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From: EU Counter-Terrorism Coordinator  
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The Council of the EU (“Justice and Home Affairs”) stated on 31 August 2021: “The EU and its Member States will do their utmost to ensure that the situation in Afghanistan does not lead to new security threats for EU citizens.” The Council of the EU (“Foreign Affairs”) stated on 17 September 2021: “Prevent Afghanistan from serving as a base for hosting, financing or exporting terrorism to other countries. All efforts must be pursued to ensure that the Taliban cease all direct and indirect ties with international terrorism.”

This Counter-Terrorism Action Plan identifies areas of action where the EU and its Member States could prepare and mobilise existing instruments in a timely fashion to anticipate and address possible terrorism risks to EU internal security stemming from the Taliban’s takeover of power in Afghanistan.

The Counter-Terrorism Action Plan has been developed in coordination with the Commission services, the EEAS, the Presidency and relevant EU JHA agencies. It sets out 23 recommendations for action, which are divided into four areas: I. security checks – prevent infiltration; II. strategic intelligence/foresight: prevent Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for terrorist groups; III. monitor and counter propaganda and mobilisation; IV. tackle organised crime as a source of terrorist financing.

Close cooperation with international partners will be key in all these areas. The Counter-Terrorism Action Plan and its implementation will be reviewed after six months in consultation with TWP and COTER and thereafter at six months intervals. The Commission is encouraged to explore mobilizing existing financial instruments so as to support the implementation of this Action Plan.

### **I. Security checks: prevent infiltration of terrorists into the EU**

It is important that **timely and enhanced security checks** are performed at the EU's external borders and during asylum adjudication, visa and other relevant processes. The aim is to effectively identify those individuals who pose, or who might pose, a risk to EU internal security, and to avoid infiltration of terrorists into the EU. Information needs to be shared in a timely and coordinated manner to avoid any shortcomings in the sharing of terrorism-related information, or of information relating to an individual, between relevant competent national authorities. This applies in particular to the exchange of information between law enforcement and other security authorities with asylum and migration authorities. All relevant information on a person should be taken into account.

***Recommendations for action:***

1. The competent authorities of the Member States need to optimise their **systematic checks** on biographical and biometric data of Afghan nationals or presumed Afghans or other nationals coming from Afghanistan, or claiming to come from Afghanistan, and arriving at the EU's external borders<sup>1</sup>. These checks need to be carried out using all the relevant databases (SIS, Eurodac - check and registration, Europol systems and databases, ECRIS-TCN<sup>2</sup>, VIS, Interpol databases<sup>3</sup>) **in line with the existing legal requirements for such searches**. Prüm should be also consulted, based on relevant information in the police databases of Member States. Whenever relevant, PNR and API data should also be used. It is also important to ensure appropriate cooperation with NATO on the use of, in particular, the BICES database for battlefield information from Afghanistan and other war zones. Where legally and in practice possible, the above security checks should be conducted before the person in question crosses the EU external border of a Member State, i.e. in the country of origin or transit. This should also be the case in relation to legal routes to the EU, in such cases as family reunification.

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<sup>1</sup> Including those who have been evacuated to the EU

<sup>2</sup> ECRIS-TCN is in its procurement phase and is expected to be fully operational before the end of 2022.

<sup>3</sup> Specifically: Nominal data; SLTD; FTF; AFIS; TDAWN.

2. **The competent authorities of the Member States need to pursue and further intensify their timely exchange of information**, and their investment in the necessary resources to detect, trace, monitor and intercept possible terrorists. This applies in relation to all individuals arriving in the EU<sup>4</sup> from the Afghan region. This work needs to build on the efforts made in relation foreign terrorist fighters travelling to and from Syria and Iraq. At Member States' request, Europol can assist in this process by consulting its databases and providing available supplementary information. This would also help to address the threat posed by foreign terrorist fighters traveling from Afghanistan<sup>5</sup>.
3. To enable a common approach for enhanced security checks, TWP needs to develop, in close cooperation with other relevant Council working parties, a **protocol** setting up a uniform procedure for endorsement by COSI. Within this protocol, EU agencies (Europol, Frontex) should support, within their respective mandates and at Member States request, competent national authorities, in particular by deploying relevant experts and making available interpreters, cultural mediators, devices and tools to facilitate quick and direct access to the Agencies' specific databases. The protocol does not encroach on the principle that national security remains responsibility of each Member State.

