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*House of Representatives, Foreign Affairs Committee, Subcommittee on Europe, Energy, the Environment and Cyber and Subcommittee on Middle East, North Africa and Global Counterterrorism*

Speaking points

*[Thank the chair for the invitation].*

There is no doubt that the events of September 11 were the driving force behind the transatlantic counterterrorism partnership over the past two decades. Throughout this period, it became increasingly clear that our security is collective in nature, and this intimacy of mission has reinforced our resolve in fighting violent extremism. Common values formed the bedrock of this relationship, while differences in privacy laws, freedom of speech protections, and other legal frameworks have spurred U.S. and European officials to think critically and creatively about new ways to address problems.

The Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS allowed to coordinate our actions in Syria and Iraq which enabled the territorial defeat of Da'esh. Today, transatlantic partners continue to operate against emerging threats in Afghanistan and the Sahel.

Our actions against terrorism include financial support and capacity building in key regions and countries (for example in Western Balkans or in the region of Sahel). It is important that we continue efforts to coordinate with the U.S and with other major donors, in order to maximise the effectiveness of our respective programs.

The European Union's counterterrorism policy is based on two main documents: (1) the Security Union Strategy published in July 2020, and (2) the EU CT Agenda published 5 months later, aiming at anticipating, preventing, protecting and responding to terrorist threats or acts. Both these documents highlight that cooperation with trusted partner countries is key to ensure the EU's internal security, and the US has always been a privileged partner.

Fora like the EU-US JHA Ministerial and the EU-US Senior Officials Meeting provide occasions for regular exchange and, luckily, we could now start again with physical meetings. Notably the recent visit of Commissioner Johansson

end of August/beginning of September saw an open exchange with US Secretary for Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas, with the Attorney General Merrick Garland and with other key interlocutors in the US administration on a wide range of topics from Afghanistan to cybersecurity, violent extremism and many others. This was encouraging and underlined the importance of a strong transatlantic cooperation on counterterrorism, given the growing global threats.

Looking at the latter, and notably the dramatic situation in Afghanistan, it seems clear that we need to enhance transatlantic cooperation on counterterrorism. We will need to closely work together to mitigate the spill over effects, in order to achieve:

- Enhanced security checks on persons evacuated from Afghanistan, or that will arrive at our external borders – to prevent infiltrations;
- Better strategic intelligence/foresight – to avoid AFGH becomes again a safe haven for terrorist organisations;
- Close monitoring & countering of propaganda and mobilisation of the Jihadi eco-system;
- An effective tackling of organised crime in AFGH/region – to reduce sources for terrorist financing.

Despite the setback in Afghanistan, we think it is fair to say that we are much better prepared today than 20 years ago. This is primarily thanks to the many areas in which we substantially developed our cooperation in the course of the last years and on which we can further build to anticipate and face new threats stemming from recent developments in Afghanistan. By way of illustration, let me give you some examples of areas where we managed to establish a longstanding cooperation between our two sides:

#### 1. Exchange of information and operational cooperation:

The exchange of data on Foreign Terrorist Fighters between FBI and Europol is a brilliant example of this cooperation. The information provided (list of 2700 identities) was inserted into the Schengen Information System by our Member States, which is valuably supporting – in EU but also US interest – checks performed at the EU external borders. The situation in Afghanistan and related security threats highlight the importance to continue, and possibly expand, this co-operation. We think that this would make sense, in

particular, for enhanced EU security screenings of persons evacuated, resettled or otherwise arriving from Afghanistan.

Moreover, we would consider it also highly desirable if, in specific cases, EU Member States could get the possibility to carry out checks in relevant US databases and information systems. We see many advantages in more targeted US information becoming available to all our Member States, possibly through Europol. It goes without saying that the Commission services stand ready to discuss at technical level all the details with their US counterparts.

## **2. Battlefield information**

Related to this is the cooperation on the exchange of battlefield information. Access to information collected on the ground is of great value and importance for preventing infiltrations and ensure effective prosecution of terrorism cases in courts.

## **3. Countering the financing of terrorism**

The 2010 EU-US Terrorism financing tracking Program (TFTP) agreement is another success story of our cooperation. The Commission considers the TFTP to be a highly efficient instrument to provide timely, accurate and reliable information about financial transactions associated with persons suspected of terrorism. It is very effective to “follow the money” to identify and track terrorists and their support networks worldwide. Over the years there have been a series of cases in which the information provided under the Agreement (“leads”) has been instrumental in bringing forward specific investigations relating to terrorist attacks on EU soil

## **4. Aviation security**

The EU and the US have worked closely in addressing threats to aviation security over the last decades, and jointly shaped the global agenda and standards, notably at ICAO.

## **5. home-made explosive threats**

The longstanding regular EU-US Explosive Expert Seminars remain a key tool for launching, discussing, developing many initiatives, notably on explosives, dangerous chemicals, drones or sniffing dogs.

## **6. Cybersecurity and Critical Infrastructure**

Fruitful cooperation exist also with CISA, as demonstrated by the EU-US-Canada meeting on critical infrastructure resilience in June, where DG HOME exchanged with US partners on the latest trends, including the COVID-19 pandemic and best practices. Common challenges exist notably in cross-border cases, with regard to cyber risks, effective public-private partnerships, security risks relating to drones in urban environments, and the protection of public spaces.

#### **7. Passenger Name Records (PNR)**

Given the global nature of security threats, the need for law enforcement and criminal justice community to exchange relevant information is undeniable. Recall the value of the existing EU-U.S. PNR agreement for the detection and investigation of organised criminal groups, including terrorist groups. Plea for U.S. openness to discuss with the Commission services how to concretely address the recommendations of the Joint Evaluations in a pragmatic manner and improve the scope of cooperation on the exchange and use of PNR data and the results of their processing

#### **8. Prevention work**

- **On Afghanistan:**

To enable informed prevention and strategic communication activities in EU Member States we need to closely monitor, with the help of Europol, the islamist extremist propaganda that may be coming from Afghanistan as well as radicalising discourses inspired by the Taliban success in other countries. Reciprocal right-wing and left-wing extremist narratives should not escape our radar either.

- **On Violent Right Wing Extremism**

We have increased our exchanges with the U.S. on the common challenge related to racially and ethnically motivated violent extremism (or violent right-wing extremism as we refer to it in Europe).

2019 was a pivotal year. After a wave of attacks worldwide, including Halle, Hanau, El Paso, Christchurch, Poway, and others, it became evident that the activities of violent right-wing extremists transcend borders and that these groups and individuals hold international links.

Currently it is not limited to the cultural and historical pasts of countries, but more to ideas and narratives, mostly spread online, that are conspiratory in nature and which aim at mobilising global audiences.

Since the end of last year we are regularly exchanging on this topic at experts levels: policymakers and practitioners.

- On terrorist content online:

In addition to voluntary approaches, the European Union has regulated in order to address the dissemination of terrorist content online, with appropriate safeguards in place to protect fundamental rights. The U.S. takes a different approach based on voluntary collaboration with platforms. It is important that we continue our cooperation on this topic in global for a such as the GIFTC and the Christchurch Call for action.

The Regulation EU (EU) 2021/784 (Terrorist Content online Regulation) responds to the need to tackle online content disseminated by terrorists in order to spread their message, to radicalise and recruit followers, and to facilitate and direct terrorist activity. Terrorist attacks perpetrated recently on EU soil, such as the attacks in France in October 2020, are strong reminders of how terrorist content online plays a role in the planning and carrying out of terrorist attacks.

*[Closing formula]*

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