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Socialists & Democrats
in the European Parliament

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Progressive solutions to counter violent extremism

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Conference proceedings

INTRODUCTION

GIANNI PITTELLA, S&D GROUP PRESIDENT

Allow me to warmly welcome you today in the European Parliament and thank you for your openness and courage to speak with us about such a sensitive subject. A subject that is very personal for some and very controversial for others. I am very happy to be with you and grateful to those who are ready to share their experiences with us!

It is only natural that in extraordinary circumstances high emotions take control of us. But to allow ourselves be dominated and guided by fear, it is even more dangerous! By doing so, we are simply surrendering to the will of the persons who are negatively affecting our lives and freedom.

After the Paris and Copenhagen attacks, many have capitulated to the hazardous temptation of mixing the fight against terrorism with a strengthened control over our borders, the illegal immigration and the integration of ethnical and religious minorities.

Now that the waters are calmer, time has come to distinguish between problems and begin identifying real sustainable solutions, beginning from the fight against terrorism.

It is obvious that when you are being attacked, you need to react and respond. Our citizens need security. But they also expect us to tackle not only the immediate consequences - also the roots of the problem! And given the complexity of our nowadays world, the real way forward lies in promoting a comprehensive and holistic response to the terrorist attacks, based on a mix of prevention, response and policy action aimed to unfold the full potential of the EU.

We need to integrate the national security threats into the existent radicalisation of vulnerable social categories, while strengthening the integration process and the dialogue with third countries.

That is why, ladies and gentlemen, in order to effectively fight against jihadism, we need more funds for an enhanced coordination among the EU member states and a stronger EU foreign policy. Our neighbourhood, an essential space for our security and prosperity, is disintegrating as we speak. Our borders, in particular the Mediterranean, are transforming themselves into the runways of millions of people, attempting to escape from conflicts and poverty.

Dear friends,

Europe has at its disposal clear, strong programmatic instruments necessary that help us remain loyal and defend such an approach: the fundamental rights and freedoms, as enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty! Safeguarding these values makes us stronger. Giving them up and surrounding ourselves with walls means giving in to the terrorists. Terrorist attacks should be addressed with more and not less democracy.

That is why, we, in the Socialists and Democrats Group, believe that the only way forward is by putting people together and integrating them in the unique social fabric of the European Union, while respecting our authentic diversity!

Grazie a tutti voi!

PANEL ONE: THE TOOLS OF DE-RADICALISATION:

Discrediting the ideologies, politics and economic grievances exploited by terrorists

TANJA FAJON, S&D GROUP VICE-PRESIDENT

In early 2015 we witnessed a wave of terrorist attacks from Paris, Copenhagen to Tunis, as well as a police shootout in Belgium. Just a few days ago more than 700 people died in the Mediterranean Sea. This latest tragedy is not out of the blue. It's a result of the indifference of a European Union which has become deaf to cries of help and blind and numb to suffering. Humanitarian visas still don't exist, humanitarian corridors still don't exist. If you come from a country where there is a dictatorship, it's your problem; if you come from a war-ridden place, it's your problem. This form of indifference is spread throughout Europe.

We cannot remain silent, not here, in the European Parliament, the only directly elected EU institution. Relations between our citizens of different backgrounds are being increasingly tense across Europe as terrorists, racists and extremists spread their hate through violence and fear. But the real solution can only be found by us – the citizens – standing up against terror and hatred. We need to unite and promote our values of equality, freedom, democracy, respect and tolerance. This is why we organised this conference with participation of young people from various Brussels neighbourhoods. We want to have a dialogue with you, and not about you and only among experts.

Let me also say that I regret the absence by the European Commission at our event today. We hear from all sides, especially civil society and academics that it is high time for the EU to demonstrate emotional intelligence. And our conference today could provide the perfect opportunity to practice what we preach. I understand the Commission is adopting the new EU internal security strategy next week. As progressives we can only hope that their emphasis will not be only on security but also on fundamental rights and our living together inside the EU and beyond.

Violent extremists and terrorists succeed when people of different religions and backgrounds mistrust each other by building social boundaries and stereotypes. To overcome this, we need to bolster bridges of communication and trust within the European societies. Europe has a history of bringing down violence and should learn from its past.

It is my honour today to be together on this panel with a family of a victim: I warmly welcome Madame Latifa Ibn Ziaten, the mother of Imad, first victim of the Toulouse terrorist attack in 2012. I wish to express my admiration for your work with young people in France: by telling your story of a mother who lost her son and by not giving up on making this world a better and a safer place to live, you are indeed contributing to a more tolerant and open Europe and you are doing this in the best possible way.

I am also glad we will hear a testimony from Mrs Hayat Khyare who has her nephew currently in Syria. These are our young people, our European citizens, and Europe needs to ask itself the uncomfortable question: Why is it that so many young people find an ideology that embraces mass beheadings, slave labour and the denial of women rights more appealing than anything else on offer in Europe?

Finally we are here today to find some solutions, we need advice from the academics and experts and it is our privilege to have with us one of the most prominent experts in the field of radicalisation, prof. Peter Neumann. We need to discuss what strategies and tasks could be tackled at the EU level? We still do not have national strategies for prevention and de-radicalisation in all EU Member States. So indeed the EU level could foster the exchange of best practice, let us see what works well and what does not work at all. Speaking of best practice, I think we need to look in detail at the work and experience of Denmark and I'm looking forward to hear from prof. Bertelsen about that.

Last but not least - actually he will be the first speaker to kick off the debate in this panel - our friend Stavros Lambrinidis, EU Special Representative for Human Rights. Stavros has a difficult task: he should ensure that human rights are a silver thread in all EU policies. But we all know contradictions persist between prioritising political and commercial interests on one side and human rights on the other. Member States very often still undermine EU human rights policy by cutting bilateral deals with dictators that suit their national energy or security interests. In this way they undermine the European cause of promoting better governance and freer societies.

In addition to these contradictions we have also the problem of double standard: internal developments in a number of EU Member States show that human rights standards are not being implemented at home which challenges EU credibility when making human rights demands on third countries. How can we eliminate all these obstacles to a credible, not a paternalistic EU human rights policy? We must recognise the fact that the root causes of terrorism are dictatorships, repression, corruption, poor governance, human rights abuses, lack of political freedom and civil liberties, sectarianism, intolerant religious ideology. Past interventions in the Muslim world, and Israeli settlements, are elements which play a role in the development of a feeling of injustice among many in the Muslim world and beyond. Muslim communities in Europe are not indifferent to this either. The intervention in Iraq in 2003, civil wars in Syria and Libya, unrest in Yemen have all contributed to the collapse of a state authority in these countries. This created a fertile ground for terrorist organisations to establish and expand their footholds in vast territories from Libya to Iraq creating a major threat to regional and global security. This context is used by terrorist recruiters as a call to communities in Europe to join the battlefield of Syria, Iraq and elsewhere.

We need to emphasize how Europe must positively contribute to conflict resolution from Israel-Palestine to Kashmir to Nigeria, to tackle grievances which can never justify terrorism but which can contribute to its support.

STAVROS LAMDBRINIDIS, EU Special Representative for Human Rights

The aftermath of Paris, Copenhagen and Tunis: a European progressive response

I am happy to present to you ten major points that I believe that need to be done to face racialization and violence.

