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NOTE

from: Spanish delegation
to: COSI

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Subject: Draft position on Spain's assumption of the role of lead country in the implementation of one of the Council Conclusions on 29 measures aimed at strengthening the protection of external borders and combating illegal migration - conclusion 4

MEASURE 4: To improve operational cooperation with third countries of origin and transit, in order to improve joint patrolling on land and at sea

PROJECT GROUP

The contact point (POC) relating to Leadership Measure 4 to improve operational cooperation with third countries of origin and transit in the framework of the Standing Committee on operational cooperation on Internal Security (COSI) has been set up:

POC:

Guardia Civil Border and Fiscal Division. Command Office
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MEDITERRANEAN SEAHORSE NETWORK (MSN)

BACKGROUND AND JUSTIFICATION

There is a serious problem regarding illegal immigration across the Mediterranean Sea where a number of criminal organisations are making large profits from the trafficking of immigrants, generally under very poor safety conditions and frequently resulting in tragic accidents in which many immigrants lose their lives.

In order to avoid such tragedies and put a stop to these dangerous criminal networks, all the affected countries, whether they are the countries of destination, of transit or of origin of the immigrants, make all their resources available, setting up cooperation links between them regarding all the aspects thereof.

As part of this willing cooperation, and with the constant aim of improving it, a number of initiatives exist including the establishment of a communications network between Coast Guard services and other similar authorities in the affected countries to allow fast and easy exchange of information, to provide better surveillance of illegal activity and, in short, to avoid the loss of human lives.

To that end, within the maritime department designated by each country, a Coordination Centre will be established and fitted with modern equipment that will allow a continuous exchange of information, including data, voice and images, focussing especially on those sea movements that might be related to the trafficking of immigrants.

These Coordination Centres will have satellite transmitters, tracing screens, computers, telephones and other components, including a central data base in which to compile all the information introduced by the users so that it will always be available to them, as in the Seahorse Atlantic Communication Network.

The European Border System project (EUROSUR) follows this example and aims at the creation in the Southern EU countries of National Coordination Centres which will be interconnected by a secure communications network.

Such Eurosur Centres could be connected with future centres which might be set up in the rest of the Mediterranean countries, whether European or African.

Furthermore, the above network would serve as infrastructure and support for operations carried out by the European Border Agency in the Mediterranean Sea: INDALO in Spain, HERMES in Italy, POSEIDON in Malta and NAUTILUS in Greece.

With this in view, a *‘Seminar on the Establishment of a Maritime Communications Network on Illegal Immigration in the Mediterranean Sea’* organised by the General Headquarters of the National Police Force and Guardia Civil (Guardia Civil framework) was held in Madrid, on 29 and 30 March 2010. It was attended by representatives from the European Commission, Frontex, Europol, Finland, Albania, Algeria, Cyprus, Croatia, Egypt, France, Greece, Italy, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, Montenegro, Turkey and Spain (DGRIE, National Police Force and Guardia Civil).

In general, participating countries were in favour of establishing the aforementioned network.

The National Coordination Centres would take advantage of experience gained in other fields, such as the Baltic and Atlantic areas, and would not only look for synergies with other already existing European programmes, but would also try to integrate with them, thus preventing duplication of effort and ensuring efficiency and effectiveness of cooperation.

The European Commission through its General Directorate for Justice, Freedom and Security which took part in the seminar, supported the idea and the added value of replicating the Seahorse model.

OVERALL OBJECTIVE(S):

An improved and efficient communications network between third countries of origin and transit according to European Union best practices.

The main aim is the proposal to extend the SEAHORSE network model to the Mediterranean Sea, the Member States and third countries of origin and transit.

This model would be extended to all EU borders (sea and land)

Purpose (s) of project:

To stimulate confidence and mutual knowledge between the coastal countries.

- To understand the current situation with regard to illegal immigration in the Mediterranean Sea.
- To explain the European Border Surveillance System (EUROSUR), especially in relation to the setting up of the National Coordination Centres and to collaboration with third countries.
- To establish a maritime communications network between Coast Guard Services operating in the Mediterranean, as well as to provide them with the necessary resources.
- To look for funding to establish such a network.
- Finally, to draw up conclusions to be submitted to the European Commission and participating countries with a view to establishing such a maritime communications network.

PRELIMINARY PLANNING.

It is proposed that M4 be implemented through the following activities, to include:

- Holding a meeting with the participants at the '*Seminar on the Establishment of a Maritime Communications Network on Illegal Immigration in the Mediterranean*' (Madrid, 29-30 March 2010), including representatives of the Commission and Frontex, and inviting the coastal countries to present the actions to be conducted.

- Establishing a **Working Group** in order to:
 - Export good practices and experience gained from the Atlantic SeaHorse Network (ASN).
 - Adapt a communications network similar to that implemented in the ASN between coastal countries, EU Member States and third countries.
 - Raise awareness among third countries in the Mediterranean area which share historical links with EU countries regarding participation in this project.
 - Take into account the fact that this project could be aligned with Objectives 3 and 6 of the EUROSUR Project, and ask the Commission about the possibility of granting financing, mainly as regards the Third Countries.
 - Set up communications centres within the Coast Guard Services or other similar services in coastal countries around the Mediterranean which address illegal immigration by sea, to allow such centres to exchange information, to improve effectiveness and coordination of available resources, and to combat more effectively illegal immigration by sea and prevent loss of human lives.
 - Design and implement the communications network
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