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VTC Europol – Morocco (11 June 2020) – report

This High Level video conference was a direct follow up to EU-Morocco Dialogue on Migration and Security, a senior-level meeting, held on 19 July 2019 in Brussels. DDG ██████ represented DG HOME, while Mr. ██████ (Director for Migration and Border Surveillance, Ministry of Interior) led Moroccan delegation. One of the concrete outcomes of the meeting was the letter from ED to the Moroccan authorities with an invitation for a high-level visit to Europol HQ. A visit to Europol HQ scheduled for April 2020 was cancelled due to COVID – 19 pandemic.

Director ██████ introduced the VTC with Europol, framing it as part of our broader cooperation between the EU and Morocco on Home Affairs. He reminded that the dialogue had been launched on both migration and security with the aim at developing it further, along the principles stated in the Morocco-EU Joint Declaration (Association Council of 27 June 2019), and building on what had been achieved so far. He also reminded the successful cooperation between the EU and Morocco on migration (namely the strong mutual engagement, important efforts by Morocco in controlling the flows of irregular migrants, strong financial support by the EU).

Director ██████ recalled main common challenges in security (Counter-Terrorism and fight against radicalisation, Police cooperation, Foreign Terrorist Fighters, fight against Drugs and illicit firea-arms) and the need to bring the dialogue further, also considering the opportunity of a cooperation with Europol, along the example of the good technical cooperation already developed with Frontex. He also reminded the opportunity of the international agreement to exchange personal data between Europol and the relevant MOR authorities in the fight against terrorism and serious organised crime; in this respect he invited MOR to meet after the summer in September to discuss such Agreement, but MOR (Mr ██████) indicated the need to take one step at a time ("il ne faut pas presser les choses").

Wali Director ██████ (Director of border surveillance and migration in Morocco, MoI, the EU interlocutor for the EU on Home Affair) thanked for the organisation of the VTC and he stressed the ambition to develop further the dialogue also on security started last year. He reminded the excellent cooperation developed with Frontex (high level meetings, roadmap for deepening technical cooperation, workshops already organised) and the need to start discussions in view of developing a similar cooperation with Europol, in a win-win approach. He underlined the critical role of border control (need to have secure borders), considering that most types of criminal activities and possible security threats (irregular migration but also good smuggling, drugs, illicit arms) have a border-crossing dimension; he then explained the successful strategy put in place in Morocco for securing the borders (against irregular migration but to fight all trans-border crime, i.e. drugs traffic). He then committed to facilitate direct contacts between Europol with relevant police authorities in Morocco in view of launching a technical cooperation. He finally invited the Director of Europol to Morocco.

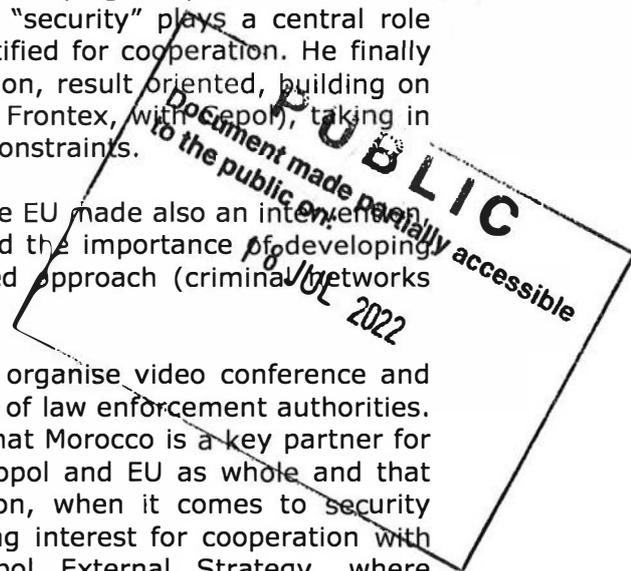
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Mr [REDACTED] (Head of Division "EU" in MFA), underlined the solid partnership between Morocco and the EU (despite some misunderstanding in the past, the page is turned and relations have restarted in a new dynamics). He reminded the successful "brainstorming exercise" held in Skhirat on 3-4 June, where both high level representatives from Morocco and the EU could meet and exchange their views and priorities in view of developing cooperation. He also reminded the joint declaration EU-Morocco, where "security" plays a central role among the 4 areas ("espaces") and two axes identified for cooperation. He finally reminded the need to develop a practical cooperation, result oriented, building on what has been done already (i.e. cooperation with Frontex, with Europol), taking in consideration the mutual interests but also mutual constraints.

Ambassador [REDACTED], Moroccan Ambassador to the EU made also an intervention, by stressing the strong partnership EU-Morocco and the importance of developing the dialogue on security in a global and integrated approach (criminal networks operate on multiple sectors).

