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The Coordination Center for
**COUNTERING
VIOLENT
EXTREMISM**
- Albania

ALBANIAN NATIONAL STRATEGY

COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM



ALBANIAN NATIONAL STRATEGY COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM¹

Fostering a secure environment based on respect for fundamental freedoms and values

The Albanian nation is founded on democratic values and a tradition of inter-faith coexistence. Our common vision is to cultivate a society based on shared respect for human rights, the rule of law, equality, and fundamental freedoms.

Peace, stability, and prosperity throughout the region are also of strategic importance to Albania. It is in Albania's interest to foster good relationships with its neighbors, based on mutual trust and inclusiveness, where inter-ethnic and inter-religious harmony prevails.

The preservation and promotion of such values is increasingly important in our ever-changing world, where the threat of violent extremism recognizes no borders.

Albania's commitment to fight against violent extremism and radicalization

Violent extremism and radicalization, in all forms and manifestations, currently constitute the most serious threats to peace and security around the world. As such, the fight against these threats, regardless of where they occur or by whom they are committed, requires government actors to strengthen cooperation at the national as well as the regional and global levels.

In conceptualizing an Albanian response to violent extremism, the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy will remain the common platform for all future endeavors. Moreover,

Albania will continue to strongly support international counter-terrorism efforts, as well as promote UN counter-terrorism standards, while safeguarding human rights and reinforcing the rule of law.

Albania is committed to making a substantial and tangible contribution to international efforts to counter violent extremism and radicalization:

- Albania was among the first countries to respond to the challenges associated with violent extremism and is currently playing an active role as part of the global coalition in the fight against ISIL/Da'esh.
- Albania has signed and ratified all United Nations anti-terrorism conventions and protocols relating to terrorism, in addition to co-sponsoring UN Security Council Resolution 2178 (2014) and the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism.
- In May 2015, Albania hosted the Balkans Regional Summit on Countering Violent Extremism in Tirana, where country representatives from the region pointed out the need to improve cooperation, not only in countering extremism, but also in addressing the associated challenges facing the region.

Together with the May 2015 summit in Tirana, the White House Summit on Countering Violent Extremism (February 2015) and the Leaders' Summit in New York (September 2015) are

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Note: This is an unofficial translation.

important milestones in the implementation of the United Nations Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy.

Domestic measures to counter violent extremism and radicalization

Our generation bears a historical responsibility to create an environment that offers security and welfare to future generations. To this end, we must commit – both as individuals and as a society – to confronting contemporary security threats, demonstrating civic willingness and determination.

In June 2014, the Government of Albania reviewed and adopted its National Security Strategy, which outlines its constitutional obligations to guarantee national security, as well as to strengthen fundamental freedoms, human rights, and the rule of law, protect the interests of Albanian citizens wherever they may be located, and promote national identity.

An important component of the National Security Strategy addresses the concerns related to violent extremism and radicalization. In response to these concerns, the Strategy includes a series of actions aimed at:

- Enhancing and improving Albania's legislative framework to criminalize all forms of violent extremism as well as the recruitment of foreign terrorist fighters;
- Strengthening the capacity and expertise of law enforcement officials to prevent violent extremism;
- Promoting the engagement of state institutions with local communities, religious representatives, and other stakeholders to identify vulnerable groups that are or may be targeted by violent extremism;
- Identifying and understanding the social concerns of local communities, so as to be able to address the root causes of radicalization and violent extremism;
- Developing tailored programs and policies to prevent the proliferation of violence and extremism and, simultaneously, raise

awareness of these phenomena within society.

Furthermore, the annual review of the implementation of the National Security Strategy stipulates specific tasks to be undertaken by state institutions and other national actors to comprehensively increase effectiveness in the fight against radicalization and violent extremism.

Aim of the Strategy

Given that violent extremism is a contemporary global phenomenon and currently constitutes a serious threat to international peace and security, the Albanian government considers countering violent extremism to be a core priority of its political agenda.

Successfully preventing the spread of violent extremism requires localized efforts including the further empowerment of youth, family, women and minorities. By channeling these efforts through religious, cultural, and educational networks, the Strategy will ensure the inclusion of civil society, as a whole, in the adoption of a tailored and proactive approach to addressing this phenomenon.

This Strategy will enable the Albanian government to devise guiding principles, policies, and actions to address radicalization and violent extremism. With the end goal of creating a prosperous and inclusive environment for citizens, this Strategy will also cultivate a culture of respect for fundamental freedoms throughout the country.

It is acknowledged that policies and measures that are pursued through locally driven and cooperative initiatives, tailored to local contexts are the most effective in countering violent extremism over the long term. As such, a community-oriented approach will be instrumental in focusing and driving Albania's fight against violent extremism. This approach will be supported through increased coordination among government institutions and local community stakeholders.

