

## **RIGA JOINT STATEMENT**

### **following the informal meeting of Justice and Home Affairs Ministers in Riga on 29 and 30 January**

Profoundly shocked by the terrible terrorist attacks in Paris in early January which have endangered the core values of EU, the Latvian Presidency adjusted the agenda of the informal meeting of Justice and Home Affairs Ministers in Riga to dedicate the whole session for discussions by Ministers of Home affairs to the EU's fight against terrorism and to add an information point for Ministers of Justice on judicial aspects of fighting terrorism.

Discussions at the informal meeting of Justice and Home Affairs Ministers in Riga on 29 and 30 January 2015 were based on the Paris statement of 11 January 2015 broadly supported by the Member States.

The EU has already a long-standing counter-terrorism strategy, developing a large scope of measures in different areas supporting Member States' counter-terrorism efforts and responsibilities.

Terrorism related issues have been an agenda point for the Justice and Home Affairs Council meetings over the last years. As a consequence, numerous measures have been discussed, approved, implemented and monitored.

The recent terrorist-attacks in France, the counter-terrorism measures taken in Belgium and the growing threat posed by the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters all over the world sends a clear and strong message that counter-terrorism efforts have to be reinforced both at national and EU level.

We, the Ministers of Home Affairs and the Ministers of Justice, have a first line responsibility in the fight against terrorism. Our actions must continue to be part of a comprehensive approach that includes the various actions in different policies, including in the area of transport, finance, information technologies and in relations with third countries.

We had a thorough debate on a number of topical issues, upon which we conclude on the following:

- We reaffirm our unfailing attachment to the freedom of expression, to fundamental rights, to pluralism, to democracy, to tolerance and to the rule of law. They are the foundation of our democracies and are at the heart of the European Union. Respect of fundamental rights is crucial in the fight against terrorism. Our common work must be based on a proper balance between security and fundamental rights.
- We strongly emphasize the need to build further work on already existing tools by accelerating and amplifying their implementation in order to ensure a strong Member States' and the EU's response to this threat, including threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters. The new initiatives could be adopted either to increase effectiveness of existing measures or to adjust the current instruments to ensure required response to the current threat.
- We reiterate that terrorism, radicalisation, recruitment and financing related to terrorism are main common threats to internal security of the EU.
- It is important to provide a determined response at EU level. The latest events have clearly proved the existence of this multidimensional threat involving different areas of crime. The

necessity and importance of effectively coordinated and coherent approach is of the utmost importance. In this regard, a European agenda on Security is needed to address the threats to internal security of the EU for the next years. To ensure the timely adoption of the European agenda on Security, we urge the European Commission to present its Communication by mid-April 2015 at the latest in order to review and update EU Internal Security Strategy by mid 2015 as concluded by the European Council.

- In the fight against terrorism, it is crucial to address not only the consequences but also the underlying factors of radicalization. In this regard, need for a comprehensive cross-sectorial approach guaranteeing the involvement of all policies concerned should be addressed, including the importance to promote culture of inclusion and tolerance through, for instance, education, social and regional policies.
- We confirm our determination to create without further delay an effective EU PNR framework in line with Council general approach and at the same time ensuring solid data protection safeguards. Constructive dialogue should be restarted with the European Parliament with a view of the adoption of the EU PNR directive as soon as possible.
- We reiterate the urgent need for further actions addressing radicalization to terrorism not only on EU but also on national and local level. The internet plays a significant role in radicalization. In this regard, we must strengthen our efforts to cooperate closely with the industry and to encourage them to remove terrorist and extremist content from their platforms. The further possibilities to detect and remove illegal content, in full respect of fundamental rights, fundamental freedoms and in full accordance to national legislation. The possible creation of effective counter-narratives, notably on social media, should also be explored. In this context, Internet referral capabilities, also through Check-the-web, could be developed within Europol to support efforts of Member States in detecting illegal content and improving exchange of information. The development of different preventive projects within the future RAN Centre of Excellence and the maximum use of the Syria Strategic Communication Advisory Team (SSCAT) should also be strengthened.
- In order to derive full benefit from existing law-enforcement cooperation mechanisms and tools, we request Europol to provide a suitable information-exchange and data-matching environment to streamline current procedures, avoiding duplications. Further information exchange, including through the Focal Point Travellers and the multidisciplinary working group DUMAS, should be strengthened. Effective use and, if necessary, further development of criminal records information system (ECRIS) should be enhanced. Also potential of the Schengen Information System should be better exploited.
- We strongly reconfirm our commitment to ensure swift and enhanced exchange of information and best practices between Member States and all justice and home affairs agencies, in particular Europol and Eurojust.
- We consider that beyond the current efforts to make full use of existing Schengen framework, a targeted proposal to amend the Schengen Borders Code is a necessary step to reinforce external borders by making it possible to proceed to systematic checks on individuals enjoying the right of free movement against databases relevant to the fight against terrorism based on the common risk indicators.

- We commit to ensure that our competent authorities reinforce exchange of information and develop further cross-border cooperation on fighting illegal trafficking of firearms, in particular by systematically inserting information into the Schengen Information System. We encourage decisive action, including legislation, where necessary, to curb this criminal activity. Specific attention should be given to deactivation of firearms, reinforcement of their traceability, information sharing and countering firearms' trafficking on internet.
- In addition, specific consideration should be given to fight against financing of terrorism. Information on traceability of financial flows and the ability to freeze assets are crucial when combating terrorism. The reinforcement of the existing tools to ensure such control along with the development of new and specific tools to counter the financing related to terrorism should be considered.
- The joint efforts of the internal and external dimension in fighting terrorism, and in particular the phenomenon of the foreign terrorist fighters, is crucial. In this regard, the work of the Foreign Affairs Council is particularly welcomed. The increasingly unstable situation in certain parts of the EU's neighborhood, such as Libya and Syria, is of great concern to the EU's security and requires special attention. The mutual legal assistance with third countries, who are strategic partners in the fight against terrorism, should be strengthened, either through agreements or exchange of liaison magistrates.
- We consider the importance of judicial aspects in fight against the terrorism, in particular foreign terrorist fighters phenomenon. In this regard, major progress has been made in recent years in improving information exchange and cooperation between judicial authorities. It is now of fundamental importance to harness the full potential of existing instruments and to consider further developments when addressing the matter, including enhancing the share of best practices and information and the use of Eurojust, in particular in conformity with the Council decision 2005/671/JHA. Preventing and countering propaganda and radicalization in prisons is also a relevant component of efforts in this field. It is important to consider further legislative developments with regard to the common understanding of criminal activities related to terrorism in light of the United Nations Security Council resolution 2178 (2014) and possible further development of criminal records information system (ECRIS).

The Presidency will ensure that the work on these issues as well as on other measures discussed by the Justice and Home Affairs Council over the last years and those provided in other contributions from Member States, from the European Commission, from the European External Action Service and from the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator is taken forward at EU level in the appropriate fora involving all relevant stakeholders.

The Joint statement will be an input of Justice and Home Affairs ministers for the discussion at the Informal Meeting of the Heads of State or Government on 12 February 2015.

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