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<sup>4</sup> Including those who have been evacuated to the EU

<sup>5</sup> The Monitoring Team continues to estimate the number of foreign terrorist fighters to be approximately between 8.000 and 10.000, mainly from Central Asia, the north Caucasus region of the Russian Federation, Pakistan and the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region of China, among others. Although the majority are affiliated foremost with the Taliban, many also support Al-Qaida. Others are allied with ISIL or have ISIL sympathies.” UN Report S/2021/486

4. **Europol, the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) and European Asylum Support Agency (EASO)** need to start preparing the logistics for the possible deployment, at the Member States' request, of, for instance, screening, de-briefing<sup>6</sup> and finger-printing at the EU's external borders. This needs to be done within their respective mandates, to ensure rapid deployment and implementation, especially in the case of a large number of arrivals of individuals as a result of the situation in Afghanistan. Common risk indicators could be developed which could be used in border controls. A "hotspots approach" with multidisciplinary teams could be considered. Europol, in collaboration with the other agencies, as appropriate, could start training guest officers. The latter could be quickly deployed at the external border for second-line security checks, as necessary. Interpreters and cultural mediators with the relevant languages (Pashtu/Dari) could already be identified as well as security-vetted. In addition, preparations could be made to enable the rapid deployment of such services. Recruitment needs to be managed<sup>7</sup>, subject to the procedures and requirements of the respective agencies' mandates.
  
5. In order more effectively to check persons evacuated from Afghanistan and detect individuals arriving from Afghanistan at the EU's external borders who might pose a threat to the EU's internal security, and in view of the need for improved security checks and exchanges of information, it is crucial that updated **battlefield information** is available to the competent national authorities and Europol. The US government and EU Member States, as well as Europol and Eurojust, have established contacts, channels and procedures for the sharing of battlefield information, including from Afghanistan. It remains essential to close information gaps and ensure the best possible availability of all relevant battlefield information from Afghanistan.

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<sup>6</sup> Frontex debriefing and screening is also relevant so as to support national authorities' information collection designed to increase reaction capabilities, e.g. regarding terrorist fighters.

<sup>7</sup> E.g. from qualified security-screened Afghan citizens who have been evacuated to Europe and have already worked for the EU or Member States in Afghanistan.

It is also essential to ensure that the relevant data is added to the Schengen information System (SIS) in line with the procedures endorsed by COSI<sup>8</sup>. Datasets need to be of sufficient quality and include the necessary alphanumeric data<sup>10</sup>.

6. Security checks concerning **Afghan citizens evacuated by the US** to the Western Balkans are equally relevant for EU security. Clarity from the US government should be sought on the envisaged security screening process before onward travel to the US for those Afghan citizens that the US has placed in transit in the EU and the Western Balkans. This applies, for instance, to applicable procedures, timelines, follow-up processes for rejected demands for visa for entry into the US. This will, in turn, enable a better assessment of potential security implications for EU Member States. For those individuals that have been placed in transit in the Western Balkans and who have been refused visa for entry into the US, the US Government should be invited to share with the Member States' authorities and / or Europol their personal and biometric data, as well as the reasons for rejection of such applications. This information will provide the legal grounds to register these individuals within the SIS, if the respective conditions are met. Moreover, US assistance is key for the screening of Afghan citizens who are in US bases in the EU, but have requested asylum in EU Member States.
7. An assessment is needed of how to deal with Afghan citizens or other nationals originating from Afghanistan that have reached the EU (e.g. via evacuation flights) and regarding whom **there are indications or evidence that they pose a security threat**. Due consideration should be given to the situation in Afghanistan. The sharing of relevant information, where possible including battlefield information, to allow for an investigation and possible prosecution of these individuals should be explored.

