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NOTE

From: EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator
To: Delegations

Subject: Report: State of play on implementation of the statement of the Members of the European Council of 12 February 2015 on counter-terrorism

The extraordinary Council (JHA) of 20 November 2015 highlighted the need to accelerate the implementation of all areas covered by the statement on counter-terrorism issued by the Members of the European Council on 12 February 2015 (doc 14406/15). Therefore, in preparation of the Council of 4 December 2015, this paper lists all the measures foreseen in the February 2015 Statement and assesses their implementation. Implementation of the Conclusions of the Council of 20 November 2015 will enhance implementation of the February 2015 statement.

Documents 9422/1/15 and 12318/15 drafted by the EU CTC assessed the state of implementation in June and October 2015. Document 12551/15, drafted by the Presidency and the EU CTC, was endorsed by the Council in October 2015. It suggests five priorities for action by December 2015. Discussion in the extraordinary JHA Council of 20 November (doc 14406/15) and COSI of 16 November 2016 focused on firearms, strengthening external border controls, information sharing and terrorist financing (doc 14122/15).

I. ENSURING THE SECURITY OF CITIZENS

1. PNR

Following the adoption of the rapporteur's report by the LIBE Committee on 15 July 2015, four trilogues and three technical meetings have taken place. Important differences of view between the Council and the EP remain, notably on the inclusion of internal flights, the scope (transnational element of serious crime) and the period during which PNR data can be stored in an unmasked manner. Agreement on many other issues is outstanding.

The rapporteur's ability to broker a deal with the Presidency is hampered by the fact that, except for the EPP shadow rapporteur, his report was not supported by other shadow rapporteurs, but by a heterogeneous majority across party lines. The EP's commitment in its resolution of 11 February 2015 to work towards passage of a PNR Directive by the end of 2015 has so far not been shared by the shadow rapporteurs (S&D, ALDE, Greens, GUE) who voted against the Kirkhope report.

As long as there is no EU PNR Directive, Member States who do not have national legislation do not have a legal basis to acquire data from carriers. On 20 November 2015, the Council reiterated the urgency and priority to finalise an ambitious EU PNR before the end of 2015.

2. Information sharing

– *Europol*: by November 2015, 14 EU MS had connected their counter terrorism authorities to the Secure Information Exchange Network Application (SIENA) hosted by Europol, a key enabling platform for information exchange. This means that half of the Member States are still not connected. Siena will be upgraded to "confidential" in 2016. Terrorism crime related information and intelligence exchange remains low. A dedicated area for counter-terrorism authorities was created in SIENA in October 2015, allowing for direct bilateral and multilateral communication between counter-terrorism authorities, with Europol and third parties with an operational cooperation agreement.

There has been a strong increase of the use of the Europol Information System (EIS) since December 2014. By 13 November 2015, 1595 foreign terrorist fighters have been registered in EIS by 14 EU MS, 5 third parties and Interpol. Nevertheless, considering the much higher number of existing EU foreign terrorist fighters and the fact that half of all EU MS still have not used EIS, the system is clearly a work in progress.

FP Travellers, both from a quantitative and qualitative perspective, is not yet a tool which can provide in depth analysis in relation to all contributed operational cases across the EU. To date, 50.45 % of all contributions originate from just five MS and one associated third country. 2081 confirmed foreign terrorist fighters have been entered into FP Travellers.

Europol will launch the European Counter-Terrorism Center (ECTC) in early 2016 to strengthen information exchange. This will provide inter alia a robust security and confidentiality framework. A more robust information-sharing and operational-coordination platform will be established at Europol as part of ECTC to connect the police CT authorities. In the Council Conclusions of 20 November 2015, Member States committed to seconding CT experts to the ECTC to form an enhanced cross-border investigation support unit and indicated that Eurojust should also be involved. As Europol is actively engaged in support of ongoing CT investigations in several Member States and has been tasked by the Council to set up the IRU and the ECTC, it will be important to increase Europol 's resources accordingly to achieve sustainability.

– **Eurojust:** Operational cooperation and information sharing have increased considerably. But this still does not reflect the extent of ongoing investigations and prosecutions. Operational cooperation in terrorism cases referred to Eurojust for assistance has more than doubled (13 cases in 2014, 29 cases so far in 2015, cases related foreign terrorist fighters increased from 3 to 14). Ten coordination meetings in terrorist cases have been organized in 2015, four of which related to FTF. In November 2015, Eurojust coordinated a joint action in six countries in a case of a radical terrorist group, leading to 13 arrests. The information on prosecutions and convictions for terrorist offences shared with Eurojust has more than doubled since 2014. So far in 2015, 109 cases were opened at Eurojust in relation to information exchange on terrorist offences - 17 on court results and 92 on ongoing prosecutions.

This is a threefold increase on the figure for 2014. Eurojust also animates several relevant networks such as the network of national correspondents for terrorism matters and the consultative forum of prosecutors-General and Directors of Public Prosecutions, specialized cybercrime prosecutors etc. The association of Eurojust to Europol's Focal Point Travellers has allowed for improved information exchange.

– ***Update of the Framework Decision on Combating Terrorism:*** The EU signed the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism and its additional Protocol on Foreign Terrorist Fighters on 22 October 2015 in Riga. The Commission plans to present a proposal for the update of the Framework Decision before the end of 2015.

3. External border controls

– ***Feeding and use of the SIS II***

While alerts entered into SIS II - including foreign terrorist fighters - have increased, the use of the SIS II for FTFs is still not adequate. The results of a recently distributed questionnaire on the use of SIS II and INTERPOL databases by EU MS and Schengen area states to counter terrorism (doc. 13059/15) shows that there has been a significant increase of alerts entered in SIS under Art. 36(2) and (3) in 2015 compared to last year. However, use of this system varies heavily between EU MS. There is disparity between the actual threat posed to some EU MS and the amount of alerts entered. Alerts entered under Art. 36(3) remain generally very low and several EU MS did not use this option at all. Statistics provided by most EU MS did not provide clarity on whether the number of alerts entered under Art. 36(2) or (3) were related to Foreign Terrorist Fighters.

The new possibility for immediate reporting under Art. 36(2) and Art. 36(3) introduced in February 2015 means EU MS can report immediately a hit on a discovered Foreign Terrorist Fighter to the MS that introduced the alert into SIS. About half of the EU MS have used this. Practices among Member States for the use of immediate reporting vary greatly. It would be useful to further discuss further how best to use this new tool.

As required by the Council, the SIS/SIRENE working party will carry out a lessons learnt exercise of cases of 2015 and define a common approach on the use of the SIS II.

It is a weakness that Europol does not have automated and systematic access to SIS II. Europol rights of access extend only to manual, case-by-case checks. This means there is no systematic cross-checking of SIS II with Europol's databases. On 20 November 2015, the Council invited the Commission to present a legislative proposal to change this.

– *Use of Interpol databases:*

There are few statistics available on EU MS concerning the use of INTERPOL databases. The Commission recently submitted a questionnaire on the use by Member States of INTERPOL's system of notices and diffusions (CM 4177/15) aimed at analysing the current use of INTERPOL's notices and diffusions, particularly red notices, by EU Member States, as well as aspects of data protection and potential abuse or misuse of the system for political purposes.

A precondition for more systematic checks is an electronic connection between border posts to the Interpol databases. At least 10 % of EU Member States and Schengen partners still do not have an electronic connection to all external border crossings (air, land and sea). Automatic screening of travel documents is also necessary to increase checks without negative impact on travel flows. 7 out of 26 responding Member States and Schengen partners do not use automatic screening. 6 out of 26 are still manually updating the Interpol SLTD database. This shows that the technical environment in a significant amount of Member States still needs to progress. The Council Conclusions of 20 November 2015 require Member States to upgrade their connectivity with Commission support.

– *Implementation of the common risk indicators (CRI)*

The objective of the common risk indicators, finalized in June 2015, is to increase the frequency of checks of the relevant databases and achieve more systematic checks, including for EU citizens and residents, in line with the updated Schengen Borders Handbook.

The impact of the implementation of the common risk indicators varies greatly among Member States and Schengen partners. Member States have integrated the common risk indicators into their national systems and are carrying out more database checks than last year. However, the volume of checks of the relevant databases in respect of persons enjoying the right of free movement varies greatly between EU MS: for example 1.5%, 25% or 34%, and, on the other hand, 100% in Switzerland.

These disparities make coordinated implementation with the help of Frontex even more urgent and important. However, Frontex has not yet received the finalized risk indicators and has not yet been included in the Working Group Dumas to work on the risk indicators and their operationalization. This could include testing the CRI in selected joint operations, agreement on a follow up mechanism, and adoption of operational guidelines and plans. Pilots could be followed by broader roll-out and training. The way ahead on coordinated implementation of the risk indicators with Frontex will be discussed in COSI on 24 November 2015 on the basis of proposals by Frontex and should be implemented as a matter of priority. This may require additional resources and updating of the Frontex work plan.

