

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Strasbourg, 3 November 2017

CODEXTER (2017) 3rev

COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON TERRORISM (CODEXTER)

24/7 Network of Contact Points on Foreign Terrorist Fighters

Information provided by the Secretariat - update

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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 41 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 10 member States and has 28 signatories.

The third meeting of the Contact Points is planned for early 2018 (exact date still to be determined). On the occasion of the next meeting, the Council of Europe will invite the representatives of the contact points to inform the Secretariat and their counterparts about how the Network operates within their national legislation and practices. Representatives will also have the opportunity to share experiences with and expectations for the Network as well as to explore means to further increase mutual confidence and thereby the efficiency of the Network.