



**UNITED NATIONS
OFFICE OF COUNTER-TERRORISM**

**Remarks by Mr. Vladimir Voronkov
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European Union Working Party on Terrorism - International Aspects (COTER)

Virtual Conference on “Violent Right-Wing Extremism and Terrorism”

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Excellencies,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear Colleagues,

I am grateful for the invitation to brief you this morning alongside Ambassador Nathan Sales, Mr. Gilles De Kerchove, Mr. Bernd Heinze, and my dear colleague Ms. Michèle Coninsx.

Let me begin by commending Germany’s leadership in putting this important issue on the agenda during its Presidency of the European Union and its membership of the United Nations Security Council.

Member States have firmly committed to combatting terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

This is a core tenet of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, which the United Nations and the European Union work hand-in-hand to promote.

‘Violent right-wing extremism and terrorism’ – to use the wording chosen for this meeting – is of course not a new phenomenon.

Secretary-General Guterres warned about the threat posed by racially, ethnically, politically and ideologically motivated right-wing and supremacist groups that resort to terrorist tactics in both his reports to the General Assembly for the sixth and seventh biennial review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

This threat has been magnified and accelerated by the COVID-19 crisis. Terrorists and violent extremists across the ideological spectrum have exploited the pandemic to disseminate hate speech, conspiracy theories, and anti-government sentiments.

This assessment was broadly shared by Member States during the UN Virtual Counter-Terrorism Week in July.

But Member States’ understanding of the nature of the threat, its severity and its impact on international peace and security varies.

First and foremost, it is critical that Member States continue discussing and exchanging information on this complex and fast evolving phenomenon to develop a common approach.

A lot of interesting insights were shared in this regard in the study from the Counter Extremism Project and the earlier panel moderated by Mr. Schindler.

The threat of 'violent right-wing extremism and terrorism' is characteristic of some of the most difficult counter-terrorism challenges with which we have to contend to prevent, detect and disrupt attacks. For example:

- Grievances that interplay with exclusionary and demonizing narratives.
- Leaderless and decentralized mobilization to violence.
- Savvy use of digital technologies for radicalization and networking, including video games, and for fundraising, including through merchandizing and virtual assets. And,
- Low cost, unsophisticated and often copycat attacks against soft targets.

The apparent nefarious symbiosis with ISIL and Al-Qaida-inspired terrorism adds another layer of complexity. They seem to feed each other's propaganda and imitate each other's behavior.

Dear Colleagues,

It is important that the European Union, its Member States and their partners recognize the need to take action not just individually but collectively to tackle the growing threat of 'violent right-wing extremism and terrorism'.

This is essential to the credibility of our counter-terrorism efforts as a whole.

We must live up to the tenets of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy:

acts of terrorism, irrespective of their motivations, are criminal and unacceptable.

And terrorism is not, and cannot be associated with, any nationality, ethnicity or religion.

As you consider how to mobilize an effective international response, I would like to propose four suggestions:

First, we need to avoid politicization and preserve the consensus that the fight against terrorism currently enjoys.

In our opinion, it is important that greater attention be paid to the transnational links that connect such groups and to consider what tools can be brought to bear against them.

In that respect, terminology can be divisive, and we need to find a pragmatic way forward.

Ultimately, we are looking at acts of terrorism borne out of hatred – individuals or groups, motivated by hate, who resort to terrorist tactics.

Second, respect for human rights and the rule of law must be at the heart of our response.

As always, we must avoid unjustified or disproportionate application of counter-terrorism measures.

There also needs to be a *consistent* approach, under the rule of law, to characterize an act as terrorist and to prosecute perpetrators accordingly, irrespective of their motivation. These laws must be applied in full compliance with human rights norms and standards.

Third, decades of countering terrorism have taught us that we must look beyond security and criminal justice responses towards a multi-disciplinary, holistic approach, including drawing on the recommendations from the United Nations Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism.

We need to take a hard look at the grievances, the anxieties and other drivers at play.

We should tap into the lessons that we continue to learn in tackling ISIL and Al-Qaida-inspired terrorism to help us identify evidence-based and contextualized measures to prevent and counter violent extremism.

This requires us to build partnerships with the academia, civil society organizations and the private sector.

Fourth, it is vital that the international community maintains a proportionate focus on the still dominant, global threat posed by ISIL and Al-Qaida.

This remains the number one threat for terrorism-affected countries in the Middle East, Africa and Asia.

Even in Europe, the recent attacks in France and Austria were brutal reminders of the appeal of ISIL's and Al-Qaida's toxic propaganda.

So, we must be clear that decisive action against 'violent right-wing extremism and terrorism' does not mean any less focus on these two transnational threats.

Dear Colleagues,

I am sure that the European Union, its Member States and partners will continue to facilitate pragmatic and depoliticized discussions on this topic.

The open briefing held by the Security-Council's Counter-Terrorism Committee in October, with the support of our colleagues from the

Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED), was an important step in this regard.

The General Assembly will soon embark on the seventh biennial review of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy during which this issue is likely to be raised.

My Office will support the President of the General Assembly and the Permanent Representatives of Spain and Oman, whom he appointed as co-facilitators, in their efforts to ensure a strong, consensus outcome.

The United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Coordination Compact chaired by my Office provides a strong framework to ensure coherence in our efforts.

Last month, we convened a special retreat of our interagency working group on preventing and countering violent extremism conducive to terrorism, including right wing one, to discuss how we can support Member States in addressing this phenomenon in a consistent and principled way.

It is clear that all our mandates, programmes and tools are aimed against terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

All our efforts are demand-driven, based on requests from Member States.

And we can tap into synergies with the important work led by United Nations Counter-Terrorism Compact entities in separate but connected areas:

This includes *the Strategy and Plan of Action to Address Hate Speech*, coordinated by the Secretary-General's Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide.

The *Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites*, coordinated by the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations.

The *Rabat Plan of Action on the prohibition of advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes incitement to discrimination, hostility or violence*, led by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

And the crucial work of UNESCO on combating anti-Semitism and promoting global citizenship education.

Dear Colleagues,

I am keen to hear your expectations and ideas on how we can work with the European Union and all its Member States to address this growing transnational threat.

Thank you.