1. The first principle: when violence is used for any reason in the name of religion it needs to be condoned by all levels, all officials, Politicians, religious leaders and journalists. We have to build discussions and coalitions globally with different religious, political leaders to address this point, violence can't be justified. In his last report the UN special rapporteur on freedom of religion or belief Heiner Bielefeldt emphasized that, indeed whenever violence is committed in the name of a religion this does not represent the whole religion. However, it does not take away the obligation from religious leaders to condemn violence publicly and openly, and this does not happen usually. Building coalitions of understanding to condemn violence is a must so it won't ever feel to be legitimized.
2. What extremists and terrorists hate the most is to be hurt where they don't want to be hurt. Why did Boko Haram attack 300 girls in a school instead of bombing one more police barrac? What is so scary about educating girls to a terrorist? What is so scary about smart girl that if they are educated they will change the power balance in any society? Therefore, they won't allow for extremism and radicalisation to flourish. You want to fight terrorism you need to educate youth to promote democracy in open societies, which is exactly what terrorist attacks are trying to limit. You want to fight terrorist defend human rights universally.
3. We have to counter the extremists discourse; we have to fight it through our own free speech. It's not only a military exercise to fight radicalization and terrorism globally it's much more. It's a battle to affect the conscious and the mind of people, not simply to fight by guns, when we fight by guns, that's what terrorists like when we fight by guns and ignore the rest of the equation. Now, in order to do that we have a strategy at the European Union that was adopted recently, dealing and discussing not only with ourselves but also with Internet companies that hate speech won't flourish. And also develop the counter narrative to stop such acts; we are working hard on it in the EU and the world. This need to happen with respect to freedom of expressions and fundamental rights. It's a fine line but Europe has to be in the front line of defending that line. What Tanja said, that we need to understand the causes because of which that radical narrative takes roots in different European countries. Therefore, we need to ask ourselves are our human rights policies equally balanced or are we more lenient to some countries who we consider friends to us or more useful. It's very often that our policies create political radicalisation and not necessarily a religious one. They find the religious narrative as a fertile ground on which to grow. So we have to make sure we look deep inside and outside.
4. We have to promote with no reservations accountability for the major violations of human rights by extremists and terrorist or governments which engaged in extremist violence and war. The lack of accountability makes it difficult to prevent extremism and terrorism. If you don't have accountability those who wish to get engaged in extremism can do it much more easily, they are not afraid to be held to account for what they do. By this I mean utilizing the International criminal court. That is why the EU repeatedly demanded for Syria to be brought to the international criminal court for crimes committed by the government and other militant groups during this

terrible tragedy in the region. And let me take this opportunity to thank human rights defenders and especially Syrian women for their tremendous commitment and efforts in document human rights violations in Syria.

5. We have to step up our efforts to protect freedom of religion and belief. The beheadings of more than 200 Assyrian Christians by ISIS by the end of February, which is a crime against humanity also goes directly against the freedom of religion and belief, which include the right of persons of all faiths to live and practice their belief without the fear of intolerance and attacks. In terms of numbers, the first victims of ISIS as Sunni Muslims, as other minorities like Christians in the region. Now, ISIS tries to utilize and claim a clash of civilization, clash of religions to justify its attacks, and other extremists around the world do the same. They try to divide the world, the west vs. the east or the north vs. the south, in fact, these extremists are trying to create a clash of civilization where it does not exist, and we have to be aware of not falling in the trap by playing the game they want us to play. And that is why I said in the beginning it's through human rights that we fight them. Some will say that human right is a battle between cultures and religions. We don't agree with what they mean, human rights have never been a battle; they have been always the universal language between the powerless against the relativism of the powerful, to those who want to divide us, those who want to use guns and violence to separate us apart. Human rights have never been a battle between religions; it's been a battle within religions. Also, it's been a battle within cultures not between cultures.
6. What do we do with the limits of freedom of speech in Europe for those who incite violence and hatred? There are limits recognized by the international law including international human rights law. International law says that freedom of expression can be limited when speech incites to violence and hatred. My answer to that question is that the law is there and it should be applied but in my view it should be applied as the last resort in the number of efforts we have made to isolate and bring down that hate speech. Let's also remember what hate speech is, it's a speech that incites violence and hatred against others. Some people said for Paris, look at the these cartoonists, they did things that offended us and so they thought it justified to flame violence against the cartoonists. That's not what freedom of expression is about. The law defends speech even if it's critical, even if it's offensive and this is a progressive position that has to be upheld extremely strongly. Now, the fact that I can offend someone does not necessary mean that I should. There is a very fine line between law and mortality. This is where education, this is where discussions among different cultures and different people comes in. We have to make that understanding happen to fight the radicalism from all sides. But that is different from restricting freedom of speech, which can be acceptable for very strictly prescribed circumstances.
7. We must protect religious and cultural heritage, it is being destroyed all around the world, which is considered a crime against humanity. We have seen this recently in Iraq and in so many countries in the neighbourhood.
8. Military action is important; progressives can't say that you can only fight ISIS through everything else that I have mentioned. However, you noticed that I have put it in the end of my speech. It's extremely important to include military. However, and this is a big however, fighting terrorism including all military means has to be absolutely subject to a governments' or international coalitions' obligation to respect human rights. Why I am telling you this is a big issue right now. There was recently at the United Nations a resolution filed by Egypt which said, that we have to protect human rights by fighting terrorism and it made virtually no firm connection or commitment that that fight has to be controlled by human rights standards. We as government have to fight but we have to do it with full respect to human rights, other than that we will be violating human rights and we are also endangering our ability to do this rightly. See for example the case of Guantanamo that has been happening now for many years.
9. Military actions yes! But we need to fill the gap of under-empowered collapsed states that terrorists or extremists are trying to fill all around the world. And that means diplomacy, development aid and economic aid. That is a program the Commission just approved by over one billion euros, for non-military actions that try to address the root causes of the problem in countries all around the world.
10. We have to embody human rights. In the past three years we have seen the rise of extremism in Europe and we have seen attacks against immigrants because they are not like us, because they come from different countries, because they believe in other religions we do believe in. We have to be as vigilante in fighting racism and xenophobia inside as we are in fighting it outside. Because if we don't, we have a credibility issue. We have to address the issue of the migrants and refugees drowning in the Mediterranean. These people trying to come here have committed no crime, the only crime is that they were born in a region of the world destroyed by war and

poverty. And as Europe we have to make sure that our values are still alive because this is if anything the best way of counter extremism. We need to show them that an open democratic and human rights based society is the best granite for the rights of everyone.

European foreign fighters: their motives, the implications and the role played by social media

Professor PETER R. NEUMANN, director of the International Centre for the Study of Radicalisation (ICCR) and professor of security studies, Department of War Studies, King's College, London

My centre ICCR in London has been interested in the phenomena of foreign fighters for two and half years. We focus in particular on foreign fighters from European countries. They are people from our cities, from Paris, Stockholm, London. They are citizen of EU countries; nearly 5000 of them have gone to Syria and Iraq for the past two and half years to join Jihadi groups. We know many of them: we found 700 of them on Facebook, twitter, Instagram and other social media platforms where they post news, updates, comments and pictures. We have spoken to a hundred of them and we have meet face to face with many facilitators and transporters and fighters themselves on the ground and border towns where they enter to Syria. So we have analysed what they do and today I am going to make a short overview of what we found.

First of all, it's very difficult to speak of foreign fighters as one entity. What we have seen among European foreign fighters is that there are many different motivations. For a segment of them adventure and brotherhood is patricianly important. They believe strongly that they are going to join their brothers, have a good time and fight for a good cause, and also to have what they call a 5* Jihad, which is a hash tag used to be on twitter throughout 2013. The fighter themselves twitted pictures that were articulating the stem and I believe those arguably were the most powerful pictures that were twitted out. It does not mean it's the official propaganda used by ISIS but these pictures were articulating something. As people can see themselves participating and indeed often you have fighters arriving on the front lines within literary five munities and they were posting pictures of themselves with guns and etc. They are telling people back home that "I have arrived and I am on the front lines in Syria now".

However, there are other motivations as they have changed through 2012 and 2013 when the first people went over. It was very clear that one of the drivers that drive people to go to Syria and Iraq was the notion of threat. People there were told that their brothers and sisters have been attacked, murdered and killed by a great coalition led by Bashar Al Assad and supported by Iran and Hezbollah. There was no one helping the Sunni people of Syria, so it was them who had to go to there. They have been told if you are Muslim if it means something to you, you have to join us.

