Council of the European Union

NOTE

From:	Europol
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Subject:	EU Innovation Hub for Internal Security - state of play

Delegations will find attached the state of play of the EU Innovation Hub, as provided by Europol.

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EU Innovation Hub for Internal Security
Report to COSI
24 February 2021

1. Introduction

In line with the Outcome of the Justice and Home Affairs Council of 7/8 October 2019 (12837/19), COSI document 5757/20 of 18 February 2020, and its further specifications in 7829/20 of 7 May 2020, Europol, as part of its role within the Innovation Hub Team, took the initiative to invite all Justice and Home Affairs (JHA) Agencies to consider the practical implementation of the EU Innovation Hub for Internal Security. "As a collaborative network of innovation labs, the EU Innovation Hub for Internal Security will provide a joint EU platform to support the delivery of innovative cutting-edge products for the security of citizens in the EU, with a view to better assess the risks and foster the use and development of advanced and emerging technologies."[1]

Due to the constraints of Agencies to second dedicated staff to work with the Hub as requested by COSI, it was decided to establish a "virtual Hub Team" in the short term and appoint permanent representatives to participate to bi-weekly meetings. More than 30 participants representing nine JHA Agencies (CEPOL, EASO, EIGE, EMCDDA, eu-LISA, Eurojust, Europol, FRA and Frontex), the European Commission (JRC, DG Home), the General Secretariat of the Council and the Office of the EU Counterterrorism Coordinator have met every fortnight since November 2020.

The Europol Innovation Lab staff in their function as heading the Hub Team and its secretariat[2], provides logistical support, organises the meetings, prepares the agenda, moderates the discussions and distributes the outcomes and follow ups. Europol also created a Europol Platform for Experts for the Hub where participants can communicate securely about meetings, joint projects and share information.

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[1] EU Innovation Hub for Internal Security, COSI, 21 February 2020, 5757/20, p. 2.
[2] "The **Hub Team** will be located at and headed by Europol, with Europol staff supplemented by staff of participating innovation labs with adequate skills and operational experience to the tasks of the Hub. The European Commission, Frontex, eu-LISA and the EMCDDA will be invited to second, or otherwise make available, at least one staff member to Europol to work in the Hub Team. The participating innovation labs of any other EU Agency or entity, including from Member States, may also second, or otherwise make available, staff member to Europol to work in the Hub Team", *EU Innovation Hub for Internal Security main principles for the establishment,* COSI, 7 May 2020, 7829/20, p. 6.

A very positive and constructive dynamic has been established in the Hub Team. Further developing the EU Innovation Hub for Internal Security into a genuine multi-agency innovation platform will require dedicated personnel and budget in each of the participating agencies, allowing for deployment from these agencies to the Hub, so as to ultimately create a true multi-agency innovation entity.

2. **Implementation of the 'Base Tasks' identified by COSI**

Whereas the first meetings of the Hub Team mainly focused on defining working modalities of the Hub, the team has entered into a more operational phase with the identification and launch of some quick-win projects to demonstrate the operational value of the Hub.

In general, the objectives of the Hub Team are to implement the four base tasks in 2021 as identified by COSI[3]:

1. Mapping of existing and future projects to foster synergies and optimize use of resources.

2. Assessing gaps and needs in key areas of relevance for security practitioners.

3. Supporting innovation and research activities on internal security.

4. Advising stakeholders on the availability, eligibility and access method to the wide range of existing EU funding sources and funding opportunities under the current and next MFF.

2.1. Mapping of existing and future innovative projects

The Hub Team has engaged in the mapping of existing and future projects by:

1) Presenting at each meeting, an overview of the innovation activities and projects ongoing in each Agency (including JRC and DG HOME). These regular updates will remain as a standing agenda topic for each Hub meeting.

2) Preparing and launching a questionnaire - at the initiative of eu-LISA - to identify long term priorities, focus areas, gaps and needs to further innovate in the field of internal security and determine themes and projects on which the Hub should work in the coming months and years. The results of the survey will be available in March and serve as input for a process that has been launched in parallel (see below).

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[3] EU Innovation Hub for Internal Security, COSI, 21 February 2020, 5757/20.

2.2. "Quick-win" projects

In the course of January 2020, the Agencies agreed to select a few concrete "quick-win" projects with a view to launch a dynamic and concrete cooperation.

The choice of quick-wins is guided by jointly agreed criteria. Ideally, the projects should include two or more JHA Agencies; have started recently or will be starting in the coming months; have a connection to the priority topics identified by COSI (i.e. Artificial Intelligence or Encryption); be financed by existing budget; and provide first concrete results in the coming six months with a possible finalisation within 24 months. In addition, the projects should demonstrate a clear added value by being conducted in the framework of the Hub.

