

Dear Under-Secretary-General,

New York, 9 July 2024

Thank you for your letter of January 4, 2024, requesting information on the measures regional intergovernmental organisations have adopted at the regional level to eliminate international terrorism, as well as on intergovernmental meetings held by those organisations.

To reflect a gender perspective in the input to reports to the Secretary-General, as conveyed in your letter, the EU would like to recall its continued focus on gender responsive counterterrorism (CT) and on preventing and countering violent extremism (P/CVE) policies. As an example, the EU is prioritising gender-responsive CT approaches as co-chair of the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF). The EU promotes and practices a prevention-centred approach, addressing root causes of terrorism and upholding human rights. It is fundamental to empower society, particularly through education and gender equality, as countermeasures against terrorism. Human rights are essential in guiding the EU's counterterrorism policy and action in the UN context.

The EU has a strong strategic and legislative framework in place in the field of Counter terrorism (CT) and Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE). We would like to highlight the EU Strategic Compass, the EU Council Conclusions on Counterterrorism from 9 June 2022 (TWP), which built on the December 2020 Council Conclusions (Security); the EU Council Conclusions (External Dimension - COTER) from June 20th 2022; the EU Commission Counterterrorism Agenda (December 2020) and the Terrorist Content Online Regulation, which entered into force in June 2022. Moreover, we would like to highlight EU CT efforts with priority countries (engagement in Africa, Afghanistan and Central Asia) and the EU role in multilateral fora, starting from the GCTF where the EU has renewed its mandate as co-chair for a period of two more years, and the Global Coalition to defeat Da'esh.

#### ***EU as a co-chair of GCTF renewed mandate***

The EU renewed at the February 2024 Coordinating Committee in Nairobi its mandate as a co-chair of the Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF), together with Egypt, for a further two years, running now until 2026. EU-Egypt overarching priorities as GCTF co-Chairs continue to be gender mainstreaming, including promoting the role of women in CT, and, from a

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geographic perspective, Africa, where the threat level and violent extremism are further increasing.

On 29 February 2024, the EU and Egypt co-organised the 23rd Coordinating Committee of the Global Counterterrorism Forum for the first time hosted by Kenya, who became a new GCTF member in September 2023, together with Kuwait, thus delivering on the EU's pledge to work with African partners on developing capacities and deepening CT cooperation in Africa. As part of that GCTF week, the EU co-organised a side-event on CT in East Africa.

The EU is also working with Morocco on the Education for P/CVE Initiative since May 2023, which seeks to follow up on the Abu Dhabi Memorandum for Good Practices on Education and Countering Violent Extremism (2014) by updating existing good practices and providing a toolkit for the concrete use of this important instrument. The EU has also initiated and sponsored the Initiative on Oversight and Accountability in Counterterrorism. With the support of the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law (IJJ), through the EU's Counterterrorism Platform for Human Rights Engagement (CT Phare), this initiative is developing a set of recommendations on good practices to strengthen and improve oversight and accountability in counterterrorism operations. The primary focus of this document is on how to improve the role and responsibilities of oversight and accountability mechanisms in promoting and protecting human rights while countering terrorism.

The EU also continued its support for the three GCTF-inspired institutions: IJJ, Hedayah, and GCERF. Since the establishment of the GCTF in 2011, the EU has made substantive contributions to the GCTF through broad participation in plenaries, coordination committees, working groups, and GCTF initiatives.

The EU provides both strategic and financial support to the three GCTF-inspired institutions. The EU is a member of the governing boards of all three offering strategic guidance and support. The EU has also provided project funding as follows:

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Funding to **Hedayah** (€10 million) to support implementation of the STRIVE Global programme that, *inter alia*, works with local partners to design, implement and develop approaches that have a demonstrable impact on the threat posed by radicalisation and recruitment to terrorism.

Funding to **GCERF** (€24.5 million) to support community-level initiatives aimed at strengthening resilience against violent extremism in areas such as education, youth, women's advocacy, social entrepreneurship, and vocational training.

Funding to **IJJ** (€4.5 million) to contribute to criminal justice reform related to counterterrorism activities in line with respect for the rule of law and human rights and to piloting a rule of law based referral mechanism in the area of prevention of violent extremism.

