

# STRENGTHENED COOPERATION WITH SOUTHERN PARTNER COUNTRIES: Achievements of the Euromed Police IV Project

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### Abstract

*The rapidly changing security environment in the Euro-Mediterranean region has made it imperative for international, regional, and state actors to engage in strategic and operational cooperation way beyond the traditional law enforcement fields. Risks arising from terrorism, trafficking in human beings, cybercrime, firearms trafficking, and drug trafficking are increasingly shared by both the EU and South Partner Countries. These challenges have brought about the firm willingness of affected EU and MENA countries to work together to enhance citizen's security by reinforcing law enforcement cooperation through joint capacity-building efforts under the aegis of the Euromed Police projects. This paper thus aims to shed light on and disseminate good practices related to the particular approach and tangible results of the EU-funded Euromed Police IV project. In early 2020, the project came to the end of its 4<sup>th</sup> phase, which makes it an influential law enforcement actor in the Euro-Mediterranean region.*

**Keywords:** *Euromed Police, law enforcement cooperation, MENA region, organised crime areas, capacity-building*

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## Introduction

Euromed Police IV was a regional project funded by the European Union for the period 2016-2020, implemented by a consortium<sup>2</sup> led by Civipol<sup>3</sup> under the supervision of the Directorate-General for European Neighbourhood Policy and Enlargement Negotiations of the European Commission (DG NEAR). Three previous projects had been implemented between 2004 and 2014 (EuropeAid Cooperation Office DG, European Commission, 2005; European Commission, 2010; European Police College, 2010) before DG NEAR-funded Euromed Police entered its fourth phase. Over the course of the past 14 years, this project has yielded several long-term partnerships across the MENA region. The Southern Mediterranean countries (the People's Democratic Republic of Algeria, the Arab Republic of Egypt, Israel, the Kingdom of Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, the Syrian Arab Republic,<sup>4</sup> the Kingdom of Morocco, Palestine and the Republic of Tunisia), the EU Agencies and participating EU Member States (France, Italy, Germany, Romania, Spain, Slovak Republic, Netherlands) constituted the implementing partners of Euromed Police IV. The project's overall objective was to increase citizen security across the Euro-Mediterranean area through the strengthening of law enforcement cooperation between the Southern Mediterranean countries, as well as between these countries, the Member States of the European Union, EU agencies and thus the EU itself through the provision of tailored capacity-building, based on the principles and international standards for good governance, democratic accountability, the rule of law and the respect for human rights.

### At the core of current EU priorities and strategic interests based on an equal partnership

The Euromed Police IV project fostered a form of cooperation that is adapted to the MENA region based on shared interests and with a flexible geographical area of action, allowing for different levels of involvement for partner countries without being excluded from the core activities. The European Commission published the package of anti-terrorism measures of the EU in October 2017 (European Commission, 2017a). This policy involved a proposal for enhancing Europol's cooperation with third countries, including Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco and Tunisia on the transfer of personal data between Europol and these countries to prevent and combat terrorism and serious organised crime (European Commission, 2017a: p.15). In December 2017, Europol Manage-

2 The implementing consortium members include the Directorate for international cooperation of the French Ministry of Interior (DCI), the International and Ibero-American Foundation for Administration and Public Policies (FIAPP), the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ), the International Security and Emergency Management Institute (ISEMI) and the Italian Ministry of Interior – Public Security Department.

3 A consulting and service company of the French Ministry of Interior.

4 The participation of the Syrian Arab Republic in the Euromed Police IV project was suspended temporarily.

ment Board adopted a list of priority countries, including but not limited to the ones as mentioned above, of which structured and regular cooperation is expected in the area of the mandate of Europol (Europol, 2017a). Although the EU Agency has the power to establish and maintain cooperative relations with competent authorities of third countries in general, Europol needs the Commission's recommendation to the Council to authorise opening negotiations with third countries (cf. Articles 23-25 of the Regulation (EU) 2016/794), in this case, Euromed project members, if the cooperation leads systematic, massive or structural transfers of personal data.

