European External Action Service (EEAS)

Remarks by the High Representative/Vice-President Federica Mogherini following the CT/CVE high level event "Leaders' Summit on Countering ISIL and Violent Extremism"

2015-09-29

Let me thank you for the invitation and also for the organisation of this important Summit, this is also a major element of our shared European and global counter terrorism effort. But let me also thank you, President Obama, and the United States of America for making it very clear throughout your mandate that this is a fight for all of us together. This is not a fight of the West against the rest. This is something we either do together or we don't do at all. And I believe this is the strongest, the most powerful message that comes out of this global alliance. It is not a clash of civilisation. The most powerful instrument we have is to explain, to remind, to partner with our Muslim friends, who are the first victims of this terrorism. Only by recognising this, can we hope to win this battle, not only to fight terrorism, but also to win this fight.

Fight against violent extremism goes well beyond our current struggles against Da'esh. Obviously this is the most urgent issue, but it is not the only one. On Da'esh we support the efforts of the global coalition including military action, in accordance with international law. We all know that military action against Da'esh is crucial, but it will not be sufficient, neither in Syria nor elsewhere. Political transition in Syria, inclusive political governance in Iraq, the formation of a National Unity Government in Libya, but also the success of the Afghan Unity Government – these are all key components of our strategy, of our fight, as it is crucial to strengthen democracy and human rights to make our society and our states more resilient. We need to understand the reasons for the group's success and to tackle them. If we don't, our victory might happen but will be fragile. Terrorist groups prosper in times of regional conflicts and civil strives. The most urgent action against Da'esh and other groups is political; this is where we are together.

The moment has come for regional and international actors to put aside the rivalries and look for viable compromises. "Compromise" is a tricky word. It can mean very little, but it can mean a solution, and this is what we have to work on: a solution, a political solution. Nothing is scarier to Da'esh than cooperation. Cooperation between Sunni and Shia, between Muslims and non-Muslim countries and societies. The deal we reached with Iran might open new perspectives and opportunities on this side. But let us not forget of a much older conflict

that is sometimes used as a root for radicalising the youth of the world, not only of the region. Moving forward the Middle East Peace Process would defuse one of the most powerful radicalising factor in the whole region, and beyond.

The story of the Middle East is one of coexistence, different faiths and ethnicities. The region's DNA is made of diversity. And on this Europe and the Middle East are on the same page. Da'esh has nothing to do with the traditions of Islam in Syria or in Libya; but in the past years and in the past decades too many actors have promoted sectarianism as a weapon in the struggle against power on the regional level. We badly need to reverse this trend and our partnership is the way to do it. In concrete terms the European Union has been responding actively to the increased threat of terrorism after recent attacks – my Danish colleague just gave good examples of that – working both on internal and external side, in an integrated way. On the external side, in particular, we intensified our counter-terrorism cooperation with countries in the Middle East, in North Africa and in the Gulf, without forgetting other regions of the world – and many of them are sitting around the tables here.

We have strengthen our commitment on the field, in particular on enhancing capacity building, addressing foreign terrorist fighters, law enforcement, boarder management, aviation security (this is very important), countering terrorist financing and violent extremism.

But as we have already said, the fight against terrorism and violent extremism is a major security and political challenge as much as it is a cultural one. Non-state actors are key partners in that, religious authorities can be our greatest ally. No one spoke more persuasively against Da'esh than the Grand Imam of al-Azhar, who denounced the groups' "misleading" use of religion as "a danger to Islam". We need the whole civil society to be mobilised along these lines. But for this to happen, we have to make sure that civil society enjoys enough liberty and it is free to express itself.

We must together reject the idea that repressive states are better positioned to fight terrorism. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon said it very clearly: "Curbing freedoms may create an illusion of stability in the short term. Things may seem calm on the surface, but the denial of free expression is ultimately a breeding ground for extremist ideologies".

So it is inclusion and not repression that makes our state and society resilient and strong. And it is inclusion and not repression that will defeat radicalisation. And this is true in our Western World, as well. Our youth, also in Europe, deserves their place in society and communities. They deserve to be listened, they deserve to have good job opportunities after they have good education. This is the most powerful message we got after yesterday's youth summit. So let us keep this in mind when we discuss on how to counter violent extremism. These are values that the terrorists fear, and through these values – turning them into action in a concrete, coherent and consistent way also in our own societies – we will manage not only to fight, but also to win the fight.

Thank you!

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