Republic of North Macedonia
Government of the Republic of North Macedonia

NATIONAL COMMITTEE
FOR COUNTERING
VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND
COUNTER-TERRORISM

National Strategy for Counter-Terrorism

2023-2027

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TERMINOLOGY[1]

"Terrorist Group"	A structured group of more than two persons, formed for a certain period of time and acting for the commission of acts of terrorisms; "structured group" means a group that is not accidentally formed for the direct commission of an offence, which does not necessarily have formally defined roles of its members, continuity of membership or a developed structure.
Radicalization	Radicalization is a process of social, psychological, and ideological change that leads to extremism and potentially violent extremism.
Extremism	Extremism is an ideological position characterized by a polarized view of the world, distrust in state institutions and democratic decision-making processes, and the legitimization of the use of violence.
Violent extremism (VE)	Position of an individual who has committed one or several acts of violence due to extremist views and thinking.
Funds	Assets of any type, whether tangible or intangible, movable or immovable, regardless of the method in which they were acquired, and legal documents or instruments in any form, including electronic or digital, including, but not limited to, banking loans, traveller's cheques, banker's cheques, money orders, shares, securities, bonds, drafts, letters of credit.
Hate speech	All forms of expression that spread, promote, incite or justify hatred based on intolerance towards one or more persons because of their personal characteristics or belonging to a certain group.
Foreign terrorist fighters (FTF)	Individuals who travel to a state other than their states of residence or nationality for the purpose of perpetration, planning, or preparation of, or participation in, acts of terrorisms or the providing or receiving of terrorist training, including in connection with armed conflict[2].
Returnees	Individuals who travel from the host country to the country of origin, country of citizenship or habitual residence, usually after spending long period of time in the host country, either voluntarily or in a forced, assisted or spontaneous way.
Disengagement	A social and psychological process whereby an individual's commitment to, and involvement in, violent extremism is reduced to the extent that he or she is no longer at risk of involvement and engagement in violent activity. This process involves a change in behaviour (no longer using or justifying the use of violence) but it does not necessarily involve a change in an individual's commitment to a radical or extremist cause.

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[1]The terminology is harmonized with the National Plan for Reintegration, Resocialization and Rehabilitation, the Standard Operating Procedures for Dealing with STDs and their Family Members, the documents of RAN, OSCE, Council of Europe and UN
[2]United Nations Security Council Resolution 2178 (2014) S/RES/2178

FOREWORD

Cognizant of the contemporary security challenges in the country, throughout the region, Europe and worldwide;

Guided by the need to develop policies and practices to counter and fight terrorism;

Committed to building a society resistant to the threats of terrorism;

Ready to implement European and international good practices in fighting terrorism;

Convinced that only full commitment of all involved institutions can ensure the smooth functioning of the system; and

In accordance with the valid legislation, the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia is pleased to present its fourth National Counter-Terrorism Strategy (CT).

The process of drafting the Strategy relied on the experiences from United Nations and European Union documents on counter-terrorism, and benefits deriving thereof are largely implemented in the proposed Strategy.

The National Committee for Countering Violent Extremism and Counter-Terrorism (NCCVECT) expresses its gratitude to all international, regional and domestic partners, governmental and non-governmental organisations (NGO) that provided support in the preparation of the National Counter-Terrorism Strategy, and in particular to the OSCE Mission to Skopje for the selfless support, exchange of experiences and quality proposals that assisted the preparation of this Strategy that will meet the needs of the Macedonian society.

The Government of the Republic of North Macedonia expresses readiness to pursue cooperation with all institutions and organisations in the fight against terrorism, in accordance with this National Strategy and the National Strategy for Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), and in line with the international human rights law, international humanitarian law, and international refugee law, in order to confront these security phenomena and preserve the stability and security of the country.

NCCVECT welcomes the commitment and efforts of professionals from institutions, academic community members, NGO activists and other collaborators in creating strategic documents for CVE and CT. We hope that the broad approach taken by the National Committee in preparing these documents will be embraced by the competent institutions in the implementation phase of all planned activities.

INTRODUCTION

Even though counter-terrorism (CT) differs from preventing and countering violent extremism (CVE) in numerous and important ways, responses to both must be designed and implemented in a coherent, connected, and strategic manner, as threats and dangers of violent extremism and terrorism are intertwined and inextricably linked. The structures of the National Strategies of the Republic of North Macedonia for CT and CVE are therefore harmonised, and the corresponding Action Plans (although in two separate documents) share the harmonised principles and correspond to a common set of drivers and factors.

Considering the regional context and developments at the European level and worldwide, one can conclude that any strategic document in the field of security should, to the broadest extent possible, embrace all challenges and threats but also opportunities for cooperation available to the state authorities and institutions they cooperate with. Confronted with numerous threats to peace, stability and security, and especially the threats of violent extremism and terrorism, countries in the region are united around the need for strengthening the capacity of law enforcement agencies, as well as for the development and promotion of international cooperation as the basis for the international counter-terrorism coalition.

Our membership in NATO adds to the clarity and visibility of all institutional efforts to respond to modern threats adequately. Fulfilment of standards for the gathering, analysis, and exchange of security information, as well as improving their quality, provides for a clearer picture of the real threats and makes the institutions more ready to counter violent extremism and terrorism.

The National Counter-Terrorism Strategy is a strategic document that stipulates the changes that have taken place at an accelerated pace in the past several years. While the strategic priorities remain the same, the shift in approach, particularly the significantly changed strategic objectives in each strategic priority, will increase our readiness and ability to respond to the changed threats. This approach will necessarily include the recommendations received during the preparatory phase of the national strategies but also during the assessment and evaluation phase of the existing strategies. A prominent place is assigned to all new security trends and challenges which may be related to terrorism and acts of terrorism.

The strategies draw on the lessons learnt and recognised weaknesses, along with envisaged concrete and specific objectives that will contribute to the strengthening of the measures and policies that have not yet yielded the expected results. Thus, we are cognizant of the numerous advantages of the previous strategic documents, as well as of the objectives that have been well implemented and thanks to which we continue to develop a quality policy of resilience to threats for the whole society.

The publication of the new national strategies reflects the Government's readiness to pursue the transparency of security policies and to inform and educate citizens on how to better protect themselves, their property and their loved ones. While it is not always possible to be fully open and transparent about specific confronted threats or how we respond in the fight against terrorism, one of the objectives of these documents is to increase the amount of information available to the general public on issues of radicalisation that lead to terrorism or violence, violent extremism and terrorism.

The Ministry of Interior, as well as other security institutions, such as the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, but also non-governmental organizations and the civil sector, have serious tasks and activities to implement the stipulated strategic priorities and strategic objectives in the strategies. The whole-of-government and society approach is an opportunity for meaningful involvement of the academic

community, the non-governmental sector, international partners, and all natural and legal persons who have the possibility, knowledge, and experience to assist and ensure the quality of the policy for countering violent extremism and terrorism.

