



**Government of the Republic of Macedonia  
National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism  
and Countering Terrorism**

**NATIONAL COUNTERTERRORISM STRATEGY  
OF THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA  
(2018-2022)**

Skopje  
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## Preface

The Government of the Republic of Macedonia, in accordance with its commitments to reform the intelligence and security services in the security sector, is pleased to present its third National Counterterrorism Strategy (CT). The present document is aligned with the strategies for countering terrorism of the United Nations and the European Union and has been drafted in cooperation with regional and international partners, who have supported the activities of the National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism (NCCVECT).

With the present document the Republic of Macedonia seeks to coordinate the efforts of the ministries, governmental and nongovernmental institutions.

The NCCVECT would like to extend its gratitude to all international, regional, and national partners, as well as to the governmental and nongovernmental organizations which have supported the drafting of the National CT Strategy.

The Government of the Republic of Macedonia is looking forward to continuing its cooperation with all institutions and organizations in countering terrorism, in accordance with the National Strategy and the Action Plan for countering violent extremism (CVE) in order to counter such security phenomena, while maintaining the stability and the sovereignty of the state.

NCCVECT applauds the commitment and the endeavors of its members and contributors in the development of the CVE and CT strategic documents. It has been a privilege to work with them on setting the foundations for *strong families, strong communities, and a strong state*.

## STATEMENT BY THE PRIME MINISTER OF THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA



The Republic of Macedonia remains committed to democracy, rule of law, respect for human rights, and equality of all nations in the international community.

The Western Balkans' exposure to the threats and risks arising from violent extremism and terrorism, exacerbated by the phenomenon of "Foreign Terrorist Fighters", makes these compound transnational and transregional threats the top priority of the country.

Our multi-ethnic, secular state is enhancing its response to such threats, with the support of our regional and international partners.

The "3-6-9 Plan" of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, in addition to other commitments for reforms in the society, also seeks to increase institutional capacities to address security challenges. The national strategic documents, although separate, make up a joint and comprehensive instrument of action, which combines the sociological and legal methods of the so-called "soft" and "hard" measures. By virtue of these measures, the Republic of Macedonia is provided with a set of "SMART power" tools to deal with the rise of different forms of radicalism that often lead to violent extremism and terrorism.

The Republic of Macedonia emphasizes the need for early intervention and elimination of radical ideas through the use of soft prevention measures, as well as hard prosecution measures, due to its complex societal context.

The Republic of Macedonia has social and collective responsibility to provide a wider front against violent extremism by engaging religious, local, media, and education actors.

Furthermore, there is a need for a contemporary approach to tackle the threat of terrorism by strengthening national security and stability through enhanced regional cooperation with counterparts in the countries in the Balkans and beyond.

In view of the long-term safety, security, stability and prosperity of the citizens of our country, the decision to establish National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism and draft the new strategic documents (2018-2022) set the foundation for the commitment of the Republic of Macedonia to collective security and defense, which is done in concert with the one of our regional and international partners – this is a testament of our selfless commitment to:

***Strong families, ... Strong communities, ... Strong state!***

**H.E. Zoran Zaev**

President of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia

## **JOINT STATEMENT BY THE NCCVECT NATIONAL COORDINATOR AND DEPUTY COORDINATOR FOR COUNTERING TERRORISM**

Despite recent successes in the fight against terrorism, the terrorist threat continues to evolve and adapt to modern ways of life. The Republic of Macedonia, as a country located at the center of the region, is continuously at risk from the dangers of transnational and transregional terrorism, and therefore the country must remain vigilant and ready to address new challenges.

Terrorism knows no nationality or religion; this is a truth that we must hold close and constant to our hearts and actions so as to remain true and fair representatives of the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia. The fight against the threats of terrorism and the terrorists' violent and destructive activities requires countermeasures: improved border security, timely information sharing, strengthened criminal law, and expanded messaging through local networks, while working on the factors and drivers of violent extremism.

The Republic of Macedonia maintains strong and long lasting cooperative ties with the countries in the region and the international community, as well as strategic partnerships with USA, NATO, EU, OSCE and other international organizations.

The important geostrategic and geopolitical positions of the Republic of Macedonia in the region enable it to contribute to the international community's efforts and campaigns to counter terrorism through rapid mobilization of available resources.

Although the number of departing foreign fighters has decreased, the threat of violent extremism and terrorism in the Western Balkans persists and is evolving. The experience gained through the recent counter-terrorism actions in partnership with the Republic of Albania and the Republic of Kosovo are examples of good practices of a cooperative approach that are essential for a coordinated effort to prevent violent extremism and fight against terrorism, which have been spreading aggressively in the region with their specific, but also shared characteristics.

The new National Counter-Terrorism Strategy and Action Plan reaffirm the commitment of the Republic of Macedonia to a comprehensive and holistic prevent, protect, pursue, and respond approach to address the threats of terrorism and terrorists' activities. These documents identify the existing gaps, as well as the ways to strengthen capabilities and institutional capacities. In this way we shall rise to the challenge of terrorism and confront it with:

***Strong families, ... Strong communities, ... Strong state!***

**Borce Petrevski**

National coordinator for PVE and CT

**Zlatko Apostoloski**

Deputy National Coordinator for CT

## SUMMARY

"Moving forward together with faith and confidence."

- Borce Petrevski,  
NCCVECT Coordinator

The experience shows that different strategies often diverge in particular segments, fail to communicate clearly and coherently their intents across institutions and to the citizens, and do not provide for effective implementation of the planned strategic goals.

Although the imperatives of countering terrorism (CT) are distinct from prevention of violent extremism (CVE) in numerous and significant ways, both have to be designed and implemented in a coherent, correlated and strategic manner, since the threats and hazards of violent extremism and terrorism are intertwined and inextricably related. Thus, the National CT and CVE Strategies of the Republic of Macedonia are substantively aligned, while the relevant action plans (despite being two separate documents) are characterized by harmonized principles and respond to a common set of drivers and factors.

### 1. National Common Guiding Principles for CVE and CT

- Principle of constitutionality and legality;
- Principles of rule of law, respect for human rights and freedoms, non-discrimination and focus on personal data protection;
- Principle of ensuring a safe, secure and sovereign Republic of Macedonia;
- Principle of a comprehensive national approach
  - Whole of Government (the Government and all of its institutions) approach (WGA)
  - Whole of Society approach (WSA)
  - Functional Teams / Working Groups / Task Forces
    - Interinstitutional cooperation
    - Transparency
- Principle of good governance and fostering democratic values;
- Principle of respect for multiethnic and multicultural aspects of the Republic of Macedonia; • Principle of regional and transnational cooperation;

### 2. Core Guiding Principles for CVE and CT

- Secure and safe citizens of the Republic of Macedonia;
- Building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions that will support and develop the public trust therein;
- Ensuring an environment that is conducive to enhanced economic development;
- Ensuring national unity and communities resilient to radicalization and violent extremism;

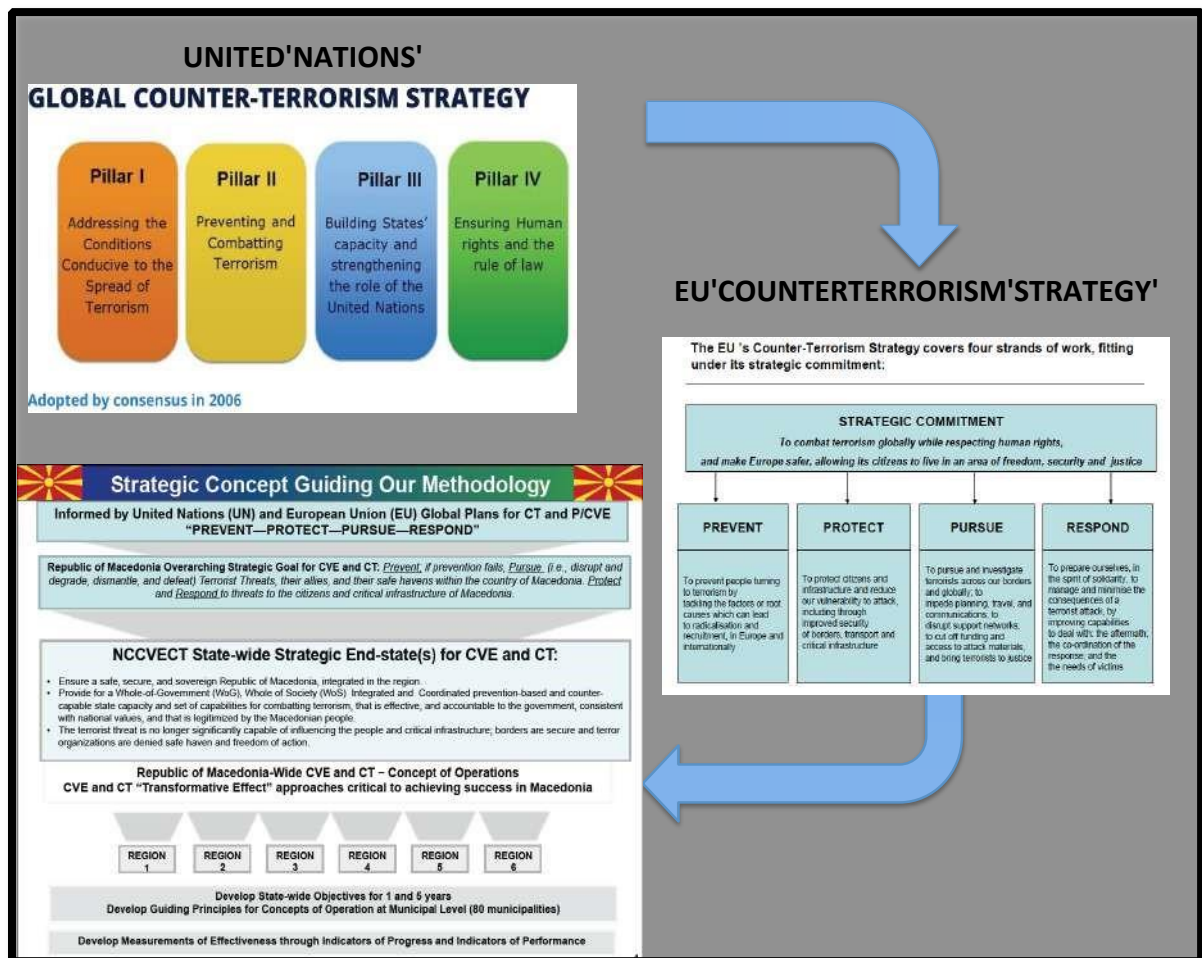
### 3. Common drivers and factors of CVE and CT

- Foreign Terrorist Fighters
- Ethno-Religious Extremism;
- Disenfranchisement & Radicalization;
- The "Nexus" of Corruption, Criminality, & Terrorism;

