Building Safer Public Spaces

Key Insights and Recommendations from the European Conference on Public Space Security and Protection 2026

RESET VIRTUOUS UNICOPS

The European Conference on Public Space Security and Protection brought together more than 180 policymakers, practitioners, researchers, security professionals and experts from across Europe in Cyprus to exchange experiences, explore emerging security challenges, and share practical approaches to strengthening prevention, preparedness, protection and response.

This publication brings together the conference's key insights and recommendations, alongside expert perspectives, conference highlights, research and practical resources. It is designed to carry the exchange beyond the conference and support continued learning, cooperation and action towards safer, more resilient and inclusive public spaces across Europe.

Contents

Introduction
The Conference at a Glance — 4
Conference Speakers, panelists and trainers — 5-8

Understanding the Current Challenges — 9-12

Insights from the Conference
Key Insights: An Overview — 13-16
Security as an Ecosystem — 17-18
Key Recommendations — 19

Voices & Highlights from the Conference
Words from the Experts — 20
Conference in Pictures — 21-23
Research & Publications from Participating Experts — 24

Continue Exploring
Resources & Ongoing Projects on Public Space Security — 25-29

Introduction

The Conference at a Glance

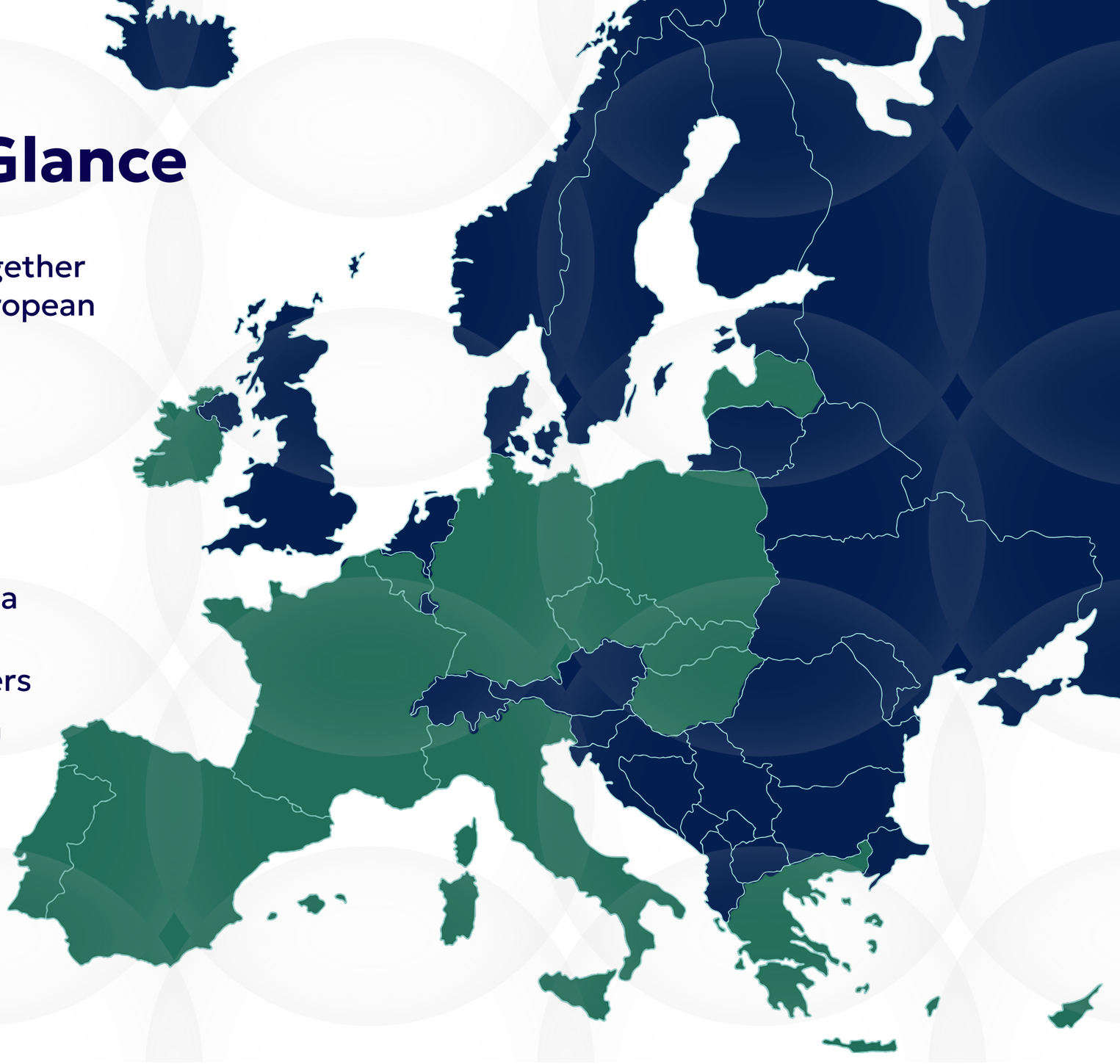
The conference was organized by RESET, together with UNICOPS and VIRTUOUS under the European Union's Internal Security Fund.