ED [REDACTED] expressed gratitude for readiness to organise video conference and emphasised the impacts of COVID - 19 to the work of law enforcement authorities. At the very beginning, ED [REDACTED] made it clear, that Morocco is a key partner for Member States relevant authorities as well as Europol and EU as whole and that this country also play important role in the region, when it comes to security matters. Management Board again confirmed strong interest for cooperation with Morocco on 10 June 2020 by adopting Europol External Strategy, where cooperation with the region and Morocco remains a priority. Similar message was delivered to Arab League ministers of interior at their meeting in Tunis on 1 March 2020. The selection of priorities for cooperation is based on the External Strategy and the findings of the EU Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment. EU and the region shares a common interest in fighting terrorism, disrupting migrants smuggling networks, preventing illicit trafficking of firearms, drug trafficking, document fraud and money laundering, as also defined with the EU Policy Cycle for organised and serious international crime and Europol play a central role to address these common threats. ED [REDACTED] informed on well-developed and established operational cooperation with US, Canada, Columbia, Australia as well as with European countries not being EU members. At the same time, Europol is further strengthening strategic cooperation in Europa, Asia and America. However, ED made it clear that Europol does not have a formal framework in place for cooperation with several Southern Neighbourhood countries. Since May 2017, Europol may cooperate with third country authorities on an ad hoc basis and may formalise this strategic-level cooperation via working arrangements. ED [REDACTED] continued with presenting the key benefits for the third countries, which conclude working arrangements with Europol. She clearly pointed out the possibility to deploy liaison officer to Europol HQ, which gives an access to the community of 260 LOs from more than 50 countries and international organisations. She introduced the role of SIENA as a safe and secure communication tool, which connects more than 1600 law enforcement entities from 50 counties. With SIENA connection, Moroccan competent authorities would be able to ensure swift information exchange with EU Member States and other partners. ED [REDACTED] briefly introduced internal Europol structure and Europol's centres and the enormous workload those centres are dealing with on the daily basis. She referred to newly established European Financial Crime Centre and the role of Europol in innovation. As a part of concluding remarks, ED [REDACTED] invited competent Moroccan authorities to visit Europol HQ in the second half of 2020 to further discuss possibilities for enhanced cooperation between Morocco and Europol.

DEDG [REDACTED] in his introductory remarks referred to the EU Policy Cycle for organised and serious international crime for the period 2018 - 2021 and stressed the role of third countries in tackling the most important threats such as: cybercrime; organised crime groups (OCGs) involved in the wholesale trafficking of



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cannabis, cocaine and heroin; OCGs which facilitate illegal immigration; trafficking in human beings; OCGs involved in the illicit trafficking, distribution and use of firearms; environmental crime money laundering; document fraud. With a view to addressing these priority crime areas as efficiently as possible, Europol adopted its Europol Strategy 2020+ with a strong focus on information exchange, agile operational support to Member States and partners and innovation. DEDG █████ emphasised that the information management capabilities is in core of Europol mandate as it allows for increased cooperation with our partners and are crucial in obtaining the necessary intelligence to tackle cross-border crime. In this regards, similar to ED █████, DEDG █████ again reiterated the value of SIENA and Europol Information System. He also stressed the importance of cooperation with other EU agencies (e.g. Frontex, Eurojust, CEPOL), in particular, Europol and Frontex are working closely together in matters related to irregular migration while Europol and Eurojust will continue strengthening their cooperation through Joint Investigation Teams and in the area of cybercrime. As part of the EU efforts to respond to the migration crisis the European Migrant Smuggling Centre (EMSC) established in early 2016 provides increased operational support to our partners in their fight against organised people smuggling networks. In this regards he emphasised the poly criminal nature of organised crime groups involved in migrant smuggling are active in several other crime areas, especially document fraud and trafficking in human beings. With a view to disrupt OGC business model, the EMSC is targeting document fraud and financial crime. Newly established European Financial Crime Centre will play important role in this regards. Europol also supports internet investigations against smuggling networks. DEDG █████ at the end briefly introduced the role of other centres, European Cyber Crime Centre and European Counter Terrorism Centre.

In a second part, Europol gave a series of presentations on how the Agency deals with organised crime (European Serious Organised Crime Centre and the EU smuggling centre), on the fight against Cybercrime (European Cybercrime Centre) and on CT (European Counter Terrorism Centre). The Moroccan side gave an extensive presentation on their National Strategy on migration, their national strategy on CT and their strategy to fight drugs. Both series of presentations were appreciated and triggered questions from both sides.

Europol concluded the VTC by renewing the invitation to Moroccan authorities to come to the Agency in the second half of 2020 to deepen the fruitful dialogue held.