These common factors serve as the contextual and substantive "links" between the National Strategies for Countering Violent Extremism and Counter-Terrorism in the Republic of Macedonia. The strategies are linked further, institutionally and organizationally, under the *"four pillars"* of the Global CVE and CR Strategies of the United Nations (UN) and the CVE and CT strategies of the European Union (EU).<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "The European Union Counter-Terrorism Strategy," Council of the European Union, Brussels, 30 November 2005; "Plan of

FIGURE 1. Comprehensive integration with the international community

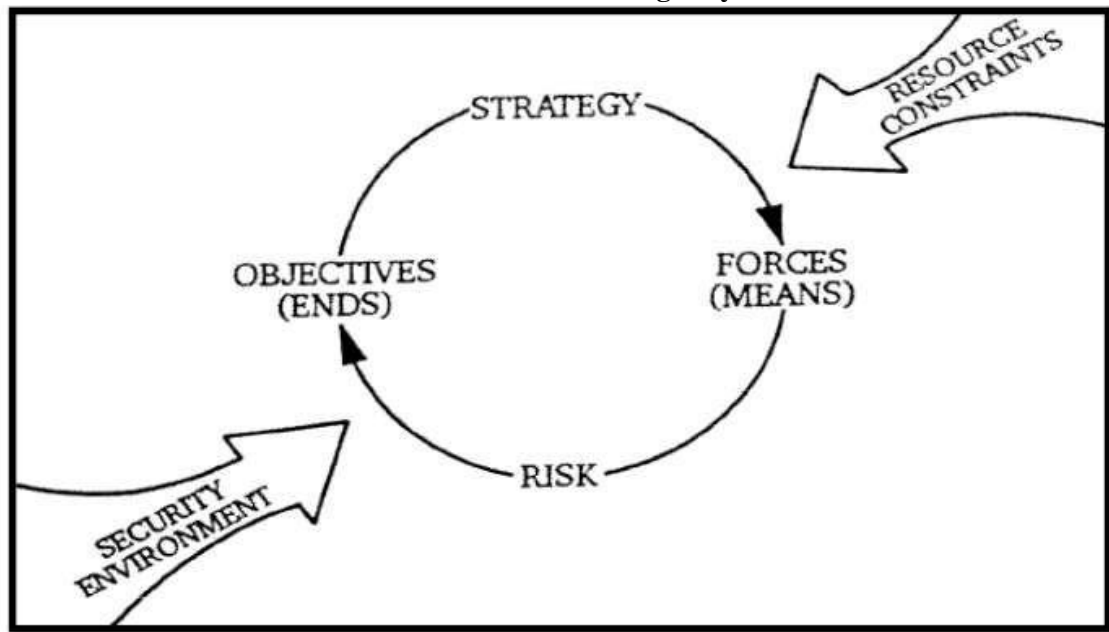


The two national strategies are a result of the collective efforts of the National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism (hereinafter NCCVECT) of the Republic of Macedonia to arrive at a common understanding of the **national goals, vision** and **mission** of the Republic of Macedonia. The NCCVECT members need to identify the competencies, capacities and needs of the ministries and institutions in view of ensuring the safety and protection of the citizens and the sovereignty of the Republic of Macedonia.

The NCCVECT seeks to codify the common understanding of the strategic environment, which provides a wider context to the CVE and CT missions, identify priorities, challenges, and opportunities to strengthen the contribution of the Republic of Macedonia in the prevention of all future manifestations of all forms of extremism and the supporting factors that lead to terrorism.



FIGURE 2: The Strategic Cycle



NCCVECT has developed comprehensive overarching strategic goals to guide the country's efforts relating to CVE and CT:

#### Republic of Macedonia's General Strategic Goal for CVE and CT

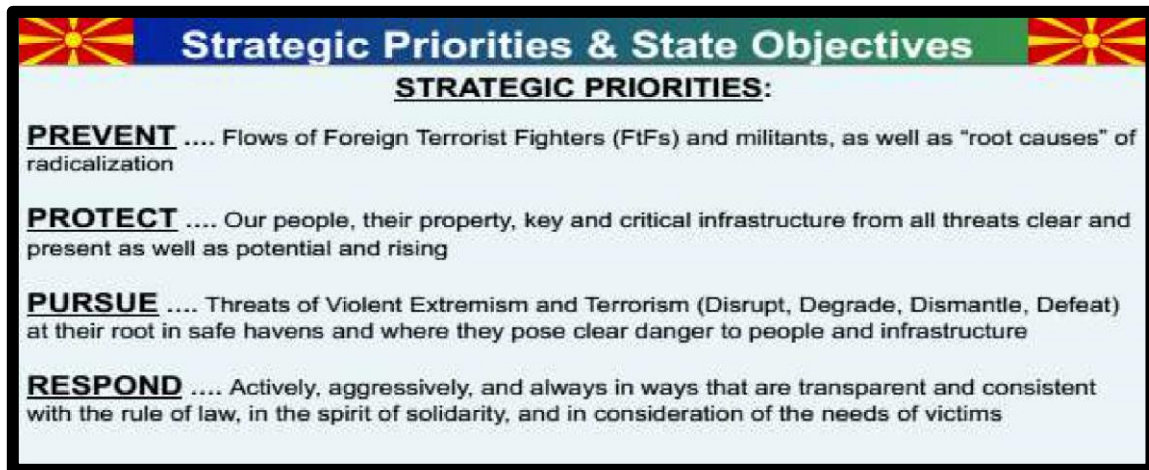
*PREVENT; however, if and where prevention fails, PURSUE (in a regulated, progressive manner, i.e., disrupt, degrade, dismantle, and defeat) terrorist threats, their allies, and their safe havens within the territory of the Republic of Macedonia, ... while always maintaining alertness to PROTECT and RESPOND to threats to the citizens and the critical infrastructure of the Republic of Macedonia.*

#### GENERAL STRATEGIC PRIORITIES OF THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA FOR COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND COUNTERING TERRORISM

The challenges relating to the prevention of violent extremism and countering terrorism (and causes thereof) require clear and distinctive and fully integrated Strategies and Action Plans. The Republic of Macedonia has arrived upon and adopted a substantive and fundamental harmony between the two national strategies and the relevant action plans in the following four (4) common **STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**:



FIGURE 3. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR CVE AND CT



The role and responsibility of the NCCVECT<sup>2</sup> is to ensure the coordination, cooperative multipronged planning and activities to support prevention of violent extremism and countering terrorism.

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<sup>2</sup> For a detailed description of the current standing official roles and responsibilities of the NCCVECT, see "Decision for the establishment of a National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Counter-Terrorism," 25 July, 2017, Government of the Republic of Macedonia.

## INTRODUCTION

The Republic of Macedonia holds a strategically important geopolitical position that, combined with its complex social structure, presents diverse challenges and opportunities for the nation. The citizens of the Republic of Macedonia should demonstrate unity in dealing with organized crime activities and radical ideologies calling for violence and threatening the societal and constitutional values of the state.

The Government of the Republic of Macedonia has a social and collective responsibility to deal with violent extremism and terrorism threats through religious, local, media and educational approaches, emphasizing strengths and advantages in view of preserving the cohesion of the society.

Violent extremism and terrorism represent a growing international threat which significantly motivates the need for an improved and strengthened collective security and institutional cooperation in the strategic planning and implementation of the activities in the Republic of Macedonia. The Republic of Macedonia should address emerging and growing challenges by remaining vigilant against everadapting criminal and terrorist networks and their affiliates, as well as other threats that create instability.

## COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM: UNDERSTANDING AND ACKNOWLEDGING THE DIFFERENCES, SIMILARITIES AND LINKS

It is essential to understand and acknowledge the major differences, similarities and ties between violent extremism and terrorism in order to develop comprehensive national strategies and action plans, which would build capacities and capabilities to counter these negative societal phenomena in an effective and affordable (i.e., "cost-effective") manner.

The consideration of the threats of violent extremism and terrorism, as well as their prerequisites, root causes, drivers and the unique local-municipal, national and regional contexts that are specific to the Republic of Macedonia is an important foundation for the development of the two national strategies and action plans on CVE and CT.

Violent extremism and terrorism are two separate and distinct problems posing a threat to the Republic of Macedonia, as well as the countries in the Balkans and the wider international community. Nevertheless, they are simultaneously two parts of a larger, wider and more dangerous "cycle" of threats.

Both threats of Violent Extremism and Terrorism worsen as single threats if not dealt with early, frequently, and continuously. It is even more important to understand that both threats worsen when counter-measures are inadequately applied. The application of wrong tools and solutions to the problem shall aggravate, rather than minimize and mitigate threats.

CVE should be seen and approached as a complementary strand of a wider CT approach.

## FIGURE 4. VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

## Countering Violent Extremism & Terrorism

### WIDELY ACCEPTED DESCRIPTIONS

#### The broad description of VIOLENT EXTREMISM –

**refers to the beliefs and actions of people who support or use ideologically motivated violence to realize radical ideological, religious or political views.**

- ✓ Central to the concept of CVE is the importance of addressing the "conditions conducive" to the spread of terrorism
- ✓ Acts of terrorism cannot be prevented through repressive measures alone
- ✓ It is essential to develop constructive solutions for grievances that may be exploited by different ideological groups and their supporters