Furthermore, the overall objective of the reviewed European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is *"to support the stabilisation of Europe's Neighbourhood and its resilience"* (European Commission, 2017b: p.11) that lied at the heart of the efforts of Euromed Police IV, corresponding to the external and internal security nexus. One key finding of the renewed ENP is that terrorism, hybrid threats, cybersecurity, organised crime and external border management have all internal and external dimensions, suggesting that security at home largely depends on stability and peace beyond borders. The renewed ENP also provides that *"Terrorism, violent extremism and various forms of organised crime affect both the EU and its Neighbourhood. For these reasons, increasing security is a shared objective relevant to all ENP countries."* (Ibid. p.19) Shared objectives require a more balanced relationship with partners, based on better targeted and ENP objectives.

Furthermore, the new ENP also introduced a new approach that foresees greater respect for the diverse aspirations of the EU's partners, more successful pursuit of areas of mutual interest and new working methods to support a greater sense of ownership by the partners. Building on the considerations foreseen by the revised ENP Strategy, Euromed Police IV sought to continue to implement its particular approach to reflect more on the ambitions of its partners. It aimed for the trustful cooperation based on ownership over the policies decided by the parties in the framework of the EU assistance.

### **An innovative cooperation methodology for the MENA region**

The Mediterranean is a key geographical area of interest for the European Union. Lying at the crossroads between Africa, the Middle East and Europe, it is an attractive hub for criminal networks operating across borders. In the last few years, the EU's interdependence with its southern neighbours has been brought into sharp focus, portraying the migration crisis and the rise of ISIL/Da'esh through powerful illustrations throughout the EU. Internal and external security aspects are more interconnected than ever, and most of the pressing security challenges for the EU Member States have both an internal and external dimension, including terrorism, hybrid threats, cybersecurity, organised crime and external border management, amongst others. (European Commission, 2015) Yet,

substantial intelligence and capacity-building gaps may be identified in light of the extent and nature of the multifold criminal activities in the Euro-Mediterranean area, which constitutes one of the regions where international cooperation is lagging.

Building on the European Neighbourhood Policy's (ENP) revised approach; the Euromed Police IV project developed an innovative methodology for cooperation within the Southern Mediterranean region, between the EU South Partner Countries (SPCs), EU countries and EU agencies (Europol, CEPOL, Frontex), international and regional police organisations (Interpol, Afripol), as well as international organisations (UNODC, UNHCR, IOM, etc.) working in the core priority areas. It intended to build a fully-fledged model embedding, in the same policy cycle, the assessment of the security landscape, the identification of the capacity gaps and cooperation needs, decision-making tools at different levels of action – from the technical level to more strategic levels of decision-making – and mechanisms to review the programming cycle. By developing its networks and mechanisms, Euromed Police IV paved the way for the establishment of longer-term structures of cooperation and effective co-planning between the SPCs and EU agencies specialised in the fight against terrorism and serious organised crime, each one in its domain of excellence: capacity-building for CEPOL and information sharing with Europol.

Consequently, the role of the Euromed Police IV was manifold. First, to optimise the impact of its capacity-building activities, it chose to provide *a coordinated technical approach to the Euro-Mediterranean law enforcement cooperation and regional police cooperation*, based on well-identified priority areas and the formulation of a strategy for increasing citizen security, similarly to the priorities established by the European Union at the EU Policy Cycle to tackle serious and organised international crime targeted by the EU member states' law enforcement community in the so-called EMPACT<sup>5</sup> projects. Accordingly, core priority crime areas included terrorism, trafficking in human beings and facilitated illegal immigration, cybercrime, illicit trading in firearms and drug trafficking. These core priority areas were complemented by cross-cutting criminal threats, namely document fraud, financial crime, and money laundering (Europol, 2017a: p.57) authorities have to address as regional (Euro-Mediterranean) security challenges related to organised crime of a transboundary nature adequately. Second, it aimed to boost *border control capabilities and strengthen crime analysis capacities and the exchange of information, thus strategic and operational cooperation*, among Southern Mediterranean countries as well as with the EU Member States and EU Agencies (Europol, 2017b). To this end, the project sought to enhance the sharing and analysis of strategic criminal intelligence and the use of existing channels for exchanging operational criminal data in priority areas. And third, the project provided a *tailored capacity building in the indicated priority areas*, based on the

<sup>5</sup> EMPACT is an acronym for European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats. (Council of the European Union, 2018)

identification of needs and gaps and promoted the sharing of existing expertise and best practices. (Euromed Police IV Project Team, 2017: p.1).

