

The European Interior Ministers approve a European security plan to be put in place by 2014

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An operational European security strategy will be put in place by 2014. This was decided today, 15 July 2010, by the European Interior Ministers at the informal Council of Justice and Interior Ministers.

The European Ministers had reached a consensus, during the Spanish Presidency, on the crucial importance of an internal security strategy. Under the aegis of the Belgian Presidency, this concept will be translated into an operational strategy.

Belgian Minister for the Interior Annemie Turtelboom announced: "At the informal Council, we agreed to put an operational plan in place by 2014. This will give us the time to develop and test a policy cycle, to exchange ideas at policy level and to draw up a four-year strategy."

Furthermore, the starting point for the security strategy corresponds to the time covered by the Stockholm Programme. "This gives an important political signa", Minister Turtelboom commented.

The strategy developed encompasses the entire security chain: prevention, prosecution and punishment. "By focusing particularly on prevention, we can counter phenomena that arise more rapidly and prevent them spreading from one European country to the next", Minister Turtelboom explained.

The policy cycle will consist of four major phases: analysis of the situation, identification of the priorities, drafting, implementing and monitoring action plans and, finally, the evaluation phase. Minister Turtelboom agreed with her colleagues that both Europol and COSI (Standing Committee on operational cooperation on internal security) will play a key role in this process.

Annemie Turtelboom: "Europol is responsible for drawing up standard definitions of the different criminal phenomena and for collecting and analysing the statistics available. COSI, for its part, will deal with drawing up an operational action plan for any priorities identified by the JHA Council (Council of Justice and Interior Ministers)."

Cross-border criminal phenomena

For the short term, the Belgian Presidency has pinpointed two cross-border criminal phenomena to be tackled at European level due to the major impact they have on the security of citizens: illegal arms trafficking and itinerant gangs.

"All European countries are seeing a rise in the number of incidents involving heavy weapons, such as Kalashnikovs", Minister Turtelboom explained. A Europol report drawn up at the request of European Interior Ministers confirms that military weapons are traded across Europe and are sold on the black market at relatively low prices. Furthermore, there is a major dearth of information on this phenomenon.

To bridge this gap, the Ministers agreed at the informal Council that COSI will draw up an operational action plan by December. "The emphasis in this regard is being placed on the harmonisation of legislation relating to the sale and classification of arms", Minister Turtelboom explained.

Finally, itinerant gangs are also the focus of particular attention at European level. "It is essential to have a clear picture of what itinerant gangs are and the type of offences they commit", Minister Turtelboom explained. "At the current time, a questionnaire on itinerant gangs is circulating in all European countries and this will be debated at a seminar in September. Based on this seminar, the

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JHA Council will draw up a definition and harmonise an action plan".