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Council of Europe and OAS step up efforts to counter terrorism and strenghten cyber security

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While the conference on terrorism and cyber security, organised on 16 and 17 April in San Lorenzo de El Escorial (Spain), focused on misuse of the Internet by terrorist organisations and their supporters - and the numerous risks that this poses - it was underlined that the Internet has proven an overwhelmingly beneficial development for modern society precisely for the way in which it has revolutionised the dissemination of ideas and information, and the formation of networks.

Discussions focused on terrorist organisations' presence on, and use of, the Internet for various purposes, including the dissemination of propaganda related to ideology and activities, and as a means of promoting radicalisation within target communities. To confront these challenges, experts are proposing a range of innovative solutions that go beyond purely technical ones. Among these, inter alia, are deterring the production of extremist materials, promoting self-regulation of on-line communities and seeking to advance a positive counter-narrative to extremist messages.

A case study illustrated the numerous challenges for law enforcement and prosecutors in investigating and prosecuting terrorists' use of the Internet. A number of suggestions were put forth with a view to enhancing efficient co-operation, including the active use of existing tools, networks, and relevant legal instruments for international cooperation; enhanced early dialogue among counterparts in distinct jurisdictions; and more active involvement of technical experts.

Experts noted that while terrorist organisations appear to be motivated to launch cyber attacks against their enemies, at the present time their ability to affect large-scale disruption or destruction via cyber means appears to be limited. However the ability of such organisations to perpetrate cyber attacks is likely to increase, and the international community must continue to develop both protective measures as well as the capabilities and mechanisms to ensure resilience in the face of an attack.

It has been recommended that States establish and develop a national Computer Security Incident Response Team (CSIRT), to serve as a focal point for the exchange of information regarding cyber incidents affecting critical information infrastructure, and to coordinate incident response and mitigation among affected stakeholders. Furthermore, the transnational nature of cyber threats requires that there be effective regional and international networks to promote cooperation and information-sharing among these national CSIRTs.

The conference highlighted the need to step up national efforts as well as bilateral, subregional, regional and international cooperation, to counter terrorism in general, and specifically where it converges with our increasing use and benefit of the Internet and other critical information infrastructure.

The event was organised jointly by the Council of Europe and the Inter-American Committee against Terrorism of the Organization of American States, under the Spanish Chairmanship of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers.