**CT MORSE: Proceedings of the June 15 Conference on
"Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) in a Development Context".**

*Background/Rationale*

Following the increase in the number of terrorist attacks and casualties in recent years, violent extremism and terrorism are increasingly seen as serious threats to global peace and stability, and have re-emerged as a political priority. While violent extremism is clearly a global phenomenon, it is developing countries, especially fragile and conflict affected states that bear the brunt of the costs. Thus, preventing and countering violent extremism (CVE) is now increasingly recognised as a development priority as well. Generally speaking, CVE is "a realm of policy, programmes and interventions designed to prevent individuals from engaging in violence associated with radical political, social, cultural, and religious ideologies and groups"[1]. As such, CVE forms part of the broader response to countering terrorism.

Development and violent extremism are two sides of the same coin and can be mutually reinforcing – in either direction. Indeed, many of today's development policies and programmes are CVE relevant: security and justice sector reform programmes are probably the more obvious examples, but others, such as employment creation programmes, strengthening of state institutions to reinforce governance, targeted human rights programmes, education curriculum development, community development programmes and the like, are likely to have an (indirect) impact on communities vulnerable to radicalisation. For that reason, calls for a more integrated approach are becoming louder, emphasizing the need to apply a CVE 'lens' or 'filter' to bilateral development assistance and amending/modernising Official Development Assistance (ODA) criteria in order to render certain forms of CVE assistance as ODA-eligible. These developments allow for a more comprehensive perspective on societal dynamics, and are likely to enhance the effectiveness of development cooperation. By the same token, it also implies that CVE actors should incorporate development and/or peace-building approaches in their own programming process. Violent Extremism poses a serious threat to development; thus, effectively targeting Violent Extremism will also require a development dimension.

Combining CVE specific and CVE relevant actions that address both symptoms and causes of violent extremism requires a whole of government approach. In doing so, greater collaboration between the development, security, diplomacy communities will be needed, which by itself is not without challenges. Agencies will be required to think and act differently, moving outside of their comfort zones and acknowledging their complementary roles vis-à-vis each other. Conceptually, together they will need to adopt a broader, interdisciplinary and context sensitive approach to conceptualising conceptualise and analyse the issues, based on a human security perspective. CVE involves higher than normal risks

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[1] Countering Violent Extremism: A Peace building Perspective, Georgia Holmer, USIP, September 2013. Why USIP definition from 2013? I prefer the definition from the UNSG PVE Action Agenda.

compared to traditional development activity. Adherence to international law and applying the principle of "do no harm" to one's proposed measures will be vital ingredients of collective policies and actions. And finally, a more rigorous approach to planning, monitoring and evaluation will be required, both to ensure that CVE is indeed effective, and to build a greater understanding of what works, what doesn't, and why. Needless to say that M&E of activities that seek to prevent violent extremism poses many methodological and operational challenges, but it can be done – as many qualitative development processes have shown.

### Conference Proceedings

With the above in mind, on June 15, 2016, under the auspices of The Netherlands EU Presidency and the European Commission (DEVCO), the EU-funded Counter-Terrorism Monitoring, Reporting and Support Mechanism (CT MORSE) organized a conference in Brussels on *"Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism in a Development Context"*. The conference brought together over a 100 participants across a range of disciplines, i.e. counter-terrorism and development experts, diplomats, policy makers and CVE practitioners working at the global and national levels, from COTER, CODEV, which kind of development agencies, GCERF Board, EEAS, DEVCO. Based on a fictitious case study, participants from different backgrounds and disciplines were grouped together to identify and experiences the various challenges in joint P/CVE programming and to overcome these collectively.

### Introductory remarks

The conference began with introductory remarks by The Netherlands and DEVCO, who both framed the conference as part of a broader learning process, building on existing efforts to encourage dialogue and collaboration between P/CVE, diplomats and development policymakers and practitioners. With the recent changes in ODA-eligibility criteria for P/CVE, an opportunity has arisen for development actors to apply their experiences and tools to P/CVE-activities. While these changes are to be welcomed, the 'ODA-bility' of P/CVE-interventions poses new challenges, including opportunism, stigmatization, and an underestimation of the importance of local communities. Importantly, how to develop and "frame" a necessarily long-term development response to what is seen as an acute threat, is one of the most pressing dilemmas politicians and policymakers currently face.

The speakers were followed by three presentations of (i) the latest developments regarding ODA-eligibility of P/CVE activities; (ii) lessons learned from the EU-funded Strengthening Resilience against Violent Extremism (STRIVE) project in the Horn of Africa; and (iii) latest developments in the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) CVE policies and strategies.

