Presentation on the Meeting of Coalition against ISIL/DAESH

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I would like to thank the organizers Kingdom of Netherland, Turkey and Kingdom of Belgium, for organizing this meeting of the coalition, for the invitation and the opportunity to present Kosovo efforts and measures taken in preventing and fighting the phenomenon of foreign fighters, FTF trends and measures taken in developing legal procedures to prosecute foreign fighters, recruiters and facilitators.

As we listen to all your comments yesterday about the statistics and trends of the FTF, it is clear that all of us here are affected by this phenomenon, Kosovo is affected as well, due to the fact that considerable number of Kosovo citizens have traveled to the conflict zone in Syria and Iraq, joining and fighting on behalf of terrorist organizations such as ISIL/DAESH and Al-Nusra.

Kosovo institutions, considering a phenomenon of foreign fighters as a serious threat to national and international security, continuously is undertaking measures to prevent and combat violent extremism, radicalism and terrorism, and is a keen to be an effective partner of global efforts to fight this phenomenon and also to give its modest contribution as the member of **Global Coalition Against** **ISIL /DAESH.**

I’d like to give some background information on the phenomenon in Kosovo.

Kosovo is a secular state, with a majority of Muslim population, has been, and continues to be recognized for religious tolerance, with the practice of religions deeply intertwined with secular traditions and culture of the population.

But, as in other countries of the region and beyond, during the last two decades, extremists have attempted to breach this tolerance through the spread and impact of imported extremist Islamist ideologies which are mainly based on interreligious and intersectarian intolerance and hate.

Despite the fact that the citizens of Kosovo in general resisted and did not accept these ideologies, a small portion of the most vulnerable population with a lot of economic and social grievances, mainly young people have become prey and victim of these ideologies.

As a result, lately we have seen consequences such as:

* Discourses of intolerance not only religious but also inter sectarian;
* Isolated incidents between Islamist extremist  and  moderate Islamic believers; moderate imams and fundamentalist imams
* Tendencies of some extremists to influence, recruit and distribute Islamist extremist ideology, primarily among young people.
* And finally fenomenon of foreign fighters, where, a significant number of young Kosovars have traveled in Syria and Iraq, and most of them have joint terrorist organizations ISIS and Al Nusra.

Based on the data of Kosovo Police, First volunteers from Kosovo have joined the conflict in Syria in the second half of 2012, initially, by joining the Free Syrian Army, and then after the active involvement of terrorist organizations in the conflict,  the majority of them have become members of these organizations.

Primarily, they joined  Al-Nusra, and later almost all of them moved to ISIL.

Most of the Kosovars traveled to Syria in 2013, but considerable number also in 2014.

The number of Kosovars that have traveled to Syria and Iraq since 2012 is around 314, among them 44 women and 28 children, Into this number are included also 38 Kosovars that has dual citizenship.

It is estimated that, currently the number of Kosovo citizens in conflict zone is about 140. Including 75 FTF which are followed by their wife’s and kids. There are 38 women’s and 27 children in Syria and Iraq, including two children that were born there.

57 Kosovars have been reported killed, some of them believed to have been killed by terrorists themselves, after their attempt to escape from the conflict zone.

Up to now 117 of them have return to Kosovo including 6 woman’s and one kid.

Kosovars who traveled to the conflict zones, are mainly young people aged between 18-27, mainly with economic and social problems, most of them with low level or lack of education, and many of them with criminal background.

Based on the analysis their motives to travel to the conflicts, range from those of personal benefit (through criminal activity or hoping in payment), naivety, humanitarian purposes and adventure (especially in the beginning of conflict), but over the time the main motive remained ideology.

**Measures undertaken**

Kosovo institutions have made significant efforts and progress to counter violent extremism and terrorism,

**First of all**, by adopting the appropriate legal infrastructure

The Pinal Code of Kosovo at the “Chapter of the Criminal Offences Against Constitutional Order and Security of the Republic of Kosovo” defines terrorism and in separate articles penalizes: Commission of terrorism; incitement, facilitation, assistance in the commission of terrorism, recruitment, Preparation of terrorism offences, organizing and participation in terrorist groups, financing, , training for terrorism.

Also in 2014, the law on Prohibiting participation of Kosovo citizens in conflicts outside the country was drafted.

This law stipulates that, apart from direct participation in conflicts abroad, sanctioned (up to 15 years in prison) also includes other sanctions, including recruitment, financing, facilitation, propaganda and callings to join conflicts abroad.