VISION

Ensure people's security and safety by reducing vulnerability, increasing resilience, and constantly building the capacities to respond to acts of terrorism of individuals and groups in line with the international human rights law, international humanitarian law, and international refugee law.

MISSION

To promote and coordinate joint activities of law enforcement institutions and civil society in order to identify and reduce risks and counter all forms of preparation, financing and execution of acts of terrorism in the Republic of North Macedonia in line with the international human rights law, international humanitarian law, and international refugee law.

PREPARATION PROCESS AND STRATEGY STRUCTURE

The National Counter-Terrorism Strategy is a document developed jointly by representatives of government institutions, relevant civil society/civic associations, the academic community, as well as representatives of international organisations the Republic of North Macedonia is a member of or jointly implements activities with.

Modern scientific methods and principles, from simple to more complex, were used to study these socially negative phenomena during the preparation phase of the national strategies, along with an analysis of certain parts in order to separate the constituent elements of a particular problem, and accordingly propose the measures for improving the conditions. In some of the simpler sections, the document is prepared by analysing the content and the problem as a whole to propose the required steps accordingly.

A special characteristic of this Strategy is the possibility to set appropriate scientific parameters which make it possible to conduct further research and analysis of each constituent part, but also of the entire document as a generalised and coherent whole, which can yield the best results in the fight against terrorism. After two years of the implementation of the Strategy, there is room to evaluate all the foreseen measures and activities, to assess the degree of fulfilment, but also whether the planned measures and activities are fully implemented and within the planned time frame.

Strategic priorities and objectives were determined through evidence-based and information-led analysis while the elaboration of ranking and further objective setting was done through debate. They derived from the analysis of the presented context by establishing the main challenges and opportunities for an appropriate preventive and proactive response of the State in countering the process of radicalisation that can lead to terrorism.

The National Strategy is a strategic document that is envisaged for a period of five years and will be valid for the period 2023-2027. The Strategy is prepared in a way that will allow it to be occasionally and regularly evaluated, assessed and analysed when planning the further steps

The National Strategy calls for a multidisciplinary response in the process of counter-terrorism in order to ensure the involvement of a wide range of government stakeholders, such as representatives from the sectors of security, social affairs, education, health, youth and sports, representatives of civil society associations, women, religious, cultural and educational leaders and the media.

This approach will enable the active involvement of all relevant stakeholders in the process of planning the future steps to be taken by the State in countering terrorism, but also in the planning phase for prevention.

The Strategy provides a global overview of the threat of violent extremism and terrorism, which is an opportunity to penetrate the ideology and methodology of terrorist groups while taking into account the threats from known terrorist organisations, but also new challenges related to the war in Ukraine, hybrid threats, and conventional and non-conventional weapons etc.

SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS

To determine the actual situation, as well as to recognise what level of preparedness is required in order to respond to the threats of terrorism, a situational analysis was undertaken that yielded the expected results and assisted in planning the priorities that are an integral part of this Strategy.

The open and inclusive approach in preparing the analysis enabled to naturally combine theoretical knowledge and practical experience, which was the basis for the preparation of the National Strategy. All acquired experiences and observed strengths and weaknesses, as well as challenges and opportunities, are an integral part of this Strategy and guided the setting of the theses foreseen in the strategic priorities and especially in the strategic objectives in each of the four generally accepted priorities.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR CVE and CT

The guiding principles for countering violent extremism and counter-terrorism reflect the picture and the vision in terms of the direction in which institutions should develop the general strategic policy.

HUMAN RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS LED ACTION

Human rights and fundamental freedoms are enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia, and it is imperative for every democratic state to uphold and promote them. The Universal Declaration on Human Rights, European Convention on Human Rights of the Council of Europe, ratified international agreements, and a number of other documents related to the work of law enforcement authorities address the need for human rights and fundamental freedoms led action to be the first guiding principle of the new National Strategies on CVE and CT. Human rights and fundamental freedoms led action is based on the following principles:

- Participation in the decision-making process (everyone is entitled to actively participate in decision-making processes affecting the exercising of their rights);

- Accountability and redress (effective legal remedies are needed in the event of human rights violations);

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- Non-discrimination and equality (everyone is entitled to equal access to human rights and freedoms without any discrimination. All types of discrimination must be prohibited, prevented and eliminated);

- Encouragement and empowerment (everyone is entitled to access and exercise their rights. Individuals and communities need to be aware of their rights and participate in policymaking that affects their lives, while competent state authorities have the legal obligation to respect, protect and ensure human rights and fundamental freedoms. This principle derives from the principle of "proportionality", which allows the restriction of human rights only within the frames of the legal powers, and is necessary for the achievement of the goal and proportionate when comparing the goal of the government action;

- Legality (all procedures taken by institutions must be in compliance with national and international law, including international human rights law, international humanitarian law, and international refugee law.); and

- Effective oversight, regular review and independent monitoring of human rights compliance of state action.

PRINCIPLES OF GOOD GOVERNANCE AND FOSTERING OF DEMOCRATIC VALUES

Good governance implies appropriate management of the State, society, and resources. It strives towards protecting the people's interests and social, economic, and political rights without discrimination on any ground.

Basic characteristics of good governance include participation, the rule of law, transparency, responsibility, equality and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency in actions taken and accountability of institutions.

Good governance supports effective, transparent and independent oversight, especially for the security sector.

A WHOLE-OF-SOCIETY AND WHOLE-OF-GOVERNMENT APPROACH

The Strategy is based on the principle of a whole-of-society and whole-of-government approach, bringing together all governmental institutions and relevant civil society associations aimed at attaining a society without radicalization and violent extremism that lead to terrorism.

In order to counter violent extremism, a comprehensive, integrated, interdisciplinary and inter-agency action is required from the institutions. The National Committee retains its primary function to provide a coordinated response of all institutions in pursuing the four strategic priorities (prevention, protection, enforcement and response).

This principle, in fact, illustrates the full commitment of the Government and the competent institutions that will continue to promote democratic values in society and create and implement policies to counter violent extremism and terrorism in the coming period.

The best response to the threats of violent extremism and terrorism entails a cohesive and joint approach of all governmental and non-governmental institutions with a legal obligation and capacity to support the efforts of society to respond to such threats.

PRINCIPLE OF EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN AND MEN

Full equality of women and men means equal rights, opportunities, conditions, and treatment in all spheres of public and private life and the absence of cultural, social, economic and political conditions that generate unequal relations of power and unequal distribution of societal goods among women and men.[3]

Competent state bodies charged with countering violent extremism and terrorism undertake to promote the principle of equal opportunities between women and men and. In addition, many UN resolutions and documents have recognized the importance of increasing women's involvement in strengthening the gender dimensions of preventing violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism. The sixth General Assembly resolution on the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy, adopted in June 2018, emphasizes the important role of women in the fight against violent extremism and the need to integrate gender analysis into programs aimed at tackling the drivers of radicalization.

