



Strasbourg, 26 April 2019

CDCT (2018) 1rev2

STEERING COMMITTEE ON COUNTER-TERRORISM (CDCT)

24/7 Network of Contact Points on Foreign Terrorist Fighters

**Information provided by the Secretariat
– Update 4**

Secretariat of the Counter-Terrorism Division
Information Society and Action against Crime Directorate, DG I

www.coe.int/terrorism

At its Ministerial Session in Sofia on 18 May 2016, the Committee of Ministers decided to “call for the expeditious designation of the 24/7 contact points to facilitate the timely exchange of information, as provided for by the Additional Protocol to the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism (CETS No. 217), pending its entry into force”.

The Council of Europe 24/7 Network of Contact Points on Foreign Terrorist Fighters (hereinafter “the Network”) has been operational since 1 December 2016 and currently counts 46 designated Contact Points, including one for the European Union.

The first meeting of the Contact Points was held on 17 October 2016. On that occasion, participants discussed several key matters including the potential added value of the Network, the modalities to exchange information, and the security and confidentiality aspects. Amongst the main outcomes from the first meeting, the most important was the need to set up the Network in a way which enables Contact Points to request, send and receive information *vis-à-vis* other Contact Points, and to channel such requests or information to other relevant national-level authorities without delay.

The second meeting of the Contact Points was held on 21 March 2017. The aim of the second meeting was to evaluate the efficiency of the Network on the basis of the experience gained and to discuss how to further improve its function. The meeting also provided the opportunity to discuss various aspects of the Network, to identify any critical issues, and to put suggestions and ideas for improvements on the table.

The Secretariat informed the Contact Points of the results of a “ping test” conducted to assess whether the Network is functioning. The “ping test” consisted of sending out an e-mail to all Contact Points requesting that they acknowledge receipt. It was agreed that more “ping tests” will be carried out in the future in order to better assess and further improve the functioning of the Network. Participants agreed on the importance of ensuring that the Contact Points are easily reachable on a 24/7 basis. It was also noted that all stakeholders should ensure a more robust co-operation between the Contact Points themselves and also between the Contact Points and the Secretariat of the Council of Europe.

On the occasion of the Council of Europe Ministerial Session in Cyprus on 19 May 2017, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mr Thorbjørn Jagland, informed the Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the member States about the state of play with regards to the Network.

The Additional Protocol entered into force on 1 July 2017. To date, it has been ratified by 16 member States and has 25 signatories.

The third meeting of the Contact Points took place on 20 April 2018. The main aim of the meeting was to examine further the efficiency of the Network in the light of the experience gained, to identify possible means of improvement on its main operational aspects, to evaluate the capacity of the Network to contribute to addressing the issue of returning foreign terrorist fighters and to inform the contact points on the outcome of the second round of “ping test” run by the Secretariat.

Several Contact Points remarked the usefulness of the Network, as it provides an easy and fast solution for the immediate exchange of police information in critical situations. Its added value was further highlighted with regards to the exchange of information between countries which have no bilateral agreements in place. The Contact Points also initiated a discussion on the added value of opening-up the Network towards non-member States of the Council of Europe.

The same issue was dealt by the members of the CDCT Bureau in the course of their 3rd meeting, held on 9 April 2019. On this occasion, it was noted that, in order to ensure the most efficient cooperation for disseminating warnings about the movements of foreign terrorist fighters, the Secretariat should find ways of involving relevant non-member States in the Network and that such process should start by extending the invitation to Council of Europe's observer States (Canada, Holy See, Japan, Mexico and United States of America) and States covered by the Council of Europe Neighbourhood Partnerships (Morocco and Tunisia). Finally, the Bureau instructed the Secretariat to gather information from the contact points in order to be able to better assess the efficiency of the 24/7 Network.

The fourth meeting of the Contact Points will take place in the second half of 2019, on a date to be confirmed. Participants will again discuss the functioning of the Network and possible means of improvement. They will also be asked to further address the practical use of the Network, including by providing concrete examples and results achieved. Furthermore, the Contact Points will be informed of the results of the "ping test" run by the Secretariat between December 2018 and February 2019.