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Young radical followers: stopping the foreign fighters' mobilization and smuggling

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**Belgian Ministry of Justice
115 Boulevard de Waterloo/Waterloolaan
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On 10 March 2015, with the support of the Belgian Ministry of Justice, the Center for European and International Policy Action (CEIPA) held a Round Table on the theme “Young radical followers: stopping the foreign fighters' mobilization and smuggling”. About 100 participants representing governments, civil society, international organisation and academia attended the event.

The following is the summary of the main highlights:

In his opening address **Mr. Peter von Bethlenfalvy, CEIPA Executive Director**, thanked Minister Koen Geens Belgian Minister of Justice, Ms Francisca Bostyn, Deputy Head of Cabinet, Mr. Serge de Biolley, member of the Cabinet, as well as Mr. Jean-François Minet and Ms. Barbara Vangierdegom for hosting the Ceipa meeting and inspiring the planning and preparation of it. He stressed the longstanding, good cooperation between CEIPA, Payoke and the Belgian Ministry of Justice.

Mr. Serge de Biolley, Member of the Cabinet of the Belgian Minister of Justice opened the Round table by pointing out to the proportionally relatively high number of foreign fighter returnees in Belgium. Only in May 2014 the country has been victim of a terrorist attack at the Jewish Museum in Brussels. He mentioned that following the violent and tragic attack on Charlie Hebdo in Paris in January 2015, the Belgian police had managed to foil an imminent plot and attack against police officers in Belgium. In light of these events, coordination of action on all levels and in particular on federal and European levels is crucial. As far as justice is concerned, the legislative reform in Belgium includes the introduction of the offence of traveling with a terrorist objective, the reform of existing legislation on special procedures to collect evidence, as well as an action plan to fight radicalisation in prisons. Because of the increased mobility of foreign fighters within Europe, the EU Member states need to step up information exchange and reinforce controls at external borders of the European Union, concluded Mr. de Biolley.

Dr. Christine Höhn, Adviser to the EU Counter- Terrorism Coordinator Ms. Höhn explained that the EU 's long- standing and complex counter terrorism measures have been further mobilized, following the Paris attacks in January this year. Because of the growing threat posed by the Jihadist movement and the foreign fighters who in a large number return to Europe after having fought in Syria, counter terrorism measures need to be further reinforced both at national and EU level. The effectiveness of the ISIS communication strategy reaching out to impressionable youngsters, contributes to radicalisation. Instead of piecemeal measures, Europe needs an overriding policy context with a strategic vision able to address the issue of returning fighters as well as radicalization of youth in their native countries in Europe. Mrs. Höhn underlined that there is no need to start from scratch, as the EU Member States- and their institutions playing a key role in the fight against terrorism- already implemented a wide set of measures over the last two years to address the foreign fighters threat. The EU Heads of

State and Government have provided this strategic vision with an ambitious programme set out in their statement of 12 February 2015.

These are based on a three pillar strategy of

- 1) ensuring the security of citizens
- 2) preventing radicalization and safeguarding values
- 3) cooperating with our international partners

Prevention of radicalization should be complemented by comprehensive, cross sectorial approach of social inclusion combining job creation efforts, education, social, political and cultural integration and accepting principles of democracy such as inclusion and tolerance as well as enhanced inter-faith dialogue. EU Ministers of Education have already met informally to discuss the contribution of education to the prevention of radicalization. Europe must strengthen its communication strategies related to democratic values, tolerance and universal human rights.

Ministers of Interior and Justice have been mobilized for several years and stepped up their engagement since the terrorist attacks in Paris. They are implementing the measures outlined by the Heads of State and government as a matter of priority.

One of the priority areas for action is preventing and combating the fast spreading incitement strategies by ISIS by way of internet.

