The OSCE's efforts to counter violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism: A comprehensive approach addressing root causes?

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Introduction

Violent extremism and terrorism have been high on the (international) political agenda for decades, especially gaining traction after the attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001. Many local, national and international actors are involved in the struggle against individuals or groups that commit crimes that

> 'may seriously damage a country or an international organisation […] committed with the aim of: seriously intimidating a population; or unduly compelling a Government or international organisation to perform or abstain from performing any act; or seriously destabilising or destroying the fundamental political, constitutional, economic or social structures of a country or an international organisation.'[3]

In general, these actors try to decrease the likelihood of violent radicalisation resulting in terrorism by addressing the factors which are conducive to this process. Aware of the complex transnational nature of the threat there is a strong emphasis on cooperation between different actors, both within and across states. Moreover, as terrorism is caused by a multitude of factors, it is common wisdom that any approach to counter terrorism requires a wide or comprehensive approach.

This paper aims to shed light on the efforts of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) to address violent extremism and radicalisation that lead to terrorism (VERLT). It provides an overview of the growing attention to the phenomenon within the OSCE and the ways in which its activities and approaches have been developed. The paper focuses on the OSCE's comprehensiveness in dealing with the causal factors of terrorism. In order to be able to investigate the extent of the Organisation's self-claimed comprehensive approach to preventing and combating

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[3]   See the EU definition of terrorism, Art. 1 of the *Framework Decision on Combating Terrorism* (2002).

terrorism,[4] as a yardstick we use the framework of causes of terrorism provided by Tore Bjørgo et al. in the much praised publication 'Root Causes of Terrorism. Myths, reality and ways forward'.[5]

Understanding the threat

After '9/11', the increased awareness of the seriousness of the threat of terrorism has been followed by a growing number of professional and academic publications on the process of (violent) radicalisation. Much attention has been devoted to factors that contribute to radicalisation, recruitment, and — eventually — terrorism. Many of the most interesting reports regarding 'what had happened' were released by governmental agencies, but also the academic world contributed to the growing body of literature on the causes of violent extremism, radicalisation and terrorism.[6]

The various efforts to isolate contributing factors across different contexts have not only produced an awareness of the complexity of these phenomena, but also some generally accepted categories. The kaleidoscope of factors can roughly be divided into an internal and an external dimension. According to Magnus Ranstorp, some of the internal factors relate to issues such as polarising public rhetoric, stigmatisation or identity crises.[7] The external dimension includes Western military interventions, the role of global media and cyberspace and a general perception of injustice suffered by Muslims. Personal and collective grievances and discontent are the dominant factors of both dimensions and can be considered to be at the core of the root causes of radicalisation and terrorism. Other often used categories of causes and contributing factors include the conceptual distinction between root causes and trigger causes or preconditions and precipitants — the latter concepts were already introduced in 1981 by Martha Crenshaw.[8]

Probably the most comprehensive publication on the causes of radicalisation and terrorism of the last decade is 'Root Causes of Terrorism. Myths, reality and ways forward', edited by Tore Bjørgo. This book

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[4] See for instance the remarks by OSCE Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut at the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee, New York, 24 February 2011. See the OSCE press release at http://www.OSCE.org/sg/75766.

[5] Tore Bjørgo, Introduction pp. 4-5, in: Tore Bjørgo (ed.), Root causes of terrorism. Myths, reality and the ways forward, London: Routledge, 2005.

[6] For an excellent overview of the state of the art in (counter) terrorism in general see Alex Schmid (ed.) The Routledge handbook of terrorism research, London-New York: Routledge, 2011. For an overview of the literature specifically focusing on (de)radicalisation see Alex Schmid and Eric Price, 'Selected literature on radicalization and de-radicalization of terrorists: Monographs, edited volumes, grey literature and prime articles published since the 1960s', in: Crime, Law and Social Change (2011) 55:337-348.

[7] Magnus Ranstorp, (eds), *Understanding Violent Radicalisation: Terrorist and Jihadist Movements in Europe*, London: Routledge 2010), p.4.

