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From: Presidency

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Subject: Draft Council conclusions on the enhancement of EMPACT and on EU crime priorities for the next EMPACT cycle 2026-2029

Delegations are provided in the ANNEX with draft Council conclusions on the enhancement of EMPACT and on EU crime priorities for the next EMPACT cycle 2026-2029 for endorsement by COSI.

DRAFT COUNCIL CONCLUSIONS
on the enhancement of EMPACT and on EU crime priorities
for the next EMPACT cycle 2026-2029

General Considerations

1. The EU Policy Cycle for organised and serious international crime (now commonly known as the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats – EMPACT) was launched by the Council conclusions of 8-9 November 2010.¹ The permanent continuation of the EMPACT cycle was approved by the Council conclusions of 8 March 2021² and Council conclusions of 9 March 2023.³
2. EMPACT is Member States-driven, permanent and consolidated framework that stands out as the key EU framework initiative for fighting serious and organised crime. EMPACT works in four-year cycles. Each cycle starts with the EU Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (EU SOCTA), which highlights the most pressing threats and serves as an input for the Council conclusions that define EU crime priorities. It continues with the development, implementation and monitoring of biennial (two years) operational action plans (OAPs), and concludes with an independent evaluation.
3. EMPACT follows an intelligence-led (evidence-based), multidisciplinary and integrated approach, bringing together law enforcement authorities, including police, customs and tax authorities, border guards, judicial authorities, other public authorities and the private sector. It bridges the strategic and operational levels and encompasses the full range of actions to tackle the priority crime threat (preventive, repressive, capacity building etc.).

¹ 15358/10

² 6481/21

³ 7100/23

I. Enhancement of EMPACT

4. The last independent evaluation⁴ of EMPACT concluded that the mechanism brings substantial added value, fosters multiagency, multi-actor, cross-border, innovative and structured cooperation, offers a unique platform that facilitates connections and provides financial support for Member States. It also concluded that to overcome persistent issues (e.g. funding, commitment of EMPACT actors) and to allow EMPACT to achieve and exploit its full potential there is a need for EMPACT to be ‘moved to the next level’.
5. With a view to the implementation of the next EMPACT cycle (2026-2029), the platform needs to continue to build on an integrated approach to EU internal security, involving measures on information management, innovation, training, prevention and the external dimension of internal security, involving third countries, international organisations and other international partners.
6. The European Internal Security Strategy⁵ recognises that the next EMPACT cycle (2026-2029) is an opportunity to strengthen this framework even further, streamlining efforts, enhancing the commitments of the Member States and ensuring an effective use of resources to disrupt the most threatening criminal networks and individuals.
7. EMPACT needs to be integrated with relevant policies and strategies and recognised as the key framework for multidisciplinary and multi-agency cooperation against priority crime threats, involving the Member States’ relevant authorities; this should be done in line with national legislation, EU institutions, bodies and agencies as well as non-law enforcement partners, the private sector, public-private partnerships and third parties. This should ensure alignment and avoid duplication with other operational tools.

⁴ 15238/24

⁵ 7750/25

8. EMPACT needs to take advantage of new technologies enabling enhanced information management and facilitating possible key developments in the fight against organised and serious crime.
9. The implementation of EMPACT relies on the active involvement and commitment of participants. At national level, it is recommended that national EMPACT coordinators (NECs) and the drivers be provided with adequate resources to enable them to fulfil their duties effectively. It is important that the contribution of NECs and drivers be recognised.
10. The lack of financial resources currently allocated to EMPACT is a serious limiting factor to its further development and expansion. It is necessary to find a long-lasting and financially sustainable solution for future EMPACT funding. In view of the launch of the 2026-2029 EMPACT cycle, all actors involved in the budgetary decisions are invited to consider, where appropriate, an increase in the financial support allocated to EMPACT, including in the Europol budget. At the same time, beneficiaries are encouraged, where possible, to make the best use of all possible sources of EU funding.
11. EMPACT structures and all actors involved should retain a certain degree of flexibility to address unforeseen risks and threats that could not be identified through OAP planning.
12. The awareness of EMPACT among decision-makers, law enforcement practitioners and other relevant stakeholders needs to be improved, contributing to a better alignment of EMPACT with national planning.