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<sup>8</sup> “Defining a process for evaluating and possibly entering information from third countries on suspected Foreign Terrorist Fighters in the Schengen Information System”, doc. 13037/20. This process would be also applicable for handling information from third countries relating to terrorist suspects from Afghanistan.

<sup>9</sup> The Europol and SIS regulations are currently being negotiated.

<sup>10</sup> Once the new SIS is operational (beginning of 2022), it will be possible to enter alerts containing only fingerprint data.

Eurojust should support Member States with regard to such prosecutions. EASO is supporting asylum administrations with the detection of applicants to whom one of the exclusion clauses may be applicable through training and country-specific tools, including on Afghanistan<sup>11</sup> Guidance on the application of the exclusion grounds with regard to applicants from Afghanistan (including e.g. possible terrorists) is also available in the EASO Country Guidance on Afghanistan.

## **II. Strategic intelligence/foresight: prevent Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for terrorist groups**

There is a risk that the Taliban is maintaining its close ties with Al Qaida<sup>12</sup> and allows Al Qaida (and other terrorist groups) a presence and opportunities to develop its activities in Afghanistan. This should be closely monitored and regularly assessed. Even if Al Qaida were to lie low for a while, and did not perpetrate external action that could be directly attributed to its presence in Afghanistan, Al Qaida would still have a safe haven and time in which to rebuild its headquarters, as well as the opportunity to guide and inspire its affiliates.

The continued activities in Afghanistan of ISIS Khorasan (IS-K) should also be monitored. Without a presence on the ground in Afghanistan, it will be a major challenge to obtain solid and reliable intelligence on the activities of terrorist groups and their affiliates. Strategic information exchange and regular consultations with key partners are essential.

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<sup>11</sup> EASO country of origin information reports provide general background information and specific information on those involved in the conflict.

<sup>12</sup> According to the UN (Report to the UN Security Council by the Sanctions Monitoring Team of 1 June 2021, Doc S/2021/486), since the signing of the agreement in February 2020, the Taliban has maintained its close ties with Al Qaida, and has continued to allow Al Qaida's presence in Afghanistan.

***Recommendations for action:***

8. Member States need to share, on a voluntary but committed basis via EU INTCEN, strategic **intelligence on the terrorist threat** resulting from developments in Afghanistan. INTCEN should ensure intensified reporting to assess the presence and activities of terrorist groups in Afghanistan. Such reporting should also cover the financing of these terrorist groups and the presence of foreign terrorist fighters. Europol should be encouraged to support the national authorities of the Member States in their efforts to monitor the movements of terrorists between the EU and Afghanistan, including through the EU Internet Referral Unit. Procedures and mechanisms to bring together all relevant actors in order to secure a real-time, comprehensive and coordinated EU response need to be ensured. Strategic information-sharing on the issue of safe havens for terrorist groups in Afghanistan and associated risks should be further enhanced with trusted third-country partners, in accordance with EU acquis concerning fundamental rights, including privacy.
9. Europol should be supported so that it can staff its **EU Internet Referral Unit** with security-vetted Pashtu/Dari/Urdu/Farsi speakers. This language range is a specialised skillset currently not available at Europol. The aim would be to monitor social networks and other sources, including information on possible calls for terrorist movements to and from Afghanistan. The establishment of an **EU-level pool of security-vetted language specialists** (including evacuated former staff of the EU Delegation in Kabul and similar local staff) could be considered so as to facilitate the recruitment of such skillsets for EU JHA agencies.

