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HIGH REPRESENTATIVE

VICE PRESIDENT OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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To the EU Ministers for Foreign Affairs

Dear Colleagues,

Ahead of our discussion at the Foreign Affairs Council on 14 December, I want to report on the work already done to set in place a coherent and effective EU external action to counter-terrorism (CT), and to suggest some priorities for further common engagement.

In the wake of the Charlie Hebdo attacks, on 9 February, the Foreign Affairs Council agreed important conclusions on the fight against terrorism. These have guided and continue to guide our work. The threat in our region has grown, inside and outside the European borders, as evidenced by the attacks in Paris, Tunis, Bamako, Ankara and Beirut. The probable involvement of Da'esh's Sinai affiliate in the Metrojet downing last month also highlights the threat the group represents to civil aviation.

In front of these increased threats, we know very well that our first responsibility lies in our diplomatic work to solve to many crises and conflicts that contribute to the destabilisation of our region. In parallel, the focus should be on the further implementation of 9 February conclusions, notably by agreeing how to mobilise additional resources where appropriate to that end.

Since February, we have appointed **CT/security experts to EU Delegations** in Tunisia, Turkey, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Lebanon and Nigeria. Experts should be posted to Algeria and Egypt shortly. The EEAS and EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator (EU CTC) have fostered a close relationship with these CT/security experts, who are working to improve the capacity of their host countries to tackle the terrorist threat. The experts have already helped to prepare and design CT political dialogues, workshops and action plans, in close consultation with other relevant counterparts from Member States, international community and NGOs/civil society.

The **first 'targeted and upgraded' CT political dialogue took place in Tunisia** in September with the active participation of the EEAS Deputy Secretary General, the EU CTC, all relevant Commission services and the EU Agencies, Europol and CEPOL. The wide participation on both sides allowed for a constructive meeting. One key outcome has been a comprehensive and ambitious CT package for Tunisia, the centrepiece of which is a €23 million security sector reform programme (funded under ENI bilateral programme), with an immediate impact on enhancing the capacity of the Tunisian judiciary to handle CT related cases starting in January 2016 as another specific outcome of the Dialogue. This model will be followed in future CT political dialogues in the MENA region. In addition, CT workshops have been organised with Lebanon and Turkey, which will now be followed up by CT dialogues and action plans, leading to concrete assistance packages.

CT political dialogues under the previous format also took place in 2015, including with **Israel, the UN, the US and Pakistan**. We also have used our membership in the various multilateral fora – notably the **GCTF, G7 and Anti-ISIL Coalition** – to further shape and actively promote the implementation of agreed EU policies and standards. Furthermore, we recently agreed with the **League of Arab States** to set up a dedicated working group on counter-terrorism that would meet twice a year. We also concluded a memorandum of understanding with the **Organisation of Islamic Cooperation** that covers enhanced security cooperation, including counter-terrorism issues.

**Several EU financing instruments have been mobilised to beef up CT capacities** in a wide range of countries with €142 million allocated at present, compared to approximately €10 million only four years ago. Recent **projects** include support to the Office of the National Security Adviser of Iraq, strengthening law enforcement and criminal justice capacities to address the foreign fighters' threat, prevention of radicalisation in the Maghreb and the Sahel, as well as the Counter-Terrorism Training Partnership implemented by CEPOL. Other projects are in the pipeline.

Moreover, it is significant that security in general and counter-terrorism in particular figured prominently as priorities identified by MENA partners during the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

In the last weeks, I have asked the EEAS to work with relevant Commission services for a review on how to **better use JHA tools and agencies** to support the external dimensions of our fight against terrorism, and also how CFSP instruments can support the priorities of the JHA Council. The latter is of particular relevance with regard to combating arms trafficking and explosives in the Western Balkans and the MENA region as well as concerning sanctions to cut off financing of terrorism. The Commission's Communication on an 'EU action plan against illicit trafficking in and use of firearms and explosives' underlines how stronger cooperation with third countries is an essential part of the work to tackle illicit firearms.