Other motivation that came later, as recently as last year, is the idea of creating the Islamic state that was not only a defensive notion but it was a positive idea for them to participate individually in something greater, that all of them would build the reaction of the caliphate. Fighters have been told that people in the next thousand years will be still talking about those western fighters (brave young Westerns who went over to create the Islamic state). If you are someone who does not have that much things going on in your life in Belgium, France or UK that can be a powerful notion, a very empowering notion. Also, since last year, since September we have again the narrative of the west vs. Islam, which also motivated some to join ISIS. These were the stated reasons. However, there are also other underlining motivations such as the searching for identity and significant meaning.

Often, I hear people talking about the poverty and lack of economic opportunities as reasons for joining ISIS. It's not as simple as that, yes this might play a role but just as the role of discrimination, just like experiencing racism in a society, all this together can create the idea in someone's mind that they don't belong to a European society and therefore it becomes easy to leave or to go against that society.

Now let's talk briefly on social media and its impact. We studied this a lot because a lot of our research is based on social media, looking on what the fighters themselves are saying on the social media profiles. Of course Internet and social media is important to ISIS as it is used as a channel to communicate with their supports. But this significance can be sometimes overstated. Let me briefly explain those couple of points. What we did in a particular study was to look at all the expressions of interest of the fighters themselves that we have in our database (the 700 fighters). We have looked at their Facebook likes, re-tweets and follows to figure out who are the important people for the fighters themselves, who influences them, who really matters to them. And what came out was actually surprising because the official twitter account by ISIS and by other Jihadi groups did not even came out in the top 10 amongst the twitter accounts. It was the the profiles and accounts of others who have never been to Syria or Iraq, people who are sitting in India or other countries, and they have taken it on themselves to carry the message of ISIS. People that are not members of ISIS, people who have never been to that particular conflict area but they have taken upon themselves to become cheerleaders. These people were the most influential hubs on twitter for

fighters. These people we have identified that are doing so - can be seen in the presentation: one is living in Australia and one in Michigan, USA.

Final point on social media is that peers and friendships are still very important in radicalization and recruitment. Wherever you look in Europe you see clusters of people, whether in Vilvoorde, Belgium or in Bremen, Germany or certain parts of the UK. That would not make sense if the Internet was the only reason why people become radicalized because the Internet is everywhere. So if the Internet was the principle reason, you expect the distribution to be even but it's not. There are clusters of people because friendships are still important. The pattern in Europe is all the same, we have a small group of people such as one or two go to Syria and they stay in touch with their friends and successively their friends go over. Here is an example from Germany, we have the case of five people who are currently in Syria, two have returned but they still have a good number of supporters who are thinking of going to Syria because their friends are over there. Of course such people are active on social media and their profiles tell us a lot by giving us examples on where they met. They tell us a lot about other extremists whom they are connected with in other parts of the country. They can tell us through their friends list whom they are connected to you. And they also tell us that they are extremely approving of their friends decisions to go to Syria. Yes! All of this is on social media but that does not mean that social media is radicalizing them, so if these pictures that they post mean anything, it means that they are radicalized as a group of friend sitting in their town socializing with each other.

Conclusion: What needs to be done?

There is a great variety of personalities, backgrounds, motivations and indeed experiences in Syria and Iraq. We should expect that the people who may come back to our countries will pose different types of challenges. There are some who will be disillusioned and can be integrated back to the society. There are some who will be mentally disturbed and will need sociological support but let's not forget that there will be some who will be outright dangerous. People who will come back with military training and experiences with global connections and emotionally de-sensitised and committed to a mission, they will cause danger to our countries. Here is the thing about the ability to master this challenge: our ability to keep our countries safe will depend on how we will be able to make a distinction between these groups and how effective the policy responses are in each of these areas.

That is absolutely very critical. Each EU country if it has not done already should look at each of these areas and see what still needs to be done.

Finally, there are three progressive priorities and I think they are urgently needed.

National prevention strategies: prevention is an important part of counter-terrorism. If we want to make our countries safer we need to make sure that fewer people are getting radicalized to begin with. Prevention work will save money and it is only logical that every European country should have a national prevention strategy. There are plenty of EU countries that still do not have it and that needs to be changed. It's the first step and a precondition for everything else.

De-radicalization programs: only yesterday I have visited in Germany a small initiative in Bremen, where they work with parents and also with the extremists themselves both Jihadists and neo-Nazis. They deliver interventions and high intensity programs either when people are close to join extremism groups before they are traveling to Syria or when they come back. It's a mix of social work and welfare dialogue. That kind of program exists not only in Bremen, Germany but also in other countries like Denmark but these countries and these programs need to be increased. It's not a solution for every case but when people are still having doubts and they still have not broken relationships with their friends and family it can work. In Bremen it's been effective in dozens of cases and the police like it too, they are happy. As they don't need to watch, monitor every single case because they are already over-burdened as they are. So investing in radicalization programs isn't about being soft on terrorism and it's not a substitute for police but it's complementary. It's about making sure that police can use their people and resources on the cases that pose a direct threat.

Finally integration: There is an uncomfortable truth for many Europeans. However, different the foreign fighters that may colleagues and I have found, what most of them had in common is that they did not feel they were part of their societies. They sometimes thought it was because of the way they look, who they are, where they come from. They were not part of us; they were not European no matter how hard they have tried. That did not turn them into terrorists but it made them open to an ideology that says that the West is in war with you, and that you can't be open and Muslim at the same time. Therefore, this is where we need to start our prevention; yes it's the toughest part but it's essential if we want to stop this from happening again and again.

Giving a voice to the families of victims

Latifa Ibn Ziaten, founder and president of the association Imad-Ibn-Ziaten for Youth and Peace.

I am the mother of Imad who was assassinated by Mohamed Merah March 11, 2012. Let me just give you my background. I arrived to France at the age of 17 years, I lost my mother at the age of 9, I was raised by my grandmother and I was raised with the values of respect, very rich values. I moved to France, I integrated there and I had five children who all succeeded. And yet my happiness and my joy were broken, when Imad my son who was professional career soldier was assassinated. He completed his studies and he joined the army and he was a very successful skydiving instructor and I was very proud of my son. There was a great suffering and humiliation that I experienced, 40 days after his death. I decided to set up my association in the memory of Imad, for youth and peace. I did not yet know how to use this association. I felt I needed to go to the place where my son had been assassinated. My family, my husband tried to stop me from doing that but I had insisted to go to the place where he had died.

Therefore, I found myself at the place on a Sunday afternoon the same hour as Imad had been murdered and I thought I'd find something there. Imad was not only my son he was my friend, he was a confident. Therefore, I thought maybe he had left something for me, his mother before he died.

I looked everywhere, I almost went mad but all I could find was traces of blood and what was left by the police investigation. I cried the tears of a mother suffering, I cried out loud and I said if anyone can hear me but unfortunately no one was there. I don't know why but I just had to go and see where Mohammad Merah grew up and who he was as a terrorist that took the life of my son and who took the life of 7 victims. So, I went to his city and found a group of young people in his age 20-25 years and I asked where Mohamed Merah lives. They replied, "Madam, you are not watching TV? Don't you read the newspapers? And I said I don't, I am just asking you simply where does Mohamed Merah live? And one of these young people said to me Mohammad Merah is a martyr, he is a hero of Islam. He put France at the knee. And I just looked at him and it was just as if he killed my son all again. So I told them, I was Imad's mother who was murdered by Mohamed Merah. Mohamed Merah is a martyr for you? These young people have surrounded me, I was scared but I thought that if I had to die for a cause, to search for the murderer of my son so let it be.

I explained to them and we talked. One of them said, Madame, if Mohammed Merah knew that your son is a Muslim he would not killed him, and I said I don't agree with you. It does not matter if you're a Muslim or not we don't kill one another. And that young man said to me "Look where we live." We live in a ghetto, in a closed city. We have no chance, we were rejected by the French Republic, and we have no identity. So you tell me how we are supposed to get out of this situation? He also, said, Madam when people are caged they become enraged and turn against the society. And I said No! What does the society have to do with this, if these young people have no chance to succeed what can they do? Do they have anything to give? Have you given anything to France? I replied I have! France was a country that welcomed me, I moved there I integrated I built, I had 5 children and we lived in a family with respect and dignity.

