

Overview on the project

“Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism in prisons and within probation services (Phase I)”

Over the past years, the OSCE Presence in Albania has been supporting Albania in establishing a solid basis towards effective, human rights-based interventions aimed at Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism (P/CVERLT). In doing so, the Presence has provided significant assistance to the Co-ordination Centre on Countering Violent Extremism (CVE) and other government institutions in implementing the National Strategy on Countering Violent Extremism. The Presence's support to the prison system and probation service aligns with the position held by the OSCE, as well as with the fact that these institutions play a vital role internationally in managing Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism (VERLT) risks.

As part of its concrete actions, in November 2017 the Presence signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Justice and the National Coordinator on CVE on the implementation of the extra-budgetary project

“Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism in prisons and within probation services (Phase I), financially supported by the Government of Austria, Government of Sweden, the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Government of the Italian Republic. The project was implemented in close partnership with the National Co-ordination Centre on CVE, General Directorate of Prisons and the General Directorate of the Probation Service.

In the span of three years, the Presence's contribution to mitigating VERLT risks in Albania has been significant in four main directions: **conducting a needs assessment** on the situation in prisons and probation settings; developing a basic training module on the phenomenon of VERLT and building capacities for prison and probation staff; **strengthening regional co-operation** and **enhancing awareness among broader stakeholders** about VERLT and the respective human-rights based interventions in the penitentiary system in Albania.

Result I

The Presence, in partnership with the United Nations Interregional Crime and Justice Research Institute (UNICRI) prepared a **Needs Assessment Report: Examining the capabilities of the Republic of Albania to prevent and counter violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism within prison and probation settings in Albania**, to help inform future policy, capacity building and management related decisions in this area.

The **Needs Assessment Report** serves as the baseline resource for state authorities and grassroots organizations to work on disengagement in prisons and probation and provides the basis for related strategic planning. The assessment also serves as an indicative road map for the first national rehabilitation and reintegration programme for offenders, part of the Action Plan on CVE.

P/CVERLT in prisons and probation service in Albania was at the focus of a conference organized in April 2017, by the OSCE Presence in Albania, in co-operation with the Ministry of Justice and the Coordination Centre on CVE as key partners of the Presence in tackling such an important issue. More than 70 participants of the Conference received information on the baseline report on the current situation of VERLT in prisons and probation that served as the basis for the needs assessment of this phenomenon, as well as the first Basic Training Manual for prison and probation staff.



Photo from the Conference “P/CVERLT in Prisons and within the Probation Service in Albania”, Tirana, April 2018
Based on the findings and recommendations of the Needs Assessment, the Presence **conducted complementary research on the effects of violent extremist groups in prisons**, the push and pull factors and

the way how current management and procedures can mitigate these effects. The research was conducted in seven detention facilities where there were offenders sentenced / accused of terrorism offences within June-July 2019.

Result II

The Presence developed a Training Basic Manual and conducted training of prison and probation staff on P/CVERLT related issues. With the aim of reviewing and approving the outline and design of the Basic Training Manual, the Presence established and chaired a Working Group, composed of concerned national institutions and Presence experts. The Training Manual focuses on available good practices and concepts, and incorporates considerations of gender and juvenile offenders, as outlined in the OSCE normative framework and relevant publications.

The Presence **directly assisted the prison and probation service staff in building capacities** in effectively addressing risks of VERLT, particularly from a human rights aspect. About 250 first-line prison and probation staff received training on basic features of the concepts of VERLT and the challenges involved in identifying push and pull risk factors that may lead individuals on a path to terrorist radicalization. The participants were equipped with knowledge and understanding of the key challenges in addressing risks of VERLT in the prison and probation context, of the particular human rights that are at stake when doing so, and the importance of upholding human rights to enable effective prevention of terrorism and VERLT.



Photos from the training sessions held with prison and probation service staff in Fier, Tirana and Lezha, December 2017 - November 2018

In July 2019, **two training sessions on the Standard Operating Procedures (SoPs) on CVE** were held with the staff of Peqin and Fushë-Kruja prisons. About 55 frontline prison employees, including social workers, security guards and education staff were trained on the application of SoPs, where issues such as dynamic security, international principles and standards for P/CVE and the rights and responsibilities of prison system employees were discussed.

In October 2019, the Presence set up and chaired a Working Group on **developing a Risk Assessment Tool for Violent Extremist Offenders**, with representatives from the National Centre on CVE, Ministry of Justice, General Directorate of Prisons, General Directorate of the Probation Service and the Presence. The Risk Assessment Tool will be used by prison and probation staff for any future interventions related to the topic, such as capacity building in managing prisoners convicted of terrorism offences and identifying and addressing VERLT risks, as well as rehabilitation and reintegration treatment programmes, including intervention plans for offenders.

