



Council of the
European Union

Brussels, 18 June 2020
(OR. en)

8888/1/20
REV 1

LIMITE

**JAI 494
JAIEX 55
RELEX 454
ASIM 36
COWEB 86
COSI 99
ENFOPOL 142
JUSTCIV 53
CATS 40**

NOTE

From: Presidency
To: Delegations

Subject: EU-Western Balkans Justice and Home Affairs Dialogue - Senior Officials Meeting: Informal written consultation
- Summary of the replies of the Western Balkans partners in the area of Home Affairs

Bearing in mind the complex situation related to the COVID 19 pandemic, the Presidency decided not to hold the Senior Officials Meeting of EU Member States and the Western Balkans initially planned for 27 April in Brussels.

In order to continue the mutual cooperation in matters of common interest and to provide contributions to the Ministerial Meeting scheduled for September 2020, the Presidency decided to launch a written consultation on the topics initially foreseen for discussion at the Senior Official Meeting.

Delegations will find below the summary of the replies from the Western Balkans partners in the field of Home Affairs, and in annex the replies received. It should be noted that while the summary was drafted by the Presidency with inputs from the Commission services and the European External Action Service, the content of the replies in the annex is the sole responsibility of the Western Balkans partners.

Justice and Home Affairs / EU-Western Balkans
Summary of the replies following the written consultation

HOME AFFAIRS

I - ASYLUM RECEPTION CAPACITY, IRREGULAR MIGRATION

Questions:

- ***What are the main gaps revealed by the COVID-19 crisis? On which aspect do you require more cooperation?***

Almost all partners reported a number of gaps revealed by the Covid-19 crisis. Most of them have struggled in implementing all prescribed preventive and safeguard measures, first of all social distancing, and the provision of medical services for migrants and asylum seekers in the accommodation facilities. Most partners faced problems related to the limited number of personnel working on the reception and treatment of migrants and at the reception facilities (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo*). They also mentioned the lack of a standard operating procedure for action by border police officers and the difficulties in conducting personal interviews with asylum seekers. Bosnia and Herzegovina informed about the difficult hygiene conditions and restricted access to healthcare in reception centres. The Covid-19 crisis has impacted also border management activities, due to the lack of preparation and logistics for border police officers (Albania). More cooperation is required in the field of information exchange and better coordination between law enforcement agencies operating at the Border (Albania).

- ***Have you identified any measures which could address the probable increasing demand for migrant smuggling services after the COVID-19 crisis?***

A key measure on which the partners agreed on is the intensification of cooperation and information exchange, at regional and European level. Some partners stressed the need to improve operational procedures (Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia) and increase the EU's involvement in fighting human trafficking as well as the smuggling of illicit substances and goods. One partner (Albania) found training of staff members, including officers stationed in remote border areas, to be key in improving the preparedness to an increasing demand for migrant smuggling services.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Most partners informed that they implemented different restrictive measures including closure of border crossing, military engagement in border protection and ban on movement of migrants outside asylum centres to contain the pandemic. All the partners pointed to the importance of strengthening the response of police agencies to migrant smuggling, protecting victims of human trafficking and strengthening material-technical equipment.

Some stressed the need to create preconditions for biometric verifications and photography checks in real time (Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo), while Serbia informed that it is already collecting and sharing biometric data with focus on security purposes.

Serbia intends to intensify exchange of information with countries of origin of irregular migrants and transit countries such as Turkey, Greece, Bulgaria, Western Balkan partners, and destination countries such as Austria, Germany and the United Kingdom.

- ***What measures have been taken by Western Balkans partners to further strengthen their reception capacities and address the challenges posed by COVID-19?***

In order to contain the spread of Covid-19 amongst the migrant population, all partners implemented measures to ensure social distancing in all reception facilities. In all centres, protective and preventive measures are applied. Two partners (Kosovo and Republic of North Macedonia) set up a separated quarantine space for new arrivals, while Kosovo is the only partner reporting a Covid-19 testing for migrants entering its territory. Most partners have distributed in the accommodation facilities protective gear (masks, gloves and disinfectors) and information on how to prevent outbreaks in the facilities, promoting health awareness among the migrant population. Kosovo is preparing for online education for the children staying at reception facilities. Two partners (Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania) underlined the need to ensure assistance and coordination of all relevant authorities, in cooperation with international organizations, in order to prevent the apparition and limit the spread of this virus.

All of the partners have highlighted the importance of improving information systems in the field of registration of migrants, i.e. interoperability of data. Montenegro has initiated procedures for the production of new electronic application solution for foreign nationals with residency, as well as for asylum seekers.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Danish Refugee Council has developed guidelines and put in place safeguards to prevent and limit the spread of COVID-19, while training by the World Health Organisation is planned for staff health centers.

- ***What obstacles to effective and proactive information-sharing between the EU and Western Balkans partners could be identified? How could these obstacles be addressed?***

Half of the partners (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro) reported no obstacles to the current way of information sharing between the Western Balkan partners and the EU. However, Kosovo reported a lack of real-time information sharing regarding migration, and suggests to establish early warning systems and conduct bilateral and multilateral investigations. Other shortcomings were mentioned such as cancelled trainings and coordination meetings, particularly among border police in the region and Frontex.

Other partners pointed out the need to have access to the databases available to the EU Member States in terms of registration of migrants and tracking irregular migration.

- ***Would the creation of a common data-sharing tool among the Western Balkans partners be beneficial, modelled on the Eurodac system and with the technical support of the EU?***

Almost all partners but Serbia agreed on the necessity to create a common system for the distribution of data among Western Balkan partners with the technical support of the EU. It should be noted that the Republic of North Macedonia expressed its preference for the partners to be included in existing European tools and mechanisms in the short term, in order to avoid the financial burden and the necessity of human and technical resources related to the establishment of a new tool. Similarly, Serbia proposed to avoid the creation of a new tool and instead to adopt bilaterally EU standards on data sharing, envisaging the future involvement of the partners in synchronized efforts within different aspects of the European comprehensive approach to migration.

II - COOPERATION IN THE FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM AND PREVENTION OF RADICALISATION

Questions:

- *How much progress has been made by the Western Balkans partners in implementing the Joint Action Plan on Counter Terrorism and the six bilateral arrangements, and where has that progress been achieved? What are the main difficulties encountered in terms of implementation?*

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, all partners are making progress in the implementation of the Joint Action Plan. Most of them have focused on strengthening the logistical and human capacities of the counter-terrorism structures. Thanks to the improvement of the technologies deployed and specific trainings, CT authorities are increasing their operational capacities. Many partners are reviewing and adapting their strategic and legal framework to the Joint Action Plan and CT Strategy of the EU and, working towards the alignment of legislation in key sectors such as money laundering and financing terrorism with EU law (Montenegro, Republic of North Macedonia and Serbia). Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo pointed out that the Covid-19 outbreak has slowed down the implementation of agreed activities, also as regards elections and political processes. The difficulties in appointing coordinating and contact points for cooperation with the EU has also been brought up (Bosnia and Herzegovina for domestic issues, Republic of North Macedonia due to COVID-19). Kosovo has indicated the wish for stronger cooperation with Europol. Serbia is undertaking initiatives with CEPOL to specialise criminal inspectors in light of new challenging trends and crimes, such as monitoring money flows and terrorist financing through cryptocurrency payments as well as prevention of cyber-attacks.

- *What measures have recently been taken to address the issue of returning foreign terrorist fighters and their family members? Do you have any best practices to share in this field? What are the main challenges confronting you in this area?*

Most partners have created Working Groups and established action plans on the reception and treatment of returning foreign terrorist fighters and their family members, particularly regarding their reintegration and re-socialisation. IOM in Bosnia and Herzegovina is implementing a regional project on supporting the regional authorities with their efforts in relation to resocialisation, rehabilitation and reintegration of returning FTF and their families. Some partners have emphasised the role of social work centres and reintegration programmes for returnees (Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo), stressing additional project activities focussing on training for police, educators and social workers.

The main example of good practice presented by the partners is the intensive cooperation and exchange of information by counter terrorism structures with counterparts and international partners, in particular Europol and INTERPOL for identifying, detecting, arresting and extraditing foreign terrorist fighters (Albania, Republic of North Macedonia and Montenegro). There is also well-established cooperation at the regional level in relation to the repatriation and managing of returning FTF and their families. Examples of good practice in Kosovo were also shared, related to receiving returned FTFs and their families, such as temporary residence, registration of children and provision of personal documents, medical examinations, provision of professional courses for self-employment preparation.

Most of the partners have stressed the increasing capacity of state police and relevant authorities, through trainings and working groups, to prevent of violent extremism and radicalisation, including at municipality level through operational local councils. At regional level, the Republic of North Macedonia National Coordinator for Fight against Terrorism and Prevention of Violent Extremism organized the First Regional Meeting (January 2020) of Representatives of Security and Intelligence Agencies from the Western Balkans, which was also attended by representatives of Slovenia and Croatia. Similarly, Albania and Serbia welcomed the participation in the EU Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN) conferences, while Serbia has been participating for two years in the work of the Working Group for the Prevention of Violent Extremism and Terrorism (WBCTI).

Partners have identified as main challenges: the availability of proper accommodation for returnees, the lack of staff and training in the social work centres, the lack of financial resources to implement the integration programmes for returnees; the registration of returnees' children born in Syria in the birth records for the necessary procedures related to health care and school enrolment; and the lack of evidences for grounding suspicion that returnees committed crimes in the area of terrorism. At present, mainly due to the COVID 19 pandemic, all planned repatriations of FTFs and their families to the WB region are put on hold.

- ***What steps could be taken to enhance the quality of information-sharing between the EU and the Western Balkans partners? What is the situation regarding the roll-out of CT SIENA?***

The level of information-sharing between the EU and the Western Balkan partners is steadily increasing, intensive and continuous. One partner proposed to enhance information-sharing by setting periodic meetings between the EU and the partners, in order to increase mutual trust (Bosnia and Herzegovina). Another partner manifested its support to the shift of the information exchange from the bilateral to the regional level with the establishment of a regional center (Kosovo).

As regards the roll-out of CT SIENA, Kosovo*, that shares information through EULEX, cannot establish direct access until they sign the working arrangement with Europol. Security institutions, including the Kosovo Police are ready to exchange information through the SIENA platform as soon as the agreement is signed between Kosovo and Europol. Among the other partners, Republic of North Macedonia is carrying out activities on linking the Sector for fight against terrorism within the Section for fighting organised and serious crime with the SIENA platform, enabling direct communication between the counter terrorism services. Serbia enabled data directly and independently through CT SIENA and suggested the possibility of faster and better exchange of data with the EU MS through operational work files.

III - ORGANISED CRIME

Questions:

- *How could we improve data-sharing using SIENA or other channels?*

Most of the partners pointed the need to improve international cooperation between the Western Balkans, EU and third parties responsible for the fight against organised crime, corruption, trafficking, criminal assets. Expert support is considered necessary, and some partners required either its increase or the establishment of a mechanism for periodical training. Kosovo still has to sign working arrangements with Europol allowing to access directly the SIENA channel. Beside SIENA, some partners stressed the need for enhanced participation in the available tools in cooperation with Europol. Such tools should be modernised at national level while creating compatible databases and software in order to achieve timely exchange of information and improve international police cooperation.

- *What practical steps could be taken to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on international law enforcement cooperation?*

Facing the impact of the Covid-19 crisis, the main proposal presented by the partners has been the establishment of a widespread use of technological means of communication, such as videoconferences and virtual meetings. The partners stressed the need for such channels of communication to be secure. One partner (Albania) proposed to set up encrypted communication online systems for investigators of EU and third countries at international level and to develop online training for investigators.

- *What measures could be taken to address the evolving threats of organised crime linked to the COVID-19 crisis?*

Due to the versatility and adaptability of organised crime, during the Covid-19 cybercrime is becoming a major threat. Most partners proposed to increase control measures aimed at detecting illegal trade via Internet and postal services as well as and online fraud. Increased cooperation should also be enforced, in order to ensure better communication between law enforcement authorities and the exchange of experiences. According to Bosnia and Herzegovina, possible measures to fight new forms of crime would be to reinforce border controls and to conduct public information campaigns on possible threats and fraud.

- ***What specifically is required in order to improve operational cooperation in law enforcement, in particular with regard to combating migrant smuggling and the smuggling of drugs?***

Partners agreed on the need to increase operational cooperation with the EU, including Europol and information exchange. Joint investigation teams through EU projects, operational meetings, and exchange of experts and technical assistance should also be promoted in the field of fight against migrant smuggling and smuggling of drugs. Serbia placed emphasis on harmonising legislation in Europe in order to carry out joint investigations of an international character more effectively. Other partners stressed the need of capacity building activities and expert support through EMCDDA IPA funds to meet the needs of the partner countries.

Specifically on migrant smuggling, some partners stressed the need to increase exchange of information with countries of origin and transit of migrants, and with Europol via secure electronic channels and by organizing meetings to discuss specific cases. The need to develop operational cooperation with South American countries of origin and production of illegal drugs was also mentioned. Some partners proposed to enhance their active participation in EU projects with a focus on the fight against organized crime, improve cooperation in the Western Balkans and increase law enforcement authorities' training.

- ***How can we enhance the participation of the Western Balkans in EMPACT?***

Almost all partners agreed on the need to enhance their participation in EMPACT, being involved in more Operational Action Plans and identifying future priorities based on risk analyses and criminal situations in the region. Serbia proposed to strengthen regional cooperation via EU funds without the necessary involvement of EU Member States.

- ***What are the main challenges in setting up national drugs observatories and early warning systems in line with the EU methodologies, and how could we overcome them?***

Partners identified two main challenges. For the early warning systems, some partners lack a proper legal or regulatory framework for establishing the early warning system on the new psychoactive substances that spread on the illegal market (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Republic of North Macedonia). For setting up national drug observatories, some partners lamented the lack of staff trained and qualified in accordance with the standards recommended by the EMCDDA (Kosovo, Montenegro) and institutional capacity to fulfil its coordination function. Bosnia and Herzegovina still needs to improve and build a system of regular data collection and reporting to the EMCDDA as per the requested indicators. For one partner (Serbia) the main challenge for improving the overall system at the national level is to create an integrated software, which would also allow integrated collection and management of data.

To overcome the outlined challenges, two partners proposed the establishment of joint action units with specialties in the field of medicine, investigation, public health service, medical control service, etc. (Albania and Kosovo). Serbia asked for assistance in the form of providing material and technical resources and trainings, as well as scientific research in these fields. Kosovo mentioned that financial experts have been distributed across certain sectors to work with investigative officials, but it is necessary to continue supporting training and further specialisation of officials.

- ***What is the state of play for the establishment of ARO Offices within the competent law enforcement authority and the conduct of financial investigations in all criminal offences relating to organised crime?***

Most partners have already established ARO offices within the competent law enforcement authority. Serbia is undertaking continuous activities to establish it. Bosnia and Herzegovina has not yet established an office for managing illegally acquired property nor has a special law on confiscation of assets acquired by criminal offences been adopted. The partners attach great importance to financial investigations, and they are taking the necessary measures to improve their organizational and legal capacities and human resources in this field.

ANNEX

ALBANIA



REPUBLIKA E SHQIPËRIË
MINISTRIA E BRENDSHME
MINISTRY OF INTERIOR

**Justice and Home Affairs / EU-Western Balkans
Discussion paper for written consultation
HOME**

I - ASYLUM RECEPTION CAPACITY, IRREGULAR MIGRATION

Questions

- *What are the main gaps revealed by the COVID-19 crisis? On which aspect do you require more cooperation?*
 - Lack of a Standard Operating Procedures for action by border police officers, which found them unprepared, to anticipate the situation created by COVID-19;
 - Lack of logistics (masks, gloves, disinfectants ... etc), which turned out to be primary and very necessary for border police officers, who worked on the front line and had direct contact with citizens and irregular immigrants;
 - Better coordination of actions by Embassies and Consular Offices of our country, structure of the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, on the notifications of Albanian citizens who remained outside the territory of the Republic of Albania, pursuant to Decisions and Orders of the Government, on their travel and repatriation to the territory of the Republic of Albania;
 - Failure to deal with a crisis such as COVID-19 before, highlighted the demand for cooperation, information exchange and better coordination between these law enforcement agencies operating at the Border.
 - During the Covid-19 pandemic period, the *National Reception Center for Asylum Seekers* faced a high number of asylum seekers accommodated in it, which made it difficult to maintain social distance. In order to prevent the spread of infection, QKPA has taken measures for both employees and asylum seekers accommodated in the Center, providing protective masks, gloves and alcohol-based disinfectants, however these protective materials are insufficient due to the duration and number of asylum seekers accommodated. In this regard, materials are needed to cope with the situation for the prevention of COVID-19.

- The Directorate of Asylum and Citizenship/Ministry of Interior has found difficulties in conducting personal interviews with asylum seekers, during this period. The development of online interviews has been initiated, which corresponds to the guideline recommended by the Council of Europe on the development of these online interview during pandemic period. The status of this process is in progress.
 - Measures will be taken that refugees and migrants are involved in drafting readiness and response plans. Effective communication to fight misunderstandings in terms of migrants' role is fundamental during the pandemic COVID-19.
- ***Have you identified any measures which could address the probable increasing demand for migrant smuggling services after the COVID-19 crisis?***
 - Increasing the detection force of migrant smuggling after the COVID-19 crisis, inconsistent with other EU structures, such as FRONTEX;
 - Logistic support for border police structures;
 - Establishment of joint information exchange centers, not only with countries that are part of the signing of the Police Cooperation Convention in Southeast Europe, but also with EU countries;
 - Exchange of information and joint analysis on this problem;
 - Drafting an electronic learning platform (remote, online or cross-border) for border officers, with specialized modules for border detection. Through distance learning it is possible to record and train a significant number of staff members, including officers stationed in remote border areas. Consider the possibility of using Moodle as a learning platform.

In June 2019, the National Strategy for Migration and its Action Plan (2019-2022) was approved by the Decision of the Council of Ministers No. 400, dated 19.6.2019; This document is currently being implemented by all responsible institutions. During the implementation of this political document, the aim will also be to increase the awareness of migrants about their rights and to facilitate their access to various forms of support / services. Particular attention will be paid to reducing barriers to effective enjoyment of the rights of categories of female immigrants, children and young people;

This political document and its action plan envisage a series of measures regarding vulnerable categories, such as:

- Drafting within 2020, of a new contingency plan for Albania to manage mixed flows, taking into account the vulnerabilities of moving populations (such as unaccompanied minors, victims of trafficking, asylum seekers, disabled people etc.).
- Improving infrastructure at border crossing points to properly meet the specific needs of migrants (children, the elderly, people with disabilities, etc.).

- Training of border employees to identify vulnerable categories in cases of massive mixed flows;
 - Developing clear standard procedures for assisted voluntary return including for vulnerable categories such as unaccompanied minors, VTs and asylum seekers);
- *What measures have been taken by Western Balkans partners to further strengthen their reception capacities and address the challenges posed by COVID-19?*
 - Exchange of information on the situation in the respective countries and the measures taken by the countries to prevent the spread of COVID-19, at the border crossing points, airports and in the centers of registration and accommodation of immigrants and asylum seekers;
 - Coordination of actions in the repatriation of citizens of the respective countries and preliminary testing of the subject nationals, readmission, repatriation or deportation by the requesting states.
 - In accordance with the guidelines of the European Union and international law, during this period the structures of the Ministry of Interior and those of border and migration in the State Police, have paid attention to the implementation of applicable law and treatment of migrants focusing especially on prevention of stigmatization and discrimination of migrants, due to measures implemented during COVID-19 response operations;
 - Collaboration with responsible institutions to provide refugees and migrants, regardless of their legal status, access to health care, other services and sensitive information from a cultural and linguistic point of view on how to prevent infection and infection of others. ;
 - Public health institutions have been informed to take into account the health risks associated with movement and relocation, poor nutrition and health status, physical and mental stress due to lack of housing, food and clean water among refugees and migrants;
 - Also through messages, it has become clear that migrants do not pose increased risks of COVID-19 for the country, compared to other international travelers, but they are a more vulnerable group that needs special support - especially access in preventive and care services;

The main accommodation center for asylum seekers is in Tirana, Babrru, “The National Reception Center for Asylum Seekers”, is open and currently has expanded its reception capacities up to 240 people as a result of the construction of the new building. Asylum seekers in the Center are provided with the right to housing, food, healthcare and various services. The center has a doctor, a social worker, a psychologist and spacious environment. Moreover, suitable facilities are created for children, also libraries and sports facilities.

The transit reception centers for asylum seekers have been established, as follows:

- Social Centre for Irregular Migrants and Asylum Seekers in need (vulnerable groups) in the Municipality of Gjirokastra with accommodation capacity of up to 15 people with a special focus on women/children (during the pre-screening process), enabling the right to stay in this center at last 72 hours, which can be extended according to their needs;
 - Transit Centre for temporary registration and temporary accommodation of irregular migrants and asylum seekers in Gërhot, Gjirokastra, whose establishment was supported by the Council of Europe Development Bank's Fund. Its accommodation capacity is up to 60 people and includes IT equipment to allow the pre-screening procedure at the center. As such, Albania's capacity will grow in case of a higher inflow.
 - Transit Center for temporary registration and temporary accommodation of irregular migrants and asylum seekers in Kapshtice, Korca, whose establishment at last was supported by IOM. Its accommodation capacity is up to 60 people and also includes IT equipment to allow the control procedure at the center. As such, Albania's capacity will increase in the event of a higher entry.
-
- ***What obstacles to effective and proactive information-sharing between the EU and Western Balkans partners could be identified? How could these obstacles be addressed?***
 - Strengthening information exchange with the relevant authorities of other states in the Western Balkans region on the latest trends, new ways of acting. The networks of central units and forms of cross-border cooperation with a focus on pandemics should be further developed, giving a more active role to the Police Cooperation Centers, joint BCPs and joint patrol modalities;
 - Developing and introducing Knowledge Management Platforms on the phenomenon of pandemics, these platforms should allow the acquisition, storage and sharing of knowledge on the positive and negative cases displayed by each country, modes of action, risk indicators, alerts, best practices, training, educational materials and those references, etc., so that employees can draw lessons from the past and put them into practice in the future.
 - The platform should be a dynamic, interactive forum, where border workers can meet and make connections, share news and views, access resources and learn from each other's ongoing experiences and increase their professionalism on the subject; Starting the preparation and signing of protocols / agreements with the border authorities of neighboring countries on coordinated actions and profiling of common risk during periods of increased flow of movements (summer tourist season, holiday season, etc. as these periods are considered as the most dangerous;
 - Assessing what needs to be done to determine the conditions for the effective use of these instruments of international cooperation such as cross-border surveillance and immediate monitoring provided for in the Convention on Police Cooperation for Southeast Europe;
 - Organize events to increase the capacity of the leading staff of the Border and Migration Police, in order to raise awareness of the threats that threaten border security from various pandemics in the future;

- Also, campaigns, seminars, round tables, mobile presentations in the respective units, etc. should be conducted on this topic.
 - To cope with the growing influx of people, the Border and Migration Police needs to strengthen their capacity in terms of equipment and logistics. Most of the equipment that Border and Migration Police (BMP) has are secured from foreign donations of various sources. Given the categories of BCPs, the tendency to increase the number of BCPs and the growing dynamics of entry and exit of persons, vehicles, goods of potentially criminal tendencies, the current equipment is not sufficient to achieve the required standards;
 - Due to the number and types of equipment available, based on risk analysis and work practice, most of the equipment has been placed in the BCPs of the first and second categories. Meanwhile, people who commit criminal activity, especially criminal groups, improve their methodology by trying to transfer criminal activity to the less supervised BCPs or less controlled or supervised border lines. Also, there are devices that can be used to identify offenders, but cannot be found in BCPs such as devices of detecting persons inside vehicles, personal luggage scanners, etc.
 - Beyond the logistical and financial problems that arise, there are obvious shortcomings in the maintenance of equipment due to the variety of brands and different products of similar equipment. This creates difficulties in finding operators who provide maintenance or repair of equipment, making them no more usable.
 - The investigative capacities of the border police need to be strengthened, in particular to detect cases of smuggling and trafficking in human beings;
 - Albania's hosting capacity to accommodate migrants is currently sufficient. But the reception center for irregular migrants in Karrec, with a total capacity of 150 beds, is in need of renovation. Our country seeks support for the possibility of creating facilities for unaccompanied minors and of course for further training of Border Police Staff in terms of identifying vulnerable categories and referring them for assistance.
 - The exchange of information in the asylum field between EU countries and the Albanian Authority for asylum is required.
- ***Would the creation of a common data-sharing tool among the Western Balkans countries be beneficial, modelled on the Eurodac system and with the technical support of the EU ?***

It would be necessary to create a common system for the distribution of data among Western Balkan countries, whether it is modeled on the Eurodac system or any other system, with the technical support of the EU. In fact, we believe that the functioning of this system would be half-hearted, if it would not interact with EURODAC. The claim that this cannot be done because of the fact that data protection legislation does not stand, as the Western Balkan countries have already signed an operational cooperation agreement with Europol, while national legislation is approximated to that of the European Union.