## **The European Commission's Counterterrorism Agenda**

The EU continued to implement the Counterterrorism agenda that was presented on 9 December 2020 for the EU to step up the fight against terrorism and violent extremism and boost the EU's resilience to terrorist threats. The Agenda explains that the EU remains on high terrorist alert. To address this threat, the Agenda identifies the following main priorities, centred on 4 pillars/work strands - anticipate, prevent, protect and respond:

1. **Anticipating the terrorist threat**, by building up strategic intelligence, early detection, risk assessment and foresight capabilities;
2. **Preventing and countering radicalisation and violent extremism**, by countering extremist ideologies online, supporting local actors, and strengthening EU action on prisons, rehabilitation, and reintegration;
3. **Protecting people, public spaces, and infrastructures**, by reducing the vulnerabilities of public spaces (in particular places of worship), making infrastructures more resilient, enhancing border security, and denying terrorists the means to attack;
4. **Responding effectively when terrorist attacks occur**, by strengthening Europol and law enforcement cooperation, strengthening information exchange, and supporting investigations and prosecution.
5. **Continuing international engagement across all four pillars**, by facilitating cooperation and promoting capacity building.

Overall, significant progress has been achieved on all work strands.

### Addressing the conditions conducive to the spread of terrorism

The continued presence of **terrorist content online** is a grave risk to citizens and to society. Terrorists misuse the internet to spread their messages to intimidate, radicalize, recruit, and facilitate carrying out terrorist attacks. The EU has put in place unique legislation to tackle this threat. Since 7 June 2022, the Regulation to address the dissemination of terrorist content applies. Based on the Regulation, terrorist content must be taken down within one hour after it is identified online. This applies for online platforms offering services in the EU, to ensure the safety and security of citizens. At the same time, the Regulation puts in place strong safeguards to guarantee that freedom of expression and information are fully protected. As concluded in the implementation report<sup>1</sup> adopted on 14 February 2024, the TCO Regulation has had a positive impact in limiting the dissemination of terrorist content online, with at least 349 removal orders issued until 31 December 2023. These numbers keep on increasing and until 31 May 2024, more than 600 removal orders have been issued by May 2023.

In addition, the European Commission continues to bring together tech industry, EU Member States, civil society, academia as well as international partners on a voluntary level in the EU

**Internet Forum.** This Forum provides the platform to discuss and address the challenges posed by the presence of malicious and illegal content online and develop guidance and support to tech industry in fighting the misuse of their platforms. The Forum continues to be an important platform to react to new developments and address threats beyond legal requirements set by the Terrorist Content Online Regulation and the Digital Services Act.

The European Union is a firm supporter of the Christchurch Call since its establishment in 2019. The European Union is also engaged in the work of the Global Internet Forum to Counter Terrorism and is a member of its Independent Advisory Committee.

#### Measures to prevent and combat terrorism

The **Directive (EU) 2017/541 on combating terrorism**, adopted on 15 March 2017, is the cornerstone of the Member States' criminal justice response to terrorism and a key part of the EU Security Union framework. It provides for definitions of terrorist and terrorism related offences that are in line with UN Security Council Resolutions, the Council of Europe Convention on the prevention of terrorism (CETS 196) and its Additional Protocol (CETS 217). The Directive helps to prevent terrorist attacks by criminalising acts such as the financing of terrorism, undertaking training or travelling for terrorist purposes, as well as organising or facilitating such travel.

The deadline for transposition of the Directive into national law was September 2018. The Commission adopted the report on the transposition measures by Member States in September 2020. The report concluded that the transposition of the Directive has led to a substantive strengthening of the Member States' criminal justice approach to terrorism and the rights afforded to victims of terrorism. In 2020, the Commission evaluated the functioning of the Directive. The scope and definitions of the Directive, as well as its minimum rules, were assessed to be highly relevant. The evaluation also found that the Directive is expected to remain relevant in the next years.

The Commission initiated proceedings against several Member States to ensure that the legal conditions are in place to enable national authorities to cooperate and exchange information on terrorist threats.

The EU, alongside a majority of EU Member States, is a party to the Council of Europe Convention CETS 196 and CETS 217. CETS 196 has been ratified by 43 States Parties, including the EU as an international organisation.