Date & Location
12.06.2026 | Nicosia, Cyprus

Experts attended
180+ participants | **14 EU countries**
+ Brazil, Japan and China

Fields of expertise
Policymakers | Law Enforcement | Researchers
Civil Society | Academia | Education | Human
Rights | Security Practitioners | Diplomacy
Legal Professionals | Social Welfare | Public
Administration | Emergency Management

Network
60 organizations



Introduction

Keynote Speaker



Zenonas Tziarras

PhD, Lecturer, Department of Turkish and Middle Eastern Studies, University of Cyprus

“The imperative, therefore, is not to imagine a world without risk, since such a world has never existed, but rather to cultivate the capacity to live with uncertainty without allowing it to erode trust, deepen social fragmentation, or weaken democratic life. This requires preparedness, effective institutions, and robust security policies.”

Speech by Dr. Zenonas Tziarras

Introduction

Panelists



Pedro Liberado

Chief Research Officer, Coordinator of Radicalisation, Violent Extremism and Organised Crime Portfolio, IPS - Innovative Prison Systems



Eliza Patouris

PhD, Co-Founder and Managing Director at Research and Education in Social Empowerment and Transformation - RESET

“(...) the question that we face is: are rehabilitation programs actually working when these people are incarcerated? Whether they aim at de-radicalisation, cognitive change, or disengagement behaviour, when can we tell the difference between genuine change and deception?”

- Pedro Liberado, Chief Research Officer, Coordinator of Radicalisation, Violent Extremism and Organised Crime Portfolio, IPS – Innovative Prison Systems

Introduction

Panelists



Alkis Kakoulis

Head of Unit, Operations Department, Police Headquarters, Cyprus Police



Maksymilian Stela

Former military officer, CBRN expert at the Biohazard Prevention Centre at the University of Lodz



Lara Raggi

EU Project Manager, Zanasi & Partners

“Lone actor attacks are rising and they are difficult to prevent. In 2025, more than 93% fatal terrorist incidents were conducted by lone actors.”

- Lara Raggi, Project Manager, Zanasi & Partners

Panel Discussion

Introduction

Table Top Exercise Trainers



Edoardo Mattiello
Security Expert, QSINT

Alessandro Marani
Security Expert, QSINT

Tablet Top Exercise on “Understanding Terrorist Strategies and Strengthening the Protection of Public Spaces”

This exercise explored the evolving threat of drone-based attacks and the potential risk of CBRN attacks, with participants split into attacker and defender groups to examine the scenario from each side's perspective. Structured discussion allowed the groups to exchange views on vulnerabilities and protective response, underscoring the value of adversarial thinking in building more resilient security practices.

Insights from the Conference

Understanding the Current Challenges

Europe's public spaces have always been where communities gather, learn, and connect. But the risks these spaces face have evolved faster than the systems designed to protect them. Today's threat landscape is shaped by interconnected, fast-moving forces that are increasingly difficult to predict.