#### The broad description of TERRORISM –

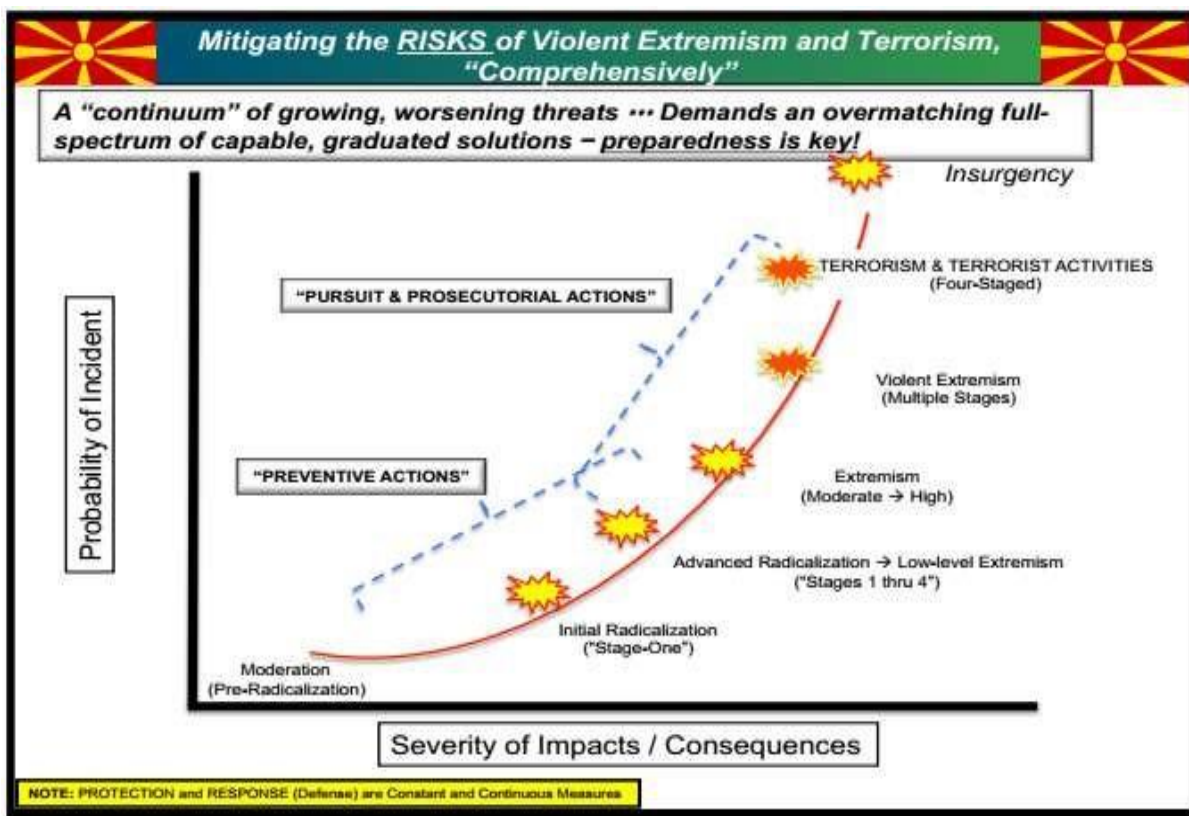
**the unlawful use of violence and intimidation, especially against civilians, in the pursuit of political aims.**

- ✓ Terrorism is a serious crime
- ✓ Terrorism cannot and should not be associated with any nationality, religion or ethnicity ✓  
Some of its common traits include: hazards to life or limb and property; intentional attempts to undermine the democratic government, in particular by trying to influence policy and legislators; indiscriminate approach to target selection, aimed at inspiring fear and terror throughout a population

*Every functioning society requires rule of law: investigation, prosecution, trial and detention. CVE does not seek to replace these approaches but rather to complement them. Any government that relies solely upon traditional counter-terrorism approaches and fails at complementing the rule of law with measures addressing the root causes of violent extremism shall ultimately endanger its own national security. CVE is not a soft option, but rather a **strategic imperative**.<sup>3</sup>*

**FIGURE 5. RISK MANAGEMENT**

<sup>3</sup> "National Action Plans Task Force Supporting Strategic Efforts to Prevent and Counter Violent Extremism," *Hedayah Global Center on Cooperative Security*, 23 January 2018.



The threats of violent extremism and terrorism today are combining and compounding, and convene at specific geopolitical locations within and outside national-state boundaries (i.e., at key "nexus" and under-regulated spaces) presenting transnational and transregional problems that are straddling boundaries.

As any other sovereign state, the Republic of Macedonia must always maintain comprehensive and robust National Strategies and Action Plans – capabilities and capacities – for CVE and CT, as separate and distinct challenges and threats. Comprehensive preparedness is KEY.

However, at the same time, one must also consider best practices which demonstrate that the more one develops, improves and maintains the capabilities and capacities for prevention of violent extremism, the less one has to use such capabilities and capacities to counter terrorism.

The preventive approach to radicalization and violent extremism is the most cost-effective way to deal with this problem, which must not be left unaddressed or ignored altogether, taking into account the fact that force should always be used as a last resort, rather than as the first and only response option.

Radicalization on its own is not a threat to society unless it is related to violence or other unlawful acts, such as incitement to hatred, as legally defined in accordance with international human rights law.<sup>4</sup> *Terrorist* radicalization, on the other hand, is a dynamic process whereby an individual comes to accept terrorist violence as a possible, perhaps even legitimate, course of action.

There is no single profile that encompasses all terrorists, nor is there a clear-cut pathway that leads individuals to terrorism. Possible drivers of terrorist radicalization are varied and complex and combine in a unique way in each specific case.

<sup>4</sup> For example, some forms of radicalization can actually be a force for beneficial change. For instance, people who advocated the abolition of slavery, or who championed universal suffrage were at one time considered to be radical as they stood in opposition to the prevailing views in their societies. Source: "Preventing Terrorism and Countering Violent

Profiles built on stereotypical assumptions based on religion, race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status, etc. are not only discriminatory, but are also ineffective, and run the risk of worsening and fueling the spread of both phenomena. For these instrumental reasons we must reject the identification of terrorism with any nationality, religion or ethnicity.

Building on these foundational tenets, and moreover on the specific and unique context of the challenges and opportunities that lie at the heart of countering violent extremism and terrorism in the Republic of Macedonia, the national strategies also present a contextually-relevant operational description of the Republic of Macedonia's set of comprehensive tools for CVE and CT.

TABLE 1. Considering various descriptions of countering terrorism, from the perspective of the Republic of Macedonia

<b>COUNTERING TERRORISM</b>
<i>"Coordination of individual and institutional capacities and resources for the purpose of detection, prevention and response to all forms of terrorist phenomena and activities."</i>
<i>"Taking political, security and military activities designed to prevent and counter terrorism, and to prosecute the perpetrators of terrorism."</i>
<i>"Terrorism is a phenomenon of violent behavior of groups and individuals due to political and ideological motives, aiming at destroying and damaging soft and hard targets with significant adverse consequences."</i>
<i>"Radical extreme groups and individuals who aim at spreading terror, fear, violence... by way of terrorist activities for the sole purpose of disrupting the constitutional order of the state."</i>

From this survey of RoM-tailored, full-spectrum tools for countering violent extremism and terrorism, we arrive on an overarching strategic goal for CVE and CT.

#### **Republic of Macedonia's Overarching Strategic Goal for CVE and CT:**

*PREVENT; but if, when, and where prevention fails, PURSUE (in a regulated, conditions-based escalatory manner, i.e., disrupt and degrade, dismantle, and defeat) Terrorist Threats, their allies, and their safe havens within the country of Macedonia... while always maintaining a preparedness to PROTECT and RESPOND to threats to the citizens and critical infrastructure of the Republic of Macedonia.*

Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism: A Community-Policing Approach," Published by OSCE, Vienna, February 2014

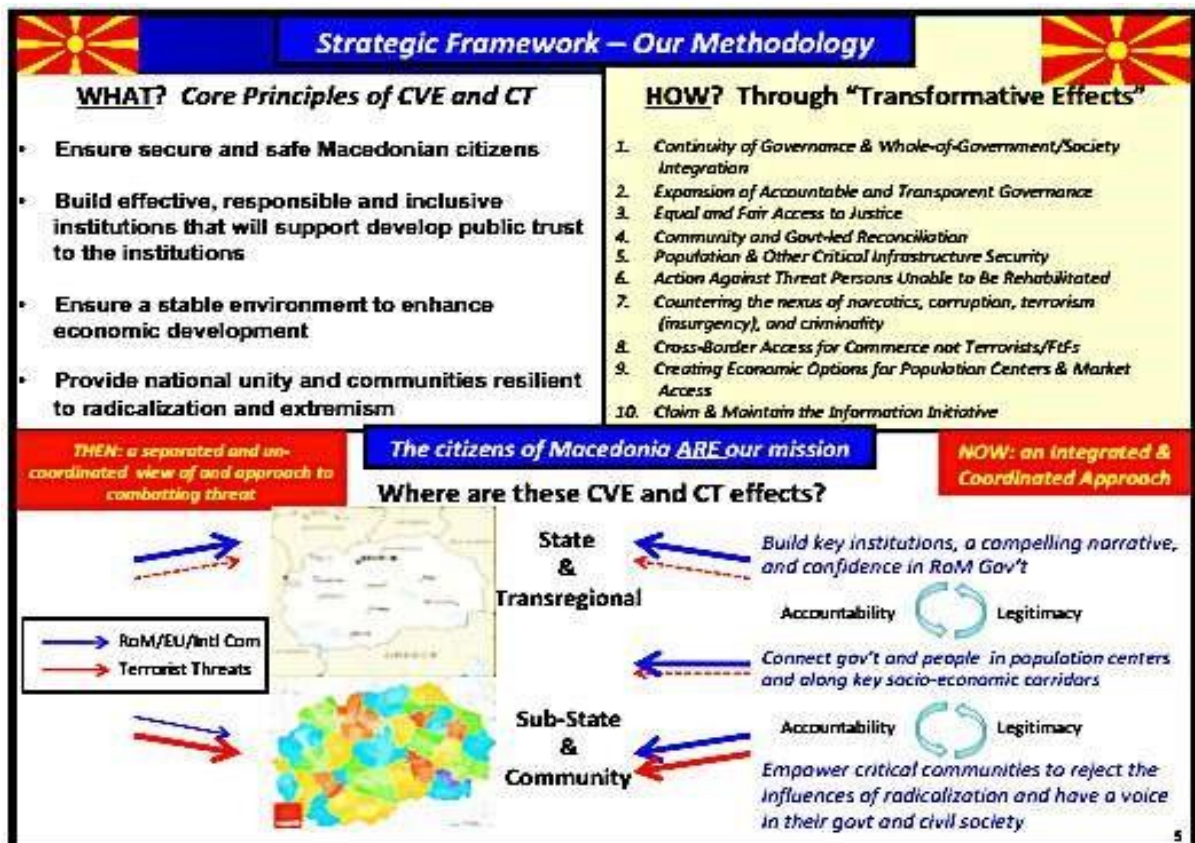
## **METHODOLOGY OF THE NATIONAL CVE AND CT STRATEGIES**

The Methodology of the National CVE and CT Strategies follows a simple, but powerful approach which:



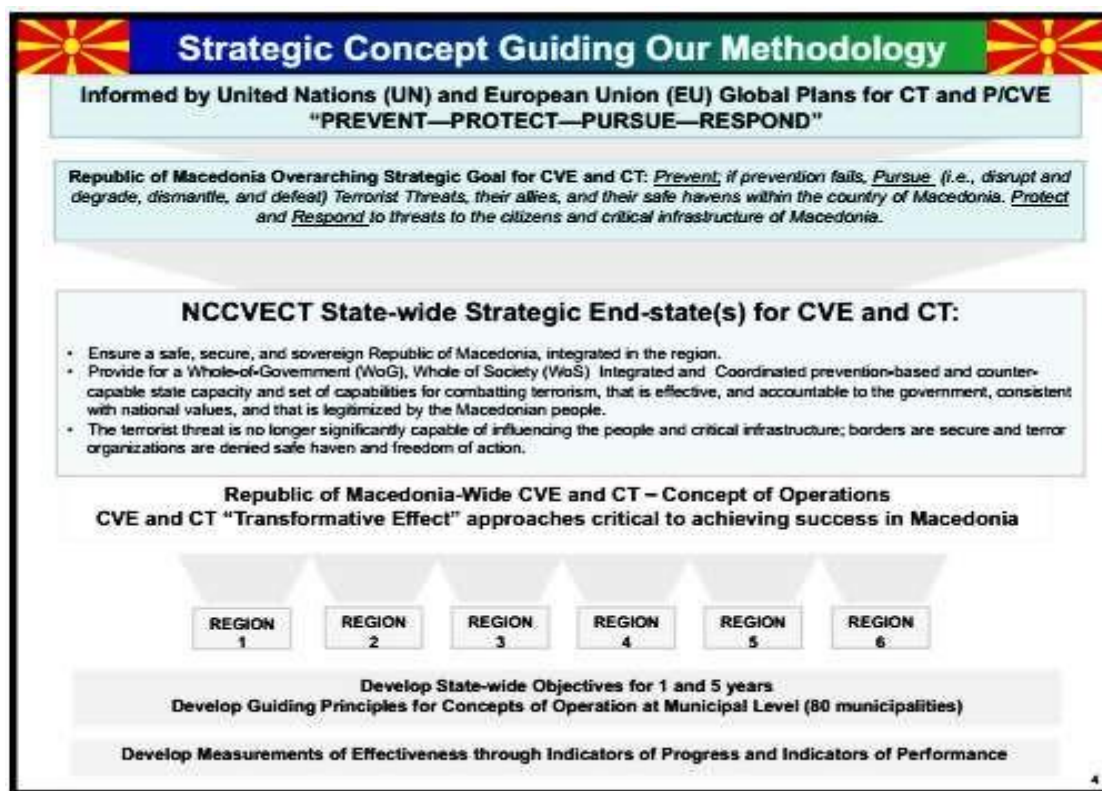
- Focuses on the *citizens of the Republic of Macedonia*, as our collective and overarching mission;
- Leads to the development of comprehensive national implementation strategies (i.e., EndsWays-Means) based on a common set of guiding principles for CVE and CT
- Identifies so-called "transformative effects" ... that represent ways in which the NCCVECT can help the making of recommendations for reorganization of institutional and community efforts for dealing with those challenges and opportunities.

**FIGURE 6.** *Methodology of the strategic approach of the Republic of Macedonia to the organization of CVE and CT*



Our methodology for prevention of violent extremism and countering terrorism begins and ends with the focus on the Republic of Macedonia and its people, while recognizing the efforts and interests of the neighboring countries and our partners from the international community.

**FIGURE 7.** *Strategic approach to countering violent extremism and terrorism*



The core role and responsibility of the NCCVECT is to provide coordination, cooperative planning and activities required to prevent, prosecute and respond to threats of radicalization that can lead to violent extremism and terrorism.

## TERMINOLOGY (GLOSSARY OF DESCRIPTIVE TERMS)

### DESCRIPTIONS OF KEY TERMS \*<sup>5</sup>

<b>Action plan</b>	A sequence of steps that must be taken, or activities that must be performed, for a strategy to succeed. An action plan has three major elements: 1) Specific tasks: what will be done and by whom. (2) Time frame: when will it be done. (3) Resource allocation: what specific funds are available for specific activities.
<b>At-risk people</b>	People who are particularly vulnerable to becoming radicalized to violent extremism. A number of factors can make people vulnerable to radicalization, including the exclusion from the family, friends or the broader community, and exposure to criminality or violence.
<b>Community</b>	A space of belonging, consisting of shared meanings, comprised of one or more of a combination of geographical, imaginative, emotional, political, and other ties.

<sup>5</sup> This list of "descriptive" terms of reference will continue to evolve. Equally importantly, this evolving list of terms will maintain a balance of 'sociological' descriptions, with the aim of being easily and clearly accessible to and understandable by the general readership, while also having terms that are 'legally' consistent and validated in accordance with the law and legal statutes and common practices in the Republic of Macedonia and the international community.



<b>Community-based organization</b>	An organization driven by community residents in all aspects of its existence, meaning the majority of the governing bodies and staff consist of local residents; priority issue areas are identified and defined by residents; solutions to address priority issues are developed with residents; and program design, implementation, and evaluation components have residents directly involved in leadership positions
<b>Community policing</b>	Community policing is a philosophy that promotes organizational strategies, which support the systematic use of partnerships and problemsolving techniques, to proactively address the immediate conditions that give rise to public safety issues such as crime, social disorder, and fear of crime.
<b>Community resilience</b>	Measure of the sustained ability of a community to use the available resources to respond to, withstand, and recover from adverse situations.
<b>Counter-narrative</b>	Actions to directly deconstruct, discredit, and demystify violent extremist messages.

## VISION AND MISSION FOR COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND TERRORISM

The detailed SWOT analysis produced a deep, broad, and comprehensive understanding and acknowledgment of the challenges, root causes, and potential opportunities that define the NCCVECT mandate relating to countering violent extremism and terrorism.

The Republic of Macedonia and the Western Balkans countries are collectively exposed to the threats and risks emanating from radicalization, violent extremism and terrorism, exacerbated by the emergence of foreign terrorist fighters.

Considering the environment of threats in a wider context and taking into account the threats that the Republic of Macedonia is facing at national, local (municipal), regional and international levels, our vision and mission are:

### VISION

*To ensure a safe, secure and sovereign Republic of Macedonia that is inclusive and responsive of its citizens and integrated in the region.*

*The terrorist threat can no longer affect the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia, the critical infrastructure and borders are stable and secure. Terrorist organizations are denied safe haven, freedom of movement and operation.*

### Overarching MISSION for CVE and CT of the Republic of Macedonia

**To develop effective, accountable and comprehensive governmental and societal capacities and activities for the prevention, protection, pursuit and response to radicalization and violent extremism that can lead to terrorism in accordance with state values, with a purpose to secure and promote a safe and prosperous state.**

Through this overarching mission, the Republic of Macedonia commits itself to improving its preparedness to counter violent extremism and terrorism by providing the state and citizens with

comprehensive governmental and social capacities and capabilities for prevention thereof. These capacities and capabilities will be effective and accountable to the Government of the Republic of Macedonia and in line with constitutional, legal and procedural rules and values.

From this overarching mission statement we derive the specific mission relating to countering terrorism.

### **Specific MISSION of the Republic of Macedonia for Countering Terrorism**

*To provide for and promote a safe, secure and prosperous state, through coordinated activities, that prevent, protect, pursue<sup>6</sup> and respond to terrorist threats.*

## **STRATEGIC ANALYSIS OF THE ENVIRONMENT**

The Republic of Macedonia, as any other countries in the international community, is not immune to the threats of violent extremism and terrorism. More recently the global threat has required that the Republic of Macedonia look specifically at its relationship with its neighbors, the international community, and national stakeholders in terms of prevention of violent extremism and terrorism.

The rise of the international tensions, which coincided with the regional separation of states in the Balkans, fostered by the inflow of foreign financial support, has encouraged the communities to become more radical and extreme. The emergence of foreign terrorist fighters is of particular concern. According to information gathered in 2016, 110 fighters from the Republic of Macedonia went to Syria, of whom 25 were killed there, and 86 returned to the country.<sup>7</sup>

NCCVECT is tasked with the assessment of the risk factors and the environmental conditions that may contribute to violent extremism and terrorism as universal phenomena.

### **National level**

The limited capacities of state institutions present barriers to the efficient countering of terrorism and violent extremism. NCCVECT acknowledges the need for state institutions to build their capacities and work cooperatively so as to understand the meaning of CT and CVE, as well as the specific activities that the institutions must undertake in order to ensure the stability and sovereignty of the state.

NCCVECT also addresses the importance of the real and perceived grievances of the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia, such as the marginalization of the communities, intolerance for differences in culture, religion and language and unfair or unjust practices of law enforcement authorities. Negative behaviors associated with these injustices can be influenced in a more positive manner once all governing bodies are clearly responsible for representing all citizens. In this way the state shall adopt proactive views on protection by virtue of prevention of the violations of the rights of its citizens. Good governance promotes a strong civil society.

It is imperative for the Republic of Macedonia to continue to improve the standardization of its institutional response to CT and CVE. Institutional efforts to create comprehensive training and support for interagency information, data, and intelligence sharing platforms, and improve the mutual trust and

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<sup>6</sup> The "Pursue" line of operations, actions, and activities will be carried out and implemented in accordance with a conditions-driven, escalator approach of Disruption, Degrading, Dismantlement, and Defeat of terrorist actors and organizations, that prescribes to a use of force through a set of approaches and protocols based on a philosophy, rule, and practices of "least force necessary."

<sup>7</sup> Analytica and the US Embassy, "Assessment of Macedonia's Efforts in Countering Violent Extremism, View from Civil Society," June 2016.

collaboration among government security services and community leaders will provide consistency of efforts.

### **Municipal/local level**

The NCCVECT focuses on various issues at the local government level, emphasizing several areas where national and local authorities should cooperate to prevent violent extremism and terrorism. These include:

- Improving trust and collaboration among government security services and religious leaders;
- Refining the comprehensive training and support for religious communities to counter online radicalization;
- Advancing the training of communities, families, prison staff and religious leaders in order to identify early signs of violent radicalization;
- Developing means and measures to counter the volume of misinformation that exposes polarizing narratives among vulnerable audiences; and
- Development of processes and procedures to encourage community programs to support societal cohesion that prevents violent extremism and terrorism.

