exploratory opinion on the

Prevention of terrorism and violent radicalisation
(exploratory opinion).

The Section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship, which was responsible for preparing the Committee's work on the subject, adopted its opinion on 2 April 2008. The rapporteur was **Mr Retureau**, and the co-rapporteur was **Mr Cabra de Luna**.

At its 444th plenary session, held on 22 and 23 April 2008 (meeting of 22 April), the European Economic and Social Committee adopted the following opinion by 147 votes to 1, with 5 abstentions.

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1.   **Introduction**

1.1   The Commission has asked the Committee to issue an exploratory opinion on the prevention of terrorism and in particular policies to prevent violent radicalisation, on which it plans to adopt a Communication in July 2008. The main objective of the Communication is to identify good practices in terms of policies, actions and initiatives in the field of countering violent radicalisation. Currently, it is foreseen that themes such as violent radicalisation in prisons and other places of vulnerability or recruitment, addressing the narrative and ideology propagated by violent radicals, as well as the engagement and strengthening of civil society, will be touched upon in the Communication.

1.2   The post-cold-war, economically globalised world has seen a profound change in the international power balance. This has had a significant impact on global institutions such as the United Nations, which have seen (and recognised) a multitude of new state entities claiming sovereignty and declaring themselves subject to international public law.

1.3   Moreover, conflicts have erupted in some of these new countries, and armed movements still occupy some territories. Human rights are often trampled underfoot.

1.4   Territories or regions which are under little or no control are havens for the leaders of the major terrorist groups, who tend to set up camp wherever the rule of law and public freedoms have ceased to exist.

1.5   Resorting to traditional warfare has proved less than effective against this diffuse threat that comes in many guises, with its scattered structures, which exploits fundamentalism and an anti-democratic political ideology to manipulate unofficial groups willing to use political violence.

1.6   The failure to find a peaceful solution to the Palestinian situation or other armed conflicts throughout the world is also a political factor in the development of extremist ideas and acts of international terrorism; it should be stressed, however, that the majority of terrorist acts are carried out in the context of internal conflicts.

1.7   It seems that not enough effort has been made to study the motives and methods of recruitment that can – as on 11 September 2001 – turn managers, engineers and intellectuals into planners and perpetrators of coordinated suicide attacks whose huge scale shows extreme determination and intelligence, and the ability to infiltrate democratic societies. An in-depth understanding of the ideological and psychological motivations at play is essential if a suitable counter-strategy on a comparable scale is to be drawn up, in addition to the necessary geopolitical analyses and the use of all means of intelligence and information exchange.

1.8   The crisis affecting nation-states – at a time when communications and globalisation have created a global world where many issues cannot be resolved solely at national level – comes hand in hand with a crisis in international law, which lacks dissuasive means of control and, above all, sufficient legal means for action. Only the UN Security Council has sufficient powers, but these are lessened by the veto held by five countries.

1.9   Nonetheless, a robust, renewed multilateral system could confront global climate, economic and social problems under more favourable conditions; international terrorism could be fought more effectively within a multilateral framework that ensures coordination and cooperation between governments and international agencies (Interpol), with the participation of NGOs which continue to monitor democracy and the defence of procedural rights and public liberties.

2.   **Responsibilities for Europe, and initiatives in progress or under preparation**

2.1   To fight terrorism effectively at EU level, the Member States had to adopt a common definition of the crime of terrorism, and bring their criminal law systems closer together in the area of criminal charges and penalties. This process, together with the adoption of the European arrest warrant, was embarked on quickly and, over time, the Council has adopted relevant framework decisions, particularly since the 1990s.

2.2   Since the horrendous attacks of 11 September 2001 on the USA, essential coordination has been established both internationally and at European and Community level: the UN Security Council linked to Interpol, NATO for military operations, the Council of Europe (with, in particular, its Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism), the OSCE and, lastly, the EU and

Europol. Cooperation has been developed with the USA, the countries of the Maghreb and the African Union, along with individual military, police and financial support operations for certain countries.

2.3   A consensus has been reached in the Community institutions and Member States, among political leaders and the majority of citizens, regarding the definition of terrorism and the types of legal or illegal actions that it does not comprise. It is necessary to be able to carefully target the threat and its permutations, to prevent efforts from being too scattered and pointless restrictions being imposed on individual and collective rights and freedoms.

2.4   However, in some African and Middle Eastern countries in particular that have authoritarian governments, there is a tendency to use the "counter-terrorism" label to attack any kind of political opposition. This should be a matter of concern for the EU and its members, some of which enjoy economic and political relations, and cooperate militarily, with the leaders of these States, and should use their influence to limit such abuse.