PRINCIPLE OF THE PROHIBITION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST ANY PERSON AND/OR GROUP OF PERSONS BASED ON PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS, ESPECIALLY AGAINST PERSONS/GROUPS IN VULNERABLE SITUATIONS

Prohibition of discrimination is a fundamental value for any action taken by democratic institutions. Security authorities (police and other security agencies) guarantee that every person is provided with equal rights without discrimination, and that groups in socially vulnerable situations are addressed with special attention in the spirit of mutual understanding, respect, and support.

PRINCIPLE OF LEGALITY

Any planned and taken pursuits and activities are in compliance with the Constitution of the Republic of North Macedonia the law, other regulations based on the law and ratified international agreements.

All measures and activities from the strategic plan that are in the function of preventing violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism, are in compliance with the international human rights law, international refugee law and international humanitarian law.

For effective preventing and countering violent extremism, the action is age - based and harmonized, with full regard to the gender equality. Any violation of the legality principle should be addressed through appropriate mechanisms in order to remedy the conduct of law enforcement officers and other state authorities.

RESPECT FOR THE MULTI-ETHNIC AND MULTICULTURAL ASPECTS OF SOCIETY

Multiculturalism implies a vision for a society that embraces different cultural groups in the main streams of society with their cultural diversities. In multicultural communities, people retain, transfer, celebrate and share their unique cultural life, languages, art, traditions, and behaviour.

REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Countering violent extremism and terrorism is possible only through the cooperation of all relevant entities at the national level. Regional collaboration is of crucial importance given the external influences within/on the region.

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[3] Law on Equal Opportunities for Men and Women, "Official Gazette of RM", no. 201/2015

Problems related to violent extremism and terrorism are neither generated nor tackled only in one state or region. On the contrary, whole regions worldwide are confronted with the transnational challenges of these negative societal phenomena, and therefore, one state cannot tackle it independently and have remarkable success.

The nature of problems is international, and challenges are global. Therefore, a comprehensive response is required that includes the exchange of information, experiences, knowledge, and skills at the global level.

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IS IMPERATIVE WHEN IT COMES TO THREATS THAT TRANSCEND THE BORDERS OF A COUNTRY OR A REGION AND ARE NOT RELATED TO A PARTICULAR CULTURE, RELIGION, DENOMINATION OR OTHER AFFILIATION

COMMON PUSH AND PULL FACTORS FOR CVE AND CT

The aetiology (root causes) of violent extremism leading to terrorism can be recognised in both societal and personal drivers that contribute to the radicalisation of certain persons or groups in the community to terrorism or violence.

The phenomenology is variable and violent extremist groups find new ways to commit their attacks, spread propaganda, finance their activities, and recruit people in their circles and carry out their attacks.

The common drivers (**push and pull factors**) that are recognised as factors for the emergence of violent extremism and terrorism are:

- **Returning "Foreign terrorist fighters"** and members of their families (the mutual and social dynamics between FTFs or between FTFs and the community)[4];
- **Violent extremist narratives** based on religion or extreme right-wing or ethno-nationalist movements;
- **Discrimination** impacts the increased isolation and marginalisation of members of smaller communities or religious groups;
- **Frozen "chronic" conflicts in the region** impact the engagement in the process of radicalisation that lead to terrorism or violence;
- **Organised crime and corruption** create distrust in institutions; and
- **Economic factors** (low standard of living, financial and energy crisis worldwide).

NCCVECT strives to codify the common understanding of the strategic environment, providing a broader context of the missions of CVE and CT and identifies priorities, challenges, and opportunities in strengthening the contribution of the Republic of North Macedonia in preventing future manifestations of all forms of violent extremism and factors that assist the path to terrorism.

NCCVECT provides a comprehensive elaboration of the strategic objectives to guide the country's efforts related to CVE and CT.

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[4] Resolution 2396 (2017) calls upon member-states to strengthen their efforts in eradicating the threats from return and displacement of FTFs and members of their families, including women and children, through measures of border control, criminal justice and exchange of information among member-states and relevant organizations, such as INTERPOL, in detecting FTFs.

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES FOR THE FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM

A priority in this Strategy is to identify the strengths and benefits deriving from the previous strategies, also being aware of the need to increasingly focus on sustainability, building relations, sharing knowledge and promoting values. The CT Strategy is based on **PREVENTION**. The concept of prevention essentially entails a broad perspective, such as providing adequate conditions for the development, upbringing and education of young people, fighting against poverty to ensure that everyone in the society, regardless of origin or status, is protected from discrimination, raising public awareness as well as building institutional capacities to provide an adequate response, given that general preventive efforts also imply deterrence from using violent means for ideological or religious goals. Speaking of prevention, it also implies taking specific interventions with adequate means and methods.

The National Strategy includes strategic objectives and measures aimed at achieving primary, secondary and tertiary prevention goals.

Primary prevention – Activities for primary prevention target a broad group of people and refer to awareness raising, development of intercultural abilities and trainings for professionals as well as various target groups in the community.

Secondary prevention – Targets a smaller group or individuals at risk of radicalisation that lead to terrorism or committing extremist violence leading to terrorism or violence. Secondary prevention measures include trainings on resilience for different target groups in the community, measures to lower the polarisation and fieldwork with groups in a potentially vulnerable situation or identified persons or groups at risk.

Tertiary prevention – Is aimed at preventing recidivism, and therefore, measures are targeted at individuals who were radicalised to terrorism or committed crimes related to extremist violence or terrorism. Tertiary prevention is also aimed at individuals who incite violence and do not participate in violent acts, as well as for convicts serving a prison sentence.

The threat of violent extremism and radicalisation that lead to terrorism is not only a security problem (risk of terrorism, etc.). It has broader implications for the well-being from the aspect of social cohesion and welfare in the society.

The National Strategy embraces the basic challenges and all aspects of countering terrorism that the state and society are confronted with, with the primary goal of providing the best response to the increased threat of terrorism in the coming period.

The analysis of the results so far has shown that the system for response to violent extremism and terrorism is well organised and comprehensive and that we need to update our approach within the already established and verified framework of **four strategic priorities**:

- **PREVENT** – to prevent people from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorist groups or individuals;

- **PROSECUTE** – to counter a terrorist attack;

- **PROTECT** – to strengthen protection against terrorist attacks; and

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- **RESPOND** – to mitigate the consequences of a terrorist attack.

It is crucial to take the necessary measures and activities in a timely manner to counter the preparation and execution of a terrorist attack in the Republic of North Macedonia, but also to prevent all preparatory activities related to these crimes in full compliance with international human rights standards.

The Republic of North Macedonia will fully respect the principles of fair trial and the presumption of innocence.

The new legislation related to the investigation procedure will allow the police and the public prosecutor's office to have sufficient legal powers to lawfully intercept activities of persons preparing to commit acts of terrorism. It is expected that the legislation will provide for proportionate prison sentences for terrorists, but also more robust monitoring of their activities after their release, in line with good practices and full respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to privacy.

Special priority will be given to the building of resilience of local communities that will be increasingly prepared in the coming period to actively participate in programs for the prevention of radicalisation that may lead to terrorism.

