NOTE

From: Europol
To: Standing Committee on Operational Cooperation on Internal Security
Subject: Enhancing Europol’s counter terrorism capabilities: European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC) at Europol

Delegation will find attached a Europol report on the state of play of the European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC) at Europol.

DOCUMENT PARTIALLY ACCESSIBLE TO THE PUBLIC (05.07.2016)
Enhancing Europol’s counter terrorism capabilities:  
European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC) at Europol

1. **Aim**

This report provides an update to COSI on the recent developments at Europol in the fight against terrorism, in particular in light of the establishment of the European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC).

2. **Background and main developments: EU counter terrorism policy context**

- On 25 January 2016, the informal meeting of the Ministers Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) presented the launch of the ECTC to the general public. In addition, it was announced that the Counter Terrorism Group (CTG)\(^1\) will set up a platform for information sharing by 1 July 2016. The CTG will consult closely with Europol, the EU Counter Terrorism Coordinator (CTC) and other relevant parties to explore ways of improving cooperation\(^2\).

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\(^1\) The Counter Terrorism Group (CTG) is a cooperation platform of the (security) intelligence services of EU Member States, Norway and Switzerland.

On 2 February 2016, the Commission released a communication\(^3\) setting out an action plan to strengthen the fight against terrorist financing. Among the comprehensive list of initiatives, an impact assessment concerning the potential establishment of an EU terrorist financing tracing mechanism (EU Terrorist Financing Tracking System – EU TFTS), complementary to the current EU-US TFTP Agreement, has been announced to be completed by the end of 2016. The background for the impact assessment is that the tracing of respective terrorist financing transactions within and across Single European Payments Area (SEPA) countries is excluded by the scope of the current TFTP. Since February 2016, Member States carry out credit transfers and direct debits denominated in Euro as SEPA transactions. By the end of October 2016, also all non-EU SEPA countries are scheduled to comply with the respective SEPA framework.

On 10 March 2016\(^4\), the JHA Council reinforced its conclusions of 20 November 2015\(^5\) concerning the strengthening of the EU’s external borders, requesting Europol, in cooperation with Member States, to develop and implement a guest officers concept to the hotspots in support of the screening process, in particular by reinforcing secondary security checks;

On 24 March 2016\(^6\), following the attacks in Brussels on 22 March 2016, the JHA Council called for the Joint Liaison Team (JLT) of national counter-terrorism experts to be reinforced at the ECTC, in order to support Member States’ law enforcement authorities in investigating the wider European and international dimensions of the current terrorist threat.

On 13 April 2016, the European Parliament adopted the European Commission’s proposal for an amending EU budget No 1/2016, with a view to increasing Europol’s workforce in support of the ECTC. Recruitment procedures are planned to be finalised by Q2 2016.

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\(^3\) Communication from the European Commission to the European Parliament and the Council: An action plan for strengthening the fight against terrorist financing, 4 February 2016, 5782/16)

\(^4\) 6995/16

\(^5\) Conclusions of the Council of the EU and of the Member States meeting within the Council on counter terrorism, 20 November 2015, 14122/15 + COR 1

\(^6\) Joint statement of EU Ministers for Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) and representatives of EU institutions on the terrorist attacks in Brussels on 22 March 2016, 7371/16
• On 15 April 2016, Europol, at the request of the CTG, gave a presentation on the ECTC and a summary on the current profile of terrorists, highlighting that all of the 6 Brussels attackers and 6 out of the 10 perpetrators of the Paris attacks in November 2015 had an organised crime/criminal background. The feedback from CTG indicates that against the background of the profile of terrorists, a structural cooperation mechanism towards the ECTC at Europol will be explored by the CTG at short notice.

• On 20 April 2016, the Commission released its communication “Delivering on the European Agenda on Security to fight against terrorism and pave the way towards an effective and genuine Security Union”, calling for cooperation between the ECTC at Europol, the EU Intelligence and Situation Centre (IntCen) and the CTG to be driven forward (including joint counter terrorism and radicalisation threat assessment activities).

• On 21 April 2016, the Council (JHA) discussed the status of information sharing in the area of counter terrorism. The EU CTC highlighted in a report to the Council (JHA) that the systematic feeding and consistent use of relevant databases at European level (3-tier-information-sharing across the SIS II, the Europol Information System – EIS and Focal Point (FP) Travellers) has improved, but still needs to increase to keep up with the terrorist threat.

• In this context, the Council (JHA) of 21 April 2016 also considered the need for increased interoperability of European and international databases in the fields of security, travel and migration, as well as the establishment of a common EU Entry-Exit System (EES), on the basis of the European Commission’s communication for stronger and smarter border and security information systems (released on 6 April 2016).

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