10. The EU needs to **strengthen dialogue, promote strategic information exchange and ensure increased interaction** with some of those countries neighbouring Afghanistan, as well as with countries in the region, the relevant Gulf Cooperation Council countries and globally with those having access to information on Afghanistan. Full use needs to be made of the ‘regional political platform of cooperation with Afghanistan’s neighbours’, to be established by the EEAS, as an outcome of the Gymnich meeting on 3 September 2021, which is expected to include a counter-terrorism angle. This also includes the launch of a Team Europe Initiative aiming to tackle forced displacement in the region. Moreover, existing instruments need to be applied. These should include the EU’s Counter-Terrorism Dialogues with countries in the region, which should be underpinned through an increased mobilisation of the EU’s CT capacity building tools and the EU’s network of Counter-Terrorism Experts at selected EU Delegations. The posting of additional EU CT Experts to EU Delegations in the region should be explored, budgetary means permitting<sup>13</sup>. Assistance to neighbouring countries receiving refugees from Afghanistan would also contribute to preventing radicalisation among camp residents. Examples of such assistance could be education, as well as provision for livelihoods and good humanitarian and security conditions.

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<sup>13</sup> In the region, currently, there are EU CT expert positions in Pakistan and in Kyrgyzstan for Central Asia.

11. The UN system and other **multilateral channels** could be an important source of information. The EU and Member States need to continue to support the high-quality UN reporting on the presence and actions of terrorist groups in Afghanistan. They should also supply relevant information to UNOCT, UN CTED and the UN Security Council's Committee pursuant to resolution 1267 (1999), 1989 (2011) and 2253 (2015) concerning ISIL (Daesh), Al-Qaida and associated individuals, groups, undertakings and entities. The EU should also engage politically and seek information as well as coordination through the Global Coalition against Da'esh and the Global Counter- Terrorism Forum. Moreover, the EU needs to engage with the G7 to promote information exchange. Such information exchange has started to map security equipment left behind in Afghanistan. Further cooperation with NATO will be explored in full respect of NATO's core mandate.
12. The EU and its Member States need to consider and explore with international partners how clear and non-negotiable demands for **denying terrorist groups safe havens on Afghan soil** can be made most effectively to the Taliban, and how potential commitments could be monitored. Without pre-empting the debate on the recognition of the Taliban government and resumption of development assistance, addressing the safe haven issue needs to be part of the considerations.

### III. **Monitor and counter propaganda and mobilisation**

The Taliban takeover has provided a propaganda boost, mobilising support beyond Afghan audiences to terrorist and Islamist extremists globally, including in Europe. Developments in Afghanistan highlight the importance of countering the spread of extremist Islamist ideology internationally.

### *Recommendations for action*

13. The EU INTCEN and the EU Internet Referral Unit at Europol needs to **monitor and provide an analysis** of the Taliban's takeover in Afghanistan with regard to the **global terrorist and Islamist extremist propaganda scene**, including the impact on those in Europe who are at risk of radicalisation. The Taliban, as well as the Al Qaida headquarters and affiliates, might operate strategic communication campaigns to develop and spread Islamist extremist narratives. These need to be monitored, including on social media. This includes monitoring of the Taliban's policy towards women and girls and the Taliban's denial of freedom of expression, religion, etc., which may have negative impacts in Europe. Monitoring should also cover potential attempts by Da'esh to use the situation in Afghanistan to increase the visibility and attractiveness of ISIS Khorasan, as well as possible violent right-wing and left-wing extremist discourse in reaction to developments in the wake of the Taliban takeover.
14. There is a need to consider impact and other analysis, support for the development of **counter-narratives** and the exchange of best practices, including through the Radicalisation Awareness Network (RAN) and the EU Strategic Communication Division in the EEAS with regard to **communication strategies**. There is also the need for an adequate response from and cooperation with social media companies. The aim is to ensure the removal of online terrorist content<sup>14</sup> and hate speech. There is a need to ensure continued policy support to Member States so as to help develop their strategic communication capabilities and raise awareness of communication challenges. In addition, there is a need to consider support for stratcom projects as well as counter-narrative projects in the region. RAN should collect and adapt existing good practices in the field of counter-narratives, and if possible create a toolbox for Member States. Member States may encourage persons with Afghan background to participate in counter-narrative efforts. Member States should work closely with their local authorities to support persons vulnerable to radicalisation, including those of Afghan origin.

