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Delegations will find in the Annex the Council conclusions on reinforcing external-internal connections in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism, as approved by the Council at its meeting held on 16 December 2024.

Council conclusions on reinforcing external-internal connections in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism

Introduction

1. The Council underlines that terrorism and violent extremism, in all their forms and irrespective of their origin, continue to pose a major threat to the security of the European Union and its Member States. In line with the 2022 Strategic Compass for Security and Defence endorsed by the European Council, the Commission's 2020 Security Union Strategy, and the Counter-Terrorism Agenda for the EU, the Council reaffirms its unwavering resolve to protect EU citizens from such threats, support and protect victims of terrorism, and support partner countries in continuing to prevent and counter terrorism and violent extremism. The Council reaffirms its fundamental values and principles rooted in international law, in particular international human rights law and humanitarian law and further affirms that the only sustainable response to terrorism and violent extremism is one based on democracy, the rule of law, transparency, accountability and gender-responsiveness. It reiterates that these fundamental values and principles remain the cornerstone of the commitment of the EU and its Member States to counter-terrorism (CT) and to preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE).

2. The Council stresses the enduring validity of the assessments and commitments made in the Council conclusions of 20 June 2022 on addressing the external dimension of a constantly evolving terrorist and violent extremist threat. Together with previous Council conclusions from 15 June 2020, 19 June 2017 and 9 February 2015, they constitute a sound and consistent political framework for ambitious European engagement on the global stage in the field of CT and P/CVE. The Council notes the complementarity of this framework with the EU's and Member States' policies on the internal aspects of CT, as set out in particular in the Council conclusions of 9 June 2022 on protecting Europeans from terrorism and the Council conclusions of 12 December 2024 on future priorities for strengthening the joint counter-terrorism efforts of the European Union and its Member States.

3. With reference to the Council conclusions of 9-10 June 2011 on enhancing links between the internal and external aspects of counter-terrorism, the Council notes that since then, the terrorist and violent extremist threat has become increasingly diverse and fragmented, continually reshaped by external and internal factors. The EU and its Member States have significantly expanded and strengthened the tools at their disposal to address this constantly evolving threat. With the present conclusions, the Council aims to contribute to a comprehensive EU CT and P/CVE policy capable of addressing the external and internal aspects of terrorism and violent extremism in a coordinated and effective way, maximising synergies and the efficient use of resources.

A constantly evolving terrorist and violent extremist threat

4. The Council reiterates that the terrorist and violent extremist threat is continually changing and has both direct and indirect impacts on the security of the EU and its citizens. Da'esh, al-Qaeda, and their affiliates remain the most prominent terrorist threat, both in the EU and worldwide. In particular, the Council notes with great concern the rise of Da'esh Khorasan Province (ISKP), based in Afghanistan and present in its neighbouring areas, including Central Asia, as well as its growing ability to inspire and carry out external operations, also in Europe. Moreover, the terrorist threat in Africa is increasing, with Da'esh, al-Qaeda, their affiliates and other non-state actors exploiting local conflicts and social, political and economic fragility. Of special concern is the deteriorating security situation in the Sahel, with spill-over effects on the coastal states of West Africa and potentially on North Africa. Other regions of the continent, such as the Horn of Africa, Central Africa and Mozambique, continue to face a rise in attacks against civilians and religious minorities. The Council maintains an unwavering commitment to combating terrorism in Iraq and Syria and to the work of the Global Coalition Against Da'esh. The ongoing transition phase of Operation Inherent Resolve should be used to maintain and strengthen the Coalition's achievements, and to prevent Da'esh from resurging.

5. The Council underlines its concerns that the ongoing crisis in the Middle East is driving polarisation, thus increasing radicalisation and the terrorist and violent extremist threat worldwide. In that context, the Council notes with great concern that terrorist and violent extremist groups are using the conflict to reach new audiences, mobilise funds, radicalise their supporters and incite violence.