All the strategic priorities defined in this Strategy represent a single set of activities and procedures of the competent state authorities, whose basic goal will be to translate into practice the strategic plan and guidelines that we expect will protect the state and citizens from terrorist acts of individuals and groups.

In each strategic priority, several strategic goals are recognized, provided for in the Strategy in a congruent manner. Based on these strategic goals, the specific activities of the involved institutions are determined.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1 - PREVENTION

The first strategic priority is prevention, and, in fact, like in a number of other documents, prevention is the basis of the fight against any socially negative phenomenon, especially those related to terrorism.

For the purposes of the National Strategy, prevention is primarily a policy targeting citizens who may be in contact with persons with terroristic intentions so that they can be prevented from becoming terrorists or supporting terrorism. Prevention also implies supporting the process of rehabilitation and disengagement of persons who are or have been involved in acts of terrorism.

IN THE FIRST STRATEGIC PRIORITY - PREVENTION, THE FOLLOWING STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES ARE IDENTIFIED:

1. *PREVENTION FROM THREATS OF TERRORISM.*
2. *IDENTIFICATION, MONITORING AND PREVENTION OF TERRORISM FINANCING.*
3. *PREVENTION OF RADICALISATION.*
4. *DEALING WITH PERSONS ASSOCIATED WITH TERRORISTIC ACTIVITIES AND SUPPORTING THE PROCESS OF REHABILITATION, REINTEGRATION AND RE-SOCIALISATION.*
5. *MONITORING AND RESPONSE TO THREATS FROM CONVENTIONAL AND UNCONVENTIONAL WEAPONS.*

Planning of preventive activities will be more successful if the previous experiences are analysed, especially in terms of rehabilitation, reintegration, and resocialisation, as well as the numerous other prevention tools developed by the institutions in the past years.

Given the basic and advanced trainings that have been provided thus far and the capacity building of institutions in the security sector, the media workers, the local community and other governmental and non-governmental organizations, one can prove the fact that we are guided by experiences gained, and lessons learnt both during the preparation of the Strategy and during its implementation. This highlights the need that prevention shall include all the aspects of possible actions of individuals or groups intending to carry out terrorist activities and their deterrence from the intention to threaten the safety and security of both the citizens and the State.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1.1 – PREVENTION FROM THREATS OF TERRORISM

The first strategic objective – Prevention from threats of terrorism, entails the most extensive response of the society to terrorism and terroristic activities, where most of the institutions are involved, both governmental and non-governmental, national or international. In this strategic objective, roles are assigned to all institutions in the security sector that have counter-terrorism powers, educational institutions, institutions charged with social affairs, religious communities and religious groups, local self-governments, media, non-governmental organisations and representatives of civil society, international and regional organisations, including the citizens who need to be encouraged to actively participate and attend the programs for the prevention of threats of terrorism.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1.2 – IDENTIFICATION, MONITORING AND PREVENTION OF FINANCING OF TERRORISM

The adopted National Strategy Against Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing (2021 – 2024) is an important strategic document establishing high-level guidance for developing policies for combating money laundering and terrorism financing. Within this strategic objective, the National Strategy fully supports and embraces the efforts of the institutions, acknowledging them as basic activities within this strategic objective.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1.3 – PREVENTION OF RADICALISATION THAT LEAD TO TERRORISM

Preventing radicalisation that lead to terrorism is a particularly important segment in the fight against terrorism. Any success achieved in the process of preventing radicalisation that lead to terrorism increases the likelihood of decreasing the number of people who will turn to the preparation and execution of terroristic activities. Therefore, it is of primary importance to tackle the causes of terrorist radicalisation and respond to the multifaceted drivers of terrorism.

Success in the next five years will mean that communities are increasingly aware of and resilient to terrorist groups' narratives, with a response tailored to local risks, and there is a largescale awareness of the threats that primarily come from online activities of terrorist groups or individuals.

Activities that will be implemented with local communities and civil society are also important. We support civil society organisations to initiate wide range of projects working with schools and universities, with families and inside the local communities in order to support the process of building resilience in the whole community, especially in local communities.

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We strongly appreciate the efforts of the local self-government and civil society to assist and support persons exposed to terrorist radicalisation and the numerous activities they will carry out to prevent possible radicalisation to terrorism or violence. An additional value of this policy is the mutual cooperation and joint projects and activities that will be implemented between governmental and non-governmental organisations and international partners.

The **Internet** is a powerful tool that terrorist organisations use in order to radicalise, recruit, and mobilise individuals to terrorism and to incite and enable terrorist attacks. Terrorist groups rely heavily on various online platforms to communicate with large numbers of individuals, spreading their terrorist ideology and propaganda. The response of the state should be complete and cover all possible segments of online abuse by individuals or groups with terrorist ideology, especially working with civil society groups to become resilient and take into account counter- and alternative- narratives online, as well as take actions that will reduce the online space for terrorists by preventing the spread of online terroristic content.

In the area of prevention of terrorist radicalisation to violence on the Internet, we expect broad support from Internet companies and civil society, especially because of their specialisation in the use of digital tools. All projects and trainings that can be implemented for professionals in society, especially for journalists and media workers, persons in institutions working on public relations, but also young people, women and categories of citizens in socially vulnerable situations, are important and should be organized in full respect of fundamental freedoms, right to privacy, freedom of expression...

Local self-governments are particularly important partners in the prevention of radicalisation that lead to terrorism. We encourage the local multidisciplinary teams and local prevention councils to continue to develop their activities and establish clear criteria for the full and effective operation of these significant bodies. In each local community where examples of terrorist radicalisation have been observed, or persons involved in/with links to terroristic activities live and reside, local multidisciplinary teams should build cooperation and partnership with the local (micro) community and provide support to prevent radicalisation that lead to terrorism.

Medical and social workers have an important role with regard to protection. We will continue to work with them and provide them with all the information and guidance they need to respond appropriately to the risks of radicalisation that lead to terrorism. We will focus on developing training for the professionals, medical and social workers to improve their knowledge to identify and support those at risk of radicalisation that lead to terrorism or violence.

Recognition of early radicalisation is also crucial for police officers, so in addition to this profile of workers, similar training will be needed for police officers, with a strong focus on the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

Protecting pupils and students from radicalisation that lead to terrorism or violence is part of the wider protection in which teachers and professors are involved. Prevention of radicalisation that lead to terrorism or violence requires all education workers to have clear policies to protect young people and build their resilience to radicalisation in schools and faculties. In the next five years, we need to develop a network of teachers and professors who will undergo appropriate training and know how to recognise the early signs of radicalisation and how to act in the environments in which there are attempts to impact the students. It is noticeable that in high schools and faculties these topics are rarely discussed and additional efforts are needed to update the topics and give space to students to open such topics, to know the dangers and fears and make clear decisions important for their future.

Any such training will need to sensitize educators, medical and social workers as well as law enforcement officers on direct and indirect human rights impacts that actions in this field may have.

