



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

*Brussels, 25.1.2018
C(2018) 397 final*

*Mr Urban AHLIN
Speaker of the Riksdag
SE – 100 12 STOCKHOLM*

Dear President,

The Commission would like to thank the Riksdag for its Opinion on the Communication supporting the prevention of radicalisation leading to violent extremism {COM(2016)379 final}.

This Communication reflects the Commission's holistic approach to the prevention of radicalisation. This approach encompasses both the security and the broader societal dimension of the phenomenon and activates the different policy instruments available at local, regional or national as well as the European and international level. In line with the goals identified in the European Agenda on Security¹, the Communication sets out how the European Union intends to support Member States in their efforts with the ultimate objective of enhancing the overall effectiveness of preventive actions throughout the Union while safeguarding and promoting fundamental rights as well as democratic and civic values. The Commission informs about the implementation of a wide range of measures in its monthly progress reports².

The Commission welcomes the feedback of the Riksdag on the Communication, among others on the importance of the local dimension and of a long term approach, the online dimension, prisons, education, research, the fight against racism and xenophobia and discrimination, the international dimension and the work of the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN).

¹ COM(2015) 185 final.

² https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-security/legislative-documents_en; for the last such report please see: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/policies/european-agenda-security/20170516_seventh_progress_report_towards_an_effective_and_genuine_security_union_en.pdf.

The adoption of the Communication on Radicalisation is only a first step towards a more effective and comprehensive approach to prevent and counter violent extremism and terrorism. It will depend on the joint efforts of all actors at national and European Union level, including both public authorities and civil society partners, to respond to the current and emerging challenges, overcome the threats of terrorism and create an area of security and freedom for all citizens. The Commission has carried out a comprehensive assessment of European Union security policy³. In parallel, the Commission established a High-level Commission Expert Group on Radicalisation⁴ (HLCEG-R) with a view to enhance efforts to prevent and counter radicalisation leading to violent extremism and terrorism. The Expert Group's objective is to improve coordination and cooperation between all relevant stakeholders, by, inter alia, exploring options for more sustainable cooperation mechanisms and structures. The Commission welcomes Sweden's active engagement in the work of the Expert Group. On 24 November 2017 the Expert Group endorsed the Group's interim report which sets out the Group's preliminary findings and recommendations. The Justice and Home Affairs Council on 7 December 2017 discussed the interim report.

In response to the more technical comments in the Opinion, the Commission would like to refer to the attached annex.

The Commission hopes that the clarifications provided in this reply address the issues raised by the Riksdag and looks forward to continuing the political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,

*Frans Timmermans
First Vice-President*

*Dimitris Avramopoulos
Member of the Commission*

³ See Commission SWD (2017) 278.

⁴ Commission Decision C/2017/5149 Commission Decision of 27 July 2017 setting-up the High-Level Commission Expert Group on radicalisation.

ANNEX

The Commission has carefully considered the issues raised by the Riksdag in its Opinion and would like to offer the following observations grouped by topic.

*The Commission very much shares the views expressed by the Riksdag about the need for all actors to work together. **The Radicalisation Awareness Network and its Centre of Excellence** remain key partners in facilitating these exchanges in a number of priority areas highlighted in the Communication and in your Opinion. In addition to providing a platform for stakeholders to exchange experiences and identify best practices, the Radicalisation Awareness Network Centre of Excellence is providing **tailor-made support services to Member States**⁵, for instance for developing and implementing prevention strategies, establishing multi-agency frameworks or advice on any other kind of prevention approach or intervention. The Commission notes that Sweden has already benefited once from such support services. The Commission appreciates the Opinion expressing satisfaction with the support provided by the Radicalisation Awareness Network to Member States. The Commission encourages both policy makers and practitioners from Sweden to continue to take full advantage of all activities and services offered by the Radicalisation Awareness Network so as to equip practitioners, experts and civil society organisations with the required skills and insights in tackling radicalisation more effectively.*

*The Communication also calls for **cooperation between Member States** and sets the creation of a network of contact points and a repository of prevention strategies as key deliverables. The Commission has already organised and hosted meetings of the **network of prevent policy makers** in early 2017. In line with the conclusions of the Comprehensive assessment and with a view to enhance efforts to prevent and counter radicalisation leading to violent extremism and terrorism as well as to improve coordination and cooperation between all relevant stakeholders, the Commission established on 27 July 2017 a group of high-level experts in the field of preventing and countering of radicalisation (**High Level Commission Expert Group on Radicalisation (HLCEG-R)**). This group advises on the further development of European Union policies in the area of preventing radicalisation leading to violent extremism and terrorism as well as options for future more structured cooperation between the different stakeholders including practitioners and Member States in this field, building on existing bottom-up approaches. Sweden is an active member of this group. The Members of the HLCEG-R meeting on 24 November discussed and endorsed the group's interim report including its recommendations which were discussed by the Justice and Home Affairs Council on 7 December 2017. The Commission's reaction to the group's recommendations will be set out in the January 2018 Security Union Progress Report.*

⁵ https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/ran-and-member-states_en.

