Proposal to open negotiations on the Commission recommendation for a Council decision authorising the opening of negotiations for an agreement between the EU and Lebanon on the exchange of personal data between Europol and the Lebanese competent authorities for fighting serious crime and terrorism

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PURPOSE: to open negotiations for an agreement between the European Union and Lebanon on the exchange of personal data between the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) and the Lebanese competent authorities for fighting serious crime and terrorism.

BACKGROUND: in a globalised world where serious crime and terrorism are increasingly transnational and polyvalent, Europol should therefore be able to exchange personal data with law enforcement authorities of third countries to the extent necessary for the accomplishment of its tasks.

Regulation (EU) 2016/794 establishes a legal framework for Europol. It sets out the rules for the **transfer of personal data from Europol to third countries** and international organisations. Since the entry into application of the Regulation (1 May 2017), and pursuant to the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), the Commission is responsible, on behalf of the Union, for negotiating international agreements with third countries for the exchange of personal data with Europol.

Taking into account the political strategy as outlined in the European agenda on security and the potential benefits of closer cooperation in this area, the Commission considers it necessary to start negotiations in the short-term with **eight countries**, as identified in the 11th progress report towards a genuine and effective Security Union.
The 2016-2020 Europol strategy identifies the Mediterranean region as priority for enhanced partnerships. The 2017-2020 Europol external strategy also stresses the need for closer cooperation between Europol and the **Middle East/North Africa (MENA)** due to the current terrorist threat and migration-related challenges.

Based on data available as well as Europol's in-house expert knowledge, cooperation with Lebanon is needed in particular to counter the following crime phenomena:

- **terrorism**: the destabilisation of Syria (and its potential spill-over), the spread of Da'esh and other designated terrorist groups pose a direct security threat to Lebanon and the EU;
- **migration-related challenges**: Lebanon is host to a significantly large population of irregular migrants and through an EU funded Integrated Border Management programme is being assisted in securing and controlling its borders;
- **firearms trafficking**: the EU and Lebanon have established cooperation on firearms and agreed a work programme including exchange of best practices, training and capacity building;

- **drug trafficking**: the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is a major source, transit point, and consumer of illicit drugs. The second main producer of cannabis and resin of cannabis in the MENA region is Lebanon.

CONTENT: the purpose of this **Recommendation for a Council Decision** is to obtain from the Council an authorisation from the Council for the Commission to negotiate, on behalf of the European Union, **an agreement between the European Union and Lebanon** on the exchange of personal data between the European Union Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation (Europol) and the Lebanese competent authorities for fighting serious crime and terrorism.

In order to respect the principle of **purpose limitation**, cooperation under the agreement shall only cover forms of crime and related criminal offences for which Europol is competent. In particular, cooperation should aim to combat terrorism and prevent radicalisation, disrupt organised crime, including trafficking of migrants, firearms and drugs, and combat cybercrime.

The agreement should respect **fundamental rights** and observe the principles recognised by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, in particular the right to private and family life, the right to the protection of personal data, and the right to effective remedy and fair trial.