Result III

Asserting its leading role in the area of P/CVERLT in prisons and probation settings, **the Presence supported a number of regional activities, contributing to the fostering of a coordinated international effort to tackle the issue effectively.** In this framework, the Presence in co-operation with the Albanian Coordination Centre on CVE and the Albanian Ministry of Justice organized a **Regional Conference on addressing VERLT in Tirana**, where relevant authorities from the Western Balkans were given the opportunity to share experiences, challenges, lessons learnt and good practices in prisons and probation services management and rehabilitation programmes. In addition, during the Regional Conference, the Presence presented the findings and recommendations drawn from the conducted country needs assessment, and provided an opportunity to relevant actors in Albania to discuss the emerging issues with their counterparts from the region.



Photos from the Regional Conference "Addressing VERLT and sharing Good Practices on Prisons and Probation Services Management and Rehabilitation and Reintegration Programmes", Tirana, 1-2 November 2018

For the double purpose of creating stronger links and supporting regional knowledge exchange, the Presence has **supported a number of visits of Albanian interlocutors to their counterparts in the region.** Moreover, the Presence has **supported various regional activities**, such as the Albanian-Jordanian closed roundtable under the Aqaba Meetings to Counter Terror, the Western Balkans CVE Regional Conference and the 10th International Conference of Restorative Justice¹, in which the Presence provided concrete ideas on addressing conflict and violence through restorative practices. The Presence also facilitated the participation of representatives from Albanian state institutions at the International Symposium "From Criminal Mediation to Restorative Justice" organized by the European Forum on Restorative Justice which took place in Bilbao, Spain in June 2019.



Photo from the International RJ Symposium "From penal mediation to restorative justice policies and practices in transition", Deusto University in Bilbao, 5-6 June 2019

Result IV

The fourth component of the project was dedicated to **raising awareness and**

Organized by the European Forum on Restorative Justice, the Albanian Ministry of Justice and the Albanian Foundation for Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation of Disputes.

knowledge among broader audience and stakeholders on P/CVERLT in prisons and within probation services in Albania, by reinforcing human rights-based aspects.

The Presence in co-operation with the National Coordinator on CVE and the General Directorate of the Probation Service organized **six awareness - raising forums with the participation of some 220 young offenders on probation** and several probation officers, respectively in Vlora, Gjirokastra, Shkodra, Korça, Tirana and Fier. These forums aimed to raise the participants' awareness on violent extremism and to serve as a platform for assessing the needs and challenges of young offenders on probation.



Photos from Awareness raising forums with young offenders on probation, June-October 2019

The Presence, in co-operation **with the People's Advocate**, the National Co-ordination Centre on CVE and the Ministry of Justice organized in Tirana, in December 2018 a **Conference on "Respecting human rights while preventing and countering violent extremism in detention facilities and within the probation service"**. This conference draw the attention to leading role that state institutions and civil society play in combating radicalization that leads to violent extremism. The Conference also pointed out that the role of the People's Advocate in tackling this phenomenon is equally important.

Three Open lectures were organized with the participation of about 200 students of the Master's Programme "Administration of Social Institutions in the Justice System" initiated by the Presence, in co-operation with the Faculty of Social Sciences and the Coordination Centre on CVE. These Open lectures served to raise the awareness and enrich understanding of the issue of the students on the VERLT phenomenon and human rights based interventions to tackle it. Lectures became part of the Presence's contribution to the master's degree curriculum at the University of Tirana, involving introduction of a new course on CVE based on the OSCE framework on CVE and best international standards. In addition to raising awareness, this programme increases the University's capacities in teaching CVE with special focus on prevention measures.



Photo from the Conference on "Respecting human rights while preventing and countering violent extremism in detention facilities and within the probation service", Tirana, December 2018

Overall, the project identified the current context, issues and opportunities for Albania to tackle the VERLT phenomenon in prisons and the probation service in full compliance with international human rights standards. The work done by the Presence raised the awareness and capacities of penitentiary institutions, by providing accurate studies and the key data, which are currently lacking, while also assisting with the design of appropriate and human rights-compliant measures to help address this challenge. It specifically focused on building the basis for risk reduction, disengagement and reintegration programmes and returning Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF's) through interlinked components in the realm of prison and probation systems.



Photo from Open lectures with Master's Programme students on VERLT and tackling the phenomenon in the penitentiary system, Tirana, July - December 2019

The project was financially supported by the Government of Austria, the Government of Sweden, the Government of the Federal Republic of Germany and the Government of the Italian Republic.