

(Statement by Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation Oleg Syromolotov at the opening of the annual OSCE-wide Counter-Terrorism Conference, Vienna, June 30, 2015)

On behalf of the Russian Federation I am glad to welcome the distinguished participants of the Conference.

Russia has always expressed its willingness to support the effective OSCE-wide format of the Counter-Terrorism Conferences. We believe that such fora have consistently furthered cooperation in combating terrorism across the pan-European space and focused on the most relevant areas of interstate collaboration in this field.

This Conference, dedicated to the subject of "foreign terrorist fighters" (FTFs), which is important for all of us, is not an exception.

We believe that Russia was first to introduce the issue of FTFs to broad international discussion. It occurred exactly at the OSCE floor during a similar event in Swiss Interlaken in April 2014.

Therefore, this European Organization has actually started discussing this global and acute danger earlier than the United Nations, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization or the Council of Europe.

I would like to express my gratitude to the Serbian Chairmanship and the OSCE Secretariat for convening this meeting that will surely give us an opportunity to discuss the major aspects of countering terrorism and to share valuable experiences and new ideas. And, most importantly, committed to OSCE traditions, we will do so despite the current international environment, which is not at its best at the moment.

The Russian Federation is deeply concerned by the increased number of terrorist threats.

For almost 15 years, the international community has been engaged in a resolute fight against global terrorism. Nevertheless, one can hardly say that any decisive results have been achieved. On the contrary, many facts show that the modern system of international counter-terrorism cooperation lacks efficiency. For instance, today we witness an unprecedented outburst of terrorism in the Middle East and North Africa. Iraq and Syria are plagued by the monstrous Islamic State (IS), which has become a new leader of the "Terrorist International", and its influence is growing literally all over the world.

Russia continues to reiterate that it is impossible to eliminate the existing terrorist threats unless we find all the true reasons behind the enormous growth in terrorist crime rate. I regret to say that such causes include the willingness of a number States to use radical groups for political purposes, as a tool of intervention in other States' internal affairs in order to destabilize the situation and remove undesirable regimes. It is primarily the misguided policy of appeasement of terrorists that has brought chaos to the MENA countries, caused an outbreak of terrorism and extremism there and the suffering of hundreds of thousands or millions of people.

Furthermore, we are even unable to imagine all the negative consequences of the current crises, including those related to terrorism or extremism, which each of our countries and the OSCE region as a whole are facing.

One of such consequences is the rapidly growing number of foreign terrorist fighters in Syria and Iraq. No barriers, erected individually or collectively, can hold back this extremely dangerous flow. According to the Russian competent authorities, about 2,200 people have left the Russian Federation for Syria. The number of European citizens who have joined terrorist groups amounts to dozens of thousands. At the same time, we are even unable to effectively prevent such "jihad tourists" from returning to their countries of origin. I suppose that we are all concerned by this phenomenon and that we do understand what a dangerous potential for violence, terrorism and extremism is brought to our societies by these returning radicals and terrorists.

Russia is just as much concerned by the fact that even in the face of an obvious and direct terrorist threat our foreign partners from the West sacrifice –and to their own detriment at that – our common counterterrorist objectives to dubious political and even geopolitical benefits.

Russia's position on the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy remains unchanged: the fight against terrorism must be comprehensive and can be effective only if all States consolidate their efforts on the universally recognized international legal basis, respect the sovereignty of the countries involved and abandon their policies of double standards towards terrorists.

All States should practically and actively improve and develop their national strategies to rebuff new terrorist and extremist threats and be receptive to international recommendations and of each other's successful experiences.

Russia is acting in precisely this way. We take consecutive and energetic steps in order to effectively ensure counter-terrorist protection of our citizens and the State as a whole. We constantly strive to strengthen our national system to counteract terrorist and extremist threats taking into consideration the urgent internal and external counter-terrorism objectives. Thus, in December 2014, the Supreme Court of the Russian Federation, in accordance with the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions 2170 and 2178, recognized as terrorist organizations the Islamic State and another dangerous terror group Jabhat al-Nusra and banned their activities in the territory of the Russian Federation. It also criminalized traveling of Russian citizens abroad for the purpose of engaging in the activities of illegal armed groups in the territory of a foreign State.

Foreign terrorist fighters are not only involved in terrorist practices, but are also spreading terrorist and extremist ideology aggressively and cunningly. This is what makes them dangerous, particularly taking into account their authoritative and extremely negative impact on the immature minds of the most vulnerable segments of the population – youth and religious people.

As I understand it, this is one of the reasons why our Conference is paying particular attention to violent extremism.

That is why we deem it important to stress that it should be for the State and government authorities, which bear the main responsibility for security, to play a leading role in organizing a system for prevention of terrorism and taking steps in countering violent extremism. In this case, of course, top priority for government bodies is, while maintaining and intensifying power struggle against specific terrorist and extremist acts, to improve dramatically the effectiveness of countering radical ideology, to erect reliable barriers to halt its penetration into social consciousness, including in close partnership with civil society institutions.

The conceptual approaches to the implementation of policy aimed at countering violent extremism were specified in the Strategy for Countering Extremism in the Russian Federation through 2025, approved by President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin in October 2014.

It would be no exaggeration to say that the Russian Federation has unique historical experience in preserving interethnic and interreligious harmony, effective resources for countering extremism and radicalization, for instance, by broad and concerned involvement in these efforts of traditional respected confessions of Russia, as well as domestic educational, scientific and business groups and other components of the civil society in the format of a public-private partnerships. We are ready to openly share our successful practices in this sphere with our foreign partners at international platforms.

I wish success to this Conference and thank you for your attention.