It is my view that the EU's existing strategies remain valid. Our key commitment remains to focus on their implementation, notably with regard to the 9 February Council Conclusions on CT. The context has changed and become even more complex. We need to focus on where the EU has the most added-value, accelerate work, but at the same time recognise that establishing cooperation with partner countries on CT is complex, takes time and requires building trust. One added value of the EU is our ability to engage for the long-term. We must strive for greater complementarity and coherence of action between the EU and Member States in our support to partner countries.

### **Geographical Priorities**

In February, we agreed that the focus of our efforts should be the **MENA region, Turkey and the Western Balkans**. Continuing to provide support to countries in other regions with critical needs, notably the **Horn of Africa** and the **Sahel** will remain crucial, particularly with regard to preventing radicalisation and building capacity in the criminal justice sector. We are focusing our effort on the speedy implementation of targeted CT political dialogues with our key partner countries. Workshops, dialogues and action plans are all steps towards establishing closer and structured CT cooperation and the development of comprehensive CT assistance packages, which are our objective.

**Tunisia** remains a key priority. I believe the approach developed by the EU institutions in respect of Tunisia can serve as a model for other priority countries, particularly **Morocco, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt and Turkey**, which are key partners for the EU in the region, face a particularly serious terrorist threat and where EU interests are most engaged (in terms of tourism, trade and investment). We have already held workshops with CT practitioners from Turkey and Lebanon and are now refining action plans. We must hold high-level CT political dialogues with both countries early in 2016. A CT workshop with Jordan and a joint visit by the EEAS Deputy Secretary General and the EU CTC to Morocco are planned in early 2016, as well as a CT workshop in Algeria. The outcome should be CT assistance packages leading to improved capacity in each country to tackle the terrorist threat; and reduced risk in each country to EU interests, particularly in the tourism sector.

**Libya** should also feature as a priority in the coming period, subject to political developments on the ground. There are indications that some elements of Da'esh have started to move from Raqqa to Sirte in Libya. CT will be included in the EU's planning for Libya, including the CSDP aspects.

In line with the Conclusions of the Council (JHA) of 20 November, it will also be important to step up our CT work in the **Western Balkans**, in particular in the context of the Slovenian-led Western Balkans CT initiative.

The EU is looking to **mainstream CT and CVE activity into its programming activities**, as required by the FAC conclusions. The revised ENP recognises the importance of CT and security issues for the region. With the help of the CT experts we will also explore greater use of TAIEX and Twinning for CT. The newly approved stability and migration trust fund offers opportunities for further intensifying CT-relevant cooperation with North African countries, as it aims to address the underlying factors of radicalization and improve resilience.

### **Thematic Priorities**

Although the EU should continue to focus on the broad outcomes identified by Foreign Ministers on 9 February, a number of key thematic priorities have emerged in recent months for our external CT engagement. These include:

- **Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTFs)**. This has become a huge problem across much of the MENA region, further highlighting the need that we strengthen cooperation with the region as a whole. As a follow up to the third Euro-Mediterranean FTF meeting in Baghdad, I believe the EU should build on this momentum and hold a Ministerial FTF Conference in 2016. This work can build on the strong foundation against foreign fighters which will be provided by swift adoption of the Commission proposal for a new Directive on Combatting Terrorism.

- **Border Security**. We should continue to focus on security along the Tunisian/Libyan border. The ability of Tunisian Da'esh recruits to filter across the border for equipment and training is undoubtedly fuelling the insecurity we have seen in Tunisia in recent months. The same goes for the Turkish-Syrian border that remains of huge concern both in terms of security and humanitarian angle, and that has to be addressed as a matter of urgency at the political level.

- **Aviation Security**. The Commission is playing a role to coordinate Member States' efforts and to define a common approach. Capacity building will be provided through a €7 million project starting in early 2016 for Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. We could focus in the first instance on those airports which have the greatest European footfalls and expand efforts as necessary.