**Figure 1.** Euromed Police core priorities as defined by the Euromed Strategy (Source: Euromed Police IV Project Team)



### A platform for expert dialogue and inter-agency cooperation

The exchanges and the subsequent capacity-building actions provided senior and operational law enforcement professionals from the Euro-Mediterranean region, designated by their respective authorities to participate in the Euromed training activities. This also allowed an excellent opportunity to exchange work experiences concerning the priority areas defined by the Euromed Strategy. (Euromed Police IV Project Team, 2017). At the training activities, experts delivered practical presentations about their experience. They participated in field and institutional visits with fellow experts to explore the national practices of the hosting country at hand. Then, participants identified potential best practices and lessons learned in the given field. To ensure a maximum impact of the training events, the engagement of senior operational experts was ambitioned, and these experts were then encouraged to disseminate the best practices and lessons learned among their colleagues in the law enforcement environment. The ultimate aim of every activity was to enhance cooperation to improve the operational efficiency of law enforcement grassroots practitioners and other end users.

In addition to these mechanisms, two expert networks were established by the project. On the one hand, the *Euromed Analysis Network* is composed of national experts from the

national police forces of SPC countries, its members (one in each SPC, called ANASPOCs) carry out operational police work and have access to relevant data on organised crime and terrorist activities in their respective countries. *These single points of contacts* were appointed by the Partner Countries. They use standardised indicators developed during the project's implementation phase to update the Euromed Police IV team on the evolution of criminal trends at the national level. They further contributed to narrative descriptions and recommendations. In addition to that, the ANASPOCs collaborate among themselves through the *Euromed Threat Forum*, allowing for thematic discussions on threats and the exchange of strategic intelligence, notably via the *Euromed Threat Assessments*. The ANASPOCs meet face to face regularly to review intelligence gaps and strategic issues. However, it should be noted that the ANASPOCs do not process operational data.

On the other hand, the *Euromed Capacity Building Network* was created in the framework of the project to identify capacity gaps and therefore, *training and capacity- building needs assessment* throughout the project. The Euromed Capacity Building Network is composed of one single point of contact appointed in each SPC (CAPA-Spocs). The CAPA-Spocs meet regularly to discuss changing capacity needs, as well as occasions of capacity- building planning.

Furthermore, in compliance with the principles of sustainability, Euromed Police IV established several processes and mechanisms that will continue to operate on completion of the project phase. These include the *Euromed Cooperation Strategy to Increase Citizen Security* in priority areas, an online *Euromed Threat Forum* for the ongoing exchange and analysis of strategic intelligence, as well as an online *Euromed Knowledge Base* for the current exchange of experience and development of training materials that are managed by the Euromed Capacity Building Network.<sup>6</sup>

## Europol, CEPOL and Interpol as key partners

First, relying on its unique expertise in threat assessment and criminal analysis, *Europol (EU Agency for Law Enforcement Cooperation)* provided vital support to the Euromed Police IV project in the development of its primary outcomes. Europol advised the project team in setting up the Euromed Threat Assessment (EMTA) methodology as well as the questionnaires and indicators of the level of the threat. Europol currently hosts on its secure network the *Euromed Threat Forum* for the online exchange of strategic information regarding criminal threats. In addition to its technical support and expertise, the EU agency hosted the project's launching conference, high-level meetings and meetings of

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<sup>6</sup> For a cross-cutting summary, see the video footage of the (Euromed Police Team, 2018).

the Euromed Analysis Network, as well as it proactively contributed to the delivery of the first *Euromed Threat Assessment*. (Euromed Police IV Project Team, 2019)

## Threat assessment and identification of priorities, in partnership with Europol

The project's implementation phase started with preliminary threat assessments carried out on the Southern rim of the Mediterranean, using a rigorous methodology. As a first step, a matrix and a set of EMTA questionnaires were developed by the project team, allowing to collect information in a structured manner. This was followed by identification missions conducted in each SPC to evaluate the specific threats faced by the different countries, therefore avoiding a "one-size-fits-all approach." Based on this study, the risks that constituted an essential matter of concern in most of the SPCs were then identified as priority areas where specific action plans were subsequently developed. Both the priorities and action plans were embodied in a Euromed Strategy for Increasing Citizen Security drafted and adopted by all the SPCs. At this stage, the advantages of such a methodology could already be discerned. First, it ensured that the project addresses *real problems* in the target countries that were identified in the assessment of local law enforcement practitioners and their perception of the national security context. Second, it ensured that the project *priorities* primarily address the most pressing issues for the SPCs. Third, it allowed *ownership* through a formal endorsement of the priorities and action plans at a higher level of decision-making, paving the way for strategic thinking ahead and building-up substantial and sustainable policies for several years. Therefore, Euromed Police IV did not only provide a framework for coherent strategic planning but set out the mechanisms for continuous assessment of the objectives, ensuring that they remain relevant in the context of an ever-changing criminal landscape and the shifting political priorities of partner countries.

