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NOTE

From:	Presidency
To:	Delegations
Subject:	Regional dialogue on internal security with the Mediterranean

Background

Creating an area of common peace and prosperity in the Mediterranean region is a strategic goal for the EU. Both sides of the Mediterranean are facing complex security threats stemming from criminal networks, as well as from terrorist and violent extremist organisations, which are transnational, multifaceted, dynamic and increasingly violent. Those threats include activities of serious and organised crime such as the trafficking in human beings, migrant smuggling or drug trafficking. The situation requires an efficient and coordinated response to disrupt criminal activities, protect our democratic societies and fundamental rights, increase the security of our citizens, and, ultimately, foster a better quality of life in the region.

In this context, the joint communication on the Pact for the Mediterranean¹ recommends setting up a regular regional dialogue on internal security among senior security policy officials from the Common Mediterranean Space, modelled on the Standing Committee on Operational Cooperation on Internal Security (COSI) of the Council of the EU. The work carried out as part of this bi-regional dialogue would contribute to the development of a joint roadmap for operational cooperation in areas of shared interest, which would guide law enforcement's understanding of and collaborative efforts in fighting serious and organised crime, terrorism and violent extremism.

On 18 November 2025, COSI exchanged views on the launch of a regional dialogue on internal security with the Mediterranean countries, based on the joint communication. Delegations agreed on the strategic importance of the region in ensuring the EU's internal security and on the need to enhance cooperation in areas such as migration, returns, drug trafficking and counterterrorism. However, a number of questions were raised and still need to be addressed, including regarding the financial support necessary to put in place such a dialogue, its scope and format, and how often it would take place.

Building on COSI's discussions, the Cyprus Presidency would like to move forward on defining the scope of and arrangements for this internal security dialogue with the Mediterranean countries. This note therefore sets out several parameters for COSI, to provide guidance.

Ongoing initiatives at EU and Member State level

Several ongoing initiatives, in particular in the areas of law enforcement and judicial cooperation, aim to address the exploitation of the vulnerabilities in the Mediterranean region by organised crime and terrorism. The launch of an internal security dialogue with the Mediterranean countries should build upon and be aligned with those existing initiatives, to ensure that they complement one another and boost one another's impact and to avoid duplication of efforts.

Among those existing initiatives, it is worth mentioning the ongoing cooperation on tackling migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings, including the Global Alliance to counter migrant smuggling. The Global Alliance promotes global cooperation based on a route-based approach across three strands: preventing migrant smuggling (including enhancing border management), responding to it and developing alternatives to smuggling services. In addition,

¹ 14203/25

operational multidisciplinary actions are implemented through the European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT), targeting major chains of trafficking into Europe.

In terms of operational cooperation between law enforcement and the judiciary, CEPOL, Europol and Eurojust have been supporting capacity building and technical- to senior-level cooperation between law enforcement and judiciary authorities under the EuroMed Police and EuroMed Justice programmes. Frontex is implementing the EU4BorderSecurity programme, which aims to build trust and cooperation between EU border management authorities and Southern Neighbourhood countries.

Concerning drug trafficking, the European Union Drugs Agency (EUDA) cooperates with the Southern Mediterranean partners within the framework of the EU4Monitoring Drugs project, to strengthen the exchange of information, expertise and early warnings related to the drug phenomenon.

In addition, the Maritime Analysis and Operations Centre – Narcotics (MAOC-N) aims to strengthen the exchange of information between the law enforcement authorities of the participating countries. In its communication on the EU Action Plan against drug trafficking², the Commission proposes deepening MAOC-N's current operational activities and possibly expanding them to the Mediterranean region.

On counterterrorism, the forthcoming EU agenda on preventing and countering terrorism and violent extremism should provide for dedicated actions to enhance international cooperation and operational support, including in the Mediterranean region. Efforts to enhance cooperation between the EU and the region on preventing terrorism and violent extremism are also being made under the umbrella of the EU Knowledge Hub (prevention of radicalisation) and in close cooperation with EU agencies, in particular Europol and Frontex.

Lastly, a high-level cooperation dialogue aiming to boost EU-MENA cooperation was launched by Portugal in 2021 and has grown steadily over three high-level EU-MENA conferences, convened in 2021, 2023 and 2025. The main outcome of the last EU-MENA States Ministerial Conference (Lisbon, 13-14 November 2025) was the decision to set up a Regional Dialogue Reference Framework to boost cooperation on law enforcement, steered by a group of participating countries and underpinned by structured and systematic cooperation at ministerial, senior official and

² 16353/25

technical level. The conclusions of the Estoril ministerial conference also called for a joint strategy on law enforcement cooperation to be prepared by a drafting committee in time for the next ministerial meeting.

Possible way forward

The Presidency would like to contribute further to the launch of a structured internal security dialogue between the Mediterranean countries and the EU. It hereby puts forward a number of proposals for the main parameters of this dialogue. They cover the following three areas: thematic and geographical scope, the articulation with existing initiatives and the modalities of the internal security dialogue.

Thematic and geographical scope

A strong partnership with countries in the Mediterranean region is essential to ensure the EU's internal security. The Presidency suggests focusing initially on developing a framework for law enforcement cooperation on tackling the following priority thematic areas:

- i) the fight against terrorism and the spread of radical and violent extremist ideologies;
- ii) migrant smuggling and trafficking in human beings; and
- iii) drug trafficking.

Other crime priorities for the EU, as reflected in the current EMPACT cycle 2026-2029, could be added in the future, depending on the evolving needs for further cooperation.

Regarding the geographical scope, the joint communication includes the following 10 Southern Neighbourhood partners: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Palestine³, Syria and Tunisia.

Taking into consideration the current geopolitical instability affecting the region and particularly some of the partners, the Presidency puts forward two possible options for launching the internal security dialogue:

- i) a phased approach, starting with a small number of partners (e.g. the North African states) as a first step, followed by a possible extension to additional partners at a later stage; or

³ This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of the Member States on this issue.

- ii) including all ten partners from the start.

Articulation with existing initiatives

Deepening cooperation with the Mediterranean partners on internal security matters requires a coherent, long-term approach that maps onto, connects with and builds on the substantial initiatives already in place. There is broad agreement about the region's strategic importance and the need for strengthening information exchange, operational coordination and joint capacity building.

In particular, the Presidency considers that it is important to identify the interfaces, synergies and potential links (or overlaps) between the new internal security dialogue and the existing high-level EU-MENA cooperation dialogue, with a view to maximising impact, optimising resource allocation and ensuring coherence in delivering sustainable results. In that respect, the Presidency does not propose any concrete way forward at this stage but invites delegations to share their views.

Modalities of the dialogue

The Presidency considers that one meeting at senior officials' level and another at ministerial level within a year would build on the momentum of the presentation of the Pact and contribute to the formalisation of this new internal security dialogue with the Mediterranean countries.

Subsequent to this, meetings could then be held at least once a year at senior officials' level, ideally back-to-back with a COSI meeting, with ministerial meetings to be convened as needed.

Questions to delegations

- Do you agree with the Presidency's proposal regarding the thematic scope of the dialogue? In terms of geographical scope, which of the options proposed by the Presidency do you consider the most suitable for launching the dialogue?
- How to best articulate the new dialogue with existing initiatives, and namely with the high-level EU-MENA cooperation dialogue, to seek synergies and added value?
- Do you agree with the arrangements for the dialogue proposed above, including a meeting at senior officials' level at least once a year, ideally back-to-back with a COSI meeting?