2.5   Internationally, the trickiest problem seems to be finding the right response to the threats that persist in the world from various terrorist movements, against embassies or other "targets", particularly civilians. For geographical reasons, Europe remains the region most at risk from terrorist attacks.

2.6   Acts of terrorism aim to instil a climate of fear and insecurity, and to undermine democratic institutions. It is important, therefore, not to fall into the trap of imposing unjustified restrictions on human rights and civil liberties in the name of security; the most at-risk countries have for years experienced emergency conditions of varying intensity: some measures may go beyond what is essential or manageable, for instance with regard to the personal data of transatlantic passengers, requiring a host of details and an excessively long retention period.

2.7   Network surveillance, widespread video surveillance in public and private areas accessible to the public, border control policies, management of demonstrations, and extensive searches in airports may, if excessive, infringe on privacy, freedom of movement and, more generally, all other civil liberties. This may affect public support for counter-terrorist policies as the public may feel targeted by these actions.

2.8   Intrusions into citizens' lives and more severe controls may also (as has already been widely pointed out) result in a rise in checks on certain specifically-targeted "visible minorities", who will feel increasingly stigmatised and subject to ethnic or racist discrimination. The threshold for tolerance has already been greatly surpassed, which encourages "violent radicalisation" during conflicts and clashes between police or military forces and young people from certain deprived areas, which are witness to the destruction of buildings and public and private property.

2.9   These episodes of urban violence, if lumped together under the umbrella of "radicalisation into violence" (considered the precursor to terrorism or even a form of terrorism *per se*), can however lead to an overly broad definition of the crime of actual, attempted or complicit terrorist activity, extending it to include various forms of violence which, though severe, are not necessarily driven by the intent to commit a terrorist act, even if they have caused extensive destruction of property and possible serious injury.

2.10   The motive behind the act or attempt is key to its definition as terrorism.

2.11   Terrorist movements have emerged in the recent past and continue to do so today on our continent. Political violence has no justifiable motive in democratic countries where political parties can be formed and one can vote in regular, fair elections at all levels of government (local, national and, in Europe's case, the European Parliament).

3.   **General points**

3.1   While there may be a consensus about the definition of terrorism, certain new concepts may be problematic, such as "violent radicalisation", defined by the Commission as "the phenomenon of people embracing opinions, views and ideas which could lead to acts of terrorism as defined in Article 1 of the Framework Decision on Combating Terrorism" of 2002.

3.2   This was highlighted in the Burgess report to the EP, with regard to the new concept of "violent radicalisation" in the context of terrorist support and recruitment: "The definitional challenge related to violent radicalisation and its prevention is that of intention". Moreover, radicalisation is often a process that can extend over time, years even, meaning that there is time for dialogue, education and information procedures and other preventive measures.

3.3   Terrorism is already old news in the political world, making use today of global communication modes, tax havens, and the opportunities provided by weakly governed countries or those whose state apparatus has collapsed in order to set up bases and training camps. Nonetheless, it is more an amorphous phenomenon than a single, structured international network.

3.4   The newest factor in the influence of terrorism can be found in the instantaneous, global media that report in a detailed and visible way, with pictures and often practically live coverage of attacks, the effects of which can be felt more than ever before. However, freedom of the press means that such sensationalism cannot be halted – and this considerably increases the fear and insecurity felt by civilians, and provides publicity for terrorist attacks.

3.5   The Internet is a forum for communication that is exploited to spread ideologies which support violence and recruit supporters or even candidates for suicide attacks, to enable

communication between attackers and their leaders, and to disseminate techniques such as making home-made bombs.

3.6 However, apart from seeking out websites which glorify terrorism, it will be hard to monitor communications between certain groups, given today's technologies for encoding and concealing encrypted information, whether written or spoken.

3.7 The EESC therefore has doubts as to the likely effectiveness of the heightened measures being adopted to monitor the Internet and private communications.

3.8 It is also reasonable to doubt whether identity checks and luggage or vehicle searches at road borders, airports, ports or, more rarely, bus or train stations actually prevent the movement of terrorists, even though the secure protection of identity papers is a good way to prevent them from being faked. While such measures do, to an extent, effectively complicate the movement of criminals in general, they also complicate the lives of the public and are creating a detailed map of people's movements, if one also includes the proliferation of video-surveillance systems, private security guards, electronic access passes for public and private establishments, and mobile telephone transmissions and other means for real-time location of persons. These methods do not, however, prevent suicide attacks. They create the feeling of a police state, if democratic steps are not taken to show that the use of these technologies must not exceed the strict minimum required to achieve their objectives. National bodies "to watch the watchers" and the creation of a European think-tank in this field, and regarding data on presumed terrorists, could be a solution.

