# Security Union: Commission presents Action Plan to strengthen the European response to tackle travel document fraud

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Today, the Commission has adopted an Action Plan setting out concrete measures to improve the security of travel documents, as announced in the Communication on "Enhancing security in a world of mobility" adopted on the occasion of President Juncker's 2016 State of the Union address. The Action Plan provides clear recommendations for Member States to tackle the phenomenon of travel document fraud and outlines a comprehensive set of actions for the Commission to take. Travel document security is an important factor in the fight against terrorism and organised crime and contributes to improving border protection and migration management, paving a way towards an effective and genuine Security Union.

Migration, Home Affairs and Citizenship Commissioner **Dimitris Avramopoulos** said: "*Ensuring the security of travel and identity documents is an important factor in the fight against terrorism and organised crime. Today's Action Plan proposes concrete operational measures which will allow Member States to combat travel document fraud more effectively, contributing to improving the protection of our borders, ensuring our internal security and better managing migration*."

Commissioner for the Security Union **Julian King** said*: "We know that terrorists have used forged travel documents to travel undetected across the EU. Indeed, many of our security measures rely on secure travel and identity documents – such as the checks at the external border under the Schengen Border Code or behind the border against the Schengen Information System. That's why Member States and EU agencies must work together to improve the security of travel documents and detection of travel document fraud. Taken together, these measures will help close down existing security gaps."*

The Action Plan is targeted at travel documents issued by EU Member States to EU citizens and third-country nationals which are used for identification and border crossing. Member States retain full responsibility for issuing the documents which are used to establish the identity of a person (so called breeder documents such as birth, marriage and death certificates) before issuing travel documents as well as the actual production and issuance of travel documents. However, security standards for travel documents issued by Member States as well as border control requirements are set at EU level. Today's Action Plan addresses all aspects of travel document security and aims at closing potential loopholes, in close cooperation between Member States and with the support of the Commission and EU agencies.

In full respect of fundamental rights and data protection rules and division of competences between Member States and the Commission, the Action Plan outlines measures in four key areas:

- **Registration of identity:** With the support of the Commission, Member States should consider how best to avoid issuing authentic documents based on false identities, examine how 'breeder' documents can be made more fraud-resistant and promote the use of the Europol handbook on breeder documents.

- **Issuance of documents**: Member States should improve the exchange of information on best practices regarding biometrics enrolment and document issuance procedures and strengthen the monitoring of the issuance of identity and travel documents to prevent theft of blank documents. The Commission will facilitate the exchange of best practices through workshops in 2017.

- **Document production:** The Action Plan calls on the European Parliament and the Council to adopt as soon as possible the proposals on a more secure uniform format for visas and residence permits for third country nationals to avoid further fraud. The Commission will finalise a study on EU policy options to improve the security of EU citizens' ID cards and residence documents against fraud and forgery risks in view of a possible legislative initiative by the end of 2017 and monitor the conformity of security features.

- **Document control:** Member States should systematically register all stolen, lost, misappropriated or invalidated documents in the Schengen Information System (SIS) and Interpol's Stolen and Lost Travel Document database, ensure better access to relevant systems for border guards and

accelerate the implementation of the 'fingerprint search' functionality in the SIS. The High-Level Expert Group on Information Systems and Interoperability is looking at how interoperability could contribute to improved document and identity checks. The Group will present its findings by mid-2017. In December 2016, the Commission will revise the legal basis of the SIS to enhance the functionalities of the system and it will implement the ' fingerprint search' functionality at central level in the Schengen Information System in 2017. The Commission will also work together with Member States and EU Agencies to boost training activities in new areas of document fraud.

The Commission will assess the progress made on the implementation of the Action Plan and will report to the European Parliament and the Council by the end of the first quarter of 2018 on the progress achieved.

## Background

Security has been a constant theme since the beginning of the Juncker Commission's mandate – from President Juncker's Political Guidelines of July 2014 to the latest State of the Union address on September 2016.

The European Commission adopted the European Agenda on Security on 28 April 2015, setting out the main actions to ensure an effective EU response to terrorism and security threats in the European Union over the period 2015-2020. Since the adoption of the Agenda, significant progress has been made in its implementation paving the way towards an effective and genuine Security Union.

The creation by President Juncker of a specific Commissioner portfolio for the Security Union in August 2016 shows the importance the Commission has attached to stepping up its response to the terrorist threat.

As outlined in the Communication of 6 April 2016 on Stronger and Smarter Information Systems for Borders and Security in order to enhance security and strengthen our borders, beyond well-performing systems, travel and identity documents must be authenticated easily and securely. The increasingly significant problem of travel document fraud has come under the spotlight in the context of the recent terrorist attacks in Europe and current migration flows. Document fraud has become an enabler of terrorism and organised crime, and is linked to the trafficking of human beings and migrant smuggling. Against this background, it is crucial that the EU and especially Member States intensify efforts to improve the security of travel documents issued to EU and third-country nationals. To that end, the Commission announced that it will present measures to fight against document fraud. In order to initiate a process towards the interoperability of information systems at EU level, the Commission decided to set up an Expert Group on Information Systems and Interoperability at senior level with EU agencies, national experts and institutional stakeholders to start the process.

In September, the Commission published a Communication on enhancing security in a world of mobility, in which it committed to adopting an Action Plan on travel document security by December 2016.

## For More Information:

Action plan to strengthen the European response to travel document fraud

Communication on Enhancing security in a world of mobility

Communication on paving the way toward effective and genuine Security Union

Factsheet: Security Union

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