The *EMTA* generated an in-depth analysis of serious organised crime and terrorist activities on both sides of the Mediterranean and identified needs and gaps in terms of criminal intelligence knowledge and analysis. With the EMTA, the project sought to provide an analysis tool that helps the Euromed law enforcement community to make informed decisions and facilitate the collaboration with Europol's serious and organised crime and counter terrorism areas. It also fostered the joint strategic analysis of the threats to facilitate the cooperation between the Euromed partners. At the same time, it aims to help define operational action plans, based on the identification of the threats. Besides, the Euromed Police IV project offered the SPC countries a fully-fledged cycle for intelligence-led decision making. The EMTA constitutes a tool to establish operational action plans based on the identification of the threats at the national, sub-regional or regional levels. Also, the SPCs rely on its insights to plan targeted and tailor-made capacity- build-

ing actions. The final version of the EMTA was published in September 2019. Later on, the EMTA will be reviewed regularly to identify new threats and adapt the action plans to new challenges. The EMTA questionnaires, ongoing re-evaluation of the risks carried out by the Euromed Analysis Network and supported by the Euromed Threat Forum, as well as senior technical control via high-level meetings and the Euromed Strategy constituted together a fully-fledged cycle for structured and systematic threat evaluation, intelligence-sharing and operational planning in SPCs, forming a system that fostered the long-term establishment of robust networks for the exchange of information based on trust. Strategic discussions were also held at a higher level of decision-making, involving the Heads of SPCs' national polices. These discussions took place in the framework of high-level meetings, which were regularly organised by the project team to allow SPCs to update each other on the evolution of priorities.

At each level of representation, the project created the conditions for a friendly and trustful environment for law enforcement cooperation. In addition to the project team's permanent interpersonal contacts with partners, the National Coordinators appointed in each SPC played an essential role in maintaining interest and stimulating Euromed networks. Each capacity building action was co-organised and hosted by one SPC in its national law enforcement training academy or police headquarters, contributing to building adequate inter-personal knowledge and trust. Furthermore, High-Level meetings enhanced SPC's political and strategic ownership over all the activities carried out in the framework of the project. Euromed Police IV allowed SPCs to engage in the enhancement of their security structures proactively. This sense of ownership sparked sustainable commitment of SPCs in Euromed Police IV cooperation mechanisms based on existing and active networks, at the law enforcement practitioner's level and higher political levels. This relationship based on shared interests, interpersonal contacts and trust is now firmly rooted. Partner countries had become acquainted with the processes, as well as with the "Euromed Police brand" that already benefits from visibility and reliability in the region. Very importantly, these mechanisms shall continue to operate after the completion of the project, which corresponds to one of the main principles of Euromed Police, that is sustainability, and thus constitute the basis of future cooperation.

Secondly, it was a tailor-made approach that improved ownership, sensitivity to the aspirations of partner countries, and flexibility. This original approach could stimulate change in the MENA region where South Partner Countries do not ambition joining the EU. Furthermore, the project provided regional cooperation with a better focus through well-defined priority areas and systematic identification of intelligence and capacity gaps. The result is sustainable and integrated cooperation structures that support well-implemented networks oriented towards operational results. In line with the European Agenda on Security committed to extending the work of the EU Policy Cycle to neighbouring countries, this "Euromed policy-cycle" could be integrated into the EU Policy Cycle. Directly



inspired by Europol's flagship strategic criminal analysis report, Serious and Organised Crime Threat Assessment (SOCTA) (Europol, 2017a) and the EU Policy Cycle, the EMTA and the Euromed threat assessment process are fully interoperable with the working methods of the EU Member States and the European Union institutions and agencies. The synergies between the Euromed Police mechanisms and the EU Policy Cycle would also permit planning joint operational actions with South Partner Countries. As a result, the Euromed Police IV project made a significant contribution to criminal information management concerning EU security and to delivering better operational impact in terms of operational support to ensuring the safety of the Euromed area.

