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The Presidency organised the Infopolex Conference on 28 February and 1 March 2011 in Budapest aimed to facilitate the regular exchange of experiences and best practices of international police cooperation and liaison officers' management services. By joining these two platforms Infopolex intends to create a link between the topics discussed at the Heads of NCBs Conference held during the Spanish Presidency on 4–7 May 2010 in Benidorm, and at the meeting of Liaison Officers' Management Services held during the Belgian Presidency on 12 July 2010 in Brussels.

The Conference consisted of two panel discussions, focusing on information exchange in criminal matters and on the management of liaison officers.

## 1. Outcome of the panel discussion on information exchange

At the beginning of the panel discussion delegations completed a questionnaire in order to identify the most relevant factors of information exchange procedures from the point of view of the operational units responsible for international law enforcement cooperation.

Based on the outcome of this questionnaire, the discussions and presentations of various stakeholders (the Commission, Europol and Interpol) an additional updated questionnaire was elaborated and sent to the delegates of the panel. Responses were provided by 26 delegations.

On the basis of the outcome of these questionnaires and the results of discussions, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- According to the MSs' estimations there was a significant increase in information exchange in 2009 and 2010 (approx. of 15-25 % in the different channels). While most MSs considered this challenge to be still manageable by their competent units, more than one third of the respondents saw it as a significant problem which called for systematic analysis and coordinated actions.
- Europol, Interpol and SIRENE/Schengen channels as well as liaison officers' network play an extremely important role in the MSs. Replies on the significance of different channels varied greatly, depending on the different approaches whether the number or the content of the messages was considered. The role of Interpol was highlighted because of the geographical extent of its possibilities, while the specific and unique analysis capabilities of Europol were also pointed out. Most MSs agreed that it was beneficial to connect the liaison officers' network with the system of information exchange. The important role of the bilateral/cross-border information exchange was also stressed. Delegations agreed that there was a significant need for close cooperation and dialogue between the different structures of information exchange (Europol, Interpol and SIRENE).

- The choice of channel was considered a less significant factor by the MSs. The criteria of content, geographical area, estimated response time, technical aspects, existence of SIS alert, channel of the previously received request in the case were frequently used in this context. It was noted that the organisational structure of the requested country's police institutions could also serve as a basis for the decision on the channel to be used. Duplicated messages/tasks were not considered a serious problem by the respondents.
- 24/7/365 availability, integrated organisational structure and the use of integrated case management systems were regarded as extremely beneficial for the efficient information exchange. However, this issue could only be assessed in detail by the MSs themselves, always taking the national/internal organisational structures into consideration.
- Opinions differed on the feasibility of the standardisation of the international information exchange. Handbooks, guidelines and standardised message formats were considered the most useful instruments in this respect, but the role of EU regulations was also mentioned. The exchange of good practices, better communication between the different levels of the competent units, establishment of a common EU police file register (EPRIS – European Police Records Index System) and standardisation of the technical infrastructure were also mentioned. The majority of the MSs expressed a view that the standardisation and direct access to the national and international databases could reduce response times.
- Delegations agreed that specific trainings were needed at both national and international levels, and indicated several fields to focus on (e.g. Europol, Interpol and Schengen awareness and procedures; judicial cooperation and Eurojust; national legal framework, methodology and procedures; EU regulations, functioning of EU Agencies and access to EU funds; use of international databases and technical solutions of processing information, etc.). Some respondents also underlined the importance of the bilateral staff exchange programmes.

- The vast majority of the MSs assessed their cooperation with the national judicial authorities as relatively efficient. However, some respondents pointed out that there was a gap between judicial and police cooperation and proposed the following means to increase the efficiency of such cooperation:
  - clear competences at national level, improvement of coordination (e. g. establishment of a coordination unit), bilateral agreements and regular meetings between stakeholders;
  - joint meetings and/or closer cooperation between the relevant Working Parties (COPEN, SIRIS, DAPIX, LEWP etc.);
  - common guidelines and joint trainings for judicial and police authorities (e.g. workshops; CEPOL courses) on the relevant matters (EAW, exchange of information for which judicial authorisation is required, etc.).
  