3.9 In principle, the surveillance of illegal financial flows does not really hinder the daily lives of citizens, and makes it possible to watch out for illegal practices (trafficking of arms, human beings, drugs, etc.) which enable illegal capital to be accrued. This would help to hinder the acquisition of funds for terrorist violence and to improve knowledge of the breeding grounds for this violence[1]. However, it is very difficult to prevent transfers made in cash or via a system of correspondents whereby money deposited in one country is collected by a middle-man in another, or operations carried out or confirmed by encrypted message or letter. Surveillance and investigations can be effective when it comes to fundraising for charities or humanitarian organisations with hidden links to terrorist groups. However, it is important to avoid monitoring all NGOs or complicating their humanitarian or charitable activities and fundraising, in a climate of widespread suspicion; this is troublesome for the public and makes it harder for charities to do their work – to the extent that it may even prevent their programmes from being properly carried out.

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[1] EESC opinion of 11.05.2005 on a Directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the prevention of the use of the financial system for the purpose of money laundering, including terrorist financing, Rapporteur: Mr Simpson, (OJ C 267, 27.10.2005), points 3.1.8 and 3.2.1.

3.10   Data exchanges between police forces and intelligence agencies concern highly sensitive information such as pictures, names, addresses, fingerprints and DNA profiles and membership of organisations, and uncertainty still remains regarding a real guarantee of privacy and protection from data processing or evaluation errors in VIS and SIS files, criminal records and other files, and the possibility for individuals to correct data held in their records.

3.11   At the end of the day, the EU's key contribution lies in harmonisation, cooperation and sharing of experiences, which can still be improved on, though care should be taken to avoid layer upon layer of legislation and extraordinary measures, when existing laws and bodies against organised or financial crime could be extended to cover terrorism.

3.12   There is much literature confirming that states of emergency (even if only low- or medium-level) tend to encourage the restriction of civil liberties, the erosion of guarantees of the rule of law and suspicion towards foreigners, legal and illegal migrants and asylum seekers. This can be observed in most Member States. An atmosphere of racism and xenophobia is spreading, and this rising tide should be opposed in both words and deeds.

3.13   The roles of the Member States, EU institutions, Europol, Eurojust, etc. are well defined, but it is above all the operational nature of cooperation within intelligence agencies and investigations which requires constant improvement.

3.14   To prevent radical violence and terrorism, knowledge is required of the backgrounds and ideologies conducive to it, and this could help eliminate many preconceived – but unproven – ideas.

3.15   The campaign can only be organised in the long term, as democracy and respect for civil liberties must be established or restored in States which are weak or cannot control all their territories, and in authoritarian or dictatorial countries.

3.16   The EESC believes that the usually discreet action of intelligence agencies and police investigations should not necessarily be accompanied by a systematic policy of secrecy towards citizens and their national and European representatives. It should be possible to provide information encouraging public involvement and to carry out democratic supervision, despite the context, using appropriate methods, particularly in order to prevent the erosion of the rule of law.

4.   **The role of civil society in preventing terrorism and radicalisation leading to violence**

4.1   **Key tasks for civil society**

4.1.1   Civil society is the main victim of international terrorism (whether driven by unrepentant nationalism, the instrumentalisation of religious fundamentalism or simply the use of violence

as an end in itself). It is the target of terrorism which aims only to punish collectively and indiscriminately, to impose a widespread climate of terror and force the State to yield to its demands. However, as pointed out in the EESC's opinion on Civil society participation in the fight against organised crime and terrorism[2], civil society is also one of the main players in any strategy to fight this threat, both as regards the mechanisms for confronting the most visible effects and underlying causes of terrorism, and its important work in caring for victims who have suffered the consequences of terrorism.

