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PREVENTING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

Violent extremism in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region threatens to reverse the development gains made over the past twenty years and is seriously challenging governance, security and social structures at a highly volatile time. In some cases, such as in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the rise of violent extremism, combined with long-term economic stagnation, a history of conflict and structural governance failures could pose fundamental challenges to the state's integrity. Naturally, some places are more impacted than others with the situation in parts of the Western Balkans, Turkey and the Caucasus being particularly challenging. More recently, the threat level has been increasing substantially in Central Asia.
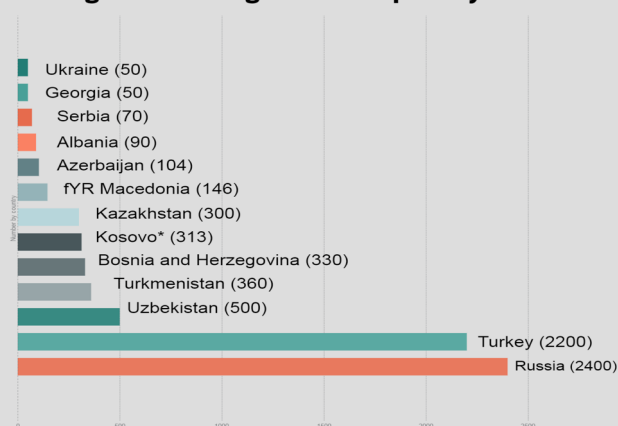
The Relationship Between Radicalization and Violent Extremism

While there is no generally accepted definition of radicalisation, it is most simply described as the process of moving from mainstream beliefs to an extreme ideology that stands in contrast to those mainstream beliefs. Those who become radicalized often seek to impose their ideology upon the rest of society. Such radicalized individuals and groups often decide to exit the legitimate political arena, thereby excluding themselves from the political system. Being outside the political system, violent extremists are those that go a step further and choose to use violence as their method of changing society to conform to their worldview.

Key Drivers of Radicalization

Much of the popular discourse on violent extremism paints it as a religious phenomenon, and indeed religious drivers are a factor, though this is not always the case in the region.

Foreign Terrorist Fighters in Iraq and Syria

- Ukraine (50)
- Georgia (50)
- Serbia (70)
- Albania (90)
- Azerbaijan (104)
- fYR Macedonia (146)
- Kazakhstan (300)
- Kosovo* (313)
- Bosnia and Herzegovina (330)
- Turkmenistan (360)
- Uzbekistan (500)
- Turkey (2200)
- Russia (2400)

3,066 Number of terrorist attacks in the Eastern Europe and Central Asia region from 2004 to 2014

Number of FF from: http://soufangroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/12/TSG_ForeignFightersUpdate_FINAL.pdf
Number of Terrorist Attacks from: Global Terrorism Database, http://www.start.umd.edu/

Many of the causes of violent extremism relate to a broad range of identity-based concerns, such as political exclusion of certain groups and ideologies around separatism.

The violent extremism threat that is the most well known in the region concerns that of individuals who leave their country to become foreign terrorist fighters. The latest available data concerning foreign fighters who have left the region for Syria is upwards of 7,800 (2015).[1]

Radical ideologies are associated with high and extreme inequality and injustice or the perception of inequality and injustice. The resort to violence can therefore be understood as motivated by hopelessness and frustration – social, economic and political. Violent

extremism on a societal level can cause a spiral of distrust between the people and the state.

In order to counter the violence of extremists, the state often uses security responses. However, this can have the effect of exacerbating the feelings of injustice and grievance already present. At the communal and inter-communal level, the threat of violent extremism is also causing rising levels of distrust between and within groups, thus splintering societal cohesion.

Extremist organizations prey on vulnerable members of society, such as the marginalized and unemployed, particularly among youth, and groom them accordingly. At particular risk of this type of vulnerability are economic migrants, for example Central Asian migrants to Russia, who by virtue of being in a foreign country are cut off from their normal social networks. Social and other forms of new media are also a factor in higher and more active means of recruitment.

Prevention is key and successful programming needs to intervene before individuals and indeed entire communities become susceptible to engaging in acts of violent extremism.

UNDP's Regional Approach

A consensus emerging is that the best means of preventing acts of violent extremism is to balance appropriate security responses with long-term development solutions. To do this, UNDP works in accordance with the UN Security Council resolution 2178 (2014) wherein the Council condemns violent extremism, and calls on Member States to support efforts to adopt longer-term solutions that address underlying causes of radicalization and violent extremism. According to the resolution, addressing the threat will require "promoting political and religious tolerance, economic development and social cohesion and inclusiveness, ending and resolving armed conflicts, and facilitating reintegration and rehabilitation."

UNDP provides a human rights-based development approach to prevent the conditions conducive to radicalization in line with the Secretary General's Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism (A/70/674). Moreover, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), in particular Goal 16 on building peaceful, just and inclusive societies, offers a framework for applying traditional development solutions, such as local governance and area-based development, the engagement of vulnerable youth, and employment schemes, with community infrastructure, citizen security and inter-religious community dialogues to preventing violent extremism. The use of innovative measurement tools, such as SCORE,[2] can help to ensure the programming is evidence-based and measurable, and can help contribute to an early-warning system.

Key to UNDP's added value is its long-term engagement, and its connection to confidence building with marginalized and key groups, particularly women who can be powerful agents of change and de-radicalization. Such work creates a climate of trust and assists communities' engagement in participatory decision-making. Strengthening access to justice and human rights protection, and addressing sexual and gender-based violence can also play a vital role in our response.

By utilizing its wide network of partners throughout the region and widely acknowledged ability to identify local development factors, UNDP can provide development solutions that allow for a re-orientation towards tolerance, inclusion and dialogue that promotes greater diversity in order to prevent violent extremism.

Examples of UNDP's Work

UNDP's existing programming in politically complex situations and conflict affected areas in the region, such as support to confidence building measures in Moldova,[3] has been doing much of this for years with an implicit aim of preventing acts of political violence. In addition:

- In **Kyrgyzstan**, UNDP supported the development of a policy and action plan on countering religious extremism, promoting religious diversity and freedom of religion.

- In **Tajikistan**, UNDP is partnering with UNICEF to review drivers of radicalization, concentrating on vulnerabilities, exclusion and marginalization with a specific focus on youth.

- In **Kosovo***, UNDP helped assess the conditions leading radicalization, informing a National Strategy on the Prevention of Violent Extremism developed by the office of the Prime Minister.

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* References to Kosovo in this document shall be understood to be in the context of Security Council Resolution 1244 (1999).
[1] http://icsr.info/2015/01/foreign-fighter-total-syriairaq-now-exceeds-20000-surpasses-afghanistan-conflict-1980s/
[2] http://www.scoreforpeace.org/
[3] http://www.undp.md/projects/Transnistria.shtml