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NOTE

From:	Presidency
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Managing the infiltration of individuals posing potential terrorist threat to EU internal security

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Introduction

Armed conflicts, geopolitical tensions and prolonged instability in countries such as Iran, Syria, Iraq, Afghanistan, Ukraine and other regions, particularly in the Sahel region and the Horn of Africa, continue to generate migratory flows towards the European Union.

While the vast majority of migrants do not pose security risks, Member States continue to face the challenge of identifying and countering the threat posed by individuals potentially linked to terrorist groups or activities, as well as violent extremist networks. Terrorist actors may attempt to exploit migratory movements and asylum systems to enter the EU undetected and move freely within the Schengen area, thereby complicating threat detection and risk assessment.

The Council conclusions on future priorities for strengthening the joint counterterrorism efforts of the European Union and its Member States, approved on 12 December 2024[1], stressed the need to ensure robust border control and security, including systematic checks of all travellers against relevant databases at the external borders of the European Union, leveraging biometric data and other available technologies to prevent the undetected entry of individuals posing a terrorist threat on EU territory. To that end, a strengthening the EU's overall capacity in the area of counterterrorism, border management, and immigration and asylum authorities was needed, together with coordinated efforts to detect and prevent the infiltration of third-country individuals with connections to terrorist organisations at the earliest stages of their entry into the Union. This has been repeated as part of the recommendations in the EU threat assessment in the field of counterterrorism[2]. Replying to this political call, the communication on ProtectEU: Agenda to prevent and counter terrorism, adopted by the Commission on 26 February 2026, also emphasises that the strong protection of external borders is the EU's first line of defence against terrorist travel. Building on the existing frameworks and systems, the communication identifies a number of key actions to further impede terrorist travel.

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The volatile situation in Syria raises security concerns due to the possible resurgence of the ISIL/Da'esh terrorist organisation and the uncertain future of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) still in detention facilities in Northeast Syria and those transferred to Iraq. Further concerns relate to reported releases and escapes from the Al-Hol camp in Northeast Syria of family members of ISIL/Da'esh fighters, a number of whom are reported to have been radicalised and many are currently unaccounted for. Attention must also be given to the individuals remaining in the Al-Roj camp and to the uncertainty surrounding the camp's future management and security arrangements.

The escalation of the conflict involving Iran, with its widening regional spill-over, is likely to generate new displacement dynamics across the Middle East that, if protracted, could translate into increased migratory pressures towards the European Union.

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1 16820/24 (see in particular point 32).
2 For the most recent assessment, see 14557/26.

Prevention: early identification

To contribute to better external border management, internal security and justice, the EU is equipping itself with large-scale interoperable IT systems. It is crucial for EU Member States to ensure the implementation and use of the existing and future, effective detection mechanisms, as the early identification of individuals who may pose a security threat is central to preventing infiltration into EU territory. Timely information-sharing and close coordination, as well as ensuring systematic checks of relevant EU, national and international systems at its external borders, are of paramount importance in supporting those efforts. Within recent years the EU has been improving Member States' ability to detect and stop terrorists at the external borders with the implementation of border management structures, including the development of modernised and interoperable systems for security and border management and also enhancing cooperation both with both EU and non-EU countries.

This approach relies on EU large-scale IT systems and interoperability components - such as the Schengen Information System (SIS), the European Travel Information and Authorisation System (ETIAS), the Entry/Exit System (EES), which is in the process of a phased implementation (it is expected to be fully deployed at all our external borders by April 2026; the new Eurodac, the European Criminal Records Information System for third-country nationals (ECRIS-TCN), and the revised VIS (Visa Information System). Enhanced travel information, provided by Advanced Passenger Information (API) and Passenger Name Record (PNR), adds to the EU's operational toolbox and constitutes a key instrument for the early detection and analysis of terrorist travel patterns. Analytical support and risk indicators provided by EU agencies, such as Europol and Frontex, in accordance with their respective mandates, and eu-LISA in the area of technical solutions, strengthen the capacity of Member States to address current and emerging threats.

