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**PRESENTATION BY MR. ÉRIC DENÉCÉ,
DIRECTOR OF THE FRENCH CENTRE FOR INTELLIGENCE STUDIES,
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**Security Dialogue: OSCE's Role and Commitments to Prevent and Combat Terrorism
in All Its Forms – Trends and Challenges**

The challenges of counter-terrorism

1. Reality of the threat

Islamic terrorism is a long-term threat. It has been active since the early 1990s, and there is nothing to suggest that it will disappear over the next decade. Therefore, it is a threat that will be with us for a long time yet. It is essential to take this time aspect into account.

As a reminder: the British have been fighting the IRA since 1916 and it is not until recently that they have managed to get the better of them; the Israelis have been confronted with Palestinian terrorism since 1948; the Marxist insurgency of the FARC in Colombia has been going on for more than half a century now; etc. It is worth recalling that Al-Qaida declared war on the United States of America in 1996, more than 20 years ago, and that despite the considerable resources deployed by the latter and its allies, that movement has not disappeared. On the contrary, the battle against terrorism has led to an unprecedented increase in the number of aspiring jihadist individuals and groups around the world.

The soil in which such terrorism thrives is particularly fertile and will remain so in the medium term, given the vigour of radical Islam fostered by the monarchies of the Persian Gulf, the chaos in societies throughout the Arab and Muslim world, the frustration of immigrant populations in Western countries, the economic crisis making the integration of such migrants increasingly precarious, the heightened sense of victimization among certain Muslims, and so on.

The danger emanates not so much from abroad as from our suburbs. The overwhelming majority of those who have carried out attacks since 2015 have been French citizens, with or without foreign training. We are thus very much dealing with an issue of domestic security.

The highly disconcerting environment in which we are living today is not unwarranted, but it is aggravated by the excessive and unthinking media coverage of terrorists and their acts, who are thereby handed the publicity that they so yearn for.

It is legitimate for part of public opinion to be concerned about encroachments on fundamental freedoms due to the new powers granted to the security forces in the name of counter-terrorism. But one must be fully conscious of the fact that we are in a situation where the danger is all too real. It is therefore essential to take action to mitigate it.

However, we are still living in a liberal and democratic system, and the danger comes not from the police or the intelligence services but, rather, from Salafism and jihadism. The public needs to understand that, in the absence of serious measures, our system cannot be reinforced as quickly as the threat is growing.

On the other hand, despite the attacks we have suffered, there do exist encouraging aspects and these deserve to be highlighted.

Our worst fears have not (yet?) been realized. There has not been a second 9/11, and in the 20 years since, terrorists have not been able to carry out an attack using weapons of mass destruction.

Even though Al-Qaida and ISIS have a numerical strength unlike that of any terrorist group before them, they have not become mass movements. Indeed, the vast majority of Muslims around the world have a negative attitude towards jihadist organizations.

The fight against terrorism has considerably checked the development of such groups, putting them on the defensive and gradually impairing their capabilities – in particular through the elimination of their leaders.

Despite the uproar caused in France by the attacks of 2015 and 2016, Islamic terrorism is the least frequent cause of violent death in our country, coming a long way behind murder, traffic accidents and accidents at home. If one includes both the attacks carried out and attempted ones, the incidence of Islamic terrorism is far below that of acts by Basque, Corsican or Martiniquan separatists, which on the other hand rarely lead to casualties.

Although hundreds of young French people have joined terrorist groups, it is important to bear in mind that the overwhelming majority of our youth have not succumbed to that “attraction”.

The main threat to our country comes not so much from terrorism in the strict sense of the term as from radical Islam. France is the European Union country with the highest proportion of Muslims.¹ While 90 per cent of these are respectable citizens who observe a moderate Islam, a very active minority numbering several hundreds of thousands of individuals has decided to destabilize the French Republic by trying to impose its own rules. This population group advocates an archaic and intolerant Islam, and propagates a hate discourse that encourages some young people to join the jihad.

One may observe how in reaction to terrorist attacks and the creeping radicalization of our society, there is a rise in the strength of far-right groups who are willing to take violent action in response, which would merely aggravate the situation.

2. The measures that are essential in France

Since the emergence of the jihadist threat (2001) and in the wake of the attacks of 2015 and 2016, numerous measures have been taken by successive governments. However, these have generally been slow,

¹ Between 10 and 12 per cent. It is surpassed only by Bulgaria with a population of 7 million of whom around 30 per cent are of Turkish and Muslim origin.

tentative and partial, and they have always come in response to attacks: they have never been proactive. It is important to go farther and to move more vigorously.

The response must be comprehensive

The fight against terrorism can only be effective if it covers a wide scope of action, ranging from the enforcement of laws (code of criminal procedure adapted to the situation; state of emergency) to training people in local communities to spot suspicious behaviour (something that we have never done, unlike Israel); and, in between, strengthening the intelligence, security and judicial investigation services and the internal security forces (gendarmerie, police), whether involved in protection or response activities. It is also advisable not to forget to enact new security regulations (for transport, public places and large public demonstrations) and to carry out the in-depth work required to understand the motives of individuals who are determined to proceed to action (countering radicalization, etc.). Now, the fact is that in our country there is no comprehensive counter-terrorism strategy as such. That is a major weakness. In addition to drawing up such a strategy, several essential measures should be taken.