The police is instrumental in implementing prevention, developing local partnerships, and bringing together a wide range of community organisations to support local projects to protect individuals from radicalisation that lead to terrorism. The police provide specialist support to other departments and have the ability to manage the risk and monitor and disrupt violent extremist individuals or groups or persons with links to those involved in terrorism-related activities. The preventive activities of the police are visible through all operation levels of the police officers, from the lower management workers to the highest structures of management. Nevertheless, the police officers who perform services in the local community and have enough knowledge and experience to recognise and react to possible radicalisation that lead to terrorism in the community are the most significant segment.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1.4 – DEALING WITH PERSONS ASSOCIATED WITH TERRORISM AND SUPPORTING THE PROCESS OF RESOCIALISATION, REINTEGRATION AND REHABILITATION

The Criminal Code stipulates that participation in a foreign terrorist armed groups is a criminal offence, and by providing quality evidence of the acts and actions committed by the perpetrators, thus far, numerous sentencing proceedings have ended in convictions for foreign terrorist fighters. Dealing with foreign terrorist fighters will pose a serious challenge in the coming period. Activities of the state must be targeted at creating real and effective policies for the implementation of resocialisation, reintegration, and rehabilitation processes, but also to ensure the interests of other citizens and the society as a whole.

The process of resocialisation, reintegration, and rehabilitation (RRR) is carried out according to the planned dynamics, and it should be fully realised in the coming period. Returnees are part of our reality, and the Government is committed to quality policymaking for RRR, that is, policies that will be useful and recognised as positive, aimed at ensuring voluntary engagement in different programs.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1.5 – CONVENTIONAL AND UNCONVENTIONAL WEAPONS

Conventional weapons are weapons that are not intended for mass destruction, including small and light weapons, landmines, cluster bombs, ammunition, cluster munition, artillery, armoured combat vehicles, combat helicopters, etc.

Non-conventional weapons are known as nuclear, biological, chemical weapons, as well as chemical warfare, gas bombs, etc.

Some terrorists have the capacity to carry out more sophisticated terrorist attacks and activities. The most threats are directed and felt in air traffic, although in that sector the greatest progress can be observed in the area of safety of passengers and users of air traffic services. The Islamic State has already tested and used chemical weapons in Syria and Iraq. Some of the Islamic State members are capable of using chemical and biological weapons, while others have specialized in making explosives and other means.

In the coming period, we remain committed to the control of all types of weapons. Together with our partners in the country and abroad, we will build a society resistant to the proliferation of weapons of mass

destruction. We will develop the monitoring of the flow of small and medium weapons, explosives and other devices that may be misused for terrorist purposes and activities. The strategic monitoring and advising of the entire Government are the responsibility of an intergovernmental body - the SALW Commission. At the operational level, there is a contact point for firearms in the Ministry of the Interior, a cross-departmental structure established to collect, analyse and coordinate all operational information and information related to firearms.

Recognising that the proliferation and illicit trade in firearms and ammunition constitute a persistent threat to internal security, within the frames of the Roadmap for Finding a Sustainable Solution to the Illegal Possession, Misuse and Trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW)/Firearms and Ammunition, a regional process was established based on which numerous projects dedicated to improving national practices for managing small arms and light weapons and building resilient communities a currently being implemented in the Western Balkan countries.

All institutions in the security system that have legal powers to control conventional and non-conventional weapons will be involved and actively participate in projects (domestic, regional and international), which will demonstrate the decisive approach to control the flow of weapons.

Additional activities are needed that will lead to improved capabilities for the detection of acts of terrorism involving chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear and explosive materials, precursors, and control and protection of these materials. We will support the strengthening of the capacities of the Ministry of Interior for the establishment of a professional unit that will have the capacity to gather intelligence, detect, enforce, and also reduce the ability of terrorists and criminals to access firearms.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2 – PROTECTION

Protection in this Strategy implies the **protection of public safety**, stability and security of people in North Macedonia and property, **by strengthening the resilience** against terrorist attacks, via specific measures and activities to **reduce vulnerability in society**.

We need to build an effective multi-layered defence against attacks by reducing the unlawful access to the assets and materials needed to organise an attack, including increasing the timeliness of reports of suspicious transactions, increased vigilance and caution in public spaces, in transport and infrastructure at risk of attack, and making full use of our powers and capabilities to control the border,

While states have an obligation to protect people from attacks, measures envisaged here (including monitoring of financial transactions, public spaces and borders) have potentially far reaching human rights implications, including but not only for the right to privacy (which is seen as a gateway right that is instrumental for the exercise for a number of other rights), freedom of assembly, freedom of expression, freedom of movement, the principle of non-discrimination etc.

Success in the next five years will mean that our partnerships deliver faster sharing of relevant data.,. Total commitment to threats is required, as well as monitoring the movements and activities of terrorist groups and individuals, including the use of research results from analysis and respect for the scientific approach, including the use of technological solutions to eliminate or mitigate risk in multiple sectors in security and other services, but also in society as a whole, while maintaining respect towards the right to privacy, in particular.

General protection must keep pace with raising public awareness of threats and a stable and responsible approach, which will enable the use of advanced protection tools along with technological development. Raising security standards, including standards for all types of traffic, hospitals, schools, and facilities of vital importance in the country, will undoubtedly lead to better protection of critical infrastructure and greater resistance to terrorist threats.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2.1 – STRENGTHENING THE BORDER CONTROL SYSTEM

Republic of North Macedonia conducts checks to identify individuals of security interest at border crossings, has developed and uses biometric travel documents and visas, collects and analyses information about passengers and carriers, has established electronic systems for identification of persons at border crossings, as well as STOP (Watch) list and "Prohibited flying", thus enabling police officers and customs authorities unhindered monitoring and control of the security of our borders and take appropriate measures to prevent cross-border movement of suspect terrorists in full compliance with international human rights. Full checks are carried out on travellers arriving at the border in order to identify and prevent any potential criminal, security and immigration issues.

Border crossing checks are carried out against the widest range of domestic and international watch lists and are kept under constant review. We need to intercept the threat early, whenever possible. This means ensuring that other countries have timely and quality information and can take appropriate action to stop individuals implicated in terrorism at the border. We need to work on increasing the amount, type and quality of information we share with trusted partners and multilateral bodies (considering that we are a member of NATO, information exchange with Europol and Interpol). The agreement with FRONTEX, signed in October 2022, will support further strengthening of border control capacities, and allow European border control practices to be closely monitored and implemented.

FULL COMMITMENT TO THREATS IS REQUIRED, AS WELL AS MONITORING THE MOVEMENTS AND ACTIVITIES OF TERRORIST GROUPS AND INDIVIDUALS, INCLUDING THE USE OF RESEARCH RESULTS FROM ANALYSIS AND RESPECT FOR THE SCIENTIFIC APPROACH, AND USE OF TECHNOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS TO ELIMINATE OR MITIGATE RISK IN MULTIPLE SECTORS IN SECURITY AND OTHER SERVICES, BUT ALSO IN THE SOCIETY AS A WHOLE.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2.2 – REDUCING RISKS AND IMPROVING THE RESILIENCE OF AVIATION AND OTHER MAJOR TRANSPORT FACILITIES, PROTECTING CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

A special level of protection is provided at airports. In addition to regular police checks, the safety of passengers is ensured by appropriate private security agencies, which fully meet international air traffic safety standards. One can be certain that airports have world-class technologies and procedures in place to identify attempts to bring dangerous items on board. Measures are continuously being taken to verify the readiness of airport services to comply with standards fully and consistently and to take care of the safety of air passengers as part of the critical infrastructure in the country.