– *Cooperation Frontex-Europol*

It is crucial that Europol and Frontex cooperate closely and that the agreement to exchange personal data between them (operation cooperation agreement) is concluded without delay, as requested by the Council. On this basis, data exchanges will be possible from January 2016.

Frontex does not have access to Eurodac nor to the SIS II database for the purpose of risk analysis and detecting suspicious travel as well as entering information. It would also need access to the smart borders database in the future. In the meantime, it will be important to maximise opportunities provided by the new “Hot spots”, and especially the EU Regional Task Force in Catania which allows Frontex and Europol officers to cooperate on the spot and to make the best possible use of screening and interviews of migrants. The association of Eurojust to the Hot spot approach is important. A mechanism has been set up. It is important that information obtained by Frontex can be shared with Europol as well as the relevant national authorities of Member States.

Border checks along EU external borders towards the Western Balkans need to be beefed up, as requested by the Council. This should include extensive baggage and vehicle checks as well as monitoring of the green border, given the smuggling routes, including firearms and explosives. Frontex has strengthened its participation in the EMPACT project on firearms trafficking at EU external borders.

As the Council requested, in the update of the Frontex regulation, the contribution of Frontex to fight cross-border crime and terrorism at the EU external borders should be explicitly mentioned in order to provide a more robust legal basis for information sharing between Frontex and Europol and Frontex and Member States, clarify the role of Frontex, allow Frontex access to SIS II and Eurodac and allow Frontex to receive and use personal data from third countries related to crime and terrorism.

4. Firearms

The Council adopted Conclusions on strengthening the use of means of fighting trafficking of firearms (12892/15) on 8 October 2015 and invited all relevant actors, Member States, the Commission, Europol and Interpol to take the necessary measures to implement the actions foreseen in these conclusions. The implementing regulation on common firearms deactivation standards was adopted on 18 November 2015 to ensure that deactivated firearms are rendered permanently inoperable.

The Commission presented its proposal to revise Directive 91/477 of 18 June 1991 on 18 November 2015. The revision will aim at reducing the legal uncertainty caused by national divergences, thus facilitating the role of national police and investigation authorities. It should strengthen the firearms legislative framework, for example to improve the sharing of information on firearms, reinforce their traceability, to standardize marking and to take into account the illegal trafficking through the Internet and Darknet.

Operational cooperation in tackling firearms through Europol under the EU Policy Cycle on serious and organised crime, notably within the Operational Action Plan Firearms is important and as requested by the Council should be increased.

5. Security services

In February Heads of State and Government asked MS' security services to deepen their cooperation. The Counter Terrorism Group (CTG) has intensified its work in recent months especially in respect to the foreign terrorist fighters and started a reflection on how to interact more closely with the EU without prejudice to Article 4 of the TEU. The challenge remains to find ways to design an EU information sharing environment which would allow more data to be shared. It is important for EU policy makers to understand the challenges security services face and reflect this in policy-making. The CTG held an extraordinary meeting on 18 November 2015 following the Paris attacks. The results were reported to the Council (JHA) on 20 November. The services decided to further step up their cooperation.

6. Countering the financing of terrorism

In addition to the 4th Anti-Money Laundering Directive which was adopted on 20 May 2015, on 20 November 2015 the Council invited the Commission to present proposals on a number of challenges related to terrorist financing.

The EU-US Terrorist Financing Tracking Programme (TFTP) has generated more than 14.500 intelligence leads since it came into force in 2010. 7514 intelligence leads of relevance were generated in 2015, 2765 of which specifically related to FTF.

7. Network and Information Security (NIS) Directive

The Network and Information Security (NIS) Directive, proposed by the Commission in 2013 and currently in the final stages of negotiations between the European Parliament and the Council, aims to put in place the necessary mechanisms at national and EU level to improve security levels and respond to cyber threats. The aim is to have a secure and trustworthy digital environment throughout the EU. This should include improving Member States' national cybersecurity capabilities, improving cooperation between Member States and between public and private sectors, requiring companies in critical sectors such as energy, transport, banking and health as well as key Internet services to adopt risk management practices and report major incidents to the national authorities.

The fifth, informal trilogue took place on 17 November 2015 and, bearing in mind that a high common level of cyber security is necessary to face today's challenges, the co-legislators should aim to conclude the file by the end of this year.