Another important facet of this approach is developing a better understanding of

community policing. The ability of the police to effectively interact with local communities is key to promoting a partnership-based effort to more effectively identify, prevent, and solve crimes, simultaneously addressing issues of physical safety and security while improving social cohesion.

In sum, successfully combating radicalization and violent extremism requires extensive coordination among various domestic and international efforts. Under this Strategy, sharing best practices and experiences in addressing violent extremism in all its forms will allow Albanian officials to enhance their capacities and expertise in the fight against radicalization, promoting national security as well as peace.

Definitions

Radicalization to violence: a decision to forgo political processes or nonviolent methods of fostering change in favor of adopting violent methods to bring about change.

Violent extremism: the use of violence to pursue political goals.

Counter-radicalization: a package of social, political, legal, educational and economic programs specifically designed to deter disaffected (and possibly already radicalized) individuals from resorting to terrorism.

Resilience: factors, ideas, institutions, issues, trends, or values that enable individuals and communities to resist or prevent violence.

Foreign terrorist fighters: individuals who travel to a State other than their States of residence or nationality for the purpose of perpetrating, planning, preparing or participating in terrorist acts, or providing or receiving terrorist training, including in connection with armed conflict.

Mission

The Albanian National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism aims to preserve the values of tolerance and religious harmony, to protect human rights, the rule of law and democracy, and to defend Albanian society from violent extremism.

The Strategy has four strategic objectives that converge under its overarching goal to develop the capacities of the various actors involved in countering violent extremism in Albania to effectively address the conditions leading to radicalization. Engaging multiple stakeholders within and outside the Government, this Strategy will not only challenge the extremist narrative and prevent the spread of violent extremism within the country, but also beyond Albania's borders. To this end, this Strategy proposes an initiative to build regional countering violent extremism (CVE) capacity and cooperation.

In line with its mission, the measures proposed under this Strategy will:

- Strengthen coordination, collaboration, and partnership, at the local, national, and international levels, among government agencies, non-governmental organizations, the private sector, religious communities, and the media in designing and implementing effective CVE interventions;
- Encourage local research to improve the understanding of the conditions, factors and drivers of radicalization to violence as well as the existing levels of community resilience against violent extremism;
- Build community resilience and narrow the breeding ground for radicalization and violent extremism through tailored preventive community-based education, employment, and policing programs and policies;
- Reduce the impact of violent extremist propaganda and recruitment online by using social media to develop and disseminate alternative positive messages.

Priority Areas and Measures

Engaging communities, challenging violent extremist narratives and developing long-term comprehensive policies to counter violent extremism.

The Albanian National Strategy proposes 10



measures, organized under three priority areas, for developing capacities, policies, and mechanisms to address violent extremism and radicalization.

These three priority areas are:

- Community outreach and engagement;
- Countering extremist propaganda while promoting democratic values;
- Developing long-term comprehensive CVE policies.

Community outreach and engagement

Communities are focal points for the formulation and implementation of CVE policies in Albania. Drawing on the guidelines and best practices of the Global Counterterrorism Forum, the EU Radicalization Awareness Network, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, measures proposed under this priority area will incorporate a community-based approach to strengthening resilience against violent extremist agendas. According to this bottom-up approach, community groups will be empowered to play an active role in preventing violent extremism in close partnership with government agencies, civil society organizations, the business community and the media.

The measures and actions proposed in the National Strategy will be implemented through locally driven, collaborative, and partnership-based initiatives, tailored to local contexts to increase their effectiveness and sustainability. Engaging communities will also be instrumental in strengthening public confidence and support for national CVE policies. While the proposed actions will primarily target youth in hot-spot areas, their success will depend on the involvement of all segments of society. Therefore, specific actions will concentrate on leveraging the competences of frontline workers: teachers, police personnel, social workers, religious leaders, and other individuals who are strategically placed to prevent radicalization.

In recent years, Albania has developed several models for providing community-based social services, all of which are particularly suited to addressing the needs of the vulnerable groups identified in this Strategy. Furthermore, various

sector-based strategies and action plans already foresee the allocation of resources to further expand these services. Under this priority area, community-based methods of delivering public services will be streamlined to target the most at-risk communities.

1. Encourage critical thinking, civic participation, and promote values of tolerance through education

The “School as a Community Center – a friendly school for all” initiative, which was already introduced in the Albanian education system, will be extended to support CVE efforts under the Strategy. This initiative encourages partnerships between schools, families and the entire community. In this sense, schools are not simply education providers but also catalysts of community cohesion and development. The “School as a Community Center” framework has the potential to become a powerful long-term policy tool to respond to the threat of violent extremism, offering counseling services and acting as a focal point in designing preventive programs. Teachers are important frontline workers who serve as liaisons within communities. Therefore, their ability to detect and respond to radicalization, and eventually prevent it, must be strengthened.