What about you? Do you have a diploma, a level? This young man told me we do not have a mother like you. I told him that all mothers love their children. I think you should look within yourself and seek the right path, however, just hanging around outside the apartment building among yourselves staying in this cage of course you're not going to succeed. And that was the moment when I decided to set up the association. I did not know what and how to use it but I knew that these young men are the cause of my suffering but I wanted to reach out a hand for them to help them.

So you know, ladies and gentlemen what is happening today became an urgent situation. There is some basic ground work that we have to do. We need to work with children when they are in the last year before going to primary school. We need to talk to them about their future and development, we need to see what these children are suffering from, are they already violent? Let's not wait for them to go to secondary school and then say that it's too late to do anything for that child. Psychologists can help to guide children. The child does not choose, children have to go into professional education. And from my experience lots of these children are from African origins, so what is the problem there? Are these young people not smart enough? That they simply can't do any better? Don't they have the right to develop more opportunities? This is a problem that I see with the schooling system; there is a lack of psychologists within schools. You have one psychologist working in two schools at the same time, how are they supposed to have time to identify children who are suffering, you might have one social worker in a school that can't be accepted.

Now, we have these closed ghettos in the big cities and then we tell them you integrate now! Where the schools and other facilities are all inside the ghettos, this is unacceptable either, so how do we combat

that? This shows the basic in depth work we have to do in the field. I go out to prisons I speak to young people who said that they had engaged in jihad, how can we take a young person who was involved in jihad for one month and then put them into isolation? In one meter space! And we don't even bring them back to society! It is only going to be worse So, why can't we try to find other alternative solutions? We need to help these young people; we could care for them instead of putting them in prison and shutting them away. Why these young people are leaving to Syria and Iraq? Are we really asking the right questions? You think they just left like this! Or have they left because they weren't given any opportunities, because we did not listen to them! Are we really listening to young people today? No! We listen to them when we need them, when we want them to vote for us, then after that we just drop them! We leave them to their own devices. So, there is a lot that we have to do here, all of us government, mothers, human rights associations, we all have a role to play in working with these young people in the field and if you can't work in the field, we have to listen to the people who go out and reach out to these young people.

Please, believe me I work in these cities, I know a lot of single mothers who will raise their children on their own, and they are brave and they ask for help but some of them they don't ask for help. There are a lot of absent fathers today! We are not talking about that! And when the children are suffering this is how they cry out! They prefer to die! Therefore, today I forgive Mohammad Merah! I don't forgive him for what he did! But I forgive him for how he ended up in that place. He lived a life without love; there was no love in this family. He did not have any help neither any schooling, no help from the school neither the society, so look how Mohammad Merah ended up! He became a terrorist and he killed those 7 victims with no mercy. Therefore, I have set up my association because my son refused to kneel before these people! He refused to kneel in front of this terrorist, he was told to kneel before his assassin and he said no! Mohammad Merah said, you are a soldier and you have killed my brother in Afghanistan and I am going to kill you today! Mohammad Merah had a camera and he filmed everything! He filmed all the conversations with the victims. For me, that was like he left a message Mom! I died standing up and therefore you have to stay standing up and reach out to other people. Today my association gets these children outside of these ghettos, outside of these closed cities! These young people have no chance to travel, have no chance to open up to other people. We are all afraid of each other, we are afraid of each other's religions! Therefore, it's important to do such work and help them to get to know each other! However, we are not doing such work and no one reaches out to the other, therefore nothing will improve.

So, my association has brought these young people on study trips to Israel, Palestine and Morocco. We are trying to familiarize them with the others by teaching them about other civilizations, so young people today can really see that how the world work. That's the work we have to do! We have to go out to school and prisons and educate!

When I look at the past of the Kouachi brothers or Coulibaly or Mohamed Merah it is not a beautiful past they had. It's a lost youth. These are young people who are living in suffering. When my son joined the army they told him keep your chin up and keep moving forward, that's an important message. Military service is important to fill the vacuum that was left by parents or school system that was not working. Military service helps teaching youth discipline. However, we don't have military service anymore because there is not enough money. We are seeing teacher's jobs being cut because of the lack of money, so how are we supposed to solve such problems?

Last thing, my son used to tell me keep your chin up and keep moving forward! I say keep peace with you and keep moving forward. Thank you very much, gentlemen and ladies.

A testimony from a family with a child currently in Syria Hayat Khyare

I am really delighted to have heard Mrs Latifa's and the experts' speeches because they reflect my story. I am the only Belgian here, I think. I am going to speak about Belgium. A few weeks ago I went to a seminar held by a non-profit organisation and one of the speakers told the story of a girl called Muriel who went to Iraq to engage in a suicide bombing attack 10 years ago. I went on to the Internet looking for information about her and I realised I had met her previously. She used to live in Brussels, she was from Charleroi originally and I realized I had met her one week before she went to Iraq. She was collecting clothing for the people in Morocco and she said that she wanted to stay in Morocco for some time because she felt so good there. Shortly after that, she died in an attack in Iraq. It was the first time I had got in touch with a person that had joined Jihad. When I received the news, I thought that she had committed suicide. I didn't think it was a Jihadist attack, I remember her quite vaguely but I remember that I saw in her eyes that she was depressed and desperate. The same desperation was something I would see later in a member of my family, my nephew. He went to Syria 3 years ago, he was 20 and he was

somebody who really struggled at school and didn't feel well in Belgium. He was a fair and gentle person; he was working as a volunteer with homeless people in Brussels.

His behaviour slowly began to change. He cut off any dialogue with his parents and his friends. He talked a lot about Syria and one day when his parents weren't at home he left for Syria, as if his departure had been planned by somebody else. It took us three days to find where he had actually gone; it really turned all our family upside down. Already three years ago I understood this was a vast complex and taboo issue. Three years ago when his parents asked the police for help they were just told: "Well, your son left for Syria" and since then an increasing number of people have gone to Syria. Some of them are just naïve; some believe they will find solutions to their problems: they have been manipulated. Last year a family asked me to try to convince their daughter not to go to Syria. The family had asked the authorities to intervene but they had responded that she was over the age of 18 and they couldn't do anything. That's scandalous. She was 20, she had a diploma and she had started to wear a headscarf 8 months before her departure. She didn't feel at home in Belgium, she said that she would have a brilliant future in Syria. She complained about the media saying that they hated the Moroccan Belgians; I believe that the media have some responsibilities for this. She said that Belgian people hated her because she was a Muslim wearing a headscarf. She said she wanted to fight for her freedom and she left for Syria. Let's not forget that these people we are talking about are Belgian citizens.

Just after the attack in Paris, Europe started to take action here. Of course, I cannot speak as a mother who has lost his son there, but I can tell you that these people feel betrayed by politicians and the media; these families are suffering in silence. I am afraid to meet another family in this situation, I have met so many so far and I am sure it will happen again. There are so many people who are going to Syria; their families do not see them as Jihadists but as human beings who are suffering from judgement especially from the media. It accumulates over time. This story I'm telling you is not an exception. If you speak to anyone working in the field: teachers and non-profit organisations, they will tell you they know at least one person who has gone to Syria. For three years I have been waiting for action to be taken and nothing has happened.

I am a mother, I am a Belgian I wear a headscarf, I am originally from Morocco and I am specifically a Berber, I have to say this here in Belgium, yet I am trying to testify and take action with the resource I have, I am a teacher of Islamic religion in Flanders and I work a lot with my colleagues, because I think that diversity is important. As a teacher, it is up to me to make sure children feel well and integrate within the society they live in. I run a project together with my colleagues and with our students.