4.1.2   Taking into account the leading role of the State and the EU's institutional framework – particularly in the areas of security, defence, justice and finance – in fighting the most visible symptoms and effects of this threat (preventing terrorist acts, prosecuting and dismantling terrorist groups, detention, judging and sentencing perpetrators of terrorist acts, blocking funding channels, etc.), civil society can also play an important task in this context, by:

4.1.2.1   actively ensuring that the counter-terrorism strategy never oversteps the rule of law and that the human rights, values, principles and freedoms that define an open and democratic society are protected;

4.1.2.2   working with Community and national authorities at all levels to identify activities and persons involved in terrorist networks (the work of financial establishments and bodies managing telecom services is particularly important in this context). This cooperation should be based on a mutual commitment by all those involved to share information, capacities and efforts to meet the common goal of defeating terrorism;

4.1.2.3   setting up channels for dialogue with leaders and social players from the communities in which terrorist groups base themselves, in order to encourage joint efforts to condemn and de-legitimise violent acts and discourse;

4.1.2.4   establishing exchanges between the different social players, with national and Community authorities, of experiences and practices for isolating and monitoring individuals and groups susceptible to exclusion and radicalisation leading to violence, always being extremely careful to guarantee fundamental rights and freedoms and closely respect the rule of law;

4.1.2.5   suggesting approaches (regarding integration processes and the views, attitudes and actions of groups of particular importance in this context) for training programmes aimed at the police, security and intelligence personnel who have the biggest part to play in combating this threat;

4.1.2.6   implementing pilot schemes which focus efforts on areas most susceptible to alienation, radicalisation and recruitment (prisons, places of worship, schools, inner-city suburbs, public call centres and telecom establishments, etc.), and designed to prevent the exclusion,

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[2]   EESC exploratory opinion of 13.9.2006 on Civil society participation in the fight against organised crime and terrorism, rapporteurs: Mr Rodríguez García Caro, Mr Pariza Castaños, Mr Cabra de Luna (OJ C 318, 23.12.2006), point 13.

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radicalisation and demonisation of individuals and groups due to their social class, gender, ethnicity or religion.

4.2   Integration as a preventive approach: concrete proposals

4.2.1   It is by paying attention to the underlying causes in which terrorist violence breeds that civil society can play its full role. While none of the possible causes identified in this context serve to justify violence of any kind, many lapses into terrorism may be explained as the end result of processes of alienation, radicalisation and recruitment fed by broad inequalities between groups in an area, exclusion and discrimination (social, political or economic) and by double standards applied when judging the actions of different individuals. Integration must therefore be the keystone of any far-reaching strategy, preferably taking a preventive approach, and aiming to:

4.2.2   strengthen formal and informal education systems, geared towards removing negative stereotypes and encouraging tolerance and integration based on shared values inspired essentially by human rights (this means, inter alia, revising current school texts with a view to reformulating conflictual stereotypes in order to encourage tolerance and multicultural learning);

4.2.3   obtain commitments (including codes of conduct) from the media, so as not to provide a platform for discourse or ideas that could encourage exclusion, racism and xenophobia. While categorically respecting the freedom of the press and of expression, there should be encouragement of media approaches and positions that focus on shared values throughout history and the advantages of a rich multicultural heritage in a globalised world;

4.2.4   by means of public campaigns, disseminate messages and inclusive approaches that help to clarify and correct erroneous concepts (international terrorism rather than Islamic terrorism, integration rather than assimilation) or inappropriate images (citizens rather than immigrants) that widen divides and encourage conflict;

4.2.5   help to raise awareness about the importance of identifying human rights as the essential basis for integration in a multicultural society. In this context, organised civil society should be an important driving force in creating a society whose members all have the same rights (social, political and economic) and responsibilities;

4.2.6   promote the creation of social forums in which players from the different communities in each country are present, and which advocate mechanisms for inclusion and peaceful settlement of disputes;

4.2.7   identify and boost the civil organisations and leaders that represent other communities within the EU as key players in the integration of people from other cultures, with the overriding aim

of seeking dialogue and cooperation in order to eradicate the causes of alienation and radicalisation among certain members of these communities;

4.2.8   implement specific programmes designed to de-radicalise those who may potentially sympathise with terrorist ideas and practices in areas where recruitment tends to occur (prisons, places of worship, etc.) and geared towards social integration and the creation of jobs;

4.2.9   focus decentralised cooperation in this direction, both at national and Community level (taking advantage of existing frameworks such as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, the European Neighbourhood Policy, or the framework linking ACP countries). Harnessing the vast potential of Member States' and the EU's development cooperation policies, this would mean establishing cooperation in the field with players who, though defined on religious or national grounds, would express their strong opposition to violence as a means of action;

4.2.10   significantly increase, within the EU and in the context of relations with non-EU countries, the number of, and the budgets for, programmes for the exchange of teachers, students, journalists, trade union and employers' organisations, defenders of human rights, members of NGOs, etc., while paying specific attention to the need to improve gender equality. Personal knowledge and exchange of experiences and viewpoints are key methods for dismantling negative stereotypes and building a common future in a century that will necessarily be multi-cultural[3]. In this context, it would be highly beneficial to harness and build on the EESC's work, through its active contacts and cooperation with extra-Community bodies, by looking into new areas of action geared towards preventing radicalisation of individuals and groups;

4.2.11   promote the emergence and consolidation of forums for inclusive participation of the population (both native and foreign), based horizontally on civic representation rather than on national or religious profiles;

4.2.12   boost the research work of specialised centres and institutes located within the EU and, through cooperation, within countries of particular interest in this context. Specific focus should be given to support for projects and studies designed to gain an insight into the processes that can lead to alienation, recruitment and violent radicalisation and interrelations between the different factors at play.