*The Commission shares the Riksdag's appreciation of the importance of countering the use of the internet for the purpose of radicalising people and polarising society. The European Union Internet Forum has been set up to tackle **terrorist use of the Internet**, whilst fully safeguarding fundamental rights, such as freedom of expression, as also highlighted by the Riksdag. The European Union Internet Forum focuses on reducing the availability and impact on terrorist propaganda online by, on the one hand, ensuring the swift removal of such content on the Internet and in social media and, on the other hand, supporting civil society in developing counter or alternative narratives. The European Union Internet Forum is pursuing **a voluntary approach** with the internet industry in relation to tackling terrorist content online and protecting online users. At the ministerial meeting on 6 December 2017, members of the forum presented progress on the action plan agreed in July this year; progress concerned in particular the data base of hashes, increased investment in automated detection and swifter removal of terrorist content upon referral. The efforts under the Forum feed into the broader policy discussions on illegal content online.*

*The **European Union Internet Referral Unit at Europol** refers terrorist propaganda to the host company, so that the company itself can decide whether or not to remove the material in accordance with their terms and conditions, which generally prohibit terrorist content. Europol examines such material not only against companies' terms and conditions but also taking into account the existing European Union legal framework on terrorist offences which includes incitement, recruitment or instructions to commit terrorist attacks online. It focusses its actions on material produced by those groups designated as terrorist organisations by both the United Nations and the European Union.*

*In this context, it is worth noting that the recently adopted **Directive on combating terrorism** requires Member States to adopt measures that ensure the prompt removal and where necessary blocking access of certain types of terrorist material, subject to certain safeguards; any such measures are without prejudice to voluntary arrangements with the internet industry.⁶*

*Work on the **development of counter or alternative narratives** is undertaken also within the Radicalisation Awareness Network and more specifically within its working group on Communication and Narratives. The Radicalisation Awareness Network and its Centre of Excellence is also playing a vital role in supporting the **Civil Society Empowerment Programme**⁷. In this context, a training of Swedish civil society actors⁸ took place on 15 May 2017. This Programme aims to equip civil society partners with the technical skills and training required to provide positive alternative narratives, in line with democratic and*

⁶ Directive (EU) 2017/541 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 15 March 2017 on combating terrorism and replacing Council Framework Decision 2002/475/JHA and amending Council Decision 2005/671/JHA, OJ L 88, 31.3.2017, see in particular Article 21 and recital 22.

⁷ https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/civil-society-empowerment-programme_en.

⁸ Training material in Swedish is available at following website: https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/civil-society-empowerment-programme/training_en.

fundamental values, to that of the violent and divisive terrorist narrative. Efforts are being ramped up over the course of 2017 and Sweden continues to be an important and active member of the Forum. The Commission only recently launched a call for proposals supporting civil society actors in developing their own counter or alternative narratives with an overall budget of EUR 6 million.

The Commission welcomes the Riksdag's views about the importance of ensuring an effective implementation of the Union legislation on combating racism and xenophobia⁹. Unmasking racist and xenophobic hate crimes, protecting and supporting victims and countering public incitement to hatred and violence which targets minority individuals or groups are key priorities in the Commission's actions. These include targeted European Union funds as well as practical guidance and best practices developed by the Commission with the Member States and other international organisations in the context of the High Level Group on Combatting Racism, Xenophobia and all other forms of intolerance.

Combating racism is a European Union policy objective in itself. It however also contributes, alongside education, inclusion and non-discrimination policies to address certain root causes of radicalisation.

