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Subject: Council Conclusions on EU External Action on Counter-terrorism (19 June 2017)

Delegations will find in the Annex the Council Conclusions on EU External Action on Counter-terrorism, adopted by the Council at its 3551st meeting held on 19 June 2017.

Council Conclusions on EU External Action on Counter-terrorism

1. The Council reiterates its strong and unequivocal condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, committed by whomever and for whatever purpose. Terrorism constitutes one of the most serious threats to international peace and security. The Council is appalled by the heinous terrorist attacks that have taken place all over the world, pays respect to the victims, and expresses its deepest condolences to the victims', families and friends. The Council also reaffirms that terrorism cannot and should not be associated with any religion, nationality, civilization or ethnic group. Recent terrorist attacks within the EU and further afield remind us that countering terrorism and preventing radicalization remain priority challenges to the EU and its citizens. The combination of home grown terrorists operating in networks; terrorists acting alone; foreign terrorist fighter returnees be they men, women or minors; attacks directed, encouraged or inspired by Da'esh and Al Qaeda; cyber related challenges; and the propagation of ideologies and beliefs that leads to radicalization and violent extremism, are parts of the evolving threat picture.
2. The EU has a vital interest in continuing to work with bilateral, regional and multilateral partners in countering the fast evolving, global and increasingly diverse threat and stands ready to address this threat in an ambitious yet realistic manner. While cooperating with partner countries and international organizations, the EU will evaluate and adapt its strategies given the ever-changing nature of the threat. EU external efforts must be tailor made and, where necessary, developed in an incremental way, taking into account the needs and capacity of its partners. Complementarity with other international and regional partners and bilateral efforts of EU Member States is essential.

3. Recalling Member States' primary responsibility for addressing terrorism, the EU as such can add value in many ways. Counter-terrorism (CT) and Countering/Preventing Violent Extremism (C/PVE) should be embedded in the various EU strategies and policies. The EU is particularly well positioned to counter terrorism and violent extremism in a unique and integrated manner with the extensive set of instruments at its disposal. These instruments allow the EU to address the root causes of radicalization, to support social and economic development, the rule of law, good governance and respect for human rights. Development and security instruments are central in this regard. The particular situation of women and girls should be taken into account.
4. The FAC Conclusions of 9 February 2015 remain the cornerstone of the EU's external engagements on CT. The instruments created through those conclusions have demonstrated their merits and should be strengthened and adapted to respond to the new trends and challenges. EU citizens continue to expect responsible and determined action. EU efforts in countering terrorism are a priority in the EU Global Strategy, which recalls that security at home depends on peace and stability on our borders, and underlines that EU external action must reflect, complement and contribute to EU's internal policy.

Counter-terrorism Structures

5. The Council welcomes the consolidation and establishment of dedicated EU capacity to enhance CT cooperation – notably the European Counter Terrorism Centre at Europol, the CT Division within the European External Action Service (EEAS) and the network of CT/Security experts posted to 13 EU Delegations. These structures usefully complement the ongoing CT activities of Member States, the European Commission, the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator and EU Agencies active in the field of Justice and Home Affairs. The Council reaffirms the role of EU INTCEN as the hub for strategic intelligence assessment at EU level including on CT.

6. In line with the current expectation from EU citizens for the EU to strengthen its response to the persistent terrorist threat, the Council calls for the further strengthening of EU capacities to ensure their long term sustainability and business continuity. Taking account of an evaluation of the experience acquired to date, the Council calls for the broadening of the geographic scope and functional scope where appropriate, of the network of counter-terrorism/security experts to include the Horn of Africa, Central and South East Asia. Their local coordination, support, and policy development role among member states' missions should be further reinforced.

Internal-external nexus

7. The Council welcomes ongoing work to further enhance the linkages between internal and external security and to make progress towards the implementation of the Global Strategy and an effective and genuine EU Security Union. This is in line with the Renewed EU Internal Security Strategy and the Roadmap on strengthening ties between the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and Freedom, Security and Justice. The Council also welcomes the European Agenda on Security and Migration, and the Security Union Communication.