6. The Council reiterates its resolute condemnation of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, which constitutes a manifest violation of the UN Charter. This aggression and its consequences can also be exploited by terrorist and violent extremist groups and will have long-term security implications far beyond the geographical borders of the conflict.
7. The Council emphasises that the threat emanating from violent right-wing extremism and terrorism is increasing, with the expanding transnational connections between violent right-wing extremist groups and individuals constituting a significant challenge. Additionally, the Council notes with concern the growth of violent anti-system extremist movements.
8. The Council recalls that terrorists and violent extremists continue to exploit means of communication and other technologies that transcend borders, for financing, propaganda and radicalisation purposes, among others. Moreover, the Council expresses concern about undesirable foreign funding emanating from foreign actors that is influencing civil society and religious organisations within the EU and on a global scale.

Enhancing links between the external and internal aspects of the EU's CT response

9. The Council emphasises that terrorism and violent extremism must be addressed through a coherent approach that actively integrates the EU's common foreign and security policy and actions in the area of justice and home affairs. Building on the successful work by Member States and EU institutions dealing with CT and P/CVE, the Council confirms its commitment to further developing synergies, while avoiding the duplication of roles and tasks.
10. The Council highlights the value of fostering a shared understanding of the challenges that forms the basis of an effective policy response. In this regard, the Council acknowledges the important role of the EU Intelligence and Situation Centre, which continues to support the EU with Member States' intelligence-led situational awareness of current and potential threats related to terrorism and violent extremism, and also contributes to an EU-wide understanding of the links between the external and internal aspects of terrorism and violent extremism.

11. The Council invites the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator (EU CTC), the Commission and the High Representative, assisted by the European External Action Service (EEAS), in line with their institutional prerogatives, to:
- **Ensure that the EU’s CT and P/CVE policy, legislation and tools remain strategically coherent** and adapted to the evolving nature of the terrorist and violent extremist threat. In this regard, the Council looks forward to the New Agenda on preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism announced by the incoming Commission.
 - **Reinforce the EU’s multilateral CT and P/CVE engagement and align it with the EU’s internal security priorities.** Priority areas include countering terrorist financing, ensuring border security, tackling illicit trafficking – particularly of firearms – and preventing and countering violent extremist content online, and building and strengthening resilience of critical infrastructures and protection of public spaces against terrorist attacks. While acknowledging the need for comprehensive coordination among international initiatives, the Council underlines the importance of engaging on CT and P/CVE with the UN, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, the Global Coalition against Da’esh, NATO, the GCTF and its inspired institutions (Hedayah, IJJ, GCERF), the FATF, the G7, and relevant regional organisations, as well as with the private sector where relevant, such as within the GIFCT and Christchurch Call.

- **Intensify CT cooperation with third countries key to the EU’s security**, by more closely involving EU justice and home affairs agencies, among other means. Specific attention should be given to EU candidate countries and to our eastern and southern neighbours. In that context, the revision of the Joint Action Plan on Counter-Terrorism for the Western Balkans provides a unique opportunity to take stock of EU-Western Balkans cooperation on CT and P/CVE. This cooperation should be intensified, taking into account the specific needs of our Western Balkan partners. Cooperation with the Southern Neighbourhood and African-led initiatives remains of paramount importance. With regard to the growing threat of ISKP, the Council acknowledges the significance of the EU’s Central Asian partners as key players in CT and P/CVE efforts in the region. The Council also stresses the importance of continued CT and P/CVE engagement with the Southeast Asian partners.

12. The Council reaffirms the mandate of the EU CTC as established by the European Council and invites the EU CTC to continue to:

- **Promote a comprehensive approach by enhancing the links between external and internal CT and P/CVE efforts**, with the support of the High Representative and the Commission, ensuring that CT work within the Union is coordinated.
- **Report regularly to the Council on the progress and effectiveness of CT and P/CVE initiatives** with external and internal dimensions, and present relevant policy recommendations to the Council.
- **Follow up the implementation of Council conclusions on the fight against terrorism and violent extremism.**
- **Reinforce CT relations between the Union and third countries**, ensuring consistency between the EU’s external and internal CT action, while taking full account of the positions of Member States, the Commission and the High Representative.