The EU Cybersecurity Strategy also included a number of measures aimed at promoting a Single Market for cybersecurity products together with fostering research and development investments and innovation. The development of a digital single market is also the main objective of the Commission's Digital Agenda, one pillar being strengthening online trust and security, on which the growth of the European economy and the development of a strong digital business sector depend. The Commission is currently working on the set up of a contractual Public Private Partnership on cyber security which will be based on Action 25 of Horizon 2020. For that purpose a public consultation will be launched by the end of November 2015 in order to receive input on the priorities and the side measures. Results are expected in February 2016.

In the European Agenda for Security presented by the Commission on 28 April 2015, cybercrime was prioritised together with terrorism and organised crime, given its strong cross-border dimension as well as being an area where EU action can make a real difference. The Agenda highlights the importance of full implementation of the existing EU legislation and cooperation with the private sector and the work of Europol's European Cybercrime Centre and Eurojust. Activities reviewing obstacles to criminal investigations will be needed, notably on issues of competent jurisdiction and rules on access to e-evidence and information, data retention, speeding up the mutual legal assistance (MLA) process for cybercrime investigations, private sector cooperation, implementation of existing policies on cybersecurity and EU legislation on cyber-attacks, enhancing cyber capacity building action under external assistance instruments and reviewing legislation on combatting fraud and counterfeiting of non-cash means of payment. A workshop took place at Eurojust in October 2015 on the review of the EU-US MLA agreement, in which questions related to e-evidence were discussed. E-evidence was also the topic of a conference organized by the Luxemburg Presidency in October 2015 and was discussed in CATS in November 2015 on the basis of a paper by the Presidency. It will also be discussed by Ministers of Justice during the December Council (JHA).

II. PREVENTING RADICALISATION AND SAFEGUARDING VALUES

1. Internet

In recent months the EU has stepped up significantly its work in relation to the Internet. The Europol Internet Referral Unit (IRU) set up in July has already contributed to the removal of 511 items of terrorist content (with a success rate of more than 90%). The Syrian Strategic Communication Advisory Team (SSCAT) has already provided advice and support to over half of all EU MS. The Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) has been transformed into a Centre of Excellence and funded with 25 M€ The Commission will launch a public private partnership with the Internet companies on 3 December (the Forum) to explore how to be more effective in monitoring and removing terrorist content from the internet, creating content (counter narrative) and accessing content.

For the first meeting of the Forum to be successful it will be crucial to define concrete objectives that the EU can ask the Internet companies to meet (e.g. commitment to allocate more staff to the monitoring/removal of terrorist content; free advertising to disseminate counter narrative material when there is a peak in Daesh propaganda; a financial contribution to the establishment of a foundation supporting credible voices in civil society etc.).

Based on further work on e-evidence in the EU context, at a later stage, the Forum may want to address this theme. Securing speedy and direct access from companies to digital evidence on a voluntary basis, where the legal framework permits, is critical in securing more convictions of FTF (see doc. 13689/15). Voluntary cooperation with the Internet companies is crucial for CT investigations and prosecutions by EU MS and cooperation remains difficult.

EU MS are encouraged to provide more national experts resources to Europol for the Internet Referral Unit (IRU). Exchange of information between Europol and the private sector is crucial for security purposes. As the Council requested on 20 November, trilogue partners should ensure that the final agreed text is consistent with the political expectations of Europol following Paris, in particular the mandate and objectives of the ECTC, including the IRU.

The current Commission-funded 18 month pilot project "Syria Strategic Communication Advisory Team" (SSCAT) will end in mid-2016. Because of its successful implementation and continued demand from Member States and Institutions alike the Commission has committed to a follow-up project beginning in July 2016. This new project will continue to support Member States to tackle the communications challenges related to the Foreign Fighter phenomena, but also in relation to all other communication challenges posed by radicalization and extremism. The project will enhance its service to Member States seeking to develop strategic communications capacity and support those already implementing or moving towards implementation of domestic campaigns (at national, regional and/or local level) and to provide a bespoke service to EU institutions. Crucially the network aspect of the project which has proved a particular success will continue to be strengthened and enhanced and the project will seek to share ideas, experience, best practice and where appropriate identify opportunities for Member States to lead cross-border initiatives in this field.

2. Tolerance, non-discrimination, fundamental freedoms:

An Annual Colloquium on Fundamental Rights 2015 "Tolerance and respect: preventing and combating anti-Semitic and anti-Muslim hatred in Europe" organized by the First Vice President of the Commission Timmermans took place between 1-2 October 2015. It is now important to follow up the conference with specific projects. Vice President Timmermans announced that he would appoint two coordinators: one for anti-semitism and one for Islamophobia.

