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Delegations will find in the Annex the Council Conclusions on Addressing the external dimension of a constantly evolving terrorist and violent extremist threat, as approved by the Council at its meeting held on 20 June 2022.

Council conclusions on Addressing the external dimension of a constantly evolving terrorist and violent extremist threat

Introduction

1. In line with the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence endorsed by the European Council on March 25, the Council recognises that terrorism and violent extremism, in all their forms and irrespective of their origin, continue to pose a major challenge in a strategic environment already impacted by multiple geopolitical shifts and growing instability. As such, it reaffirms its unwavering resolve to protect EU citizens against these threats and to place the EU in a position to become a stronger and more capable security provider, while reaffirming its fundamental values and principles in compliance with international law, in particular international human rights law and humanitarian law. To this end, the Council recognizes the need for enhanced multilateral engagement and strengthened cooperation with strategic international partners where it serves EU interests.
2. In this context, the Council recalls its condemnation in the strongest possible terms of the unprovoked, unjustified and illegal military aggression against Ukraine by the Russian Federation that grossly violates international law, and the principles of UN Charter, and undermines European and global security and stability. It expresses serious concern about possible long-term implications this aggression could have on the terrorist threat both within the EU and globally.

3. The Council stresses the enduring relevance of the assessment and commitments emanating from its June 15, 2020 Conclusions on EU External Action on Preventing and Countering Terrorism and Violent Extremism. Together with previous Conclusions from February 9, 2015 and June 19, 2017, and in line with the EU's 2005 Counter-Terrorism Strategy, the European Agenda on Security and the EU's 2016 Global Strategy as well as the July 24, 2020 EU Security Union Strategy, and the December 9, 2020 Counter-Terrorism agenda for the EU, they represent a sound and consistent political framework for an ambitious European engagement on the global stage.
4. The new Conclusions the Council adopted today therefore aim at ensuring that the political guidance driving our common action remains adjusted to the reality of the EU's security exposure. To this end, they focus on recent significant evolutions in the nature of the threat itself, but also in the global context in which the EU operates in order to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism.

A constantly evolving international terrorist threat

5. The Council underlines that Da'esh, al-Qaeda and their affiliates continue to represent the most prominent terrorist threat worldwide. Despite the loss of its territorial control over parts of Iraq and Syria, as well as the continuous and significant strikes against its leadership, Da'esh has purposely reverted back to an underground insurgency while seeking to further destabilize both countries, liberate its detained fighters, maintain its influence and hold on local supporters, preserve its funding sources, and eventually reconstitute a threat projection capability. Against this backdrop, the Council calls on the EU and its Member States to focus on strengthening their comprehensive approach, maintaining an unwavering commitment to combat terrorism in Iraq and Syria, alongside the Global Coalition against Da'esh and other key partners, while resolutely addressing the threat posed by the expansion of both terrorist organisations' global networks. The Council also reiterates the need for a political solution to the conflict in Syria in line with UNSCR 2254.

6. The Council notes that several regions in Africa are experiencing a particularly concerning expansion of the terrorist and violent extremist threat, including in the Sahel with a risk of spill-over towards West-Africa and the Gulf of Guinea. Against such a backdrop, it reaffirms its support to African-led initiatives aimed at placing prevention and the protection of civilian populations at the heart of their counter-terrorism efforts, as stated during the 6th EU-AU Summit held in Brussels from February 17th to 18th 2022. Both Da'esh and al-Qaeda have managed to exploit security, economic, social and governance vacuums in order to foster territorial expansion of their local affiliates. The Council notes with great concern the alteration of democratic principles and the rule of law in an increased number of countries, and the growing militarization and proliferation of violent actors in vulnerable regions. From this standpoint, it expresses its conviction that the deployment of allegedly private military companies such as Russia sponsored Wagner group which, under the pretext of combatting terrorism, engage in local natural resources predation, grossly violate human rights, and exacerbate ethnic tensions, all of which are bound to serve the interests of Da'esh, al-Qaeda and their affiliated groups and organisations in the long run.

