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NOTE

From:	Presidency
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Portuguese Presidency's proposal for an EU-North Africa Enhanced Political dialogue on Justice and Home Affairs - Information from the Presidency

Delegations will find attached an information from the Portuguese Presidency.

**Portuguese Presidency's proposal for an EU-North Africa
Enhanced Political dialogue on Justice and Home Affairs**

State of play

1. Context

Enhanced cooperation between North Africa and the European Union is of paramount importance to the stability and security of both regions. The challenges, as well as the opportunities, are global, common and must be addressed together.

A renewed and further strengthened strategic partnership between the EU and its northern African partners is a clear priority, as highlighted under the New Agenda for the Mediterranean.

In this context, Portugal, as Presidency, proposed a comprehensive dialogue on issues of common interest dedicated to the area of Justice and Home Affairs. Focusing initially on strengthening cooperation with certain North African countries, namely Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania, this dialogue would complement the bilateral relations that these countries maintain with the EU under existing dialogue mechanisms, in modalities, formats and frequency to be jointly agreed, and inspired by the JHA dialogues with the Western Balkans and the USA.

A list of possible themes has been identified, including border management, fight against serious crime, police cooperation, counterterrorism, cybercrime, judicial cooperation in criminal and civil matters, data protection and migration, open to discussion with partners.

The initiative was introduced in February through a letter signed by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Home Affairs and Justice, addressed to the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and to the European Commissioners for Home Affairs and Justice. And last March, we presented it in the Council formations of the Justice and Home Affairs as well as in the "Jumbo" Council that brought together the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Interior Ministers. In all three occasions, the proposal received broad support from all those who intervened.

VP/HR Borrell and Commissioners Johansson and Reynders confirmed their interest and support in a letter to the Presidency in April.

2. Outreach with proposed partners

Throughout May and June, the Presidency, together with the European External Action Service and in coordination with the services of the Commission, prepared and executed a diplomatic initiative with the 6 target countries (Morocco, Mauritania, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt).

Joint démarches by Portuguese ambassadors, accompanied by the EU ambassadors, were made in the capitals of those countries (except for Tripoli, the meeting with Libya took place in Lisbon), with the respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs.

The main goal of this "outreach" was to present the initiative and assess the degree of interest of our partners and their willingness to start a discussion on the best way to achieve the goal.

3. Assessment

The proposal was received with general, although cautious, interest. As expected, the reactions were of a preliminary nature. All countries expressed their willingness to engage in dialogue and to study the proposal further.

Three main reactions can be singled out, regarding the links with neighborhood policy and other initiatives, the format, and themes.

Most expressed the need to clearly differentiate this initiative from existing regional or thematic initiatives and dialogues. Some expressed doubts on the added value and affirmed the importance of their own bilateral (in some cases privileged) relations with the EU.

As for the format, a multilateral dialogue also gave rise to reservations by some, clearly preferring to engage at bilateral level in this possible format, considering their different situations and the sensitivity of some of the issues. Regarding the level of the dialogue, it should be further discussed in future contacts.

Regarding the list of themes, migration (despite being dealt in several other fora) was mentioned by most of the countries approached. Other themes, like security, cybercrime, money laundering, terrorism or fight against corruption were mentioned by some. There was also reference to sensitivities in some Justice areas, and some recognition that many of the themes are cross-cutting and could be better addressed together.

All referred the need of internal consultations with the Ministries of the Interior/Justice before taking an official position.

4. Conclusion

In general terms, we make a positive assessment of the reactions from the potential partner countries. Despite some doubts and reservations, partner countries showed interest and openness to work and discuss the concrete shape of the proposal.

We therefore feel that there is room for the following presidencies, the Commission and the EEAS to pursue a constructive dialogue with these countries over this proposal.