4.3   **Attending to victims**

4.3.1   Last but not least, attending to the direct victims of terrorist acts should be considered a fundamental part of a general approach, in which civil society plays a key role in fighting

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[3]   EESC opinion of 20.4.2006 on the *Proposal for a Decision of the European Parliament and of the Council concerning the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue (2008),* rapporteur: Ms Cser, (OJ C 185, 8.8.2006).

terrorism. In order to prevent these victims from being forgotten or socially excluded, it is essential in this context to:

4.3.2   campaign for the full recognition of all the rights of victims (including financial compensation due) harmed by any type of terrorist activity, whether within or outside national borders;

4.3.3   develop social support mechanisms (physical, psychological, economic) to help victims overcome their trauma and prevent the emergence of discourse that demonises or is openly racist or xenophobic;

4.3.4   rally political will within national governments and the EU in order to establish agreed bases for acknowledging, assisting and protecting these people.

4.4   **People as the main focus of security and prevention: contributing policies**

4.4.1   Assuming that people are the main asset of any State and, therefore, the EU, and in order to ensure human safety, peace-building and the prevention of violent conflicts, it is necessary to:

4.4.2   develop strategies and multidimensional efforts to guarantee a decent level of wellbeing and safety for all those inhabiting an area, and for their neighbours – for by promoting their development and safety, one guarantees one's own;

4.4.3   reduce and eventually eliminate inequalities between groups and countries, as the main means of promoting safety for all. To ensure integration and undermine the terrorist threat, there must be systematic respect for human rights and a strong democratic climate, guaranteeing freedom of religious practices and ensuring their separation from public affairs. This also means opposing social areas that exist outside the law (legal "limbos" or ghettoes based on customs that are unacceptable in this context);

4.4.4   understand that security cannot be achieved at the cost of freedom, by restricting the rights that define an open and democratic society, or by applying counter-terrorist measures that resemble those used by the other side;

4.4.5   acknowledge that an approach such as that required by counter-terrorism (which must be cross-disciplinary, multi-dimensional and long-term) can only bear fruit if there is a dedicated, adequate budget, bringing together national and Community efforts.

4.5   **Public-private partnerships**

4.5.1   The terrorist threat is widespread, permanent and global. is safe from its impact, and its profile and methods change constantly. This, together with the idea that the right strategy has still not been defined to combat it, results in the need to constantly re-examine the analyses, assessments and methods employed to fight it. This effort involves everybody, from

governments and Community bodies to civil society as a whole. By definition, this will also mean exploring the possibilities for public-private partnerships (under no circumstances allowing this to lead to counterproductive privatisation of security and defence), working towards a common goal: the wellbeing and safety of all[4]. The following key aspects of this approach should be highlighted:

4.5.2 the need to draw up a glossary of terms so that, when it comes to both discussion and action, agreement can be reached on the concepts that will guide the work of all parties and players involved;

4.5.3 democratic monitoring of the counter-terrorism strategy at all levels and in all its guises;

4.5.4 raising awareness of the importance of the Member States' foreign policies – and the CFSP/CESDP at Community level – and national and Community development cooperation policies in preventing terrorism and de-radicalising potential terrorists;

4.5.5 the absolute need for an adequate, long-term budget for all the programmes and initiatives mentioned herein;

4.5.6 the need to open – or maintain – channels for dialogue and cooperation with social, political and economic players, both inside and outside the EU, given the impossibility of successfully fighting this threat alone, and the advantages of joining forces in order to devise consistent, long-term approaches and strategies for action.

Brussels, 22 April 2008.

The President of the European Economic and Social Committee	The Secretary-General of the European Economic and Social Committee
Dimitris Dimitriadis	Patrick Venturini

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[4] In line with the position taken by the EESC's exploratory opinion of 13.9.2006 on *Civil society participation in the fight against organised crime and terrorism*, rapporteurs: Mr Rodríguez García Caro, Mr Pariza Castaños, Mr Cabra de Luna, (OJ C 318, 23.12.2006), point 13.