Insights from the Conference

A Security Environment Without Borders

Conflicts today generate consequences that travel far beyond the battlefield. Economic disruption, migration pressures, political polarization, digital exposure, disinformation, and uncertainty create channels through which external crises can acquire domestic significance across Europe.

The challenge is not simply the emergence of new threats. It is the way different risks increasingly interact and reinforce one another. Military confrontation can contribute to economic disruption; economic and political pressures can deepen social polarisation; polarisation can be amplified through digital environments and disinformation. What emerges is not a series of isolated threats, but interconnected chains of vulnerability that are far harder to anticipate and manage.

This changing environment challenges traditional approaches to security. Prevention, deterrence, intelligence, and crisis management remain essential; however, no system can prevent every threat, eliminate uncertainty, or completely insulate societies from the indirect consequences of instability elsewhere.

Insights from the Conference

From Prevention to Resilience

What happens when prevention fails?

Resilience means strengthening the capacity of institutions, communities, and individuals to absorb shocks, adapt to changing circumstances, respond effectively, and recover without lasting damage to social cohesion, institutional confidence, or democratic life.

This goes beyond operational preparedness. Trust between citizens and institutions, strong local communities, solidarity, and networks of cooperation are themselves part of the security architecture.

Insights from the Conference

The Threat Landscape is Evolving

- Geopolitical landscape: Ongoing conflicts, economic instability, and regional disorder generate uncertainty across Europe, testing institutions and social cohesion.
- Technology & AI: Artificial intelligence is reshaping both attack and defence. It accelerates radicalization through diverse content and deepfakes, while also offering new tools, from CCTV analytics to threat detection, that support (but cannot replace) human judgment.
- Online radicalization: Self-radicalization via social media and gaming platforms now drives the majority of terrorist incidents, often blending ideologies into confusing, hybrid belief systems.
- Prison systems: Long treated as separate from public space security, prisons are where many attacks are incubated making rehabilitation and reintegration a frontline security issue.
- Lone actors: Low-means, high-impact individuals exploit the very openness that makes public spaces valuable, requiring renewed attention to CBRNe (chemical, biological, radiological, nuclear, explosive) preparedness.

Key Insights: An Overview

Security is a shared responsibility
No single sector, discipline, or institution can protect public spaces alone. Effective protection depends on cooperation between law enforcement, policymakers, researchers, first responders, civil society, communities, and other actors across the security chain.

The discussions showed that different actors hold different pieces of the picture. Information, expertise, intelligence, operational capabilities, and community knowledge need to connect before an incident occurs, rather than for the first time during a crisis.

The "whole-of-society chain" is real, not rhetorical
Public-space security begins long before an incident reaches a public square, university, place of worship, or cultural venue.

Teachers, religious and community leaders, NGOs, prison and probation staff, health professionals, municipalities, researchers, law enforcement, and intelligence services can all encounter different pieces of information relevant to prevention. The effectiveness of the chain depends on whether those pieces connect.

Key Insights: An Overview

Research must become operational

Research has little security impact if its findings remain inside the “research bubble.” Researchers and practitioners need to work together to turn evidence into procedures, tools, training, technologies, and exercises that can actually be used on the ground.

Preparedness must extend beyond the most familiar risks

Low-probability threats can still have serious consequences. The conference highlighted CBRNE as one example. Hazardous materials are routinely transported and used across Europe, information about them is increasingly accessible, and sabotage was identified as an area requiring greater attention.

Preparedness for emerging and less familiar threats should become as systematic as preparedness for established risks such as fire. Clear procedures, regular training, and exercises help turn preparedness from an exceptional response into routine practice.

Key Insights: An Overview

First responders are a crucial part of the circle of protection
Specialist teams may have advanced capabilities, but they are not necessarily the first people to reach an incident. Police officers, firefighters, and medical personnel may arrive before the nature of the threat is fully understood.

The Tokyo subway sarin attack, highlighted during the conference, illustrates the risk of secondary contamination among emergency personnel. It reinforces the importance of awareness, appropriate protective equipment, detection capabilities, training, and clear procedures for those most likely to arrive first.