The Council invites Member States to:

13. Integrate the relevant actions developed within EMPACT into their national internal security strategies and planning and allocate resources to support a common EU approach.
14. Support all the steps that constitute EMPACT, in particular by assuming and sharing among themselves the strategic roles of driver, co-driver, action leader and action co-leader.
15. Provide adequate capacities (in terms of time and human resources) to NECs and drivers to enable them to effectively fulfil their tasks and responsibilities. Appoint, where relevant, a full-time driver or part-time driver supported by other experts. Consider establishing national EMPACT support teams (NEST) assisting the NECs.
16. Ensure active involvement and commitment by all national competent authorities when participating in EMPACT operational actions.
17. Make use of all available funding opportunities and ensure that funding is timely and made available to allow operational actions to start at an early stage.
18. Develop and coordinate measures to strengthen the communication, visibility and identity of EMPACT and OAPs, in accordance with the EMPACT joint communication strategy⁶, including by publishing and promoting the operational results (e.g. the factsheets) on regular basis.
19. Ensure that the national experts on EMPACT communication are part of, or in close contact with, the NEC or NEST, where established, and with the other EMPACT core actors (EU institutions, bodies and agencies). The national EMPACT communication contact points should be actively involved in the network activities and meetings of EMPACT communicators.

⁶ 13112/2/21 REV 2

20. To make sure, when they are in charge of EU networks and expert groups – especially those affiliated to the Law Enforcement Working Party (LEWP) - Police and Customs – to commit in their work programs to actively participate, support and strengthen EMPACT instruments and the implementation of OAPs, including taking the lead in specific actions.
21. Include EMPACT priority areas in national training curricula for competent authorities and make full use of the training opportunities under EMPACT offered by CEPOL, organising awareness raising and training for law enforcement officers and other stakeholders involved in the implementation of EMPACT.

The Council invites COSI to:

22. Continuously monitor the functioning of EMPACT and its alignment with EU needs in the area of security and operational cooperation, provide strategic vision for its evolution and seek the optimisation of the resources allocated to the platform.
23. Draft of Council conclusions and documents (e.g. terms of reference, strategic guidance on the planning of the joint action days) related to EMPACT.
24. Liaise, where relevant, with the relevant Council preparatory bodies, JHA agencies, the Commission and the European External Action Service, to align their relevant activities to the implementation of the EU crime priorities. Incoming presidencies are invited to take this into account when preparing the programmes of the relevant Council working groups.

The Council calls on the Commission to:

25. As a matter of priority, propose an increased allocation for EMPACT in the Union's annual draft budget (both under the Union's contribution to Europol and under the Internal Security Fund) and discuss with Member States options for a long-lasting and financially sustainable solution for the future of EMPACT.
26. Raise awareness about alternative and complementary funding possibilities from the EU budget (e.g. preparation of the funding opportunities information package).
27. Integrate and articulate the EMPACT activities with other relevant EU security policies and strategies and capacity-building programmes.
28. Invite relevant EU networks and expert groups, financed by the Commission, to commit in their work programmes to participate in (including as leader or co-leader of specific actions), support and strengthen EMPACT and the implementation of its OAPs.
29. Task its services with conducting, towards the end of each cycle – taking experience into consideration and in close consultation with the Member States and EU agencies – an independent evaluation of the implementation of EMPACT and present the results thereof to the Council.

The Council calls on the European External Action Service and the Commission to:

30. Mainstream, in line with the European Internal Security Strategy, security considerations into the EU's external action. In particular, promote the awareness of EMPACT in security dialogues, strategic partnerships, agreements and other cooperation frameworks with third countries, as well as in Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) missions and operations. Where relevant, invite third countries and CSDP missions and operations to participate in EMPACT actions, in close coordination with drivers.
31. Facilitate, including through EU delegations, EU security experts and European migration liaison officers, the participation of third countries in the operational implementation of EMPACT, where appropriate, according to identified threats and needs.

The Council calls on JHA agencies to:

32. Commit in their annual work programmes to participate in and provide support – including financial – to EMPACT activities.
33. Provide, in line with their respective mandates, continued operational, analytical support for operational actions and joint action days, including the processing of crime-related personal data, as well as specific support for, reporting on and monitoring of the implementation of OAPs and support for training and awareness raising.
34. Take on, where relevant, the role of co-drivers and action leaders, action co-leaders, coordinators of common horizontal strategic goals and joint action day coordinators.