8. The revised mandates of Europol and the European Border and Coast Guard Agency in particular will also allow these agencies to contribute more effectively to the fight against terrorism and to ensure greater coherence between internal and external actions in the field of security. The Council highlights that it has approved an extension of the Feira missions to the fight against terrorism in its May 2017 conclusions and that such an extension should strengthen the link between internal and external security. Therefore, the Council recalls the role of civilian and military CSDP missions and operations in combating terrorism through enhancing security, stability, border control and security sector reform, in building counter-terrorism capacity and information sharing. It calls for enhanced cooperation and identification of synergies between CSDP and JHA actions. Without prejudice to Member States' sole responsibility for national security the Council welcomes ongoing efforts to strengthen EU action on counter-terrorism by enhancing law enforcement and military cooperation, within a rule-based order, including through exchange of information among relevant national actors, which form a key part of the rule-of-law response. The Council stresses the importance of supporting Interpol, by sharing appropriate information where appropriate and legally possible and of developing information sharing tools such as Advanced Passenger Information systems (API) and Automatic Fingerprint Identification Systems (AFIS).

Strengthened cooperation with MENA, Western Balkans, Turkey, Sahel and the Horn of Africa

9. The Council welcomes the EU's expanded and reinforced CT cooperation through dedicated political dialogues on counter-terrorism with priority partner countries in the Middle East and North Africa. These efforts should be maintained and further developed as a matter of priority with a view to developing effective counter-terrorism partnerships with these priority countries with a targeted use of internal security tools. Cooperation with the Western Balkans and Turkey should continue in line with the GAC Conclusions of December 2015.

10. The Council recalls the importance of addressing CT in the relevant programming of external cooperation instruments. The Council welcomes the regional CT projects which have been put in place and calls for their full implementation. The Council calls on Member States to mobilise expertise to implement EU CT programmes and invites the Commission, to make maximum use of all existing possibilities for the swift and coordinated implementation of CT projects. The mobilising of twinning and TAIEX projects should be increased. The Council welcomes the significant increase in financial support for CT/P/CVE, which amounted to € 225 million by the end of 2016.
11. In line with its conclusions on strengthening the EU internal security's external dimension in the Western Balkans, the Council reaffirms the importance of strengthening the EU's operational partnership with the countries of the Western Balkan region on CT and P/CVE through the Western Balkans Counter-Terrorism Initiative – (WBCTi), and the Integrative Internal Security Governance (IISG), which also includes the fight against transnational organised crime and border security. The Council also stresses the importance of joint and effective efforts on countering the illicit trafficking of arms and the movements of foreign fighters as well as countering extremist ideological influences in the Western Balkans.
12. The Council highlights the importance of enhanced CT engagement, including through the relevant regional fora and mechanisms, with the Sahel and Horn of Africa in developing their capability and sharing expertise on CT, P/CVE and addressing regional security threats. The Council recalls the support given to African initiatives, capacities and operations to fight terrorism and prevent and counter violent extremism through EU various instruments (African peace facility, CSDP, IcSP, EU Emergency Trust Fund for Africa) and reiterates the importance of initiatives such as the G5 Sahel Joint Force, the Multinational Joint Task Force or the AMISOM, that aim to foster coordinated regional responses and local appropriation. The Council stresses the importance for the EU to improve its ability to build security and defense capacities in Africa and where appropriate include CT in CSDP missions and operations.

13. The Council welcomes the ongoing work by the High Representative and the Commission to step up strategic communications and invites them to continue strengthening the EU instruments to address communication challenges more effectively. In this regard, it welcomes new reinforcements to strengthen the capacity of the StratComms Task Force South, established in 2015 with the objective of improving communications and outreach in the southern neighbourhood, including in Arabic, and developing and promoting positive narratives about the EU and its policies. In this process, we can draw on the expertise of the European Strategic Communications Network (ESCN).
14. The Council is concerned by the radicalisation of vulnerable youths, and invites the High Representative and the Commission to increase the focus on education, intercultural dialogue, strengthening of autonomous and critical civil society, job creation and regional youth exchange programmes for the EU and MENA: the virtual Erasmus programme connecting European and Arab youth announced by the Commission in 2016 should be launched as quickly and ambitiously as possible. In addition, exchanges between schools in the EU and in MENA countries, Turkey and the Western Balkans through the e-Twinning platform should be further developed and scholarships for youth from the Arab world should be increased.

Strengthened international cooperation

15. The Council welcomes the EU's efforts to strengthen outreach, cooperation and coordination on counter-terrorism with key strategic partners such as the US, Australia, Canada and Schengen partners. Cooperation with regional and multilateral bodies including the United Nations (UN), OSCE, Council of Europe, NATO, INTERPOL, the African Union (AU), the Global Coalition against Da'esh, the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF) and its Horn of Africa Working Group, the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), ECOWAS, the G7, the G5 Sahel, ASEAN, the League of Arab States (LAS) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) remain key. The Council notes the importance of engagement with other relevant actors including the Gulf States, Israel and also, in line with our guiding principles, Russia. The Council further underlines the importance of continued outreach, dialogue and cooperation with Afghanistan, Central and Southeast Asia, China, India, Indonesia, Iran, Nigeria, and Pakistan.