Cognizant of the need to protect critical infrastructure, we therefore strongly support the institutions' efforts to enact a law on the protection of critical infrastructure, which will significantly facilitate the protection and enable a coordinated approach to monitor and prevent any threat to vital facilities.

We will also continue to strengthen rail safety. Announcements for the modernisation of rail traffic and especially the opening of the corridor towards the Republic of Bulgaria will increase the need for additional security regarding this type of traffic.

In the next four years, to ensure the protection of critical infrastructure:

- A larger volume of data will be **collected and analysed** in order to identify individuals, as well as materials and assets that may raise concerns related to counter-terrorism;

- **Investments will be made in additional technologies** for border surveillance and control, including digital technologies, profiling of persons, vehicles and objects, enhanced analysis and analytics of data collected by border authorities;

- **Information exchange systems**, in particular of border crossing services, **will be strengthened** with a view to more straightforward controls, a higher level of passenger safety and greater detection of potentially at-risk persons;

- **Further strengthening of physical and cybersecurity** throughout the transportation network in the state and other parts of our critical national infrastructure will enable the uninterrupted pursuit of functions and provision of essential services to citizens;

- **Better safety in public places** through closer, more effective work with a wider range of local governments, responsible private sector partners; and

- **Novelties will be introduced in the design of critical infrastructure facilities** to increase the possibilities for their protection from possible attacks.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2.3 – PROTECTION AGAINST MISUSE OF CYBERSPACE

In parallel with this National Strategy, a new National Cyber Security Strategy of the Republic of North Macedonia is being prepared, replacing the existing Strategy for 2018 – 2022. This National Strategy will fully address the benefits of the National Cyber Security Strategy.

In addition, the fight against terrorism should also focus on reducing risks in cyberspace and working with the private sector and individual IT experts to ensure coherent cyber security, as well as cyberspace risk management, supported by research and innovation, while fully respecting human rights.

The National Committee and other security authorities will continue to work closely with law enforcement and security-intelligence agencies to help prevent, counter, and investigate cybercrime and other cybersecurity threats.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2.4 – PROTECTION AGAINST MISUSE OF CLASSIFIED INFORMATION THAT MAY BE USED FOR TERRORIST ATTACKS

The National Strategy draws attention to the need for strengthening the information protection system

and its appropriate use. As a NATO member country, we have serious obligations to exchange quality information, but also store all classified information that we receive through the channels of international exchange, as well as information that we independently gather through the already established system in the security services.

In the past period, we witnessed several abuses of classified information. Therefore we encourage the institutions within the framework of this strategic objective to strengthen their capacities for the protection of that information, especially the information related to countering terrorism.

As part of this strategic objective, institutions should strengthen their capacities to protect that information, particularly information related to countering terrorism and select information related to critical infrastructure and related vulnerabilities, while fully and consistently respecting human rights and freedoms.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3 – PROSECUTION

The main goal of the second strategic priority is to counter terrorist attacks at the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia. One of the most effective ways to respond to the threat of terrorism is to strengthen the investigations and bring the perpetrators to justice, to convict them, but also to thereby deter them from re-offending, while delivering justice to the victims. The success of the National Strategy will also be recognised in the way the police and the prosecutor's office will be in a position to gather the evidence for such crimes, enabling timely verdicts for the perpetrators, which will have a preventive effect on other potential perpetrators.

It is also necessary to strengthen the capacities for external control and oversight over the operation of the security services so that both professionals and citizens can be assured that the system works, operates in full conformity with international human rights standards and domestic legislation, and that the necessary measures are taken to find, capture and prosecute the perpetrators of crimes related to violent extremism and terrorism in a human rights-compliant manner.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3.1 – DETECTION, IDENTIFICATION AND PROSECUTION OF PERPETRATORS OF CRIMES RELATED TO TERRORISM AND FINANCING OF TERRORISM

In the Republic of North Macedonia, terrorism-related crimes are stipulated in the legislation, and institutions have clearly set powers and competencies related to the criminal prosecution of perpetrators.

A **fundamental challenge** faced by members of the law enforcement authorities is **insufficient coordination with the public prosecutor's office**. In this regard, further clarification of the activities of different institutions is included in the Strategy, which, in particular, pursues persistent, complete and timely cooperation in support of all legislative solutions for the prosecution of perpetrators of terrorism-related crimes.

Terrorist financing is an additional challenge which all societies face. Our state follows and upholds the international standards for controlling and monitoring financial markets, money transfers and suspicious transactions. In this section, the National Strategy addresses the National Strategy Against Money Laundering and Terrorism Financing.

Competent institutions need to prepare guidelines if certain sectors lack clear guidance, but also to develop the existing rules and procedures further in order to respond to the altered conditions in financial flows. Terrorists are financed in various ways, including through organised international channels. Therefore, the response should be coordinated and cover all aspects of the illicit transfer of funds that may be used for supporting terrorists and preparing acts of terrorism in compliance with international human rights standards.

THE NATIONAL STRATEGY HIGHLIGHTS THE NEED TO INCREASE THE LEGAL ENTITIES' RESPONSIBILITIES AND THEIR CONSISTENT COMPLIANCE REGARDING FINANCING TERRORISM-RELATED CRIMES, ACCORDING TO METHODS AND PROCEDURES SPECIFIED IN THE LAW AND OTHER STRATEGIC DOCUMENTS.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3.2 – INITIATION OF THE PROCEDURE FOR ENACTMENT OF ANTI-TERRORISM LAW

In the past several years, we had the opportunity to grasp the advantages and strengths deriving from how the operation of institutions is arranged by law. The analysis shows that the activities of institutions are stipulated mainly by law, without leaving a large gap between the actual situation and the legal arrangements.

However, to fully regulate the operation, procedures and activities of various institutions in view of achieving the ultimate goal of preventing and countering terrorism, an anti-terrorism law will need to be enacted. Academic analyses undertaken for the needs of this Strategy, clearly identified the lack of a legislative solution for anti-terrorism as a deficiency of the system, whereby the proposed strategic objective for the enactment of such a law will significantly improve the capacity/ability of the institutions to fight terrorism in accordance with international human rights standards, to speed up the procedures for prosecution and trial of persons implicated in terrorist activities, and will also enable enhanced development of the entire response system.

Without an appropriate law, the current activities will continue, along with the development and progress of the state's response to the threats of terrorism. However, a new law will enable real, realistic and significant progress that will put us side by side with the countries that are most successfully resisting the threats of terrorism.