Preparedness must also account for crowd behaviour and communication. This is particularly important in CBRNE incidents, where exposure to chemical agents can cause immediate fear and panic, while the sudden surge of information following an incident can overwhelm communication channels and complicate scene management.

AI cuts both ways
It accelerates radicalization through synthetic content but also strengthens detection and response. A clear boundary: technology should support human judgment, not replace it.

Key Insights: An Overview

Prisons and probation are frontline security actors

The boundary between prison security and public-space protection is increasingly difficult to maintain. This is highlighted by previous attacks in which perpetrators had been radicalised, or had intensified their radicalisation, while incarcerated.

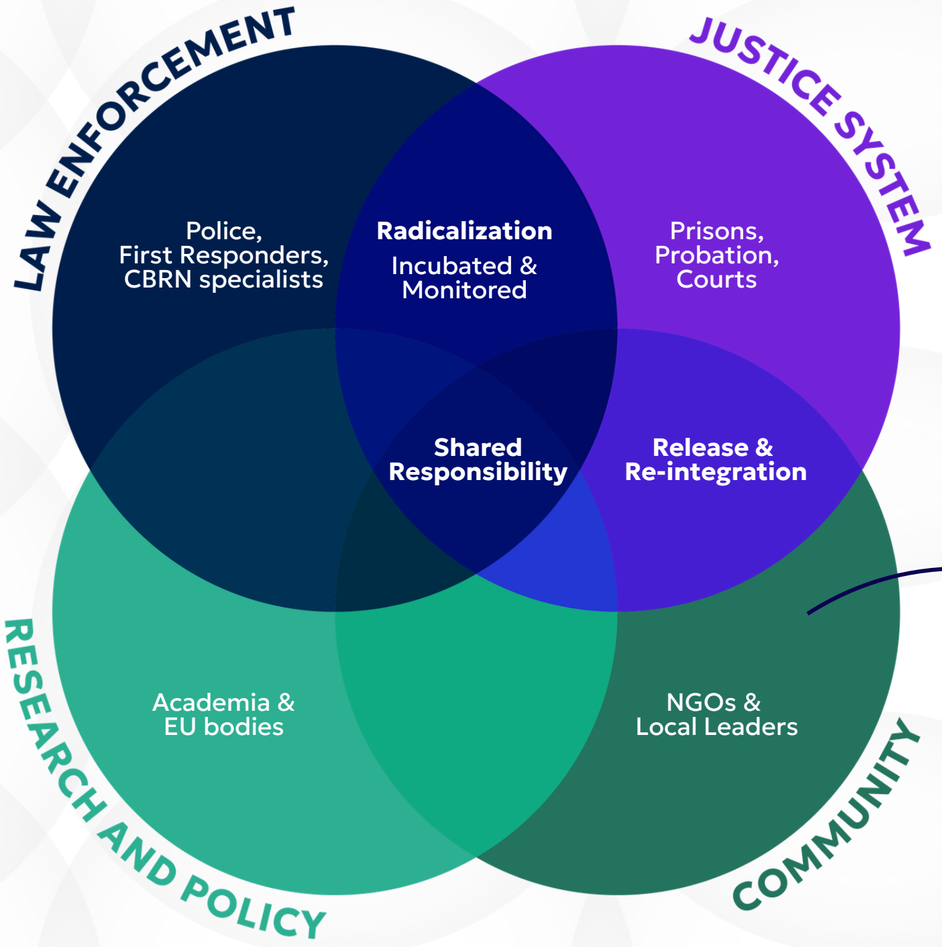
Prisons should therefore not be treated as a “black box” at the end of the criminal justice process. They are part of the wider prevention and intelligence environment. Rehabilitation, disengagement, dynamic security, probation, reintegration, and continuity of information after release can all have consequences for security beyond prison walls.

Radicalization often begins long before an attack reaches a public square.

Insights from the Conference

Security as an ecosystem of a shared responsibility

The notion of shared responsibility is where all circles meet. Shared responsibility is a condition where information flows fast enough and is structured enough that no single circle is ever left holding a threat alone.



*Law enforcement and community overlap where local tip-offs, faith leaders, and youth workers become the "eyes and ears" of prevention.