- **Combatting the financing of terrorism (CFT).** The EU's current external measures, including sanctions, could be enhanced by reducing the time lag between adoption of UN listings and implementation in EU law, as far as possible and in line with FATF recommendations; and by building the capacity of MENA countries to protect their cultural heritages in order to curb more effectively the illicit trade on cultural goods, in cooperation with EU MS and Agencies. Trans national cooperation with third countries on requests for freezing assets should be further explored in compliance with the EU and MS legal frameworks. A new substantial action on countering terrorist financing and anti-money laundering is presently being developed with Member State expertise for implementation in late 2016.

These proposals will be taken up by the ECOFIN Council on 8<sup>th</sup> December, providing us further guidance on the way forward.

- **Countering Violent Extremism (CVE).** The EU can assist partner countries in developing a different vision for CT, including in the prevention of radicalisation, mobilisation of soft tools and the rehabilitation of returning foreign fighter. The EU has developed some internal tools on this front, including the Radicalisation Awareness Network Centre of Excellence, the Internet Referral Unit in Europol and the Syria Strategic Communications Advisory Team. The EU can aim to develop new partnerships with countries in the region that have developed significant experience on CVE, ensuring that their efforts are adequately resourced. An EU-funded project is about to start to work with Morocco, Tunisia and Lebanon to develop together effective counter-narratives. This could potentially become a marker for wider EU communications activity across the MENA region. In addition, in line with the 2030 Agenda on Sustainable Development, the EU is supporting an increasing number of initiatives aimed at identifying drivers of youth extremism, empowering women, promoting community dialogue, strengthening local actors or improving the media and education capacities to counter radicalising ideologies across the globe, including through Global Counter Terrorism Forum initiatives such as the Global Community Engagement and Resilience Fund (GCERF) and the Hedayah Centre.

- further strengthening a **rule of law and human rights based, judicial and law enforcement approach** to CT.

- the **internal/external nexus:** strengthening operational cooperation between the EU Member States and partner countries, mobilising more the JHA agencies (CEPOL, EUROPOL, FRONTEX, EUROJUST), including by posting of liaison officers/magistrates, and JHA tools, supporting the work of INTERPOL in the region to increase connectivity and the feeding and use of INTERPOL databases.

- **Strategic Communications and Youth:** it is important to improve our communication and outreach across the MENA region. The EEAS has established an inter-institutional Strategic Communications Task Force to enhance outreach in Arabic-speaking countries in the MENA region. Work has already begun in priority countries to develop pilot communication projects with EU Delegations to reach out to key audiences, in particular young people. Early priorities for action will include strengthening communication on EU action and projects in these countries, highlighting their positive effects on the everyday lives of the people and creating opportunities for an open dialogue with the youth on shared values. This outreach will be based on polling to get a sense of the key audiences and the most appropriate communication approaches in each country. The Task Force has benefited from the advice of the Syria Strategic Communications Advisory Team, and is working closely with other related projects such as that financed by the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace.

It would benefit greatly from additional resources, not least Arabic-speaking staff, for example Seconded National Experts such as those provided for the StratCom East Task Force. We can also appoint an Arabic communications adviser to the region who could ensure that EU policy positions are accurately reflected in the Arabic language media and assist EU Delegations. Engagement with opinion leaders, educators, training and study visits for journalists are also important. I suggest we promote initiatives connecting youth from both sides of the Mediterranean.

Across all of these lines of activity, I am committed to ensure that we secure the outcomes we all want to see: a reduced threat to Europe and our citizens from Da'esh and Al-Qaeda-terrorist groups, founded on a common work of the EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator, the EEAS and Commission services, and enhanced CT capacity in relevant countries in the region. In this respect, I plan to involve the EU CTC much more closely. I look forward to hearing your views on how best to take forward our CT efforts and the suggestions contained in this letter.

Yours sincerely,



Federica Mogherini