Albania has completed the establishment of a “Database” which is functional for the data of asylum seekers and those who are under protection in the Republic of Albania. This platform has started to function as an integral center between the Directorate of Asylum and Citizenship, the Directorate of Border and Migration and the National Open Center for Asylum Seekers, exchanging information in real time, shortening decision-making procedures as well as serving as a unique database in this area. The “Database” of asylum seekers now is efficient, enabling connection to any country.

I - ASYLUM RECEPTION CAPACITY, IRREGULAR MIGRATION

- In the Western Balkans, illegal immigration from the Middle East and North Africa, which tends to be used by countries in the region to reach the European Union, has long been seen as a phenomenon.

This phenomenon, in Albania, has increased significantly during 2019, compared to 2018. During 2019, 11,890 illegal foreign immigrants were caught and treated. Compared to the same period last year, there has been an increase with a total of 4,997 foreign citizens illegal immigrants or 72% more than during 2018. The treatment of immigrants caught in our country has been according to all international standards. Each of them has been treated with a "reception package" consisting of food, clothing and sanitary facilities, while over 160 of them have received immediate medical assistance at police stations or medical care institutions. Identifying foreign terrorist fighters in mixed migratory flows from the Middle East and North Africa has been a priority for Border and Migration Police services. During 2019, 2 suspected foreign nationals have been identified as foreign terrorist fighters, who are under investigation, while about 11 others have been referred to the Counter-terrorism Directorate and have been interviewed by the experts of this Directorate.

During 2015, 2016 and 2017, the number of irregular immigrants decreased, but 2018 and 2019 marked a significant increase, which shows that Albania continues to be an attractive transit country for crossing from Greece to European Union countries. Currently, as a result of measures taken, the growing influx has been managed.

- Coping with the situation, our authorities have paid special attention to the capacity for their reception, registration and accommodation in the territory of the country.

- As the flow of immigrants is mixed, a lot of attention is being paid to two indicators:

1. Identification of potential victims and victims of trafficking between citizens who come as irregular immigrants;
2. Identification of various violent extremist individuals or foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs).

The accurate identification of captured immigrants poses a real challenge. Irregular immigrants caught by Police services do not possess any documents and as a result their registration is done according to the declared identity, but as a result of the approved procedures, fingerprints and photos are taken.

What is noticeable is that irregular immigrants before arriving in Albania are well informed about the services provided in our country, the opportunities to seek asylum and the National Asylum Center, by asylum seekers who are accommodated in this center, or relatives and acquaintances who have managed to transit through our country.

From interviews of immigrants it turns out that all immigrants openly express their intention to reach Germany, Austria, Sweden or other EU Member States.

Irregular immigrants who are selected as asylum seekers and accommodated in the National Reception Center of Babrru, stay in this center for a period of 4 days to several weeks and then using the free exit in the city of Tirana, leave in the direction of Shkodra or, in very few cases, Kukes, in order to continue their journey to Montenegro or Kosovo, to reach EU countries. The number of asylum applications during 2019 is 6 703 or 56.3% of the total amount of 11,890, while during 2018 the number of asylum applications was 4,175 or 60.5% of the total amount of 6,893. In Babrru, during 2019 it is 5 831 or 87% of asylum seekers, while during 2018 it was 5 509 or 79.9% of the total number during 2018. As can be seen from the data, the tendency to abuse the right to asylum is high .

Special attention was paid to strengthening regional cooperation. This is how joint patrols operate along the green border with Macedonia, Kosovo and Montenegro. Police Cooperation Centers with Macedonia and Kosovo and the tripartite Albania-Montenegro-Kosovo Police Cooperation Center have been set up and are functioning, while progress has been made in opening such a center with Greece as well.

In cooperation with IOM, with the funding of the Bank of Europe Development Bank Fund and Gjirokastra Municipality, to cope with the possible influx, host capacities have been strengthened by setting up the Temporary Registration and Accommodation Center for Irregular Immigrants in Gërhot, Gjirokastra. (29 km from the border with Greece) with a capacity of 60 people while such a Center with the same capacity has been set up in Kapshtica, Korça, in cooperation with IOM, with funding from the Bank of Europe Council for Development Bank, and the Municipality of Devoll. Microbuses have been placed at the disposal of these centers for the transport of irregular immigrants. In cooperation with UNHCR, IOM and the Municipality of Gjirokastra, a reception center has been set up and is functioning for vulnerable groups, mainly families with small children and minors, in Gjirokastra.

In cooperation with CARITAS, it is enabled the creation of an amusing environment for children in the Closed Center for Foreigners in Kareç, the surveillance system with cameras in this Center has been re-launched, as well as the system of drinking water filtration throughout the premises of the Center.

Strengthening cooperation for the effective implementation of readmission procedures with neighboring countries has been a priority. Specifically, the implementation of the readmission procedures with Greece is problematic, not due to lack of will, but due to the fact that most of the arrested immigrants apply for asylum, while another part prefers voluntary departure from Albania. While the implementation of the readmission agreement and its protocol with Montenegro continues unhindered. As part of the South Border Initiative, biweekly information is regularly exchanged on the situation of the flow of irregular immigration between Albania, Northern Macedonia, Montenegro and the Republic of Kosovo.

At the moment, irregular immigration is one of the main threats to border security but also internal security in Albania and we believe in our region as well.

In the context of this phenomenon, an important challenge is the accurate identification of captured immigrants. Irregular immigrants caught by the Police services are no in possession of any documents and consequently their registration is done according to the declared identity, but as a result of the approved procedures, fingerprints and a photo taken. Difficulties in accurately identifying the identity of irregular immigrants, or potential failure to capture and identify them, increase the risk of trafficking in our territory, violent extremist elements or foreign terrorist fighters.

There is currently a clear risk that irregular immigration is associated with other criminal phenomena such as human trafficking and forgery / use of forged travel documents, which could revitalize the market for forged documents in the region. The ease of their passage through our borders and territories is also made possible by the involvement of different groups or individuals in the smuggling of immigrants. ***For this reason, close cooperation is needed between the law enforcement authorities of the countries of the region and the countries of destination.***

Immigrant abuse with the right to asylum application is present every day and more. We are in the midst of enforcing national and international legislation on the rights of irregular immigrants and openly abusing this right by asylum seekers. ***To address this issue, we think that clear, common policies should be adopted to ensure, on the one hand, the right to seek international protection and, on the other hand, to prevent abuse of this right.***

In regional terms, in our judgment, there is a lack of a common approach to tackling this phenomenon. Countries already affected, such as Albania, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia, do not have a common plan to address the problem. Thus, we reiterate the official position that this phenomenon needs to be addressed collectively, regionally with the participation of the destination countries in the EU and with the financial and logistical support of the EU. ***Therefore, we think that a joint plan of the countries of the region should be adopted, in order to react jointly and quickly in case of a possible crisis.***

One challenge that currently turns out to be very difficult is negotiating and signing readmission agreements with many countries of origin. This, coupled with the lack of diplomatic missions of the countries of origin, makes it impossible to repatriate illegal immigrants to these countries.

Operacioni i FRONTEX - Joint Operation Flexible Operational Activities Western Balkans 2019 in Albania

Joint Operation Flexible Operational Activities Western Balkans 2019 in Albania, is for the first fully-fledged operational activity organised and coordinated by the European Border and Coast Guard Agency on third country territory. The operation was inaugurated on 21 May 2019, in Tirana thus marking the start of the operationalisation of the Status Agreement between the EU and Albania which entered into force on 1st May 2019. Consequently, on 22 May 2019, Joint Operation (JO) Flexible Operational Activities Western Balkans 2019 in Albania started and it covered the Greek-Albanian border area as part of JO Flexible Operational Activities concept.

The operational aim of the Joint Operation Flexible Operational Activities – Western Balkans 2019 in Albania (hereinafter “JO”) is to implement coordinated operational activities at the land border between Albania and Greece, in the territory of the Republic of Albania, in order to control illegal immigration flows, to tackle cross-border crime and to enhance European cooperation. This aim has been successfully achieved and continues to be achieved.

During the operational period (22 May 2019 – 29 January 2020), 17 participating Member States contributed to JO FOA WB 2019 in Albania by deploying 248 Team Members, to 2 Border Control Units and 2 Border Crossing Points, with 7 profiles related to border control tasks (Border Surveillance Officer, Debriefing Expert, Screening Expert, Frontex Support Officer, Advanced Level Document Officer, Stolen Vehicles Detection Officer, First Line Officer) with additional support of Interpreters/Cultural Mediators (as part of the Netherlands contribution). In order to fully cover the operational needs of the JO, additional human resources were made available by internal redeployment of 27 ALB police officers co-financed by Frontex. The operational aim is implemented in full compliance with the relevant EU and international law, and national law of the Republic of Albania, guaranteeing the respect for fundamental rights in particular the access to international protection, the compliance with the principle of non-refoulement and data protection rules and taking into account the recommendations of the Frontex Consultative Forum and the reports and observations of the Fundamental Rights Officer. The Operation has managed to enhance border security on the operational area, to enhance operational cooperation, to enhance information exchange (excluding personal data), to identify risks and threats and to establish best practices. The operation continues.

Document fraud

During 2019, the total number of forged documents was 388 cases and 904 documents (including travel guarantees, forged travel documents, etc.) and 435 authors, 319 Albanian citizens and 116 foreign citizens were identified.

Of the 388 reported cases of documents (passports, identity cards, stamps, visas, residence permits) during 2019, 21 cases have been apprehended at BCPs entrances and 367 at exits. 24 documents were seized at the entrance and 880 at the exit, mainly during the control of Albanian and foreign nationals attempting to use forged documents to travel to EU / Schengen countries.

The number of travel documents during 2019 was 904 (101 passports, 225 IDs, 357 visas, 59 stamps, 24 residence permits and 138 other accompanying travel documents such as driving license, health card, bank card, vehicle insurance, notarized statement , etc.).

Various citizens are constantly trying to use the PKK, especially the Mother Teresa Airport Rinas and the Port of Durres as transit points for crossing the border with forged documents. From the analysis made of these cases during the one-year period 01 January - 31 December 2019, in the field "crimes through falsification of documents" in total are identified; 388 cases with 435 offenders.

Reception capacity

The accommodation capacities in Border and Migration Administration are as follows:

- Closed Center for Foreigners, Karreç - 100 people.
- Temporary Reception Center in Gerhot, Gjirokastra - 60 people.
- Kakavija Border and Migration Police Station - 13 people.
- Temporary Reception Center in Kapshtica, Korça 60 persons.
- Kapshtica Border Police Station, Korça - 8 people.

II - COOPERATION IN THE FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM AND PREVENTION OF RADICALISATION

Questions

- ***How much progress has been made by the Western Balkans partners in implementing the Joint Action Plan on Counter Terrorism and the six bilateral arrangements, and where has that progress been achieved? What are the main difficulties encountered in terms of implementation?***

The fight against terrorism, in particular the prevention and fight against violent extremism, remains a key area of cooperation, but also a priority of the work of the State Police.

The Joint Action Plan on Counter Terrorism in the Western Balkans, signed by the EU and the partners of the Western Balkans, in October 2018, is the main document in this area.

The main principles of cooperation in the field of information exchange between EU law enforcement agencies and partners of the Western Balkans, which are being implemented by the State Police and counter terrorism structures, include the exchange of information on time, proactive, secure and qualitative according to legal requirements.

The main commitment of the structures of counter terrorism within the priorities of the Government, remains the implementation of the obligations deriving from the the Joint Action Plan on Counter Terrorism in the Western Balkans.

In this framework, on 9 October 2019, between Albania and the EC, an agreement was signed on the priority actions that Albania will follow during the years 2019 - 2020, for each of the objectives set out in the Joint Action Plan on Counter Terrorism in the Western Balkans.

In order to ensure progress in the implementation of the Joint Action Plan, it is envisaged that this agreement will be regularly updated and will include priority actions, which will need to be implemented in the frame of the Joint Action Plan.

In terms of monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the agreement and the obligations set out in Joint Action Plan on Counter Terrorism in the Western Balkans, by order of the Minister of Interior No. 82, dated 06.03.2020, the Director of the Counter Terrorism Directorate is appointed as the Single Point of Contact with the EU Delegation.

Also, at the State Police, by Order of Director General of the State Police, No. 367, dated 07.04.2020, a Working Group has been set up in charge of monitoring the fulfillment of the obligations of the State Police, deriving from the implementation of the Agreement on the implementation of the Joint Action Plan against terrorism for the Western Balkans between the EC and Albania.

The State Police, in cooperation with international partners, has strengthened the logistical and human capacities of the counter terrorism structures, in order to use special investigative methods, through the improvement of technology and specific training.

The Directorate of Counter Terrorism has full operational capacity, motor vehicles and surveillance tools to carry out special operations, which have helped in the progress of work to prevent and fight criminal acts in the area. Moreover, further capacity building is enhanced in cooperation with PAMECA V an ICITAP.

Statistics on criminal offenses referred to the Prosecutor's Office by counter-terrorism structures:

- In 2018, 25 criminal offenses were referred.
- In 2019, 33 criminal offenses were referred.

If we compare with the referrals of 2018, it results that for 2019 the number of referrals of criminal offenses has increased by 8 cases more.

In the period January - March 2020, the counter terrorism Structures referred to 9 criminal offenses, in the Special Prosecution Office against Corruption and Organized Crime (SPAK) and the Judicial District Prosecutions.

PREVENTION OF VIOLENT EXTREMISM AND RADICALISM, COOPERATION WITH OTHER FACTORS

The State Police, specifically the structures for community policing and not only, in the framework of institutional obligations to prevent the phenomenon of Violent Extremism and Radicalism in Albania, have closely cooperated and continue this cooperation with all local and foreign actors operating in Albania whose focus is preventing and fighting Violent Extremism, Radicalism and Terrorism.

In the framework of meeting the obligations on community policing in terms of prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalism, the Guideline “On the Prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalism, in the Framework of Community Policing” was drafted and approved by Order of GDASP no. 396, dated 21.04.2020, which was submitted to the local structures of the State Police for implementation.

The State Police for increasing the capacity of community policing structures, for the prevention of the phenomenon of Violent Extremism and Radicalism in Albania, have conducted trainings on the "Identification of factors and indicators / signs leading to Violent Extremism and Radicalism", and specifically:

- training conducted in cooperation with PAMECA-V Mission in the period January - February 2019 with about 640 specialists of community policing to get acquainted with the risk factors and signs of the occurrence of this phenomenon.
- One-week training conducted in cooperation with the OSCE, ICITAP Program and the CVE Center, in April 2019 with the heads of community policing sections at police commissariats.
- training conducted in cooperation with ICITAP Program in September 2019 with 26 heads of community policing sections in police commissariats.

Also, in the framework of increasing and strengthening the professional capacities of community policing structures, for the prevention of the phenomenon of Violent Extremism and Radicalism in Albania, the State Police has cooperated with local and foreign actors, namely:

1. The Center against Violent Extremism CVE, at the Prime Minister's Office, has undertaken a tour of meetings in 61 municipalities nationwide and has held 38 meetings with municipalities, where the State Police has been part of, pursuant to the tasks set out in the National Strategy for the

Fight against Violent Extremism and Radicalism in Albania, approved by DCM no. 930, dated 18.11.2015, as well as in the Action Plan with the Ministry of Interior for the period 2019-2021.

These meetings consist of raising awareness on the prevention of Violent Extremism and Radicalism, as well as recognizing the work done by the relevant municipalities to establish and make operational the Local Public Safety Councils (LPSC) in each municipality, with a special focus on the fight against violent extremism and radicalism, related to the obligations of first-line actors (teachers, psychologists, sociologists, community policing officers, religious communities, etc.) in preventing violent extremism and radicalism in Albania.

2.The Institute for Democracy and Mediation - IDM, is implementing with the financial support of the Public Relations Office at the US Embassy, the project "Building sustainable communities against violent extremism through the model" School as community Center", focusing on areas such as Kashar, Vore, Shijak, Keneta, Fushe-Kruje, Kruje and Peqin.

- Meetings were held aiming at strengthening local communities of Durrës, Shijak, Vora, Kruja, Fushë-Krujë, Cërrik, Peqin and Kashar, as well as strengthening the professional capacity of State Police employees (NSPK / SPZ).
- Actors involved in the Project are; the Municipality, the Local Education Office, the high schools identified in each municipality, the local directorates of the State Police, businesses and members of local communities such as parents, teachers, psycho-social services, youth groups and religious communities.
- The purpose of the meeting is to inform local state and non-state actors about the project and its main pillars, as well as to present the findings of the study on violent extremism in Albania and areas exposed to the phenomenon.

3. The USAID / PLGP project "For Effective Municipalities, Active Communities, and Safer Citizens", in cooperation with the Coordination Center against Violent Extremism CVE, is conducting a training cycle in 21 municipalities of the country. Community police officers of the police commissariats have also participated in the 15 meetings / trainings held so far. In addition to gaining knowledge, the presence of community policing officers in training is a good opportunity to increase coordination and cooperation with local actors.

- During 2019, this training was conducted in the municipalities of Bulqiza, Peshkopi, Kamza, Tirana (2), Durres, Kavaja, Pogradec, Librazhd and Cërrik.
- For 2020, trainings are scheduled to be held in 11 municipalities. This training was conducted in Shkodra, Bilisht, Berat, Kuçova and Lushnja, and trainings are to be held in the municipalities of Fier, Patos, Vlora, Saranda, Korça and Elbasan, scheduled for March 2020, but due to Covid-19, they are postponed and will be completed till the end of 2020.
- Employees of the State Police and community policing officers will attend the trainings (NSPK / SPZ).

5. Cooperation with Woman Center for Development and Culture Albania - WCDCA, based in Elbasan, which is preparing a study with the support of Hedayah - International Center for Excellence for Countering Violent Extremism, and funded by the European Union (EU)), within the GLOBAL STRIVE project.

In this context, the project is engaged in research for Albania on a number of issues related to the analysis of factors that encourage the participation of women / girls in countries such as Syria and Iraq, possible forms and threats of extremism, identification of communities endangered, issues of re-integration and de-radicalization, all based on gender perspective. This organization has requested to hold meetings / interviews, among others with representatives from; General Directorate of State Police, LPDs of Tirana, Elbasan, Shkodra, Vlora, Korca, and Diber.

- *What measures have recently been taken to address the issue of returning foreign terrorist fighters and their family members? Do you have any best practices to share in this field? What are the main challenges confronting you in this area?*

The state of play of Albanian citizens in conflict area of Syria\ Iraq

Based on the information available from Counterterrorism Directorate, there are currently 122 Albanian citizens in Syria, including 50 men, 22 women and 50 children.

Based on status and location:

- There are 10 male in the territory of Syria.
- In the camps run by the Kurds, there are 61 individuals, of whom 17 are women and 44 are children.
- Prisoners are 10 male individuals.
- 11 individuals have passed away, of these 5 women and 6 children.
- 30 men are suspected to have been killed on the front line.

- Albania is a country that hasn't faced terrorist acts and victims, but the phenomenon of citizens going to Syria / Iraq conflict areas with their families, women and children has been present.

- Ministry of Interior and Albanian State Police (Counter Terrorism Directorate) have cooperated and exchanged information with Italy's counterpart structures and partners, as it is the case of the Alvin Berisha, the minor boy returned to his family, after he had gone to Syria with his mother.

In the framework of measures undertaken by Albania for the reception and treatment of Albanian citizens expected to return from the conflict areas in Syria / Iraq, work has been continues on implementing the Inter-Institutional Action Plan "On the reception and treatment of Albanian citizens after their return from countries in conflict Syria / Iraq", approved by Order of the Prime Minister No. 169, dated 1 November 2018.

- Currently, there are no Albanian individuals returned from conflict areas, but the State Police/Counter –Terrorism Directorate are cooperating the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs to prepare relevant files with the data of the citizens expected to return from the conflict zones, the apartments where they will be accommodated, the family members waiting for them, schools that the returned children will attend, etc.

Cooperation with EU member states, through projects dedicated to returned foreign terrorist fighters and members of their families, as well as the support provided to our country through the Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN) and the Regional Network of National Coordinators P-CVE, has a key role in the exchange of best practices between institutions in order to identify and detect cases.at border.

- Also, for all individuals who are in Syria and are expected to return, the counter terrorism structures has initiated the criminal proceedings No. 333/2017, for the criminal offenses ***Involvement in military operations in a foreign state*** and **Terrorist organization** foreseen by articles 265\,a, 234\,a of the Criminal Code, proceedings which are being pursued in cooperation with the Prosecutor`s Office.

-
Another moment related to foreign fighters is the monitoring of suspected persons participating in the armed conflict Syria-Iraq, who returned to Albania before September 2014, when the amendments in the Criminal Code of the Republic of Albania came into force. Consequently, an investigation could not be initiated under Article 265 of the Criminal Code. These persons are being monitored and kept under control by the structures of the Counter Terrorism Directorate in the State Police.

- Monitoring of returned citizens and their family members, as well as other citizens suspected of involvement in terrorist activities, is also done by placing them on the checklist in the section "Border notifications", interviewing, denying their entry, keeping under surveillance and interception and other investigative and procedural actions.

-There is also a risk to national security from the return of FTF from Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, part of the group of immigrants coming from Syria, Iraq, or people from countries at high risk of terrorism, who may enter as emigrant through the neighboring countries, as well as the so-called "Lone Wolves", using forged documents.

- The arrest and extradition, in July 2019, of the Chechen citizen, (FTF), declared internationally wanted by Interpol / Moscow, coming to the Republic of Albania among immigrants from Greece, confirms the potential danger that comes from penetration within FTF (lone wolf) immigrants, escaped from conflict countries with the aim of securing residence in a European country.

- This is a very good practice that we have shared with our counterparts and partners in the fight against terrorism, in joint meetings and trainings, where intensive cooperation and exchange of information by counter terrorism structures with counterparts and international partners Interpol, Europol and the European Counter Terrorism Centre was crucial in identifying, arresting and extraditing this foreign terrorist fighters.

- ***What steps could be taken to enhance the quality of information-sharing between the EU and the Western Balkans partners? What is the situation regarding the roll- out of CT SIENA?***

Effective exchange of information and operational cooperation with counter-terrorism services of the countries of the region, Interpol, Europol, European Counter Terrorism Center, liaison officers, Terrorism Screening Center (TSC-USA), law enforcement agencies and EU partner services, remains the main priority for the Counter Terrorism Directorate at ASP.

This cooperation consists of:

- Proactive exchange of qualitative information
- Participation in Joint Operations
- Trainings, meetings, conferences, etc.

Albania has signed 21 cooperation agreements and protocols, on the fight against terrorism, with the countries of the Western Balkans, EU, the USA and beyond, which form the legal basis for international cooperation and exchange of information by the State Police and the Counter – Terrorism Directorate with these countries.

Exchange of information with counterparts and international partners:

A total of 590 messages were exchanged with Europol Sienna. Mostly the correspondence was for verification or for cases under investigation by the Directorate of Counter Terrorism.

The Counter-Terrorism Directorate sent a request to Europol to support OSINT for 44 suspects, in connection with an investigation into terrorist activities, within the Task Force for the Identification of Terrorism. The information provided by Europol, served as material and was used to continue legal proceedings and criminal prosecution against these subjects.

The Directorate of Anti-Terrorism also used the reports of the European Operational Analysis and the reports of the "LIFELINE" project, in 3 cases for the initiation of preliminary investigations and the referral for criminal prosecution for financing terrorism against the subjects.

The State Police/Counter-Terrorism Directorate is part of Europol's focal points: "Hydra", "Dolphin", "Travelers", "Europol CTI Initiative Counter Terrorism" and the "LIFELINE" project, for individuals or groups suspected of having links to terrorism, as well as for the identification of the FTF of the Western Balkan countries, arrested in Syria-Iraq.