In October, Commissioner Jourova and the Luxemburg Presidency with the support of the EU CTC organized a conference on "Criminal justice response to radicalisation", in which Eurojust also actively participated. Council Conclusions are being finalized. It will be important to invest in the development of rehabilitation programmes for foreign terrorist fighters inside and outside prison. As a follow-up to the conference, the Council (JHA) on 20 November 2015 adopted Conclusions on enhancing the criminal justice response to radicalisation leading to terrorism and violent extremism, which inter alia identify good practices, mobilize a number of relevant EU bodies for the exchange of experience and invite the Commission to support Member States to develop rehabilitation programmes through expert advice from the RAN-Centre of Excellence and funding.

Some weeks after the attacks in Paris and Copenhagen, France and the Commission called for an extraordinary meeting of Education Ministers in Paris, on 17 March. A dedicated declaration on Promoting citizenship and the common values of freedom, tolerance and non-discrimination through education was adopted. The Commission will present soon concrete measures to support Member States implementing it. Flagship projects as well as dedicated calls within the Erasmus + (€14 billion until 2020) will be foreseen. The objectives of the Paris declaration have been given priority for the Erasmus + funding as from 2016 already. Projects having an impact at the grassroots level on education, sports, youth and culture will be presented. Moreover, the potential of the E-twinning platform (an online network of 300 000 teachers throughout Europe) could be enlarged to cover schools from third countries. It is important that the Commission presents ambitious initiatives, although the topic is not included in the 2016 work programme.

The Fundamental Rights Agency in cooperation with the Austrian Federal Ministry of the Interior and with the participation of the EU CTC will organise a workshop, "Towards an EU Communication Strategy to promote respect, non-discrimination, fundamental rights, freedoms and solidarity throughout the EU," on 14/15 December 2015. The purpose is to develop a toolbox for communication strategies to promote respect, non-discrimination, fundamental rights, freedoms and solidarity, including narratives to positively communicate values as enshrined in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.

III. COOPERATING WITH OUR INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS

DAESH is ultimately the product of two things: political failings in Iraq; and the conflict in Syria between the regime and the opposition. Tackling the group in its heartland in Syria and Iraq will require the integral involvement of forces which will be recognised as liberators: Sunni Arabs. To generate sufficient numbers of such forces to have an impact on the ground depends on political progress in Iraq and Syria. In Iraq, the EU should therefore support PM Abadi as he seeks to deliver political reforms which bridge sectarian divides. And in Syria it means continued strong support for the UN and de Mistura's efforts to broker a solution involving the regional powers as well as exploring increased assistance to the opposition in the liberated areas.

In February 2015, the Foreign Affairs Council decided to prioritise CT engagement with the MENA region, the Balkans and Turkey all of which have been destabilised by the rise of DAESH. The conclusions were in line with the EU's strategies on foreign fighters and EU regional strategy for Syria and Iraq as well as the ISIL/Da'esh threat.

The EEAS and the Commission with the support of the EU CTC have started implementing the FAC Conclusions: CT/security experts have been deployed in Morocco, Tunisia, Nigeria, Jordan, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Turkey. CT experts to Egypt and Algeria will deploy soon. Experts' workshops have been organised in Lebanon and Turkey to identify the CT needs of these countries. The first enhanced security and CT dialogue has taken place in Tunisia. Several financing programmes (regional, thematic, bilateral) have been finalised to beef up the CT capacities of the MENA countries. Concrete projects have started recently (e.g. 23 M€ for security sector reform in Tunisia, 3.5 M€ to support the Office of the National Security Adviser of Iraq, 5 M€ to strengthen law enforcement and criminal justice capacities to address the foreign fighters threat, two projects (5 M€ and 1,675 M€) to strengthen prevention of radicalization in the Maghreb and the Sahel), other projects are in the final stages of preparation (such as 3.3 M€ to set up a Strategic Communication Task Force, 2,5 M€ Counter-Terrorism Training Partnership implemented by CEPOL, CT MENA 14 M€ projects on prevention of radicalization on Jordan (9 M€ and Lebanon (2,5 M€), Euromed Police IV, aviation security in MENA and Africa 7 M€, community engagement in Tunisia 2 M€).

