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NOTE

from : Presidency

Subject : Conclusions of Regional EU Liaison Officers Conference, 8 June 2006, Belgrade

1. At the initiative of the Austrian Presidency of the EU Council, an EU – Western Balkan Liaison Officers' meeting took place in Belgrade on 8 June 2006.
2. Referring to the Conclusions of the European Council of Seville on the creation of a network of Member States' immigration liaison officers, based on Council Decision 2003/170/JHA of 27 February 2003 on the common use of liaison officers posted abroad and Council Regulation No 377/2004 of 19 February 2004 on the creation of an immigration liaison officers' network.
3. In consideration of the recommendations of the Friends of the Presidency Report on Organised Crime in the Western Balkans (October 2004), which started the process of a better coordination by the EU and its Member States of activities in the region.
4. Referring to the results of previous LO Conferences concerning the region, in particular the third Conference of EU Liaison Officers posted in the Balkans, which was held in Rome on 5 and 6 December 2005.

5. The aim of the meeting was to further develop and strengthen the regional network of EU liaison officers and the coordination of their work in accordance with, and implementing, the Action-Oriented Paper improving co-operation on organised crime, corruption, illegal immigration and counter-terrorism between the EU and Western Balkans, which was adopted at the JHA Council on 2 June 2006.
6. The meeting was attended by the Austrian Federal Minister of the Interior, the Serbian Deputy Minister of the Interior, the Director of Europol, representatives from the European Commission, the General Secretariat of the Council of the European Union, the European Police Missions in the Western Balkans, the OSCE, the ICMPD, the LO from EU MS posted in the region, as well as representatives from the Western Balkan countries.
7. The Austrian Minister of the Interior emphasised the importance of security in the region for security in the European Union. The Minister briefed participants on the latest developments in the EU concerning the 'Partnership for Security' between the EU and the Western Balkan countries, based on the findings of the "Vienna Declaration on Security Partnership" of 5 May, the results of the Austrian Presidency of the EU Council and the Police Cooperation Convention for Southeast Europe as important steps in improving regional police cooperation, and encouraged the contracting parties to ensure the best possible implementation of this Convention.
8. The Director of Europol presented an overview of the current situation concerning cooperation with Europol and possible future developments.
9. The participants underlined the importance of developing a regional approach for the EU's action to fight organised crime, terrorism and illegal migration in and originating from the Western Balkans. Therefore the participants decided to contribute by exchanging information about their activities and the possibilities for cooperation on a mutual basis, including the countries in the region and third countries as well as international institutions.
10. Supplementing the meetings of the EU LO in the individual countries of the region, a regional network of the EU LO should be established.

11. In the afternoon participants discussed the main problems of internal security in three different working groups.

12. In Working Group 1, dealing with migration and border issues, the participants concluded that the role of the LOs as practitioners on the spot should be further enhanced. The EU, the OSCE, the World Bank and all other partners involved in projects in the area of illegal migration and border management should be more aware of the contributions LOs can make.

The 3 main issues discussed were:

a) Integrated Border Management (IBM)

The common goal should be an effective IBM as an intelligence-led system based on a risk-analysis Entry-Exit-registration-system, fully respecting privacy rights and making use of new tools such as APP, with the help of biometrics.

Cooperation at the borders should be enhanced (technical cooperation agreements to be signed; providing i. a. for common patrols at the green border, one-stop-controls at the BCPs and effective and fast forced return and readmission procedures). The goal should be to provide a smooth and fast passage, while picking out the identified dangerous or risky cases.

The efforts should be optimized in such a way that donations can be increased where and when necessary and duplications avoided.

Investments (infrastructure, equipment and training) should be more target-oriented and led by the idea of solidarity and burden-sharing (tackling the root causes and avoiding unnecessary investments; development of short-/medium-/long term-strategies; avoiding unsuccessful readmissions or "chain readmissions".)

b) Identify high-risk routes

External migration (persons coming from third countries) exists, as does internal migration (taking advantage of visa regimes and of asylum regimes). Special attention is to be paid to links to trafficking and counter-terrorism. More emphasis should be placed on fingerprinting – FRONTEX and Europol can play an important role. An effective early warning-system should be launched (ILO-network; FRONTEX).

c) Combating document and visa forgery

The Western Balkan countries are not the main sources of document forgery, although more attention is necessary. "Soft skills" are needed (more resources and better training in general, interviewing skills, foreign language, document checking-skills, profiling, expertise in general) as well as "hard skills" ("FADO" – database, VIS).

13. The participants of Working Group 2, which addressed organised crime issues, called for a better coordination of the LO detached to the Western Balkan Region through regular meetings. The concept of lead nations should be evaluated by the Council Secretariat. The LO pointed out that a possible measure to improve regular cooperation and to enhance common use of LOs could be the sharing of offices.

14. Working Group 3 focused on preventing and fighting terrorism. In the course of the discussion obstacles were identified that hinder an effective exchange of information. The subsequent recommendations are geared towards structural improvements, which facilitate both the fight against terrorism as such, and the forms of co-operation needed to achieve this aim. The assessments and recommendations are the product of the experiences of the LOs in the course of daily practice.

a) Information-sharing- problems identified:

Due to different legal and institutional conditions in the various Balkan countries, effective information-sharing is difficult. Personal contacts remain a precondition for acquiring reliable information. The security of information shared cannot be assumed..

The information and interpretation of this information is subject to politicisation. Old ethnic conflicts have not been fully eradicated and continue to impact the war against terrorism.

Recommendations:

➔ Strengthen institutions by

- Continuing to signal political interest;
- Ensuring that promises are translated into action and promoting public awareness in the region of the achievements attained and
- Encouraging bilateral agreements.

➔ Including LOs in the production of strategic intelligence.

The most important long-term preventive measures remain:

- The building of civil society,
- Investment in education and
- Economic investment to create employment.

One immediate action, which could contribute to all three preventive measures, would be a flexible regulation of the visa regime. (e. g. further exchange of students)

15. In the context of the improvement of the LO network, the incoming Finish Presidency announced that the next LO conference would be held on 18 or 19 October 2006 in The Hague to discuss issues of relevance and to evaluate results. Until the next meeting LOs would continue their work on strengthening regional cooperation and coordination.

List of participants: see Annex.

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