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<sup>14</sup> Preparations for the application of the Terrorist Contents Online Regulation should be stepped up.

15. For decades, Afghans have been exposed to an externally supported spread of extremist Islamist ideology. The **spread and influence of Islamist extremist ideology**, both in the region and globally, call for an in-depth assessment of how to counter this problem and of how such efforts can be integrated more strongly within the EU's foreign policy. The EU's continued engagement with Saudi Arabia on the reduction of Islamist extremist proselytisation can help inform this effort. Similar dialogues, including back-to-back with regular counter-terrorism dialogues, could be initiated in close coordination with Member States with countries in which there are activities promoting extremist Islamist ideology internationally. The issue can also be part of the dialogue with regional organisations. The relevant Council Working Groups should assess the recommendations for EU approaches in the two recent studies issued by Commission services on the spread of fundamentalist Islam/Salafism in the Sahel and West Africa<sup>15</sup>. Utmost importance must be given to strengthening reporting by EUDELS and Counter-Terrorism Experts, integration, as appropriate, within development assistance programmes as well as cooperation with relevant CSDP missions in the region. This needs to be done in line with the core mandates of those missions. Consideration needs to be given, too, to further expert studies. This will, in turn, facilitate informed decision-making.

#### IV. **Tackling organised crime as a source of terrorist financing**

The Taliban are thought to have been controlling most of the opium production and poppy cultivation in Afghanistan. The business is considered to be one of their main sources of income. The Taliban are also believed to have been involved in the production or trafficking of synthetic drugs. The increase in opium production in Afghanistan directly influences heroin availability on EU markets where heroin arrives mainly via the Balkan route.

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<sup>15</sup> A discussion in COTER is tentatively scheduled for December 2021

However, more recently, this has also been arriving via the Southern route, via Eastern and Southern Africa<sup>16</sup>. The extraction of ephedrine<sup>17</sup> and the production of methamphetamine in Afghanistan have been rapidly expanding in recent years<sup>18</sup>. There is emerging evidence that this is used by Taliban groups to fund their activities<sup>19</sup>.

The weaponry<sup>20</sup> seized by the Taliban after the withdrawal of U.S. and allied troops, and taken from Afghan security forces, represents a predominant mid- to long-term threat. The reason is that it could be traded to generate income, or used to support organised crime networks as well as terrorist cells operating in Afghanistan and beyond, so as to launch attacks against Western targets. As in Syria and Iraq, terrorists may either destroy antiquities for propaganda purposes or traffic them for financial purposes. Migrant smuggling / trafficking of human beings is a potential source for terrorist financing and can be used by organised crime groups to facilitate the infiltration of terrorists into the EU. To prevent an increase in the financing of terrorist groups connected to Afghanistan and the Taliban, all possible revenues related to trafficking activities should be tackled.

***Recommendations for action:***

16. **Europol** should monitor and assess the potential impact and evolution of the crime risks linked to the situation in Afghanistan on EU security and develop an enhanced up-to-date criminal intelligence picture.

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<sup>16</sup> European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) 2019, EU Drugs Markets Report 2019, accessible at [https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/joint-publications/eu-drug-markets-report-2019\\_en](https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/joint-publications/eu-drug-markets-report-2019_en)

<sup>17</sup> Attention has been placed on Afghanistan in relation to a new method for extraction of the methamphetamine precursor, ephedrine, from the ephedra plant growing in the mountainous regions of the country.