7. The Taliban takeover in Afghanistan raises significant concerns for the EU in the fight against terrorism, with a potential regional spill-over effect and the resurgence of Da'esh Khorasan Province which now represents the most immediate terrorist threat in the country. The Council also reiterates deep concerns about the Taliban's connections with both al-Qaeda core and its regional branch (al-Qaeda in the Indian Subcontinent -AQIS), assessing that those groups are likely to benefit from the current situation in the long run in order to gain and secure funding, including by engaging in various types of illicit trafficking, and attract new recruits which might lead to a renewed capability to pose a direct threat to European interests. It recalls the unequivocal demand that the Taliban cease all direct and indirect ties with international terrorism, and will continue to monitor the situation closely, in line with its Conclusions adopted on September 15th 2021, and in accordance with United Nations Security Council resolution 2593. Taking note of the measures recommended in the EU Afghanistan Counter-Terrorism Action Plan, the Council stands ready to mobilise all relevant tools at its disposal to ensure that Afghanistan doesn't become again a safe haven for terrorist organisations.

8. The Council emphasises the need to address the critical challenge posed by the capability of Da'esh and al-Qaeda in attracting an unprecedented number of supporters worldwide. Despite military setbacks suffered by both organisations in the recent past, the continued presence of numerous mostly local but also foreign terrorist fighters in many regions, especially in Iraq and Syria, still represents a major security risk. Noting that there can be no lasting victory against these groups unless this issue is adequately addressed, the Council stresses the need for the EU and its Member States to further develop a comprehensive approach aiming at preventing recruitment of terrorist fighters among vulnerable populations, including youth, by addressing humanitarian, social and development needs. It also underlines the necessity of preventing undetected relocation of terrorist fighters and their families, promoting accountability, defining tailored deradicalisation, rehabilitation and reintegration strategies, ensuring appropriate during and post-detention monitoring of those convicted of terrorism, where necessary, as well as offering increased support to the countries which are primarily impacted by the "returnees" phenomenon.

9. The Council recognises the increasing threat emanating from right-wing violent extremism and terrorism, representing a serious global challenge for the EU and its Member States. Transnational connections between right-wing violent extremist groups and individuals have gone beyond mere communication on the Internet, and now entail coordination, financing, recruitment, and shared operational tactics. Additionally, the Council notes a growing number of violent actions associated to left-wing violent extremism and terrorism which also require continued close scrutiny. It therefore calls for fostering a common understanding of the threat and strengthening international engagement in the fight against politically motivated violent extremism and terrorism, including in the fields of counter-narratives, exchange of information, capacity building, and dissemination of best practices, *inter alia* by cultivating critical thinking, digital literacy, and online public safety and by promoting intercultural dialogue and tolerance through education at all levels.
10. The Council expresses concern regarding the growing threat posed by home-grown terrorism and attacks perpetrated by lone actors. It notes that global terrorist organisations have wilfully engaged in a strategy focused on inspiring individuals who, in most instances, do not have previous connections with international terrorism, and mainly resort to rudimentary *modi operandi*, thus making their actions more difficult to prevent. This strategy has been amplified during the COVID-19 pandemic which has increased isolation of vulnerable people and reinforced their exposure to often quick radicalisation phenomenon, specifically online. The Council therefore stresses the need to keep investing efforts in sharing analysis, detecting as well as preventing radicalisation both online and offline.

11. The Council notes with concerns the spread of violent extremist ideologies that can create a breeding ground for terrorism. It stresses the need to prevent dissemination and funding of all types of violent extremist propaganda, including violent extremist Islamist ideology, that are inconsistent with fundamental rights and freedoms which are at the core of EU values and principles. To this end, the Council especially calls on addressing the challenge of non-transparent funding emanating from foreign actors that foster undesirable influence on civil and religious organizations within the EU and on a global scale. It also calls on identifying effective ways to address the threat posed by organisations, individuals and entities whose activities directly aim at radicalizing, indoctrinating, and inspiring people to carry out violent and terrorist acts.

Misuse of new technologies for terrorist purpose

12. The Council acknowledges that new technologies first and foremost represent a tremendous opportunity for the EU's economy and society, and may equally facilitate the EU's CT and P/CVE efforts. At the same time, it also stresses the need to take into account legitimate security concerns arising from the potential misuse of some of these tools by terrorist actors, such as 3D printing, unmanned aerial systems (UAS), etc. To this end, the Council encourages the EU to maintain a comprehensive multi-stakeholder approach encompassing robust engagement with partner countries, multilateral fora, the private sector, academia and the meaningful participation of the civil society including women's rights organisations and women- and youth-led organisations.