Politicians are dismantling our freedom: they speak against religion, the right to wear a headscarf, I am fed up with politicians speaking on my behalf. They are really working very hard to ban the headscarf and this is something I want to talk about because this was so important to that young woman who went to Iraq. She talked a lot about the headscarf and how Belgians had hatred for women that wear a headscarf. Politicians think that because I wear a headscarf I must reject homosexuality. If I walk in the street and I see a man wearing a T-shirt with a rainbow, which is the symbol of homosexuality, I don't reject him. I am just a human being looking for my freedom in the same way that he is. My religion doesn't teach me to hate anyone else, it doesn't matter what that person represents. I think the Muslim community in Belgium is quite clear about that. Extremists are where there is destabilisation, that's how you get terrorism. Politicians have to act for our well-being, in our interest and I don't see them doing that. The solution has to come from the bottom-up. That's why we have to work with grassroots people. But the people who are at the top they don't work directly with those who are actually concerned in the field, they are the ones making decisions and it's dangerous. I do not usually talk about politics but I can tell you I am just fed up with all of these pieces of legislation that make the situation much worse. I no longer want to stand by and look on, I want to act. Following the recent attack in Kenya, and last week Muslims throwing Christians out into the sea, I am horrified by all of this. At the same time I see European Union leaving 850 migrants to die in the Mediterranean, I feel ashamed. When I hear the Prime Minister Charles Michel that says that Belgium is engaged in the fight against Daesh and sends F-16 to fight terrorists and radicals as a way to prevent strong immigration flows, I am afraid by our politicians. We need to promote more prevention, diversity and stop promoting laws that divide.

Targeted interventions and de-radicalisation – lessons learned from Denmark
Professor Preben Bertelsen, Department of psychology and behavioural science, Aarhus University

I will walk you through the theoretical work and ideas behind what we are doing in Denmark and especially the theoretical approach behind the so-called Aarhus model. We are seeking explanations of what these young people are searching for. One of the basic things they are looking for is a decent life, they are

asking themselves the fundamental questions of how life should be? The road is full of obstacles and from a sociological point of view we want to see how people confront these obstacles and take a path of political activism. This activism can be radicalization and can lead to extremism. Most people will try to construct their life so that it should be according to their view.

One of the main obstacles is that people might be prevented from political and religious activism. The problem here is that if you can't take the directory of political and legal activism then some people will take the path of illegal political and religious activism. Again, it's a fundamental human motivation to do something about your situation. And the main process is the same, it can be radicalization and can develop into extremism but the difference is exclusion from the normal path of being active in a society within law and democracy. They still have the idea of doing something about their situation but they will take a different path than the other people. Therefore, it's very important for us in Arhus to make this distinction between these two path-ways. We are in fact having no problem with people being politically active or religious or even extremist within law and democracy.

We even think that a modern democracy is in a need of some people pushing our borders. Also, it's very important for us to make this distinction between young people so we don't identify the false positives.

We also see some people who give up, they don't have the life that they wish. They can't fight and end up with psychological problems.

Another way to react to these obstacles is for individuals to turn to crime. And that last path is the example of what happen in Paris and Copenhagen. It is people who don't really belong to anywhere. They really want to belong somewhere but they are excluded from societies, for example the case of Copenhagen the guy was excluded from his own criminal gang. So he was seeking for credit that could gain him some recognition.

The combination of crime and sociological problems, "the attempt to belong to somewhere", these things go together and they will accumulate into a new dangerous type characterized by crime or violence but not by a political or religious agenda. What we are trying to do in Arhus is to identify two set of risk factors, we are trying to identify what is it exactly that young people find threatened about. So we have to study their mind-sets.

What we are trying to do is, to ask what these people are searching for? And then we will take preventive measures. We will try with the measures of inclusion and in fact what we have learned in Arhus is that it's extremely necessary to force in the early prevention programs and to train our mentors to help these young guys empowering them with life again, empowering their way of overcoming life obstacles to reach a good life. Also, we can help them develop these life skills by helping them change their sociological mind-set. So, sometimes the monitoring program is not enough then we have to use the sociological programs to help them develop their fundamental human life skills. One, really necessary thing is also to work with parents in schools etc., so that they will be a resourceful network for us.

Last, there are many young gangsters who are drafting around Europe looking to join such groups. Therefore we need to find a way to reintegrate them into the society before it becomes very dangerous. Maybe a very important question is, what can they do to contribute to our society? So we are working on empowering their mind-set to help them to go back to the positive path. At the Aarhus University we are not the police and we don't want to remove their religious and political criticism of the society but we believe that we can help them to balance it within law and democracy.

A testimony from the Brussels Imam and a former member of the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) Hocine Ben Abderrahmane, historian and Imam at the Brussels El Azhar mosque

I agree with many of the ideas that have been suggested before me. The approach related to non-integration and racism is right and true but now I want to tackle another problem. Generally, the young people going to Syria belong to Islamic communities and are converted.

I have been an Islamist for 30 years of my life, Islamism started in the Arab countries as an alternative to the actual power at the time, then it has moved away from its initial path at a certain time and I started wondering why people moved from religion to violence. I tried to look at this more carefully: people that move to Syria do not do it overnight and they don't do it just because they are excluded. Recently, I have met young people from Belgium that wanted to leave because they felt excluded but it's not a satisfactory answer. Nobody's asking them to go to Syria. The Syrian problem is an internal conflict and that's why we

have to deconstruct the ideas that have emerged in Europe. In Europe in the 90s hatred has been promoted against Muslims. Nobody has understood it, even in Copenhagen. Just a few Imams, me included, have rung the bell that this way of thinking would lead us to become murderers. In this context Imams, teachers of religion don't know what to do because for them Islam represents tolerance, mercy. How is it possible to end up with these images of cruelty? We ended up at this point because something happened that people didn't see coming. Ancient readings dated more than 1000 years ago have been cited and people now are claiming what is called Salafism. This school of thought sent people to Afghanistan. Young people from Egypt, Algeria, Libya and other Arab countries see themselves in confrontation with the state and society. According to them constitutional monarchies and republics are not entitled to exist. They advocate the utopic idea of the caliphate. Historically, this thing has never existed; this is what I try to say to young people that want to create it. There has always been cultural unity among Arab countries but not political unity. This issue of the caliphate is the most important thing, people don't know that. In the 80's this pushed young people to think they should confront society. This damages the image of Islam. A lot of people do not know that before Al Qaeda there was something called the World Front for combatting Jews. This is universalised hatred. Why Christians? Why to attack Christians? I asked somebody: "Do you like what's going on? Do you like this genocide against Christians? Do you like what Daesh has done in Libya with the assassination of 22 Copts, have you forgotten what's written in your sacred book of Islam when the prophet sent his companions to Abyssinia to find political asylum at that time? You are responsible for the spoiling of the image of Islam. This is what we have to say to Daesh and to Boko Haram. Islam doesn't make people go backward. It's not slavery. Evolution of humanity has to be taken into account. These are the ideas that we have to deconstruct. This is what pushes people to go. People think they are doing something good religiously but it's not stated anywhere in Islam. It's been universalised hatred and then we have reached a stage where Islamism has been criminalised. The Imams can't deconstruct this mind-set. This mind-set has been widespread since the 90s among young people and today the same mind-set can be found in groups like Sharia4Belgium that went to Antwerp. When I met young people that wanted to leave I tried to stop them and I invited them to think rationally and in an Islamic way.

We also have to deconstruct this status of martyr. Being a martyr is not a choice; people are pushed to purgatory in the name of martyrdom. It is false and we have to tell it. This is a mind-set we need to deconstruct. We need to tell this to our young people; first of all we have to spread this message in the Mosques. They are walking on a rope in mid-air like in a circus. It is very easy to fall.

At a certain point people preaching this wrong mind-set also wanted to ban young people to attend biology classes because they would see woman's anatomy. They didn't want girls to go to the swimming-pool. This mind-set prevented us from integrating in the society it is not only the fact that the others didn't want to integrate us. These preachers didn't want young people to say "Merry Christmas" or "Happy New Year" to their neighbours who were not Muslim. We have to call for a new approach to Islam, and this has to be applied by Muslims in their Mosques, in their press in order to live in harmony with the other components of society here in Europe. Thank you.