At the domestic level

- Clearly identifying the domestic enemy. It is not Islam. It is not Muslims. It is Salafists, Wahhabists and the Muslim Brotherhood. They make up a veritable fifth column within our country, infiltrating French society, in particular those in the population who are of Muslim faith. We must combat them with the utmost resolve:
 - By closing all the hubs for the propagation of Islamist ideology in France (radical mosques, associations, centres and libraries);
 - By imposing, in agreement with our Muslim compatriots, a ban on the outward signs of radicalism. The niqab and burka are explicit signs proclaiming affiliation to the aforementioned fundamentalist currents filled with hatred that openly reject our values. As Tareq Oubrou, the imam of Bordeaux, has put it, “When a garment becomes ostentatious, it has no longer anything to do with ethics, since showing oneself just for the sake of it is ridiculous. The habit does not make the Muslim.”
- Developing a true strategy to counter radicalization that is more appropriate than the one introduced by the Government in early 2015, which is characterized by great naivety and has not achieved its objectives. Such an approach should be informed by expertise in cognitive phenomena and not be based on denigrating the other but, rather, on reasserting the superiority of our values.
- Combating criminality, since, rather than terrorists, those who perpetrate ostensibly “religious” attacks are above all criminals: almost all of them have a police record. They have generally converted to radical Islam while in prison, seeking to satisfy their urge to inflict death. Now, as a result of the French suburbs being flooded with weapons through trafficking, these individuals have all the equipment that they need to carry out their acts. Criminality thus prepares the ground and Islamism can then make a clean sweep.
- Undertaking a law-and-order, economic and social reconquest of the “lost territories” – those parts of the suburbs that are beyond the authority and reach of the law enforcement agencies and public services. They are spaces “outside the law”, in which criminality, trafficking and radical Islam flourish with impunity.

- Re-establishing border controls so that we have control over our territory and can restrict the mobility of terrorists.
- Enforcing our laws. Indeed, although we have quite complete and adequate legislation, it is always as if the very principle of authority were taboo, and our leaders are extremely hesitant about applying it, which weakens the country and demotivates the law enforcement authorities. It is up to politicians to show courage and give the police and the gendarmerie orders to do all that is required to ensure that laws are upheld.
- Applying the articles of the codes of criminal procedure and military justice that deal with treason and contact with the enemy. Indeed, those French citizens who joined Daesh (ISIS) or Al-Qaida have taken part in armed activities, whether abroad or on home soil, and they are unquestionably traitors. They must therefore be treated as traitors.
- Raising the personnel strength of the intelligence and security services, which continues to be inadequate in relation to the threat. At the same time, it is advisable to invert the paradigm of our domestic intelligence system, which suffers from excessive centralization, and to improve knowledge of Islam in those branches where it is insufficient.
- Increasing the resources and budgets of the law enforcement authorities, which have continually been reduced for more than 20 years now, and releasing our troops from domestic security tasks under “Opération Sentinelle”. More broadly, it is high time to rethink how our National Police and Gendarmerie are organized.
- Further strengthening internal co-operation between the intelligence and security services (Directorate-General of External Security, Directorate of Military Intelligence, Directorate of Defence Intelligence and Security, Directorate-General of Internal Security), the police, the gendarmerie, customs and prison administrations, but also tax authorities and social services, so as to counter radicalization and terrorism effectively. It is necessary to take steps to mitigate the disdain shown by the Directorate-General of Internal Security for the other services.
- Increasing the number of specialized magistrates, which to this day remains insufficient given the number of proceedings that are under way.

At the international level

- Reconsidering our foreign policy, and clearly identifying the external enemy and its sources of sustenance. Indeed, we are caught up in an utter contradiction, since we have delinked the fight against terrorism from the fight against Salafism, Wahhabism and the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood, all of which feed terrorism. We are pursuing an irresponsible foreign policy by making alliances with States that support Islamism and terrorism, thereby depriving ourselves of a working relationship with the Syrian intelligence services, which would be a great help to us in curbing the activities of jihadists who have returned to France. It is essential to question our diplomatic relations with these States. Without a major change to our foreign policy, it will scarcely be possible to make any progress.

The threat of Islamist terrorism has gained a firm foothold. That is a sad reality that we should face up to. All the measures taken by the authorities following the attacks in January 2015 are relevant and appropriate, even if they constitute no more than altogether quite minor developments in our system. There is nothing “revolutionary” about them, since we have no way of inventing a magic weapon against the

terrorist threat. Indeed, whatever the extent of the resources channelled into counter-terrorism, it is and will always be impossible to prevent all attacks, as illustrated by the United States or Israel. Moreover, to this day there is no magic method or weapon that can be used against this threat. Hence the importance of speaking clearly to the French citizenry so as to increase the resilience of our society.

However, this is by no means to suggest that we have given up in the face of this threat. We might recall how, faced with the anarchist threat at the end of the nineteenth century, the Third Republic responded most vigorously by enacting and enforcing laws – described as “villainous” (*lois scélérates*) by those who deservedly felt their full weight – that proved to be the key to its success.

That is why we must respond without waiting, since the measures decided today will take several years to bear fruit, which means that during that period we are in a situation of heightened vulnerability. Counter-terrorism is a permanent and all-out struggle that calls for realism and perseverance, resolve and moderation.