13. The Council stresses the critical importance of preserving freedom of expression and other fundamental rights, which play a central role in democratic societies. It recognises that a significant part of the fight against radicalisation leading to terrorism needs to be conducted online, at a time when international terrorist organisations are relying significantly on digital tools for spreading their propaganda, recruiting and expanding their footprint on the Internet. While the adoption of the Regulation on Addressing the dissemination of terrorist content online, and the adoption of the Digital Services Act have placed the EU at the forefront of this fight, technical developments continue to present vulnerabilities which terrorist groups have shown every intent to seize in order to maintain their presence online. This includes malign cyber activities through the misuse of smaller platforms, often based on blockchain technology and the decentralised web, which make the detection and, when appropriate, suppression of illegal content even more difficult. Against this backdrop, the Council calls on the tech industry and especially online platforms, regardless of their size, to take on more responsibility for preventing and countering the spread of terrorist and violent extremist content online, including by its algorithmic amplification.

14. The Council reaffirms the critical importance of cutting off sources of terrorism funding, including through illicit trafficking such as of cultural property, in line with EU and Financial Action Task Force (FATF) standards. It also notes with concern the risk associated with the increased use of new and anonymous forms of payments involving e-money, crypto-assets and blockchain technologies, mobile money, and prepaid cards by terrorists. It therefore calls on the EU and its Member States to support partner countries to increase compliance with EU and FATF requirements and enhance their efforts to address the anonymity of transactions, by tracing, detecting, sanctioning and effectively dismantling illegal money transmitters. It encourages to that end more active cooperation from the Fintech industry with financial intelligence units, law enforcement-and judicial investigation services. The Council recognises the essential role played by non-profit organizations and stresses the need to include them as central partners in the fight against violent extremism. It also reiterates the importance not to disrupt nor discourage civil society activities, and to ensure that measures to counter the financing of terrorism are not misused to target or criminalise legitimate humanitarian actors or human rights defenders. In the meantime, the Council calls upon Member States to fully cooperate with non-profit organisations through a risk-based approach as well as targeted and proportionate measures in order to prevent any abuse by and for terrorists.

A need for the EU to reaffirm its fundamental values and principles

15. The Council regrets a trend of growing politicisation in the fight against terrorism. On the one hand, terrorist organisations have been increasingly trying to capitalise on weak governance systems, especially in the most fragile countries, in order to impose their dominance, attract support from local populations, and portray themselves as more legitimate and efficient alternatives to governments. Comparably, the ability of the international community to present a united front against terrorism continues to be undermined by undisguised attempts from mainly authoritarian regimes aiming at using counter-terrorism as a pretext to achieve their own political goals, thus contributing to exacerbate the polarisation in multilateral fora on this issue. Against this backdrop, the Council stresses the need to strongly push-back against any attempt of politicisation in the fight against terrorism, including in international fora. The EU and its Member States will endeavour to preserve and promote an approach based on objective facts and the evolution of the threat, while also taking into account that comprehensively preventing and countering terrorism requires the fostering of sound, inclusive and democratic governance models based on the respect for human rights.
16. Against this backdrop of a mounting systemic rivalry on the global stage, the Council resolutely reaffirms its conviction that democracy, transparency, accountability, gender responsiveness, as well as compliance with International law, including the respect for human rights and the rule of law, and international humanitarian law are the only sustainable response to terrorism and violent extremism. The Council notes with great concern that dictatorships, military and authoritarian regimes are on the rise in several countries most affected by terrorism and that such models of governance are proven to exacerbate this threat. The EU and its Member States should therefore ensure that the promotion and respect for these fundamental principles remain the cornerstone of their engagement in both bilateral and multilateral settings while reinforcing the link between adherence to these values and principles and the assistance they provide or are ready to provide to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism throughout the world.

17. Combatting impunity for acts committed by terrorists and ensuring recognition and adequate assistance, support and compensation for the victims are absolutely critical to ensure terrorist threats can be successfully addressed in the long term. The Council therefore calls for pursuing EU capacity building activities aiming at reinforcing partners' capability to adequately investigate and prosecute terrorism cases with due respect for human rights and the rule of law. Recognising the key role that victims and their families can play, including in countering the terrorist propaganda, it also emphasizes the need to promote international solidarity and ensure they are treated with dignity and respect.

