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NOTE

from : Working Party on Terrorism
to : Article 36 Committee / COREPER / Council

No. prev. doc. : 9496/06 ENFOPOL 96 JAI 261 and 16532/1/06 ENFOPOL 219

Subject : Council Conclusions on cooperation to combat terrorist use of the Internet
("Check the Web")

1. At its meeting of 15 May 2007 the Working Party on Terrorism examined the present note on the "Check the Web" project that was launched by the German Presidency.

2. The Article 36 Committee is invited to forward to COREPER / Council (JHA Council of 12-13 June 2007):
 - a) for notation Annex 1 of the note, which explains the initiative; and
 - b) for approval Annex 2 of the note, which contains Council Conclusions.

1. Internet use plays a significant role for terrorist organizations. Terrorists use the Internet to radicalize, recruit and train potential terrorists and to transfer information. So-called terror manuals provide instructions on how to produce weapons, how to carry out attacks, how to take hostages and how to build bombs, among other things. In the face of the global availability of the Internet, this is especially worrying.

2. Only resolute action against the use of the Internet by terrorist structures can tackle this development. The EU has a role to play in this and has recognized the need to act. In its strategy and action plan for combating radicalization and recruitment to terrorism (doc. 14781/1/05 and doc. 14782/05) the EU calls for measures to combat the terrorist use of the Internet. It also emphasizes that the activities of the Member States have to be accompanied by action at EU level. In its conclusions of 15/16 June 2006 (doc. 10633/06 CONCL 2), the European Council expressly asks the Council and the Commission to develop measures to prevent the misuse of the Internet for terrorist purposes while at the same time observing fundamental rights and principles.

3. Member States and Europol are already actively monitoring and evaluating terrorist websites. Furthermore, in its communication on the “Terrorist Recruitment – Addressing the factors contributing to violent radicalization”, the European Commission announced its intention to explore possibilities of tackling of content used to radicalise individuals for terrorism on the Internet in order to address the factors conducive to violent radicalization.

4. Besides the activities of the single actors and co-operation in other fora, there is also scope to strengthen cooperation on an EU basis, specifically with regards to monitoring and evaluating Islamist terrorist websites. Many Internet pages in various languages have to be monitored and evaluated, which requires enormous technical and human resources. Due to the huge quantity of Internet pages in use, problems arise on a national and international level concerning the quantity and quality of resources, especially with a view to the language skills needed. It is hardly possible for one individual member state to cover all suspicious terrorism-related activities on the Internet. Monitoring and evaluating the Internet should therefore be intensified by sharing this task on a voluntary basis among the Member States, taking advantage of the special language and professional competence of the relevant authorities of the individual Member States. In addition to sharing information via Europol, Member States may also choose to divide labour amongst themselves on a voluntary basis to achieve the most efficient use of resources. However, irrespective of potential distribution of priorities the responsibility of deciding whether to monitor, interrupt or shut down specific websites remains with the Member States. In all of this work the activities of the various actors (Member States, Commission, Europol, SitCen, et al.) have to be coordinated in a targeted way.
5. On 8 June 2006 the Article 36 Committee took note of a memorandum on EU cooperation to combat the terrorist use of the Internet and on 25 January 2007 it took note of a progress report on the project “Check the Web” (doc. 9496/06 and 16532/1/06).
6. The following Council Conclusions on cooperation to combat terrorist use of the internet (“Check the Web”) are based on the Conclusions of the European Council of 15/16 June 2006 (doc. 10633/06 CONCL 2). It underlines the meaning of the cooperation between the Member States to combat terrorist use of the Internet.

Council Conclusions
on cooperation to combat terrorist use of the Internet
(“Check the Web”)

1. The Internet use plays a significant role in the logistic, operational and communication network of terrorist organizations. Terrorists use the Internet not only as a means to communicate and spread propaganda, but also to radicalize, recruit and train terrorists, to spread instructions on how to carry out concrete offences and to transfer information, as well as for terrorist financing purposes.
2. The EU has made it one of its primary goals to tackle the Internet as a basis for radicalization and recruitment to terrorism. The prevention of radicalization processes and the recruitment of potential terrorists is one of the main pillars of the fight against terrorism. Accordingly, the strategy and action plan for combating radicalization and recruitment to terrorism (Doc. 14781/1/05 and Doc. 14782/05) contain measures to combat the terrorist use of the Internet in this regard.
3. The Council supports the initiative “Check the Web”, which aims at strengthening cooperation and sharing the task of monitoring and evaluating open Internet sources on a voluntary basis.
4. The Council welcomes the progress that has been made concerning the coordinated monitoring and evaluation of Islamist terrorist websites within the framework of "Check the Web". The information portal at Europol constitutes an essential tool for cooperation among Member States.
 - a. Europol is building the information portal as a technical platform for information exchange among Member States. It will contain the following modules, for which the Member States provide their data and to which all Member States have access:
 - Contact persons for strengthening the expert network;

- Lists of links to monitored websites for mutual information;
- Additional information (special language competence in the individual Member States, technical expertise, possibilities of legal action against terrorist websites) that enables the sharing of resources;
- List of announcements by terrorist organizations, to aid in combining resources;
- Evaluation results to avoid duplication of work.

The first functionalities of the information portal (contact persons, link lists and lists of statements by terrorist organizations) were launched at the conference of the Europol Management Board on 8/9 May 2007 and are accessible to all Member States. Europol will expeditiously extend the information portal.

The establishment of this information portal will facilitate a significantly increased quality of cooperation between the Member States in monitoring and evaluating Islamist terrorist websites. It provides a platform where Member States can make their information accessible to each other, thus compiling the knowledge available within the EU. Member States will have direct and fast access to information on the work performed by other Member States and their results. In urgent cases direct contact can be established and cooperation can be coordinated through the list of national contact persons. In addition, initial steps were taken to strengthen cooperation, on a voluntary basis, under the principle of the division of labour amongst interested Member States.

- b. Cooperation through the information portal is complemented by regular expert meetings. The first of these meetings already took place under the German Presidency. They serve as a forum for the targeted exchange of information and experience including the national approaches in the Member States to monitoring and evaluating of terrorist websites, the analysis of jihadist activities on the Internet and the technical aspects of Internet monitoring. The German Presidency is summarizing the results of these meetings in a handbook. After the German Presidency, Europol will take over the organization of these regular expert meetings.
 - c. The Member States have started to work on joint projects. At present some Member States under German lead responsibility are sharing the task of analysing Al Qaida's media department "As-Sahab". If possible, the results of the project will be made available in the information portal.
5. The Council calls upon all the Member States, the Commission, Europol and SitCen to support the "Check the Web" project. The Council confirms it will consider whether that the systematic cooperation in sharing the task of monitoring and evaluating the Internet needs to be further strengthened on the basis of the evaluation of "Check the Web".
6. The Council requests that future Presidencies report annually on the progress made concerning this cooperation.