The new screening process**3**, which will apply from June 2026, will facilitate the identification of third-country nationals who have crossed the external borders illegally or are staying illegally on Member States' territory without having undergone entry checks.

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3 Regulation (EU) 2024/1356 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 14 May 2024 introducing the screening of third-country nationals at the external borders (OJ L, 2024/1356, 22.5.2024).

The entry into operation of the new 'information alerts on third-country nationals in the interest of the Union' in SIS pursuant to Regulation (EU) 2018/1862 as amended by Regulation (EU)2022/1190 is planned in the third quarter of 2026. According to its newly published communication on an Agenda to prevent and counter terrorism[4], the Commission will propose a way forward on a 'post-hit procedure' to further share SIS-hits on terrorism-related alerts with volunteering Member States, and it will also assess the application of refusal of entry alerts in the framework of the overall evaluation of the SIS[5] and update the SIS Handbook[6] as necessary[7]. Moreover, the Commission intends to continue working closely with Member States to advance Member State cooperation and information sharing on individuals who could potentially pose a terrorist or violent extremist threat ('Gefährder'). In addition, the Commission is exploring options to expand the travel information framework to other modes of transport such as maritime and land transport, in line with international initiatives, and tailored solutions for private flights.

Risk assessment and the monitoring of infiltrated high-risk individuals

Timely risk assessment and the continuous monitoring of high-risk individuals remain essential.

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5 In accordance with point 9 of Article 74 of Regulation (EU) 2018/1862 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 November 2018 on the establishment, operation and use of the Schengen Information System (SIS) in the field of police cooperation and judicial cooperation in criminal matters (OJ L 312, 7.12.2018, p. 56).

6 Commission Recommendation establishing a Practical Handbook to be used by Member States' competent authorities and SIRENE Bureaux when carrying out tasks related to the Schengen Information System ('SIS Handbook') 31.3.2023 C(2023) 2152 final

Disengagement, deradicalisation and rehabilitation programmes, established protocols and close cooperation among competent authorities (asylum services, migration authorities, intelligence services, community police, social services, etc.) are key components for a sustained threat mitigation process. Special attention must be paid to those convicted under terrorism charges or radicalised within prisons during and after release in order to ensure proper reintegration and due monitoring. The EU Knowledge Hub on prevention of radicalisation will maintain support to Members States and priority third countries in the development of knowledge and capacity building in the prison and probation framework. It will aim to provide concrete tools, in line with the Commission's communication on an Agenda to prevent and counter terrorism, such as a prerelease assessment grid to be put at the disposal of the Member States. The tool has the dual aims of ensuring proper monitoring after release and providing indications for possible rehabilitation interventions.

Returns

It is crucial to ensure the efficient and swift return of third country nationals who do either not or no longer have a right to stay. The return of high-risk individuals constitutes an essential tool for managing security threats. The proposed Return Regulation**8**, on which the Council adopted its general approach on 8 December, is now waiting to start interinstitutional negotiations. The Regulation should promote the efficient return of individuals posing a security risk, by introducing firmer rules regarding their return. The Commission will also promote the efficient return of such individuals through the work of its Return Coordinator and the High-Level Network for Returns.

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Since March 2023, Member States have been required to introduce a return alert in the Schengen Information System (SIS) on third-country nationals subject to return decisions. This should be

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done without delay following the issuance of a return decision. The return alert should also indicate whether "the return decision is issued in relation to a third-country national who poses a threat to public policy, public security or national security". Hence, this "security flag" can also contribute to the rapid identification of persons posing a security risk and channel them into the appropriate return procedure.

Cooperation with relevant third countries remains an important component, both in relation to operational matters - such as returns and readmission - and in relation to information exchange.

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Questions to delegations

1) In your view, besides the full implementation and use of current tools and systems, what could be further improved at EU or national level to mitigate the risk of infiltration?

2) What key trends and challenges do you currently observe at national level concerning the infiltration, identification, monitoring and management of high-risk individuals?

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