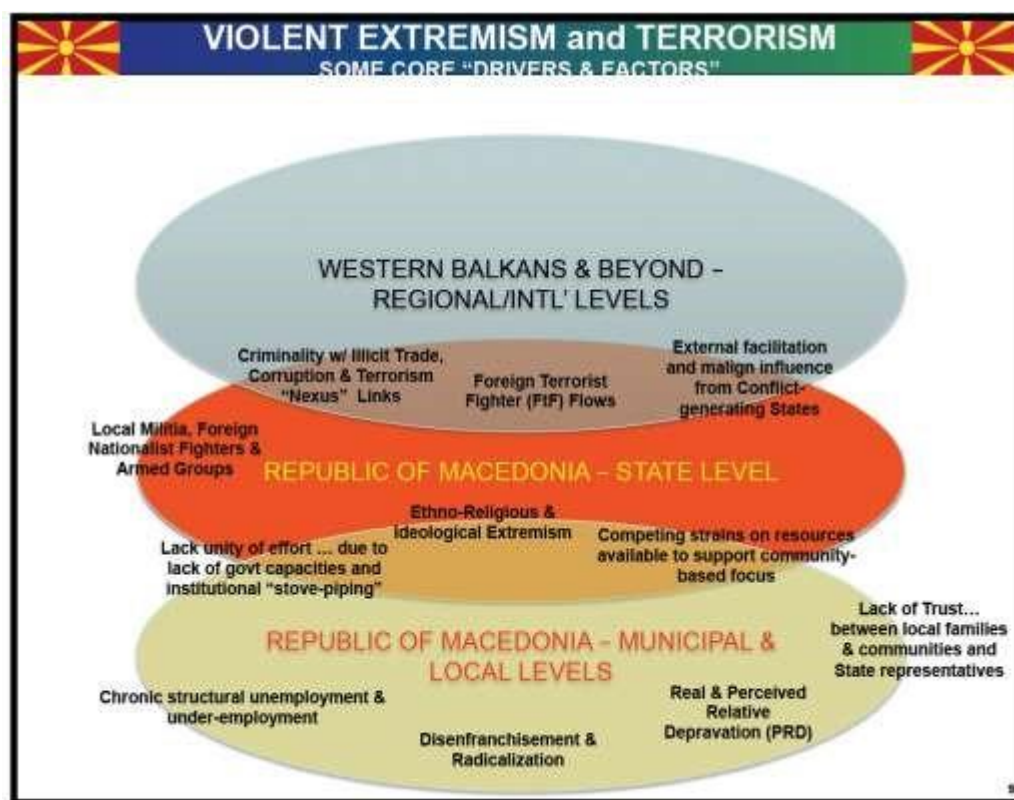
Underemployment and unresponsive policing authorities add to the frustration of communities who perceive their needs as not being taken seriously. The failure, or the late response to community demands for assistance from state institutions to safeguard the rights of citizens, reinforces the emergence of violent and radical activities.

In the Republic of Macedonia, the propensity to encourage citizens to maintain ethnic and religious closed societies, rather than make efforts to encourage inclusive, inter- and intra-cultural integration and religious tolerance, are important causes of unrest. Furthermore, such differences in society contribute to individual or collective desire to embrace extremism. Ultimately, divisiveness and exclusion contribute significantly to the transnational spillover effects, which compound consequences at local, national, and regional levels.

### **Regional level**

The Republic of Macedonia is at the crossroads of a transnational movement that connects criminal, ideological and extremist groups – the spread, influence, and activities which the state can stop, or at least thwart, with international support and cooperation.

The Republic of Macedonia has many key drivers or factors that are not specific to the state. An overview of the potential overlapping of these levels is presented in Figure 8.

**FIGURE 8.** *Some of the key violent extremism and terrorism drivers and factors*

## INTRODUCTION: THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA'S FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM<sup>8</sup>

The Government of the Republic of Macedonia approved the second National Counterterrorism Strategy in March of 2016. It contained a section dedicated to the prevention of violent extremism (PVE). The Government also drafted a Counterterrorism Action Plan in 2016 and submitted it to the European Commission for review and comments. The Action Plan, however, lacked implementation benchmarks, funding estimates, and control of monitoring and evaluation.

The Republic of Macedonia conducted three significant counterterrorism operations in 2015 and 2016, one of which was in coordination with authorities of the Republic of Albania and Kosovo, namely:

The Republic of Macedonia was engaged in three law enforcement actions against terrorists in 2015/2016:

- On 6 July 2015, house searches on 28 locations were conducted (24 natural persons and 4 legal persons), and 14 persons were arrested, which were later convicted in accordance with the Criminal Code of the Republic of Macedonia, and the search for others continued, within the operation "Cell".

<sup>8</sup> Source: U.S. Department of State, "BUREAU OF COUNTERTERRORISM AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM Country Reports on Terrorism 2016 Report," accessible [online] at: <https://www.state.gov/j/ct/rls/crt/2016/272231.htm#Macedonia>. For further information on money laundering and financial crimes, see the 2017 International Narcotics Control Strategy Report (INCSR), Volume II, Money Laundering and Financial Crimes: <http://www.state.gov/j/inl/rls/nrcrpt/index.htm>.

- On 9 July 2016, Macedonian authorities carried out simultaneous searches at seven locations and arrested four persons (the fifth person turned himself in later on 25 July 2016), charging them under Criminal Code of the Republic of Macedonia, in an operation called “Cell 2”.
- On 12 August 2016, authorities worked with regional partners from the Republic of Turkey to arrest and extradite five citizens of the Republic of Macedonia who were seeking to join ISIS in Syria.
- In November 2016, the Republic of Macedonia, in coordination with regional partners from the Republic of Albania and Kosovo conducted a raid to arrest 25 suspected terrorists who were planning a terrorist attack on a large stadium in the Republic of Albania during the World Cup qualifying soccer match between Albania and Israel.

The Republic of Macedonia cooperates with the USA in the fight against terrorism, displaying its strong commitment to the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS.

In February 2015, the trial of 29 persons charged with terrorism and planning to form a terrorist group began, and in May 2015, eight others were charged with providing logistical support to armed clashes with the police in Kumanovo. The trial continued in the course of 2017 and 2018.

The political crisis in the Republic of Macedonia that lasted several months in 2016 inhibited the decisive action by the Government of the Republic of Macedonia to address the deficiencies in law enforcement authorities and border security, including shortages in personnel and equipment. The Public Security Bureau within the Ministry of Interior worked with U.S. authorities to prevent corruption among border officials, resource constraints, training gaps for border police officers, and issues related to the border management system, Personal Identification Secure Comparison and Evaluation System (PISCES).

*A Joint Combined Exchange Training with U.S. Special Forces* took place in March 2016 in order to improve Macedonia's ability to protect soft targets. Macedonian authorities at the Ministry of Interior (MOI) reported that they developed operational plans to prevent and respond to terrorist attacks on soft targets including stadiums, hotels, etc. Furthermore, an international counterterrorism exercise in September 2016 brought together multiple agencies from the United States of America and the Republic of Macedonia to review Macedonia's preparedness and response capacities.

As regards the legislation, law enforcement and border security authorities, the Republic of Macedonia contains comprehensive counterterrorism provisions that prohibit domestic and international acts of terrorism. The country's counterterrorism law includes a provision criminalizing civilian participation in foreign conflicts. In particular, Article 322-a of the Criminal Code stipulates a five-year minimum prison sentence for participation in a foreign military or paramilitary force, or for recruiting, training, or transporting fighters.

Capacities of the Republic of Macedonia to detect and deter acts of terrorism without international support still need to be further reinforced. In particular, the police require training in command and control, tactical planning and execution, as well as casualty care.

Notwithstanding, the Republic of Macedonia successfully arrested “foreign terrorist fighters” and house searched potential foreign fighters; it also coordinated with regional partners to disrupt terrorist attack plans and to arrest Macedonian citizens attempting to join ISIS. Prosecutors secured prison sentences against foreign terrorist fighters primarily through plea bargaining.

Within the MOI, the Administration for Security and Counter-Intelligence is the leading authority in terrorism detection and intelligence gathering and works in coordination with the Public Security Bureau's Department of Organized and Serious Crime to detain suspects. The Prosecutor's Office manages the questioning and prosecuting of the arrested terrorist suspects.

The Border Police of the Republic of Macedonia use INTERPOL and EUROPOL watch lists that are regularly updated and they have biometric screening capability. The Border Police also share and receive information through alerts via the Joint Contact Centers with neighboring countries (Albania, Bulgaria, and Kosovo) and INTERPOL. In response to the influx of migrants, the European Union (EU) and Balkans countries regularly send border police detachments to assist the border police in securing Macedonia's southern border.

Border authorities work with European and U.S. partners to develop information-sharing protocols and upgrade the Personal Identification Secure Comparison and Evaluation System (PISCES) - border management system, improving its capacity to respond to the migration crisis and stem the flow of foreign terrorist fighters returning from conflict zones.

Finally, in regard to countering terrorist financing, the Republic of Macedonia is a member of the Council of Europe's Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering Measures and the Financing of Terrorism, a regional body similar to the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). Macedonia's Financial Intelligence Unit (FIU) and the Money Laundering Prevention Directorate (MLPD) are members of the Egmont Group of Financial Intelligence Units.

Major deficiencies in Macedonia's anti-money laundering/countering the financing of terrorism legal framework remain, including insufficient criminalization of terrorist financing and lack of clear mechanisms to implement UN measures. In addition, an overly complicated confiscation regime that remains conviction-based hinders the effective freezing and confiscation of terrorists' assets.

**TABLE 2a: 2018 SWOT ANALYSIS**

	STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<b>REGIONAL LEVEL</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Key Geostrategic Position - RoM is a “Strategic Pivot State”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RoM is in a turbulent and moderately unstable region of relatively weak democratic states</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RoM is not a “conflict state”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RoM is surrounded by states with post conflict and economic instability, inherited policies that impact the quality of building socially sustainable systems</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RoM is not an exporter of violent extremism and terrorism. Dramatic reductions in foreign terrorist fighters since 2015.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RoM lies at the East-West geostrategic crossroad surrounded by countries with porous borders that encourage “grey economies.”</li> </ul>
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Insufficient level of sharing of regional financial and counter terrorism-related intelligence</li> </ul>
<b>STATE LEVEL</b>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RoM is a strong state, with well-established governmental institutions and rule of law systems and procedures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RoM still suffers from a relatively high degree of dissatisfaction and lack of trust between communities and state and local government authorities</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RoM is in compliance with many key pillars of UN, EU, OSCE, and NATO</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of state and municipal institutional capacities and capabilities and persistent challenges with corruption</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RoM enjoys strong positive ties to International Organizations and is committed to the global mission of preventing radicalization of all kinds and combating terrorism and countering violent extremism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Insufficient means and measures to counter the volume of misinformation that exposes polarizing narratives among vulnerable audiences</li> </ul>
<b>MUNICIPAL AND LOCAL LEVEL</b>		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RoM is a society characterized by strong families and familial bonds and strong communities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chronic unemployment and under-employment, particularly within minority communities</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In the RoM there is a strong healthy tolerance for ethnic and religious differences and diversity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Weak trust-bonds between local police/law enforcement authorities and local persons</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RoM has traditionally adopted and fostered a moderate form of religious Islam and Orthodox Christianity, not identified with radical branches</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Lack of and weakness of “legitimate” authority creates leadership vacuums easily filled by radical extremist leaders with violent anti-state and anti-nation vision and intentions</li> </ul>