On the repression side, while prosecuting terrorist offenses based applicable laws in Europe, a criminal policy should be developed so that returnees would not all end up in prison, but rather a differentiated approach taken, including also rehabilitation and reintegration programmes. The European Radical Awareness Network is developing good practices. Ms Hoehn stressed the need to strengthen controls at Schengen external borders. An EU PNR (Passenger Name Record) framework needs to be developed. Better use of existing instruments and institutions especially the EU Justice and Home Affairs agencies is necessary. While addressing the EU's Foreign and Security Policy's role in combating and preventing radicalism, Ms. Höhn referred to the EU's efforts to create closer cooperation with the Mediterranean and Middle East countries as well as the Balkans, based on the ambitious conclusions of the Foreign Affairs Council on counter-terrorism of 9 February 2015.

Mr. David Reizenzein, Frontex Liaison Officer, Brussels explained the role of Frontex, the European External Border Agency mandated with the management and operational cooperation of European external borders. With 320 staff members and 114 M € budget Frontex coordinates joint operations for the benefit of EU MS, of which Joint Operation Triton is the most recent example. It features a research and development unit as well as a training unit, carries out risk analyses and joint return operations. Eurosur is Frontex' European surveillance network enabling near real time sharing of border related data between the agency and EU countries that are part of the Schengen area.

Mr. Reizenzein stressed that Frontex is an operational agency, with no decision making powers. Mandated by the EU Council Frontex is in charge of integrated border management and supporting tasks in combating border related organised crime. Under the strain of the increased illegal migration (280 000 illegal crossing last year) Frontex is now facing new challenges such as diversified routes used by smugglers and traffickers or the phenomena of ghost ships with migrants abandoned by its crew and left adrift in the Mediterranean. With the political and security crises in Libya Frontex is also confronted with the possibility that smugglers in the future could use the vessels to transport foreign fighters into Europe. Although not specifically mandated with the fight against terrorism, through its Joint Operations Frontex helps gathering information that are fed back into the work of national law enforcement authorities. Mr. Reizenzein deplored the fact that as a response to the strengthening of border controls and security the Jihadists diversify routes and strategies to leave and re-enter Europe. With negotiations under way, close cooperation with Europol will be soon formalized by the conclusion of the Operational Working Agreement. There is also a possibility to increase the capacity building in this field that can be translated at the level of border guards. Frontex training programmes reach out to some 400 000 European border guards and is complemented by the strengthening of management capacities of and cooperation with third countries that are generating the flows of illegal migration, smuggling and foreign fighters.

Mr. Rodrigo Ballester, Member of Cabinet of the EC Commissioner Tibor Navracsic highlighted the complexity and underlying causes of radicalisation. He admitted the difficulty to get a full grasp of radicalisation of third generation migrants who were born and integrated in Europe. Although education falls into the scope of member states competences, the European Commission designs programmes to support national actions such as the event to be organised on 17 March on transmitting values and incorporating them into the school curricula. By encouraging intercultural dialogue (and thereby tackling the discrimination issue) the Erasmus programme, which is not only aimed at student exchange but also provides training opportunities for teachers, is aimed at instilling our shared values into futures generations.

Migration is very hard to tackle, for three reasons 1) because migration cannot be stopped; 2) because it's a complex, multi-faceted phenomenon; 3) because of the risk to import jihadists together with migrants. Radicalization is the consequence of failed integration and education policies. From the point of view of education in particular, we must ask ourselves how we can avoid stereotypes and stigmatization. The next European Council of Education Ministers will be devoted to this issue. Amongst the proposals that will be tabled at the Council are: educating about values in schools, teaching critical thinking, tackling discrimination and helping disadvantaged students, especially of migrant background, and intercultural dialogue. Giving young people access to the labour market and providing them with jobs that match their skills and

expectations is another challenge that needs to be addressed. Teachers are the pillars of these efforts, as they are first-liners in detecting radicalized behaviors. Teaching the European migration history, bringing in former foreign fighters to talk about their experience and visiting religious schools are examples of the measures that could be used in fighting radicalisation. These and other tools need to be complemented by digging into the international dimension of migration, an important task awaiting the High Representative of the EU Foreign Affairs and Security policy.