Several "quick-win" projects are currently under preparation:

1) Triggered by a preparatory action[4], the European Commission (JRC and DG Home) is launching a project **"EU-coordinated Darknet monitoring to counter criminal activities for 2020"** together with Europol and EMCDDA. By bringing the project under the roof of the Hub, the tool to be developed will benefit from the expertise and experience of the other JHA Agencies and can be used eventually by national actors.

2) Europol is launching a project to develop **Accountability Principles for Artificial Intelligence (AI) used in the area of Freedom, Security and Justice"**[5]**.** A first meeting was held in February with interested Agencies (FRA, Eurojust, and Cepol), and also EASO expressed the willingness to join the initiative. The project's objective is to define a set of universally applicable accountability principles to guide human-centred and socially driven AI capabilities for organisations within the security and justice sector. The project will also create a toolkit for security and justice practitioners to auto-evaluate future AI systems in light of the accountability principles. The outcome of the project could also inform the European co-legislators on the expected Commission proposal for AI legislation in April 2021 by providing a comprehensive account of the JHA Agencies' approach to develop AI tools in an accountable and responsible manner.

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[4] Commission implementing decision C(2020) 7942 final of 19.11.2020 on the financing of the Preparatory action on the EU-coordinated Darknet monitoring to counter criminal activities for 2020.

[5] The Heads of JHA Agencies discussed the impact of AI on their work at their last meeting on 20 November 2020 and called for the JHA agencies to take the aspect of accountability into consideration in their work.

3) eu-LISA proposed a project entitled **"Artificial Intelligence (AI) initiatives in ETIAS"**. Article 33 of the ETIAS Regulation[6] specifically asks for an algorithm to be developed to allow for automated profiling of travellers through the comparison of data recorded in ETIAS with pre-defined risk indicators and screening rules. The algorithm shall be based on the specific risk indicators to be defined by the ETIAS Central Unit. AI could support this effort. Considering the timeline of the implementation of the ETIAS system, this will be one of the first use cases where AI will be deployed within systems managed by eu-LISA. Cooperation with Frontex on this project is foreseen as the ETIAS Central Unit will play a key role. This project will be tested and deployed as early as possible and no later than the entry into operation of ETIAS before the end of 2022.

4) Frontex proposed two operational projects and two research projects:

a. **Maritime Surveillance Aerostat Pilot Project** - focused on the deployment of innovative technological solutions to assess their reliability, performance and cost-efficiency in a multi-platform architecture for integrated coastline surveillance;

b. **Land border pilot for Entry-Exit System (EES) solutions** - piloting state of the art technology for biometric data capture and defining a stand-alone border crossing check and registration "package";

c. **The EU Green Deal and the European Border and Coast Guard** - define the EU regulatory framework and instruments of relevance for the EBCG community and define tangible actions which would allow for the EBCG community to reduce the environmental footprint of its facilities, operations and services in order to achieve, and then maintain, a high level of environmental sustainability;

d. **Technology Foresight on Biometrics for the future of travel** – a study on the future opportunities that biometric technologies and biometrics-enabled border control systems could provide to Frontex and the European Border and Coast Guard (EBCG) community.

While JRC and Europol's quick-win projects have started under the auspices of the EU Innovation Hub for internal security, the projects proposed by eu-LISA and Frontex are still under consideration by the Hub Team.

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[6]   Regulation (EU) 2018/1240, OJ L 236, 19.9.2018.

3. Priorities for the coming months

The virtual Hub team has found a workable way to pursue its objectives in the challenging times of the pandemic and despite severe resource and budget limitations.

The members of the Hub Team are committed to show the added value of the EU Innovation Hub for Internal Security for the European internal security communities by starting the implementation of concrete cooperation projects with a view to support their respective stakeholder communities with innovative tools which will concretely improve their operational work.

The Hub team is also working on the development of operational and financial models led by eu-LISA, underpinned by a robust governance model, led by Europol, for long-term cooperation under the roof of the Hub. Together with the definition of long-term priorities of the Hub and its focus areas, based on the questionnaire developed by eu-LISA (see point 2.1.2), it is envisaged that these draft models could be presented to COSI during the spring for discussion and endorsement.

Conclusion:

- The current virtual set up of the Hub team is working efficiently in a cooperative spirit.

- The Hub Team has tackled both strategic tasks (mapping of projects, operational modalities for cooperation, prioritisation mechanism) as well as operational tasks (identification and launch of quick win projects to be implemented in the first half of 2021).

- The Hub is running on existing JHA Agencies' resources. Further progress to make a real difference and to fulfil the objectives set by the COSI (becoming a joint EU platform to support the delivery of innovative cutting-edge products for the security of citizens in the EU), will depend the allocation of dedicated personnel and budget from the Agencies involved.

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