The Directorate of Counter-Terrorism is proactive and has exchanged the list and all possible and necessary information, with Europol / Interpol, as well as with our counterparts and partners in the region and the EU, regarding the identification of Albanian FTF citizens and their families, who are currently in conflict areas and their return to our country is expected.

The cooperation of the Counter Terrorism Directorate with Europol has been intensive and continuous given the facilities provided by the electronic systems offered by Europol.

On May 2016, the Directorate of Counter Terrorism has access to "Europol-SIENA", for the direct exchange of information with the Counter Terrorism Center of Europol and third countries.

The exchange of information in the area of fight against terrorism over the years has been steadily increasing, specifically:

During 2019, the following information was verified and exchanged:

- 168 information was exchanged, 88 received and 80 sent with Interpol.
- 77 information were exchanged, 66 received and 11 sent with Europol.
- 590 information were exchanged with Europol Sienna.
- 47 information, received 30, and sent 17 with the Sector of Liaison Officers.
- 39 of information were exchanged, 21 were received and 18 were sent with CIA.
- 51 information were exchanged, 25 were received and 26 were sent with the FBI
- 12 information, received 6, sent 6 with RSO (Regional Security Office at the US Embassy)
- 20 information were exchanged directly with the Liaison Officers from homologues countries.

During the period **January - March 2020**, the following information was verified and exchanged:

- The TSC, Terrorism Screening Center, service 24\7, where for this period a total of 5170 e-mails received in the communication channel with TSC have been treated.
- There have been carried out a total of 730 verifications for subjects with "Inconclusive" status, and 12 responses were sent regarding what was requested by the partners.
- 81 cases in connection with the Vennling Project have been verified.
- Procedural actions for the screening of 76 profiles on the social network Facebook have been carried out and were forwarded to the investigation sector.
- 84 cases via Siena have been verified.

Operational Cooperation in the Fight against Terrorism:

During 2019 there were 2 police operations and 1 joint investigation with international partners against terrorism:

- In April 2019, a joint operation with the Italian INTERFORCA, 1 Albanian citizen was arrested for the purpose of extradition to Italy, declared internationally wanted by Interpol Rome, for the criminal offense of "Participation in a terrorist organization".
- In July 2019, 1 Chechen / Russian citizen was arrested for the purpose of extradition declared internationally wanted by Interpol / Moscow, (FTF with ISIS) who came to the Republic of Albania among immigrants from Greece (lone wolf) toward European countries.
- 2018-2019, joint investigation with the Partner services regarding the planning of the terrorist attack against the leaders and members of the MEK organization in Albania (remaining in the attempt because it was prevented). This joint investigation was carried out in cooperation with Tirana Serious Crime Prosecution Office and with the cooperation of the Tirana Serious Crimes Prosecution Office.

Trainings, seminars, meetings, etc.

During 2019, 72 trainings, meetings, seminars, conferences and study visits were held, inside and outside the country, twice compared to 36 trainings in 2018, and specifically:

Abroad they have been realized

- Trainings were conducted 17, with 25 participants;
- Meetings were held 13, with 19 participants;
- Seminars 4, with 4 participants;
- Conference 2, with 3 participants;
- Study visit 2, with 3 participants.

Inside the country are realized

- Training 26, with 279 participants, by the US Embassy in Tirana, ICITAP, PAMECA V, UNDOC, K.E, BKA, etc.;
- Conference held 2, with 4 participants;
- Meetings for discussion of various topics 4, with 13 participants;
- Seminars 2, with 5 participants.

Trainings and meetings, for the period January - March 2020:

- On 28.01.2020, a Regional Training was held in Tirana, for the investigation and criminal prosecution of terrorism, organized by the PAMECA V, which was attended by 20 CTD employees.
- On 28.01.2020, the Europol Operational Meeting took place in The Hague, the Netherlands, attended by an employee of the CT Directorate.
- On 23.01.2020, a Pristina-Kosovo meeting was held, attended by an employee of the CT Directorate.
- On February 18-22.02.2020, the Regional Counter-Terrorism Program was held in Drubovnik-Croatia, attended by two employees of the CT Directorate.
- On 25.02.2020 in Rome-Italy, a high-level meeting was held at the Central Directorate of the Italian CT Police, for the exchange of information regarding citizens involved in terrorist activities in both countries.

Internal cooperation:

- With SIS, 205 information was exchanged, 111 received and 94 sent, not including daily information exchange through the coordinator with SIS.
- Defense Intelligence and Security Agency (DISA), 16 information were exchanged, 4 were received and 12 were sent.
- With the Prosecutor's Office, 77 information were exchanged, 18 received and 59 were sent.
- With the Local Police Directorates, 46 information were received and 3 information were sent.
- With the Department of Border & Migration, it has been assisted in 88 cases by CT specialists to interview 682 individuals, coming from the Middle East.
- With the General Directorate of Prisons, based on the Joint Agreement No. 146/4 dated 20.03.2017, between the State Police, SIS, GD of Prisons, there has been a continuous cooperation through periodic and urgent meetings in case of situations and sensitive information for information exchange and at the operational level, to keep individuals under control who are convicted for criminal offence for terrorism purpose and the protection of other individuals convicted for radicalization.
- Systematic cooperation in exchange of information with GDPML (FIU), based on a bilateral agreement, where the two institutions have access to each other's databases, to verify citizens and entities related to financial transactions suspected of terrorist financing.

The increase of inter-institutional cooperation, especially with GDPML (FIU), is shown below:

2018

- 14 requests for information were sent by the Directorate of CT to GDPML (FIU).
- 16 information on monetary transactions from GDPML (FIU) to the Directorate of CT

2019

- 44 requests for information were sent by the Directorate of CT to GDPML (FIU)
- 41 information from GDPML (FIU) to the Directorate of CT.

For the period January-March 2020, 30 information were exchanged between the Directorate of CT and the GDPML (FIU), as follows:

- 13 requests for information were sent by the Directorate of CT to GDPML (FIU).
- 17 information sent by GDPML (FIU) to the CTD.

Out of 33 criminal offenses, referred during 2019 to the Prosecutor's Office, 6 were referred for "Financing of terrorism", provided by Article 230 / a of the Criminal Code.

Capacity building to combat terrorist financing has been another primary objective of the State Police, based on EC Moneyval recommendations.

The police have fulfilled their obligations, including the transfer of the criminal offense to the competence of DCT, the establishment of the FT Investigation Unit, the completion of organic, facilities and work tools, as well as training and full efficiency in April 2019.

In February 2020, Albania completed the monitoring period by the Financial Action Task Force (FAFT) and the ICRG in its report concluded that Albania has made positive and tangible progress in the actions included under the IO9 recommendation. Recommended actions considered as key include: understanding the risks of terrorist financing, parallel investigations, systematic approach to FT investigation and terrorism-related offenses.

CHALLENGES / PRIORITIES FOR YEAR 2020:

- At the end of 2020, the Inter-Sectorial Strategy for the Fight against Terrorism and the Action Plan 2016-2020 will be completed, therefore it is foreseen to draft a new Strategy and Action Plan 2021-2025, for the implementation of the strategy, based on the CT Strategy of EU and WB Joint Action Plan on Counter Terrorism.
- Prevention of terrorist acts by individuals who can penetrate through immigrants who enter legally into Albania, destined for EU countries (so-called lone wolves).
- Monitoring of individuals returning from countries of conflict Syria / Iraq, as well as any individual suspected of radical / extremist and terrorist activities.
- Monitoring of Albanian individuals, who are expected to return from the conflict zone Syria / Iraq, as well as their families.
- Management of the situation related to the safety of MEK members and former MEK members.
- Identification of individuals / groups with ethno-nationalist tendencies and taking measures to prevent criminal offenses against security and constitutional order.
- Carrying out parallel investigations into terrorist financing in each case of reference for acts with terrorist purposes, based on the recommendations of the FATF and the EU Moneyval.

III - ORGANISED CRIME

Questions

- ***How could we improve data-sharing using SIENA or other channels?***

In order to increase the number of information and requests exchanged with Europol, should be used the opportunity provided by the Operational Agreement with Europol and the use of the secure information exchange network SIENA. Also:

- Establish secure and direct links between the competent authorities of EU countries and third parties responsible for the fight against organized crime, corruption, trafficking, criminal assets.
- To design, build, use and develop secure online direct communication channels for communication between police officers and law enforcement experts of EU countries between them and third countries.

Europol National Unit Albania in this regard has held several meetings with the relevant Directorates and Sectors in the General Directorate of State Police and in the Regional Directorates along with the Europol Liaison Officer deployed in Tirana regarding the role, capacity and services Europol offers by informing the structures about the possibilities and benefits deriving from the Operational Agreement with Europol.

- ***What practical steps could be taken to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on international law enforcement cooperation?***
- Establish direct links between the competent authorities of EU countries and third parties, according to specialized structures against organized crime, illegal trafficking, corruption, money laundering and terrorist financing, criminal assets, etc.
- Utilize all secure online communication channels, Weebex, telegram, and liaison between EU investigators and third parties for international investigative cases, and establish other security communication channels.
- Training structures should develop online training for organized crime investigators, drug trafficking and human beings, etc., illegal trafficking, PP / FT of corruption especially for direct communication systems electronically.
- Review the information technology system using the law enforcement authorities by affirming a new approach to the current conditions and the latest developments.
- Increase the number of meetings of law enforcement experts in safe and digital platforms for communication and online connection.
- Conceive and build encrypted communication online systems for investigators of EU and third countries at international level.

- ***What measures could be taken to address the evolving threats of organised crime linked to the COVID-19 crisis?***
 - Increasing control measures for services, especially online shopping, housing services, postal packages, etc.
 - Increasing communications, meetings, online training of law enforcement officers, for new forms of crime and changing techniques and tactics of investigation in line with the emergence of these forms.

Also, the Criminal Police Department during the global pandemic COVID-19, but not only, using the INTERPOL and Europol channels, has carefully followed all the reports received from international partners regarding the latest developments in the field of organized crime. Currently in Albania there is no change affected by this pandemic. The Criminal Police Department, at a time when there will be information on evolution and change in terms of organized crime, will compile the appropriate information which it will disseminate through the Europol channel with all international partners.

- ***What specifically is required in order to improve operational cooperation in law enforcement, in particular with regard to combating migrant smuggling and the smuggling of drugs?***

The Criminal Police Department has a very good cooperation with international partners in the fight against organized crime. To further improve this cooperation, the following are proposed:

- Further strengthening of international cooperation through the exchange of police information in real time, organize as many operational meetings with countries involved in criminal activity of drug / migrant smuggling, the establishment of joint investigative teams, the development of joint operations;
- Involvement of the State Police in as many regional and European projects with a focus on the fight against organized crime as an expression of determination and commitment to fight organized crime through European instruments.
- Establishment of joint units of action with more local and regional actors by the border police, criminal police, rehabilitation centers for victims of trafficking, the prosecutor.
- Development of joint trainings for these action units.
- Operational cooperation between law enforcement agencies of EU countries and those of the Western Balkans is essential to reduce the smuggling of migrants. Through EU and regional policies on serious and organized crime, it is necessary the coordination of common priorities and operational action, including smuggling of migrants;

Albania has a very positive cooperation with Europol, especially appreciating the fact that Europol has a representative in Tirana; Close cooperation with JOO (serving as a Regional Operational Platform for International Investigations for migrant smuggling) of Europol, will also play a key role in supporting operational cooperation through the secure exchange of information, expertise and analytical support. It will work closely with Europol's JOO to detect and dismantle organized criminal groups that facilitate illegal immigration along the Mediterranean-West and Central routes. JOO will be a very important contact point for us.

STATISTICAL DATA

- Joint investigations

During 2019, there were 52 criminal proceedings under investigation in cooperation with international partners, in the fight against Narcotics and Trafficking.

For the period January-March 2020, 9 joint investigations have been recorded which are being pursued in cooperation with international partners in the fight against Trafficking of Narcotics.

- Operational meetings

During 2019, 27 joint operational meetings with international partners were conducted in view of investigations on pursuit in the fight against narcotics.

During **the period January-March 2020**, 7 joint operational meetings with international partners were conducted in order to investigate the prosecution.

-

- Joint investigation teams

- 4 joint investigative teams (JITs) have been established, which follow criminal proceedings for “Structured criminal groups” and “Narcotics trafficking”, Articles 333/a and 283/a of the Criminal Code.

- 3 teams with Italian counterparts;
- 1 team with German counterparts, supported by IPA Program.

- During the period January-March 2020, no joint investigation team has been set up.

- Collaborative operations

During 2019, 83 police operations were conducted, in cooperation with international partners, in the field of narcotics and smuggling:

- 60 police operations in the field of narcotics;
- 23 police operations in the field of illegal trafficking.

Operations "Goldfinger", "Goldfinger 2", "Quito", "Teversus", "The Wrong Way", "Fiori di primavera", "Metropolis" are among the most significant ones.

During the period January-March 2020, 20 police operations have been conducted in cooperation with international partners, in the field of narcotics and smuggling:

- 18 police operations in the field of narcotics;
- 2 police operations in the field of illegal trafficking.

As the most important we can mention operations "Barracuda", "Besa 2018", "Kitchen".

In cooperation with INTERPOL, the International Operation was carried out in terms of smuggling called "Joint Action Days", related to the "Fight against Trafficking in Human Beings in the Balkans". The operation took place on 09-17 December 2019. At the end of this operation, the following results were achieved:

- People referred to the Prosecutor's Office for illegal border crossing 120 people
- Victims of smuggling 3 persons
- Number of arrested/detained during the operation 6 persons
- Monitored flights 349
- Number of monitored passengers (24/7) 40260

POLICE OPERATIONS (in terms of smuggling)

During 2019, the structures of the State Police, in the fight against smuggling (Assistance in Illegal Border Crossing), have carried out 23 police operations, with 113 people involved, 66 arrested / 8 detained, 30 prosecuted at large.

The most important operations that we can mention are : "Rruga e Gabuar", "Departure", "Lutton", "Clandestine Taxi", "Ekspulsi", "Terminali", "Transportuesi", "Kamionisti", "Dublanti", "Tranziti", "Klandestini", "Mesnata", "Bilishti", "Viroi", "Emigranti", "Vishotica", "Jad Western Balkan 2019", "Bllata", "Ndalesa", "Vishotica", "Last Destination" Operacioni "Driver".

During the period January-March 2020, the structures of the State Police, in the fight against smuggling (Assistance in Illegal Border Crossing), have carried out 2 police operations, with 4 people involved, of which 4 arrested/ detained.

The most important operations to be mentioned are: "New start" dhe "Similarity 2".

- *How can we enhance the participation of the Western Balkans in EMPACT?*

Albanian State Police participates in some priorities of EMPACT, in different roles, but it could be involved in more Operation Action Plans, which could create a new dimension of cooperation and successes from Albania in the fight against crime. By Order of the General Director of Albania State Police Nr.392, date 15.04.2020 a National Contact Point for Empact was appointed.

It has been proposed:

- Tracking and orientation of police structures from established priorities,
- Identification of future priorities based on risk analyzes and criminal situations.

Also, the Criminal Police Department has had a very good cooperation with international partners in the fight against organized crime, with a special focus on drug trafficking, crackdown on criminal groups, especially EUROPOL which organizes and finances the **EMPACT project**.

We propose the involvement of the State Police in as many regional projects as possible.

Within EMPACT, EUROPOL every year joint operations are organized such as "JOINT ACTION DAYS- OAP WESTERN BALKANS", in the fight against arms trafficking, narcotics, smuggling of persons, documents` forgery. The project includes all Western Balkan countries as well as EU countries.

For 2019, the State Police has participated in the JAD EMPACT FIREARMS "On firearms, illegal migration, drug trafficking and forgery of documents", organized by EUROPOL, on 05-08 September 2019. The results of which are:

- 5342 persons checked
- 1931 controlled vehicles
- 105 controlled premises
- 10 postal packages
- 4 people arrested where:
 - 1 person for vehicle trafficking;
 - 1 person for drug trafficking;
 - 1 person for forgery of documents;
 - 1 person for people smuggling

Cooperation in this Project is ongoing.

- *What are the main challenges in setting up national drugs observatories and early warning systems in line with the EU methodologies, and how could we overcome them?*

It has been proposed: Establishment of joint action units with specialties in the field of medicine, investigation, public health service, medical control service, etc.

- Regarding the establishment of the early warning system, on the initiative of the State Police, on March 13, 2019, the agreement between the European Monitoring Center for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) was signed by the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Health and Social Protection of the Republic of Albania.
- The areas of cooperation for this agreement are:
 - Exchange of methodology of data collection systems and for data in particular (demand reduction of demand, supply and decrease of supply, legal aspects and policy models);
 - Exchanging experiences and data on new psychoactive substances (SRPs), as well as creating and strengthening an Early Drug Warning System.
 - Exchange of experiences on health and social reactions to problems caused by drugs, above all for the prevention of infectious diseases, harm reduction, social integration and integrated care for people who are addicted to drugs.
 - Support for the approximation of national legislation and Albanian policies with EU legislation and policies on drug-related issues.

- **Implementation:**

During 2019, pursuant to the agreement, representatives of the Criminal Police Department and the Anti-Narcotics Sector took part in several meetings organized by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection with its representatives and representatives of the Scientific Police Institute, regarding the establishment of the early system warning about drugs and changes to **Law 7975 "On Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances"**.

During 2020: Pursuant to the agreement, in terms of the Criminal Police Department and the Anti-Narcotics Sector, there have been no developments.

- *What is the state of play for the establishment of ARO Offices within the competent law enforcement authority and the conduct of financial investigations in all criminal offences relating to organised crime?*
- AAPSK has now been transferred to the Ministry of Interior, the investigation unit should be stabilized within the Directorate for Economic and Financial Crime in the Police and special units should be set up in the prosecutor's offices of the judicial districts, however a mixed national center should be established by law to serve for receiving, transferring and

executing international orders for the seizure, freezing, seizure, confiscation and recovery of criminal assets;

- Financial investigation in addition to, in parallel and regardless of criminal proceedings should be applied without hesitation to any criminal offense of organized crime, trafficking, corruption and crimes that generate products;
- Property disclosures to be used as indirect evidence in criminal proceedings;
- Finding, seizing, confiscating, recovering criminal cases is a strategy with names to fight, organized crime, illegal trafficking and corruption.

DATA ASP:

-
- Pursuant to Law 10192, "On the prevention and crackdown on organized crime, trafficking, corruption and other crimes, through preventive measures against property", amended in April 2017 we have:
 - **During 2019**, 123 reference materials for the initiation of property investigation were referred to the Serious Crimes Prosecution.
Compared to 2018, there are 15 more referrals.
 - **During the period January-March 2020**, 20 materials referring to the initiation of property investigation were referred to the Judicial District Prosecutor's Offices.
Compared to the first 3 months of 2019, there are 2 fewer referrals.

SEIZURE

- Pursuant to Law 10192, "On the prevention and crackdown on organized crime, trafficking, corruption and other crimes, through preventive measures against property", amended in April 2017, the following results are presented:
 -
 - **During 2019**, about 56,100,000 Euros of movable and immovable property were seized.
Compared to 2018, there are 38,500,000 Euros less seized.
 - **During the period January-March 2020**, about 207,317 Euros of movable and immovable property were seized.
Compared to the first quarter of 2019, there are 6,392,583 Euros less seized.

Annex: General information related to the fight against organized crime

The State Police is fully committed to strengthening the fight against organized crime, aiming to achieving the required standards and meet commitments within the process of Albania's integration into the European Union.

Special attention is paid to implementing the priorities, objectives, planned measures to prevent, detect and crack down criminal activity in the fight against organized crime, which are provided in the following documents:

- National Plan for European Integration.
- Priorities program of MoI.
- State Police Strategy 2015 - 2020 and its Action Plans 2015-2017 and 2018-2020.
- Cross-cutting Strategy for Organized Crime, Illegal Trafficking and Terrorism 2013 - 2020, and action plans in its implementation (2013-2016 and 2019-2020);
- Annual Work Program of the General Directorate of State Police;
- Annual Work Program of the Criminal Police Department;
- Action Plan for the Fight against Organized Crime, Operation "Force of Law" (*which aims to significantly increase, together with inter-institutional and operational mechanisms, results in the fight against organized crime, through detection, investigation and the crackdown on various individuals, groups and criminal organizations, also targeting and cracking down on any illegal economic assets derived from criminal activity*);
- Order of the Minister No. 1246, dated 05.12.2017 on the Establishment and functioning of the Special Task Force, at Central and Local level, for the implementation of the Action Plan in the fight against organized crime, Operation "Force of Law";
- "National Plan Against Cannabis" 2018-2020, approved by DCM No. 313, dated 31.5.2018, for a change in the Decision No. 248, dated 29.3.2017, of the Council of Ministers;
- Action Plan for addressing the recommendations of the fifth round of the Moneyval Committee (40 recommendations of the FATF) which was issued by the Coordinating Committee of the War on Money Laundering, approved on 04 September 2018;
- Normative Act No. 1, adopted on 31.01.2020 "On preventive measures in the framework of strengthening the fight against terrorism, organized crime, serious crimes and consolidation of public order and security" is being implemented.

In this context, a number of measures and activities have been taken and coordinated:

In the field of narcotics, preventive and strike measures such as:

- Increasing proactive investigations in order to prevent the timely crackdown on criminal activity of drug trafficking;
- Identification of leaders and members of criminal groups or various entities related to them for a more effective exercise of criminal prosecution and in parallel the identification of their assets in order to weaken economic and financial power by seizing and confiscating assets with criminal background;
- Increasing international cooperation through the exchange of police information, organizing operational meetings with countries involved in the criminal activity of drug trafficking, setting up joint investigative teams and conducting operations;
- Participation of the State Police in many regional and European projects with a focus on the fight against organized crime such as the "Balkan Task Force", the "ORKA" Project, etc. (*as an expression of determination and commitment to fight organized crime through European instruments*);
- Increasing and strengthening the capacities of the anti-drug structures through their provision of the necessary tools and equipment, as well as in the continuous training of the personnel;
- Monitoring and evaluating the results in the field of reducing the supply of drugs.

In terms of drug cultivation, preventive and striking measures are enforced;

- Periodic control of the territory in the early stages of preliminary cultivation of seedlings of narcotic plants indoors or on other small areas;
- Extensive public involvement in the process of informing the cultivation of narcotic plants through awareness and creating practical opportunities for providing information.
- Strengthening cooperation with other law enforcement agencies, other state institutions and local government that have legal obligations to prevent and crack down on criminal activity of cultivating narcotic plants;
- Strengthening the control of the integrity of police officers in charge of preventing and cracking down on criminal activity of cultivating narcotic plants;
- Intensification of work for providing police information for cultivation of narcotic plants, as well as increasing cooperation with other state institutions and local government bodies;
- Effective and efficient use of professional and operational capacities of all police structures in the fight against cultivation of narcotic plants;
- Striking the criminal activity of trading cannabis seeds and cultivating narcotic plants in Cuba, through proactive investigations, conducting operational actions, for legal documentation and bringing to justice the perpetrators;
- It is worth mentioning that the State Police, in addition to the planned, organizational and operational measures in the fight against the cultivation of narcotic plants and inter-institutional cooperation in this engagement, for years cooperates with the INTERFORCE MISSION at the Italian Embassy for air monitoring with special aircraft Guardia Di Finanza "Air Supervision 2017 - 2019", funded by the Italian Ministry of Interior;

- Cooperation with the Guardia Di Finance, in the framework of the Project "SANCAS" "Air surveillance to prevent the cultivation of narcotic plants", for 2020, but also during the years 2019, 2018, 2017, 2016.

In the area of Illegal Trafficking, preventive and strike measures such as:

- Identification and crackdown on individuals or criminal groups involved in human trafficking through the use of our state borders
- Collection, exchange, evaluation and analysis of information in order to identify the persons involved in these activities and to identify the lines, shapes, tools and places of their performance.
- Improving capacities in terms of documenting criminal activities.
- Improving the protection and control of our state borders.
- Strengthening the fight against illegal trafficking through inter-institutional cooperation and coordination.
- Preventing and cracking down on human trafficking by cooperating with all law enforcement agencies.
- Also, anti-trafficking structures have become part of important projects initiated by EUROPOL, specifically SESAC, SEFEG, SEFEN, etc., through the implementation of which will increase the effectiveness of preventive work and fight against trafficking in firearms and ammunition.

