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NOTE

from:	Czech delegation
to:	Working Party for Schengen Matters (SIS/SIRENE) /Mixed Committee (EU-Iceland/Norway and Switzerland/ Liechtenstein)
Subject:	SIRENE and FAST joint conference in Prague May 2012: conclusions and other activities in the area of searches for wanted persons

To keep the delegations in the SIS/SIRENE formation of the Schengen Working Party informed about developments in the area of searches for wanted persons, the Czech delegation provides information below on recent activities.

SIRENE and FAST joint conference

Under the Czech Presidency of the Salzburg Forum - a group established to support cooperation in the area of internal security, covering Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia and Croatia - the joint conference of SIRENEs and FAST experts took place in Prague between 28 and 31 May 2012. Germany was also invited. The purpose of the conference was to support the work of SIRENEs and FASTs, share best practices and improve coordination and cooperation in the area of searches for most wanted persons. The conclusions of this conference are available as an attachment to this document.

In brief:

- the participants confirmed that SIS and SIRENEs are pivotal tools for police cooperation in the Schengen Area and the EU and that FASTs are important tools for searching for most wanted criminals
- the need for adequate SIRENE capacities in human resources, organizations, workflows and competencies was agreed to be of crucial importance,
- the intensive use of information from electronic communication for searches was recalled, together with a call for necessary harmonisation in this area,
- the SEarCH initiative was supported as an effective set of measures to support searches for most wanted criminals; close cooperation between SIRENE and FAST was noted as a basic element,
- the completion of the SIS II project was supported, given the need for uninterrupted functioning of SIRENEs; the substantial role of Member States' SIRENE experts in the project was acknowledged
- the holding of regional meetings of SIRENE and FAST was recognised as good practice.

ENFAST experts meeting in The Hague

Experts from FAST (Fugitive Active Search Teams) associated in ENFAST - European Network of FAST (see 15382/10) met on 10 and 11 April 2012 in the Hague at Europol's premises, with the participation of Europol and Interpol. The report from this meeting is available as 11404/12, soon to be released in a REV 1 version following the Czech delegation's comments. The report was presented at a Law Enforcement Working Party last week.

SIRENE CZ was invited to the meeting to present the SEarCH initiative and to provide information about the roles of SIS and SIRENE in the searches. Despite extensive support from Europol, the participation of the SIRENE CZ expert was finally not possible. However, SIRENE CZ prepared the presentation on SIS, SIRENE and SEarCH, which was made available to the participants in the meeting. There was very a positive reaction on SEarCH, and SIS was mentioned in the press release from the meeting.

However, the Czech delegation sees a vital need for further steps to ensure coordination with ENFAST and Europol which require the involvement of SIRENEs to ensure unity of searches in the Schengen area.

SEarCH initiative

In connection with support for SEarCH initiative, the Member States are invited to further discuss the proposal and to implement the agreed parts of the initiative step by step.

General point

The Working Party for Schengen Matters (SIS/SIRENE) is invited to ensure coordination and cooperation with other subjects involved in searches in the Schengen/EU, namely ENFAST, Europol and Interpol, to avoid duplication or fragmentation of the current effective system of searches and any weakening of the role of SIS and SIRENE, with all the negative impacts that would have.

SIRENE AND FAST JOINT CONFERENCE IN PRAGUE MAY 2012**CONCLUSIONS**

Under the Czech Presidency of the Salzburg Forum - a group established to support cooperation in the field of internal security - the joint conference of SIRENE (central units for SIS searches and police co-operation in Schengen) and FAST (Fugitive Active Search Teams) experts took place in Prague from 28 to 31 May 2012. The participants, after fruitful discussions, reached following the conclusions in the area of SIRENE and FAST cooperation, in particular regarding the search for wanted persons.

SIS and SIRENEs are the pivotal tools for police cooperation in the Schengen area and the EU. FASTs have an irreplaceable role in the search for the most wanted criminals. Cooperation between SIRENEs and FASTs at both national and European levels is therefore indispensable for effective searching for wanted criminals who present a danger to European citizens. The following best practices in this area should be noted: SIRENE and FAST close cooperation and dialogue; mutual information flow, mutual access to workflows for effective and direct sharing of information.

Since the numbers of alerts and hits in the SIS conducted by the SIRENEs (more than 108 000 hits on foreign alerts in 2011, amounting to a 19% increase from 2010) rise constantly and substantially, the issue of SIRENE capacities — human resources, organizations, work-flows and powers — is now reaching a breaking point, calling for immediate action at national level to maintain the necessary standards of cooperation. The following best practices in this area should be noted: additional staff for SIRENE, integration of international police cooperation units/channels (however, the integrated staff must comply with SIRENE standards of cooperation), effective electronic work-flow with high level of automation, effective organisation of cooperation with other units and authorities, appropriate powers and access rights for execution of SIRENE functions.

Bearing in mind the wide use of electronic communication tools in recent times, which have proved to be among the most effective sources of information when conducting searches for wanted persons and also for missing persons in danger, participants fully supported the intensive use of these tools for searches and in this connection also called for harmonisation of relevant legislation in the EU to ensure common appropriate access to them by law-enforcement authorities for search purposes.

In line with the Stockholm programme, which calls for effective use and further development of existing channels, the participants supported ideas of SEarCH as needed to allow further progress in searching for the most wanted criminals involved in serious crimes who often take measures to avoid standard ways to be arrested. SEarCH should involve full use of EAWs and SIS alerts, intensive work on such cases at SIRENEs, a proactive approach after the search is launched, deep involvement on the part of FAST/ENFAST, use of Europol databases and consideration of common operation. The link to the recently considered Most Wanted Criminals website or other ways to involve the public into the search in suitable cases should be considered. However, the most important point for effective SEarCH would be close cooperation between SIRENE and FAST/ENFAST.

The participants expressed full support for the whole SIS II project, as the modernisation of the system is crucial for keeping the Schengen search up to date and effective, as is necessary for the area of free movement of persons and goods. Therefore all initiatives of the experts from the Member States directed to that end, namely DEBS, SIRENE Manual and SIRENE Functional Test preparation and execution, are to be fully supported. In addition, a clear migration plan for SIRENEs, ensuring a smooth transfer to SIS, needs to be delivered within a short time. The uninterrupted functioning of the SIRENEs is the goal.

Participants welcomed the conference of SIRENE and FAST experts as very useful and effectively contributing to mutual cooperation in searches in the region of Salzburg Forum Member States. It can therefore also serve as good practice for the future and for other regions.