- The need for evaluating the efficiency of the international information exchange was not considered significant. However, it was noted that, if conducted, it should be done without causing an added burden on the daily activities of the units concerned. The conclusions of the Mapping Sessions held in the framework of the development of the European Information Exchange Model (EXIM) could serve as a good basis for further evaluations and initiatives.

### Conclusion

The Presidency is convinced that further discussions on the issues mentioned above would contribute to the improvement of the international information exchange procedures and therefore strongly supports the idea of further organising similar conferences with the participation of the MSs' heads of operational units, as well as of the representatives of the agencies and organisations involved in the information exchange both at the national and at EU level.

## 2. Outcome of the panel discussion on the management of liaison officers

In order to prepare the background for the panel discussion on the management of liaison officers, delegations were invited to fill in a questionnaire set out in doc. CM 6061/10.

26 contributions were received from 25 Member States and Europol. A detailed overview of these replies is set out in doc. 6368/11 ENFOPOL 33 and was presented for the panel discussion. The overview below provides a summarised outcome of the discussions that took place within the panel.

### Training of LOs

- As a vast majority of MSs agreed that joint training or a common training curriculum for LOs at the EU level could be useful, and that it would provide an added value by supplementing national trainings, participants agreed to contribute to this process by providing detailed suggestions for the common training curriculum in a written form using a questionnaire to be sent out by the Presidency. As several MSs suggested that such common training could be organised by CEPOL, the outcome of the replies could be adopted at the next meeting and subsequently submitted to CEPOL for further handling. FRONTEX was mentioned as a relevant agency for training of border police LOs.

### Bilateral vs. Europol LOs within the EU

- Delegates shared their views and national strategies on the deployment of bilateral and/or Europol LOs within the EU. Although it was noted that MSs' approaches in managing national LO networks differed greatly in this respect, participants agreed that there was no generally preferred way, and that the decision had to be a national one, based on the national needs and possibilities, always bearing in mind the specifics of the host countries and/or regions. It was agreed to share experiences on the different national strategies on a regular basis, preferably at future meetings of the LO Management Services.

### LOs from third countries

- It was noted that the majority of the MS had LOs from third countries posted in or accredited to their countries, but no information on these LOs was collected and/or managed at EU level. Although most MS considered it useful and welcomed the idea to include a list of such LOs in the *Compendium on law enforcement liaison officers*<sup>1</sup>, due to the number of concerns raised in connection with this suggestion (opinion of third countries would have to be considered and the Compendium would have to be shared with them), MSs agreed not to adopt this practice.
- Suggestion was made to draft a model agreement to be used by a MS when hosting a LO from a third country to make sure that law enforcement interest of the whole EU are also considered when adopting a bilateral agreement. Europol offered to provide its model agreement used for the cooperation with third parties as a template.

### Conclusion

Participants considered the forum for liaison officers' management services to be a very useful platform for sharing experiences and best practices on the management of LOs. The intention to follow up this initiative and to hold the next meeting was expressed by Denmark. Europol suggested that future meetings could also be hosted on the Europol premises in the Hague.

Possible agenda items for the next meeting of LOs' management service were identified:

- discussion and adoption of the common training curriculum for LOs;
- further discussion on the use of a Model Agreement with third parties when hosting their LOs;
- update from MSs on the experiences concerning their LO network strategies.

### **3. General conclusion of Infopolex**

As the experts of both panel discussions agreed that sharing of good practices and experiences at regular meetings was necessary for the efficient work of the national operational units responsible for international law enforcement cooperation and the liaison officers' management services, the Presidency intends to further attend to these topics and support the initiatives taken by other MSs in this field.

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<sup>1</sup> 16389/10 ENFOPOL 333 JAIEX 88 COMIX 755 + COR 1.