[8] Martha Crenshaw, 'The Causes of Terrorism', *Comparative Politics* 13/4 (1981) pp.379-399.

provides a generic framework on the root causes of terrorism which distinguishes four categories that cause terrorism: Structural causes; facilitating (or accelerator) causes; motivational causes; and triggering causes. Structural causes are causes which affect people's lives in ways that they may or may not comprehend, at a rather abstract macro level. Examples are demographic imbalances, globalisation, rapid modernisation, increasing individualism, etc. Facilitator (or accelerator) causes enable or activate terrorism without being prime movers. Examples include the evolution of modern news media, transportation, weapons technology, and weak state control of territory. Motivational causes are the actual or perceived grievances that people experience at a personal level that motivate them to act These types of causes may also be seen as concrete 'symptoms' of more fundamental structural causes. Finally, triggering causes are the direct precipitators of terrorist acts. They may be momentous or provocative events that call for revenge or action. Think of a political calamity, an outrageous act committed by the enemy or even peace talks that may trigger opponents of political compromise to carry out terrorist attacks in order to undermine negotiations and discredit moderates.[9] Based on the above-mentioned broad categories, Bjørgo et al. have identified the following fourteen more specific set of root causes of terrorism:[10]

1. Lack of democracy, civil liberties and the rule of law
2. Failed or weak states
3. Rapid modernisation
4. Extremist ideologies
5. Historical antecedents of political violence, civil wars, revolutions, dictatorships or occupation
6. Hegemony and inequality of power
7. Illegitimate or corrupt governments
8. Powerful external actors upholding illegitimate governments
9. Repression by foreign occupation or by colonial powers
10. The experience of discrimination on the basis of ethnic or religious origin
11. Failure or unwillingness by the state to integrate dissident groups or emerging social classes
12. The experience of social injustice
13. The presence of charismatic ideological leaders
14. Triggering events

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9 Tore Bjørgo, Introduction pp. 4-5, in: Tore BjørgoBjørgo (ed.), Root causes of terrorism. Myths, reality and the ways forward, London: Routledge, 2005.

10 Tore Bjørgo, Conclusions, pp. 259-260, in: Tore BjørgoBjørgo (ed.), Root causes of terrorism. Myths, reality and the ways forward, London: Routledge, 2005.

These fourteen sets of causes clearly indicate that terrorism is the product of a wide range of factors which are different in scope and nature, the impact of which depends on personal and contextual factors. Some of the sets of causal factors reflect general trends in society that cannot or are very difficult to influence by individuals or even governments, e.g. rapid modernisation or historical antecedents. Other sets are clearly the subject or object of policymaking such as a lack of democracy, civil liberties and the rule of law or the experience of discrimination on the basis of ethnic or religious origin.

As can be derived from the general framework of the root causes of terrorism by Bjørgo et al., as well as other scholarly and expert studies, the underlying mechanisms of this process are highly complex, multi-dimensional and context-specific. Moreover, it may change over time and it may vary in different settings or contexts. Given the multitude of contributing factors and their complex interplay, any attempt to counter the process of violent extremism and terrorism requires a comprehensive approach that focuses primarily on individuals to prevent them from radicalising. In the next section, we will explore and discuss the different actions developed by the OSCE to deal with these phenomena and processes. We will also examine the extent to which these actions focus on the root causes of terrorism.

The OSCE and countering violent extremism
When the United Nations (UN) Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy was adopted by UN Member States on 8 September 2006, it was applauded for its comprehensive approach to countering terrorism, focusing not only on measures to combat terrorism but also on effective ways to prevent it and to address conditions conducive to its spreading.