In the field against Money Laundering and Assets, important measures in the fight against money laundering are taken:

- Increasing the exchange of information in the field of Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing, with international agencies and partner services such as Europol, Interpol, CARIN, Albanian police liaison officers abroad and police liaison officers in Albania.
- Increasing cooperation with the Law Task Force, for financial and property investigations alongside and during criminal investigations, for finding, seizing in order to confiscate and recover criminal property.
- Continuous inspection of local structures in order to improve investigative activity and increase efficiency in prosecuting criminal proceedings for cleaning.
- Strengthening the capacity of law enforcement authorities dealing with the fight against economic crime.
- Following the Action Plan for addressing the recommendations of the fifth round of the Moneyval Committee.

As above, we introduce you to the progress made in the relevant areas in the fight against organized crime, corruption, for 2019 and the period January-March 2020:

During 2019, a total of 35,210 criminal offenses were identified, 30,259 or 86% of which were detected. *Compared to the same period of 2018*, the number of recorded cases is 742 more criminal offenses or + 2.15%, while the detectability is +1% higher.

36083 persons were suspected as perpetrators, of which 8491 detained / arrested, 25637 are being prosecuted at large.

Compared to the same period of 2018, there are 1546 perpetrators more implicated or + 4%, +85 perpetrators arrested / detained more or + 1%.

During January-March 2020, a total of 7183 criminal offenses were identified, 6234 or 86.78% of them were detected. Compared to the same period of 2018, the number of recorded cases is 380 less criminal offenses or -5.02%, while the detection rate is +3.6% higher.

73333 persons were suspected as perpetrators, of whom 2009 were detained / arrested, 4942 were prosecuted at large.

Compared to the same period of 2018, there are 275 perpetrators less implicated or -4%, 342 perpetrators arrested / detained more or + 21%.

During 2019, the Special Central Task Force and the Local Task Force set up in the Local Police Directorates, during the police operation "Force of Law" have developed:

- 38 police operations;
- 24 criminal groups dismantled where 259 perpetrators were prosecuted, with 204 arrested / detained, 36 declared wanted and 19 prosecuted at large.
- About 73,000,000 Euros of criminal assets were seized.

For the period January-March 2020, there have been achieved:

- 3 police operations, with 197 perpetrators, of which 151 arrested / detained (1 house arrest), 36 are being prosecuted at large, 10 have been declared wanted.
- 1 criminal group with 8 members was dismantled (criminal group "VJOSA", within the police operation Mezhgorani ", February 2020), for the criminal offense of "Production and sale of narcotics".
- No seizure of criminal assets.

During the period **01 February - 31 March 2020**, pursuant to Normative Act No. 1, dated 31.01.2020, within the Operation Force of Law (OFL) the following results were achieved:

- ❖ 56 property declaration notices were sent;
- ❖ Based on the information received from 538 entities, the Local Police Directorates have processed / supplemented the materials and sent 87 practices to the Special Prosecution Office Against Corruption and Organized Crime:
 - 81 practices were submitted pursuant to Article 19 of the Normative Act;
 - 6 practices pursuant to Article 18 of the Normative Act.
- ❖ 16 decisions of the Special Court for Seizure and Confiscated Property have been seized by the Court and have been executed by OFL, in order to carry out the procedures for transferring assets under the administration of the Agency for Administration of Seized and Confiscated Assets, as follows:

| LPD | No. of decisions | Flats | Vehicles | Businesses | Land | Resort | Fuel | Motors |
|--------------|------------------|----------|-----------|------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| Durrës | 8 | 2 | 7 | 3 | - | 1 | 1 | - |
| Fier | 1 | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - |
| Elbasan | 1 | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - |
| Gjirokastrë | 1 | - | 1 | - | - | - | - | - |
| Shkodër | 5 | 4 | 4 | - | 2 | - | - | 1 |
| Total | 16 | 6 | 14 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 1 | 1 |

POLICE OPERATIONS

During 2019, the State Police conducted 361 police operations in the field of organized crime and financial crimes, of which 87 operations in cooperation with international partners and 274 national operations of which:

- 192 police operations in the field of narcotics - of which 60 operations in cooperation with international partners and 132 national operations;
- 65 police operations in the field of illegal trafficking, of which 23 operations in cooperation with international partners and 42 national operations;
- 104 police operations in the field of economic and financial crime, of which 4 operations in cooperation with international partners and 100 national operations.

The following police operations need to be mentioned such as "Wrong Road", "Fiori di primavera", "Metropolis", "Goldfinger", "Vjosa", "Open Road", "Laboratory", "Lënginas", "Continuation", "Limit", "Quito", "Goldfinger 2", "Rodoni", "Your turn" and "Your turn 2", "Last destination", "Rotterdam", "Romano 2017", "etc.

Compared to 2018 (318 police operations), there are 43 more police operations conducted.

During the period January-March 2020, the State Police conducted 68 police operations in the field of organized crime and financial crimes, of which 23 operations in cooperation with international partners and 45 national operations of which:

- 45 police operations in the field of narcotics - of which 18 operations in cooperation with international partners and 27 national operations;
- 5 police operations in the field of illegal trafficking, of which 2 operations in cooperation with international partners and 3 national operations;
- 15 police operations in the field of economic and financial crime, of which 2 operations in cooperation with international partners and 13 national operations;
- 1 police operation in the field of serious crimes (property) - of which 0 operations in cooperation with international partners and 1 national operation;
- 2 police operations in the field of cybercrime - of which 1 operation in cooperation with international partners and 1 national operation.

The most important operations are: "New start", "Similarity 2," "Short gun", "Transferta e gabuar" "Piano Bar", "Mezhgorani" "Lojrat e fatit" "Euro 2020" Kredia "" Start " "Amiant" "Pasojat", "Ndermjeteresi" "Barracuda", "Besa 2018", "Kitchen" "Opson IX" Eclipse IV "" Pangea ". "Vasjari", "E-Trace", "Trajektorja", etc.

Compared to January-March 2019 (78 police operations), there are 10 less developed police operations.

CRIMINAL GROUPS

During 2019, 43 criminal groups were dismantled, of which:

- 28 criminal groups active in the field of narcotics;
- 8 criminal groups with activity in the field of economic-financial crime;
- 6 criminal groups with activity in the field of illegal trafficking;
- 1 criminal group with activity in the field of serious crimes / property.

Compared to 2018 (72 criminal groups, there are 29 less hit criminal groups.

During the period January-March 2020, 5 criminal groups were hit, of which:

- 5 criminal groups with activity in the field of narcotics;
- 0 criminal groups with activity in the field of economic-financial crime;
- 0 criminal groups with activity in the field of illegal trafficking;
- 0 criminal groups with activity in the field of serious crimes;

Compared to January-March 2019 (3 criminal gr.), there are 2 more hit criminal groups.

CRIMINAL ASSETS SECURITIES

During 2019, a total of about 95 122 511 Euros of assets, bank accounts, cash were seized from the criminal activity of persons and criminal groups as follows:

- In the framework of the criminal offense "Laundering the proceeds of crime or criminal activity", Article 287 of the Criminal Code, a total of about 39 022 512 Euros were seized.
- Law No. 10192 dated 03.12.2009, "On the prevention and crackdown on organized crime, trafficking, corruption and other crimes, through preventive measures against property" amended in April 2017, were seized about 56,100,000 Euros of movable property and immovable.

Compared to 2018 (39 110 885), we have 56 011 626 Euros seized more.

During the period January-March 2020, a total of about 1,717,188 Euros of assets, bank accounts and cash seized from the criminal activity of persons and criminal groups were seized, dividing them into:

- In the framework of the criminal offense "Laundering the proceeds of crime or criminal activity", Article 287 of the Criminal Code, about 1,509, 871 Euros were seized.
- Law No. 10192 dated 03.12.2009, "On the prevention and crackdown on organized crime, trafficking, corruption and other crimes, through preventive measures against property" amended in April 2017, about 207,317 Euros movable and immovable property were seized.

Compared to the first quarter of 2019 (9,100,000), there are 7,382,812 Euros less seized.

FIGHT AGAINST CULTIVATION

During 2019: Aerial monitoring performed:

- 108 Air Monitoring Reports;
- 44 Monitoring reports (camera + sensor);
- 12 Monitoring reports (camera + sensor) by SANCAS;
- 50 Extra monitoring reports (camera only);
- 2 Extra monitoring reports (camera only) SANCAS;
- 1103 places suspected in total (coordinates);
- 893 confirmed coordinates (places) in which narcotic plants were found;
- 25,931 plants destroyed;
- 210 coordinates (places) no narcotic plants were found and cultivated;
- Total 82 flight missions;
- 69 from the Interforce Mission and Guardi di Financa;
- 13 from SANCAS, EU support;
- Total 225 flight hours;
- 185 flight hours from the Interforce Mission and Guardi di Financa;
- 40 hours of flight from SANCAS, EU support;
- 7350.13 km² controlled area;
- 6518.88 km² of surface controlled by the Interforce Mission and Guardi di Financa;
- 831.25 km² of surface controlled by SANCAS, EU support.

For 2019, 17,098 control groups have been engaged in territory control, with 57,965 police officers, 13,103 police vehicles, 19 vessels, 389,600 service hours, a total of 136,322 inspections / rechecks, as follows:

- Greenhouses / mini greenhouses 36605;
- Warehouse / objects 13475;
- Former Military Objects 11454;
- Abandoned houses 8612;
- Stalls 3989;
- Open environments 57561;
- Former parcels 2016-2018, are 4654.

During 2019, the criminal offenses covering the field of cultivation are:

453 criminal offenses were recorded, Article 284 of the Criminal Code, of which 44 are proactive proceedings which are under prosecution and 409 are cultivation cases.

- Out of 409 cultivation cases, 235 or 57.6% of the citizens involved 501 (author article 284) were arrested, 226 arrested, 63 detained, 107 released, 105 declared wanted.
- 1,607 cultivation sites were detected with a total of 90,175 destroyed / sequestered narcotic plants, of which 14,886 plants were caught in cubes and 6 self-sufficient and 246 in the drying process;
- Also, 193 perpetrators (Administrator of the administrative unit, village head and inspector of the forest service, water supply guard) were prosecuted for the criminal offenses "Abuse of duty" and "Failure to report a crime", provided by Articles 248 and 300 of the CC, of whom 14 were arrested, 1 was detained, 171 were released, 7 were declared wanted;
- Of these 5 police officers, 6 heads of administrative units, 111 village elders and 71 employees of the forest police service;

Comparing the same periods of two years, for 2019 there are:

- 190 more criminal offenses;
- 161 more cultivation cases;
- 54,205 more narcotic plants;
- 12,170 more seedlings / cubes.

For the period January-March 2020, 2287 control groups have been engaged in the control of the territory, with 6872 police officers, 1902 police vehicles, 43610 service hours, a total of 26373 control / re-controls have been performed as follows:

- Greenhouses / mini greenhouses 9135;
- Warehouse / objects 5402;
- Former Military facilities 4779;
- Abandoned houses 2704;
- Stalls 1321;
- Open spaces 2894;
- Former parcels 2016-2017-2018-2019, 33 have been checked.

As for air monitoring, for the period January-March 2020, there was none. Air monitoring begins on April 28, 2020.

Also, there were no criminal offenses identified for the period January-March 2020.

Data on seizures in the field of the fight against narcotics:

During 2019

- 6 331 kg 415.86 gr marijuana were seized compared to 20 3655 kg 082.525 gr seized in 2018. (marijuana sales and traffic activity for 2019, decreased significantly by -14 tons 033 kg 666,665 gr);
- 38 kg 098.55 gr of heroin were seized compared to 23 kg 971.75 gr seized in 2018. (heroin sales and traffic activity for 2019, increased by +14 kg 126.8 gr);
- 145 kg 069.71 gr of cocaine were seized compared to 630 kg 566.01 gr seized in 2018. (activity of sale and trafficking of cocaine for 2019, has decreased by -485 kg 496.3 gr);

During the period January-March 2020:

- 1012 kg 286.77 grams of marijuana were seized compared to 3801kg 351.11gr seized in the period January-March 2019. (marijuana sales and traffic activity for the period January-March 2020 decreased significantly by -2 789 kg 064.34 gr);
- 1 kg 882 gr of heroin were seized compared to 15 kg 252.7 gr seized in the period January-March 2019. (heroin sales and traffic activity for the period January-March 2020 decreased significantly by - 13 kg 370.7 grams);
- 1 kg 764.25 gr of cocaine were seized compared to 617.95 gr seized in the period January-March of 2019. (cocaine sales and traffic activity for the period January - March 2020 increased by + 1kg 146.3 gr).

CRIMINAL GROUPS *(in terms of smuggling)*

- *During 2019, 4 criminal groups with 51 perpetrators were dismantled, of whom 46 arrested in the act / detained and 5 were declared wanted, with criminal activity in terms of criminal offenses, “Assistance for illegal border crossing”, “Group structured criminal”, “Exploitation of Prostitution”, “Committing criminal offenses by a criminal organization and a structured criminal group”.*
Compared to the same period a year ago, there are 2 more criminal groups.
- *During the period January-March 2020, there are no criminal groups dismantled.*

CRIMINAL OFFENCES:

- *For 2019, a total of 146 criminal offenses were identified for “Assistance for illegal crossing of borders”, of which 138 cases or 94.52% were detected, with 259 perpetrators, of whom 146 arrested / detained, 97 prosecuted at large.
Compared to the same period a year ago, there are 19 more criminal offenses.*
- *For the period January-March 2020, 64 criminal offenses were identified for “Assistance for illegal crossing of borders”, of which 60 cases were discovered or 93.75%, with 113 offenders, of which 69 arrested / detained.
Compared to the same period a year ago, there are 43 more criminal offenses.*

INTERNATIONAL COORDINATION

The State Police/Criminal Police Department, in the fight against organized crime has given special importance to strengthening and increasing cooperation with counterpart structures at the regional and international level.

It is worth noting that the cooperation has been very good with all countries, mainly the cooperation has consisted in information exchange for drug offences investigation, trafficking, money laundering, economic and financial crime, cybercrime, where the information was exchanged mainly through the channels of Interpol, Europol, CARIN Network, Interforce Office, contact officers, etc.

In the context of cooperation, the State Police, during the time span of years has conducted many parallel investigations or joint police operations, coordinated by Europol, but also in the framework of bilateral or multilateral cooperation.

The purpose of this cooperation has certainly been to exchange information as soon as possible to prevent and crack down on criminal networks / groups, ie organized crime in general.

With the establishment of the **FAST-ALBANIA Unit** in July 2019, the priority in the framework of cooperation with EU countries, has been the capture of people declared wanted on international level, mainly Albanian citizens who have committed criminal offenses in EU countries and that are believed to have been sheltered in Albania. So far, there has been intensive cooperation in this direction with Germany, France, Belgium, Croatia, Montenegro and Kosovo.

FAST ALBANIA is a specialized unit for identifying, locating and apprehending 50 most wanted persons nationwide, also in charge of search Albanians committing crimes in the EU countries.

Since its establishment, 14 people have been arrested, of whom 3 foreigners.

Some indicators within this cooperation:

During 2019, there were 64 criminal proceedings under investigation in cooperation with international partners, as follows:

- In the fight against Narcotics and Trafficking, 52 joint proceedings are ongoing;
- In the fight against Economic and Financial Crime, 9 joint proceedings are ongoing;
- In the fight against crimes against Persons and Property, 3 joint proceedings are ongoing.

For the period January-March 2020, 9 joint investigations have been recorded, which are being pursued in cooperation with international partners.

- In the fight against Narcotics and Trafficking 9 joint proceedings.

In total, 73 criminal proceedings are ongoing, which are being pursued in cooperation with international partners.

During 2019, 37 joint operational meetings were held with international partners as follows:

- 27 operational meetings were held by the Narcotics and Trafficking Investigation Unit;
- 7 operational meetings were held by the Economic and Financial Crime Investigation Unit;
- 3 operational meetings were held by the Crime Investigation Unit against the Person and Wealth.

During the period January-March 2020, 7 joint operational meetings were held with international partners in view of ongoing investigations.

4 joint investigative teams (JITs) have been established, which follow criminal proceedings for “Structured criminal groups” and “Narcotics trafficking”, Articles 333 / a and 283 / a of the Criminal Code as follows:

- 3 teams with Italian counterparts;
- 1 with German counterparts, with the help of the IPA Program.

During the period **January-March 2020, there were no JITs established.**

During 2019, 24 police operations have been finalized in cooperation with international partners, as follows:

- 19 operations in the field of narcotics;
- 1 operation in the field of trafficking;
- 3 operations related to “Laundering the proceeds of criminal offence and criminal activity”;
- 1 operation for the criminal offenses of theft and armed robbery.

Some of the most successful police operations in cooperation with International Partners:

“GOLDFINGER“, “GOLDFINGER 2“, “KUITO”, “REVERSUS”, “RRUGA E GABUAR”, “FIORI DI PRIMAVERA”, “METROPOLIS”,

During the period January-March 2020, 11 police operations have been finalized in cooperation with international partners in the area if narcotics.

Some of the most important operations are: “BARRACUDA”, “BESA 2018”, “KITCHEN” etc.

(TBC) Child sexual abuse: plans to enhance operational cooperation in the fight against child sexual abuse)

In terms of future engagement, the Computer Crimes Investigation Sector has all the commitment in the fight against sexual abuse online with children.

- There is excellent cooperation with national and international organizations such as CRCA (Agency for Child Protection) and UNICEF, as well as with international law enforcement agencies.
- In the framework of this cooperation, meetings are planned for the exchange of experiences in the prevention and investigation of cases of sexual abuse with children. Moreover, awareness-raising initiatives and campaigns are organized by actors interested in children's online safety online.

- Meanwhile, we are part of the 24/7 network, following all cases reported or evidenced by this line in the direction of online sexual abuse with children, to bring to justice the perpetrators.

CRIMINAL OFFENCES:

During 2019, 5 cases are identified related to the criminal offense of "Pornography" provided by Article 117/2 of the Criminal Code. In all cases, there are no suspected perpetrators.

During the first three months of 2020, 2 cases are identified for the criminal offense of "Pornography" provided by Article 117_2 of the Criminal Code. In both cases, there are no suspected perpetrators.

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

ASYLUM RECEPTION CAPACITY, IRREGULAR MIGRATION

- **What are the main gaps revealed by the COVID-19 crisis? On which aspect do you require more cooperation?**

As COVID-19 is a disease caused by a new infectious virus for which there is still no vaccine or special treatment, there is a high risk that this disease will affect people who already have impaired health and who are housed in overcrowded reception centers with restricted hygiene conditions and restricted access to healthcare. In such conditions, it is more difficult to implement all prescribed preventive and safeguard measures. It is necessary, in accordance with the decisions of state, entity and local authorities, to protect the health of migrants as well as the health of local population, in particular through the provision of adequate medical care, protective equipment, improvements in hygiene conditions, provision of facilities for preventive and symptomatic isolation, and restrictions of movement.

The Ministry of Security of BiH has been additionally engaged in this issue, and managed, through international partners in BiH, to provide minimum amounts of required products for personal hygiene and disinfection products for reception centers, both for external and internal areas, in order to maintain hygiene and hygienic-epidemiological standards recommended and prescribed by the World Health Organization and domestic authorities in BiH.

- **Have you identified any measures which could address the probable increasing demand for migrant smuggling services after the COVID-19 crisis?**

The crisis, caused by COVID-19, presents great challenge for all spheres of life. This is particularly true for the area of security, especially regarding illegal migration, since the methods of committing these crimes are contrary to the measures that are aimed at restraining the spread of the virus. There is a great danger to the health of migrants and the health of police officers and other employees who come into contact with them. Currently, the scope of illegal migrations is declining due to a series of measures that are taken to prevent the spread of Covid-19 virus. However, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the countries in the region, currently there is a large number of migrants waiting for the lifting of the measures, in order to continue their journey towards European Union countries. So, it is reasonable to assume that after the pandemic, there will be a massive migratory pressure on the entire region. In this sense, it is necessary to intensify the international operational cooperation between the Western Balkans countries, and with the European Union countries, aimed at timely undertaking joint measures and actions in the prevention and detection of criminal offenses of migrants smuggling.

Statistical information on illegal migration collected by the Border police BiH in 2018, 2019 and first two months of 2020, were pointing out to the possible increase in illegal migration after the winter period, especially on borders with Republic of Serbia and Republic of Montenegro. This data, together with the 134% increase in illegal border crossings and attempts of border crossings in February 2020 when compared to the previous year, were indicating that the continuous increase in migratory pressure, recorded since the end of 2017, will keep on increasing in 2020 as well.

Also, situation on the border between Turkey and Greece, created at the end of February 2020 due to the decision of Turkey to allow refugees and migrants further movement towards Western Europe, was threatening to additionally aggravate situation with illegal migration in Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially on the borders with eastern neighbors.

However, significant decrease in number of persons caught in illegal border crossing or in the attempt of illegal crossing has been recorded since the middle of March 2020. This is the result of measures, such as closure of border crossings, military engagement in border protection, and ban on movement of migrants outside of the asylum centers, taken in neighboring countries and in Bosnia and Herzegovina, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Following a sharp increase in the number of irregular migrants entering the country in May 2018, the Council of Ministers of BiH adopted the Information with an Action Plan of Measures defining key priorities in the field of migration and asylum. These priorities are primarily focused on strengthening the capacities of the competent institutions (Border Police of BiH, Service for Foreigner's Affairs), implementation of readmission agreements and strengthening of readmission capacities, strengthening asylum capacities, as well as intensifying the fight against migrant smuggling.

Based on the existing plan, the Ministry of Security of BiH, in cooperation with the competent institutions, has prepared a new Plan of Measures and Activities for the Efficient Management of the Migrant Crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is currently in the procedure of obtaining necessary opinions before adoption by the Council of Ministers of BiH. Priority number five, which focuses on intensifying the fight against migrant smuggling, contains measures aimed at strengthening the response of police agencies to migrant smuggling, protecting victims of human trafficking and strengthening the material-technical equipment of the State Investigation and Protection Agency. Also, the implementation of measures defined in other priorities, will lead to improvements in the migration management processes, including better control of migrants' entry into Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In the previous period, the Sector for Asylum in the Ministry of Security, has been in continuous communication with the competent state agencies (Border Police BiH, Service for Foreigners' Affairs, State Investigation and Protection Agency and Intelligence-Security Agency), and has also had periodic exchange of information with them about the observed forms of behavior that may be in connection with the offence in question.

Although the current migratory pressure in Bosnia and Herzegovina has been significantly decreased due to the measures related to COVID-19 pandemic in neighboring countries and in Bosnia and Herzegovina, increase in illegal migration can be expected after the corona virus crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in neighboring countries is over.

It is needed to create preconditions for biometric verifications and photography checks in real time. Currently, there is a possibility to verify and check biometrics, which takes long (day or two) and which is not effective due to the fact that after registration migrants leave and it's difficult to follow up on them.

Border Police of BiH will continue to follow the state of illegal migration on the entire border of Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the situation related to the corona virus pandemic. It will also continue to act and take action in accordance with positive legal regulations and plans regarding the protection of state border. Also, Border Police of BiH will continue to act on ensuring adequate and timely reaction in case of renewed and intensified migratory pressure.

▪ **What measures have been taken by Western Balkans partners to further strengthen their reception capacities and address the challenges posed by COVID-19?**

Officials from the relevant border, migration and asylum management authorities, service providers in temporary reception centers as well as migrants housed in these centers, are at risk of coronavirus infection. In this regard, a number of measures have been taken to limit the spread of coronavirus (COVID-19), to ensure the protection of all at-risk groups, and to enable the smooth functioning of the relevant authorities and of migrant reception centers. Assistance and coordination of all relevant authorities, in cooperation with international organizations, is necessary to prevent the occurrence and limit the spread of this virus.

In order to prevent the spread of COVID-19 disease, the Council of Ministers of BiH adopted the following decisions: Decision declaring the state of natural or other disaster on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina ("Official Gazette of BiH", No. 18/20); the Decision prescribing the additional conditions for the entry of foreigners into BiH ("Official Gazette of BiH" No. 18/20 and 20/20) - which temporarily prohibits the entry of foreigners in BiH; the Decision on temporary closure of international border crossing points in air traffic for passenger traffic in BiH ("Official Gazette of BiH" No. 20/20) and the Decision to restrict the movement and residence of foreigners in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In order to raise its level of readiness, the Border Police of Bosnia and Herzegovina has created an Action Plan for Prevention of the Coronavirus Spread. Aim of this Action Plan is to ensure that planned and organized measures and actions are taken, within the Border Police competence, regarding the safety and protection of BiH citizens. The Border Police has been implementing the measures under this plan since the date of its adoption - 12 March 2020.