PANNEL II: THE TOOLS OF INTEGRATION & EDUCATION **Restitching the fabric of European society**

CHAIR: JÖRG LEICHTFRIED, S&D GROUP VICE-PRESIDENT

Ladies and Gentlemen, dear Friends, dear Comrades, let me now introduce the second panel of today's conference, devoted to inclusion, integration and education. Increasing security is essentially a short term response to violent extremism. We as progressives know that this is not enough, and that we should work as well, and probably primarily, on the root causes of extremism, and that is the feeling of isolation and discrimination that is shared by too many in our societies. Fighting against those feelings, and too often, those realities, by making concrete proposals and discussing positive experiences, is what I propose to concentrate on in the next 2 hours.

The message of tolerance and togetherness is best carried by a good film, such as the documentary by our moderator Hadja Lahbib. She unveils to us the world of immigrant women who never took a metro in Brussels, their joy when learning how to use a computer, their unconditional love for their families and their numerous talents. It is a privilege for me to be on the same panel with Tata Milouda, Loredana Marchi and Rahma Sebtaoui, the protagonists from the film *Patience, patience t'iras au paradis*.

Culture is a key tool to foster integration. It is of fundamental importance for you young people in search of their identity to get valorisation through culture or sports. Artists and intellectuals offer a novel way of looking at things because they involve all our senses and stir controversy.

In our effort of prevention or de-radicalisation our key ally is the family as the primary social environment. Women, mothers, sisters, friends are among the first to detect symptoms of radicalisation or isolation of children or youngsters. Young women are also among those leaving to Syria, Iraq and other war zones where they end up in slavery and where according to the latest report by the Human Rights Watch the ISIS is carrying out systematic rape of women.

The EU should be supporting widespread programmes that aim to engage young European Muslim women in their endeavours for greater equality, provide support networks and platforms through which they can safely have their voice heard, and ultimately help generate an environment of security and hope for them.

The EU must also support programmes that seek to promote an understanding of Islam's position on women which includes education, public participation and civic contribution, through supporting and working with Islamic groups that have the credibility to bring about change in their communities.

We will address in this panel also the religious diversity. We support freedom of belief and do not believe that restrictions should be directed against a particular religion. We must act to counter hate speech and incitement to terrorism, while respecting freedom of expression. But we must ensure that intervention does not lead to alienation or victimization of communities or an erosion of public confidence in, and support for, law enforcement agencies.

There has been a disproportionate emphasis on Muslims, who are already victims of widespread discrimination and Islamophobia. Muslims have been in Europe since the 7th Century. In Dresden, Saxony, the heart of PEGIDA anti-Islam protests, Muslims represent only 0.1% of the population. The European Commission must urgently address the mounting trend of intolerance and discrimination in the EU. We have long campaigned for a comprehensive, EU-wide directive against discrimination, including that on the ground of religion.

Finally, we will deal with empowerment and winning community trust. Mayor of Vilvoorde Hans Bonte will be joining us after 17:00 to discuss the situation in Vilvoorde, a laboratory for countering violent extremism. It is estimated that 380 fighters have left Belgium for Iraq and Syria. 101 have returned in the meantime. Of 50 we are as good as sure that they have been killed. From Vilvoorde with just 42,000 inhabitants, 28 people have gone to Iraq and Syria. 5 were killed. 8 have returned. Two of those are in prison. There are another 45 potential leavers, including a number of under-age girls. It is important to note that nobody has left for Syria or Iraq since the summer of 2014. Mayor Hans Bonte will present their programme of prevention and de-radicalization which consists of countering indoctrination and isolation of people. Information sharing and involvement and close cooperation with the families, social workers are at the heart of the programme.

We must understand the link between underrepresentation and the radicalisation process. Opinion formers in the Muslim community are those chosen by the community itself. Many initiatives, such as those on inter-religious dialogue, do contribute to a more tolerant society but when it comes to political issues, these initiatives have so far failed. We need more research and data on the political representation of citizens with Muslim backgrounds. Progressive parties can lead by example and promote diversity when it comes to determining their lists of candidates in European and national elections and offering opportunities and internships, as well as using role models as key persons to encourage participation.

Culture and media as a tool for integration

Hadja Lahbib, RTBF news anchor and author of the documentary

"Patience, Patience t'iras au paradis"

I first went on air in 1997 and little by little I realized how important it is to be the first Muslim female news anchor, especially on the prime time news at 7:30. Then I have dedicated myself to make documentaries. Now, we have heard a lot about the media and "their negative role" and the idea that the multiculturalism in society is not will represented as it could be. It's important for me to say that I did not do this because sometimes you can become an icon without wanting too and how important you are as an icon of hope for others who have no hope. And if I go back to Algeria I might feel like a stranger too. So, my work as a journalist over the last 20 years was really to build bridges to put some light on things that are often hidden. I was correspondent for a while I dedicated my time to cultural shows. I am very happy that I can

still play my role to build bridges between different communities and the north and the south of this country. On the other hand, I believe that the media is an excellent meeting place, a place of discovery, now often the media get bad press and that is my daily challenge but this is my life and what I am trying to do. So, what I am doing now is to put the light on the lives of immigrant women; women whom had rare chances to have a voice in the last hundred years. These women who are often in the front line of suffering when they found out that one of their sons have left to Syria. Now, I am sure if these mothers had been welcomed well when they arrived we would not be here to talk about the problem of radicalization. We are here to talk about the documentary and about these mothers in their 60's who decide to take their destiny in their own hands.

Tata Milouda, participant from the documentary

I am very pleased to be speaking to you here today. Thanks to the literacy classes and learning about cultures I have overcome one of my greatest fears, which is to read and write. I suffered a lot of humiliation due to the traditions in Morocco in my village. In France things were new to me, things that I've never seen in my village. I am 65 now and the idea that a 60-year old women could change was new to me! There are millions of women who were like me but despite my suffering and violence and fear I kept fighting. Even at the time were I was not allowed to go out from my home but I still kept fighting, I tried to find the light in the end of the dark tunnel. I came to France in 1989 and all I could say at that time was "good morning, thanks and good bye" and I was very proud of that. One day I met a lady in Paris, that I've lost her address, who told me go to the literacy class. She told me you can learn to read and write. At that time, I did not know what that was. So, I started looking for it and I found the cultural centre and the trainer started asking me questions and slowly I started learning, this experience shaped my life. Now, I am very happy and active and now I am star in two different films one in France and one in Morocco.

Engaging women in the effort to prevent recruitment and support for terrorism Shiria Khatun, chair of the Shanaz network, UK

I am really happy to be here, I am the chair of the Shanaz network in the UK, which was set up by the association of chief police officers in the UK. It was set up by a Muslim female detective; her late mom was called Shanaz. The network has women from all around the UK coming together who have expertise in counter terrorism. The other role I play "as I always say that we women have different roles and different identities to play" I helped setting up another small women project in east London called "Bismillah Women's Journey". The project is about the 45 ladies and their journey to development. These women have never worked in their lives, they have been house wives but they got a passion to share their skills. As a result of this project, women can now go into a social enterprise, as they will be generating jobs for themselves. The other thing and related to women engagement, we have noticed for years that there has never been a platform for women to come together and talk about important issues, such as extremism and radicalization. So, at Shanaz we work on bringing these women together and share the expertise they have. We work with women from "hidden communities", women who do not have access to community centres and services.

We need to raise the importance of the role of women with regards to tackling extremism & radicalisation. After all, who better than women to know what is happening in their own homes as well as in their communities!

I have seen a growth in Islamic Women's Circles, which are operated from people's living rooms. The idea is each women will have a target to recruit other women & bring them to their circles. Where there will be a female "Alima" (Scholar) who will educate the women on Islam.

We need to recognise that this is not only taking place here in the UK but in other countries too, where there are Muslims residing.

Women are now empowering other women therefore it is vital to include women & those organisations representing women to be able to voice their opinions & advice to policy/decision makers.

Now, regarding the prevention of radicalization, in the UK we have a prevention strategy, which actually works with the police and the community. We also have a program called Channel focused on de-radicalization for people who came back from Syria. Also, related to youth engagement we are doing a lot on that in the UK through community policing as we have police forces focusing on working with the community, they receive the appropriate training and they are real assets. We can witness the change in people who decide to leave Syria and how they became a role model for many others. Therefore, Shanaz

is the network for many to learn to do better. Finally, and most importantly we need as European countries to share our experiences and therefore, I am here today.