Mr. Johan Leman, Professor at the University of Leuven, Interculturalism, Migration and Minorities Research Centre started his intervention by providing the definition of radicalisation, which he defined as a decreasing moral legitimacy of democratic society, caused by an idea or utopia that should replace the democratic society. The pursuit of this idea is carried out at all price including by the use of violence. This is contrary to the principles of democratic society based on the principles of human rights and plurality of religious beliefs. Various forms of Salafism (political, jihadist etc.) are aimed at reducing Islam to a tool aimed at achieving the utopia through illegal means. Taking the example of the Sharia 4Belgium movement, Prof. Leman depicted the older members as petty criminals in a pursuit of adventure. The younger members are usually below 18 with precarious economic status and no financial responsibility towards the family. Most have no contact with the mosque, possess a very limited knowledge of Islam and have an antecedent with the police. Urging the in depth analyses of the causes of radicalisation Prof. Leman underlined the backward tendency of Sunni ideology which is often compounded by the conspiracy theories, seeking to discredit the mainstream culture. With the Internet that is often a first trigger these ideas find a fertile soil among disenfranchised, alienated youth that after being indoctrinated with radical ideas venture into Syria, Iraq or Palestine. Endowed by the impressive social media skills the recruiters require unconditional commitment, including the severing of contacts with the family (especially mother) and former friends that in turn will be rewarded by a new identity and the life in an Islamic caliphate. Considering the complexity of the problem the way towards fighting radicalisation should favour a counter narrative strategies to be espoused by schools, employers and other members of the society. These principles should consist of no double standards, no racism and no discrimination.

Mrs. Helga Konrad, Head of the 'Regional Implementation Initiative on Preventing & Combating THB' and former Austrian Federal Minister, started her intervention by pointing to the parallels and overlaps between this debate on radicalization and the debates on trafficking in human beings. She criticized the predominant and almost exclusive focus on security at the expense of preventive measures and called for a more comprehensive, strategic and long-term approach. She

urged States, decision makers and the EC to learn lessons from the past, including from the fight against human trafficking and to avoid repeating the same mistakes and shortcomings. She made a plea to test the assumptions on which we base our fight against radicalism and extremism and to address its root causes rather than ruminating always the same bureaucratic concepts (such as the 'three pillar strategy' of the EC). She also criticized the failure to deal properly with complex issues and to understand the interlinks between various crimes. As one example she pointed to the fact that funding of (anti-trafficking) programmes and projects has increasingly resulted in shifting attention and support away from issues of development, equality and human rights to issues of state security and anti-migration. She deplored the ping-pong between institutions and countries as well as the tendency to brush off certain problems and the fact that very often, action was being taken simply for the sake of action, not leading to nor producing meaningful results. On a final note, Mrs. Konrad presented some of the key features of the new Austrian 'Islam Law' which includes a ban on foreign funding for mosques and Islamic organizations, the requirement for Imams to preach and teach in German, and the precedence of Austrian law over Sharia law.

Mr. Alastair Macdonald, Reuters Bureau Chief, Brussels elaborated the main issues raised during the meeting. Pondering about terrorism, he recalled Mr. Leman's statement about the meaning of counter narrative and utopia, stating that youth's fascination with counter-culture has always existed and is likely to stay with us in the future. He reminded the audience that the young men who were recently tried in Antwerp did not have a religious background, which shows that the one-size-fits-all approach is unlikely to yield results. Mr. Macdonald wondered about the need for coordination and our apparent inability to succeed in it. He mentioned King Abdullah of Jordan's recent speech at the European Parliament calling on Muslims to join the fight against the Islamic state while urging European governments to fight Islamophobia. Policy makers need to look at the big picture and propose measures to fight radicalisation, while taking into account that such problems will never completely disappear.

In his concluding remarks **Mrs. Jelena von Helldorff, CEIPA Senior Policy Advisor** stressed the need for a continuous dialogue, as the crucial means capable of overcoming the misunderstanding and prejudices. CEIPA is committed to further promoting dialogue on various subjects touching upon migration, radicalisation, human trafficking, corruption and organised crime. The participants will shortly be informed about the future events to be organised on these and adjacent subjects.

Mr. Peter von Bethlenfalvy closed the meeting and thanked the participants for their active participation and lively discussion. He extended his thanks to the Ministry of Justice for its support in organising this important event