13. The Council invites the High Representative, assisted by the EEAS and with the support of the Commission and the EU CTC where relevant, to:
- **Continue investing in action-oriented EU CT dialogues and consultations with third countries and multilateral organisations**, ensuring that they deliver tangible results on issues that affect the EU’s external and internal security. Maintaining and increasing complementarity with EU dialogues on justice and home affairs is key. Involving Member States in preparing for and following up CT dialogues and consultations leads to a more cohesive and consistent EU external CT policy, as exemplified by the participation of the Chair of the COTER Working Party in EU CT dialogues.
 - **Harness the full potential of the EU CT/Security Experts’ Network**, which has proven to be a central component of the EU’s and its Member States’ CT toolkit and an important instrument for supporting EU CT policy development and action. The Network should continue to identify developments that have implications for the EU’s internal security, as well as contributing to the EU’s programming on CT and P/CVE. As terrorist threats continue to evolve, the network must spearhead efforts to tackle terrorism and violent extremism and hold frequent exchanges with Member States, both locally and at working party level. The High Representative will regularly share information gathered by the network with Member States’ capitals, including by sharing expert reports.
 - **Promote synergies between the activities of CSDP missions and operations, relevant EU delegations, EU CT/security experts and EU-funded projects on CT and P/CVE.**

- **Fully utilise the EU’s membership and current mandate as Co-Chair of the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF)**, to support the development of good practices and guidelines to address existing, emerging and evolving security challenges in line with the GCTF Strategic Vision for the next Decade, in particular to support practical tools for capacity-building to fight terrorism and violent extremism in relation to threats that require a comprehensive approach with a particular focus on the African continent. These actions should be pursued in synergy with other existing formats dealing with the issue of countering terrorism and violent extremism.

14. The Council invites the Commission to:

- **Promote the adequate exchange of information on terrorism and violent extremism between EU justice and home affairs agencies and trusted partners**, within their respective mandates and keeping Member States informed.
- **Provide annual briefings on EU-funded capacity-building projects in the field of CT and P/CVE**, to ensure that EU funds are used effectively, avoid duplication or funding gaps, and facilitate Member States’ input and participation. The Council encourages action by the EU and its Member States aimed at increasing their respective and joint capacities, and those of partner countries, to address terrorism and violent extremism. In that context, the Council welcomes the launch of the EU Knowledge Hub on Prevention of Radicalisation, which will strengthen EU assistance for Member States and priority third countries in their efforts to prevent and counter radicalisation and violent extremism in all its forms.
- **Follow up on the successful negotiations on the revised pan-European legal definition of terrorist offence** for the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism, which should contribute to greater legal certainty and inspire further international norm-building that is fully compatible with the laws of the European Union.

15. The Council highlights the value of national coordination efforts between ministries and agencies responsible for the external and internal aspects of CT and P/CVE, and invites Member States to:
- Contribute to coordinated and coherent EU CT action by sharing information about their own policies within the relevant Council preparatory bodies. This includes, where appropriate, information regarding their bilateral CT dialogues with third countries and multilateral organisations.
 - Provide timely political guidance for the EU’s bilateral and multilateral CT engagement, and fully engage with the High Representative in preparing for and following up on EU CT dialogues.
 - Increase the effectiveness and coordination of EU programming on CT and P/CVE by sharing information about their own capacity-building projects and best practices, and by joining Team Europe initiatives.

16. The Council undertakes to:

- Further enhance coordination efforts within the Council, notably between preparatory bodies dealing with terrorism and violent extremism as part of their mandates and explore synergies with other relevant working parties in the field of common foreign and security policy and justice and home affairs. The Working Party on Terrorism (International Aspects, COTER) and the Working Party on Terrorism (TWP) should continue their practice of holding regular joint meetings to identify concrete actions that address the external-internal connection in the fight against terrorism and violent extremism. The Council underlines the value of regular joint consultations to ensure coherence among the working parties dealing with restrictive measures linked to counter-terrorism, promoting cooperation while fully respecting their respective mandates.
- Increase interaction between COTER and the Political and Security Committee (PSC), allowing for strategic and action-oriented discussions covering all aspects of terrorism and violent extremism.
- Ensure that connecting the external and internal aspects of CT and P/CVE remains a priority by regularly reviewing the implementation of these conclusions.