Dr Malika Hamidi, director of the European Muslim Network

I am really happy to witness the debate taking place in the European parliament and also the variety of speakers we have, especially the academics and from the Muslim community. Today, I am going to reflect on this subject from a perspective of gender looking at the role of women in combatting radicalization, and violence to extremism. I am going to reflect on this issue through two different perspectives. First of all the role of women, of course today there are women (mothers) who are fighting extremism and the phenomena of going to Syria. Also, how jihadism and terrorism is becoming feminist, why are women joining such movements and what about young women how come back from Syria and Iraq.

Academic work is showing that women have been signing up for radical movements and not only religious movements, examples include Nazis, Fark movement and others. So, this phenomenon is not new but it seems its awakening up now. I think the first thing we need to do is to look at the role of media and Internet. Second of all, we need to look at the role of women in radical movements, and this is not new but ISIS these days are welcoming women easily, which is the opposite of Al Qaeda.

There are different reasons why women have signed up for such movements. One of the major problems we have is that there is a generation of young women who suffered from the lack of education, work, and symbolic violence, for example, women who are wearing a scarf and can't get a job. There is an issue of identity and politics there. These women who are not exercising their human rights and still believe that they are going to heaven by going to Syria. Some of them received lots of dollars per month to do it. So, there is hope being injected in the lives of these women who can't find any reason of their lives. We often heard that they live in societies that experience acts of violence and racism against women and we must look over that. As a result, these acts raise certain feelings in these young women. Some women find this emancipation as in some examples women are getting involved in politics and they are leaving their country. So, what we are seeing is social illusion, marginalization, exclusion, which is in some cases encouraging young women into religious extremism. I would love to talk more about this as I think this is the phenomena we are seeing recently with women.

Now, let's go back to the role of women from the other different perspective (mothers). We have seen in Belgium some mothers have their sons leaving to Syria or Iraq and government and civil society has actually realized that these women can do social change and that they have an important role and we can't combat extremism and radicalization without them. So, the government is convinced that we need to include women and we are seeing growing number of proposals that are focusing on women empowerment. So, how can we give those resources, tools and strategies to help them combat radicalization? Women are increasingly involved in the decision-making. Of course there is the issue of the economy and education. In the Muslim community poverty is dominating therefore it also pushes people to extremism. We can give women the right to start their own small enterprises or small business which could lead them out of poverty. We also want to encourage women to encourage girls to learn and to go to school, which is a key.

The role of women in combatting extremism within their families is also very important. There is one network I would love to mention, which is called SAVE, which is Sisters against violent extremism. 15 years ago I was invited to a meeting and they were saying that we have an important role to play in combatting extremism, not only religious extremism but every type. This network is considered to be one of the first networks to invite women from all around the world to fight extremism. Lots of these women are mothers, which gives them the power to detect the first signs on their children. It's really up to the mother to identify when her son is suffering from such issues. A really fantastic campaign called mothers for change, which focused only on the role of women and mothers in detecting early signs of radicalization.

Finally, I am going to talk about the role of women in the inter-community and inter-religious dialogue. Since years we have had female imams who are working on combatting radicalization. Women are going to mosque and focusing on the origin of the spiritual message of Islam, the message of love to fight radicalization. So, women have a community role to play by deconstructing the myth of heroism in radical Islam. Women who are mothers are telling us about their daughters when they come back and how they are disappointed about what they have seen. I believe this is an essential point of prevention.

Also, we need to create a critical mind, a political culture, we don't want this issue to be instrumentalized in order to really rally Islam and the position and the role of women in Islam. We know today that there are

governments in Europe that have blood on their hands and that they are complacent of what's happening. So, we need to ask why we are allowing these young people to go through customs to go to these countries and they are under age and they are still the responsibility of our government.

Integration and religious diversity as a tool to strengthen Europe's social fabric: lessons from Canada Professor Eugenia Relaño Pastor, senior lecturer on Islam in European Society, Complutense University, Madrid

Related to my presentation we have to map out the diversity the European society is facing today. We know that we have religious and ethnic diversity. As different immigrants come to Europe, they face different types of discrimination and racism, as black or Muslim. Europe has been an experiment of diversity all around history. All this has a lot to say about fear and challenges.

There has been a lot of research done by the academia and the national human rights networks about diversity and social coherence and Islamophobia. We can witness that many reports have showed fear and prejudice against Islam assuming that Muslim people experience their identity and faith in fanatic way.

What to do? How to prevent? How to respond to the phenomena of Islamophobia? When developing the education for a democratic citizen, the challenges we are facing in Canada and Europe are several. We operate within a normative and a legal framework. This implies that we have to change our normative human rights frameworks, non-discrimination work is not enough. There is something wrong because we still have drawbacks.

Now, the political question which is always incorrect is how much diversity can be accommodated with liberal and secular democracy. So, why don't we have a Muslim political party? It is because we are afraid and we consider this a threat to us. However, we are very comfortable with Christian political parties and there are plenty of them in the European Union.

There has been a history of accommodation in Canada, it's not only about Muslims, it's about altruism and the natives. The governance on diversity is based on education, and this is not a matter of course; it is a matter of building up an intercultural literacy. Just like the children need to learn about numbers, literature, history, they need to learn also about intercultural mechanisms, resources and religions.

We need better policies of moral equality, which means it does not matter if you are a Muslim or an immigrant you need to have the same right. You need a formal right and also an equal participation in the society. That means the state has to treat everyone equally but not only neutrally; the state ought to also optimize for each citizen.

Integrative poli-realism, this term means respectful diversity in all aspects of society and emphasizes the interdependent of the dimensions of social, economic and political and cultural. In order to do so politically we need a Canadian term called open secularism. In Europe we have one of the main threats to the religious diversity: it comes from the extreme secularism, like the making of policies in France, which diluted systemically all the public participation of other identities and in the end this gets us to marginalization. So when we say open secularism we have to accommodate the cultural differences which lead us to inclusive citizenship.

Empowerment and winning community trust

Hans Bonte, mayor of Vilvoorde

In Belgium Vilvoorde is one of the chief suppliers of Syria fighters and Belgium is the number one supplier anyway. We have in the meantime at least managed to stop the exodus to Syria. No one had left since the summer of 2014. An uncertain truce seems to have come about. In Washington I had the opportunity to explain our policy (prevention where possible, repression where necessary) and to listen to other approaches. It is our common task not only to safeguard our model of society – be it in Vilvoorde, Paris or New York - but most of all to ensure it will resist those forces that wish to destroy that model. Co-operation is the key word: between countries, between cities, between communities, between people. Vilvoorde, with its 42,000 inhabitants, is a small town, a stone's throw from Brussels, at the heart of Belgium and Europe. You may reach the capital's Grand' Place in just ten minutes, by train. Just as you can travel to Paris in one and a half hours. Cities like Amsterdam or London are just extra half hour away. Anno 2015 Vilvoorde's small-town reality has long since been engulfed by the complexity of the big city : sociologically by now we form one whole with Brussels.

Vilvoorde is the fastest growing town in the country. A striking feature is that the growth is due primarily to a rapid expansion of the non-native community, mainly from North-Africa. Today 1 in 4 inhabitants isn't of Belgian origin, whereas among under-18's that figure rises to 40%.

A common language, Dutch in our case, is one of the main keys to making it easier to live together, to really being part of a society. But that is often the rub. And there are consequences, particularly when hunting for a job in times of crisis. A daily helping of racism and discrimination – I won't mince my words – makes it a lot more difficult still to achieve a warm society with a fair chance for all. Add a permanent shortage of places in our schools and nurseries, and a lack of playgrounds and sports facilities, and you'll realise what numerous and diverse challenges a small town on the northern Brussels periphery has to face.