A comprehensive CT assistance package for Tunisia is under preparation and will be discussed in the PSC on 26 November 2015. The third Euro-Mediterranean Foreign Terrorist Fighters meeting took place in Baghdad. In September the High Representative signed a memorandum of understanding with the Organisation for Islamic Cooperation which includes a commitment to closer cooperation on counter-terrorism and violent extremism. At the end of November, the EU will address the same issues in a meeting with the League of Arab States. A CT working group is being set up and actions for closer cooperation on CT are being identified.

The EEAS, together with the EU CTC and the Commission will further intensify its efforts with the MENA countries, Turkey and the Western Balkans, building on the progress we have made over the past 10 months. It will be important to mobilize additional resources to offer comprehensive CT assistance packages as is done with Tunisia. CT and CVE should play an important role in the upcoming programming of assistance for 2016. In particular, the EU will:

- aim to agree a joint CT action plan with the Lebanese Government (the EEAS DSG as co-chair and the EU CTC will participate in the CT political dialogue meeting to finalise the plan between 17-18 December) which then needs to be implemented with capacity building projects and other CT cooperation activities.
- aim to draw up a joint CT action plan with Jordan, for discussion at a CT workshop in Amman on 15-16 December, which will then be implemented with assistance measures;
- implement rapidly the list of joint actions agreed with the Tunisian Government, focusing on strengthening the strategic approach to CT, countering violent extremism, border security and security sector reform;
- accelerate the start of the 7m€aviation security project (IcSP long term) to improve aviation security measures in the MENA region and Africa, focusing on Egypt and Turkey in the first instance (given that both countries are prime destinations for European tourists) in early 2016. The EU will also explore to develop a broader programme of capacity building assistance with the Egyptian Government;
- encourage the Turkish Government to engage with EU proposals to intensify engagement on FTF travel, terrorist financing and countering violent extremism. The EU will hold a CT political dialogue with Turkey in the first quarter of 2016 to finalise a joint action plan;
- in January the EU CTC/EEAS will visit Morocco and Algeria (CT workshop) to develop ideas to strengthen CT cooperation;
- it will also be a priority to implement the Iraq/Syria/Counter-ISIL Strategy

- support further projects within the scope of the Slovenian led Western Balkans CT initiative (IPA programme), particularly in the area of countering violent extremism (especially on how to handle). returning FTFs The EU should also work with the Western Balkan States to reduce arms trafficking in the region. This could be achieved by special firearms amnesties and stricter enforcement of national legislation.
- A number of MENA countries and Turkey have expressed interest in greater engagement with the EU Radicalisation Awareness Network's Centre of Excellence. The EU should encourage exchanges between the RAN, the MENA region, the Western Balkans and Turkey as soon as possible, building on the progress achieved in September where the CVE Summit agreed to adopt a number of best practices based on the experience of EU Member States. Many of these recommendations are likely to appear in the UN Secretary General's Action Plan for Preventing Violent Extremism.
- The EU agencies Europol, Eurojust, CEPOL have started to increase their cooperation with the MENA countries, the Western Balkans and Turkey on CT. This needs to be further intensified and budgetary resources should be allocated, as appropriate. The EU CTC, in consultation with the Commission services, the EEAS and the relevant EU agencies presented a paper to COSI in November 2015 on how to do this, including the questions of liaison magistrates and officers.
- The EU will continue to use its membership in the various GCTF, G7 Roma/Lyon and anti-ISIL Coalition to inform discussions and decision making, shape policy, help foster coordination and help assess further needs, including that of capacity building of third states. More specifically, there are currently preparations ongoing with the Turkish Co-Chair of the GCTF Horn of Africa Working Group to address the Youth dimension at this year's Spring meeting of the Horn of Africa Working Group. The EU intends to actively contribute to the work around the US-initiated 'life cycle' initiative, the new US-lead clearing house mechanism and the GCTF NL-Chair mapping of ongoing assistance. The EU will furthermore carefully study the upcoming UN Secretary General Action Plan for the Prevention of Violent Extremism and identify ways to ensure swift implementation. The EEAS is in contact with partners on furthering in the year to come the work on countering of financing of terrorism and of addressing the phenomenon of foreign terrorist fighters.

- Finally, the EU should intensify its effort to improve perceptions towards Europe across the Arab neighbouring region, drawing on the expertise of the Syria Strategic Communications Advisory Team (SSCAT). Adequate funding is important. It would be important to appoint an Arabic speaking communications adviser based in the MENA region to increase outreach in major media and assist delegations. Youth initiatives are crucial as well, such as exploring to set up a virtual exchange programme with the MENA countries, similar to President Obama's Stevens virtual exchange programme.
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