In the first year after the adoption of the National Strategy, the procedure for drafting a Law for Anti-Terrorism should begin.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3.3 – CAPACITY BUILDING FOR THE PUBLIC PROSECUTION OFFICE AND LAW ENFORCEMENT AGENCIES IN THE FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM

Law enforcement agencies, where the Public Prosecution Office has the leading role, are confronted with

a **severe lack of capacity** for processing terrorism-related crimes. There is no specialised department for prosecuting these serious crimes at the Public Prosecution Office, which requires undertaking serious analyses that will either underpin or deny the need for such a specialised department, given that at least several public prosecutors should be specially trained and prepared to conduct terrorism-related investigations.

In addition to the Public Prosecution Office, there is a **significant need to strengthen the capacities** of the Ministry of Interior, respectively the Counter-Terrorism Sector of the Bureau for Public Security should increase the capacities to a level required to meet the real needs for policing related to terrorism, money laundering and financing of terrorism.

The Republic of North Macedonia will take the necessary measures to provide effective investigative tools available to professionals, units and services responsible for investigating or prosecuting terrorist offences in line with the international human right law, international refugee law, and international humanitarian law.

A handy tool for enhancing the capacities of the Public Prosecution Office, but also generally of all involved in investigating, prosecuting and adjudicating terrorism-related crimes, are the joint trainings that can be conducted both in the region and in the European Union. In fact, most directives and regulations of the European Parliament and the European Council pursue the same direction, encouraging trainings as one of the most effective ways to promote quality and professionalism in the procedures taken.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3.4 – INTENSIFYING THE STRATEGIC COOPERATION AT THE NATIONAL, REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEVEL

Cooperation between various state authorities is a prerequisite for integration at the national level to respond effectively to terrorism threats. Inter-institutional networking and exchange of information, knowledge and experience are extremely important in creating quality, effective policies for responding to terrorism threats. The cooperation between the police and security and intelligence agencies is extremely good, being implemented according to the already established international standards. and in line with the international human right law, international refugee law, and international humanitarian law..

The region of Southeast Europe is unique in many respects. Of course, the same applies to threats, but also to countering terrorism. Participation of the institutions in the country in regional initiatives is also important as this reflects the strategic commitment to the protection of the State, by ensuring protection both regionally and internationally.

Since threats are developing faster than ever, it is clearly in the interest of the state and our NATO allies to maintain the closest possible cooperation in dealing with terrorism, organised crime and other threats to national security, now and in the future.

We will strive to maintain deep and close cooperation with our European partners, and especially the signing of the FRONTEX Agreement will help us identify and take new opportunities to strengthen our security.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4 – RESPONSE

Preparedness entails an overall multi-agency response to the threats of terrorism. Also, it means an overall institutional capacity to respond to current and future threats of terrorism in line with good practices and full respect for fundamental freedoms and human rights.

The ultimate goal of all activities for preparing the response against terrorism is to reduce the impact of terrorist attacks on citizens and society as a whole. Preparedness also means reducing the range in which terrorists operate, recognising the early stages of radicalisation that lead to terrorism in a timely manner, hindering preparatory actions and limiting or preventing terrorist attacks.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4.1 – REDUCING THE CONSEQUENCES OF ACTS OF TERRORISM AND RECOVERY AFTER COMMITTED ACTS OF TERRORISM

Reducing the consequences of and **recovery after committed acts** of terrorism refers to the State's readiness to protect the critical infrastructure with methods and procedures that will enable a rapid and vigorous response against acts of terrorism, unimpeded access to emergency services, resilience to urban crimes, access to sources and means of information, etc.

In this regard, prevention is deemed particularly important. Certain extenuating circumstances may also be offered to a person who participates in preparatory activities or has information about the possible preparation and execution of a crime related to violent extremism and terrorism. **This will especially apply to persons who**:

• **Detect the movement and activity** of individuals or groups with terrorist intentions, and

• **Share information** with the police and other law enforcement agencies **for the purpose of**:

  - **prevention or reduction of the consequences** of the planned crime,
  - **bringing to justice** any persons involved in the acts of terrorism,
  - help **provide evidence** for the processing of the crime, and
  - **prevention** of further preparation of terrorism offences.

The recovery period after an act of terrorism is just as important as any previous phase. After the persons who have been directly attacked or threatened have been taken care of, it is necessary to restore the previous state, that is, restore the interrupted communications, clean up the environment, repair damaged facilities and other material assets and resources, and rebuild a sense of security within communities. In the period of implementation of this Strategy, by 2027, the **crisis management system will be further developed**, especially through the single European **emergency call number E-112**, whose functionality is yet to give the expected results.

RECOVERY AFTER AN ACT OF TERRORISM IS A VERY IMPORTANT PROCESS:

1. *TAKE CARE OF PEOPLE,*
2. *RESTORE INTERRUPTED COMMUNICATIONS,*
3. *CLEAN UP THE ENVIRONMENT,*
4. *REPAIR DAMAGED FACILITIES,*
5. *RETURN TO PREVIOUS STATE, AND*
6. *BUILD RESILIENCE.*

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4.2 – IMPROVEMENT OF THE PROCESS OF EXECUTION OF THE PRISON SENTENCE FOR PERPETRATORS OF TERRORISM-RELATED CRIMES

The process of monitoring the execution of prison sentences for persons convicted of terrorism offences **should be improved**. One of the main postulates related to the work on this strategic objective precisely refers to the **capacity strengthening** of the prison staff through the introduction of new, effective tools for monitoring the behaviour of convicts during their stay in penal-penitentiary institutions (PPI). In particular, we will support **introducing intelligence** in the PPI. This tool will undoubtedly contribute to additional prevention and deterrence of convicted persons from further acts of terrorism after release.

The responsibility of convicted persons for committing terrorism offences is adequately stipulated. However, the way of serving the prison sentence should be improved, for the sake of greater prevention of terrorism and violent extremism and disengagement efforts to help inmates to prepare them for a normal life after release from the institution.

The exchange of information between various law enforcement agencies, intelligence, the Directorate for Execution of Sanctions and other agencies or external partners requires that clear, strict and transparent procedures be established to respect the right to privacy of convicted persons and the protection of their personal data. **UN Rules** (known as the Nelson Mandela rules) require that the files of convicted persons be kept confidential and be accessible only to those whose professional responsibilities require access to such records, that is, access to such information must be on a strict "need-to-know" basis.

The prison staff, when receiving new convicted persons serving a prison sentence, in whom they have noticed signs of spreading radicalization leading to terrorism or violence, will act in accordance with the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) for dealing with persons convicted of crimes related to terrorism, while adhering to the principle of respect for human personality and dignity, preserving their physical and mental health, taking into account the achievement of the individual sanctions and measures.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4.3 – SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS OF TERRORISM

Victims of terrorism are a very sensitive category, given the extensive damage inflicted by acts of terrorism, leaving **lasting consequences to the life and property of citizens**. Therefore, the state will strengthen its capacities to ensure investigation and prosecution of all crimes related to acts of violence and terrorism.