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*Ad. (i) OECD*

The OECD representative presented the outcome of recent discussions at the OECD regarding the ODA-eligibility of P/CVE activities. The motivation to do so was threefold: first, to clarify unclear or ambiguous wording and thereby prevent the abuse and misuse of aid; second, to respond to developmental challenges in conflict situations; and third, to target aid better towards achieving both the Peace-building and State-building Goals in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. As a consequence, these new criteria are expected to free up more resources for eligible P/CVE initiatives.

As a principle, financing of activities that <u>combat</u> terrorism (including intelligence gathering and training in counter-subversion method or suppression of political dissidence) is generally excluded from ODA. In the spirit of the recommendations of the 2016 UNSG Plan of Action to prevent violent extremism, as well as the recently adopted sustainable development goals (SDGs), activities <u>preventing</u> violent extremism in developing countries are now reportable as ODA, as long as they are led by partner countries and their primary purpose is developmental. ODA-eligible activities to prevent violent extremism must be undertaken in accordance with respect for the peaceful exercise of political, social and economic rights, including the right to non-violent forms of political expression.

Eligible activities now include: education; activities that support the rule of law; working with civil society groups specifically to prevent radicalisation, support reintegration and de-radicalisation, and promote community engagement; building the capacity of security and justice systems in specific skills required for the prevention of extremist or terrorist threats, such as in the collection and correct use of evidence or fair trial conduct, to ensure more effective and human rights-compliant behaviours; and finally, research into positive alternatives to address causes of violent extremism in developing countries. The OECD will continue to update its Casebook with examples of what is needed in development interventions to target radicalization/VE as well as qualifying and not qualifying activities in relation to prevention of violent extremism. It was pointed out that the UN Secretary General's recently launched PVE Action Plan underscores the development-P/CVE nexus and calls upon states to address these more adequately.

*Ad. (ii) Lessons Learned from the EU-funded Strengthening Resilience against Violent Extremism (STRIVE) project in the Horn of Africa*

The representative from the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) gave a brief summary of some key lessons learned and recommendations for future interventions, drawn on the basis of the first phase of the pilot STRIVE project. It was argued that the drivers of Violent Extremism (VE) manifest themselves largely at the local level. Thus, the impact of VE

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(recruitment as well as negative consequences for the population subject to VE) also should be analysed at the local level, in order to assess who particularly are most at risk. In this regard, experience showed the need for on-going monitoring and evaluation of effect and impact, requiring engagement in action-research, to assess varying and changing degrees of vulnerability. Importantly, one should aim to strengthen the resilience of both states and communities alike. Too often, the focus was on the one, at the expense of the other. In this regard it was imperative to engage with governments, as they played a key role in solutions-oriented strategies. Trust-building *within* law enforcement agencies is was just as important as building trust *between* civil society and law enforcement agencies; the same applied to faith-based organisations and intra-religious dialogue, e.g. between the older and younger generations. Training and capacity building in the prevention of use of force by law enforcement bodies was strongly recommended, as excessive use of force had been identified as an important driver of VE.

*Ad. (iii) United States' evolving CVE strategy*

The representative from USAID provided some reflections on the recently published "Joint US State Department & USAID strategy on Countering Violent Extremism" (May 2016). Based on the need for a sustainable approach to combat the persistent threat of terrorism, CVE refers to proactive actions to counter efforts by violent extremists to radicalize, recruit and mobilize followers to violence and to address specific factors that facilitate recruitment and radicalization to violence.  The Strategy's five key objectives are to (1) expand international political will, partnerships and expertise to better understand the drivers of VE and mobilize effective interventions; (2) Encourage and assist partner governments to adopt more effective policies and approaches to prevent and counter the spreads of VE, including changing unhelpful practices where necessary; (3) Employ foreign assistance tools and approaches, including development, to reduce specific political or social and economic factors that contribute to community support for VE or put particular segments of populations at high risk of violent extremist radicalization and recruitment to violence; (4) Empower and amplify local credible voices that can change the perception of violent extremist groups and their ideology among key demographic segments; and (5) Strengthen the capabilities of government and non-governmental actors to isolate, intervene with, and promote the rehabilitation and reintegration of individuals caught in the cycle of radicalisation to violence. By recognising the critical importance of context, USAID country and regional offices will play a key role in operationalising the strategic objectives, putting particular emphasis on community engagement and promoting political inclusion. To help measure progress towards achieving the strategic objectives and ensure that future efforts are guided by both qualitative and quantitative monitoring information, evidence of results and effect, State and USAID will develop a results framework, including a set of common indicators.