**TABLE 2b: 2018 SWOT ANALYSIS**

	OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
REGIONAL LEVEL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishment of State Working Groups (SWGs) for focused multi-agency, cross-institutional actions on the following: MKD-led establishment of a Western Balkans Regional CVE and CT strategy, led by Macedonia</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Due to its uniquely important geostrategic position as a state republic, MKD is always at risk of being a target of terrorist attacks</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Effective and efficient use of EU, OSCE, and other International Organizations capacity-building expertise and donor funds</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The transnational and transregional “Nexus” compound threat of criminality with illicit trade, corruption, and terrorism</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved standardization across regional data sharing platforms, including data processing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Foreign terrorist fighter (FtF) flows and external influences from conflict-generating states</li> </ul>
STATE LEVEL		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishment and further strengthening of the institutional capacities of the NCCVECT</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How the state chooses to address the threats of radicalization, violent extremism, and terrorism needs to be careful and cautious, so as to not produce adverse “blowback” effects</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishment of Integrated Task Forces (ITFs) for conducting coordinated, cross-institutional, state-community activities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ethno-religious and ideological extremism and radicalization</li> </ul>
MUNICIPAL AND LOCAL LEVEL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishment of permanent standing State Working Groups (SWGs) for coordinating and assessing activities for CVE and CT per each strategic priority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Competing strains on limited resources available to support community- based focus; lack of unity of efforts, due to lack of government capacities</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishment of key Integrated Task Forces (ITFs), including a MKD Joint Terrorism Task Force (MKD-JTTF) for improved border area control and crisis action prevention and response</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establishment of Community Action Teams (CAT s) for improvement of the cooperation between the state and local authorities</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Measures taken with the aim of preventing extremism and radicalism can infringe on personal freedoms and rights</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>RoM is characterized by strong, healthy and talented youth population for creating and fostering and promoting healthier inter-faith and inter-communal tolerance</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Chronic structural unemployment and under-employment</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved and comprehensive training for religious communities to counter online radicalization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disenfranchisement and sense of disaffection of local communities from and lack of trust between local people, families and communities with state and municipal representatives</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Improved training in identifying early signs of violent radicalization, including among prison and other professional staff</li> </ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Create means to encourage community programs to support societal cohesion that prevents violent extremism.</li> </ul>	

## UNDERSTANDING THE THREAT AND THE THREAT ENVIRONMENT<sup>9</sup>

Understanding of threats helps us understand our strengths, our roles and responsibilities, and our immediate-near-long term priorities - in at least three interrelated contexts: State level, local (and municipal) level, and the regional/international level.

**GLOBALLY**, international relations are undergoing a major power transition and geopolitical competition between states and nations creates preconditions for occurrence of violent extremist organizations and terrorist groups that threaten the already established world order.

This period of time of change marks significant changes in, and rising challenges and challengers to, the governing *norms and principles, rules and decision-making procedures*<sup>10</sup> that have defined the conditions for assured stable footings of the Western-Liberal ("Westphalian") International Order – namely:

1. namely, the primacy of territorial sovereignty of the state,
2. the general rule of inviolability of state territorial sovereignty,
3. and the definition of "aggression" as an act of a state or collective of states breaching and violating the territorial space and authority of a nation-state,
4. declared as the ultimate 'sin' of international affairs, warranting and even demanding collective security interventions to reestablishing the status quo ante.

System stability, based on these four governing principles has since the late 1980s been, first, "stirred" by reemerging claims of self-determination and rise of ethno-sectarian conflicts during the 1990s. The 9/11 terror attacks heralded the rise of other, non-state actors, namely Al Qaeda and its offshoots, including the so-called 'Islamic State'.

**REGIONALLY**, we see the rising presence of boundary-spanning, trans-regional compound security threats, and challenges that because of their trans-state spread and contagion potential are placing more and more pressure on countries and their states' and societies' capabilities and capacities to maintain sovereignty, protected private rights, and core value systems. Within these geostrategic characteristics, we find the Republic of Macedonia facing great threats of violent extremism and terrorism.

The Republic of Macedonia and the Western Balkans more broadly, are key and critical "strategic pivot" states<sup>11</sup>, upon which the future stability, security, and prosperity of the European Union, the coherence of NATO's southern flank security depends.

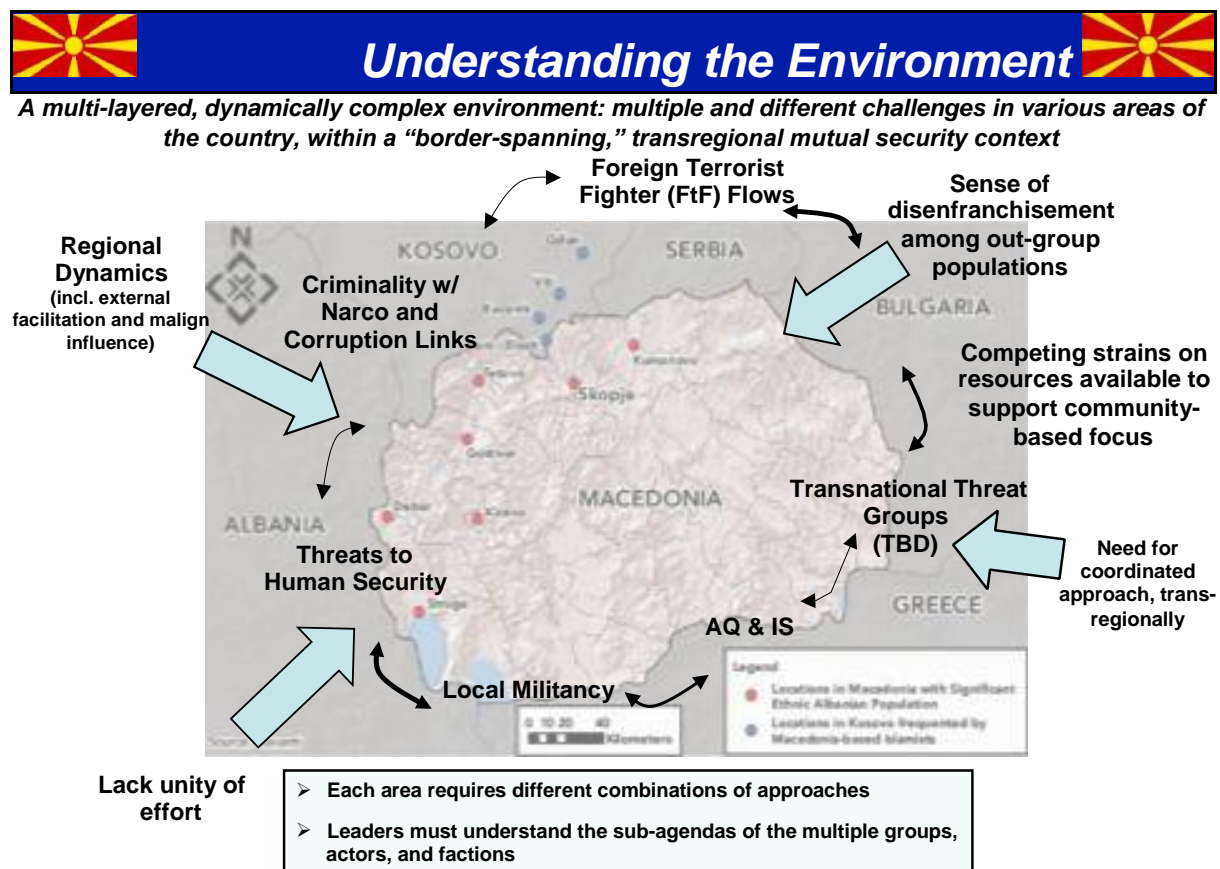
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<sup>9</sup> Wilson III, Isaiah. "Power in Transition: Challenges of Providing for an uncommon defense and the search for strategic stability," presentation for RAND Corporation, February 2017.

<sup>10</sup> See Stephen Krasner, *International Regimes* (1986).

<sup>11</sup> "WHY ARE PIVOT STATES SO PIVOTAL? THE ROLE OF PIVOT STATES IN REGIONAL AND GLOBAL SECURITY, *The Hague* Centre for Strategic Studies, 2014.

**FIGURE 9.** *Understanding the 'Compound' Trans-Regional Threat Environment*



2

The fact that the Republic of Macedonia remains not an exporter of violent extremism and terrorism is one of our country's greatest strengths; it is also one of our country's strongest justifications for approaching the international community as a willing and capable partner, and uniquely well geopolitically positioned, with a possibility to enhance the stability and security of the EU.

The Republic of Macedonia is an important strategic country for countering the major causes and preconditions that feed and spread the virulent threats of radicalization that can then give rise to violent extremism, and ultimately, to terrorism.

Major causes for concern originates from increasingly emergent links between once separate and discrete threats of criminality, violence and terrorism (including narco-terrorism, illegal finance, illicit arms and human trafficking, etc.). They combine with threats of a transnational and transregional reach that spillover established state and regional boundaries and borders, threatening national-state sovereignties. With these kinds of linkages with organized crime and terrorism a specific concern of special importance is the risk of selling false passports to foreign and aiding/smuggling transiting FTFs through the Republic of Macedonia, as well as the smuggling of firearms from the Western Balkans into the EU or other countries where they may be used for terrorist activities.

Additional risk factors that generate from these transregional threats dynamics include (but are not limited to) the following:

- Spillover of long lasting conflicts from para-military groups supported by local actors, organized crime groups in line with extreme actors on the local level contributing towards destabilization, creation of terroristic cells, intentional and wrong interpretation of political and religious messages aimed at destabilization

- Migration routes from the war-torn regions where the migration crises originate from
- Foreign terrorist fighters, transnational and transregional threat groups becoming networks, which operate on a transregional and even global level (e.g., AL-QAEDA/ISIS etc.)

## **SPECIFIC DANGERS OF THE FOREIGN TERRORIST FIGHTER THREAT<sup>12</sup>**

Overall, from the end of 2012 until the beginning of 2016 it is estimated that up to 1,000 individuals from the Western Balkan countries have travelled to and stayed in Syria and Iraq, some with their families. Some have joined ISIS whereas others aligned themselves with Jabhat Fatah al-Sham (also known as Tahrir al-Sham, and formally known as Al Nusrah Front). These individuals come from Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania, and Macedonia. Since ISIS's physical land mass has contracted, some of the Foreign Terrorist Fighters from the Western Balkans have returned home or to other third countries, whereas others have died in battle.

The departures and returns of Foreign Terrorist Fighters decreased as a result of the intensified regional and international efforts aimed at criminal prosecution of aspiring fighters and returnees from Syria and Iraq. Compared to contingents from other countries, the Western Balkans detachment in Syria and Iraq is older (on average men were 31, while women were 30 years of age on the date of their entry to Syria) and include more women (27 percent to 36 percent, among Kosovars and Bosniaks, respectively), which is almost double the European average. Consequently, the non-combatants (women and children) make up far more (up to 55 percent) of the Western Balkans contingent than is true of other foreign contingents in Syria and Iraq.

While a unique profile of the typical Western Balkans foreign fighter remains elusive, there are commonalities that can be understood as patterns, primarily: (1) links to diasporas in the EU (particularly in Austria and Germany), and (2) pre-departure criminality. Other common features include poor education, unemployment, dysfunctional or broken families, and mental health issues.