In May 2023, formal negotiations were opened in the Council of Europe to modify the definition of terrorist offences in CETS 196. The current definition in CETS 196 refers to a number of UN CT treaties in the Appendix to the Convention. The aim of the negotiations is to adopt a wider and more suitable legal definition of terrorist offences in order to address contemporary and future counterterrorism challenges.

As the EU Directive on combating terrorism (EU) 2017/541 provides for a definition of terrorist offences, the Commission obtained an authorisation to negotiate on behalf of the European Union the modification of the definition of terrorist offences CETS 196.

An agreement was reached at technical level in the Council of Europe Committee on Counterterrorism (CDCT) on the text of the modified definition of terrorist offences, as proposed by the European Union, in December 2023. In May 2024, the CDCT agreed on the text of the Amending Protocol to be used to modify the definition in the Convention. The next negotiating session in November 2024 will be dedicated to discussing the text of the Explanatory Memorandum accompanying the Amending Protocol.

New and improved EU legislation that enhances the **resilience of critical entities** against man-made (including terrorism) and natural risks has entered into force in early 2023. Member States have until October 2024 to adopt national measures of transposition. The legislation covers 11 sectors, among which energy, transport, health, space and food. In addition, the EU is providing additional support to Member States in this area. A Council Recommendation on a coordinated approach by the Union to strengthen the resilience of entities operating critical infrastructure was adopted in 2022, based on which stress tests of critical infrastructure were conducted in the energy sector in 2023. A Critical Infrastructure Blueprint is also being adopted as a Council Recommendation, aiming at improving coordination as regards response at EU level to significant cross-border critical infrastructure incidents.

Firearms remain the main means for terrorist to commit their attacks, so measures to prevent and fight against the misuse and trafficking of firearms is a priority for the EU and it is part of the CT Strategy.

Aligned with the CT strategy, the 2020-2025 **EU Action Plan on firearms trafficking** focuses on four priority areas: to safeguard the legal market for firearms and avoid diversion, to build a better intelligence picture, to improve law enforcement crack-down on firearms-related crime, and to increase international cooperation. The operational dimension of the EU Action Plan is developed within the operational actions of the EMPACT firearms.

The EU started implementing in February 2023 a list of 11 actions with the Member States, relevant stakeholders, and in agreement with and where necessary with Ukraine, to counter firearms and other small arms and light weapons diversion in the context of Russia's war of aggression. The purpose of this list is to enhance and align our efforts in countering the trafficking of firearms and other small arms and light weapons focusing on prevention, promoting security, and stepping up operational support, with specific measures at short, medium and long term.

The Commission proposed a revision of Regulation (EU) 258/2012 implementing Article 10 of the UN **Firearms Protocol** in October 2022. Following negotiations, the Council and the European Parliament have agreed on the revised text. The official adoption of the text, following translations, is expected in November 2024. This revision will harmonise the national rules on import, transit and export authorisations of firearms, their essential

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components and ammunition in civilian transactions. The revisions will also decrease the administrative burden on economic operators and improve the traceability of firearms, by introducing a digitalisation of the procedures. Furthermore, these revisions are expected to strengthen the competent authorities in the prevention of and fight against the smuggling and diversion of firearms.

Also based on the results of a study mapping criminal sanctions across Member States related to firearms trafficking, the Commission will propose a Directive to establish common criminal law standards at EU level and specific provisions on the illicit manufacture of firearms by 3D printers.

In the EU external dimension, the EU CBRN Centres of Excellence Initiative is a civilian security programme focusing on the mitigation of risks and threats related to **chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear (CBRN) materials**, stemming from accidental, natural or

criminal sources. It contributes to sustain peace and stability and build resilience. The initiative currently includes 64 partner countries grouped in eight regions. CBRN risk mitigation covers a broad range of activities that can include also links to critical infrastructure protection, climate security, security of public spaces, counterterrorism and cybersecurity, as well as strategic export controls.