The updated Plan for Protection and Rescue against Natural or Other Disasters of the Border Police of Bosnia and Herzegovina has been activated. In accordance with this plan, the Headquarters for management in the event of natural or other disasters of the Border Police was established, as well as crisis management teams at central and regional level, who were instructed to act in accordance with this plan. Around-the-clock, 24/7 working hours for executive officers at central, regional and local level were established.

In addition to measures taken by the Border Police, in order to prevent the spread of coronavirus among migrants housed in reception centers in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and for the protection of the staff who manage these centers, the competent authorities and international organizations have taken the following actions:

- Migrant reception centers provide isolation space, both for preventive and symptomatic monitoring. Also, the measures necessary to prevent the spread of coronavirus were implemented in all temporary reception centers, and the document "Procedures for emergency operations to prevent or limit the transmission of COVID-19 in temporary reception centers in BiH" was developed, adopted and immediately implemented. Certain quantities of sanitary materials, protective gloves, masks and disinfectants were obtained, and due to the extraordinary circumstances, organizational adjustments were carried out, and food, as well as necessary non-food items that are needed for the smooth functioning of the centers for the next two months, were provided. Hygiene measures have been strengthened in all temporary reception centers.
- The Danish Refugee Council (DRC) has developed guidelines and put in place safeguards to prevent and limit the transfer of COVID-19 in temporary reception centers for the accommodation of migrants in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Also, informational materials, prepared by the World Health Organization, health institutions and institutions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, were placed in all temporary reception centers. The DRC ensures the sharing of information materials on health awareness. Leaflets and posters were made in several languages for all centers.
- Equipment and disinfectants, as well as other necessities, such as gloves, masks and hygiene products that IOM has at its disposal, can be used in temporary reception centers to protect against coronavirus.
- In addition to the trainings already carried out, training by the World Health Organization (WHO) is planned for staff of health centers that provide health care to migrants in temporary reception centers.

To date, fortunately, no asylum seekers, nor employees of the Sector for Asylum, were infected, and the isolation and quarantine rooms have not been used to date, thanks to the measures taken on time to protect and restrict movement to and from the centers.

- **What obstacles to effective and proactive information sharing between the EU and Western Balkans could be identified? How could these obstacles be addressed?**

Regarding the exchange of information between the Western Balkan countries and the European Union in the field of combating illegal migration and organized crime, this information are exchanged through Interpol, Europol, and through police liaison officers and SELEC. There are currently no obstacles to the exchange of information, and we would like to emphasize that exchanged information are of high quality and timely. However, further improvements in regards to the exchange of information can only additionally enhance the cooperation.

Bosnia and Herzegovina is also a member of the Western Balkan Task Force for Illegal Migration. In addition to the Western Balkan countries, many European Union member states also take part in this Task Force. Through regular meetings, intensive exchange of strategic data and early warning information, the Task Force has significantly improved cooperation among its member states. The Task Force also enables excellent bilateral and multilateral cooperation in specific cases, gives support to working meetings, and provides help with the translation of rare languages.

We can note that before COVID-19, intensive work was done to fulfill the measures and to cooperate on building EU standards in order to obtain the candidate status for Bosnia and Herzegovina. To this end, many activities were started on joint projects: databases of countries of origin, databases of interpreters for "rare" languages- through the MARRI initiative, as well as the development of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Roadmap in the field of Asylum with EASO, and also a large number of trainings was held by EASO experts, which was interrupted by the COVID-19 crisis.

However, with EASO we have opened a new approach to trainings, which should start in this month (May 2020), via WEBEX/ ZOOM, etc. This may also be a proposal and a work regime for other areas as well, which would help restore cooperation, data exchange and communication that are currently aborted.

- **Would the creation of a common data-sharing tool among the Western Balkans countries be beneficial, modeled on the Eurodac system and with the technical support of the EU?**

Yes, noting that Western Balkans partners have two modules in the phases of development and use, but also that the partners have different views on this issue. With the help of the EU, we should certainly work on these activities and try to ensure that they are operational in practice.

COOPERATION IN THE FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM AND PREVENTION OF RADICALIZATION

- **How much progress has been made by the Western Balkans partners in implementing the Joint Action Plan on Counter Terrorism and the six bilateral arrangements, and where has that progress been achieved? What are the main difficulties encountered in terms of implementation?**

At a ministerial forum for Justice and Home Affairs of the European Union and the Western Balkan countries, which was held in Tirana in Albania on 5 October 2018, representatives of the European Union and Western Balkans partners have signed a Joint action plan for fight against terrorism for the Western Balkans.

As it is established in the Joint Action Plan, there is a need for appropriate follow-up procedures, including customized monitoring of priority actions with each of the WB partners, in order to achieve and timely map progress in meeting five objectives from this plan:

1. A strong framework for combating terrorism and prevention and suppression of violent extremism: institutional settings and legal harmonization, implementation and implementation capacities;
2. Effective prevention and suppression of violent extremism;
3. Effective exchange of information and operational cooperation;
4. Building the capacities to combat money laundering and terrorism financing;
5. Strengthening the protection of citizens and infrastructure.

The competent authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina on one side, and the European Commission, on the other side, have successfully identified the priority activities for implementation for 2019 and 2020, for each of the five objectives set out in the Joint Action Plan.

In accordance with the Joint Action Plan, this arrangement is harmonized and should continue to be harmonized with policy measures taken under the Stabilization and association agreement with Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Also, on the 4 March 2020, the Delegation of the European Union in Sarajevo has organized video conference that was attended by representatives of the Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Intelligence-Security Agency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Republika Srpska, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the representatives of the European Union and EUROPOL. The Action Plan for Combating Terrorism in the Western Balkans was presented to the participants during the videoconference, and they agreed upon the further cooperation on drafting of the report on the implementation of activities.

The challenge is to establish a contact point for future cooperation with the European Union. However, it is important to highlight that there is an initiative to establish a contact point, and we hope to have a recent appointment of the same in order to successfully implement the envisioned priority activities.

- **What measures have recently been taken to address the issue of returning foreign terrorist fighters and their family members? Do you have any best practices to share in this field? What are the main challenges confronting you in this area?**

In December, the Ministry of Security of Bosnia and Herzegovina, in cooperation with competent institutions, and in accordance with positive regulations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, has coordinated and successfully completed the return of the first group of Bosnia and Herzegovina citizens from Iraq and Syria. In this process, we have established cooperation with international partners, especially the Government of the United States. In total, 6 women, 11 of their children, and 1 child without parental escorts were returned, as well as 7 men who were, due to the existing arrest warrants against them, immediately upon arrival handed over to the Prosecution of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the State Investigation and Protection Agency.

Ministry of Security of BiH, in cooperation with other competent institutions on all governmental levels in Bosnia and Herzegovina, is currently working to strengthen the coordination mechanism that was created and on its final formal and legal establishment. This is done taking into account the competencies prescribed by the law, and the division of jurisdiction between the state and entities, especially having in mind that the system of social health care and education, which is key to the process of return and reintegration, is in the jurisdiction of lower government levels in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Also, activities have been initiated to establish coordination mechanisms on the level of the entities and the Brčko District of Bosnia and Herzegovina. On the state level the coordination will be conducted in accordance with jurisdictions prescribed by the law, and between the relevant ministries, the Ministry of Security, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Civil Affairs. After establishment of coordination mechanisms on the entity levels, the Council of Ministers of BiH will proceed with the process of adopting a final decision regarding the state-level coordination mechanism, which is urgently needed taking into account that the certain number of citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina are still in Syria and Iraq.

It is important to highlight that the pillar of trust has been established between the social work centers and returnees, which is a precondition for further cooperation. But as a challenge, there is a need for registration of returnees' children born in Syria in the birth records for the necessary procedures related to health care and school enrollment. The social work centers also have a need for engagement of additional personnel and for education of the existing personnel in their services due to the increased scope of work imposed by the return of citizens and activities in their competence.

Department for cooperation with EUROPOL in the Sector for international operational police cooperation of the Directorate for Coordination of Police Bodies of BiH, coordinates activities of competent police bodies on updating BiH FTF list (foreign fighters). In addition, information related to this issue is being exchanged between competent authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina with EUROPOL and EUROPOL member states through the Department for cooperation with EUROPOL.

Department NCB Interpol Sarajevo in the Sector for international operational police cooperation of the Directorate for Coordination of Police Bodies of BiH exchanges information in the field of fight against terrorism with other member states and with INTERPOL General Secretariat, as an active participant in several projects of INTERPOL General Secretariat:

- Project NEXUS – with participation of countries of Europe and Mediterranean. Primary objective: identification of active terrorist groups and their members, collecting and exchanging information and intelligence, providing analytical support, strengthening member states capacities in confronting terrorist threats,
- Project VENNLIG – exchange of information on foreign citizens suspected of involvement in terrorist activities in Iraq. Purpose of this initiative is to proactively receive and share information with member states focusing on crime and terrorism and to prevent future terrorist attacks.
- Project Foreign Terrorist Fighters (FTF) – exchange of information on transnational foreign terrorist fighters who travel to conflict zones in Syria and Iraq in order to participate in acts of war, terrorist activities and training.

On 20 April 2020, the Directorate for Coordination of Police Bodies of BiH, together with State Investigation and Protection Agency, Intelligence-Security Agency of BiH, Border Police of BiH, Federation Police Administration, Ministry of Internal Affairs of Republika Srpska, Brčko District Police, and Service for Foreigner's Affairs has concluded the Agreement on mutual assistance and operational cooperation in fight against terrorism.

This Agreement has improved cooperation and coordination of activities in fight against terrorism, especially timely exchange of information, establishment, composition, competences, and mode of operation. Signatories to the agreement, within their legal competences, take all measures to improve mutual cooperation and coordination of activities in fight against terrorism, and especially: exchange of information, providing mutual assistance within their competences, exchange of experiences, joint implementation of certain operational activities, establishment of operational group for fight against terrorism in order to coordinate activities, exchange of information and identification of other details for achieving and improving mutual cooperation, and other activities in accordance with their competences that are needed for effective fight against terrorism.

State Investigation and Protection Agency continuously, in accordance with the possibilities due to the newly created situation related to pandemics, and in cooperation with local and international law enforcement agencies, collects and exchanges information on all operationally interesting persons from the aspect of the fight against terrorism. Information on Bosnia and Herzegovina

citizens located in camps and prisons in Syria are also being exchanged with international partners, and measures are being undertaken for their repatriation to Bosnia and Herzegovina.

- **What steps could be taken to enhance the quality of information-sharing between the EU and the Western Balkans partners? What is the situation regarding the roll-out of CT SIENA?**

To this end, we consider it necessary to organize periodic meetings of the Heads of Counter-Terrorism Units of EU and the WB countries in order to exchange experiences and good practices, getting to know each other and to exchange contact details in order to build greater mutual trust, which is necessary for better exchange of information.

As regards to CT SIENA, it has not yet been established in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We are waiting to define which of the possible models of its establishment is acceptable in BiH, bearing in mind the police structure in BiH. The Directorate for Coordination of Police Bodies of BiH, in accordance with its competences and national legislation, currently presents a national contact point for cooperation with EUROPOL.

ORGANIZED CRIME

- **How could we improve data-sharing using SIENA or other channels?**

The Directorate for Coordination of Police Bodies of Bosnia and Herzegovina is the contact point for cooperation with EUROPOL through protected communication system of SIENA. The Sector of International Operational Police Cooperation, within which there is the Department of cooperation with EUROPOL, is mediating between EUROPOL and the EUROPOL member states and third parties and competent institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and conducts mutual exchange of information through a secure communication channel - SIENA.

SIENA is key for strengthening EUROPOL as the central information point on crime in the European Union and Europe. Thus, it allows EUROPOL and the EUROPOL member states efficiency in law enforcement, especially when it comes to upgrading and improving the exchange of information related to terrorism.

In the framework of cooperation with EUROPOL via the SIENA application, information is being exchanged between the relevant institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina and EUROPOL, in accordance with the domestic legislation and provisions of the Agreement on operational and strategic cooperation between Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Office of the European Police (EUROPOL), particularly respecting the laws relating to the protection of personal and classified information.

In organization such as EUROPOL, which facilitates and relies on exchange information, safe and fast transmission of sensitive and restricted information is essential. We therefore believe that the SIENA application is a good way for the more active contribution of Bosnia and Herzegovina in providing intelligence and information to EUROPOL.

Also, there is a need for further development of SIENA as a system for exchange of information through a secure communication line on law enforcement in Bosnia and Herzegovina. From that we can say that there is still room to use all the possibilities that the SIENA platform provides.

The more active use of available tools for the exchange of information between EUROPOL and INTERPOL can contribute to a more active exchange of information between competent authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina with these organizations and their member states. This primarily refers to the expansion of the SIENA application to all law enforcement authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which would allow them to have a direct access to the "SIENA" application, thereby facilitating the exchange of information. In addition, the accession to the AP EUROPOL (AP - analytical projects or information bases established by EUROPOL for various forms of criminal offences) would also facilitate the exchange of information between law enforcement authorities in BiH with EUROPOL and member states in the mutual interest.

When it comes to INTERPOL databases, we believe that by more active use of eASF databases (facial searches, vehicles, documents, weapons), i.e. an increase in the number of checks on faces, vehicles and documents by the competent authorities that are given direct access (16 police authorities in BiH, the Service for Foreigner's Affairs of BiH, the Directorate for Indirect Taxation and the Prosecutor's Office of BiH), would increase the exchange of information between the competent authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina with INTERPOL and INTERPOL member states. Therefore, this would also increase the exchange of information in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Timely exchange of information, through the INTERPOL, EUROPOL, and SELEC channels, is often very important for the efficient conduct of investigations and other activities carried out in the context of the investigation, and it also leads to the improvement of information sharing.

The work efficiency of the on-call service in the Sector for International Operational Police Cooperation in the Directorate for Coordination of Police Bodies of BiH, which works in shifts and covers all available channels for international information exchange around the clock (INTERPOL, EUROPOL, SELEC, email, fax, tel.), contributes significantly to the improvement of the information exchange between competent authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina and international organizations and their member states.

Sharing information via SIENA or other protected channels needs to be intensified during the work on cases, with the aim of establishing and conducting international police cooperation. When it comes to financial investigations of crimes related to organized crime, the relevant organizational units of SIPA, in accordance with the orders of the competent prosecutor's offices, successfully conduct them.

- **What practical steps could be taken to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 crisis on international law enforcement cooperation?**

To mitigate the negative impacts of COVID-19 on international cooperation in the area of law enforcement and the fight against organized crime it is necessary to establish a widespread use of technological means of communication, such as videoconferences and virtual meetings. It is also necessary to use the available Internet applications to establish a conference links and conduct operational meetings through online platforms. As far as the trainings are concerned, they could be organized and held via webinars.

International exchange of information should take place electronically through the existing Operational centers, contact points/persons and centers for police cooperation.

- **What measures could be taken to address the evolving threats of organized crime linked to the COVID-19 crisis?**

Number of criminal offenses has been significantly decreased. The reason for this decrease are the measures taken in Bosnia and Herzegovina and neighboring countries due to the pandemic. Border Police of BiH closely follows the development of current situation. In the previous period, no significant activities of organized criminal groups were registered at the border.

However, criminal groups and individuals can take advantage of the current situation in order to find new ways to earn money. Possible areas of their action are counterfeiting of medicinal products, various types of fraud, cyber crime, etc. As possible measures to fight these forms of crime, it would be necessary to reinforce border controls and to conduct public information campaigns on possible threats and fraud.

We also believe, that the exchange of experiences and observed modus operandi used by the organized criminal groups during the COVID-19 pandemic, through EUROPOL, is extremely useful. Through this exchange, we can follow the trends used by organized criminal groups and we can timely take preventive measures to stop these forms of behavior.

- **What specifically is required in order to improve operational cooperation in law enforcement, in particular with regard to combating migrant smuggling and the smuggling of drugs?**

Operational cooperation in the area of law enforcement, especially in the case of combating smuggling of migrants and drug trafficking, can be improved by using special investigative actions, forming joint investigative teams, successful fight against money laundering, increased border control, and adequate protection of witnesses.

We should also strengthen the intelligence overview through intensified activities and collection of information on organized criminal groups and their activities (identification of key suspects, networks structure, modus operandi, financial flows, document forgeries, etc.).

We also believe that conducting joint operational actions, both on local and international level, would have significant effect when it comes to fight against migrant smuggling and smuggling of drugs.

As regards to the fight against human trafficking and migrant smuggling, we feel that trainings should be intensified (on local and international level) so that the officers dealing with these issues could get acquainted with innovations in this line of work (positive experiences, operational work, analytics, computer tools, etc.).

Also, in order to improve the cooperation, we could focus on the following:

- Active participation of competent law enforcement authorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina in carrying out operational actions on the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina in the organization of EUROPOL and INTERPOL.
- Timely exchange of information between Western Balkan countries in the field of illegal migration, drug trafficking, arms trafficking and terrorism.
- Activities of joint centers for international cooperation.

At the level of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the State strategy for monitoring of narcotic drugs, prevention and suppression of narcotic drugs in Bosnia and Herzegovina was adopted for the period 2018-2023.

The proposal for the formation of a working group for drafting the State action plan to combat abuse of narcotic drugs in BiH was submitted for the adoption to the Council of Ministers in January 2019. At the beginning of 2020, appointments for the members of the working group were collected again, and in the following period, the Council of Ministers of BiH is expected to adopt a decision on establishment of a working group for drafting the State action plan to combat abuse of narcotic drugs in BiH.

▪ **How can we enhance the participation of the Western Balkans in EMPACT?**

When it comes to BiH, it is necessary to define, that is to officially establish a contact point for EMPACT that would coordinate EMPACT activities in BiH and participate in working meetings organized at the European level.

Active participation in operational actions supported by EMPACT with adequate contribution during the operation, is another way to improve participation in EMPACT.

- **What are the main challenges in setting up national drugs observatories and early warning systems in line with the EU methodologies, and how could we overcome them?**

The head of the Department for fight against abuse of narcotic drugs of the Ministry of Security of BiH is appointed as National correspondent for BiH's cooperation with the EMCDDA (European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction). The goal of cooperation is to prepare institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina for cooperation with the EMCDDA, which will be the obligation of Bosnia and Herzegovina when it becomes EU member state.

The Department for fight against abuse of narcotic drugs has, in its work so far, coordinated activities in cooperation with EMCDDA.

EMCDDA requires the EU member states to report as per indicators established by the EMCDDA. In regards to this obligation Bosnia and Herzegovina needs to improve and build a system of regular data collection and reporting to the EMCDDA as per the requested indicators.

Working group for the preparation of the early warning system on the emergence of new psychoactive substances in BiH has held 7 working meetings. During these meetings, the working group drafted and harmonized the proposal of Instruction on the early warning system on the emergence of new psychoactive substances in BiH. Following the collection of opinions of the institutions that participated in the drafting of the Instruction, there was a need to amend the Law on Prevention and suppression of abuse of narcotic drugs in the part that relates to definition of the notion "new psychoactive substance".

- **What is the state of play for the establishment of ARO Offices within the competent law enforcement authority and the conduct of financial investigations in all criminal offences relating to organized crime?**

The state level has not yet established an office for managing illegally acquired property nor has a special law on confiscation of assets acquired by criminal offences been adopted. The seizure of property obtained by criminal offences in Bosnia and Herzegovina is regulated with material, process and executive penal codes (BiH Penal Code, Criminal Procedure Law and the Law on BiH's executive procedure).

Lower levels of government (Federation of BiH, Republika Srpska, Brčko District) have adopted special laws on confiscation of assets acquired by criminal offences, and have established agencies for managing illegally acquired assets, i.e. Public Property Management Office in the Brčko District.

KOSOVO*

Justice and Home Affairs / EU-Western Balkans

Discussion paper for written consultation

HOME

I - ASYLUM RECEPTION CAPACITY, IRREGULAR MIGRATION

- 1. What are the main gaps revealed by the COVID-19 crisis? On which aspect do you require more cooperation?**

One of the challenges identified by the crisis has been provision of medical services for migrants and asylum-seekers. Nonetheless each migrant underwent medical examinations before entering reception facilities, and since 25 of March each migrant entering Kosovo was quarantined for 14 days. Another challenge has been the limited number of institutional personnel working on reception and treatment of migrants at the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Public Administration (MIAPA) as well those working at reception facilities due to the Government decision to work only with essential staff.

- 2. Have you identified any measures which could address the probable increasing demand for migrant smuggling services after the COVID-19 crisis?**

Kosovo has applied a proactive approach in managing the situation with irregular migrants, following the developments of irregular migration in Turkey / Greece, and in the region and making the necessary plans to manage the growing number of migrants. In this regard, regional cooperation in particular will be very important in managing a possible upcoming crisis. As experience shows, the usual policies and measures that the countries of the region apply in the treatment of irregular immigrants who try to enter the territory of their countries, can also affect the number of immigrants who enter the territory of the Republic of Kosovo.

- 3. What measures have been taken by Western Balkans partners to further strengthen their reception capacities and address the challenges posed by COVID19?**

The Republic of Kosovo has taken several measures to protect migrants from COVID19. First, reception and accommodation capacities for migrants and asylum-seekers were increased. Currently there are 3 reception and accommodation facilities as follows:

1. Center in Vranidoll with a capacity of 200 persons/beds.
2. Center in Magure with a capacity of 100 persons/beds.
3. Center in Togbashqe with a capacity of 24 persons/beds.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.

Even before the official announcement of first cases with COVID19 by Government authorities, in February, the Department for Citizenship, Asylum and Migration (DCAM), took protective measures for migrants and asylum-seekers. The National Institute of Public Health has inspected all facilities and provided necessary recommendations that were implemented by competent authorities.

By decision of MIAPA, No. 140/2020 dated 03/25/2020, the Detention Center in Vranidoll has been assigned a quarantine space for applicants for international protection and other migrants. The current capacity of this space is 70 persons/beds. Even before this decision, each new migrant that entered the territory of Kosovo underwent medical examination and testing for COVID19. It is important to note that so far, there have been no reported cases with COVID19 among migrants and asylum-seekers in the territory of Kosovo. Furthermore, MIAPA is currently renovating new reception facilities in 'Belvedere Camp' in Mitrovica which can accommodate up to 500 persons/beds.

Other protective measures from COVID19 taken by MIAPA in cooperation with international partners such as UNHCR and IOM include:

- Regular check-ups conducted by medical teams at asylum-seekers and migrants' facilities;
- Delivery of protective gear (masks, gloves, disinfectors) to centres;
- Translated prevention instructions and advice as provided by the Ministry of Health were distributed to migrants staying at accommodation facilities;
- Psychological and legal advice for migrants and asylum-seekers are provided 'online', with the aim of avoiding mass gatherings and maintaining social distance as advised by the Ministry of Health;
- Preparations are being done to enable 'online' education for children staying at reception facilities.

4. What obstacles to effective and proactive information-sharing between the EU and Western Balkans partners could be identified? How could these obstacles be addressed?

The obstacles that affect directly or indirectly effective and proactive information-sharing are: general lack of capacity to address illegal migration, biometric identification and registration, temporary accommodation facilities, transport capacity, translation, and lack of cooperation between countries on access to irregular migration. There is a lack of real-time intelligence dissemination among countries regarding migration. It is necessary to establish and operate an early warning system, as well as to plan and conduct bilateral and multilateral investigations.

5. Would the creation of a common data-sharing tool among the Western Balkans countries be beneficial, modelled on the Eurodac system and with the technical support of the EU?

Yes, exchange of information among WB countries is of immense importance in managing migration flows in the region. This system would contribute to preventing irregular migration, in particular their vulnerability from criminal groups that deal with migrant smuggling.

II - COOPERATION IN THE FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM AND PREVENTION OF RADICALISATION

1. How much progress has been made by the Western Balkans partners in implementing the Joint Action Plan on Counter Terrorism and the six bilateral arrangements, and where has that progress been achieved? What are the main difficulties encountered in terms of implementation?

