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NOTE

from: Presidency
to: Working Party on Information Exchange and Data Protection (DAPIX)
Subject: Outcome of the 3rd Conference on Police and Customs Cooperation Centres (PCCCs) on 6 and 7 November 2012, Brussels, Belgium

On 6 and 7 November 2012, the 3rd Conference on Police and Customs Cooperation Centres (PCCCs) was held in Brussels under the aegis of the Cyprus Presidency. The Conference was co-financed by the European Commission.

The Presidency's aim was to maintain the impetus of the first and second Conferences held under the Belgian and Polish Presidencies respectively and, in particular, to discuss the progress made on the roadmap for the development of PCCCs in the EU. This roadmap was endorsed by the Conference in 2011, and subsequently the assessment of SIENA as a possible information exchange channel for PCCCs was suggested as action 7.2 for the 2nd action list for the implementation of the Information Management Strategy (see doc. 5709/1/12 REV 1 DAPIX 7 ENFOPOL 18 CRIMORG 8 ENFOCUSTOM 4).

The following three items were on the agenda for this year's conference:

- 1) the assessment of the feasibility and benefits of the implementation and the use of SIENA in a PCCC,
- 2) the creation and promotion of a platform for PCCCs within the Europol Platform for Experts (EPE) and
- 3) the assessment of the need for updating the PCCC guidelines.

In preparation of the conference, the Presidency sent out a questionnaire with regard to these three items and assessed the need for other issues to discuss during the conference.

The first day of the Conference was attended by the national PCCC coordinators only. Firstly, the results of the questionnaire sent out by the Presidency in April 2012 were presented. Secondly, the Europol Platform for Experts (EPE) for PCCCs was presented to the conference. The tool is already operational and prior to the conference PCCC coordinators were invited to access the EPE in order to assess the usefulness and make suggestions for improvement. Thirdly, four case studies of police operations were presented, demonstrating that the PCCCs are able to provide support for police operations. Fourthly, the European best practice guidelines for PCCCs as adopted by the Council under the French Presidency in 2008, and as amended under the Czech Presidency in 2009 and the Belgian Presidency in 2010, were discussed based on the input of the questionnaire.

At the end of the first day of the Conference, the Presidency concluded that

1. The use of PCCCs on a daily basis could facilitate the work of law enforcement authorities;
2. The Europol Platform for Experts (EPE) in the PCCCs was a very useful tool for improving the exchange of experience and best practices featuring non-operational information such as guidelines, discussion groups and contact information that can be used on a daily basis by PCCC staff;
3. PCCCs were a very useful and efficient tool for assisting law enforcement operations and that the knowledge of PCCC staff concerning police, customs, legal and judicial procedures and organisations as well as language skills were very beneficial for specific police operations and day-to-day police work as illustrated by the presentations;

4. The results of the questionnaire underlined a general need for updating the guidelines but didn't show clear trends. A core group should be set up to assess in detail which specific chapters of the guidelines for PCCCs should be updated.

On the second day of the Conference, the PCCC coordinators were joined by representatives of national authorities. The following items were examined: firstly, the possible use of SIENA by the PCCCs; secondly, the role of customs in the PCCCs; thirdly, the operational and strategic crime analysis; fourthly, information flows and the chain of requests; and fifthly, the project entitled "Strengthening of PCCC Cooperation in the European Union" funded under the ISEC financial programme and led by Germany.

The conclusions of the second day of the Conference concluded that:

1. SIENA was considered an alternative solution with the potential to make the PCCCs more efficient and effective and which would offer a suitable level of data protection and the requisite level of security. Member States are invited to (a) evaluate the level of personal data involved in the use of SIENA; (b) assess the big differences between Member States in required protective measures for the use of SIENA, (c) assess the need for a different type of access to SIENA allowing processing non restricted information only. The next steps would be taken depending on the results of a feasibility study as to the implementation of SIENA;
2. the presence of customs authorities in the PCCCs was highly recommended as an added value for our work on cross-border crime as illustrated by the presentations;
3. operational and strategic crime analysis could be used as the best possible means of support for the day-to-day business of the PCCCs, to be conducted in order to support the police and customs authorities during investigations and operations in the border regions;
4. information flows are the bedrock of the PCCCs and should be further discussed, even with regard to the admissibility of chain requests, in the core group charged with updating the guidelines with a view to providing solutions to problems in this area.

5. The ISEC-funded project "Strengthening of PCCC Cooperation in the European Union" was aimed at implementing the EU policy on PCCCs and activities were based on the PCCC roadmap, action r 7 concerning the Information Management Strategy and the PCCC guidelines. The project of 36 month would seek close cooperation with Cepad, Europol, DAPIX and the European Commission.
