National Coordinator for
Counterterrorism and Security
Ministry of Security and Justice

Clean IT

Fighting the illegal use of internet with public-private partnerships from the
perspective of counter-terrorism

PROJECT OUTLINE

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1. Context and project justification

The internet plays a central role and is of great strategic importance for Al Qaida influenced extremist networks. These networks know that propaganda is a critical tool for generating funding, recruits and support for their cause within their communities. Historically they have used a variety of media channels, such as television, radio and publishing, in order to communicate their views. During the past decade of huge global growth of the internet, Al Qaida influenced extremists have made increasing use of this medium. There is now a significant and increasing number of websites and forums, hosted across the world that promote this kind of extremism.

This project builds on the results of the EU project "Exploring the Islamist extremist Web of Europe - Analysis and Preventive Approaches", that was finalised in October 2009. The overriding objective of this study was to contribute to preventing radicalization via the internet and to develop ways and means to preventively address Islamist extremist content in the internet. This project identified several best practices in Germany, the United Kingdom, the Czech Republic and the Netherlands.

Although some potentially interesting national best practices were identified, it is not always clear how to apply them effectively on the Internet because:
- Content on the internet is difficult to localise, and is duplicated easily or automatically;
- Information on the internet criss-crosses geographical borders and is therefore not always submitted to a single legal system;
- The national legal systems, based on the E-commerce directive (2000/31/EC), regulate the conditions under which information society service providers can be held liable for third party illegal content when they act as "online intermediaries". It does not regulate in concrete steps how to

act in case of illegal use of the internet and does not define in which way public and private parties can shoulder their common responsibility to keep the Internet clean from criminal and terrorist activities;

The preceding project concluded that the internet and its fast and anonymous means can contribute to individual radicalisation processes. There are concerns about the possibilities for illegal use of the internet for terrorist purposes and the misuse of legal / neutral websites. These concerns and the possible solutions this project aims for will probably also apply on other forms of cybercrime or abuse, like fraud, illegal trade and sexual exploitation children. The primary focus of this project however, is combating the misuse of internet for Al Qaida influenced terrorist purposes. Even though we do not exclude other types of terrorism, we chose to focus on Al Qaida influenced terrorism because it is perceived as the most significant terrorist threat at the moment. The project partners have a strong will to solve these problems, but they realise that current initiatives are bound to national systems and need international coordination and stimulation.

In addition to regulatory approaches, public-private partnerships can cause a breakthrough in deadlocked talks between government and industry. The internet is in most countries predominantly privately owned, and the internet knowledge is 100% privately owned. Therefore, the solutions to these problems can be found in direct cooperation between member-states and the Internet business.

2. Objectives

The main objective of this project is of a non-legislative ´framework´ that consists of general principles and best practices. The principles will be used as a guideline or gentlemen's agreement, adopted by many partners. They will describe responsibilities and concrete steps public and private partners can take to counter the illegal use of Internet. The principles should fill the gap between Member States (national) regulation and private initiatives / best practices. Because the general principles are co-produced by internet industry and governmental organizations, this project is likely to boost the public-private cooperation and achieve more law-compliance on the internet. Best practices in the public and private sector will be identified and can be implemented voluntarily in order to achieve more law-compliance on the Internet. The result will be an implementation guideline which can be attached to the general principles.

3. Activities

The general principles will be developed through a bottom-up process in which both the public and the private sector will participate actively. At the start of the project, the focus will be on creating mutual understanding of the perceived problems of public and private parties and think about possible solutions. To reach this mutual understanding a platform for discussion is needed. This will also give

experts the possibility to share their knowledge and ideas. The next step is creating a first draft of the general principles which will be discussed in the first conference.

In total there will be 4 workshops and 2 conferences. The first workshops will be held in October 2011, January 2012 and March 2012. The results of these workshops and a first draft of the general principles will be presented in a conference in May 2012. The fine-tuning process will continue with an additional workshop and conference in the fall of 2012.

The workshops will be conducted in a small setting to promote consensus and trust between partners. The workshop-results will be presented in conferences. These conferences will give us the opportunity to get feedback from a broader audience, and to create support for the solutions that are found. Also, the conferences might be the start of a coalition of public and private partners that want to reach agreement on the topics identified.

4. Project Organisation

The Netherlands is the coordinator for this project and is responsible for the overall project management. Germany, Spain, the United Kingdom and Belgium are partners in this project. A small project team is based in The Hague, at the office of the National Coordinator for Counter Terrorism in the Netherlands.

New partners from public and private organizations (and NGO's) can join the project as an 'Associated Partner'. EUROPOL, for example, has the status of associated partner.