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*Working group sessions*

Thereafter, based on a fictitious illustrative country case study of Andala[2], participants split up into <u>four working groups</u> to address four key questions:

1. How do we define CVE relevant and CVE specific measures, and how will the new OECD DAC criteria on CVE potentially impact this?
2. How can development interventions targeted towards youth be rendered more CVE specific?
3. How to mainstream CVE within criminal justice responses to counter-terrorism?
4. How can CVE initiatives within development cooperation best be coordinated?

Moderated by external experts, all four working groups were tasked to, first, discuss the scenario and agree on a common understanding of the problems; subsequently, agree on a joint, coordinated course of action, involving CVE interventions directed at youth and CVE-mainstreamed interventions in the criminal justice sector; and finally identify methods and approaches to integrate CVE within development cooperation. During the second working group session, while zooming in on "their" specific topic, participants were tasked to identify the opportunities and challenges such an integrated response would pose and how best to deal with these. The conference concluded with plenary presentations of each working group, followed by a wrap up of the main points, focusing on the importance of joint analysis and planning, and on the practical utility of the DAC criteria as a tool for resource mobilization.

*Observations about process and outcomes of the working groups*

➢ For many participants, the chosen format – a fictitious case study, to be dealt with in a multi-disciplinary setting, under time pressure - was a new experience, forcing them to think and act "out of the box" and interact with people whom they normally would not, in ways that stimulated debate and led to new insights. Although all four working groups approached the assignment differently, process and outcome were to a large extent similar. On the whole, participants were very enthusiastic and engaged actively in role-playing and negotiating during the two sessions.

➢ The format encouraged participants challenge their own positions and assumptions, as well as those of the agencies they represented. The analysis of the problem(s) was approached differently by different people, some aiming to prioritise problems and responses, whilst others wanted to have more information and avoid oversimplification. Although attempts were made to base programme design and planning on an agreed joint assessment of the problem, individual and institutional interests and agendas (as demonstrated in the case study during the role play sections) also influenced the planning process.

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[2] A fictitious fragile country characterized by long-standing tensions that are multi-dimensional: political, religious, economic, ethnic and social, and geographical.

➢ Actually engaging in joint analysis and planning proved challenging, involving trade-offs between short-term and longer-term needs and opportunities. How to reconcile humanitarian and developmental "axioms" (e.g. impartiality, "do no harm" – principle, Rule of Law compliance) with short-term security needs, oftentimes driven by *realpolitik* considerations, in far from ideal conditions, required, for some at least, a novel mindset. For instance: how to deal with a weak and simultaneously corrupt government if one of the guiding principles for effective responses to the threat of extremism is in fact local ownership? How principled should one be in dealing with complex situations such as Andala? How to avoid making the wrong assumptions and in doing so, becoming part of the problem?

➢ All four working groups concluded that the case study was complex, involving not only the recent and more immediate threat posed by violent extremism and terrorism, but also those connected with the longstanding political conflict. The CVE elements in the scenario formed only part of the picture, and in order to better understand the drivers of violent extremism, one had to analyze the broader (political, tribal and developmental) dynamics, identifying key actors and interests, as a basis for prioritization and targeted interventions.

➢ Some participants emphasized the importance of applying a "CVE lens" – i.e. a particular way of analyzing situations from the perspective of radicalization and extremism trends & dynamics, rather than through a traditional, one-dimensional "development" or "security" angle. Others questioned its utility, given the conceptual vagueness of the concept of PVE and CVE itself. By focusing on the expressions of extremism, one ran the risk of ignoring the aforementioned broader (political economy-related) dynamics, as well as overarching institutional deficiencies. Alongside a set of CVE specific interventions, preferably at the community level, interventions at the political level were deemed equally important, as were "CVE-sensitive" development interventions, such as activities to promote capacity, accountability and responsiveness of the government at large and the security apparatus in particular, the independence of the judiciary etc.

➢ Humanitarian assistance, ODA and CVE-specific interventions were seen as compatible, with DDR and reintegration of child soldiers into society as clear examples. The new ODA guidelines represented an opportunity for security and development stakeholders to engage much more actively with each other and agree on a common understanding of key aspects and notions.