To date, the Republic of Kosovo has implemented some of the activities foreseen in the Joint Plan such as training for judges and prosecutors, issuing indictments and court decisions for persons returned from Syria. Also, the Division for Prevention and Reintegration within MIAPA is fully functional and has coordinated and supervised all activities related to women and children returned from Syria. Two main difficulties have arisen related to this matter. First, the position of national coordinator for Counter Terrorism (CT) and Counter Violent Extremism (CVE) which has been the coordinating point for all these activities, no longer exists. Second, the current situation with COVID19, which due to the taken measures and restrictions has complicated the implementation of foreseen activities.

2. What measures have recently been taken to address the issue of returning foreign terrorist fighters and their family members? Do you have any best practices to share in this field? What are the main challenges confronting you in this area?

The Rehabilitation and Reintegration Program for returnees has been prepared and is being implemented. All returned women and children are contacted on a regular basis by the officials of the Division for Prevention and Reintegration. With their help, assistance is provided to these families, including: temporary residence (rent), registration of children and provision of personal documents, medical examinations, assistance with food and hygiene packages, inclusion in the list of beneficiaries of social schemes, coordination of support for these families by NGOs and other international actors and provision of professional courses for self-employment preparation (at the end of the training they will also receive free work tools).

MIAPA maintains regular contact with countries in the region and EU regarding Kosovo's experience in this process and has expressed its readiness to share this experience and knowledge. For this purpose, several bilateral meetings were held with Albania and Macedonia. While in Petrovac, in an event organized by OPDATT, MIAPA met with all countries in the region and distributed all the documents and plans which were used during the repatriation of Kosovo citizens from Syria.

A continuous challenge to this process has been the lack of a specific budget line which would be used for the rehabilitation and reintegration of radicalized persons and those returned from conflict zones. Also, more awareness raising is needed on the issue, because CT and CVE are still not a top priority for either central or local institutions.

3. What steps could be taken to enhance the quality of information-sharing between the EU and the Western Balkans partners? What is the situation regarding the rollout of CT SIENA?

Due to a lack of an agreement with EUROPOL, Kosovo Police (KP) does not have direct access to SIENA. Currently, the exchange of information between KP is carried through the "Swedish Disk", within EULEX. Security institutions, including the KP are ready to exchange information through the SIENA platform as soon as the agreement is signed between Kosovo and EUROPOL. A Police Liaison can also be appointed to contribute in this matter.

Regarding the exchange of information between WB countries, despite some initiatives to establish a regional fusion center, with the possibility of gathering, analysing and disseminating information regarding CT/ CVE, this exchange is mainly done through existing bilateral agreements. However, the Kosovo Police supports an earlier initiative for the establishment of the regional fusion center in Tirana. The example of national coordinators for CVE of WB countries can be taken as a model for cooperation (although this office no longer exists, the possibility for its re-functionalization can be considered).

Also, the Kosovo Police has benefited from the experience and methodology of EUROPOL, for the analysis of the summary of threat from terrorism (TeSAT), which has resulted in raising the capacities of KP, but also other security institutions in addressing issues linked to terrorism and violent extremism.

III - ORGANISED CRIME

1. How could we improve data-sharing using SIENA or other channels?

Kosovo Police can increase cooperation in this area by signing a cooperation agreement with EUROPOL which offers the possibility of access to the SIENA channel. KP is very limited to exchange data at this stage. Due to this, KP has directed its attention towards the bilateral exchange of information with the police forces of other countries.

2. What practical steps could be taken to mitigate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on international law enforcement cooperation?

Models of information exchange and implementation of activities through online platforms should be researched which would enable the exchange of information but also to discuss cooperation between implementing officials. Since the restriction of movement of people outside state borders has affected the reduction of transnational crime and criminal activities in general, this situation should be used for the analysis and evaluation of organized crime groups. As COVID-19 has reduced international cooperation, steps taken to increase this cooperation should be in line with mitigating the spread of infection. In this regard, it is important to have interstate communication with EU structures to continue cooperation and coordination.

3. What measures could be taken to address the evolving threats of organised crime linked to the COVID-19 crisis?

As movement of people through state borders is limited, the activity of individuals and groups who, through the use of cyber space, are planning and carrying out criminal activities, has increased. Exchange of information between the police of the countries of the WBs but also with EU Agencies should be increased in order to prevent and combat criminal activities.

Various organized crime organizations can use this situation to profit through online fraud, publishing fake news, influence, and other forms of crime. To be more efficient in this area it is important to exchange particular experiences and cases from different countries.

4. What specifically is required in order to improve operational cooperation in law enforcement, in particular with regard to combating migrant smuggling and the smuggling of drugs?

Preventing and combating migrant smuggling and drug trafficking can be improved by increasing Joint Investigation Teams between the countries of the WBs and the European Union Agencies in particular in cooperation with EUROPOL. Cooperation can be enhanced by strengthening the implementation of EU projects that support the countries of the WBs in conducting joint investigations, operational meetings, exchange of experts and technical assistance in handling practical cases. Further, the efficiency of information exchange can be improved through the establishment and functioning of joint Border Cooperation Centers and Police Customs Cooperation Centers or the establishment of new centers.

5. How can we enhance the participation of the Western Balkans in EMPACT?

Kosovo Police has been involved in EMPACT as a beneficiary and contributor. KP is interested in being more actively involved in EMPACT activities in addition to handling cases of joint investigations and joint operations. In this regard, KP thinks that joint investigations and joint operations supported by EMPACT should be increased.

6. What are the main challenges in setting up national drugs observatories and early warning systems in line with the EU methodologies, and how could we overcome them?

MIAPA has in the past delegated the tasks and responsibilities of a National Drugs Observatory to its Secretariat for Strategies, which is a body within the MIAPA responsible for monitoring the implementation of National Strategies, including the National Strategy against Narcotics. The Secretariat has in the past, due to lack of staff trained and qualified in the most recent EMCDDA methodologies, employed part-time experts to assist in fulfilling the duties of the observatory. However, these solutions have been short-term in nature, partly because the MIAPA has also aimed to review its internal regulation on the organization of departments. The aim of MIAPA has been to create a new unit that would fulfil the function of the observatory by amending the aforementioned regulation. However, so far MIAPA has not managed to amend this regulation due to frequent changes of government. Until then, the Secretariat for Strategies is continuing to carry out the function similar to that of an observatory, and it is continuing contact with EMCDDA in order to cooperate and share relevant information. With regard to the Early Warning System, a contact point has been set up in the Kosovo Agency for Forensics. The contact point receives and distributes information to all relevant institutions.

7. What is the state of play for the establishment of ARO Offices within the competent law enforcement authority and the conduct of financial investigations in all criminal offences relating to organised crime?

To enhance financial investigations, Kosovo Police has built its organizational and legal capacities and human resources by establishing three relevant sectors:

- Sector of Financial Investigations within the Directorate for Investigation of Economic Crime and Corruption;
- Integrated Financial Investigation Sector within the Directorate Against Organized Crime and;
- Asset Restitution Office (ARO) within the Directorate of Economic Crime Investigation.

Kosovo Police has attached great importance to financial investigations. Since March 2014 KP integrates financial investigations into all investigations of organized crime and corruption. In terms of capacity building, KP has increased the capacity of human resources by certifying financial investigators and vocational training with the support of the EU-funded project. In 2016, all needed cases of organized crime and corruption were investigated financially.

Further, financial experts are distributed across certain sectors in order to work with investigative officials. Financial investigation experts have been appointed to the Directorate for Drug Trafficking and the Directorate for Trafficking in Human Beings, as well as to the Directorate Against Economic Crime and Corruption. Whereas, within the Directorate Against Organized Crime, there is a special sector for integrated financial investigations.

What is needed currently is to continue supporting training and further specialization of officials who deal with these tasks. Also, it would be very useful to continue exchanging officials in this field with EU member states to benefit from their experience.

MONTENEGRO

I ASYLUM RECEPTION CAPACITY, IRREGULAR MIGRATION

During the crisis period caused by Covid-19 (March and April 2020) number of migrants in Montenegro has been significantly reduced, comparing to January and February of 2020 and previous year.

To date, there are no registered cases of COVID-19 infection among the migrants accommodated in the asylum center in Montenegro, which is an extenuating circumstance in the prevention of further spread of the virus. Since Montenegro is a country where the first case of infection was registered in the second half of March, while the rest of the world registered cases long before, the Ministry of the Interior, in cooperation with the Institute of Public Health, continued to carry out activities in cooperation with the Institute for Public Health, in relation to the inspection of the premises in which the migrants were accommodated, and accordingly adopted measures related to the disinfection, while in cases where there was suspicion of COVID-19 presence, additional inspection was carried out.

Within the scope of our capacities, accommodation for migrants provided social distance in bedrooms and dining rooms, and the freedom of movement, in accordance with the adopted measures of the National Coordination Body of the Government of Montenegro, was restricted at the national level for all the people residing in the territory of Montenegro, at that moment. In regard to the accommodation capacities, the Ministry of the Interior launched a series of projects, before the COVID-19 outbreak, with an objective to increase the capacities, both through available EU funds and the national budget. Precisely, initiated were the activities with the objective of increasing the capacity of the existing Asylum center, as well as the construction of a new center near the border with Albania. It is expected that the increased capacities fully meet the requirements, thus eliminate the mechanism of leasing additional premises in private facilities.

Concerning the exchange of information, it certainly is the most effective of the tool in the timely fight against irregular migration. Representatives of the competent Montenegrin institutions have given priority to this form of co-operation, both through the exchange of information with the Western Balkan countries as well as with the member states. Of course, this mechanism of cooperation can always be further improved, especially by improving the information systems in the field of registration of migrants, i.e. by establishing interoperable databases. In this light, the Ministry of the Interior has already initiated procedures for the production of new electronic application solution for maintaining the register of foreign nationals with granted temporary or permanent residence, stateless persons and asylum seekers in accordance with the new Law on Administrative procedures.

II COOPERATION IN THE FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM AND PREVENTION OF RADICALIZATION

Terrorism and violent extremism is not the main problem in Montenegro. There are a small number of individuals who joined terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq present in the country. In this regard, the Montenegrin authorities estimated that 26 individuals joined Islamic State or Al-Qaeda affiliates and splinter groups, which are the lowest figures of all Western Balkans countries.

Nevertheless, relevant institutions are demonstrating a commitment to the prevention and fight of terrorism and violent extremism.

In line with Joint Action Plan on CV and bilateral agreement, both signed with European Commission, Montenegro continuously conducting activities toward fulfillment of objectives defined in these two documents. Having in mind minor occurrence of these phenomena in Montenegro, main focus of the actions is based on strategic and legal framework, as well as on awareness raising and training. In this light, at the beginning of this year, new CVT strategy has been adopted, while preparation of the new CT strategy is ongoing, with the plan to be finalized by the end of this June. Likewise, bylaws are being developed, in accordance with the Law Amending the Law on Prevention of Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism, which was adopted in December 2019. The procedure of full alignment of the Law Amending the Law on Prevention of Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism with the Fifth EU Directive has been initiated. Activities have started to align the Law on International Restrictive Measures with the European Union acquis, in line with the earlier recommendations of the European Commission. Montenegro carried out a set of activities related to strengthening of international cooperation and renewal of membership in the u EGMONT group. Following revision of delivered documents by the EGMONT Secretariat and Working Group for EGMONT membership in the forthcoming period, it is expected that Montenegro's application will be found on the agenda of the EGMONT Working Group (June 2020), where they will decide whether to propose voting on the renewal of membership of the Montenegrin FIU at the EGMONT plenary session.

Officers of the INTERPOL-Europol-SIRENE Department of International Operational Police Cooperation in the Criminal Police Sector, use Europol's services and products, and have continuous cooperation with Europol and our Europol liaison officer. Cooperation relates to the exchange of information on foreign terrorist fighters and persons who can be contacted by terrorist organizations. Officers of this Department also carry out, through Europol's CT SIENA communication channel, an ongoing international exchange of information between national Anti-Terrorist Unit, between EU Member States, Western Balkan countries and other non-EU countries that are Europol's operational partners. This exchange of information is always accompanied by the necessary cross-checks carried out at national level. In addition to this, these officers, on the basis of previous queries of the Sector for Prevention of Money Laundering and Financing of Terrorism, carry out checks on persons on suspicion of committing the criminal offense of Financing Terrorism through the CT Operations Center of EUROPOL.

III ORGANIZED CRIME

Fight against organized crime remains one of the most important priorities in the work of Montenegrin institutions, while international operational cooperation and sharing information is considered as the main tool in this area. Latest Commission Staff Working Document for Montenegro (2019) recognizes that some progress in certain areas of the fight against organized crime related to initial track record of investigations into money laundering, of financial investigations and of temporary seizures of criminal assets was developed. The enhanced international police cooperation is bringing results, as illustrated by a number of high-profile international operations, arrests and drug seizures.

Despite the crisis caused by COVID-19, Montenegrin police continues smooth exchange of communication, through all available channels, such as Europol, Interpol, SELEC and with foreign liaison officers.

Within the Europol programme EMPACT, Montenegrin police also participates in the project FIREARMS. The important step forward under the EMPACT FIREARMS was made by taking the co-leader role in operational action 4.1 from the 2020 Operational Action Plan, the goal of which is to establish ongoing cooperation with the Western Balkan countries, with emphasis on the support to joint investigations, improvement of information exchange and activities aimed at building capacities involved in the fight against firearms smuggling. To that effect, the emphasis is put on the joint intelligence-led actions, support to future operational initiatives and joint actions in the region, along with sharing of information and results with the Europol analysis projects, designation of priority goals and creation of mixed working groups. Preparatory activities are underway when it comes to the “JAD for the Western Balkans” for firearms, under which the joint investigations with EU member states and third countries will be promoted.

Montenegro shares information on persons travelling to conflict zones to participate in terrorist activities through the Europol analysis project AP TRAVELLERS. Furthermore, under the EMPACT project for illegal migration, in which Montenegrin police takes part, the 2020 Operational Action Plan was developed and specifies operational and other actions aimed at combating illegal migration.

Since the establishment of the ARO within the Police Directorate of Montenegro (Rulebook on Internal Organization and Systematization of the Police Directorate, April 2019) up to the end of 2019, 37 requests for conducting checks on 137 individuals and 23 legal entities have been received by foreign competent authorities through INTERPOL and SIENA channels, as well as the CARIN informal network.

Out of the above, 3 requests were received through SIENA channel for conducting checks on 4 individuals and one legal entity, while 4 CARIN requests were received through the CARIN informal network for 6 individuals and 1 CARIN request through the Interpol channels for verification of one individual.

In addition, 103 requests for conducting checks on 217 individuals and 80 legal entities were sent by domestic competent authorities through INTERPOL and SIENA channels, of which 25 requests were sent through SIENA channel for conducting checks on 108 individuals and 33 legal entities.

Within the EURoL II project, a workshop was held regarding the work of the Montenegrin ARO, during which a report on the results of work with planned development in 2020 was prepared, as well as the development of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs).

Concerning the establishment of National Drug Observatory (NDO), legal and strategic conditions in Montenegro exist since 2010, in regard to the establishment of NDO and EWS, according to EU guidelines.

All activities aimed at achieving this objective were implemented permanently and on a continuous basis, through fair communication between Montenegrin institutions, and through close continuous cooperation and expert support from the EC (TAEX), EMCDDA, as well as participation in all international referral bodies in the field of drug policy. The main challenge poses the recruitment of a sufficient number of staff members in the national EMCDDA contact unit (NDO), so that the activities in the current and upcoming phase of cooperation could be properly conducted. It is not possible for one employee only to perform such complex tasks in the field of monitoring and data collection, and everything else that is within the competence of NDO. Having in mind that this contact point is based in Ministry of Health, we are expecting that number of the employees in the competent organizational unit of this Ministry will be increased soon. Furthermore, the future membership of Montenegro in the EU agency is subject to engagement of a national contact point for EMCDDA, as well as signature of a preliminary agreement. In regard to EWS, there are no current challenges and we are in constant communication and have expert support from the colleagues from EMCDDA, with the objective of permanently monitoring the situation in this field at EU level.

Based on our prior experience, we would like to recommend a more significant degree of adjustment of expert support, so as to meet our needs, not based on the requests for information only. Moreover, there is a need to consider joining new domestic experts in researches funded by the EMCDDA through IPA funds, who, so far, were not presented with the opportunity take part.

NORTH MACEDONIA

Justice and Home Affairs/EU-Western Balkans

Croatian Presidency of the Council of the European Union

Points for discussion in the area of home affairs

I. Accommodation capacities for asylum seekers, illegal migration

| |
|--|
| Brief overview of the situation with illegal migration and asylum applications submitted in the first quarter of 2020 |
|--|

With reference to the illegal border crossings in the Republic of North Macedonia, the attempts of illegal crossings in the first three months of 2020 have increased for 86.3% compared to the same quarter last year. At the borders with neighboring countries, a total of 7,410 attempts for illegal crossings have been prevented, most of them during February 2020 when Turkey decided to allow migrants to cross the border to Greece.

However, in March 2020, the number of detected cases dropped significantly by 53%, i.e. 1,629 attempts were detected. This drastic decrease is due to several factors such as the spread of the COVID-19 virus, the measures taken by the Government to prevent it, the restriction of the movement of the citizens, the increased presence of the police and the army at the state borders and inside the country, as well as the fear of infection with the virus among organizers and members of criminal groups. However, it is realistic to expect that the attempts for illegal crossings and smuggling of migrants will again increase with the stabilization of the situation with the COVID-19 virus.

Analyzing the situation by borders, almost 80% of the attempts were registered at the border with the Republic of Greece, 13% at the northern border with the Republic of Serbia, and a significant increase in attempts this year was registered at the eastern border with the Republic of Bulgaria, where the number has multiplied compared to last year as a result of the increased number of detected cases of migrant smuggling. At the borders with the Republic of Albania and the Republic of Kosovo, the attempts for illegal crossings decreased by 38% and 53%, respectively.

According to the structure, the top five countries of origin of migrants which are most represented in this quarter are: Afghanistan with 40.7% whose number has increased significantly compared to last year, highly represented migrants from Pakistan - 22.2% and India - 7.2%, as well as migrants from Bangladesh - 5.3% and Syria - 5.6%. There are also smaller number of migrants from Morocco, Algeria, stateless persons, etc. Also, asylum applications in the first quarter of 2020 have doubled compared to the same period last year. The Ministry of Interior has received new asylum applications from 153 (75) people, most of them from: Afghanistan-35, Cuba-20, Turkey-18, Pakistan-17, Syria-15, Morocco-14, Bangladesh-11. etc. In addition, in the Republic of North Macedonia, 199 people have been granted the right to asylum for subsidiary protection, while 15 people have recognized refugee status.

Facilities for accommodation of illegal migrants and asylum seekers in the Republic of North Macedonia

The Reception Center for Asylum Seekers - Vizbegovo, Skopje for accommodating asylum seekers, which is under direct competence of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy and its capacity is 300 beds. Until March 31, 2020, 64 asylum seekers were accommodated in the Reception Center for Asylum in Skopje.

Facility for accommodating vulnerable categories of asylum seekers, which accommodates unaccompanied foreign children, as well as families belonging to the group of vulnerable families (single parents and their children, pregnant women, the elderly people with deteriorating health, families with more children, etc.). The capacity of the accommodation facility is 28 beds.

The Reception Center for Foreigners, which is under the direct competence of the Ministry of Interior. This center accepts foreigners who cannot be forcibly removed from the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia, a foreigner for whom a deportation decision has been issued, a foreigner who does not have a valid and recognized passport, a foreigner whose identity cannot be determined. The maximum accommodation capacity is 120-130 persons.

In case of increased number of migrants in the Republic of North Macedonia, a Temporary Transit Center - Gevgelija has been established with the role of accepting, registering, issuing certificates for expressed asylum intention and preparing migrants for further transport. Furthermore, a "Temporary checkpoint for help and support" has been established near the border with the Republic of Serbia, in the vicinity of the border crossing "Tabanovce", intended for migrants who have transited through the country with the intention to cross the state border towards the Republic of Serbia. The total capacity of the two Reception Centers (Gevgelija and Tabanovce) is 2000 beds, 1500 beds in Gevgelija and 500 in Tabanovce. They operate with the assistance of the competent institutions in the Republic of North Macedonia (Mol, MLSP, MoH) as well as the support and assistance from civil society organizations and international organizations.

The listed facilities with their accommodation capacities fully meet the needs of the Republic of North Macedonia for accommodating illegal migrants and asylum seekers.

In accordance with the new situation related to Covid-19, based on the recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO), the Government adopted a conclusion that all asylum seekers in the initial period of 25 days will be accommodated in the Reception Transit Center in Vinograd-Gevgelija. In the other accommodation facilities, protection and prevention measures are applied, in accordance with the WHO recommendations.

Cooperation with FRONTEX

The current cooperation with the border police in the region and Frontex is taking place through existing channels and platforms for early warning and data and information exchange, and it is at satisfactory level, given the current state with the corona virus. However, they may not be of the same quality as regular meetings which provide sufficient insight into migration movements and exchange of views.

The functioning of the border police is adapted to the new situation, and the main shortcomings are seen in terms of additional staff engagement and canceled trainings and coordination meetings at regional and international level as well as part of the activities within the current projects.

The main obstacles in the effective and proactive sharing of information with the EU remain the same as before the corona virus crisis - the inability to access and use databases available to the EU member states.

A common tool for sharing information between the Western Balkan countries tailored according to the EURODAC system

The implementation of the EU standards in the daily work of the services that act upon the submitted asylum applications in the Republic of North Macedonia is a strategic priority where legislative and institutional measures are continuously undertaken. In that regard, the creation of a common tool for sharing information between the Western Balkan countries tailored according to the EURODAC system will contribute to deepen the cooperation among the Western Balkan countries and bring closer the way of work of the EU member states.

However, given the financial resources and the engagement of human and technical resources for its establishment and maintenance, we consider that it would be more beneficial if it is established right before the accession of the Western Balkan countries to the European Union. Thus, additional financial resources would be avoided to ensure compatibility of the two information systems, especially if we consider the rapid development of the information technology.

In addition, given the current state of illegal migration and the growing number of asylum applications, it would be particularly important for us in this period to define the way of including the Western Balkan countries in the existing European tools and mechanisms, or at least enabling conditions for their direct or indirect use.

II. Cooperation in the fight against terrorism and prevention of radicalism

I. Significant realized activities from the Joint Action Plan for Fight against Terrorism and Preventing Violent Extremism in the Western Balkans

Institutional setting: level of financial and human resources of the National Committee for Prevention of Violent Extremism and Fight against Terrorism (NCPVEFAT)

Financial resources:

- In 2018, NCPVEFAT had its own budget, while in 2019 it does not have its own budget and uses the budget of the General Secretariat of the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia (as well as the other national coordinators in the Government)
- in 2019, some of the institutions that participate in the work of NCPVEFAT, have allocated certain financial resources for the implementation of their activities in accordance with the National Strategies and Action Plans for PVE/ FAT

Human resources:

- Since November 2018, a civil servant from the General Secretariat of the Government has been engaged in the office of the NCPVEFAT as a support to the National Coordinator for PVE/ FAT and the Deputy National Coordinators for PVE/ FAT.
- a local consultant for PVE and an international expert for PVE have been engaged through IOM project for a period of 18 months (until October 2020)
- Reform package has been prepared by the NCPVEFAT, envisaging the establishment of a new organizational structure (Department with 7 employees), change of certain members and deputy members of the NCPVEFAT from the institutions and establishment of mechanisms for their closer cooperation with NCPVEFAT.

Measures have been undertaken to ensure that senior local police officers are part of the National Committee

NC continuously cooperates with senior police officials at central level and with representatives of the local police. The Ministry of Interior / Public Security Bureau delegated two representatives to NCPVEFAT: a representative of the uniformed police and the criminal police, which unified the two key segments in the police work. According to the competences of their organizational units, they have the authority to implement the established priorities on local level.

The Rules of Procedure of the National Committee (which is in the final stages of preparation) will give the possibility for the National Coordinator to expand the composition for certain sessions with local police representatives.

Preparation of Common Risk Assessment

In order to successfully implement the provisions of the Law on Coordination of Security and Intelligence Community, on December 16, 2019, the Government adopted a Decision on establishing a Council for Coordination of Security and Intelligence Community. The Council is consisted of the Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Political System and Inter-Community Relations, Minister of Interior, Minister of Defense, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Director of the National Security Agency, Director of the Intelligence Agency and the head of the competent organizational unit for military security and intelligence at the Ministry of Defense.