<sup>18</sup> Even if it appears that the impact on EU markets has been limited until now, it is likely that the Taliban will capitalise on this business opportunity.

<sup>19</sup> Emerging evidence of Afghanistan's role as a producer and supplier of ephedrine and methamphetamine <https://www.emcdda.europa.eu/system/files/publications/13410/emcdda-methamphetamine-in-Afghanistan-report.pdf>

<sup>20</sup> This includes also night vision goggles

17. As part of its reporting on Afghanistan-related terrorist threats, EU **INTCEN** needs to continue reporting on terror-related organised crime and related issues. Attention needs to be paid to weaponry, military and specific equipment left behind, which is at risk of being used by terrorist groups in attacks, including in Europe.
18. **Drugs trafficking:** Europol and the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) - according to their respective mandates - and in cooperation with other stakeholders such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), other EU Agencies such as Frontex, countries from the region and other international partners, should assess the implications of developments in Afghanistan on drug production and trafficking. Focus should be placed, in particular, on the impact thereof on the EU drugs market. In this regard, there is a need to explore potential short-to mid-term scenarios. This assessment could also identify how to enhance monitoring capacity so as to support and increase preparedness and possible responses<sup>21</sup> to future changes and challenges in Afghanistan and the region. This assessment should also focus on how to analyse links with criminal networks, and how this can enable terrorist activity. This assessment should, in particular, take into account the production and trafficking of opiates, cannabis and methamphetamines and as well as the trafficking of precursors towards the region. It will be important to ensure sufficient resources for Europol, as well as enable a clear mandate and sufficient resources for the EMCDDA to carry out this activity, notably in view of the planned revision of EMCDDA's mandate.

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<sup>21</sup> The EU-ACT programme against drug trafficking set up under the Instrument contributing to Stability and Peace is dedicated to tackling heroin trafficking in the region and towards the East-Coast of Africa. Continuing this programme, which has local teams in Pakistan, Ukraine, Georgia and Tanzania, should be taken into consideration.

Specific attention should continue to be given to Afghanistan and neighbouring countries in EMPACT<sup>22</sup> operational activities addressing the production and trafficking of drugs. In this regard, focus should be placed on the ongoing preparation of the 2022 operational action plans. Stepping up EU support to strengthen border security in the region, such as the Border Management Programme in Central Asia and Afghanistan (BOMCA) initiative, should also be explored. There is also a need to mobilise the regional Integrated Border Management programme for Silk Routes countries<sup>23</sup>.

19. The EU should call on Afghanistan to respect its obligations under the UN Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, notably concerning opium poppy cultivation, and under the UN Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances<sup>24</sup>. Without pre-empting the debate on the recognition of the Taliban government and resumption of development assistance, the EU, in close cooperation with all relevant regional and international stakeholders, in particular the UNODC, could explore ways to steer the Afghan economy away from its dependence on drug cultivation and trafficking, both through incentives (such as economic incentives for farmers dependent on poppy cultivation and alternative development programmes) and stricter regulatory frameworks (such as: an effective gradual ban on poppy cultivation and trafficking of opiates and synthetic drugs in accordance with the relevant UN conventions and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights; specific action to dismantle illicit laboratories and drug-trafficking networks). Relevant Commission services should consider providing support to alternative development measures to ensure the livelihoods of farmers. At the same time, the Commission needs to take precautions to avoid any misuse of funds.

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<sup>22</sup> EMPACT is the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Crime Threats. EMPACT tackles the most important threats posed by organised and serious international crime affecting the EU. In May 2021, the EU adopted 10 EMPACT priorities (e.g. drugs and firearms trafficking and organised property crime) to be implemented between 2022 and 2025

<sup>23</sup> EUR 12 Million, implemented by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICMPD)

<sup>24</sup> The relevant UN conventions are: The 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs, as amended by the 1972 Protocol, the 1971 Convention on Psychotropic Substances and the 1988 United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances.