Figure 2. A summary document of the Euromed Threat Assessment (Euromed Police IV Project Team, 2019)



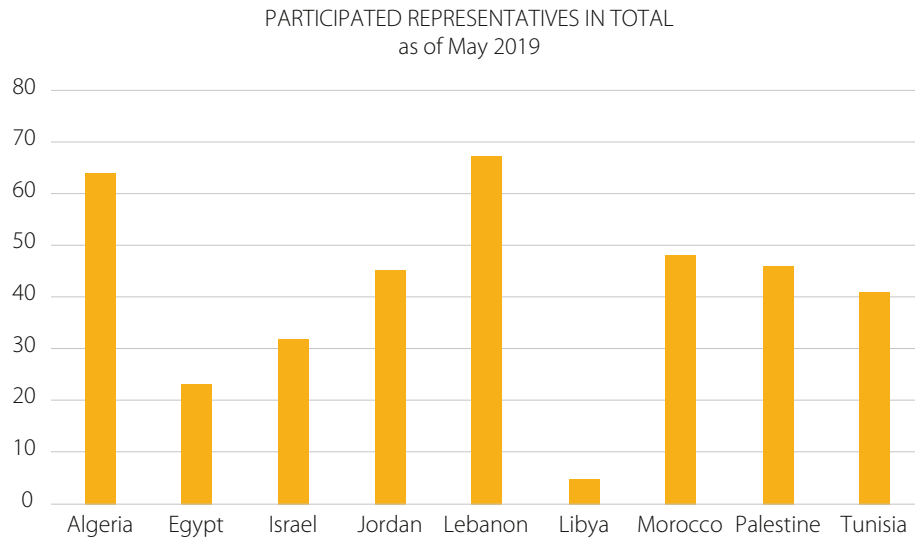
## Threat assessment for concrete results on the ground: targeted capacity building, in partnership with CEPOL

CEPOL (EU Agency for Law Enforcement Training) has been one of the key stakeholders in the project. At the same time, Euromed Police has also actively contributed to the establishment of CEPOL's longstanding strategic partnerships in the region. The *Euromed Mobility Scheme* was inspired by the CEPOL Exchange Programme and thus constituted the basis of the training context of Euromed exchanges, and thus his partnership has been crucial in the implementation of the training activities. Besides, a key expert was deployed to CEPOL to create the *Euromed Knowledge Base (EKB)* hosted and eventually owned by CEPOL. The EKB constituted a further EU commitment to provide yet another platform for law enforcement professionals both from EU and SPC countries to engage in discussions on the uploaded documents through various platforms to contribute to the formation of a body of knowledge and shared understanding of the training challenges, needs and gaps.

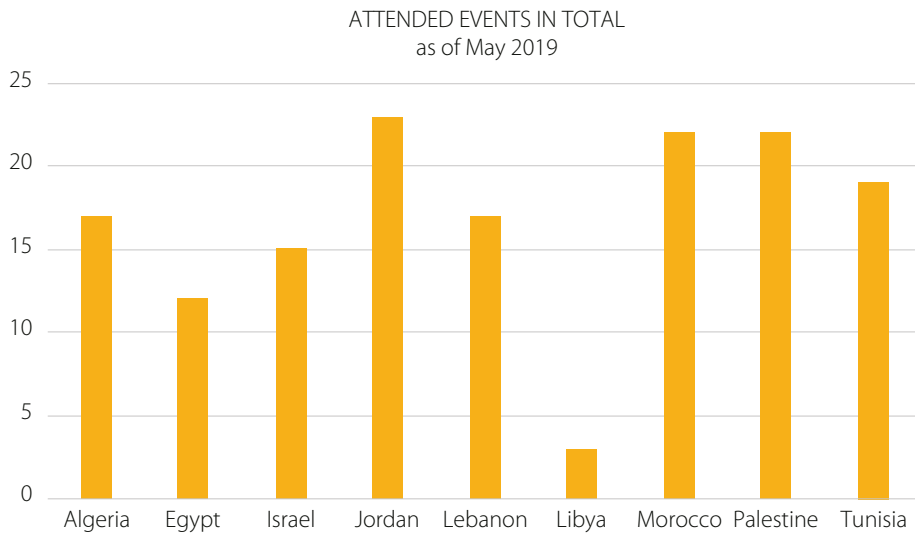
Threat assessment represented only one of the Euromed Police's two independent "policy cycles." As we shall go on to examine, capacity-building benefited from its network and autonomous policy development in the project in partnership with CEPOL. Although the two pillars of Euromed Police IV had their programming cycle, both are intertwined and self-reinforcing. Below we shall explain how threat assessments in SPCs feed in the identification of their needs in terms of capacity. Similarly, to the methodology used for threat assessment, the Euromed Police IV approach to capacity-building was based on an identification and prioritisation process that allowed targeting the most pressing capacity needs of SPCs.