From the vantage-point and perspective of the ***STATE and MUNICIPAL-LOCAL LEVELS***, interethnic relations in Republic of Macedonia between the two largest communities continue to remain tense especially in parts of the country where the extremist groups are still present and active and are disposed to use the violence for achieving their political goals. So far there have been cases of violence against citizens and institutions of the Republic of Macedonia. Such acts of violence may boost violent reactions.

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<sup>12</sup> Sajjan Gohel & Vlado Azinovic, "The Challenges of Foreign Terrorist Fighters: A Regional Perspective," PfP-CTWG Policy Paper, November 2017, accessible [online] at: [www.pfp-consortium.org](http://www.pfp-consortium.org)

From an intra-state point of view, based on previous research and analyses, the cities of Skopje (within the borders of the City of Skopje, particularly the municipalities of Cair, Serava and Gazi Baba), Tetovo, Gostivar, and Kumanovo show themselves to be the main potential locations of violent extremism in Macedonia.

Challenge still remains regarding the protection of the citizens of the Republic of Macedonia from the influence of extremist ideologies based on intolerance, hatred, and violence to achieve political and ideological goals by abusing religion.



The threat of Foreign Terrorist Fighters, and the "push-pull" factors and drivers that produce and sustain them, is an especially important external threat of note. Macedonian foreign terrorist fighters have tended to be comprised of largely young men who have developed personal ties (over several years) to a small group of radical imams operating in the Skopje area. More recently, these flows have declined following law enforcement efforts against some radical imams and a decline in ISIS's influence.

There has been a drastic reduction in Macedonian Foreign Terrorist Fighters since 2016, which is likely due to the increased difficulty of traveling via Turkey, arrests of recruiters and influencers within Macedonia, and increased media attention towards ISIS' atrocities.

Regarding drivers of this threat, research and analysis, including local first-person key informant interviews, note economic, social, and ideological factors as the most likely factors influencing and driving foreign terrorist fighters. Also noted are the roles and influence that recruiters often play, targeting vulnerable individuals in the most vulnerable of locations, such as those with criminal pasts. In contrast to both self-identified religious conservatives and friends/family and neighbors of foreign terrorist fighters, experts and interviewees place less value on the importance of a potential foreign fighter identifying with the humanitarian plight of civilians in conflict states such as Syria and Iraq.

Locally and regionally conducted research also cites funding and influence from religious organizations in the Middle East as a significant influencer on extremism in Macedonia, in addition to the influential roles played by local imams, and local leaders linked to extremism.

We see this negatively affecting neighborhood and neighborly cooperative and trust-based relationships and behavior not only at and in the local context, but at and in the "regional" context as well. Under these relatively new and emergent types of challenges and conditions, preparedness and prevention become critical and essential prerequisites for maintaining and preserving legitimate, counter-terrorism capacity.

As such, the challenge for the Republic of Macedonia, and even more specifically for the National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism (NCCVECT) will be in identifying as early as possible those threats at "unregulated spaces" at and between the level of municipalities and State Government level, as well as at and between the level of regional and transregional partnerships with the EU and UN, and other International Organizations.

Additional factors that tend to influence and even drive cycles of pre-radicalization to radicalization, include the factors of closed ethnics groups, limited intercultural events, low social awareness, declining

secularism as a product of unreformed and non-liberalized religious communities; in addition to the "domino" or spillover effect from outside regional dynamics.

And lastly, maybe most important, systemic structural poverty is critical and central reason for the challenge of radicalization, violent extremism and terrorism.

## OVERARCHING STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The Republic of Macedonia has harmonized both National Strategies and the relevant action plans for prevention of violent extremism and fight against terrorism in the following four (4) common **STRATEGIC PRIORITIES**:

1. **PREVENT** flows of FTFs and militants and root causes of radicalization and extremism;
2. **PROTECT** our people, their property, key and critical infrastructure from all threats, that are clear and present as well as potential and growing;
3. **PURSUE** threats of Violent Extremism and Terrorism at their root in safe havens and where ever they pose clear danger to people and infrastructure; prosecute these threats actively, but fairly and transparently, and consistent with the rule of law;
4. **RESPOND** actively, aggressively, but always in ways that are transparent and consistent to the rule of law, in the spirit of solidarity and in ways that manage and minimize the consequences of a terrorist attack, by improving capabilities to deal with the aftermath, the coordination of the response and the needs of victims.

## STAKEHOLDERS

The activities set herein shall be implemented by the institutions involved in the fight against terrorism, including, but not necessarily limited to: the Ministry of Interior - the Agency for Security and Counterintelligence and the Bureau for Public Security, Agency for Intelligence; in the Ministry of Defense - Sector-Service for military security and intelligence; Ministry of Justice; in the Ministry of Finance - Directorate for Financial Intelligence, Customs Administration, Financial Police, Public Prosecution Office and other involved institutions in the work of the National Committee.

## COORDINATION AND OPERATIONS

"Coordination" encompasses joint engagement of all relevant institutions in the Republic of Macedonia - State down through local, municipal levels - for timely exchange of information, as well as cooperation in order detection, defining, evaluation and interception of possible terrorist's and/or terrorist organization threats.

This coordination will provide timely exchange of information, rightful and appropriate allocation of resources, strategic counter terrorism planning and synchronization of the cooperation with the relevant state, national (local-municipal levels), regional and international institutions in the fight against terrorism.

The cooperation between the services on operational level will be intensified through forming joint teams.



## **ANTICIPATED RESULTS**

Implementation of these activities herein shall enable:

- More efficient detection, documentation and investigation of criminal activities linked to terrorist activities;
- Coordinated activities and exchange of information on an interdepartmental level;
- Increased and efficient international cooperation in the prevention and fight against terrorism;
- Increasing the population's awareness of the meaning of the fight against terrorism and the role and place of the state organizations and other institutions that participate in this fight;
- Achieving a higher level of personnel and equipment manning of the institutions included in the fight against terrorism; and,
- Converging to the international standards and harmonizing of the national legal regulations with the European Union, UN, OSCE and other international partners.

## **IMPLEMENTATION: ACTION PLANNING FOR CVE and CT**

Adoption of the National Strategies for the Countering Violent Extremism and Counter-Terrorism (2018 – 2022) is the competence of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia. These strategies are drafted and revised by the NCCVECT based on preliminary analysis of potential risks, in order to address the phenomenon of extremism and radicalization and other factors and drivers that can lead to terrorism.

These strategic documents are living policy documents; therefore, their drafting, revision, adoption, implementation, and monitoring are a continuous process.

The objectives of action planning in preventing radicalism and radicalization, extremism and violent extremism which lead to terrorism and terrorist activities are accommodated to:

- Accurately depict the issue and determine the right balance between a preventive approach, a disrupting approach and a repressive approach;
- Reduce the impact of terrorism.

Two additional keys to realizing these four goals are (1) improving our capabilities and capacities for identifying and mapping out the individuals and groups, and other factors, with a radicalizing effect on their environment, and (2) improving capabilities and institutional capacities for reducing the impact of the drivers of radicalization that often lead to violent extremism and, ultimately, to terrorist activities.

A national comprehensive approach against violent extremism and the terrorist threat in our society will be enabled through the implementation of administrative, judicial and socially preventive measures against individuals who spread radical and violent ideas.

## **STRATEGIC AND SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES**

Our Strengths-Weaknesses-Opportunities-Threats (SWOT) Analysis enabled defining and elaborating many strategic priorities that are common and core to both missions of CVE and CT.

For CVE, the NCCVECT has identified four specific objectives for Prevent, two objectives for Protect, one new CVE-specific objective for Pursue, and three objectives for Respond.

For CT, the Republic of Macedonia now has eight specific objectives for Prevent, five objectives for Protect, four specific objectives for Pursue, and three objectives for Respond. NCCVECT also developed and adopted/incorporated a relatively new implementation protocol - an emergent, NATO standard compliant operational framework for implementing our PURSUE lines of activities in an improved controlled escalatory manner: Disrupt—Degrade—Dismantle—Pursue.<sup>13</sup>

The NCCVECT has derived the following specific State/National Objectives ("Goals") for countering terrorism:

*TABLE 3. SPECIFIC GOALS FOR COUNTERING TERRORISM*

<p><b>COUNTER TERRORISM</b></p> <p><b>1. PREVENT</b></p> <p>Strategic goal 1.1: Prevention of Terrorist Threats</p> <p>Strategic goal 1.2: Preventing Financing of Terrorism</p> <p>Strategic goal 1.3: Preventing radicalization via Internet</p> <p>Strategic goal 1.4: Preventing "Foreign Terrorist Fighters" thru strengthening of institutional capacities</p> <p>Strategic goal 1.5: Preventing radicalization and terrorist recruitment by enhancing bilateral, regional and international cooperation</p> <p>Strategic goal 1.6: Improving prevention by the conduct of assessments, analysis, and research related to radicalization and terrorism</p> <p>Strategic goal 1.7: Prevention of chemical, biological radioactive, and nuclear risks</p> <p>Strategic goal 1.8: Preventing the illegal trade of weapons and technologies</p> <p><b>2. PROTECT</b></p> <p>Strategic goal 2.1: Protection through strengthening of systems for State border control</p> <p>Strategic goal 2.2: Protection through raising transport standards</p> <p>Strategic goal 2.3: Protection of critical infrastructure</p> <p>Strategic goal 2.4: Protection of objects of vital and public interest</p> <p>Strategic goal 2.5: Protection through strengthening and development of mechanisms on protection of Cyber threats</p> <p><b>3. PURSUE</b></p> <p>Strategic goal 3.1: Pursue further alignment of State Legislation with International standards</p> <p>Strategic goal 3.2: Pursue through detection, identification and prosecution of perpetrators of terrorism-related crimes</p> <p>Strategic goal 3.3: Pursue through detection, identification, and prosecution of perpetrators of financing of terrorism</p> <p>Strategic goal 3.4: Pursue through strengthening of bilateral, regional and international cooperation</p> <p><b>4. RESPOND</b></p> <p>Strategic goal 4.1: Respond through strengthening of capacities of relevant institutions for response to terrorist attacks</p> <p>Strategic goal 4.2: Respond through reducing and mitigating of consequences from terrorist attacks</p> <p>Strategic goal 4.3: Respond through improving intergovernmental coordination</p>
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<sup>13</sup> These are emerging doctrinal terms. DISRUPT - upsetting a terrorist group's organization and operational timetable without fundamentally challenging its ability to conduct future operations; DEGRADE - the suppression of a terrorist group's ability to conduct large-scale external operations as well as the loss of the group's freedom of movement; DISMANTLE - fracturing a terrorist group to a point at which it can no longer function as a cohesive organization; DEFEAT - the elimination of a terrorist group from within its safe havens and preventing terror groups from reestablishing a safe-haven and regenerating over time.