The law on preventing money laundering and terrorist financing was amended recently which offers more legal ground and opportunities to detect and investigate terrorism finances.

**Second**, Kosovo Government adopted the national CVE Strategy, which offers a comprehensive and holistic approach to early identification of radicalized persons, prevention, intervention and de-radicalization and re-integration of radicalized persons.

Based on this strategy dozens of activities have been undertaken by institutions and civil society, including debates with citizens, seminars and workshops with local institutions; civil society; NGOs; religious communities, at same time a Referral Mechanism was created and started in some of the cities as pilot project. Also three municipalities of Kosovo were included in Strong Cities Network.

**And third**, along with the activities to prevent the spread of extremism, radicalization, and involvement of citizens of Kosovo in the conflicts abroad.

Kosovo Police in cooperation with Special Prosecutors Office, has initiated criminal investigations against  more than 250 people under suspicion that, they have  committed criminal offenses of: organizing and participating in  terrorist groups participating in conflicts abroad, organizing, recruiting, facilitating, financing of terrorism, and also for other crime offences against the constitutional order and security of the Republic of Kosovo.

As result of these investigations, since 2013, over 110 people were arrested , including the key members of the main group that recruited and facilitated most of the Kosovars FF

Kosovo Special Prosecution Office, up to now has filed indictments for more than 67 persons, who are currently, in criminal proceedings, and the Court has already issued decisions sentencing about 26 persons.

Kosovo Police had begun in early stage to gather information from various sources about the activity of the extremists, foreign fighters, recruiters and facilitators, and continuously have monitored their activities and movements, including their online propaganda activities.

Regarding the gathering of information and evidences related to the FTF’s. we cooperated with other local agencies, such as Kosovo Intelligence Agency, Financial Intelligence Unit, Customs, Border Police, but also we had cooperation with international partners including countries in the region, and also Turkey and FBI.

In cooperation with the Prosecutors we consistently interviewed the families of persons who ended up in conflict zone, but also individuals, who have been part of the conflict and returned.

Also, against FTF’s recruiters and facilitators, we applied different covered investigative measures, including: phone interception, human and technical surveillance, online investigation and other investigative techniques, including the facilitation of protected witnesses who witnessed the activities of recruiters and facilitators and the undercover operations

**COOPERATION/ASSISTANCE**

I have to underline that during our efforts to counter phenomenon of FTF’s and to investigate and prosecute them, we faced difficulties and objective obstacles, due to the fact that Kosovo Police still, is not a member of many regional and international mechanism including Interpol, in which case the exchange of timely information was very difficult.

The other biggest difficulty was the lack of experience of the prosecutors dealing with terrorism cases and foreign fighters in particular.

However, in this mater we very much appreciate help and the support, which was provided especially from US DOJ institutions. Such as: Prosecutors from National Security Division (NSD) and “Office of Oversees Prosecutorial Development Assistance and Training” (OPDAT) in Kosovo.

NSD Prosecutors, trained Kosovo Police Anti-Terrorism Investigators and Special Prosecutors using, fact pattern case studies.

The trainings were very useful in strengthening the capacities of the police investigators and prosecutors to investigate and prosecute terrorism and foreign fighter cases.

They also did case based mentoring for the prosecutors of the Special Prosecution Office.

This included continuous engagement on specific challenges related to the prosecution of FTF cases, and multiple phone conferences between Kosovo prosecutors and prosecutors from NSD. NSD prosecutors also assisted and contributed in drafting the Foreign Fighters Law.

I would like to emphasize, that based on all the above mentioned activities we managed to: sensibilize the people about the threats and consequences of extremism through many awareness campaigns, to delegitimize extremists ideology and finally to reduce and minimize the FTF phenomenon, and, I am glad to report that in the last seven months we had no reported cases of any Kosovar traveling to the conflict zones.

Finally I would like to conclude by highlighting, ones more, the importance of regional and international cooperation, not by just sharing: intelligence, experiences among us, numbers of foreign fighters.

But also to exchange specifically the identity of individuals that are currently in Syria (because they who are currently there are considered to be the core extremists and terrorists and the most dangerous ones), and create and share the database with their data including fingerprints in order to identify and arrest them whenever they try to cross the borders using fake identity, fake passports or as a refugee.

And also I would like to highlight ones more, especially for the countries, were the prosecutors have no enough experience in dealing with terrorism cases and FTS to take into consideration this opportunity for assistance by the DOJ NSD, which in my opinion, is an outstanding opportunity .

Thank you very much.