The Commission has been supporting Member States in addressing the threats from **non-cooperative drones** since 2016 and many more relevant initiatives have been developed in different European institutions, agencies, member states, international organisations and partner third countries since then. To tie together all the counter-drone activities in the Commission, we adopted a counter-UAS package in 2023 outlining the EU's future policy in this field. This was announced through a dedicated Commission Communication that will describe the upcoming work leading towards EU counter-drone guidelines and even examine the need for legislative measures. Support activities will include a handbook on the protection of critical infrastructure and public spaces, provide technical guidance on the physical protection of infrastructure against drones, and establish an enlarged technical expert group on voluntary standards to cover counter-drone solutions.

The EU is one of the leading donors in the world on technical assistance on **anti-money laundering and countering financing of terrorism**. In line with the Counterterrorism Agenda, in 2022 the EU established a **Counterterrorism Financial Investigators Network** with the aim to bring about an exchange of expertise and best practices between investigators. This network is the focal point for increased capacity and competence building for counterterrorism financing investigators. The EU has strengthened the EU network of Financial Intelligence Units, that work together to analyse Suspicious Transactions and exchange information through a dedicated IT system, and increased the capacity and competence building for counterterrorism financing investigators.

The EU continued its engagement through the **Global Facility on Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (GF-AML/CFT)**, which started in 2017. The EU GF-AML/CFT provides on-demand support to third countries, through a series of both bilateral

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and regional programs, to adopt enhanced measures designed to prevent money laundering and cut off access to funding for individual terrorists and terrorist organisations, through increased compliance with the EU AML/CFT Framework, FATF Recommendations and relevant UN Security Council Resolutions. Besides regional conferences and activities, the EU GF-AML/CFT has so far engaged in over 40 countries bilaterally, providing expert assistance on multiple areas.

On 30 May 2024, EU legislators approved a **new package of anti-money laundering rules**, which will apply after a three-year implementation period. It will help the EU and its Member States to further develop the tools to detect and prevent terrorist financing, notably regarding a better coverage of all crowd-funding platforms, a future AML Authority to foster cooperation among financial intelligence units, e.g. on terrorist financing cases investigations, or regulating and supervising more adequately crypto-assets services providers. The new regulation exhaustively harmonises anti-money laundering rules for the first time throughout the EU. The package sets up a new **European Authority for Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of Terrorism (AMLA)** that will have direct and indirect supervisory powers over high-risk obliged entities in the financial sector. AMLA will be based in Frankfurt and start operations in mid-2025.

## **Counterterrorism Efforts with Priority Countries**

The EU's involvement in counterterrorism and security actions all around the world especially in neighbouring countries and in Africa reinforce the EU's role as the largest external cooperation partner in the world and a global security actor. We address both the long-term causes of terrorism and respond to emerging crisis linked to terrorism.

Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism (P/CVE) is an important priority for the EU, both internally and outside the EU. The assistance offered by the European Commission addresses the security needs of every partner in a tailored manner. The EU therefore supports a number of initiatives that aim to identify drivers for youth extremism, to empower women, to promote community dialogue, to strengthen local actors, and to improve the capacity of media and education sectors to address radicalising ideologies. Increasingly, violent right-wing extremism is seen as a threat also outside the EU.

The EU recalls that, in partnership with UNOCT and working closely with CTED, it launched in 2022 the **EU-UN Terrorism Threats Facility** to enable UN Member States to receive expert assistance across the four pillars of the UN Global Counterterrorism Strategy to rapidly respond to identified needs, as well as develop capacities to detect, prevent, counter, prosecute, investigate and respond to this evolving threat and emerging terrorist *modi operandi*, while ensuring respect for international law, human rights and the rule of law, thereby enhancing the resilience of States facing a dynamic and persistent terrorist threat.

Through the **UN-EU Countering Terrorist Travel Partnership**, the EU works closely with UN partners to detect, track and counter suspected terrorists and serious criminals and their travel by using passenger data, improving the use of existing databases of known and

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suspected terrorists and criminals, and enhance international information exchange, while respecting international human rights and fundamental freedoms.

The EU continued to support **judicial capacity building** in close cooperation with strategic partners like GCTF inspired institutions. The EU is funding CT JUST which is a CT facility that works with the MENA and Sahel regions. It provides support to state actors to strengthen and improve their criminal justice systems while ensuring compliance with international law.

### *Afghanistan and Central Asia*

The situation in Afghanistan remains of great concern, with terrorist threats emanating from this country to the neighbourhood, in particular Central Asia, and at global level.

