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Subject: Conclusions of the PCCCs seminar: "PCCCs, national bodies and Europol:  
3 levels, 1 goal?!" (27 October 2010)

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Delegations will find in annex the conclusions drawn by the Presidency on the Police and Customs Cooperation Centres' (PCCCs) seminar: "PCCCs, national bodies and Europol: 3 levels, 1 goal?!" held in Brussels on 27 October 2010.

## Conclusions of the PCCCs seminar

### "PCCCs, national bodies and Europol: 3 levels, 1 goal?!"

Within the framework of the Belgian Presidency of the Council of the EU a seminar "PCCCs, national bodies and Europol: 3 levels, 1 goal?!" was organised in Brussels on 27 October 2010 with the support of the European Commission (in particular Directorate-General Home Affairs).

This seminar was held within the scope of the projects of the Belgian Presidency relating to the Police and Customs Cooperation Centres (PCCCs).

The main objective of the seminar was to promote a better reciprocal knowledge of the possibilities, limits, competencies, and modes of operation of the three levels of international police and customs cooperation (national, regional and European).

Participation in the seminar was a real success: more than eighty participants coming from 16 different countries and representing the PCCCs, the national central bodies, Europol, the Commission, other European bodies and Interpol contributed to the success of this seminar.

All the contributors and participants welcomed the initiative taken by the Belgian Presidency to organise this seminar and bring together, for the first time ever, the three levels of international cooperation.

Following the opening of the seminar by a representative of the Belgian Federal Police (Directorate of Operational Police Information) and of the Commission (Directorate-General Home Affairs), the PCCCs, the national central authorities and Europol presented their organisations, competencies, missions and possibilities. These presentations were followed by an overview of the specific analysis of cross-border crime within a PCCC and by information from the Commission about the results of the questionnaire on the statistics relating to PCCCs within the EU. At the end of the day the conclusions were drawn by two Directors of the Belgian Federal Police.

The exchanges were numerous, open and fruitful and could be summed up under three headings:

## **1. Relevance of the three cooperation levels**

The participants agreed on the relevance of the three levels of international cooperation of police and customs: each of these three components plays an essential role in the framework of the fight against criminality in Europe.

It was concluded that the PCCC's were in full development. Their number is constantly increasing: there are currently more than thirty of them and new bilateral or multilateral PCCC's of different forms are set up regularly at the borders of the EU. Moreover, the development of a PCCC model is specifically mentioned in the Stockholm Programme, and appropriate budgetary resources under the ISEC programme are available for this. In addition, the role of PCCC's will be reflected upon when the Commission presents its European Information Exchange Model in 2012.

The number of requests dealt with by these services is also constantly increasing. During the seminar it was estimated that the PCCC's in Europe exchanged on average **one million pieces of information per year**.

The participants of the seminar emphasised the important role played by the PCCC's in international police and customs cooperation. Indeed PCCC's:

- obtain tangible and immediate results and meet operational needs;
- provide an efficient answer to the problems generated by the differences in structure and competencies between diverse respective police and customs organisations, as well as to the difficulties of communication caused by language barriers;
- the requests addressed to the PCCC's are dealt with within extremely short deadlines and without unnecessary formalities;
- relieve the central authorities from many requests that do not fall within the scope of their 'core business';
- are geographically close to the requesting services and know the distinctive features of their border area.

## 2. Challenges

However, it emerged from the debates held during the day that:

- the level of competence of the three levels and their cooperation (partnership) and complementarity should be specified; the information exchange between the three levels still needed to be improved;
- a better convergence of the resources, functionalities and operation modes of PCCCs was desirable (in particular the use of a joint – or at least compatible – application for registering and dealing with the requests);
- PCCCs felt the need to communicate better and more with each other in order to exchange best practices enabling them to improve their respective functioning;
- there were some misunderstandings about what kind of cooperation centres fall under the scope of PCCCs; all facilities for regional cross-border cooperation with the participation of police and/or customs and/or border guards should be involved in the activities organised for PCCCs;
- the choice of the channels to be used should be clarified for the first line law enforcement agent (for the questions as well as for the answers).

## 3. Perspectives

During the seminar, the following proposals were formulated:

- the setting up of a ‘network’ for exchanging best practices between PCCCs in the form of:
  - a platform for (non-operational) information exchange,
  - (regular) meetings between PCCCs' coordinators;
- the organisation of regular meetings between the PCCCs, the central national authorities and Europol ;
- putting Europol’s SIENA system (Secured Information Exchange Network Application) at the disposal of the PCCCs (in accord with the respective national authorities) in order to ensure optimal information exchange between the PCCCs, the national central bodies and Europol; the fact that this system would be put at their disposal would not in any way imply that the PCCCs fall under the authority of Europol.

The implementation of these three measures should be prepared by a limited group of experts composed of representatives of the levels and services concerned, and in collaboration with the Commission (in particular DG Home Affairs).

The Commission declared that there were appropriate budgetary allocations under the ISEC programme to support these proposals and agreed to put its secured network 'Circa' at the disposal of the PCCCs as a platform for exchanging good practices.

At the end of the day, the participants agreed on the fact that the objectives of the seminar had been unquestionably met and that this seminar should be considered as a first step, calling for other meetings in order to carry out the proposed initiatives.

The three levels that were invited to get to know each other better during this seminar declared that they were now on the same bandwagon leading to better mutual acquaintance and cooperation. They expressed their intention to keep this train moving in the right direction.

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