In accordance with the abovementioned law, the Council reviews and implements the proposals of the Security Council of the Republic of North Macedonia submitted to the Government; coordinates the work of the security and intelligence services; considers and assesses the security-intelligence threats and risks to the national security of the country; gives directions and draws conclusions on the manner of protection and realization of the national security of the state.

At the same time, in January 2020, the Government appointed a Secretary to the Office of the Council for Coordination of the Security and Intelligence Community, who will lead the Office of the Council. The above mentioned Office will be tasked with uniting and evaluating the objectivity and relevance of the submitted reports, analysis, assessments and other information from the security and intelligence services, which are important for the security and intelligence threats and risks to the national security of the country. At the same time, the Office will prepare reports with recommendations for the national security, as well as assessments of the degree of threats and risks to the national security of the country, which will be submitted to the Council. Activities are ongoing for preparing assessments of threats to national security.

In early March 2020, the Government adopted the National Risk Assessment (NRA) on money laundering and terrorist financing.

The Financial Intelligence Unit, with the support of GIZ, has launched a project to prepare risk assessment for terrorist financing of CSOs. For that purpose, a working group has been formed with representatives from other relevant institutions and civil society organizations as well, which has the obligation to prepare this risk assessment.

Determining the priorities set in the fight against terrorism and in preventing radicalization in accordance with the two strategies adopted in March 2017

Preventing violent extremism

- 1) Training of teachers and school staff (from primary and secondary schools)
- 2) Joint efforts of religious communities in preventing VE and radicalization
- 3) Dealing with online radicalization
- 4) Adoption of a Reintegration Program
- 5) Implementation of the Strategic Communication Plan

Fight against terrorism

1. Establishment of an intelligence unit in prisons;
2. Draft-law on Critical Infrastructure;
3. Dealing with online radicalization
4. Revision of the national assessment of terrorist financing
5. Amendments to the Criminal Code in line with EU standards.

Developing local mechanisms that will provide an inter-agency approach

Action teams in the community (ATC) have been established in 3 municipalities in the country (Chair, Gostivar and Kicevo). They were established with decision of the Municipal Council and they have prepared their own action plans.

The ATC is consisted of: representative of the mayor and the president of the municipal council; police representative; representative of the education sector - school principals; representative of the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy; religious communities; CSOs / youth and local communities / villages.

The ATC members in these municipalities have attended basic and specialized trainings for prevention of violent extremism (PVE). Also in Kumanovo, the LCP (Local Council for Prevention) established the ATC and prepared an action plan as basis for their activities.

Steps taken regarding potential reintegration of foreign terrorist fighters and their families

The inter-institutional working group (established with Decision of the Government in December 2019) with the support of the IOM Mission in the Republic of North Macedonia, developed the National Plan for reintegration, re-socialization and rehabilitation of returnees from foreign armies and members of their families (women and children). It will be adopted by the Government in the upcoming period.

Undertaken measures for preventing further radicalization in prisons

Regarding the dealing with radicalization in prisons, a number of activities are undertaken by the Directorate for Execution of Sanctions within the projects supported by the EU / Council of Europe, which refer to the strengthening of the capacities of prisons to deal with VE and FAT. The following are particularly important:

- A five-year comprehensive National Strategy for the Development of the Penitentiary System (2020-2024) has been prepared.
- The capacities of prison directors and prison staff are being strengthened in order to better identify and address prison radicalization through the systematic application of newly acquired skills and developed tools and mechanisms in their daily work.
- A working group has been formed, consisted of 11 experienced prison officials from the Directorate for Execution of Sanctions from five prisons.
- The so-called Multi-treatment teams have been established in five prisons that have radicalized prisoners. They are consisted of prison police and people who help with the re-socialization and work with prisoners on a daily basis.
- With the support of international experts, screening and risk assessment tools (RNA tool) have been developed, as well as
- Methodology for the treatment of radicalized prisoners, including individual treatment.

The support from the Council of Europe will continue in the upcoming period in the process of establishing intelligence units in prisons.

Measures in the education sector to prevent and combat violent extremism / conducted campaigns

Trainings for students, school staff and parents - high school are conducted, with the support of the OSCE and CSOs;

There are undergoing activities for developing an early warning system for radicalization leading to violent extremism as well as developing a local referral system.

A Regional Workshop was held together with the Republic of Albania (organized in the Republic of North Macedonia, with the support of IOM) for exchange of experiences and good practices as well as next joint steps in PVE in education.

Activities regarding critical infrastructure

A strategic framework is planned to be developed for ensuring the successful functioning of the coordination system of all institutions that will work on the protection of critical infrastructure. It will include defining of the facilities that fall into the category of critical infrastructure, measures for their safety as well as obligations and responsibilities for their protection. The stated strategic framework will also include the adoption of the Law on Critical Infrastructure.

Activities undertaken on the basis of the Strategy for preventing violent extremism

Based on the Action Plan of the Strategy for PVE, the activities that are additionally implemented, in addition to the above mentioned, are the following:

- Training was organized for local youth councils, to raise awareness on the dangers of violent extremism and radicalization.
- Strategic communication plan has been prepared and it is being implemented
- Campaign is conducted against hate speech (MOI, NCPVEFAT) and Agency for Youth and Sport)
- Capacity building activities continue through training of police officers, teaching staff, students, parents and young people for detection whether or not there are signs of radicalization
- Youth centers have been established with the support of CSOs, ,
- Projects related to multi-ethnic and multi-religious approaches have been implemented, including the project " Multiethnic Cohesion through Sport", activities to promote inter-ethnic tolerance and coexistence in order to jointly prevent violent extremism
- Memorandum for joint access to PVE is planned to be signed in cooperation with the Commission for Relations with Religious Communities and Groups in the Republic of North Macedonia.
- Multi-sectoral approach is developed at local level, provided through: establishment of local prevention councils, creation of community action teams, creation of community working groups, as well as a reference mechanism that is in its initial phase.

Regional cooperation

Regarding regional cooperation:

- The Signed Memorandum for cooperation with Albania in PVE is already being implemented. Draft Memorandum is prepared for cooperation with Kosovo.
- Basis has been established for further cooperation with Montenegro, Bosnia and Serbia.
- In the period from 27 to 29 January 2020, the National Coordinator for Fight against Terrorism and Prevention of Violent Extremism organized the First Regional Meeting of Representatives of Security and Intelligence Agencies from the Western Balkans, which was also attended by representatives of Slovenia and Croatia.

Realised trainings in the first quarter of 2020

Realised trainings in the period January-March, 2020:

Within the IPA Project “Strengthening the coordinative capacities in the prevention and fighting violent extremism and fight against terrorism”, the following trainings were realised:

- Training on operative and strategic intelligence for members of NCPVEFAT, whereby specific analytical reports were drafted (03-07.02.2020). Number of trained professionals: 14.
- Training on open sources intelligence, whereby 17 professionals (from institutions - members of NCPVEFAT) are trained for monitoring and interpreting radical content on Internet / social networks (10-21.02.2020).

In February 2020, NCPVEFAT, in cooperation with the EU Internet Referral Unit (EU IRU) within the European Counter Terrorism Centre of Europol and Mol, organised one day training on the topic Cyber investigations related to online radicalisation and terrorism, with the aim to strengthen the capacities of the CVE/FAT institutions in the Republic of North Macedonia. The training was realised by two experts (from Italy and Spain). 7 professionals in total were trained.

Activities undertaken for dealing with the returned foreign fighters and members of their families / good practice examples.

Mol prepared Guidelines with measures to be undertaken after received information for terrorist operations. Developing inter agency cooperation in dealing with foreign fighters and members of their families represents an example of good practice that confirmed in the last cases realised in 2020. In cooperation with the office of the National Coordinator, representatives of the Basic PPO for prosecuting organised crime and corruption Skopje, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy - Social Works Centre, the procedure, competence and procedure for dealing with foreign fighters and their families was laid down and it was confirmed in the following cases:

- 1) On the basis of the provided evidence material criminal charges were filed for a crime “participation in foreign army, police, paramilitary and parapolice formations“ and 30 days custody was imposed.
- 2) After the deportation from Gaziantep - Turkey of three female members of the family of FTF killed in Syria, by the Ministry of Health, medical supervision was imposed with a Decision in a duration of 14 days. The persons are accommodated in a special building managed by the Social Works Centre, where they are accepted by the professional services of the Social Works Centre - psychologist, social worker and others. After the expiry of the medical supervision on the basis of the professional assessment by the Social Works Centre, they were accommodated with a member of their family.

Main challenges in this area are determining permanent premises for accommodating FTF family members and adequate stable financing of the activities in that regard. Second main challenge is providing evidence for FTF for which there is suspicion that they committed adequate crime in the area of terrorism.

- **Which steps could be undertaken to enhance the quality of sharing information between the EU and the Western Balkan partners? What is the situation like with regard to establishing a CT SIENA?**

Since 2020 there are ongoing activities on **linking the Sector for fight against terrorism within the Section for fighting organised and serious crime with the platform for safe exchange of information and network analysis – SIENA**. The realisation of this activity will enable direct communication between the counter terrorism services, as well as fast, protected and uninterrupted exchange of information. In April 2020 there was a training for the employees of the Sector for fighting terrorism with regard to using the mentioned platform. The activities are in the final phase and they are expected to finish in the first half of May 2020.

Organised crime

- **How can you improve sharing information by using SIENA system or through other channels?**

Intensifying the activities for participation in joint bilateral or multilateral operations in all areas, participation in joint investigation teams, joining to new Projects for analysing working files will certainly contribute towards increasing the exchange of operative and strategic information (with the EU Member States and the operative cooperation partners) .

The enhanced participation in analytical working files and joint activities during the operational days within EMPACT, the exchange of information, participation in working meetings with experts in the area through all the phases, are the best way for increasing the cooperation. Moreover, further promotion of the EU policies cycle such as EMPACT, on a strategic and operational level, will contribute towards raising the awareness and understanding of the need for intensive cooperation, compliance and establishing the best European practices in fighting organised and serious crime. In promoting these policies it is especially important to include all the national law enforcement bodies. In that regard, **there is a need on national level to establish a mechanism for periodical training that would promote and learn international cooperation mechanisms.**

Considering the existing channels for police cooperation INTERPOL, EUROPOL, SELEC and bilateral liaison officers, border police joint contact centres, international initiatives for establishing networks of experts in certain areas, as well as the future challenges in the international police cooperation (for our country the establishing of SIRENE bureau is of particular importance), one should undoubtedly have in mind the possibility of doubling the working processes. The Sector for international police cooperation within the Ministry of Interior represents the unique contact point for exchanging information through INTERPOL, EUROPOL, SELEC and the bilateral liaison officers, hence the duplication of information towards abroad is at the minimum. However, the software tool must be modernised in order to improve the working processes and the exchange of information itself. In that regard, **modernisation of the existing and establishing new national databases in accordance with the Schengen conditions is an important requirement for improving the international police cooperation.**

Which measures can be undertaken to address the biggest threats of organised crime related to the COVID-19 crisis?

In order to deal with the danger of spreading the virus COVID-19, on 16 March 2020 the President of the Republic of North Macedonia announced state of emergency. As of that moment all the capacities of the Ministry of Interior and of the other institutions in the country are directed towards dealing with the pandemic. After adopting the Decision for proclaiming and extending the state of emergency in the Republic of North Macedonia (16 April 2020) and the decision for restricting the movement of the citizens, Operational Headquarters was established in Mol which gathers all the information on criminal activities that have elements of organised form related to non-compliance with certain measures by the Government.

In order for the law enforcement services to have a comprehensive overview of the situation in the serious and organised crime and terrorism during the COVID-19 pandemic, intelligence notification is prepared i.e. report/estimation of the situation and development of crime and terrorism in EU.

Two important aspects for the law enforcement agencies are highlighted in the reports:

1. The events in serious and organised crime and terrorism related to the COVID-19 pandemic;
2. The impact of the pandemic on the police and the law enforcement agencies.

The intelligence notifications by Europol drafted so far about the situation in the area of organised crime and terrorism have been submitted to the competent services, and the Mol prepared two contributions on the situation and they have been submitted to Europol.

Europol has suggested implementation of the operations as well as drafting reports, estimations related to the pandemic situation, as follows;

- **Operation Retrovirus**, the aim of which is to prevent careless gathering, transport, managing and possible disposal of the **sanitary waste** arising from the health centres, but also other objects in charge for acting upon in relation to the pandemic,

- **Operation SHIELD** aimed at detecting illegal trade in the following categories of products via Internet: medicine equipment, sanitiser and disinfectants, medicines, food and other products at demand currently.

- Impact of Covid-19 on crime related to **sexual exploitation of children through Internet** and related approaches on Internet.

Namely, by closing many schools and increasing the number of people working from home, it is considered within AP TWINS whether this change in the way of life causes also changes in illegal behaviour through Internet.

Within the General Secretariat, the INTERPOL Command and Coordination Centre established **Special coordination body against the pandemic** in order to submit the newest information related to the spread of CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19). As of 19.03.2020 the INTERPOL Command and Coordination Centre started submitting daily reports with the latest gathered information for the last 24 hours. The information contains messages sent by different national central bureaus of INTERPOL from all the 194 member states or information gathered from open sources (media, World Health Organisation etc.) NCB INTERPOL Skopje submitted reports to the member states on the introduced extraordinary measures by the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia.

Special emphasis is placed on the warnings that INTERPOL GS sends to the member states referring to the more frequent cyber frauds in particular directed towards medical institutions.

Due to the pandemic, the international police cooperation in the area of extradition of persons is aggravated i.e. due to the cancelled flights we can only extradite persons that have been approved for extradition by road traffic only.

What is specifically needed to improve the operation cooperation in implementing the law especially in fighting smuggling migrants and drugs?

Republic of North Macedonia is target of illegal migration and smuggling of migrants and is located on the crossroad of the migrant routes from Asia and Africa towards Central and Western Europe. Having in mind the situation in political, security and economic sense, it is expected for this route to be active in future also and this comes as a conclusion from the statistical data and detected cases in this period.

In 2020 despite the emergency working conditions due to the pandemic, the detected cases of smuggling migrants note 100% increase compared to the same quarter last year. Since the beginning of 2020 until the end of March, 28 cases were detected and criminal prosecution measures were undertaken against 23 persons for committed crime "smuggling of migrants".

In March 2020 a criminal group that organised smuggling of 25 migrants from Afghanistan, Pakistan and from Bangladesh was detected and criminal charges were filed against two persons for committed **crime** "organising a group and instigating the crimes trafficking in human beings, trafficking in minors and smuggling of migrants".

With the cases realised in 2020 totally **720 migrants** were prevented from smuggling, out of which half come from Pakistan - 244 and from Afghanistan - 237. There is an increase in the number of migrants coming from Bangladesh -130 persons, and also there is a large percentage of migrants coming from Egypt.

At the same time, in the period February - March 2020 four victims/children of trafficking in human beings, nationals of the Republic of North Macedonia. They were sexually exploited by persons close with the victims (parents, close relatives or intimate friend relationships) and they come from dysfunctional families with low level of education or without education.

Proposals for strengthening the international operative cooperation in fighting smuggling of migrants:

- **Intensifying the activities within the Western Balkan Task Force in the area of smuggling migrants and the European Migrant Smuggling Centre**

Western Balkan Task Force on Migrant Smuggling was established on the initiative and with the support of the Joint operational office from Vienna and Europol, in June 2018. All the Balkan countries and EU Member States participate in it. This project is being implemented for almost two years and through this cooperation platform the countries exchange criminal and intelligence information and statistical data on smuggling migrants cases, perform checkups in databases, information on modus operandi, new trends and a system of trust is being implemented among the police officers. At the beginning of March 2020 the last meeting of this group was held in Berlin, Germany where the latest information were exchanged on the situation with the illegal migration and the increased inflow of migrants through the Turkish-Greek border and the threats for reopening of the Western Balkan route. Having in mind the state of emergency, meetings are not held, but on the other hand Europol i.e. the **European Migrant Smuggling Centre** finds new alternative ways for mutual communication, apart from the electronic one, and the first video conference meeting is scheduled for the beginning of May regarding the exchange of information on the situation with illegal migration, current investigations, operation modes of the organised criminal groups, trends etc.

Criminal drug market

According to the criminal intelligence information it is found that the crisis does not have big impact on the procurement and transport on international level, whereas on national level changes are insignificant i.e. they occur in the part of limiting the time period for movement that makes the street sale more difficult. Organised criminal groups use the transport services of the legal or natural entities, although in aggravated circumstances.

However, even in these emergency conditions, the activities for detecting illegal drug trafficking continue. In 2020 two criminal charges were filed against five persons, Macedonian citizens, for committed crime "unauthorised production and trading narcotic drugs, psychotropic substances and precursors" in accordance with Article 215 paragraph 3 of the Criminal Code. 1001 grams of cocaine was seized on the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia within the international police operation jointly with the police officers from Italy, Montenegro and Albania. Within the second investigation there was a case of illicit trade in heroine where 4951.7 grams of heroin was seized on the territory of the Republic of North Macedonia, in a passenger vehicle. The detected amount of heroine was procured from the Republic of Kosovo and was supposed to be transported through the Republic of North Macedonia towards the Western European countries as a final destination.

In the area of improving the operational cooperation in law enforcement in fight against trafficking in drugs, the exchange of data and information among the countries in the region and wider should be intensified for the purpose of timely undertaking coordinated measures and activities given the differences in the national legislation.

| |
|--|
| How to strengthen the participation of Western Balkans in EMPACT? |
|--|

As of 2015 the Republic of North Macedonia participated in Joint Action Days (JAD) within EMPACT whereby through the Europol Unit, by using the SIENA secure communication link, the activities for realisation of the activities were coordinated and the operative information were exchanged among the operating coordination centres in Europol, National coordination centres and the member states in the Operation. Apart from the Western Balkans countries, also EU Member States and third partners for cooperation with Europol participated in the operations.

Analysing the situation on a national level, the following activities are being considered as future activities that will intensify the cooperation in EMPACT:

- intensifying the participation of MoI employees in Joint Action Days (JAD), as well as participation in other operative actions in accordance with the priorities of the EU,
- appointing a coordinator in the MoI/Public Security Bureau that will coordinate all the coordinators of EMPACT in special activities (illegal migration, illicit arms trafficking, etc.)
- establishing central police software tool by means of which the Sector for international police cooperation in MoI will have an access to all the active bases available for the law enforcement services. This will allow for direct checkups throughout the implementation of the joint action days within EMPACT.

What are the main challenges in establishing the National observatory for drugs and the early warning system in line with the methodologies of the EU and how can we overcome those challenges?

In the existing legislation there is no legal ground for establishing the early warning system regarding the new psychotropic substances that spread on the illegal market. Currently the information regarding the new psychotropic substances obtained through the Early warning system established in EMCDDA are being sent to all the participating parties through a circular e-mail.

The adoption of the new Law on controlling drugs and psychoactive substances, currently in parliamentary procedure, will set up a legal ground for establishing early warning system and it will be regulated and implemented in accordance with the instructions given by EMCDDA.

The new Law on controlling drugs and psychoactive substances will also set up a ground for establishing National drugs observatory.

What is the situation like regarding establishing ARO within the competent law enforcement body and the implementation of financial investigations for all the crimes related to organised crime?

In February 2018, the Government adopted a Strategy and an Action Plan strengthening the capacities for leading financial investigations and confiscation of property. The Strategy includes comprehensive approach towards financial investigations the implementation of which also includes the PPO, the Mol, the Ministry of Finance - Customs Administration and the Financial Police Directorate, as well as other competent bodies that cooperate in the exchange of information.

Acting in accordance with the defined strategic priorities, on 14.03.2019 the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia established the ARO and appointed at the same time contact person in the ARO network. The ARO was established within the PPO of the Republic of North Macedonia.

Special units for financial investigations were established within the Mol, the Customs Administration and the Financial Police Directorate. There were activities with regard to staffing and there are continuous measures in view of efficient functioning.

Active financial investigations implemented in Mol:

| No. | Crime area | Number of criminally reported persons if the group is detected | Number of persons subject to the financial investigation |
|-----|---|--|--|
| 1. | OCG involved in trafficking in drugs and production of synthetic drugs in improvised laboratory | 7 | 29 natural persons |
| 2. | OCG involved in smuggling migrants from Europe to USA | 9 | 6 natural persons and 3 legal entities |
| 3. | OCG involved in crimes in the area of violent crime and illicit drugs trafficking | 8 | 8 natural persons |
| 4. | OCG involved in trafficking in cultural goods | 15 | 14 natural persons |
| 5. | OCG involved in illicit drug trafficking, violent crime and property torts | / | 37 natural persons and 11 legal entities |
| 6. | OCG involved in smuggling migrants | / | 17 natural persons |
| 7. | OCG involved in activities related to financing of terrorism | / | 5 natural persons and 1 legal entity |
| 8. | OCG involved in misuse and malpractice in the procedure of expropriation state owned land | 11 | 2 natural persons |

SERBIA

Written contribution by the Republic of Serbia on Discussion paper – for the purpose of the Senior Officials EU-WB meeting – Home affairs session

I – ASYLUM RECEPTION CAPACITY, IRREGULAR MIGRATION

- **Republic of Serbia, throughout the crisis caused by the COVID-19 has put all efforts in order to obtain public order with respect to all guaranteed human rights for all citizens within our territory.**

-

- The Asylum Office, as the authority responsible for processing asylum claims, has neither encountered any difficulties nor gaps in its area of competence due to the emergence and spread of Covid 19. Asylum seekers' rights are fully protected by decisions adopted by the Government of the Republic of Serbia during the state of emergency. Asylum procedures will resume once the state of emergency has been lifted and the virus has stopped spreading.

-

From the beginning of a state of emergency in the Republic of Serbia, which has been declared on March 15, 2020, the influx of irregular migrants is significantly reduced, as well as the number of application for asylum procedure, as a result of the closure of the borders of the Republic of Serbia and regional countries, as well as enhanced measures taken by the police.

Regarding the statistics related to the asylum procedure, a total of 836 application for asylum have been recorded, while during the state of emergency a total of 9 application for asylum procedure were recorded, which is less than 1% out of a total number of application from the beginning of the year

- The Service for foreigners as the authority responsible for processing claims for temporary and permanent residence of foreign nationals within the Republic of Serbia has neither encountered any difficulties nor gaps due to emergence and spread of Covid 19 in its area of competence.

- The rights of legal aliens, or of those who were legally staying in the Republic of Serbia once the state of emergency had been declared are allowed to stay legally in the Republic of Serbia without having to initiate further procedures with respect to their status as set out in the Decision of the Government of the Republic of Serbia on the Status of Foreign Nationals in the Republic of Serbia during the State of Emergency.

- As far as irregular migrants are concerned, persons having found themselves with this status in the Republic of Serbia during the state of emergency have remained in the Republic of Serbia. All such persons were accommodated in both reception and asylum centers run by the Commissariat for Refugees and Migration in accordance with the decision taken by the Government of the Republic of Serbia. Their rights have been fully protected by the decisions adopted by the Government of the Republic of Serbia during the state of emergency, and once the state of emergency has been lifted the provisions of the Law on Aliens on Illegal Stay in the Republic of Serbia will be applied.

-

During the period January 01 – March 15, a total of 4.863 persons were prevented in attempt to illegally cross the state border, 3.361 persons were gave up after spotting border guards.

On the other side, from March 15, a total of 243 persons were prevented in attempt to illegally cross the state border, which is less then 5 percent out of a total number from the beginning of the year and 1 667 persons were gave up after spotting border guards and army, which is less than 33 percentage out of a total number from the beginning of the year.

Risk Analysis Department also has not encountered any gaps due to outbreak and spread of COVID-19 within its area of competence.

- With the outbreak of the crisis caused by the spread of the virus Covid-19 there have not been observed major drawbacks in the efficient suppression of human smuggling. Although there are individual cases of smuggling, where the criminal offenders are using the emerging situation for organizing illegal transit and state border crossing, the number of identified cases and data from ongoing investigations are supporting the fact that this crime area stagnated in the Republic of Serbia primarily due to better security in order to protect migrants in reception centers.

- Since the beggining of 2020. until the 07th of May 65 criminal charges were raised against 73 persons for criminal act Illegal crossing of the state border and people smuggling (artc.350 of Criminal Code), including two criminal charges against two organised criminal group with 11 persons involved. From the begginig of a state of emergency in the Republic of Serbia (15th of March '20) 25 criminal charges were raised against 23 persons for the same criminal act.

