



in co-operation with



Building Bridges: Promoting Dialogue to Prevent Radicalization and Violent Extremism

Vienna, 21-22 May 2015

Concept Note

In recent years, countries in the OSCE area have become increasingly diverse, taking in people of different cultures, faiths and ethnicities through successive waves of immigration. In some societies, this influx has increased debates and tensions over issues such as diversity, integration, respect for minority rights, and religious freedom. Many OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation have made significant efforts to build bridges between communities and to promote mutual respect and strengthen mutual understanding between people from different cultural and religious backgrounds. However, a complicated interaction between political, socio-economic and ideological factors can lead to the marginalization of some individuals, groups, and communities, which in turn can push some of them toward the kinds of violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism.

The 2005 Cordoba Declaration rejects equating terrorism and extremism with any religion, culture, ethnic group, nationality or race. Nevertheless, counter-terrorism policies in the OSCE area have in some instances contributed to stigmatizing certain religious and/or ethnic groups by associating their beliefs and culture with violent extremism and terrorism. This risks validating controversial narratives and intolerant ideologies and may further alienate and marginalize groups already perceived as being outside the mainstream.

As more and more communities in both the OSCE area and neighbouring regions face growing threats from violence motivated by extremism and as well as increasing intolerance towards people with certain cultural, ethnic and/or religious backgrounds, it is more important than ever to engage different communities and religious groups in inclusive, frank and constructive dialogue with each other. Such dialogue has the potential to increase mutual understanding and respect between different groups. It can also help us gain a better understanding of the nature and main drivers of violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism.

This OSCE Security Days event on “**Building Bridges: Promoting Dialogue to Prevent Radicalization and Violent Extremism**” will provide a forum for dissecting the roots of the challenge we are facing and discussing how different levers and tools – including media, education, inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue, and empowerment of women and youth – can contribute to effective counter-narratives that can help reduce tensions and turn vulnerable individuals away from the kinds of extremism and radicalization that lead to violence. It is also intended as the launching pad for further collaboration between the OSCE and other international and regional organizations on preventing violent extremism and radicalization by promoting tolerance, non-discrimination and respect for diversity.

The OSCE has traditionally been active in promoting initiatives and creating platforms for many different forms of dialogue at various levels as a means of countering misperceptions, decreasing tensions, preventing conflict and promoting stability across the OSCE area. Although inter-cultural and inter/intra-religious dialogue is not something new, the OSCE seeks to ensure that it is more inclusive by engaging more women and youth; that it addresses critical social, economic and political issues, as well as the security implications of violent extremism and radicalization; and that it strengthens co-operation between governments and civil society.

The OSCE Security Days event is expected to send a powerful, unifying message condemning violent extremism and terrorism. A proactive communication strategy will help spread the message, including through live-streaming the event, mobilizing social media, and engaging journalists and civil society representatives in all phases of the event. This message will not target any region in particular but will encompass the diversity of contexts in the OSCE area and neighbouring regions.

Format

The OSCE Security Days conference on “**Building Bridges: Promoting Dialogue to Prevent Radicalization and Violent Extremism**” will engage religious and civil society leaders, prominent women and youth, senior officials from governments and international organizations, eminent experts, and leading journalists from OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation in a wide-ranging discussion on the nature of the challenge we are facing and the tools that can be employed to address it, with a special focus on the security dimension of this phenomenon. Experts from the *New-Med* track II network, a new tool for dialogue to support the OSCE-Mediterranean Partnership, will contribute ideas and expertise. Positive and successful initiatives, experiences, and projects at the regional, national and local levels will be featured throughout.

This Security Days event should build on, not duplicate or reproduce, ongoing discussions taking place in existing institutional OSCE forums, and it should send a powerful public message. The target audience will be external as much as internal.

Launching a Process

The OSCE Security Days conference on “**Building Bridges: Promoting Dialogue to Prevent Radicalization and Violent Extremism**” is envisaged as the first in a series of related events that could be continued by other organizations, with follow-on events in neighbouring regions. It is intended to increase engagement between and among international

and regional organizations on this important issue. Some of the organizations that will be invited to participate include the League of Arab States, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, the UN Alliance of Civilizations, the Union for the Mediterranean, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia, the African Union, the Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions, the Anna Lindh Foundation, the European Council of Religious Leaders, and the Network of Religious and Traditional Peacemakers.

The conference's concluding session will focus on advancing practical recommendations for follow-on activities, including activities involving partner organizations. A list of envisaged activities in both the OSCE and neighbouring regions may include: cross-community projects and initiatives; training courses on how to engage with marginalized men, women and youth; promotion of cross-community representation during high-level governmental country visits and activities; and project-oriented workshops.