SHARE KNOWLEDGE

↓

BUILD CAPACITY

↓

ACT TOGETHER

Insights from the Conference

The Case of Modena, Italy

On 16 May, an attack took place in the city centre of Modena. Prior to the incident, different actors had encountered warning signals concerning the individual involved.

The individual had previously been hospitalized in a psychiatric facility. Separately, the University of Modena had received aggressive emails from the individual, including offensive messages targeting Christians, alongside demands that the university help him find employment.

Key insight

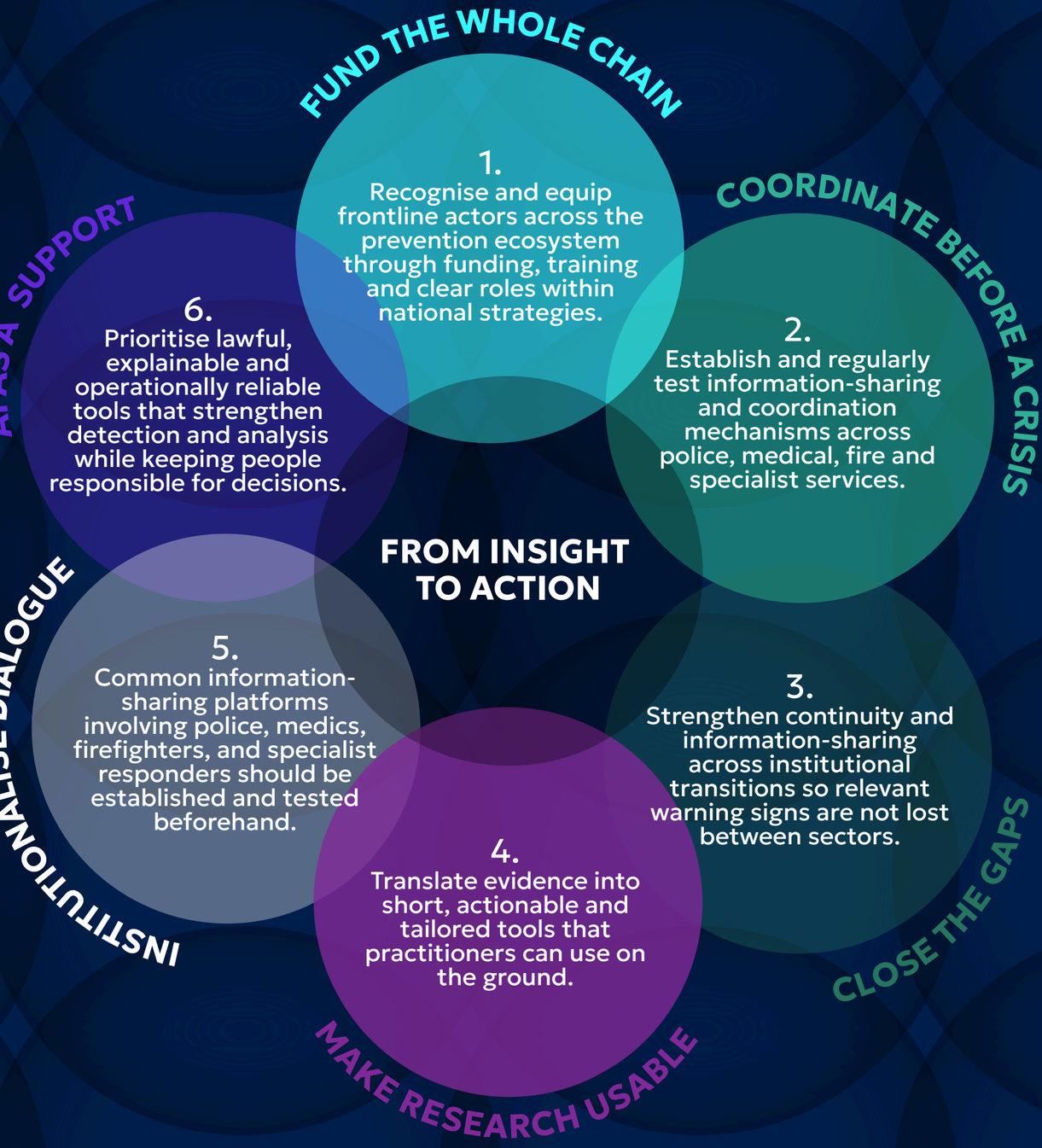
Shared responsibility does not mean that every actor must identify or prevent a threat alone. It means recognising when information may matter to another part of the security ecosystem and having trusted, lawful channels to share it. If warning signals remain isolated, opportunities for coordinated prevention can be lost.