The Council calls on Europol to:

35. As a matter of priority, continue to support EMPACT and consider an increase in the allocation for EMPACT within Europol's budget.
36. Develop, in close cooperation with Member States, an interim report on new, changing or emerging threats, whilst having regard to agreed EMPACT crime priorities.
37. Produce, in close cooperation with Member States, the EU SOCTA and the updated analysis and mapping of the most threatening criminal networks, providing a complete and thorough picture of criminal threats impacting the EU.
38. Enable a better integration and use of operational task forces (OTFs) within EMPACT by providing drivers with additional strategic information about the OTFs, in particular non-personal data such as relevant crime areas, trends and modi operandi.

II. EU Crime priorities for the 2026-2029 EMPACT cycle

39. In accordance with the EMPACT methodology and based on the 2025 EU SOCTA, the Council should identify the EU crime priorities for the fight against serious and organised crime.
40. The 2025 EU SOCTA⁷ highlights seven key threats to be considered for the 2026-2029 EMPACT cycle.
41. The 2025 EU SOCTA shows how serious and organised crime is progressively causing destabilisation (generating illicit proceeds and spreading violence and corruption), increasingly happening online (criminal networks exploiting digital and online infrastructures) and strongly accelerated by artificial intelligence and other new technologies (e.g. blockchain or quantum computing). Special emphasis should be therefore placed on tackling these developments when developing the General Multi-Annual Strategic Plan (G-MASP) and OAPs in different crime priorities.
42. Based on the 2025 EU SOCTA and considering other strategic papers, assessments and policies, the Presidency and the European Commission services drafted a policy advisory document (PAD)⁸ that was discussed with the Member States.
43. Experiences gained from the relevant OAPs in the current EMPACT cycle of 2022-2025 should be duly taken into consideration for the implementation of the OAPs.

⁷ 7280/25

⁸ 8388/25

44. Based on these discussions, the Council considers that the EU crime priorities for the 2026-2029 EMPACT cycle should be the following:

1) THE MOST THREATENING CRIMINAL NETWORKS AND INDIVIDUALS

The aim of this priority is *“to identify and disrupt the most threatening criminal networks active in the EU, the individuals with key roles in these networks and the individuals acting alone and committing serious crimes as a service. A special emphasis should be placed on the criminal networks and individuals undermining the rule of law by using corruption and parallel financial systems and abusing legal business structures to launder money, and by exploiting young recruits and using violence to further their criminal goals. Efforts should also be made on asset recovery to effectively seize and confiscate criminal profits and disrupt the financing of further criminal activities”*.

The priority of tackling the most threatening criminal networks and individuals should be addressed through one OAP intended to be overarching/horizontal/cross-cutting.

While other commodity-based OAPs would still tackle the criminal networks and individuals involved in the related crime area (e.g. drugs trafficking), this specific overarching OAP could contribute to gathering intelligence on networks and individuals, contribute to Europol’s mapping and intelligence notifications, and deal with the ones that would not be tackled by commodity-based OAPs. For instance, as money laundering is a distinct criminal phenomenon which is critical for criminal networks, this specific OAP should contain operational actions (OAs) on criminal networks and individuals engaging in or providing money laundering as a service to foster the fight against money laundering and asset recovery. In addition, this OAP could also contain OAs on mobile organised crime groups involved in large-scale organised property crime (OPC) throughout Europe, and on the Russian-speaking networks (e.g. ‘thieves-in-law’). Moreover, this OAP could provide a relevant framework for examining how organised crime networks interact with external illicit actors and for analysing the role such networks may play in broader security dynamics within and beyond the EU.

Member States could also consider a specific distribution of tasks between the ‘driver’ and the ‘co-driver(s)’ of such an ‘overarching’ OAP. For instance, while the ‘Driver’ would fulfil its coordination and management responsibilities, one ‘co-Driver’ could be tasked to follow closely the ‘mapping of the criminal networks’, another ‘co-Driver’ could be tasked to follow the ‘anti money laundering, asset recovery (freezing and confiscation)’ aspects (etc.).

2) FASTEST GROWING CRIMES IN THE ONLINE SPHERE

The priority of tackling the fastest growing crimes in the online sphere consists of three sub-priorities and should be addressed through three OAPs.

2.1. Cyber-attacks

The aim of this sub-priority is *“to target the criminal offenders orchestrating cyber-attacks targeting critical infrastructure, governments, businesses and private citizens.”*

This sub-priority should be addressed through one OAP.

2.2. Online child sexual exploitation

The aim of this sub-priority/OAP is *“to combat child sexual exploitation being nurtured online, including the production and dissemination of child sexual exploitation material (CSAM) and the solicitation of children”*.

This sub-priority should be addressed through one OAP.