However, it was the OSCE Bucharest Plan of Action for Combating Terrorism, adopted by the OSCE Ministerial Council in December 2001, almost five years earlier, in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, that was one of the first international documents to recognise the necessity of a broad approach to counter-terrorism.[11] The Bucharest Plan of Action

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[11]   It should be noted that to the OSCE (counter)terrorism is not a post '9/11' phenomenon. In fact, already in the Concluding Document of the 1980-1983 second follow-up meeting held in Madrid, terrorism is mentioned and which expressed the Participating States' concern about terrorism. According to the document, 'The participating States condemn terrorism, including terrorism in international relations, as endangering or taking innocent human lives or otherwise jeopardizing human rights and fundamental freedoms and emphasize the necessity to take resolute measures to combat it. They express their determination to take effective measures for the prevention and suppression of acts of terrorism …'. (1983:5). Nonetheless, before '9/11', the OSCE did not feel that it had a mandate to actively deal with terrorism-related issues — this was made very clear in several statements in 2000 when it was said that the UN would be the organisation that deals with terrorism. A joint OSCE — UNODC conference that

highlighted the importance of a comprehensive approach to countering terrorism and the need to address 'the various social, economic, political and other factors, including violent separatism and extremism, which engender conditions in which terrorist organizations are able to recruit and win support.'[12] The Plan of Action emphasised that 'the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security provides comparative advantages in combating terrorism by identifying and addressing these factors through all relevant OSCE instruments and structures.'[13]

The OSCE was thus ahead of the game in its recognition that not solely repressive action but preventive efforts focused on addressing some of the conditions conducive to the spread of violent extremism are the most effective approach. As such, the whole range of OSCE activities across its three dimensions — the politico-military, economic and environmental, and human dimension — contributes, directly or indirectly, to countering VERLT in the long term. Be it activities focused on conflict prevention, the promotion of human rights, the freedom of the media, minority rights, or the establishment of good governance mechanisms.

However, there is recognition in the OSCE of the fact that while a broad range of OSCE commitments and activities contribute to preventing terrorism, they should not be framed around nor labelled as counter-terrorism. For instance, promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women is an objective on its own; it should not be pursued just because it may benefit the counter-terrorism agenda. EU Counter-terrorism coordinator Gilles de Kerchove has made similar remarks, arguing for a distinction between certain activities that are counter-terrorism-specific, and others that are counter-terrorism-relevant but should not necessarily be formally labelled as such.[14]

The principal focal point for coordinating and facilitating OSCE initiatives and capacity-building programmes in combating terrorism is the Action against Terrorism Unit (ATU), which became operational in 2003. Since the beginning of 2012, ATU has become part of the OSCE Secretariat's new Transnational Threats Department (TNT), which brings together the

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was held in Tashkent in that year on countering drugs, organised crime and terrorism could not even be formally declared an OSCE conference as many Participating States were against this and the Austrian Chairmanship had to label it a Chairmanship conference. For the Summary Report of the conference, see http://www.unodc.org/pdf/uzbekistan/tashkent_ conference.pdf.

[12] OSCE, The Bucharest Plan of Action for Combating Terrorism, MC(9).DEC/1, 4 December 2001, p. 2.

[13] OSCE, The Bucharest Plan of Action for Combating Terrorism, MC(9). DEC/1, 4 December 2001, pp. 2-3.

[14] '10 years — 10 lessons: What our experiences since 9/11 can teach us for the future', speech by EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator Gilles de Kerchove on 5 September 2011, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/1267061/10-years-10-lessons.pdf.

Secretariat's work in the field of counter-terrorism, policing, border security and cyber security.

In terms of activities for countering VERLT, ATU started first to address this area in 2005 within the framework of expert workshops promoting the exchange of lessons learned and good practices in countering the use of the internet for terrorist purposes and in countering incitement to terrorism. This included a joint OSCE — Council of Europe Expert workshop in 2006 on fighting incitement and related activities.

Next, the issue of countering VERLT was approached from the perspective of promoting public-private partnerships in countering terrorism, a theme that gained prominence during the Spanish Chairmanship of the OSCE in 2007, with the organisation of a High Level Political Conference on 'Partnership of State Authorities, Civil Society and the Business Community in Combating Terrorism' and the subsequent adoption of Ministerial Council Decision 5/07 on public-private partnerships in countering terrorism. Both the Conference and the subsequent Decision recognised the importance of partnerships with civil society and the media in addressing the underlying factors, such as social, political, and economic conditions which terrorists exploit, as well as in promoting tolerance, human rights, the rule of law, democracy, good governance and inter-cultural dialogue, and in promoting public awareness and outreach through the media and educational institutions, while respecting cultural and religious diversity.