- In the period After the COVID19 crisis, we expect that that there will be an increase in demand for migrants smuggling services and therefore, we will intensified exchange of information with countries of origin of irregular migrants and transit countries such as Turkey, Greece, North Macedonia and Bulgaria, Western Balkan countries, and destination countries such as Austria, Germany and Great Britain. We will also use, to a larger extent, information obtained through the Early Warning System in the framework of Integrated Border Management (IBM) in order to improve operational procedures and enable more efficient suppression of the smuggling of human beings, illicit substances and goods in the post COVID19 period.
- Ministry of the Interior Republic of Serbia is beneficiary of the Twinning project - “Support to the Preparation for Participation in EUROSUR Network and EURODAC System”, that paves the way for conditions necessary for the accession of the Republic of Serbia to the aforementioned EU systems. Therefore, our position is that we should focus on the establishment of the operational and legal procedures, technical and IT standards on bilateral basis, which are necessary to conduct EU standards in this area and create the possibility to be part of the synchronized efforts within different aspects of migration management in line with Common European Asylum and Migration policy, rather than the establishment of the separate data sharing tool only for Western Balkans.
- Our position is that the current way of information sharing between the Western Balkan countries is of satisfactory character, it is performed in an efficient and timely manner, and as such it enables rapid and appropriate actions to be taken in the field of migration management.

II – COOPERATION IN THE FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM AND PREVENTION OF RADICALISATION

The Republic of Serbia recognizes terrorism as a threat to the basic values on which it is based and as a threat to international peace and security of the international community. In accordance with that, the Republic of Serbia expresses its readiness to improve cooperation at the regional and global level, because the complexity of the phenomenon of terrorism requires coordinated action at the international level.

The national policy of the Republic of Serbia in this area is based on the condemnation of all acts of terrorism, regardless of the circumstances, manner and time of execution. The Republic of Serbia opposes linking terrorism to any religious, ethnic or other group.

Prevention and fight against terrorism is a significant part of the foreign policy priorities of the Republic of Serbia in order to ensure lasting global and regional stability and combat the security threat posed by terrorism and other threats related to it.

The current assessment of the threat of terrorism, including risk assessment, indicates that the potential threat of terrorism in the Republic of Serbia is realistic and present.

The Republic of Serbia is facing an increase in the radicalization of certain individuals and groups, as well as the strengthening of violent extremism, which can lead to terrorism.

In the Republic of Serbia, the activities of members and sympathizers of radical Islamist movements and organizations are evident, where the phenomena of converts, radicalization of young people and continuous propaganda activities of radical religious preachers, but also foreign terrorist fighters who joined terrorist organizations in Syria and Iraq are a special challenge.

In accordance with the National Strategy for the Prevention and Countering of Terrorism for 2017–2021 (hereinafter: Strategy), in April 2019 the Government of Republic Serbia adopted the Decision on the formation of the National Coordination Body for the Prevention and Countering of Terrorism (hereinafter: NCB), which has the task to coordinate the activities on prevention and fight against terrorism, radicalism and violent extremism leading to terrorism at the national level, and to ensure effective implementation, monitoring, evaluation and reporting on the implementation of the National Strategy. The National Coordination Body makes decisions on taking measures and activities of state administration bodies and competent authorities in the field of preventing and combating terrorism.

By decision of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, the Police Director, Police General, Vladimir Rebić, was designated and appointed as National Coordinator for the Prevention and Countering of Terrorism in the Republic of Serbia in June 2019.

The NCB has so far formed a multiagency Working Group to develop a Plan of Action for the return of foreign terrorist fighters and members of their families to the territory of the Republic of Serbia and there are preparations for the formation of two more, the Working Group for the formation of the Initial Assessment Team and a Team for Analysing the Effects of the Implementation of the Strategy (GAP).

Contributions from all competent state bodies on the implementation of activities from the Strategy Action Plan for the period 2017-2019 have been collected and a first Consolidated report is under preparation. At the next session of the NCB, the Team for Analysing the Effects of the Implementation of the Strategy will be formed. Based on the results of the effect analysis conducted, a decision will be made as to whether the existing National Strategy will be revised or a new strategy document will be adopted.

In order to improve coordination and cooperation at the operational level in the field of counter-terrorism the Working Group was formed in which participate representatives of the Service for Combating Terrorism (Ministry of Interior), SIA and the Prosecutor's Office for Organized Crime. Members of the Working Group regularly exchange current operational information and coordinate follow-up activities. Once a month, the Working Group reports to the NCB on its work.

Strengthening the role of the national counter-terrorism coordinator, further specialization in law enforcement agencies focused on new trends and crimes in this area such as monitoring money flows and terrorist financing through cryptocurrency payments as well as prevention of cyber attacks will be a challenge in the coming period .

In that sense, the Ministry of the Interior is already undertaking initiatives towards CEPOL in order to find adequate specialization for our criminal inspectors, so that they can successfully process such modes of committing criminal acts.

In order to increase specialization and use innovative approaches in the prevention and fight against terrorism, the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Serbia established a Department for the Prevention of Abuse of Public Resources and the Internet at the end of 2018 within the Counter-Terrorism Service. This section was established to conduct online investigations involving covert intelligence operations and the collection of intelligence and open source data, with the aim of providing evidence, including digital evidence, for the purposes of prosecuting perpetrators.

Within the National Center for Criminal Forensics, a new Department for Electronic and Informatics Forensics has been established, which performs the tasks of finding, collecting and providing digital evidence (traces and samples), their analysis, expertise and examination, using modern forensic methods.

In addition, further specialization of the relevant lines of work was provided through the transfer of knowledge and application of state-of-the-art methods in cooperation with EUROPOL's Internet Abuse Unit for Terrorism, primarily through the contribution of the MIA to the SIRIUS expert platform EUROPOL to exchange digital evidence and information obtained. from open sources and via the Internet.

All this aims to improve the counter-terrorism system in the Ministry of the Interior and to establish an effective mechanism for detecting and responding quickly to the Internet propaganda of terrorism and violent extremism and radicalization via the Internet, as well as to prevent the misuse of the Internet and public sources. purposes.

Our ministry has started with initial activities related to the establishment of a multidisciplinary team that would be engaged in case of suspicion of an individual's involvement in radicalization activities, but also to assess the degree of his radicalization and risk. with the ultimate goal of rehabilitation and resocialization of persons.

Also, the Republic of Serbia has been participating for two years in the work of the Working Group for the Prevention of Violent Extremism and Terrorism, better known by the abbreviation WBCTI, as well as in the work through operational work files related to terrorism, known as "Travelers" and "Hydra". here we see the possibility for better, faster and better exchange of data with the member states of the European Union.

Having in mind the almost certain return of persons who fought within some of the terrorist organizations in Syria and Iraq, the National Coordination Body formed a Working Group to define procedures for specific actions towards foreign terrorist fighters and their families, after their return to the Republic of Serbia.

As of 2018, NCB representatives are also participating in the activities of Regional Network of National P-CVE Coordinators (coordinators in the field of preventing and combating violent extremism) of the Western Balkans.

As already mentioned, in the segment of advancing the prevention of all forms of radicalism and violent extremism leading to terrorism, the realization of several multiagency projects has begun.

On the formation of a multi-agency team at central level to support local communities in case-by-case risk management, the Service for Combating Terrorism launched an initiative in mid-2019 to begin activities to establish a Model for the Prevention of Radicalization and Violent Extremism Leading to Terrorism in the Republic of Serbia..

This model involves the establishment of a central level Initial assessment team, which would assess the validity of the initial information that a person is at risk of radicalization, provide an assessment of that person's level of radicalization and risk, as appropriate, and collect information from other institutions, and decision on further action, supporting other institutions in dealing with such persons. The establishment of a prevention system in the Republic of Serbia would be in two phases: the first phase would involve the formation of a multiagency working group, which would be in charge of preparing the necessary conditions for establishing a Team; the second phase would involve the formation of the Team and activities to establish its functionality. It is expected that the NCB will form a Working Group for the establishment of the above multiagency Team in the forthcoming period.

We are currently in the process of negotiations with the OSCE Mission in Serbia regarding the additional project activities such as - "Strengthening the capacity to recognize the first signs of radicalization and prevent violent extremism and radicalization leading to terrorism" – with a particular focus on training additional trainers, developing a training plan that would cover the entire territory of the Republic of Serbia, as well as teaching materials and training of the Local Security Councils, local police, educators and social workers. Internal procedures have already been initiated to obtain the necessary approvals for the implementation of the above project activities.

Republic of Serbia actively participate on the meetings within the informal RAN Expert Network and participate in the EU Radicalization Awareness Network (RAN) conferences.

With regard to the detection and reporting of terrorist content on the Internet, in early 2019, with the support of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, the project "Strengthening National Capabilities to Combat the Misuse of the Internet for Terrorist Purposes" began, which aims to improve the capacity to find, identify, collect and process information about incriminating activities of terrorists on the Internet in such a way that they can also be used as evidence in possible criminal proceedings. Planned project activities include: participating in study visits to units responsible for preventing misuse of the Internet (Italy, IRU EUROPOL, Germany, Estonia) for police officers of the Service for Combating Terrorism and competent prosecutors; material and technical equipment for the Service for Combating Terrorism (appropriate hardware and software tools); organizing seminars, workshops, expert meetings and production of information materials.

In addition, we participate in the SIRIUS, Europol's Expert Platform, which is a secure web platform for law enforcement professionals and serves to convey knowledge, best practice and expertise in criminal offenses committed through misuse of the Internet, with particular reference to the fight against terrorism.

In order to combat the misuse of the Internet for terrorist purposes, Service for Combating Terrorism has established international cooperation with private companies that own social networks such as Facebook and Twitter.

The absence of well-established procedures for removing content from domestic web portals was recognized as a problem, so consultations of the Service for Combating Terrorism with the Ministry of Trade, Tourism and Telecommunications, as the competent authority began in order to solve the problem.

In mid-2019, the National Coordination Body for the Prevention and Combat of Terrorism formed a Working Group to develop a Plan of Action for the return of foreign terrorist fighters and members of their families to the territory of the Republic of Serbia (hereinafter: the Working Group). The Working Group was formed with the task of directing, harmonizing and defining a closer course of action and planning of the competent authorities of the Republic of Serbia in case of return of foreign terrorist fighters and members of their families, citizens of the Republic of Serbia, to the territory of the Republic of Serbia.

The activities of the Working Group were resulted by the drafting of the Plan of Action which is submitted to the National Coordination Body for consideration. The Plan of Action envisages the activities of the competent institutions, which will be implemented through four phases:

- Phase of preparatory activities, before the return of foreign terrorist fighters and their families to the Republic of Serbia
- Phase of immediate acceptance of a person as soon as he/she enters the Republic of Serbia
- Phase of stay in the reception centre and
- Phase of reintegration into the local environment

Based on the Plan of Action, Local Teams will be in charge of implementing the Phase of reintegration in the local environment for the purpose of re-socialization of persons, comprising representatives of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development, the Ministry of Labour, Employment, Veteran and Social Policy, the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Interior.

Local teams are planned to be formed to cover the territory of the city of Belgrade and three other administrative districts in the territory of the Republic of Serbia (Raški, Pčinjski and Podunavski), i.e. parts of Serbia from where the largest number of foreign terrorist fighters and members of their families left to join terrorist organizations active in Syria and Iraq.

It should be noted that, according to a criminal complaint filed by the Service for Combating Terrorism, the Prosecutor's Office for Organized Crime of the Republic of Serbia has indicted seven persons charged with the criminal offenses of terrorist association in connection with the criminal offenses of recruitment and training for committing terrorist offenses, public incitement to commit terrorist acts and terrorist financing related to armed conflict and terrorist activities in Syria and Iraq. The Higher Court in Belgrade, the Special Department, rendered on 04/04/2018, the first instance verdict against the accused persons, which was upheld by the Court of Appeal on 22/03/2019 and became final.

Communication with EUROPOL and its partners takes place through the EUROPOL's Secure Information Exchange Network Application (SIENA). SIENA also has a separate platform specifically created for the direct exchange of information between national counter-terrorism units (CT SIENA - Counter-Terrorism SIENA), to which the Ministry of Interior has been attached since April 2017. For easier and more efficient communication, Service for Combating Terrorism is enabled to exchange data directly and independently through CT SIENA, that is, certain officers of the Service for Combating Terrorism were given direct access to the CT SIENA platform, which, until May 2019, was used only through a Serbian liaison officer at EUROPOL headquarters. From June 2019 to the end of 2019, Service for Combating Terrorism exchanged a total of 394 messages via CT SIENA (327 received and 67 sent) and 129 (110 received and 19 sent) in the first quarter of 2020.

The Ministry of Interior regularly checks through Europol databases and at the same time participates in their filling and updating by submitting their requests or responding to requests from foreign police. The access to the EUROPOL databases is made possible with the assistance of EUROPOL, since the Republic of Serbia is not an EU Member State, but a third party, that is, an operational partner of EUROPOL. Information is also obtained through communication with EU Member States and third parties - Europol's operational and strategic partners, including the US services, FBI and ICE, which play a significant role in the fight against terrorism, especially when it comes to monitoring terrorist financing and checking money transactions through Western Union. Through the exchange of information, biometric data (fingerprints) and DNA profiles are verified, both through the national databases of other countries and through the EUROPOL databases.

The Ministry of Interior is particularly active in checking and contributing to the databases of EUROPOL's Analysis Projects (AP) Travellers (dedicated to FTF) and Hydra (dedicated to Islamist terrorism) within EUROPOL's Counter-Terrorism Operational Centre, to which it has been associated since 2015, on the basis of a signed Working Arrangement with EUROPOL. MoI participates in the databases of EUROPOL's European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC) through the exchange of data through SIENA and CT SIENA, but also cooperates with other analysis projects within the EUROPOL's Counter-Terrorism Analysis Work File, such as AP TFTP, which deals with monitoring terrorist financing. The Ministry of Interior is actively involved in the drafting of a unified list of foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs), supported by EUROPOL, in which INTERPOL was one of the partners. As part of this project, the Ministry of Interior provided a national FTF list with available biometric data, which was entered into the Europol Information System (EIS) and submitted to the Czech Republic, as an intermediary, for entering this data into the second generation Schengen Information System (SIS II), with given that Serbia is not an EU

member state and does not have access to this system, but retains ownership of the information provided.

The Europol database on terrorism also stores and processes data that is regularly exchanged and updated within the framework of Europol's Analysis Project "Lifeline", in whose realization participate the police officers of the Service for Combating Terrorism. The said project was initiated on 19/06/2018 by the European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC), EUROPOL, and refers to foreign terrorist fighters from the national lists of Western Balkan countries (Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenia, Albania, Croatia, Northern Macedonia, Serbia, and also from Czech Republic). As part of the AP Lifeline, data on the financial transactions of persons / suspects who participated in these transactions with foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) from the national FTF list of the Republic of Serbia are regularly exchanged and updated, either as recipients or as senders of the money.

During 2019, police officers of the Service for Combating Terrorism actively participated and contributed to the work of Europol's project "Syrian Wallet", which is related to the fight against the financing of the activities of foreign terrorist fighters.

All of the above-mentioned will be contained as a response of the Republic of Serbia through activities that are concretized in the text of the CT Arrangement between EU and the Republic of Serbia, with first implementation report foreseen to be conducted by the end of July 2020.

Our expectation from the arrangement is that after a period of two years of implementation, it will create a starting point for further improvement of policies in the field of deradicalization and the entire prevention system, including treatment in prisons.

On the other hand, we expect that the analysis of the achievements will show what challenges we face when it comes to the protection of critical infrastructure, control of explosives precursors, how to monitor money flows financing terrorist activities and their preparation, as well as online propaganda and social networks

III ORGANISED CRIME

One of the four priorities in the work of the Ministry of the Interior is fight against organized crime and corruption.

Polycriminal structure of organized crime groups requires intensified international operational cooperation and information sharing with all relevant stakeholders.

Improvement of both, operational and strategic context of international police cooperation is a priority for the successful fight against organised crime.

On a strategic level, we are implementing our reforms aimed to reduce the general crime rate in three parallel but interconnected segments:

- Improvement of the normative framework for dealing with and defining the assessment of key security threats (i.e. the new Law on Police and the Strategic Threat Assessment of Serious and Organized Crime - SOCTA)
- Improvement of the organizational structure in such a way that the police are ready to independently, or in cooperation with international partners, conduct the most complex investigations according to the same methodology as other most developed police in the world.
- Strengthening human resources through further specialization and training of police officers

Through the initiative of the Ministry of Interior, at the level of the Government of the Republic of Serbia, we established for the first time specialized Governmental Bodies for the fight against drugs, terrorism, human trafficking and money laundering, which once again showed clear political support for establishing a comprehensive system for Republic of Serbia.

Through the composition of such specialized bodies, we have created single point of contact for cooperation with relevant EU authorities and specialized Agencies *(i.e. Counterterrorism coordinator, EMCDDA etc.) and made precondition for the further improvement of our cooperation in many fields.

When it comes to the Ministry of Interior, we have improved the capacities of a number of organizational units, established standard operating procedures and completely changed the way of work - from reactive to proactive:

Two new departments have been established in the Department of High-Tech Crime - for online fraud and payment card misuse, new Department for digital forensics has been established in the Center for Criminal Forensics, a permanent firearms team has been established, The Department for the Suppression of Human Trafficking and Human Trafficking in Service for combating organised crime was established – and through that change, the activities performed by the Border Police Directorate were transferred to the jurisdiction of the Criminal Police Directorate in order to increase efficiency of the criminal investigations, Service for fight against drugs, Service for Operational Analytics and Counter-Terrorism and Extremism Service has been established, Anti-Corruption Service established as a specialized organizational unit that directly cooperates with higher public prosecutor's offices, defined new scope of competencies of the Criminal Police Directorate in a way to perform the function of the National Central Office for the prevention of counterfeiting of means of payment as well as basic contact point for the exchange of operational information with foreign partners in the field of recovery of illegal property, New Department for Prevention of Misuse of Public Resources and Internet for the Purpose of Conducting Online

Investigations Established as well as New Department for Electronic and new Department for Information technology Forensic Expertise etc..

We have changed the concept of the work within the Police Directorate through the introduction of the Intelligence Led Policing model (ILP), where in the first year since the introduction of the new concept, we have reached over 125,000 operational reports, which greatly increases the speed, quality and volume of exchanged information between different line services of the Ministry of the Interior on the territory of the Republic of Serbia, and which significantly shortens the pre-trial procedure and enables all perpetrators of criminal acts to be prosecuted much more efficiently in front of the judicial authorities.

In this way, we have responded to the latest trend of organized crime - their versatility, i.e the diverse activities that an organized criminal group performs in order to obtain illegal property gain. By exchange and analysis of the operational reports of different lines of work, we create a picture of the security profile of a certain criminal group and through multidisciplinary teams, using all the information available, we conduct the investigation in order to provide quality evidence against perpetrators.

In the area of the fight against migrants smuggling, as an area of organized crime and drug trafficking for the improvement of cooperation at the operational level specifically it is necessary to: Intensify cooperation with countries of origin of irregular migrants, both bilateral and cooperation by means of the EUROPOL in the field of information exchange via secure electronic channels and through organizing meetings in order to work on specific cases,

Intensify cooperation with transit countries, especially with North Macedonia, Bulgaria and Romania in order to exchange initial findings on the existence of organized criminal groups of international characters, which are involved in human smuggling on the Western Balkans Route,

Simplify and speed up the procedures for information exchange and organization of bilateral and multilateral meetings of police officers with the possibility of participation of competent prosecutors,

Allocate funds of the EUROPOL and other EU agencies and international organizations for realizing previously stated activities in order to enable faster supply of necessary equipment for work, that is, timely education with the view of getting familiarized with new trends in the area of human smuggling either by means of seminar courses or web platforms, that is, by getting familiarized with new, in practice proved to be efficient, methods of work of police units across the EU in form of study visits,

International cooperation should remain a priority, especially with the countries in the region. The Western Balkans, as well as with EU members. Cooperation with South American countries of origin and production of narcotic drugs should also be intensified. In this regard, it is necessary to establish direct cooperation with law enforcement authorities in these countries. To this end, we are of the opinion that support for the provision of funds for the purpose of financing operational and other meetings, travel expenses, etc. would contribute to improving operational cooperation. The aim of such cooperation, which would be manifested through direct communication with partners from South American countries, is to build trust between the authorities, which is often recognized as a key factor in effective operational international cooperation,

Particular emphasis should be placed on harmonizing legislation in all countries of Europe in order to carry out joint investigations of an international character more effectively. The aim is to carry out, in a synchronized manner, the investigations undertaken by the Joint Investigation Teams of two or more countries, in terms of the duration, content and manner of implementation of the investigative measures. Particular attention should be paid to the provision of information to investigative and judicial authorities when it comes to the conduct of criminal proceedings in relation to offenses related to international drug trafficking,

Due to the fact that organized crime groups are increasingly using highly sophisticated means of communication that have a very high level of crypto protection (be it online communications or servers where crypto-telephone communication is stored), there are often challenges in intercepting such real-time communication, which makes it much more difficult to monitor the communication between OCG members. For these reasons, the human factor is more important than ever, and other ways of gathering information need to be encouraged. One way is to intensify the use of informants and associates. In this regard, we believe that in order to detect and investigate the criminal activities of the OCG, it would greatly contribute to providing financial assistance for more frequent involvement of informants and associates.

Considering that the OCG, whose main criminal activity is drug trafficking, most often use river and road transport for transport through the territory of Serbia, we consider it extremely important to provide assistance for risk assessment in order to control the transit in river and road traffic, primarily in the form of technical equipment and training.

Police officers from the Organized Crime Unit regularly participate in EMPACT activities, and we believe that financing operational meetings between the Western Balkan countries, without the necessary involvement of one of the EU member states, as well as the possibility of donating technical equipment, would significantly improve the cooperation of partners from the Western Balkans.

In accordance with the EU directive, in connection with the establishment of a national observatory and early warning system, The Law On Psychoactive Controlled Substances was adopted and harmonized in 2018. This law defines that the national observatory and the early warning system fall within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Health. In this regard, the Ministry of Health has formed both bodies. Reporting to the EMCDDA is regular, as is participation in EU meetings, on all indicators. The challenge for improving the overall system at the national level is to create integrated software, which would also allow integrated collection and management of data. In this regard, in order to achieve the full national capacity to respond to EMCDDA and UNODC requirements (seizure records, ARQ report...), we believe that a project / assistance from EU MS would be essential in order to harmonize the existing database in Drugs Combatting Service with the needs of the National Criminal Forensics Center.

In order to successfully overcome the existing challenges, we need help in creating the most effective conceptual solution, assistance in the form of providing material and technical resources and trainings, as well as scientific research in these fields.

In accordance with the activities in the Action Plan for Chapter 24 - Justice, Freedom and Security) – regarding the establishment of the Asset Recovery Office - ARO: it is decided that the Financial Investigation Unit in the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Serbia shall perform the tasks of the Asset Recovery Office – ARO in the Republic of Serbia as the primary contact point. The second contact point will be established within the Ministry of Justice, for Mutual legal assistance purpose.

Continuous activities are being undertaken in order to establish ARO (Asset Recovery Office) in the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Serbia: Improvement of access to databases of other state bodies, first of all, improvement of access to the database of the Republic Geodetic Authority, the National Bank of Serbia and the Tax Administration, contact persons in the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Serbia (Prosecutor's Office and the Court), Directorate for Confiscated Property Management, and Administration for the Prevention of Money Laundering of the Ministry of Finance were appointed, who will be in charge of communication with the FIU, established security

channel for communication and information exchange in the Financial Investigation Unit, with other AROs, through SIENA - Secure Information Exchange Network Application.

The Rulebook on internal organization and job classification within the Ministry of Interior of the Republic of Serbia has been adopted, with the description of the operations of the Financial Investigation Unit, which indicates the leading role of conducting international cooperation to be performed by the Financial Investigation Unit, material and technical conditions are provided for the functioning of the ARO office, an initiative has been submitted to the Ministry of Justice of the Republic of Serbia in order to amend the Law on Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime related to adopting the possibility for the Financial Investigation Unit to keep the necessary records on submitted and received information. In line with the above mentioned, an analysis of the legal framework for the start-up of the Asset Recovery Office are ongoing.