16. The Council welcomes current reform efforts at the UN and by the Secretary General to establish an Office for Counter-Terrorism. The Council reiterates its interest and support for a strong and efficient UN that drives the important global counter-terrorism agenda, taking a balanced approach across the four pillars of the UN Global CT Strategy. The Council encourages practical cooperation and coordination between the EU and the UN in areas of mutual interest at both headquarter and field levels, through close cooperation with the UN bodies involved in CT, including the newly established Office for Counter-Terrorism and the UN Counterterrorism Committee Executive Directorate (UNCTED), by drawing *inter alia* on the capability needs assessments that UNCTED conducts with the governments of relevant third countries as a basis for EU assistance. The Council emphasises its full support for the UN Secretary General's Plan of Action for Preventing Violent Extremism.
17. The Council welcomes the efforts of the GCTF to address the evolving threat of violent extremism, and to streamline and focus on implementation and to cooperate closely with the UN. The EU will continue its comprehensive support of the various work strands of the GCTF, including those of GCTF-inspired institutes – the International Institute for Justice and Rule of Law in Malta; *Hedayah*, the International Centre of Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism based in Abu Dhabi; and the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) in Geneva. The EU will use its co-Chair role of the Horn of Africa Capacity Building Working Group to help address targeted capacity needs through enhanced coordination, mobilisation of resources and consider how to reinforce regional initiatives.
18. The Council recalls the potential for EU cooperation with NATO in relevant areas, as reflected in the December 2016 Council Conclusions on the common set of proposals for the implementation of the Joint Declaration signed by President Tusk, President Juncker and NATO SG Stoltenberg in Warsaw on 8 July 2016. The Council welcomes the decision by NATO to enhance the Alliance's contribution in countering global terrorism through its support for the Global Coalition against Da'esh, of which the EU is also a partner.

19. The Council welcomes the efforts of the Global Coalition against Da'esh. EU support for immediate as well as long term stabilization of legitimate and inclusive political structures in post Da'esh period in Iraq and in Syria will be crucial. The Council agrees to step up capacity building and Security Sector Reform work in Iraq, including through synergies with the existing programme on coordination and information sharing among Iraqi law enforcement and intelligence services and other projects aimed at developing Iraq's counter-terrorism and law enforcement capabilities, in line with the UN CT needs assessment for Iraq. It will also be crucial to step up work to deny Da'esh and other terrorist organisations new safe havens. Strategic communication is equally vital and potential complementarities between existing projects of the Global Coalition's Communication Cell and those of the EU in, for example, Jordan, Lebanon and Tunisia, should be developed.

Strengthening the EU Response in Key thematic areas

20. The Council calls for increased engagement in the field of P/CVE, including at the global level. The Council emphasises its full support for the UN Secretary General Plan of Action for Preventing Violent Extremism and the development of national and regional PVE action plans. The Council notes that numerous countries have recently, or are in the course of establishing or revising their CT and their P/CVE strategies and policies. It calls for systematic mainstreaming of P/CVE into political dialogues and assistance programmes. Full advantage must be taken of the updated OECD guidelines deeming P/CVE funds and programmes eligible Official Development Assistance (ODA). Particular focus should be placed on the role of women, youth, civil society, victims of terrorism, and religious and community leaders as change agents in society. The Council emphasises the importance of effective co-ordination of all activity relating to P/CVE, including the sharing of research and analysis, collective lobbying and engagement, and the development of joint interventions, programmes and projects in support of partners' P/CVE action plans. The Council welcomes the strengthening of the Radicalisation Awareness Network through the establishment of a centre of excellence and its external engagement with priority countries, as well as the ongoing reflections on the further strengthening of EU capacities in this domain.