At the Madrid OSCE Ministerial Council, the term VERLT emerged explicitly for the first time as part of a Ministerial Statement 3/07 adopted in support of the UN Global Counter Terrorism Strategy. The Statement provided recognition of the OSCE's involvement in countering VERLT and an encouragement for further activities in this field. Specifically, the Statement noted that intolerance and discrimination must be addressed and countered by the OSCE Participating States and the OSCE's executive structures within their respective mandates, and that the OSCE Permanent Council would consider in 2008 how the OSCE, with a multidimensional approach, could contribute to the development of a better understanding of the phenomena of VERLT, through sharing national experiences.

But it was the 2008 OSCE Ministerial Council Decision (MC.DEC/10/08) on Further Promoting the OSCE's Action in Countering Terrorism that provided ATU and other OSCE executive structures with a specific mandate to work on VERLT. The Decision:

> 'calls upon the OSCE participating States to make use of the OSCE executive structures in countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism in their respective countries. To this end, participating States are encouraged to continue to exchange ideas and national best practices about their strategies and measures to counter violent extremism and radicalization that lead to

> terrorism as well as to enhance their co-operation with media, the business community, industry and civil society'.

Prior to the adoption of this provision, ATU was only able to address VERLT either from the perspective of promoting public-private partnerships and countering the use of the internet for terrorist purposes, or through an activity at the initiative of a Participating State providing political and financial sponsorship. Now, with the 2008 Decision, Participating States are encouraged to file individual country requests to ATU or other executive structures for activities in the area of VERLT. It should be noted that — being part of a member-driven intergovernmental organisation — ATU cannot proactively initiate new programmes without either a clear mandate to do so or a specific country request. This is one of the main frustrations: it requires a huge and time-consuming effort — i.e. many meetings and political dialogues — to get countries moving.

Two Tracks
ATU has sought to become more active on VERLT since 2011, as there was a growing realisation that VERLT is one of the strategic areas where the OSCE should do more. In late 2010, ATU organised a series of VERLT-related activities to build new momentum, including an OSCE Chairmanship Conference on Successful Strategies, Effective Policies and Best Practices to Prevent Terrorism, held on 14-15 October 2010 in Astana; a Central Asian Regional Seminar on Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism, organised jointly with the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate and the Government of Uzbekistan on 9-10 December 2010 in Tashkent; and a Public-Private Expert Workshop for South Eastern Europe on Suppressing Terrorist Financing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism, held on 8-10 December 2010 in Sarajevo.

At present, ATU seeks to develop OSCE engagement in countering VERLT following two tracks.

Harnessing the OSCE's multi-dimensional approach to VERLT
ATU has been strengthening its collaboration with the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), working closely together on human rights and good governance-related issues to make sure that VERLT is understood as not only a law enforcement issue but a multidimensional threat that requires a human rights-compliant, comprehensive, multi-stakeholder response. The first ever joint ATU-ODIHR activities have been two roundtable meetings focused on preventing female terrorist radicalisation and on the empowerment of women in Countering VERLT. Although initially having to overcome differences in background and vision, ATU and ODIHR see joint activities as mutually beneficial; a third joint meeting is being planned for the end of 2012.