SIGNALS EXIST → **SIGNALS REMAIN ISOLATED** → **COORDINATED PREVENTION BECOMES IMPOSSIBLE**

Insights from the Conference

Key Recommendations

Effective public space security depends on moving from dialogue to action. The conference identified six priorities to strengthen cooperation, preparedness, and resilience across the whole security ecosystem.



Voices & Highlights from the Conference

Words from the Experts

Interviews with EU Experts on public space safety, protection and resilience

- **Safety in public spaces**
  with Alkis Kakoulis – Head of Unit, Operations Department, Police Headquarters, Cyprus Police
- **Emerging technologies**
  with Dimitrios Skarpalezos – Head of Unit, Operations Department, Police Headquarters, Cyprus Police
- **Identifying radicalization risk factors before an attack happens**
  with Edoardo Mattiello, Security Expert, QSINT
- **Warning signs of radicalisation**
  with Lara Raggi – Project Manager at Zanasi & Partners with expertise in radicalization & lone-actor terrorism

Voices & Highlights from the Conference

Conference in Pictures





Voices & Highlights from the Conference

Conference in Pictures







Voices & Highlights from the Conference

Conference in Pictures





“When we talk about protecting public spaces, prisons are often forgotten. Many attacks that have occurred in public spaces started being planned in prisons, were incubated in prisons, and were carried out by perpetrators who were radicalised while in prison long before they reached the square, a concert hall, or a place of worship. Adolf Hitler, for instance, wrote Mein Kampf while in prison. That's where his ideology consolidated.”

- Pedro Liberado, Chief Research Officer, Coordinator of Radicalisation, Violent Extremism and Organised Crime Portfolio, IPS – Innovative Prison Systems

Research & Publications from Participating Experts

Alessandro L. (2025). Enhancing the Protection of Places of Worship: Insights from ISF Projects and Guidelines for Stakeholders

Dimitriadis, N., Cruz, C., Silva, I., Oliveira, J. & Patouris, E. (2023). **The Impact of Religious Fundamentalism on Places of Worship**. Open Journal of Social Sciences, 11,4.

Karlos, V., Larcher, M. (2021). A Guide to Key Information on the Protection of Public Spaces

Larcher, M., Karlos, V., Schumacher, R., Strezova, D., Caverzan, A. et al. (2022). **Security by Design: Protection of Public Spaces from Terrorist Attacks**

Laudy, C., Ruini, F., Zanasi, A., Przybyszewski, M., & Stachowicz, A. (2017). **Using Social Media in Crisis Management**. SOTERIA Fusion Center for Managing Information Gaps

Pałka, N., Kowalski, M., Giorgi, G., Venturi, G., Zanasi, A. et al (2020). **Human Factor Based Failures In Technology Forecasting**

Tziarras, Z. (2019). **The New Geopolitics of the Eastern Mediterranean: Trilateral Partnerships and Regional Security**

UN Alliance of Civilisations. (2019). **The United Nations Plan of Action to Safeguard Religious Sites: In Unity and Solidarity for Safe and Peaceful Worship**

Continue Exploring

Resources & Ongoing Projects on Public Space Security

CBRNe4rail - CBRNe preparedness for passenger rail transport hubs

The initiative strengthens CBRNe preparedness and resilience at passenger rail transport hubs through improved prevention, detection and response measures.

Website: https://www.cbrne4rail.eu/

Link for Other Resources

COBRA - Confrontation of CBRN-Terrorism Threats

The initiative focuses on improving preparedness and response capabilities for confronting CBRN terrorism threats.

