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Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination

No Hate Parliamentary Alliance

*Draft minutes*¹

On Tuesday 23 June, the No Hate Parliamentary Alliance and the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development organised a joint hearing on “Preventing Islamophobia while combating radicalisation of young people”, in the presence of Ms Anne Brasseur, President of the Parliamentary Assembly, and Ms Gabriella Battaini-Dragnoni, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

1. Opening

The meeting was **opened** by **Mr Valeriu Ghiletschi, the Chairperson** of the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development who welcomed the members of the No Hate Parliamentary Alliance and the Committee, as well as experts and guests, and announced that he would be co-chairing the meeting with his colleague, **Ms Santerini**, as **coordinator** of the No Hate Parliamentary Alliance and **General Rapporteur** on combating racism and intolerance of the Parliamentary Assembly.

Ms Santerini welcomed Ms Anne Brasseur and Ms Gabriella Battaini-Dragnoni and passed the floor to Mr Ghiletschi to introduce the hearing on “Preventing Islamophobia while combating radicalisation of young people”.

Mr Ghiletschi pointed out that the title of the hearing was very dense and reflected the different perspectives involved: the one of fighting discrimination, xenophobia and intolerance regarding certain religions (for the No Hate Parliamentary Alliance), and the one of child protection, promotion of their development and citizenship education (for the Social Affairs Committee); the panel of experts would certainly provide comprehensive replies to various of these issues. He welcomed the three experts:

- **Professor Tahir Abbas**, Department of Sociology, Fatih University, Istanbul, Turkey, who had an impressive academic background from different countries across the world, including the Netherlands, Indonesia, Pakistan, Israel and the United Kingdom, and who was particularly interested and specialising in issues of radicalisation, Islamophobia, and the link between ethnic and religious identity and politics;
- **Mr Bernard De Vos**, Ombudsman for Children's Rights of the Federation Wallonia-Brussels, Belgium, who had originally trained in Islamic and Oriental Sciences and then had been working with young people for many years in various contexts, including disadvantaged urban areas, whilst pursuing his academic activities in parallel;
- **Dr Francesco Ragazzi**, Lecturer of International Relations, Institute of Political Science, Leiden University, Netherlands, who had recently worked on the issue in question for the European Parliament.

¹ These minutes were approved and declassified by the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination and the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development at their meetings to be held respectively in Paris on 10 and 11 September 2015.

The hearing was yet another event of the Parliamentary Assembly organised in the follow-up of Assembly Recommendation 2061 (2015) on Terrorist attacks in Paris: together for a democratic response adopted at the January 2015 part-session, and was covering a most topical and crucial issue, touching upon fundamental values of the Council of Europe and its promotion of European unity, peace, tolerance and respect. References to recent Council of Europe activities in this field could be found in the files, notably the Declaration of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe entitled “United around our principles against violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism” adopted in Brussels in May 2015.

Following Assembly Resolution 2061 (2015), the Social Affairs Committee had launched an activity in this area by tabling a motion on “Preventing the radicalisation of children by fighting the root causes” for which a reference had just been sent back to his Committee by the Bureau (rapporteur yet to be appointed).

Ms Brasseur welcomed this joint initiative taken by the two Committees and the “No Hate Parliamentary Alliance”. She deemed the action taken by the Alliance as most important in a time where hate and intolerance were visibly on the increase. She had herself recently investigated whether the European Parliament could join the Alliance, and was convinced that NGOs, associations such as sport clubs and religious communities and leaders should do likewise. She had also raised the issue with UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon who was present in Strasbourg on the same day. Red lines should be drawn to extremist and populist movements which were on the rise and raising their voices, including on specific issues such as migration. Lately, the Parliamentary Assembly had unanimously approved the proposal to institute 22 July as a European Day against Hate Crime, but the idea had not been endorsed by the Committee of Ministers. However, she would herself go to Norway on that day and mark the occasion, and she invited all parliamentarians present to spread and promote this idea in their national parliaments.

2. Expert presentations

Professor Abbas pointed out that there was growing concern especially in Europe and North America on the issue of radicalisation of young people. As concerned the United Kingdom, which was probably the most researched context, there had been several waves of jihadism, with Muslim youth leaving the country to take part in a number of wars as foreign fighters. The first wave took place in the 1980s in Afghanistan and Kashmir, the second wave was linked to the first Gulf War in 1990, and the third one to the war in Bosnia. The current wave of jihadism began in the aftermath of the Arab Spring and concerned particularly Syria and Iraq. This phenomenon drew the attention of analysts and researchers already in the 1980s, but was originally not penalised by British law. The situation changed after the events of 11 September 2001 in New York, with the “war on terror” leading to a tighter grip on activities considered to be potentially linked with terrorism and consequent restrictions of civil liberties. People involved in the first waves of jihadism were second generation British-born Muslims of South Asian (Pakistani and Bangladeshi) heritage. They mostly came from urban communities, often from post-industrial cities and from disadvantaged milieux, with limited expectations. Deindustrialisation heavily affected certain communities, in particular working class people and those with poor education or limited employability as a result of discrimination, making young people vulnerable to external influences. Anti-immigration, anti-welfare and anti-Muslim sentiment was now increasingly widespread in Western Europe, including the United Kingdom.

Professor Abbas noted that Islamophobia emerged in relatively recent times. Previously there was no real concept of a Muslim community in the United Kingdom, but rather of a community of Asian heritage, with little religious connotation. Today Islamophobia was real and represented a threat, in spite of efforts to counter it in the media and the world of politics. At a global level, in the last few decades the “clash of civilisations” thesis had begun to turn into reality, with growing incomprehension between the Western world and Muslim countries. Against this background, some young Muslims who did not have a precise understanding of Islam may consider jihad as a form of salvation, providing empowerment through acts which they considered justifiable. Radicalisation and Islamophobia were interconnected, both of them being the product of the current social context. The Islamic State had proved to be able to target vulnerable and exposed groups through the use of symbolism, media messages and propaganda appealing to the anxieties that young Muslims faced in the West. Its ideology gave young radicals the power to *become someone*, in a way seemingly legitimised by a religious-political framework. There was frequent misrepresentation and disinformation regarding European Muslims *per se*. The spotlight on terrorism and extremism took attention away from the life of ordinary Muslims, living as average citizens anywhere in Europe. It was important to note that European-born Muslims involved in violent jihadism represented a very small number, especially considering that Muslims accounted for 5 to 10 per cent of the population in countries like Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. Extremism was often a result of marginalisation and

disengagement, of voices unable to find expression in their social context. This applied to Muslims but also to other disadvantaged groups. Therefore, one of the solutions was to provide opportunities for participation and to listen and understand those voices. It was not a religious question but rather a socio-economic situation, with young Muslims not being given the same opportunities in the labour market and in education, and islamophobic hate crime on the rise. However, anti-radicalisation policies had contributed to the stigmatisation of the entire Muslim community. Radicalisation in itself was not a negative concept: if channelled effectively, it could even lead to positive forms of social and political involvement.

Mr De Vos gave his presentation against his background of 30 years' experience as educator for disadvantaged young people in Belgium and in his current capacity as Ombudsman for Children. In his professional activities, he had met a number of young fundamentalist (including those who wished to join conflicts in other countries) and had noted that there was no typical profile amongst these, but that they came from very different socio-economic milieux and had varying levels of education. However, they all had certain points in common; above all, a feeling of injustice against them individually or their group (sometimes in a global perspective). This made them express their solidarity with certain "great causes" fought over by religious or political extremism abroad. Especially young people of Arabic-Muslim background very often received signals of being different and inferior from their social environments, despite their sometimes respectable levels of education. In such cases, religious extremism, but also delinquency was sometimes a way of expressing their difference for these young people.

Mr De Vos believed that facing three possible approaches to religion (1) a traditional one closely following the Sharia; (2) a moderate / intermediate one with a realistic view of the Sharia; (3) a pragmatic one taking the Sunna / Quran as sources of inspiration), in particular some of the rituals were contested by society: the full face veil; ritual slaughter to obtain "halal" meat; the fasting month Ramadan. Whilst his own country, Belgium, was quite pluralistic and open to different cultures and religious practices, in other country (e.g. France as a secular state) additional frustrations were created by limitations set to religious beliefs and their expressions. He therefore invited all stakeholders concerned by this matter to:

- To practice a clear and non-ambiguous public discourse by speaking of radical movements or terrorism, but not to confound these with Islam as such;
- To reinforce the moral resistance of young people in order to limit their vulnerability;
- To give a meaningful place in society to every young person, either through employment or social/citizenship action;
- To vigorously fight against the segregation caused by current educational systems (e.g. in France or Belgium), which is a "time bomb" for society;
- To stimulate interreligious and interethnic dialogue beyond religious rituals, addressing some of the really problematic phenomena (e.g. the "little prince" education for boys as practised in some cultures);
- To raise awareness of the real problems amongst the general public;
- To communicate in an honest manner about the real structural causes of current trends, i.e. education and employment opportunities;
- To assign a new value to the notion of "community" (but not in the sense of "communitarianism"²);
- To engage into veritable partnerships with all Parties involved.

Dr Ragazzi referred to the study to which he had contributed for the European Parliament, on "Preventing and Countering Youth Radicalisation in the EU", had been published in spring 2014 and was now publically available.³ The notion of radicalisation was defined as adopting radical policy views or adhering to extremist and violent movements; various causes, including root causes reaching far back in their lives, could lead people to become radical in some way. The State, through domestic living conditions and foreign policy, certainly contributed to the context in which some people were radicalised. In certain contexts, it was better to speak of escalation and de-escalation instead of using the notion of radicalisation (as a one-way-street). He agreed with Mr De Vos in saying that a feeling of injustice amongst young people was one of the causes, and that people could also be pushed into extremism.

In his views, possible counter-measures were: (1) judicial action (increased investigation periods, better anti-terrorist measures and monitoring of the Internet etc.); (2) sanctions (e.g. the removal of citizenship in extreme cases); (3) prevention programmes to counterbalance some of the (legitimate) security programmes. Prevention programmes should include mentoring, urban area/community partnerships

² NB: Here understood as a 20th Century political doctrine which emphasises the interest of communities and societies over those of the individual.

³ See: European Parliament / Directorate-General for Internal Policies: Preventing and Countering Youth Radicalisation in the EU, Study for the LIBE Committee, Brussels April 2014, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2014/509977/IPOL-LIBE_ET\(2014\)509977_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/etudes/join/2014/509977/IPOL-LIBE_ET(2014)509977_EN.pdf)

(including with the police), and the production of a “counter-narrative” (e.g. by spreading more moderate online information). However, no evaluation of ongoing programmes and their effectiveness had taken place so far.

Dr Ragazzi saw the main challenges in the current absence of a clear division (“firewall”) between social integration work and police work (i.e. those helping should not be reporting), in the stigmatisation of Muslim communities who felt targeted without any reason, and in the targeting of ideological trends to anticipate crimes not having happened yet (“pre-crime observation of intentions”). For his part, he would recommend:

- improving data collection in this field, including quantitative surveys on the effects of anti-terrorism policies;
- developing anti-radicalisation policies which have been assessed on their human rights impact;
- encouraging member states to introduce clear divisions between services in charge of support and of reporting;
- employing harsh measures only if absolutely necessary and, otherwise, rather build upon existing democratic institutions, including by rebuilding trust in them;
- avoiding limiting fundamental freedoms because this might produce further radicalisation;
- establishing rules and limits for police and intelligence intervention (e.g. not systematically ask others to spy amongst their peers);
- basing judicial action on acts accomplished but not on the anticipation of extremist acts;
- developing policies for the reintegration of prisoners;
- strengthening schools and universities as places of political learning;
- encouraging political leaders to stand by democratic structures and to take bold measures.

NB: Documents related to the experts' presentations have been made available on the PACE Extranet.

3. Discussion

Ms Santerini opened the floor for discussion.

Mr Davies underlined that the world of British Muslims was diverse, with Sunni and Shia groups and different beliefs and mentalities. Austerity was affecting the most disadvantaged groups, including white working class people and people with a migration background, leading the latter to an increased risk of radicalisation. There should be no firewalling between police forces and the various communities, instead it was important to build trust so that people from whichever social and ethnic group would report violence and crime to the police.

Ms Magradze considered that looking at root causes was crucial and wondered what exactly happened to well-integrated young people when they followed extremist religious movements, and how they could be mobilised so easily.

Ms Quintanilla was convinced that some people hated what they did not know. She had never observed any hate movements around mosques in Spain, which were present in every neighbourhood of her country. Integration across ethnic groups and religious communities was an element of wealth for a society, and religious leaders should be involved to promote tolerance and avoid misconceptions about Islam, which normally was a peaceful religion.