18. The Council reaffirms its conviction that terrorism and violent extremism are not an inevitability. Defeating them requires a consistent, comprehensive global effort that cannot only rely on military action, but also encompasses a civilian-led, whole of society, response aiming at tackling the root causes of the threat, including socio-economic-inequalities, lack of good governance, as well as the impact of organised crime activities and climate change. Protecting cultural heritage can also play a key role in promoting peace, democracy, sustainable development and prevention of terrorism by fostering tolerance, dialogue and mutual understanding. The Council recognises that this global effort should entail a strong gender-responsive dimension, with a view to address the impact of gender stereotypes and gender-based violence on terrorism and violent extremism, while ensuring promotion of women's active and meaningful participation in the prevention and counter-terrorism efforts. This comprehensive approach should *inter alia* include humanitarian assistance in most critical settings, stabilisation aid in countries emerging from crisis, development cooperation and an increased investment in preventing and countering violent extremism through enhanced partnerships with local actors. While remaining committed to do so, the Council also recalls that the importance of local ownership and that the primary responsibility of this fight lies with governments of the countries that are confronted with these threats in the first place.

19. The Council recognises the critical work undertaken by international and non-governmental humanitarian actors in order to provide vital assistance to populations in need affected by conflict and instability, noting that this humanitarian aid contributes to ultimately prevent the resurgence of the threat in areas liberated from the control of terrorist organisations. From this standpoint, the Council reaffirms its conviction that counter-terrorism policy and humanitarian action based on the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence can mutually reinforce each other. In line with the commitments taken in the framework of the European Humanitarian Forum held from March 21st to 23rd 2022, the Council reiterates its resolve to safeguard humanitarian space and adopt concrete measures aiming at preventing any potential negative impact of counter-terrorism actions on principled humanitarian activities without undermining the integrity of the EU counter-terrorism architecture. These measures should, *inter alia*, involve concrete solutions to facilitate non-profit organisations' financial access, address difficulties emanating from over-compliant behaviour from the private banking sector, and provide further guidance to humanitarian organisations with regards to their rights and responsibilities under the different EU counter-terrorism sanctions regimes.
20. Noting that the EU's international involvement against terrorism and violent extremism is being undermined by increasingly aggressive information manipulations campaigns, including disinformation, fake news and the spread of conspiracy theories, the Council recognises that successful actions in this field require to be supported by a strategic communication, and by strengthening community resilience. A coordinated effort is therefore needed to better outline and explain the EU's main strategic objectives, communicate positive narrative and engage with third countries' audiences and to counter disinformation.

Expanding EU's role on the global counter-terrorism stage

21. Building upon the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, the Council stresses the need for the EU and its Member States to reinforce their international engagement against terrorism and violent extremism, making full use of the instruments at their disposal in order to contribute to an adequate collective response to terrorism and violent extremism and ensure it matches their priorities and values, based on full respect for human rights and international law. While the nature of the threats necessarily imposes a global dimension to this engagement, priorities pursued by the EU and its Member States should primarily be guided by the reality of their security exposure. They should therefore endeavour to devote specific attention to their close neighbourhood, including the Sahel, North Africa, the Levant and the Eastern Mediterranean. Cooperation with the Western Balkans should be further strengthened, including through the continued implementation of the EU-Western Balkans Joint Action Plan on counter-terrorism. The EU should also maintain focus on specific theatres where the presence of international terrorist and violent extremist organisations might eventually pose a direct threat to the European security, including Central Asia and the Indo-Pacific region.

22. Strong and principled bilateral and multilateral engagement is a central feature of the EU's global counter-terrorism policy. In this framework, the Council stresses the need to seek and maintain intensive cooperation with strategic bilateral partners, recognizing the key importance of the EU political dialogues on counter-terrorism and security. It acknowledges the leading role played by the United Nations in this field and welcomes efforts made by the EU to strengthen its strategic partnership with relevant UN bodies. In line with the agreed guiding principles reiterated also in the Strategic Compass, the Council furthermore stresses the need to deepen the mutually-reinforcing and beneficial strategic partnership with NATO, in the context of the implementation of the Warsaw (2016) and Brussels (2018) joint declarations, *inter alia* in the fields of resilience against terrorism and violent extremism, and capacity building of partner countries. It furthermore supports a more sustained EU engagement vis-à-vis international organisations involved in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism, including the OSCE, the Council of Europe, Interpol, and multi-stakeholder fora such as the EU Internet Forum and the Christchurch Call.