## CONCRETE IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES

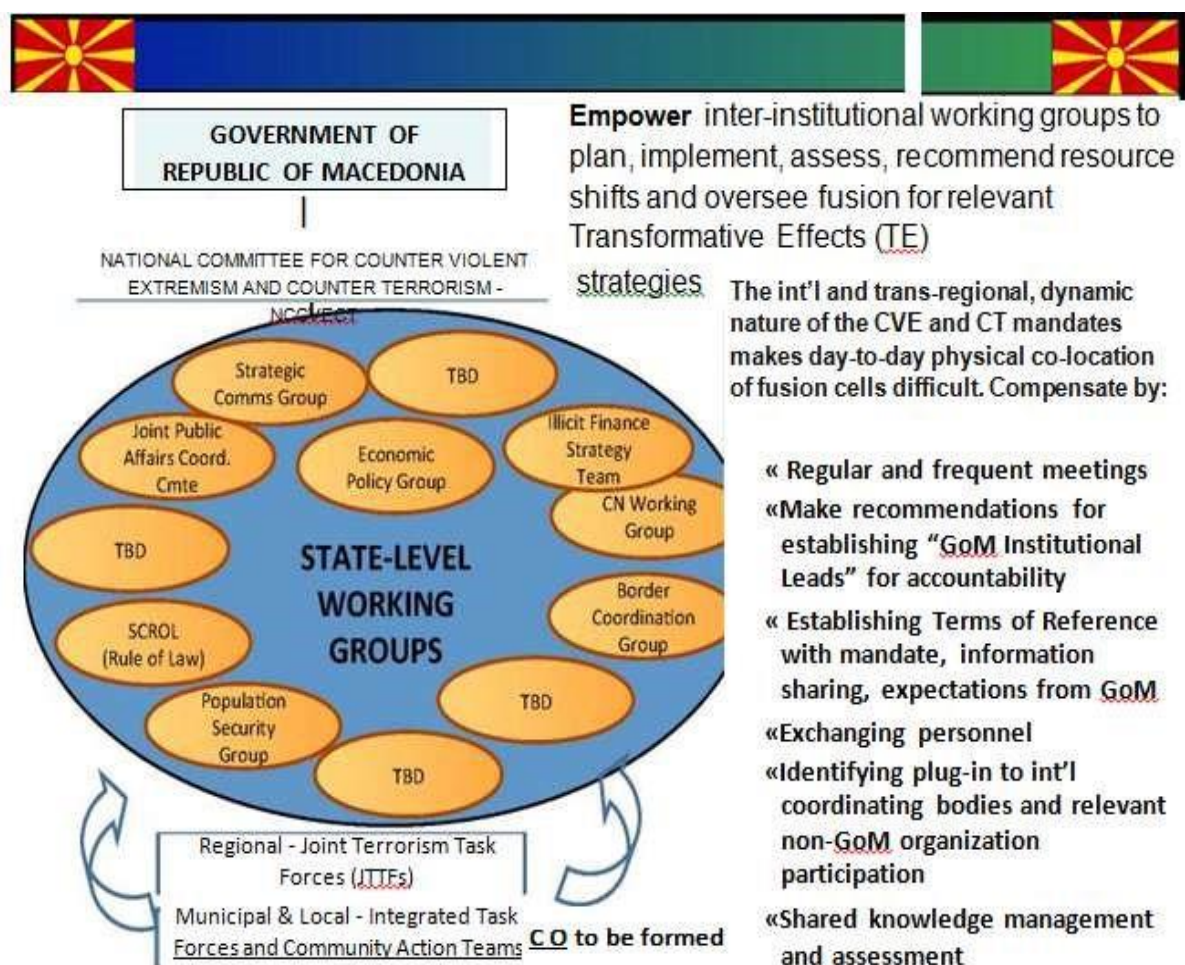
To effectively implement the National Strategies for Countering Violent Extremism and Countering Terrorism, the Government of Macedonia will develop corresponding procedures and regulations.

The NCCVECT is responsible for the initiative for the implementation of the Action Plans (with the contribution from the relevant institutions and ministries of the Government of the Republic of Macedonia) and is responsible for coordination and communication of efforts to CT and CVE.

## FRAMEWORK AND GENERAL APPROACH

The objectives of the Action Plans for Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism imply an integrated and common approach that is supported by the National Committee for Counter Violent Extremism and Counterterrorism (NCCVECT), and through the coordination and management of the NCCVECT, by way of National Working Groups (NWGs) and Task Forces (a mix of permanent, theme- based or ad hoc). Each established working group is coordinated by a Lead Ministry (carrier of activities). Additionally, NCCVECT recommends the establishment of Terrorism Task Forces in order to ensure an efficient interaction with the field work.

**FIGURE 10. COORDINATED EFFORTS OF THE GOVERNMENT/OVERALL SOCIETY**



NOTE-1: The NCCVECT has authority to form Working Groups and Task Forces (internal) to itself, but only recommends formation of the same (when involving institutions outside of the NCCVECT).

NOTE-2: Formation of regional Task Forces will be in accordance with existing bilateral and international agreements.

Figure 10 briefly describes some of the basic principles and opinions of our proposed organizational approach as NCCVECT for improved and strengthened "harmonized" efforts in countering violent extremism and terrorism as a collective body.

We propose strengthening interinstitutional task forces (state and municipal level, when suitable) in order to plan, implement, evaluate and recommend redistribution of resources to State bodies...as well as to oversee the "fusion" of information and improved integration for certain topics of "transformative effects".

## **PRIORITIZATION**

The NCCVECT, working in concert with representatives from all institutions and ministries from the Government of the Republic of Macedonia with relevant stakes in the actions and activities of countering violent extremism and terrorism, has identified five (5) critical "building partner capacities" priorities most appropriate for an immediate investment of International donor funding and subject-matter expertise and technical assistance support:

### **CVE and CT funding priorities for the first year**

- |  |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Further strengthening of the institutional capacities of the NCCVECT</li><li>2. Improve standardization across regional data sharing platforms, including data processing; Create a dynamic network-analysis based Escalating Threat Mapping Program and Database</li><li>3. Establishment of Community Action Teams (CATs) for improvement of cooperation between state and local authorities and local communities; improved community policing training and presence</li><li>4. Establishment of key Integrated Task Forces (ITFs), including a MKD Joint Terrorism Task Force (MKD-JTTF) for improved border area control and crisis action prevention and response</li><li>5. Establishment of State Working Groups (SWGs) for focused multi-agency, cross-institutional actions on the following: MKD-led establishment of a Western Balkans Regional CVE and CT strategy; Completion of a Full- Border Surveillance &amp; Control System</li></ol> |
|--|

Projecting forward on needs-based capacity-building requirements, the NCCVECT has identified the following mix of CVE and CT specific objectives (and corresponding progress-measurable activities) as top priority Year 2 to Year 5 goals:

## CVE and CT funding priorities for Years 2 to 5

- Preventing radicalization and terrorist recruitment by enhancing bilateral, regional and international cooperation {CT STRATEGIC GOAL 1.5; CVE STRATEGIC GOAL 2.2}
- Strengthening capacities of the institutions for dealing with "foreign terrorist fighters" {CT STRATEGIC GOAL: 1.4} in connection to an established set of measures for early detection of radicalization {CVE STRATEGIC GOAL 3.1}
- Preventing radicalization via internet {CT STRATEGIC GOAL 1.3; CVE STRATEGIC GOAL 1.4}
- Preventing the financing of terrorism {CT STRATEGIC GOAL 1.2}
- Improving capacities by conducting assessments, analyses and research related to radicalization and terrorism {CT STRATEGIC GOAL 1.6; CVE STRATEGIC GOAL 1.1}
- Strengthening systems for state border control {CT STRATEGIC GOAL 2.1}
- Improving inter-governmental coordination {CT STRATEGIC GOAL 4.3; CVE STRATEGIC GOAL 4.3}
- Strengthening capacities of relevant institutions to respond to terrorist attack {CT STRATEGIC GOAL 4.1; CVE STRATEGIC GOAL 4.3}

## MONITORING AND EVALUATION FOR CT

The responsible institutions are obliged to fulfil the activities foreseen with the Action Plan for implementation of the measures and activities herein. The responsible institutions shall report on the level of achievement to the NCCVECT.

The NCCVECT shall inform the Government of the Republic of Macedonia, once yearly, about the status of implementation of the activities prescribed by the National Strategies, i.e. Action Plans.

This report shall contain proposed conclusions in case of other relevant institution have not attained the activities in the timelines set in the Action Plan.

Supervising bodies over the implementation of the measures and activities for fight against terrorism will be defined within the Ministry of Interior, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Justice, the Intelligence Agency, and Public Prosecution.

MEASURING PROGRESS: The purpose of the assessment process is two-fold: 1) to provide decision makers in Macedonia with necessary information to prioritize and direct allocation of resources and efforts, and 2) inform National-level decision-making through integrated reporting.

## RECALIBRATION

The Strategy foresees implementation of the planned activities and measures in the period of five (5) years, i.e. 2018-2022.

The funds required for implementation of this strategy will be covered with projects and the budget of the Republic of Macedonia for which financial assessment will be additionally developed, as well as International donor support.

Resource Alignment - two overarching principles:

- Pushing accountable resource decision-making down to the lowest possible operational level; and,
- Maximizing the comparative advantage of each type of resource tool.

## A HOLISTIC AGENDA FOR ACTION

### Action Planning for 'comprehensive' countering violent extremism and countering terrorism

As this strategy document begins, so it concludes: with a discussion on the imperatives of differentiating between the ends, the ways and methods, and the means of countering violent extremism and countering terrorism while simultaneously building and resourcing implementation plans of action that are mutually reinforcing and mutually affecting; towards a comprehensive and holistic philosophy and set of approaches for preventing, countering, and if where and when necessary, combating violent extremism and terrorism.

The Republic of Macedonia's approach to these strategies, and more pointedly, to the corresponding action plans call for and represent the intent and efforts towards a *balanced implementation* of the National Strategies for the Republic of Macedonia for Countering Violent Extremism and Terrorism... consistent with United Nations and European Union strategies and action planning principles.

As we 'action' our strategies, the Republic of Macedonia will continue our concerted efforts to counter violent extremism, at its roots and points of genesis, with weighted attention and efforts turned to preparedness, prevention, and response. The Republic of Macedonia is committed to broadening our responses, to engaging earlier to risks and threats, and to addressing the drivers of violent extremism; drivers and factors that all too often lead to terrorism and terrorists' activities.

The Republic of Macedonia will complement the countering of violent extremism with preventive measures. By making prevention an integral part of our comprehensive approach, this will help us tackle many of the underlying conditions that drive individuals to join violent extremist groups; in and of itself, an "early-signs" oriented preventive approach to "countering" terrorism. As with the practice of prevention more generally, results may not be visible immediately and will require our long-term and patient engagement.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> Excerpt from the UN Strategy on countering terrorism, Action plan for prevention of violent extremism "Report of the Secretary General", 24 December 2015, pg. 10.