➢ Participants stressed the importance of drawing lessons from positive as well as

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negative experience, adapting terminology to locally acknowledged themes and topics, and engaging with the local population in all programming stages, particularly since VE manifests itself at an individual level. Among the key issues highlighted by participants was the importance of robust, conflict-sensitive analysis as the basis for designing P/CVE interventions to the specific contexts where they are to be applied. This meant acknowledging the prominent role of political dynamics and interests, sensitivities that the CVE realm arouses in certain circles (donors as well as beneficiaries), the high risks associated with the implementation of CVE-specific projects, and the challenges posed by weak or corrupt governments, who themselves have vested interests and tend to focus on hard CT security only. Community engagement needed to be nuanced, sustainable and substantive, if it was to be effective. In this regard, it was imperative to have greater community engagement and local participation in the problem identification and planning process. The nature of drivers of violent extremism means that these factors are very specific to individuals and groups of individuals in certain circumstances and communities. Therefore, it is only disaggregated understanding of different groups of individuals that can inform and guide planning, as there is no one set of factors that programming should address. So research and analysis as well as program planning need to be adapted to the specific requirements of each targeted group of individuals. Finally, participants acknowledged that P/CVE programming is high risk in many aspects and managing risk should be fully integrated into program design.

➤ With regard to possible solutions and strategies, participants agreed that rule of law and criminal justice and security sector capacity building programs in countries at risk of violent extremism need to encompass P/CVE specific elements. Active participation of civil society stakeholders and the creation of spaces to discuss community grievances were stressed as a vital ingredient of context-specific strategies and programs, involving a combination of CVE-specific and CVE-relevant interventions. Areas of support included targeted development efforts in marginalized areas; development of a national CT strategy including P/CVE elements; provision of technical assistance to enhance the legal framework and institutional capacity; CVE training of law enforcement officials; supporting the independence of the judiciary; and engaging in prison management.

*Main conclusions and recommendations*

1. When confronted with (manifestations of) violent extremism and terrorism, one has to be acutely aware of the difference between symptoms and causes. Addressing symptoms without a full understanding of the causes and the likely effect such

interventions may have, is bound to have negative consequences. Context is everything; therefore, so is understanding local socio-political dynamics, the sensitivities and risks linked to CVE-related interventions and the challenges posed by weak or corrupt governments. Equally, it was imperative to be clear about assumptions and risks as a basis for action, and to tailor this to local needs and considerations.

2.  In this regard, carrying out integrated, multi-stakeholder analysis and planning is critically important, but judging by the evidence so far, more of an exception than the rule. Despite the many policy recommendations in favour of integrated responses that combine development, diplomatic, security and P/CVE actors and instruments, in practice, such efforts are rare, oftentimes frustrated by existing institutional (dis-) incentive systems, conflicting interests and priorities, as well as prevailing organisational cultures.

3.  Comprehensive approaches to counter and/or prevent extremism and terrorism, should consist of sets of synchronised and mutually reinforcing actions in the diplomatic, development, security, humanitarian and CVE spheres, all catered to the specific, rapidly changing context. A comprehensive approach is more than the sum of their parts. As such, comprehensive approaches are not new: experience in conflict-affected states, with post-conflict stabilisation, 3-D (development, defence, and diplomacy), civ-mil and pol-mil planning etc. provides ample lessons and do's and don'ts for the fast-growing CVE community.

4.  Most of the traditional development interventions are applicable and beneficial to preventing and countering violent extremism.  But security and development stakeholders need to collaborate more often, develop a common language, and utilize the new ODA guidelines as an opportunity to work more closely together. All of the stakeholders involved need to be open to other perspectives and willing to adapt to real and changing circumstances. Stove-piped responses, i.e. applying axiomatic concepts and approaches within the column of one's discipline, are unlikely to have the kind of symbiotic effect a joint, integrated response could have, if properly grounded.

5.  A comprehensive approach will normally include efforts to strengthen the rule of law and to build criminal justice and security sector capacity as essential components of P/CVE strategies and interventions, while also promoting the active participation of civil society stakeholders in that regard.

6. The conference itself, and especially the working group sessions, was seen as an excellent opportunity to reflect on the complexities when trying to operationalize P/CVE in a "real life" (albeit in this case fictitious) situation. Bringing experts from different disciplines and backgrounds, including NGOs and think-tanks, together led to a different understanding of the context and, as a result, more nuanced and more integrated solutions. This method / format, whilst not at all novel, should become institutionalised within governments and agencies.

7. CVE is a relatively new concept. In light of the aforementioned recommendations, plus the growing political momentum in favour of CVE (CVE is *en vogue* and more and more governments and agencies are becoming engaged in "it"), it is becoming increasingly important to reach at least some kind of conceptual and definitional agreement of sorts.