23. The Council recognises the need for the EU and its Member States to reinforce their coordination and develop a strategic approach aimed at reinforcing their collective ability to influence these organisations' strategic orientations. It welcomes the EU's successful bid to the co-chairmanship of the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum (GCTF) where the EU can help shape the agenda on international counter-terrorism policy and practices and promote EU values in the field of counter-terrorism. The Council notes that this should lead to greater support and strategic engagement towards this organisation as well as its "inspired" institutions (the Global Community Engagement & Resilience Fund, the Hedayah Center and the International Institute for Justice & the Rule of Law). The EU should also remain heavily engaged within the Global Coalition against Da'esh, its working groups and the newly established Africa Focus Group, as well as in the Coalition for the Sahel, with a view to implement a coordinated, comprehensive approach to countering terrorism and violent extremism. This international engagement should also be guided by the need to foster synergies among various international, regional and national initiatives aiming at combatting terrorism and violent extremism, and avoid duplication of effort.
24. The Council welcomes the valuable contribution provided by the network of Counter-Terrorism/Security Experts deployed in selected EU delegations, noting that this network has allowed the EU to expand its global reach, its capability to develop more precise assessments of local situations, and to sustain bilateral and multilateral engagement. While this network has continued to expand over the recent past, the Council underlines the importance of ensuring its capacity be strengthened and its size increased further in order to be responsive to geopolitical developments and strategic needs. The Council welcomes the EEAS' recent efforts and reflections in this regard, including when it comes to the network's geographical scope, mandate, and its coordination with Member States' actions.

25. The Council also recalls the valuable contribution provided by the civilian CSDP Missions, within the framework of the EU's integrated approach and as stressed by the Civilian CSDP Compact, within their respective mandates, in strengthening the security and justice sectors in host countries and building their capacities to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism effectively and in compliance with the rule of law.

A more strategic use of EU CT sanctions regimes

26. The Council recalls that counter-terrorism sanctions are a powerful tool to support and implement the EU external policy on countering terrorism. It therefore welcomes greater use of these instruments in order to collectively support a resolute and ambitious EU action through new designations, when relevant and possible, which reflect the evolution of the threat and respond to the emergence of new terrorist actors.

Compliance of EU restrictive measures with international law, in particular international humanitarian law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, due process and the rule of law constitutes the cornerstone of the credibility and effectiveness of EU sanctions policy. In that perspective, the Council recalls that restrictive measures are targeted, carefully calibrated and proportionate to the objectives they seek to achieve. It recognizes that the role of sanctions must be preventive, and commits to fully take into account the evolving circumstances and the reality of the threat posed by the listed entities and individuals as part of regular reviews and update the listings accordingly. In this regard, the Council continues to welcome all measures taken in this direction including the significant contribution of the UN Office of the Ombudsperson which, since its establishment, has brought more fairness and transparency to the UN sanctions regime for Da'esh and al-Qaida.

The Council underscores the shared benefits resulting from coordination with other international actors, including the United Nations Security Council and third countries on sanction designations. Furthermore, it encourages further dialogue and enhanced efforts to ensure a good understanding of the EU's specific legal and procedural requirements, and prevent political instrumentalization of counter-terrorism sanctions.

Conclusions' implementation and follow-up

27. The Council expresses strong support to increased synergies between the internal and external dimensions of EU actions in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism. It also calls on a collective effort from all EU institutions and Member States to contribute to implementing the priorities and achieving the objectives set out above. These policy guidelines should especially be taken into account while defining future financial engagement with partner countries and international organisations. To this end, and in line with the objective set out in the Strategic Compass for Security and Defence, the Council welcomes the launch of a review, to be concluded by early 2023, of EU tools and programmes which contribute to building partners' capacities against terrorism, in order to increase their effectiveness.
28. The Council deems it necessary to regularly review these conclusions to ensure that political and strategic considerations guiding the EU external action against terrorism and violent extremism remain adjusted to the reality of the threat.