Over the last years an estimated 380 fighters have left our country for Syria or Iraq. 50 are known to have been killed. Just over 100 have returned in the meantime. Vilvoorde – once again : with 42,000 inhabitants – saw 28 leave to take up arms in the Middle East. 5 of them died and 8 have returned, 2 of whom are in prison. We now estimate the number of potential leavers to be 45, including a number of under-age girls. It is important to point out that since the summer of 2014 nobody has left. And we'd like to keep it that way for as long as possible.

There is no such thing as “a standard profile of the Syria fighter”. It is striking they are often young people – both boys and girls – and of non-native origin, although we see some young people of local origin going to the war zone too. But we do discern a consistent radicalisation methodology. It is essentially a dual process based on *indoctrination* and increasing *isolation*. And all of them have one thing in common: they are young people who don't feel at ease the way they are now. All are marked by frustrations and a profound lack of prospects.

Young people who are susceptible to radicalisation (the vast majority through lack of prospects, low social status or an identity crisis) are actually bombarded with a very radical message. This gives them the idea that they have a special role to play in the historical development of the only true Islamic state. Indoctrination takes place simultaneously in the intimacy of a room - by means of images on Internet or chat sessions on Facebook or other social media – and equally during personal conversations with recruiters. Yes, in Vilvoorde as well. The content of the message is two-pronged. Western civilisation – or your country, or your town – doesn't want Muslims, and as a real Muslim you can make a difference by joining friends in IS.

Another component is increasing isolation. As indoctrination progresses the young person is systematically and progressively cut off. He or she has to sever all links : with family and friends, sports or youth club, the adviser at school or colleagues at work. That way the person is supposed to feel that he or she has been chosen to fight, as it were. Add to this the endless flow of war images from Iraq, Syria or Israel, with the West standing idly by or reacting with fighter planes, and the process of radicalisation is complete. By now Vilvoorde has begun to function as a laboratory for Belgium, and beyond that, for Europe and the world. This is because in my town a number of conditions for radicalisation are present more powerfully than in other towns and cities. But the zero departures is no coincidence and of that I am proud.

Obviously we made some mistakes, but our trial and error system enabled us to make progress. In the end we made a virtue of necessity and, step by step, adapted our plan to fit the needs encountered in practice. And we kept far away from ideological or political rigidities and close to everyday reality.

Over the last year what I modestly call the “Vilvoorde method” has aroused the interest of other towns and authorities in Belgium. They wanted to know what the secret was, whereas there wasn't one. We just set to work with the means at our disposal then and now. Our contacts with the Flemish and federal authorities also revealed that there existed no general plan. They often looked (and still look) to us. And so, de facto, Vilvoorde became a source of inspiration for other authorities' policy, and not just local ones.

In Vilvoorde we have a very diversified town administration and town council, made up of people firmly embedded in our community and who have a direct view of the processes and risks involved when a heterogeneous community attempts to function homogeneously. Thanks to their knowhow we can keep an ear to the ground for radicalisation processes. Better still, they often are the first personal contact, which is a great asset. Without the popular ethnic councillors – who enjoy the confidence of the Muslim community – we would be nowhere in our search for solutions.

And we play this trump card every day to deradicalise a local community. Our strategy rests on a number of basic principles, devoid of clichés :

1. Radicalisation and extremism prosper most in a context where integration is failing, in a context where people - young people – are given no prospects.
2. By now we have learnt in Vilvoorde that the best way to counter frustration is with a policy offering support and warmth.
3. “*Giving respect, demanding respect*” is another guiding principle. My experience as a youth and community worker has taught me how important it is to show respect when approaching people in a problematic situation who might radicalise. Only that way will you earn the necessary respect yourself. That balance is decisive.
4. In the same vein all subjects must be debatable. I go personally to speak to young people who have returned from Syria or Iraq. The more we show we're involved, not just in words but in our deeds too, the more progress we can make.
5. Finally, deradicalisation is work in progress. It is society as a whole that has the problem, not just the police and security forces. And society, that's we all together : friends, family, sports club, youth club, the mosque, town council, all of us. Only by sticking together can we make a stand, and no other way.

The essence of our approach is trust. The authorities need to enjoy the trust of vulnerable people, the old and the young, non-natives and Belgians. This trust you must earn. This means being close to people and accessible. And showing in your attitude that everybody is equally precious. You see, there is a long way to go before vulnerable mums and dads come to tell you that their child is in the grips of violent radicalism. And that input you need. You need to know where radicalism is growing in order to develop anti-radicalist strategies.

Afzal Khan MEP, Manchester's youngest, and first Asian, Muslim Lord Mayor in 2005

Excellent ideas have been shared this afternoon. I was the youngest lord Mayor of Manchester in history and let me give a brief of my background. I was adopted at the age of 11 and came to UK as I have been through the ups and downs of life. Today, I am a proud Muslim who is the Vice-Chair of security and defence subcommittee in the European Parliament. I represent around 7 million people, the message today is on one hand the society has the responsibility and the ability to give that opportunity and on the other hand the individual also has the responsibility to take that opportunity and also by working together you can have a powerful society. Therefore, I am an example of someone who started his life and left school without any qualifications to be here in this position, it can be done and many need this hope so they can succeed.

The second idea is upon the S&D to put this together, the diversity is what strengthens us, to pull out 28 countries to work together in a union, where there is a huge history of violence between nations. And today celebrating this diversity is acutely the way forward and there is no other way than this. We have seen in Manchester and it's a big diverse city as there are 200 hundred languages spoken there and yet it's still a world class city and there is so much progress that has been made in the last 20 years. Many of these communities have made this contribution to make Manchester the way it is today. A lot of great work goes there, many festivals take place there as we share the joy and learn about each other. Many interfaith activities take place as at least 36 different interfaith groups are operating in Manchester and I want to share with you one, a Muslim-Jewish forum which I was involved in since 10 years, often in the media when have the pictures of the Jewish and Muslim it's like the worst combination you can have but actually in the ground when they work together they realize they have actually more in a common than any one else and this is the successful example of such work.

The integration is a two-way street, we all have a responsibility towards it. It's not the responsibility of one side. Also, the leadership have extra responsibility as poor leadership will end up dividing communities, as good leadership will end up uniting communities. Finally, the representation point is important itself, as if you look at society there is gap horizontally and vertically that means number of people proportionally who should be there are not there and those who want to get there they don't make the progress that need to be happening, again this is the responsibility of the leadership to ensure that to happen. Also, the idea of role model is really important as young people can see that someone from their own background can make progress, the message they send is so powerful.

Furthermore, the family and women contribution, we have seen today the amazing contribution women can make and there role of the family. Of course, other issues play a role but still there are many organizations that are doing amazing work with little money. Also, some of the parents need help as changes are happening quickly, and that c creates the stress and uncertainty. Therefore, many

immigrants' parents need help to keep up with change, also as society and government we need to make sure we have the resources to help them.

Final point, I want to finish with, communities have to be working together and celebrate the diversity within our society, it's like any relationship it requires effort and therefore, we can work on both bases and build those relationships. Unfortunately, there are many misunderstandings about Muslims and Islam and I am not surprised if you look at it from a historical point of view or if you look at the media culture, the share negativity that is shared by the media is doing so much harm. In one recent research, it says that there are 21 negative stories about Muslims with 1 positive story, is this fair? Is this right? As we are a community made up of 1.2 billion people that have so much negativity? How come the media has 21 to 1 ratio of negative story therefore, there is responsibility on that front as well. Also, other wrong stereotyping is that the majority of Muslim are Arabs, that's obviously not true as Arabs are minority in Islam. Therefore, we need all to learn, including Arab communities, that there is huge diversity within Islam.

Last example, you know extremists, it does not matter what faith or ethnicity they come from their agenda is the same and I will leave with you the last example, when I was elected as MEP I stood against Nick Griffin who was the leader of the British national party and throughout the five years he was here, he took every opportunity to spread the poison of hate and even during the election itself his message was this: There are 8 people to be elected from the North West of England, the main parties will get their people elected and the last seat will be either me Nick Griffin or a Muslim liberal being elected. I've found this sickening, but I won the election and he lost.