According to the Pre-University Education Development Strategy (2014-2020), the Ministry of Education and Sports plans to broaden the “School as a Community Center” network in the upcoming years. This measure will entail the following actions:

- a. Expand the “School as Community Center” network to reach hot-spot areas.
- b. Empower and train teachers to recognize and respond to signs of radicalization.
- c. Enhance support for curricular and extra curricular efforts in targeted schools to prevent radicalization, including civic and religious education, arts and sports initiatives, debate clubs, and similar resilience-building activities.

2. Address socio-economic drivers of radicalization through vocational education and training (VET) and employment services

Jobless youth in areas with limited employment



opportunities are vulnerable targets of extremist propaganda and recruitment. Albania's National Employment and Skills Strategy (2014-2020) identifies social inclusion as one of its main objectives, and the National Employment Service intends to promote improved and diversified active labor market policies and programs that will be available to marginalized groups.

Furthermore, existing plans to extend employment and vocational training services to rural areas will prioritize targeted hot-spot areas in line with the following actions:

- a. Extend national employment services and active labor market support to reach the most at-risk groups and individuals.
- b. Provide vocational training in targeted hot-spot areas (including through mobile or satellite units), tailored to the needs of the local population.
- c. Establish vocational training and employment assistance initiatives in correctional institutions to facilitate the rehabilitation and reintegration of violent extremist offenders
- d. Support public and private initiatives generating employment opportunities, social entrepreneurship, and women's economic empowerment in the targeted hot-spot areas.

3. Build trust and confidence and increase community safety through community policing

As part of its Seven-Year Strategy (2007-2013), the Albanian State Police introduced a "community policing" model to be implemented throughout the country. Pro-active and collaborative problem solving focused on prevention is particularly useful when dealing with the threats associated with violent extremism. As such, expanding and developing community policing skills, with an emphasis on preventing radicalization and violent extremism, will be prioritized through the following action:

- a. Leverage community policing capacities in the targeted hot-spot areas.

4. Empower civil society to build community resilience

Engaging civil society organizations and volunteer groups in an effort to prevent violent extremism and counter radicalization is key to a successful CVE strategy. Potential joint projects may include those in targeted hot-spot areas that promote civic participation, socio-economic development, public awareness and discourse on violent extremism. The Government of Albania will explore funding options with the Agency for the Support of Civil Society, relevant ministries and international donors to establish the most suitable mechanism for supporting civil society projects in targeted hot-spot areas, in line with the following action:

- a. Issue Calls for Proposals for projects aimed at preventing radicalization and building community resilience against violent extremism.

Countering extremist propaganda while promoting democratic values

The Government of Albania intends to challenge the violent extremist narrative, particularly its transmission via online campaign materials and messages. With respect to this priority area, the Albanian National Strategy puts forth a two-pronged approach to discredit, and in turn mitigate the influence of extremist propaganda.

First, the Government will improve communication with the public to raise awareness of radicalization and its associated threats. Through clear and effective communication channels, both online and offline, using credible voices such as community leaders, religious authorities, and other role models, the Government seeks to facilitate public discourse, empower local communities with information, dispel myths, and provide answers to the various concerns related to violent extremism. These efforts will serve to dissociate violent extremism from any particular religious group, emphasizing Albania's rich cultural heritage and history of religious tolerance. By providing the public with information on the Government's CVE efforts, this communication plan will increase transparency

as well as elicit support and confidence among at-risk groups and the population in general.

Second, carefully crafted and contextualized messages and campaigns will be created to counter violent extremist propaganda online, using channels and methods most likely to reach and influence at-risk groups and individuals.

5. Propose a creative and innovative communication strategy to complement the Albanian National Strategy

Through this measure, the Government of Albania will develop a narrative designed to keep the public informed on how they can contribute to preventing violent extremism. For maximum impact, the following actions will be undertaken:

- a.** Establish a Communication Working Group engaging various actors such as state officials, academics, media and technology companies, civil society, religious communities, and frontline workers.
- b.** Issue communication guidelines for local partners implementing initiatives on the ground.
- c.** Continuously raise awareness through regular meetings in targeted communities, bringing together local interlocutors to provide practical insight into how to address radicalization and violent extremism locally.

6. Influence attitudes and behaviors towards violent extremism through contextualized campaigns and other communication initiatives

Effective strategies and techniques for countering the spread of violent extremist messages and narratives will be identified and scaled up under this priority area. More specifically, civil society and religious communities, as well as the media, will be supported in the development and dissemination of powerful messages and alternative narratives, promoting tolerance, peace, human rights and democratic values through the following action:

- a.** Develop tailored social media campaigns, radio and TV programs, and other types of initiatives promoting counter-extremism narratives capable of reaching target audiences.