ATU is also collaborating with ODIHR and the OSCE Strategic Police Matters Unit (SPMU) in promoting the use of community policing to prevent terrorism and counter VERLT. Community policing is often already a component of OSCE police reform assistance programmes implemented by individual field operations; community policing additionally falls under the mandate of SPMU, which is now also part of the Secretariat's TNT Department. ATU and SPMU have already organised national workshops on community policing and countering VERLT in Kyrgyzstan and Montenegro, working jointly with the respective OSCE field offices. The aim of the guidebook is 'to provide guidance, based on international experiences and in line with OSCE commitments in the field of counter-terrorism and human rights, on how to leverage community policing as part of an effective human-rights compliant, gender sensitive and multi-disciplinary approach to countering terrorism.' It will be directed towards policy level officials and community leaders, and fed by the expertise, experience and research of academics and practitioners, including through an online forum. The guidebook is intended to serve as a basis for follow-up projects with interested OSCE Participating States, including training programmes.

Furthermore, ATU is continuing its activities in the field of countering the use of the Internet for terrorist purposes, including connections with VERLT. Concerned about the extent of the use of the Internet by terrorist organisations, OSCE Participating States have adopted two Ministerial Council Decisions that serve as the basis for the ATU's ongoing active role in this area. Specifically, Participating States committed to exchange information on the use of the Internet for terrorist purposes and to identify possible strategies to combat this threat, while ensuring respect for relevant international human rights obligations and standards (MC.DEC/3/04). They further decided, *inter alia*, to intensify their action by enhancing international co-operation on countering the use of the Internet for terrorist purposes and to explore the possibility for a more active engagement by civil society institutions and the private sector in preventing and countering the use of the Internet for terrorist purposes (MC.DEC/7/06). ATU has assisted Participating States with their commitments in this field by organising four OSCE-wide events as well as three national workshops, including in 2007 an Expert Workshop on Combating Incitement to Terrorism on the Internet. In 2012, four online expert workshops will be conducted on 1) the Internet used as a tactical facilitator by terrorists, 2) terrorist use of social networking tools, 3) right-wing extremism/terrorist use of the Internet, and 4) institutionalising public-private partnerships to combat terrorist use of the Internet.

Engaging participating States in more systematic, tailored capacity-building projects

The second track pursued by ATU is to try to move away from piecemeal, ad hoc workshops by initiating and supporting a more systematic OSCE engagement with interested countries and, where possible, encouraging OSCE field operations to become more active and potentially take the lead. The idea is that the various field offices have long established relationships with their respective host country, which could enable them to address VERLT-related issues as part of their comprehensive package of activities, which should ideally lead to a more sustained engagement on VERLT instead of ad-hoc initiatives.

To date, however, only the OSCE Office in Tajikistan is actively engaged in VERLT with the first ever VERLT field programme, a half million Euro project. The first phase of the project, already accomplished, involved an assessment of the (perceived) threat of VERLT in Tajikistan, based on a survey completed by over 3,500 respondents consisting of a cross-section of the population. The survey contained questions on threat perception, the role of religion, experience with radicalisation processes and perceptions about the most effective ways and the most relevant stakeholders to counter VERLT. Following the publication and the presentation of the results of the survey, the programme is currently moving to its second phase — capacity building. Based on the survey's outcomes, OSCE hopes to engage a broad range of actors in capacity building and training efforts in five distinct domains: religious education & counter narratives, civil society & community policing, threat assessment tools and methodologies for government agencies, prisons, and the media.

The hope is that this programme serves as a source of inspiration, a useful example for other field missions that may consider implementing a VERLT programme.

Individual national seminars and workshops on VERLT organised by ATU are seen as confidence-building actions between the OSCE and the host country, preparing the ground vis-à-vis the authorities as well as the colleagues in the field office. These events focus *inter alia* on social science-based research on VERLT trends, policy/action plan formulation, criminal justice responses to VERLT (adequate criminalisation and human rights-compliant/rule of law-based law enforcement action), upstream prevention (e.g. promoting tolerance, religious freedom/education, community cohesion, youth/women initiatives, including public-private partnerships).