2.3. Online fraud schemes

The aim of this sub-priority is *“to target criminal networks and individuals orchestrating large-scale fraud schemes online aimed at defrauding private individuals, businesses and public sector organisations, particularly those generating multi-million euro revenues each year and using online platforms to amplify the reach of their scams to target a large number of victims”*.

This sub-priority should be addressed through one OAP.

3) DRUGS TRAFFICKING

The priority of fighting drug trafficking consists of two sub-priorities and should be addressed through two OAPs.

3.1. The production, trafficking and distribution of cannabis, cocaine and heroin

The aim of this sub-priority is *“to identify and target criminal networks and individuals involved (1) in the wholesale trafficking of cannabis, cocaine and heroin to the EU, and/or (2) in the cultivation of cannabis and distribution of cannabis, cocaine and heroin and related precursors in the EU”*.

This sub-priority should be addressed through one OAP.

3.2. The production, trafficking and distribution of synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances

The aim of this sub-priority is *“to identify and target the criminal networks and individuals involved in the production and global supply of synthetic drugs and new psychoactive substances and (pre-)precursors in, to, and from the EU”*.

This sub-priority should be addressed through one OAP.

4) **MIGRANT SMUGGLING AND TRAFFICKING OF HUMAN BEINGS**

The priority of tackling smuggling, trafficking, and exploitation consists of two sub-priorities and should be addressed through two OAPs.

4.1. Migrant smuggling

The aim of this sub-priority is *“to fight against criminal networks and individuals involved in the smuggling of migrants, in particular those providing comprehensive facilitation services to irregular migrants along the main migratory routes crossing the external border of the EU and those involved in facilitation of secondary movements and legalisation of residence status within the EU, with a focus on those whose methods endanger people’s lives. Specific attention should also be given to document and identity fraud, and the use of fraudulently obtained documents”*.

This sub-priority should be addressed through one OAP.

4.2. Trafficking in human beings

The aim of this sub-priority is *“to disrupt criminal networks and individuals engaged in the trafficking in human beings for all forms of exploitation, including labour and sexual exploitation. Special focus should be given to cases of exploitation of minors, including, for forced criminality, cases of use or threats of violence against victims and their families, cases of misleading victims by simulating to officialise the exploitation, cases of recruitment, advertisement or exploitation of victims online, cases of intermediaries providing digital services.”*

This sub-priority should be addressed through one OAP.

5) FIREARMS AND EXPLOSIVES CRIMES

The aim of this priority is *“to target criminal networks and individuals involved in the misuse, illicit manufacture, trafficking, possession and modification of the marking of firearms and other small arms and light weapons (SALW). This is also applicable to corresponding illicit activities related to explosives and pyrotechnic products”*.

This priority should be addressed through one OAP.

6) ENVIRONMENTAL CRIMES

The aim of this priority is *“to disrupt criminal networks and individuals involved in all forms of environmental criminal offences, with a specific focus on those involved in waste crime, which poses a critical threat by causing devastating effects on the environment, human health and the economies, and on those with a capability to infiltrate legal business structures or to set up their own companies or similar organisational structures as a mean to facilitate unlawful activities”*.

This priority should be addressed through one OAP.

7) ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL CRIMES

The priority of fighting fraud against the interest of the EU and its Member States consists of three sub-priorities and should be addressed through three OAPs.

7.1 VAT (incl. MTIC) fraud

The aim of this sub-priority is “*to disrupt criminal networks and individual criminal entrepreneurs involved in large-scale and complex value added tax (VAT) fraud, in particular in missing trader intra-Community (MTIC) fraud*”.

This sub-priority should be addressed through one OAP.

7.2 Excise and customs fraud

The aim of this sub-priority is “*to target criminal networks and individuals engaging in the large-scale excise fraud, with particular focus on the production and/or trafficking of illicit tobacco products in the EU, and in customs fraud (including sanctions evasion) that results in significant financial losses for the EU and substantial tax revenue losses for many Member States as well as threatens the safety and security of EU citizens*”.

This sub-priority should be addressed through one OAP.

7.3 Intellectual property (IP) crime, counterfeiting of goods and currencies

The aim of this sub-priority is “*to combat and disrupt criminal networks and criminal individual entrepreneurs involved in IP crime and in the production, sale or distribution (physical and online) of counterfeit goods or currencies, with a specific focus on goods harmful to consumers’ health and safety, to the environment and to the EU economy*”.

This sub-priority should be addressed through one OAP.