20. This could possibly be done in cooperation with national and international stakeholders with expertise in this area. Assistance through NGOs and the UN could be options to explore. There is also a need to support initiatives aimed at promoting regional cooperation so as to tackle transnational drug trafficking.
21. **Firearms trafficking:** To date, Afghanistan has not been a source country for firearms trafficking. Firearms are trafficked into the EU mainly from the Western Balkans. A potential trafficking of firearms from Afghanistan into the EU is likely to occur via the South-East Europe route. To reduce the possibility of a medium-term risk of trafficking of weapons from Afghanistan into the EU, the implementation of the 2020-2025 EU action plan on firearms trafficking is key. The reason is that this includes both the EU and South-East Europe partners (Western Balkans, Moldova and Ukraine). Operational actions involving the Western Balkans should be prioritised and strengthened through the relevant EMPACT operational action plans, e.g. firearms trafficking, High Risk Criminal Networks to tackle the illicit trafficking of firearms parts. Europol should monitor online distribution of firearms or components thereof. Cooperation with the US and fast parcel companies should be reinforced in this context to increase detection. FRONTEX and CEPOL should increase training on firearms detection for border and coast guards, law enforcement and customs. The recently developed Frontex Handbook on detection of firearms should be a key tool for frontline officers, especially border guards and customs officers. A version to be used in the Western Balkans should be developed by Frontex in cooperation with Western Balkan authorities, supported by the EU and international partners.

22. **Trafficking of antiquities:** This relates to the monitoring and comprehensive risk assessment of trafficking of cultural goods from Afghanistan. This needs to be carried out by Europol, and supported by EMPACT, for instance through operation Pandora, or other operational activities, such as operation Harmakhis. This could be included in the 2022 EMPACT Operational Action Plan on organised property crime. The Commission should consider issuing a specific new alert to the art market and border management authorities, asking them to exercise vigilance and due diligence with regard to cultural goods from Afghanistan. This can be done in cooperation with Interpol, UNESCO, the World Customs Organisation (WCO), UNODC and the International Council of Museums (ICOM), and the Informal Network of Law Enforcement Authorities and Experts competent in the field of Cultural Goods (EU CultNet). The Commission could consider launching projects to digitise Afghan cultural artefacts present in Europe and possibly other countries, which are already circulating. The aim would be to support the detection of stolen artefacts from Afghanistan. A comprehensive and temporary ban on the import of cultural goods from Afghanistan could be explored. A rapid reaction system needs to be set up by the Commission in the context of the upcoming action plan on the trafficking of cultural goods to ensure immediate measures.

23. **Migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings:** EU institutions and bodies, relevant JHA agencies, e.g. Europol, Eurojust, Frontex and Member States should strengthen existing efforts, in particular via EMPACT and possible inclusion in the 2022 Operational Action Plan<sup>25</sup>, to tackle organized crime and terrorist groups that are facilitating and financially exploiting migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings. In this context, the EU should strengthen co-operation with countries neighbouring Afghanistan, as well as with its regional partners. There is the need to tackle instrumentalising migration for political purposes and other hybrid threats as a security risk<sup>26</sup>.
24. Consideration could also be given to adding a focus on Afghanistan within the **EMPACT criminal finances and money laundering initiative**, given the latter's horizontal and cross-cutting dimension, to support financial investigations linked to criminal activities funding terrorism. The EU needs to closely monitor Afghanistan's future policies and practices on anti-money laundering and on countering the financing of terrorism, and to consider the next steps at the appropriate time.

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<sup>25</sup> Migrant smuggling priority, trafficking in human beings priority, and common horizontal strategic goal of provision of fraudulent and false documents as an enabler.

<sup>26</sup> The Council of the EU ("Justice and Home Affairs") stated on 31 August 2021 that it "will respond to attempts to instrumentalise illegal migration for political purposes and other hybrid threats, including by developing new tools".