Long-term engagement
The last track especially signifies the ambition for more sustained, long-term engagement with individual countries, making effective use of OSCE field operations.
The capacity of field offices is a major obstacle here, as they often have large mandates, a limited number of staff and a wide range of projects to

implement. The person in the field office who would be best suited to engage in VERLT activities is very likely already dealing with issues of disarmament, police reform, tactical training, etc. Hence, a great deal of the preparatory work on the development of new programmes must be done by ATU, tailored to the needs of the respective host country and including the mobilisation of extra financial and human resources. While field operations would then take the lead in implementing field VERLT programmes, ATU would further assist in mobilising international expertise and would ensure co-ordination so that all programmes follow the same understanding and approach, and possible synergies between them are effectively used.

Furthermore, there is the question whether ATU — and for that matter for the whole of the OSCE — should engage more on VERLT issues with individual Participating States 'west of Vienna'. Many Participating States believe that the OSCE's raison d'être is activities east of Vienna, and in particular where it has field operations (Eastern Europe, South-Eastern Europe, South Caucuses and Central Asia). Although this is partly understandable in terms of areas of improvement and donor capacities, it would be a positive sign on the part of Participating States west of Vienna to host meetings in their own countries, especially since no country is immune to the threat of VERLT.

An opportunity to balance the geographic focus of its activities would also allow ATU to devote more attention to the threat posed by types of violent extremism other than Al Qaeda-inspired violent extremism. This would appear particularly warranted in light of, for instance, the case of the attacks by Anders Breivik and failing to do so might otherwise give rise to a perception that the OSCE focuses unduly on Islamist violent extremism only. However, more than 90% of the ATU's work relies on extra-budgetary funds and therefore depends on the interests of donors, which are all countries from Western Europe and North America.

A comprehensive approach?

Despite the mentioned challenges, limitations and shortcomings, it could be argued that the OSCE approach in dealing with VERLT is indeed comprehensive in nature, addressing the underlying factors that could lead to terrorism. When looking at the fourteen root causes of terrorism and radicalisation provided by Tore Bjørgo the VERLT-related approach directly addresses most specifically the root causes 'lack of democracy, civil liberties and the rule of law', 'extremist ideologies', and 'the experience of discrimination on the basis of ethnic or religious origin'. These are mainly facilitating (or accelerator) and motivational causes. In addition to that, the OSCE, through its general work on the three dimensions of security, also addresses many root causes. Or in its own words 'the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security provides comparative advantages in combating terrorism by identifying and addressing these factors through all

relevant OSCE instruments and structures.'[15] The most notable of these factors and Bjørgo's root causes are 'historical antecedents of political violence, civil wars, revolutions, dictatorships or occupation', 'hegemony and inequality of power', 'illegitimate or corrupt governments', 'failure or unwillingness by the state to integrate dissident groups or emerging social classes', and 'the experience of social injustice'. These are mainly structural and facilitating causes. It should be noted that some of the root causes cannot be addressed in terms of concrete policies or dialogues. Think of the factor 'rapid modernisation', particular circumstances such as 'the presence of charismatic ideological leaders', or incidents like 'trigger events'.

All in all, it is safe to say that regarding counter-terrorism and radicalisation, the OSCE lives up to its concept of common and comprehensive security. It provides a much needed platform for a wide range of actors to cooperate and/or learn from each other. The focus on public-private partnerships and civil society are important elements of this both comprehensive and cooperative approach. It is worth repeating that in fact the OSCE was one of the first international organisations to recognise the necessity to address 'the various social, economic, political and other factors, including violent separatism and extremism, which engender conditions in which terrorist organizations are able to recruit and win support'.[16]

The comprehensiveness of the OSCE in relation to counter-terrorism and radicalisation, however, does not say much about its effectiveness in addressing VERLT. Given the challenges, limitations and shortcomings mentioned above, the Organisation still has a long way to go in strengthening collaboration between the various units, offices and missions and in convincing Participating states that VERLT is understood as not only a state-centred, law enforcement issue but a multi-dimensional threat that requires a human rights-compliant, comprehensive, multi-stakeholder response.

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[15] OSCE Bucharest Plan of Action for Combating Terrorism, adopted by the OSCE Ministerial Council in December 2001.

[16] OSCE Bucharest Plan of Action for Combating Terrorism, adopted by the OSCE Ministerial Council in December 2001.