

EC takes action to tackle radicalisation through the criminal justice system

Radicalisation is a growing threat

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USPA NEWS - The European Commission hosts the first high-level conference on the criminal justice response to radicalisation. Addressing the problem of radicalisation is a cornerstone of the European Security Agenda, which sets out the European Union's collective response to terrorism.

In this context, on 19 October, the European Commission hosts with the Luxembourgish Presidency, the first high-level conference on the criminal justice response to radicalisation, bringing together Justice Ministers, Members of the European Parliament, Government officials, the Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, Eurojust and frontline practitioners including national prosecutors and prison directors.

Commissioner for Justice, Consumers and Gender Equality, Vera Jourová, will lead discussions on how to deal with radicalisation better, and find the right criminal justice responses to this common challenge. On the occasion of the conference she said: "Radicalisation is a growing threat across Europe. Online radicalisation and the issue of foreign fighters are new challenges that emerged over the last years. Radicalisation in prisons is a particular point of concern."

"Member States have started to develop initiatives to tackle this challenge, but many questions remain on how best to address it. Bringing together all these experiences will help shape an efficient criminal justice response. The Commission is committed to supporting Member States by funding projects in this field and training people in the criminal justice system to deal with radicalised persons," he added.

Also present at the Conference, Commissioner for Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship, Dimitris Avramopoulos said: "Tackling radicalisation head-on is a key priority in our fight against terrorism. Our European Agenda on Security made this very clear. This is a challenge that goes beyond national borders, that requires collective efforts across Member States, at different levels of government, and through agencies and different sectors."

"That is why we are reinforcing our existing Radicalisation Awareness Network with a centre of excellence within Europol, to improve the sharing of best practices and information with more than 2000 key experts and practitioners across Europe. That is also why I will be launching the Internet Forum this year with important industry players to strengthen our collective response to tackling radicalisation online. This is a fight that Europe "our societies, our culture, our Union" cannot afford to lose," he said.

Ministers and practitioners will focus their discussions on the topics: How to avoid radicalisation in prisons and improve risk assessment "representatives of prison administrations and other experts will discuss the responses they have adopted so far, especially on inmate housing (segregated from or integrated into the general prison population) and how to detect signs of radicalisation in the prison community; and new challenges for judges and prosecutors in the national criminal justice systems when dealing with aspirant foreign fighters and returnees; for instance whether rehabilitation programmes during criminal proceedings are feasible.

Conclusions at December

The conclusions of the Conference will be presented by Commissioner Jourová and the Luxembourg Presidency with the support of key Member States at the December Justice and Home Affairs Council. The response to extremism and radicalisation should draw on common European values and integrate a societal dimension into security actions. Following a Colloquium on fundamental rights dedicated to combatting antisemitic and anti-Muslim hatred, the Commission has put forward concrete actions for the EU, national and local authorities, civil society, media and community leaders. They range from education, non-discrimination, inter-faith and inter-cultural dialogue to measures to counter hate crime and hate speech.

The European Commission has been working on radicalisation issues for several years, mainly through the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) set up in 2011. RAN is an umbrella network connecting experts and practitioners involved in preventing radicalisation

and violent extremism throughout Europe. Its aim is to exchange ideas, knowledge and experiences on countering radicalisation and violent extremism.

In April 2015, the Commission presented the European Agenda on Security which drives better information exchanges, increased operational cooperation and mutual trust, drawing on the full range of EU policies and tools. The Agenda prioritises terrorism, organised crime and cybercrime as interlinked areas with a strong cross-border dimension, where EU action can make a real difference. It also focuses on the importance of the criminal justice dimension of the fight against terrorism and organised crime. The Commission defined five priorities for the judicial response to terrorism in the Agenda. One of these priorities is the development of effective de-radicalisation and disengagement programmes both inside and outside prisons.

The Conclusions adopted by the Justice and Home Affairs Council on 15-16 June 2015 on the Renewed EU Internal Security Strategy 2015-2020 confirmed Member States' commitment to working on this issue. These provide a basis for cooperation and joint action in the next five years. Priorities for action include preventing radicalisation in prisons and developing effective de radicalisation and disengagement programmes.

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