Ms Rawert asked if there were other criteria than religion to distinguish radical movements, and how resistant notably young women were against religious extremism. Moreover, in her own country, Germany, the issue of data retention for preventive purposes was highly controversial.

Ms Kronlid called for a constructive debate: violence from any side should be condemned and people should not be reproached for being islamophobic when simply showing concern about terrorist attacks.

Ms Heinrich felt uneasy about the present debate, including about the title under which it was announced for today: radicalisation was not directly caused by religious identity, and many of the young people who were radicalised were not religious at all.

Ms Eaton underlined the role of civil society organisations in fostering mutual understanding between people of different religious backgrounds. A charity called Near Neighbours was a positive example and its programmes had been validated by academic researchers as very successful.

The Deputy Secretary General was glad to spontaneously comment on the debate in which she judged important to keep the dialogue alive even if not everybody agreed all the time. She drew attention to some of the Council of Europe publications in this field, including on “Islamophobia and its consequences on young people”, and the recent declaration and action plan adopted by the Committee of Ministers in Brussels in May 2015. She suggested that these and other references could be added to the minutes of the present meeting afterwards (*NB: see list added just after conclusions*).

Professor Abbas found that the most general root cause of extremism was the lack of power and of representation that some young Muslims in Europe felt, the inequalities and lack of justice that they faced. However generalisation was misleading, as extremism concerned only marginal fringes of this community and even terms like jihad or sharia referred to complex realities with a variety of aspects. Most Muslims were still getting on with their lives in spite of some difficult situations.

Mr De Vos underlined that the concept of integration was often mentioned in the debate. Discrimination of people with an Arab-Muslim background, even of second or third generation, was evident in European countries. Various indicators including the access to education, to employment and even to the world of sports confirmed this phenomenon. Some Islamic fundamentalists (pietist Salafists) professed ideas which were non compatible with Western principles, but they were peaceful and it was necessary to engage in dialogue with them.

Mr Ragazzi noted that violent radicalisation concerned a few thousand people, who were already in the radar of security services. Efforts should be made to improve prevention. Non-governmental organisations could play an important role in preventing radicalisation, provided that there was a clear separation between their work and that of the police, otherwise their credibility would be undermined as it happened in the United Kingdom with charities funded by the State’s Prevent programme.

4. Conclusions

Ms Santerini thanked all participants for a fruitful debate. This had given useful indications on what should be done, including by the No Hate Alliance and the Parliamentary Assembly in general, to counter both islamophobia and radicalisation. The key word was prevention, which implied promoting mutual understanding through accurate information, to avoid harmful misconceptions.

NB: Added to the minutes after the meeting (upon proposal by the Deputy Secretary General):

Council of Europe publications relating to the radicalisation of young people

- Ramberg, Ingrid: “Islamophobia and its consequences on young people”, Report of a seminar co-organised by the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) and the Advisory Council on Youth at the European Youth Centre Budapest in June 2014, https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Source/Resources/Publications/Islamophobia_consequences_young_people_en.pdf.
- Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism (2005, ETS 196): <http://conventions.coe.int/Treaty/EN/Treaties/Html/196.htm>.
- Declaration of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, made at their 125th Session in Brussels, on 19 May 2015: “United around our principles against violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism”: [https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CM\(2015\)74&Ver=final&Language=lanEnglish&Site=COE&BackColorInternet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=EDB021&BackColorLogged=F5D383](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CM(2015)74&Ver=final&Language=lanEnglish&Site=COE&BackColorInternet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=EDB021&BackColorLogged=F5D383).
- Action plan on “The fight against violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism”, adopted by the Committee of Ministers at their 125th Session in Brussels, on 19 May 2015: [https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CM\(2015\)74&Ver=addfinal&Language=lanEnglish&Site=COE&BackColorInternet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=EDB021&BackColorLogged=F5D383](https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?Ref=CM(2015)74&Ver=addfinal&Language=lanEnglish&Site=COE&BackColorInternet=C3C3C3&BackColorIntranet=EDB021&BackColorLogged=F5D383).

ATTENDANCE LIST / LISTE DE PRESENCE

The names of the members present are in **bold**. / *Les noms des membres présents sont en gras.*

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