Developing long-term comprehensive CVE policies

The multi-stakeholders, whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach to countering violent extremism adopted by the Government of Albania in this Strategy requires the continuous improvement of policies and measures that have a significant impact on the ability of violent extremist narratives and recruitment efforts to penetrate Albanian communities. Aligning existing CVE policies in order to leverage preventive efforts, in conjunction with developing required capacities among public servants at all levels to implement such policies, and gathering policy evidence through research, monitoring, and evaluation require a long-term commitment. In light of these observations, this priority area presents measures to enhance evidence-based policy making to counter violent extremism in Albania and the broader region of Western Balkans.

7. Develop knowledge and expertise on countering violent extremism through research and increased information sharing

Operational intelligence, data, research and analysis of both the drivers of violent extremism and the levels of community resilience will inform future CVE policies. Information sharing will be enhanced to further improve the general understanding of the radicalization process and how to counter it. The following actions will support this measure:

- a.** Develop information-sharing protocols and systems to regularly collect, collate, and share data from a wide variety of sources to ensure timely and effective responses and prevention efforts.
- b.** Support and utilize local research on conditions, factors, and drivers of radicalization to violence as well as existing levels of community resilience against violent extremism.

8. Enhance capacities of practitioners and

frontline workers

For professionals in direct contact with individuals at risk of radicalization, i.e., frontline workers such as teachers, social workers, local police and corrections officers, the ability to assess and support persons being drawn to violent extremism is central to the successful implementation of the Albanian National Strategy. CVE training courses, materials and guidelines will, therefore, be developed and distributed to frontline workers through the following actions:

- a. Provide comprehensive training to a variety of actors who will deal with violent extremism in the scope of this Strategy.
- b. Develop guidelines for frontline workers on identifying signs of radicalization and intervening in individual cases.

9. Evaluate CVE policies: apply and share lessons learned

Effective CVE policies require horizontal and vertical coordination as well as integrated, comprehensive and long-term cooperation across the security and development sectors. The Government of Albania will, therefore, adopt a holistic approach to CVE in line with the following actions:

- a. Establish a monitoring mechanism to gather data for reporting and analysis.
- b. Assess the impact of the individual measures of this Strategy and compile relevant lessons learned from interventions in the targeted hot-spot communities.
- c. Further adjust integrated CVE policies to increase their impact and effectiveness based on evaluation findings, in consultation with local communities.

10. Develop partnerships at the regional and international levels

To further advance domestic CVE capacities and expertise, as well as share lessons learned and best practices, the Government of Albania will build on regional and international platforms, frameworks and organizations such as the South-East European Cooperation Process and the Regional Cooperation Council, the EU Radicalization Awareness Network, the Global Counterterrorism Forum, Hedayah, and the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund.

In addition, the Government of Albania will spearhead a regional initiative dedicated to building CVE capacity and cooperation in the Western Balkans, based on experience, expertise and skills developed through the implementation of this Strategy. Programs and activities within this regional initiative will include sharing and expanding local research on the drivers of violent extremism and the measures to counter it; training law enforcement in community engagement and identifying early signs of radicalization; and coordinated public campaigns on social and traditional media platforms to counter, and offer alternatives to, violent extremist narratives. The following actions will be undertaken in support of this measure:

- a. Continue to take a pro-active role, at both regional and international levels, in organizing and participating in thematic events such as roundtables, conferences, and discussions to showcase Albanian achievements in countering violent extremism and share best practices.
- b. Launch a region-wide CVE capacity-building initiative in the Western Balkans to leverage Albania's commitment to developing advanced tools to combat violent extremism and to contribute to countering violent extremism on a larger scale.

Implementation

To effectively implement the National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism, the Government of Albania will develop corresponding procedures and regulations as well as an inter-agency structure. The Prime Minister's office will lead the initiative, with contributions from the Ministry of Education and Sports, the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, the Ministry of Internal Affairs, and the Ministry of Defense, the latter of which will be engaged to perform a facilitating role throughout the implementation process.

The priorities, measures, and actions outlined above are largely cross-cutting and inter-institutional. However, the Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth will be the lead institution in covering community outreach and engagement

as well as targeting groups that are marginalized, vulnerable, unemployed, or in need of social assistance.

The Ministry of Education and Sports will guide the activities related to education, where teachers will have a primary role in implementing the objectives by targeting students, parents, and communities. Lastly, the Ministry of Internal Affairs will oversee the information-sharing processes.







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