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NOTE

From: General Secretariat of the Council
To: Standing Committee on operational cooperation on internal security (COSI)
Subject: Interpol discussion paper on the use of Interpol's border security data systems.

Delegations will find attached a discussion paper prepared by Interpol regarding the use of Interpol's border security data systems.

BORDER CAPABILITIES IN THE EU

1. INTRODUCTION

In our increasingly globalized world, it is easier than ever for people and goods to cross international borders. This issue was brought to light recently after the case of the missing Malaysian Airlines flight MH370. Two Iranian nationals managed to board the plane using stolen passports. Even though these passports were registered in the INTERPOL Stolen Lost Travel Documents (SLTD) database, at no point in the travel documents of the passengers on the flight were checked against INTERPOL's databases. In the first week of the plane's disappearance, much attention and investigative resources were focused on ascertaining the identities of these two individuals, when the problem could have simply been avoided had the checks been carried out beforehand.

This gives rise to the question of how widely INTERPOL's databases are used worldwide, especially at the borders. Effective border security is an essential aspect of combating transnational crime, and there are existing tools and services to aid this fight. However, the efficacy of border security is largely compromised by the underutilization of the tools already at the disposal of member countries. In 2013, less than 20 of INTERPOL's member countries systematically checked passports of international travelers against INTERPOL databases. Given that terrorists, murderers and war criminals have previously been identified by INTERPOL as having travelled internationally using stolen passports, the lack of usage of INTERPOL databases presents a large loophole for many more criminals to exploit.

2. INTERPOL DATABASES AND SLTD

Currently, INTERPOL has a total of 11 databases that can be utilized at the borders, one of which is the **Stolen and Lost Travel Documents database (SLTD)**. This database records data on lost, stolen and revoked travel documents, such as passports, identity cards, UN Laissez-passer or visa stamps, including stolen blank travel documents. The purpose of SLTD is to give the ability to law enforcement, including immigration at land/sea/air border posts, to detect and prevent the fraudulent use of invalid travel documents by criminals.

To help countries connect easily, INTERPOL has developed two integrated solutions using either fixed or mobile integrated network databases, known as FIND and MIND. Both can integrate into the existing computer-assisted verification system in a country. In addition, MIND can be used in a country without an existing system.

3. INTERPOL INTEGRATED BORDER MANAGEMENT TASK FORCE

The INTERPOL Integrated Border Management Task Force (IBMTF) comprises representatives of the relevant INTERPOL departments. The Task Force serves as a central point of contact and coordination for international border security and management efforts. Its activities fall into four main areas: information sharing, operations, capacity building and partnerships. Local officials are equipped with the skills necessary to streamline their border security practices and incorporate INTERPOL's tools and databases into their daily routines.

This training is then put into practice through operations conducted with the support of INTERPOL. These operations have proven time and again to be an effective method of disrupting cross-border crime, as well as providing officials with the experience to conduct their own similar operations.

IBMTF is therefore in a great position to facilitate larger use of SLTD and other INTERPOL databases at the border points of our member countries. It can deliver a comprehensive package bringing together various departments in the house to provide support from the initial phase of training all the way through the operations and follow-up.

4. EU'S INVOLVEMENT

A passport issued by an EU Member State, especially one that belongs to a country in the Schengen zone, is recognized as highly valuable for illegal immigrants and criminals who, upon possession of such an item, can travel freely within countries in this zone. Europe is also a welcome destination for many seeking asylum from their own home countries, as we saw with flight MH370. While not all EU countries are in the Schengen zone, the proximity and ease with which it takes to travel from one EU country to another implies that the border security of EU countries is only as good as its weakest link.

Recognizing the additional security features of EU issued travel documents, they are often welcomed without the necessity for enhanced pre-screening or visa requirements by many countries around the globe. This additional value enhances interest for their use by the criminal and terrorist communities.

The EU has been consistent in its usage of the SLTD, at about 200 million searches every year from 2010 to 2013. It also makes up more than 80% of the European records registered in the SLTD database. While this looks promising, it can also be misleading – searches from the UK, Croatia and France make up more than 90% of these 200 million searches, implying that only 3 out of the 28 EU countries run searches on a regular basis.

The EU fares better in terms of number of records in the system – 25 million records in the database are registered by EU countries (out of 30 million records in Europe and 40 million records in the world). Seven EU countries, namely Germany, Netherlands, UK, Romania, Czech Republic, Bulgaria and Belgium, are amongst the top ten countries in terms of number of records registered.

While it is heartening to know that EU countries are recording instances of stolen documents into the database, these efforts are limited in their efficacy if we do not utilize the same database to run searches against these records.

Finally, the above data profile clearly demonstrates a significant vulnerability to the EU and its border protection. With in excess of **25 million EU travel documents reported as stolen or lost**, each presents an opportunity to be exploited for crime as we saw with flight MH370. INTERPOL believes it is not only an imperative that the EU considers maximizing the use of this data routinely across all Member States, but also strives to encourage its wider use across the globe in the regions that welcome EU travellers without realizing the potential perils from these stolen or lost travel documents.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

The 2005 Council Common Position¹ by the EU on SLTD recognizes the same threats as discussed above with stolen and lost passports. Article 3 in this Common Position also encourages Member States to provide relevant passport data to INTERPOL when possible, run searches on the SLTD databases and take the necessary follow-up action should a hit occurs.

Bearing that in mind, the following recommendations are proposed:

- The European Union mandates that all Member States make routine use of INTERPOL's border security data systems to protect the residents of the European Community;
- The European Union issues guidelines to ensure that EU Member States implement MIND or FIND, enabling systematic SLTD checks to be made at key border points;
- The European Union seeks to ensure that all its international border security initiatives incorporate the potential for INTERPOL's border security data systems to help detect the illegal use of EU travel documents.

¹ OJ L 27, 29.1.2005, p. 61