21. The Council notes the growing challenges presented by online terrorist and extremist content and emphasizes the need to effectively address online recruitment and radicalisation. The Council encourages Communication Service Providers, social media companies, broadcasters and other industry bodies to steadily increase their ongoing efforts to address these issues at a greater pace and scale, according to their terms of services. The Council welcomes industry's ongoing efforts in developing and sharing new technology and tools to improve their existing systems of automatic detection of, and removal of illegal content and to support positive alternative narratives in line with UNSCR 2354 and communication campaigns. The Council welcomes and supports the EU Internet Forum's efforts in bringing Member States and the industry together to address this urgent issue. The Council recognises the role of media in supporting alternative discourse to extremist content online and to combat hate speech, promote education on critical thinking and media literacy as important components in countering radicalization to violent extremism.
22. The Council welcomes the action taken to tackle the acute challenge of foreign terrorist fighters, in particular the issue of returnees, including women and children, through CT projects with partner countries most affected. Information sharing remains a vital component of efforts to address returning foreign terrorist fighters and wider CT activity. Significant steps have been taken to address this on an intra-EU level, and continued collaboration is needed with partner countries to ensure that information about the most serious terrorist threats is shared in a legally compliant manner with those that need it. The Council stresses the importance of sharing experiences to bring to justice foreign terrorist fighters, radicalisation in prisons, and integration in society. The Council notes the importance of supporting cross-border investigations and prosecutions, in particular of foreign terrorist fighters and individuals suspected of planning or carrying out terrorist offences. The Council encourages further engagement in this area, including through Europol law enforcement cooperation with priority countries, as appropriate, and notes the role of Eurojust in assisting Member States in investigations and prosecutions with these countries. The Council also calls for deeper cooperation with Interpol, to foster dialogue and cooperation on key security issues including terrorism, transnational organised crime and cybercrime.

23. The Council stresses the need to continue prioritising efforts to counter terrorist financing and money laundering. This includes implementing policies and regulations designed to prevent misuse of financial systems for these ends, reinforcing judicial cooperation and response, promoting cooperation between competent authorities, freezing assets of terrorists, adopting and implementing sanctions and providing law enforcement with the tools to trace illicit financial activity. In this regard, the Council reiterates its support to international fora, including the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), the G20 and the Global Coalition against Da'esh's working group on financing of terrorism. It further calls for increased support to third countries in their fight against terrorist financing and money laundering, as outlined in the Commission Action Plan. This includes activity to improve and enhance information sharing and the provision of technical assistance to third countries in order to enhance their capacity to comply with UN Security Council Resolutions and FATF recommendations on anti-money laundering/countering financing of terrorism. The EU is supporting third countries' efforts in identifying and tackling any possible source of revenues for terrorist groups such as illicit trafficking. In this regard, a specific focus should be devoted to the fight against the trafficking of cultural goods, also in view of fulfilling the international responsibility to protect humanity's cultural heritage. In this respect, the Council welcomes the recent opening for signature of the Council of Europe Convention on Offences relating to Cultural Property.

24. The Council stresses the importance of a criminal justice approach to the fight against terrorism and support to partner countries to strengthen their criminal justice response in compliance with international law, including international human rights law, international refugee law and international humanitarian law and improve the investigation of CT related cases within a rule of law perspective. Efforts should continue to bring Da'esh and other terrorist organisations to justice, in close cooperation with Iraq, other third countries and international organisations. CT should increasingly be mainstreamed into justice programmes. The Council encourages the MENA partners to approximate with and ultimately accede to the Council of Europe Conventions open to non-members. The Commission and the EEAS are invited to explore ways of developing judicial cooperation in criminal matters with priority partners and, in particular, to look at the feasibility and usefulness of negotiating new EU-level Mutual Legal Assistance Agreements with them. In this context, the Council also highlights the relevance of UNSCR 2322 aiming to strengthen International Judicial and Police cooperation against terrorism, since it raises awareness of the need for cooperation on those fields and the creation of tools to promote it. The Council further underlines the importance of policies and protection of rights of victims of terrorist crimes.
25. The Council notes the 2017 Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment by Europol on the links between serious and transnational organised crime and terrorism. In this regard, it calls for continuing assessment of these links and for focused activity to target the organised criminal gangs facilitating the trafficking of people, weapons, drugs and goods in priority countries in the Middle East, North Africa, the Western Balkans and Turkey, including, when appropriate, through the further involvement of these countries in the EU Policy Cycle. The Council welcomes in particular the joint EU-Western Balkans Action Plan on illicit trafficking in firearms and notes the proposed revision of the 2005 EU Strategy to Combat the Illicit Accumulation and Trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons and Ammunition.

26. The Council welcomes UNSCR 2309 "Threats to international peace and security caused by terrorist acts: Aviation security" (September 2016) and the renewed focus of the EU in supporting partner countries to improve their aviation security procedures in line with international standards, particularly in the MENA region. The Council stresses the importance of effective and proportionate measures to address the evolving terrorist threat to aviation, and encourages Member States, the Commission and EEAS in further jointly assessing and mitigating such risks. Council underlines the importance of working closely at global level to counter the terrorist threat, including in the international maritime sector. The Council welcomes also UNSCR 2341 adopted unanimously in February 2017 on the protection of the critical infrastructures against the danger of terrorist attacks.