*The Commission is particularly concerned in this context by the spread of illegal hate speech online. Since the adoption of the Code of Conduct **on countering illegal hate speech online**¹⁰¹¹, IT companies have improved time and response to illegal hate speech, have strengthened their reporting systems and made it easier to report, trained their staff and they have increased their cooperation with civil society. The Commission will reach out to other relevant social platforms to ensure that illegal hate speech is adequately countered in Europe. The Commission attaches great importance to tackling radicalisation in the **prisons** and the **probation** sector. The Commission organised a High-Level Conference on 19 October 2015 on the Criminal Justice responses to radicalisation. The objective was to discuss the issue of radicalisation in prisons and the new challenges judges and prosecutors face when dealing with radicalised individuals. The outcome of the Conference has fed into the Justice and Home Affairs Council Conclusions on enhancing the criminal justice response to radicalisation of 20 November 2015 (14382/15). Currently the main challenge for the Commission is to speed up implementation of the Council Conclusions by the Member States and to encourage them to fully benefit from the financial support offered by the Justice programme to develop de-radicalisation and rehabilitation programmes in and outside prisons, risk assessment tools and training schemes for all actors on the ground. To this effect the Commission earmarked EUR 6.5 million in 2015 and 2016 for projects in the field of radicalisation in prisons. A conference will be held on 27 February 2018 to take stock of the state of play of the projects funded by the Commission, including the 18 projects funded under the Justice Programme with a focus on the use of de-radicalisation, disengagement and*

⁹ In particular, Council Framework Decision 2008/913/JHA, of 28 November 2008, on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law.

¹⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/justice/fundamental-rights/files/hate_speech_code_of_conduct_en.pdf.

¹¹ http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-1471_en.htm.

rehabilitation programmes, risk assessment tools and alternatives to detention, in particular for juvenile offenders.

The Commission is also working with the European Judicial Training Network by funding a training programme on radicalisation for judges and prosecutors to provide them with the necessary knowledge and skills to deal with radicalised people, and make available risk assessment tools and methodologies for determining the level of threat posed by suspects of terrorist crimes.

Organisations which receive operating grants from the Commission, such as the European Confederation for Probation (CEP) and EuroPris are also closely involved in the issue of radicalisation in prisons. EuroPris works together with RAN and the European Penitentiary Training Academies (EPTA) to set up an online collection of good prison training practices.

The Radicalisation Awareness Network Working Group on Prison and Probation develops and provides support to practitioners and authorities, through the exchange of best practices, the formulation of recommendations¹², practical guidance and training. The Commission hopes that these recommendations and guidance prove useful for practitioners in Sweden and for further efforts that the Swedish Government may want to undertake in this area in line with the reports and communications mentioned in the Opinion.

*As regards the **security dimension of radicalisation**, the Commission has proposed the revision of the **Schengen Information System (SIS)** on 21 December 2016. The proposals, amongst others, make the creation of terrorism related alerts mandatory and extend the use of biometrical identifiers by adding facial images and crime scene fingerprints and by establishing a new alert category on unknown wanted persons. The proposals also strengthen Schengen Information System concerning irregular migration as they make the creation of refusal of entry alerts mandatory and they also provide for the obligation to share individual return decisions. In addition, other operational, technical and legal changes will also be addressed as a result of the overall evaluation of Schengen Information System, which will reinforce the use of the system for counter-terrorism purposes.*

*Recognising the need for enhancing skills in the education sector, the Commission supports Member States in equipping **teachers** to better identify and respond to signs of radicalisation. Exchanges among teachers are facilitated at European level through a number of initiatives, including for instance the dedicated Radicalisation Awareness Network working group for teachers and educators. Within the policy cooperation framework "Education and Training 2020", a Working Group on promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education has been set up. It supports evidence-based exchange of good practices among Member States and develops policy messages, including on teacher training for social and civic competences and managing diversity in the*

¹² https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/what-we-do/networks/radicalisation_awareness_network/about-ran/ran-p-and-p/docs/ran_pp_approaches_to_violent_extremist_en.pdf.

classroom. Also, eTwinning, which is funded under the Erasmus+ programme, is the biggest network of teachers and schools in the European Union supports. Its potential in this context, is being fully exploited giving greater focus on themes linked to citizenship.

*The Commission shares the Riksdag's view on the necessity to step up efforts to increase knowledge on radicalisation through **research**. The Radicalisation Awareness Network Centre of Excellence has recently prepared a research gap analysis¹³ whose results the Commission will take into consideration when commissioning new research. Furthermore, several research projects on anti-radicalisation, aimed at producing scientific tools, and providing policy suggestions for direct use by law enforcement agencies and security policy-makers, including by the experts of the Radicalisation Awareness Network network, are managed in the framework of the Seventh Framework Programme's Security theme as well as of the Horizon 2020 security research programme. Four of these research projects, worth EUR 12 million in European Union contribution have been launched this year alone.*

*The Commission shares the Riksdag's views on the importance of the **international dimension** of preventing and countering violent extremism and terrorism and is cooperating closely with the relevant international organisations and third countries in this respect.*

¹³ https://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/sites/homeaffairs/files/docs/pages/201612_radicalisation_research_gap_analysis_en.pdf.