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From: Presidency
To: Delegations

Subject: **Overview of the COTER activities during the first semester of 2019**

Delegations will find in the annex an overview of the activities of the COTER Working Party in Preventing/Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) and Counter Terrorism (CT) during the first semester of 2019, submitted by the Romanian Presidency.

Romanian Presidency of Council of the EU

Overview of the COTER activities during the first semester of 2019

In full accordance with the mandate of COTER, which states that the working party is the main advisory body to the Council in the field of CT and P/CVE external aspects, the Romanian Presidency programme of work (WK 1079/2019 INIT) has built on the work and results of previous presidencies, as well as on the exchanges of views with the Member States during COTER meetings. Both the programme of work and the agendas of the meetings have been designed in close cooperation with the European External Action Service (EEAS), EU IntCen, the EU Counter-terrorism Coordinator (CTC), the Council Secretariat and the European Commission.

Under the Romanian Presidency, five formal COTER meetings (one extraordinary meeting) took place in Brussels, an informal EU-NATO (seminar) meeting, two joint meetings with the TWP and one spotlight event.

The EU's Global Strategy for European Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS) as well as the Council conclusions adopted by the Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC) in June 2017 guided the work of the group. Consistent with the motto "Cohesion, a common European value", the work of the COTER for the past six months has been focused on taking forward the priorities of the Romanian Presidency of the Council of the European Union placed under the heading "*Europe of Safety*", as well as those that fall under the section "*Europe as a Stronger, Global actor*".

As announced in the COTER work programme distributed in January 2019, creating synergies, exploring new ways to bring together topical issues related to combating terrorism and seeking consistency with the EU policies and strategies were at the heart of the Romanian Presidency of the COTER with the aim of making the activity of the group more coherent with other working groups and committees.

Consequently, the activity of the group was organised in three main axes of work throughout the geographic and thematic priorities already established in the guiding documents and deriving from the terrorist incidents presented at every COTER meeting:

1. Strengthening the links between the internal and external dimensions of security on counter-terrorism

The Romanian Presidency aimed to strengthen the link between internal and external dimensions of security on counterterrorism. During the two TWP/COTER meetings that were organized, on January 16 and March 20, we revisited some of the suggestions proposed at the end of 2017, with a view to assessing progress achieved and to see whether and how to further increase the coherence of work between the internal and external dimensions. The discussions were based on two Presidency papers¹.

The debate showed that most Member States found the co-operation well-functioning, but with room for improvement. Given the increased interconnections between the work strands of the two working parties, more regular joint meetings would allow for focused and substantive debate and provide increased consistency amongst activities relevant for both the internal and the external side. Thereby duplication and overlap between the agendas/work of the two would be avoided and coherence would be maximized. Delegations also emphasized the need to have feedback from the network of CT experts, and better integrating/involving them in the discussions of the joint meetings, at least at TWP/COTER level.

The general conclusion of the debate was that there should be at least one joint meeting per semester; where possible, including CT/security experts from 3rd countries; when appropriate, joint input should be given from TWP/COTER to other Council preparatory bodies, such as COSI and PSC. Based on the request for more visibility on the work of CT experts and more coordination on the ground among liaison officers, CT experts, police attachés and other relevant EU and Member States' officers, EEAS indicated it was looking into the possibilities of issuing a yearly report on the activities of the CT/security experts.

¹ *"Strengthening the links between the internal and external dimensions of security on counterterrorism"* (WK 78/19 INIT), discussed at the TWP/COTER meeting on 16 January 2019, and *"Increasing synergy between internal and external activities in CT area - TWP/ COTER meeting on cooperation with the Western Balkans"* (WK 464/2019 INIT) discussed at the TWP/COTER meeting on 20 March 2019.

The Presidency sees great value in the targeted use of internal EU security tools in priority third countries or regions, and in exploring new ways to make best use of them for supporting the EU external action. As a *proof-of-principle* for its approach and in order to apply results of the discussions in practice, the Presidency has prepared a dedicated discussion on EU cooperation and engagement in the Western Balkans, from a comprehensive perspective, during the TWP/COTER meeting on 20 March 2019. The state of play of CT and P/CVE efforts in Western Balkans was outlined both by EU institutions (Commission, EEAS, INTCEN, Europol), but also by detailed presentations from regional EU CT/security expert from the EU delegation in Sarajevo and regionally focused organizations and platforms (WBCTi-platform and the Regional Cooperation Council). **2. Bringing partners within the EU closer together**

As it was widely noticed during the meetings, we made extensive use of EU IntCen presentations. It is our belief that any good debate on a certain topic should have a solid background. On this basis, member states can interact or take informed decisions. Up to a point, the terrorist incidents document served the same purpose. A special note of appreciation goes to IntCen experts for sharing their knowledge with us and for presenting the overview of the threat assessment.

The dialogue we had with EU SATCEN uncovered a potential that can be developed further in this line of work. The inputs from Europol were also widely appreciated.

The presence of the CT expert for Western Balkans in the March joint meeting with TWP has contributed to the overall knowledge of the two groups on the EU cooperation with the region. Likewise, the dialogue with the EU Special Representative for Central Asia a few days before the release of the new strategy for this region contributed to acknowledging the opportunities to strengthen the links with partners in order to foster resilience.