The EU has been strengthening its cooperation with Central Asian countries to tackle this threat. In partnership with UNOCT, UNODC and UNDP, the EU has implemented the action "*Strengthening Resilience to Violent Extremism in Asia: A joint EU-UN partnership (STRIVE ASIA)*", aimed at contributing to prevent and counter violent extremism in Central Asia. The action included South and Southeast Asia as other regions of implementation. STRIVE has been operating through a whole of society/ multi-stakeholder approach including governments, security actors, civil society, and the private sector.

In 2024, new phases of projects on organised crime and terrorism from Afghanistan (EU ACT and LEICA) will ensure an **increased support** to law enforcement capacities in Central Asia, with a view of enhancing security both on a national and regional level, among others through strategic and operational exchanges on CT between the European law enforcement communities, operating in close coordination with other EU - funded global programs on Organised Crime and Counter-terrorism, that will be prioritised to deliver capacity-building activities in Central Asia. The EU is launching a new phase of the Central Asia Drug Action Programme (CADAP), while continuing its programme on Border Management Programme in Central Asia (BOMCA). New programmes will address firearms trafficking from Afghanistan to Central Asia and support to PRR process of returnees in Central Asia. Special attention will be dedicated to strategic communication to counter online radicalisation and strengthen societal resilience to terrorist and violent propaganda.

#### *Africa*

The EU's vision is to tackle the increased terrorist threat in Africa through **an inclusive and African-led approach**, by addressing the drivers of radicalization; weakening the terrorist groups by targeting their dissemination of propaganda, recruitment and financing; and providing significant, multidimensional support to African countries by strengthening our partners - on a national and regional level – through capacity building efforts and improving the criminal justice chain actors (intelligence, the judiciary, law enforcement) and military systems in place.

The support comes via **several programmes and initiatives**. Through EU financed UNODC training to the attorney general's office and the central investigative police, EU is strengthening the law enforcement response to terrorism in Mozambique. Several projects

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are implemented in Africa in the framework of global initiatives: for example, the STRIVE JUVENILE project addresses the issue of Preventing and Responding to Violence against Children by Terrorist and Violent Extremist Groups, in Mozambique and Nigeria; EU has supported to the Nigerian demobilization, de-radicalization and reintegration efforts for former associates of Boko Haram; under CT INFLOW, international standards and good practices for the exchange of information and analysis in the Sahel, including the use of new technologies, have been promoted; within the CT JUST programme, in 2024 the EU will start new actions in the Sahel and Gulf of Guinea on developing law enforcement capacities, enhancing judiciary procedures and strengthening regional CT cooperation in cross border intelligence. The European Union Global Facility on Anti-Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing is assisting several African countries to strengthen their response to terrorism financing.

Of the **€659 million the EU spends on Counterterrorism and prevention of violent extremism related programming, 72% goes to Africa.**

The EU also provides military training and equipments for example to Somalia and Mozambique, as an answer to the immediate threat posed by the so called IS-Mozambique province and al-Shabaab and IS-Somalia. The EU has also supported AMISOM/ATMIS for many years a key African Union peace support operation to support Somalia's fight against terrorist groups. The **EU continues to support through the European Peace Facility the efforts of the Lake Chad Basin countries and the trans-regional Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF)** a home-grown regional response to terrorism, supported by the



international community. Our support to the Multinational Joint Task Force - since 2016 worth more than 200 million Euros is part of our wider comprehensive approach to addressing the threat from different angles, both kinetic and non-kinetic.

### ***Global Coalition Against Da'esh***

The EU stays committed to strengthening its contribution to the Global Coalition Against Da'esh on a number of fronts, including through intensified efforts on countering Da'esh narrative. The Coalition has succeeded in pushing Da'esh out of territory it once held and severely degraded its military and economic capacities. Nevertheless, the threat persists, and the EU will continue supporting the Coalition to ensure that it stays fit for purpose ten years after its establishment. The EU remains engaged in all the Coalition's working groups, including on Foreign Terrorist Fighters, Countering the Financing of Terrorism, Communications and Stabilisation and uses its tools to play a prominent role, in particular, in the communication and stabilisation dimensions of the Coalition's campaign.