Website: https://cobraproject.eu/en/cobra project

Link: Risk Registry Platform

Link for Other Resources

HOTHREAT - Tailored CBRN protection measures for hotels and conference centres

The initiative develops tailored CBRN protection measures to strengthen the preparedness and resilience of hotels and conference centres.

Website: https://hothreat.eu/

Link: Recommendations for Prevention, Protection and Response

Link for Handbook

Link for Other Resources

Continue Exploring

Resources & Ongoing Projects on Public Space Security

PACTESUR2 - Protect Allied Cities against TErrorism in Securing Urban aReas 2

The initiative strengthens the capacity of European cities to prevent and respond to terrorism and improve the security of urban public spaces.

Website: https://www.pactesur.eu

Link for Toolbox

PARTESS-COM - Participatory Approaches to Protecting Places of Worship, Schools & Community Centres

The initiative uses participatory approaches to strengthen the protection and resilience of places of worship, schools and community centres.

Website: https://www.partess-com.eu/

Link for Other Resources

PROSECUW - Protection and Security for Places of Worship

The initiative focuses on strengthening the protection and security of places of worship through improved risk assessment, prevention and preparedness.

Website: https://prosecuwproject.eu/

Link: PROSECUW Hub

Link: PROSECW Documentary

Link for Other Resources

Continue Exploring

Resources & Ongoing Projects on Public Space Security

PRoSPeReS - Protection System for Large Gatherings of People in Religious Sites

The initiative develops an integrated protection system to improve the safety and security of large gatherings in religious sites.

Website: https://prosperes.eu/

Link: Guidebook on Security Measures

Link: Security by Design Guidebook for Religious Sites

Link for Other Resources

PROTECTOR - Protecting places of worship from hate crime and terrorism

The initiative focuses on improving the protection of places of worship against hate crime and terrorism through enhanced security, prevention and preparedness.

Website: https://www.protector-project.eu/

Link: Operational Briefings

Link for Other Resources

SAFE-CITIES - Risk-Based Approach for the Protection of Public Spaces in European Cities

The initiative develops a risk-based approach to strengthen the protection and resilience of public spaces in European cities.

Website: https://safe-cities.eu

Link for Other Resources

Continue Exploring

Resources & Ongoing Projects on Public Space Security

SAFE STADIUM - CBRN Security of Mass Events

The initiative focuses on strengthening CBRN security and preparedness for mass events, with a particular focus on stadium environments.

Website: https://safe-stadium.eu/

Link: Protection Platform

SHIELD - Solutions to enhance interfaith protection of places of worship from terrorist danger

The initiative develops solutions to strengthen the protection of places of worship against terrorist threats while promoting cooperation and dialogue between faith communities.

Website: https://shieldproject.eu/

Link for Handbook

SHRINEs - Raising Awareness for the protection of places of worship by promoting interfaith dialogue on the use of advanced technologies

The initiative promotes the protection of places of worship by raising awareness and fostering interfaith dialogue on the use of advanced security technologies.

Website: https://shrines-project.eu/

Continue Exploring

Resources & Ongoing Projects on Public Space Security

SOAR - Strengthening the security and resilience of at-risk religious sites and communities

The initiative focuses on strengthening the security and resilience of at-risk religious sites and communities through improved protection measures and preparedness.

Website: https://soarproject.eu

Link for Other Resources

UNICOPS - CBRNE Protection for Higher Education Institutions

The initiative develops integrated approaches for protecting higher education institutions against CBRNe threats.

Website:
https://unicops.eu/

VIRTUOUS - Protection and Security for Places of Worship

The initiative improves vulnerability assessment and resilience for places of worship.

Website:
https://virtuousproject.eu/

Beyond the conference

Contact Us



Eliza Patouris

Co-Founder and Managing Director
at RESET - Research and Education
in Social Empowerment and
Transformation

Email: eliza.patouris@resetcy.com

“Protecting public spaces is a shared responsibility. The conversations in Cyprus reinforced that resilience is built before a crisis, through stronger partnerships, trusted communities, practical preparedness, and knowledge that moves across sectors and borders.”