3. Further promoting the mainstreaming of the counter-terrorism issues

During the first semester of 2019, one of the aims of the Presidency was to strengthen coordination among MS and with the institutions on the external dimension of counter-terrorism activities.

In this respect, the Presidency allocated a large amount of time to discussing the agendas of the CT Dialogues, allowing the MS more visibility on the substance of the rounds of dialogues. We appreciate the EEAS for its openness and for transparent approach. During the Romanian Presidency of the COTER four CT dialogues were organized, with the US, Ethiopia, Israel and Tunisia. A general meeting with CT experts, to which MS were invited, took place in January 2019.

The presentation of the mapping of EU funded external CT and P/CVE activities for 2018 launched a useful debate on the links between the priority areas and the money spent for resilience activities.

For the purpose of mainstreaming P/CVE and CT efforts into wider EU CFSP/CSDP policies, throughout the semester COTER was reinforced for various agenda points by COTRA, COEST, COWEB, COAFR, MaMa and MOG delegates. Debates were organised in COTER ahead of important visits, events or release of EU policy papers thus linking the activity of the group with the political reality of the Union.

Additionally, information exchange at COTER level, at the request of the Member States, on planned level of participation at upcoming counter – terrorism events² allowed for a more structured approach and facilitated decisions on the appropriate involvement of MS.

²

“International and Regional Cooperation on Countering Terrorism and its Financing through Illicit Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime” (Dushanbe, 16-17 May 2019), High-level Inter-Regional Conference on ‘Whole-of-Society-Approach’ to Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism’ (Ulaanbaatar, 20-21 June 2019); African Regional High-Level Conference on Counter-Terrorism and the Prevention of Violent Extremism conducive to Terrorism (Nairobi, 10-11 July 2019).

Highlights of COTER activity during the Romanian Presidency

a) Prospects for enhanced dialogue with NATO

On the basis of the existing framework³, the Romanian Presidency has continued to explore ways and modalities of **strengthening the dialogue between EU and NATO**, in full respect of the decision-making autonomy and procedures of both organisations and in close cooperation with the Member States. In this respect, the seminar on *Opportunities and perspectives for EU - NATO cooperation in strengthening resilience to terrorism in the partner states* was organized on May 8, 2019. Along with the mutual information of the two communities (PC-NATO and COTER) on the projects carried out at the level of each organization, PRES RO aimed to bring into discussion the opportunities for concrete cooperation in the field, especially from a practical perspective. For the Romanian Presidency, the discussion has underlined that the support for such common events and for exploring greater synergies is slowly but steadily increasing. Moreover, the mutual visibility on each other projects and priorities will allow greater opportunities for cooperation in the field, particularly in assisting third countries in building and enhancing capacities.

b) Cooperation with international organizations

The Presidency aimed for further **synergies with other relevant international organisations** such as the UN, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and the as well as with regional initiatives and formats of cooperation (RCC, IISG, WBCTI). In this context, a **Framework on Counter-Terrorism between the UN and the EU**, has been examined by COTER during an extraordinary meeting on March 20, 2019 and endorsed by decision making bodies. The document has been signed in New York in the context of 24 April EU-UN CT dialogue.

³ Joint Declaration by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the Common set of new proposals on the implementation of the Joint Declaration.

Additionally, the **OSCE presentation** in our June meeting was focused both on specific OSCE agenda and activities, but also on exploring new strands of cooperation between the two organizations. The potential of the OSCE, as the largest regional organization, promoting a comprehensive concept of security, was revealed during the debate. Appreciation was expressed for the OSCE involvement and particularly for the transition from the analysis phase to the operational one. We noted OSCE's involvement in providing operational assistance, information campaigns, and regular reporting to the OSCE Security Committee on the ongoing and future work on combating violent extremism and of radicalization leading to terrorism (VERLT). A special emphasis was placed on the organization's focus on creating capacities of participating states to detect the trans-national travel of FTFs, as well as on the issue of returning FTF families. The integration of gender dimension in OSCE activities (both CT and P/CVE) was highly appreciated. A very distinct line of work involves the NGOs and religious leaders.

c) Increased focus on new developments

COTER has been exposed during the first semester of 2019 to presentations focusing on new ways of financing terrorist activities, provided by EU SATCEN, Europol and Interpol. The use of cryptocurrency, smuggling artefacts and cultural heritage were given proper attention. The speakers pointed out that, from the counter-terrorism perspective, the protection of cultural goods is relevant not only as a form of terrorist financing, but also as a protection against a direct attack on the cultural values of humanity. Continuing the debate on ideology at COTER meetings yielded concrete results taken forward by the CTC.

We also explored potential new threats coming from actors that are not necessarily in the spotlight. The main terrorist attacks with EU citizens as victims were discussed in the COTER meetings.

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The Romanian Presidency team would like to thank all the partners and MS for their contributions and expresses its readiness to continue to work closely with them. Also, we are ready to work further in the Trio format on the initiatives put forward during the Romanian Presidency of COTER.