The Republic of North Macedonia will provide **support services** that address the **specific needs of victims of terrorism** and make them available immediately after the terrorist attack and for as long as necessary. Such services are provided in addition to or as an integral part of general victim support services, which may call upon the existing entities providing specialist support, according to the newly adopted legislative solution for supporting victims of crimes. Support should always be carefully selected and tailored to each specific case and victim's needs. Support and services provided by the state will be confidential, free and easily accessible to all victims of terrorism. **These will include**:

⇒ **Psychological support**;

⇒ **Advice and information** on all relevant legal, practical, or financial matters, including the facilitated exercising of the right to information for victims of terrorism; and

⇒ **Compensation for the victims**, according to the law.

The state will also ensure **medical support, medical services and treatment of the victims** as long as required. It will also provide **support to victims' families** to alleviate their condition while dealing with the consequences of terrorism.

Victims' rights must always be fully provided for and respected. When determining whether and to what extent protection measures should be useful during criminal proceedings, particular attention will be paid to the risk of intimidation and retaliation and the need to protect the dignity and physical integrity of victims of terrorism, including in the questioning and testimony process.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4.4 – COORDINATED MULTI-AGENCY APPROACH TO RESPOND TO ACTS OF TERRORISM

All governmental and non-governmental organisations, national and international, educational institutions, religious communities, social services, the academic community and all well-intentioned people will have the opportunity to join the activities in a coordinated multi-agency approach to respond to terrorism, in view of the main goal to ensure protection from acts of terrorism.

The National Committee will have the key, central role to ensure coordination of the activities and promotion of quality and effective cooperation between all competent institutions. The achieved level of professional communication, the authority and reputation of the domestic institutions, make North Macedonia a respected partner in the international community.

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 4.5 – PROMOTION OF PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION WITH THE MEDIA AND THE SOCIAL MEDIA

Cooperation with the media and the media workers in North Macedonia needs to continue to develop in the right direction, using all opportunities to facilitate communication with citizens through timely, appropriate, and realistic reporting about events related to terrorism and acts of terrorism.

Countering fake news is deemed especially important. We live in a world of fake news, so the truth should be communicated constantly and thoroughly. All false narratives, especially those related to terrorism, violent extremism, and radicalisation that lead to terrorism or violence, must be noted, and countered with quality, official and timely information.

The State will take the necessary measures to **ensure rapid removal of online content** that constitutes a public provocation for the commission of acts of terrorism, regardless of whether the news comes from portals registered on the territory of our country or from outside. In this sense, there is sound and professional cooperation with a large part of the portals and electronic media. Some world media registered in other countries are exception, posing a problem for the rest of the world security services in achieving the security goals and interests. The National Strategy highlights the need for the media and those responsible for information literacy to deal with the challenges that appear in the online space, but also work on the development of counter-narratives.

Removing and blocking online content without a clear process, adequate safeguards and effective remedies threatens human rights and freedom of expression and can fuel violent extremism and radicalization leading to terrorism and cause online VPNs activity beyond the scope of traditional surveillance capacities, aimed at limiting the operational effectiveness of measures for preventing and dealing with the use of the Internet for terrorist purposes. Therefore, counter-terrorism measures that do not protect human rights will be counterproductive and may lead to serious security consequences.

Appropriate attention will be paid to the protection of individuals from arbitrary or unlawful interference with the right to privacy, which includes the right to privacy of information about an individual's identity, as well as his/her private life.

The State may request that certain content calling for acts of terrorism be withdrawn and blocked online, but only in exceptional situations and in full compliance with international human rights standards, when necessary to protect national security interests and against serious crimes. Measures for removal and blocking must be undertaken according to transparent procedures and provide for adequate safeguards to ensure that those measures are limited to what is necessary and proportionate and that users are informed of the reason for those measures. Safeguards relating to removal or blocking also include the possibility of bringing legal proceedings against the persons who produced and disseminated such information.

PRIORITIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Priorities for implementation are identified following the Action Plan for the implementation of the 2023-2027 National Counter-Terrorism Strategy. In this context, the **following activities** are set as a **priority**:

1. Development of a comprehensive training system (basic and advanced trainings) for police officers, customs officers, members of the MoD - MSIS and the Army, employees of the PPI and correctional facilities and other professionals from law enforcement agencies, in view of preventing the threats of

terrorism and radicalisation that lead to terrorism.in line with the international human right law, international refugee law, and international humanitarian law.

2. Enhancement of activities related to existing and introduction of new operational actions to ensure successful monitoring of developments and prevention of terrorism threats.

3. Development and promotion of cooperation within the three basic pillars for preventing threats of terrorism:
   - Intersectoral cooperation;
   - Interagency cooperation; and
   - International/regional cooperation.

4. Implementation of the Module for Keeping Records of Incidents, Documents, Activities (MEIDA), i.e., the Police Information System for keeping records and documenting incidents related to weapons.

5. Identification of critical infrastructure and preparation of a map of critical infrastructure, as well as major soft targets.

6. Preparation of an Assessment of the threat from all risks and hazards to the state's security.

7. Adoption of standard procedures for access and use of classified information and warranty for protection against manipulation and illegal disclosure, use and abuse of classified information.

8. Starting the procedure for drafting a Law on Anti-Terrorism.

9. Establishment of a network for the regular operational exchange of information and data at national and international levels to monitor terrorist groups, organisations and individuals, as well as coordinated cooperation and participation in international operations, actions and joint investigations for suppression of terrorism in line with the international human right law, international refugee law, and international humanitarian law.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

Monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the Strategy and its Action Plan are carried out by the NCCVECT in cooperation with competent state authorities. Relevant citizen associations and international organisations are partners in implementing the activities stipulated in the Action Plan on the implementation of the 2023 – 2027 National Strategy on Counter-Terrorism.

The implementation of the objectives of the Strategy will be financially supported by the budgets of the respective state institutions. State entities are urged to establish cooperation to utilise additional financial, expert and institutional support from EU funds, OSCE, UN and other international organisations.

NCCVECT coordinates the process of pursuing the strategic objectives of the Counter-Terrorism Strategy, as well as aligning the activities with the other strategic documents. In addition, NCCVECT monitors the implementation of the Action Plan to the Strategy and makes recommendations to the Government of the RNM on undertaking appropriate measures in the event of non-implementation or difficulties in implementation.

The monitoring of the Strategy implies the collection of data on the degree of implementation of the activities and the determination of the possible risks that may arise from unrealized activities or from the unrealized results. In certain situations, the impact of certain measures and activities on the change of the

situation is also measured (by means of an adequate and objective presentation of performance indicators).

The following principles will be considered in reporting: concise and clear writing, relevance, objectiveness, and presentation of quantitative and qualitative information.

The Coordinating body, at a session of the National Committee, will present the Annual Report on the degree of realization, performance indicators and obstacles in the achievement of strategic goals.

Independent experts will biannually analyse the progress in implementing the strategic objectives and submit their reports to the NCCVECT.

National Counter-Terrorism Strategy

2023- 2027