The exchange of expertise taking place within the residential training was thus further complemented by field / institutional visits most related to the topic at hand in an attempt to enhance the participants' understanding of the good practices, lessons learned and the modus operandi of the different stakeholders of the host country. These visits generally took place in law enforcement facilities, nonetheless, for instance, during the exchange on firearms trafficking in January 2019, participants of the Euromed Police exchange were guided through the land border station at Nasib/Jaber constituting the crossing point between Jordan and Syria which had been re-opened only three months beforehand. Therefore, such field visits sought to provide participants with exclusive occasions of exchange, giving experts from both partner and EU countries a real opportunity to engage in further discussions substantially.

**Figure 3.** Total number of MENA participants in Euromed exchanges and capacity-building actions (Euromed Police IV project team)



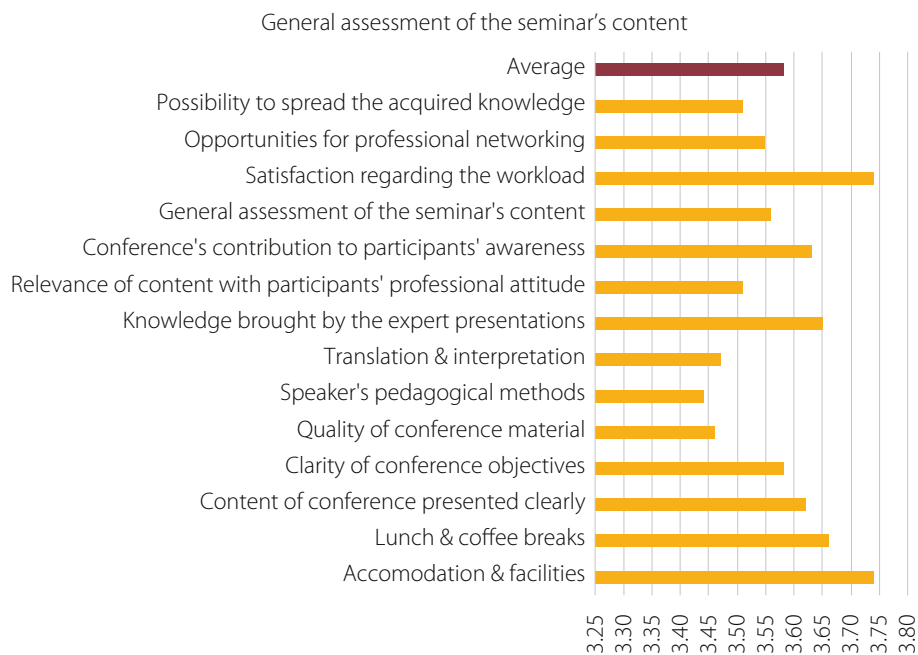
**Figure 4.** Country-specific data on the total number of MENA participants in Euromed exchanges and capacity-building actions before November 2018 (Source: Euromed Police IV Project Team)



The second step took the form of a more specific Euromed Police Capacity-Building Action (CBA) that was organised based on the results of an exchange to address the gaps identified during the training in one particular priority area of the project. For instance, a Euromed Exchange on counter terrorism was followed by CBA gathering experts in the field of online investigations, which had been described during the corresponding exchange as a central area of interest and one of the most striking capacity gaps in the field of counter terrorism for South Partner Countries.

As a third step and follow-up to the Euromed training sessions, the participating experts could

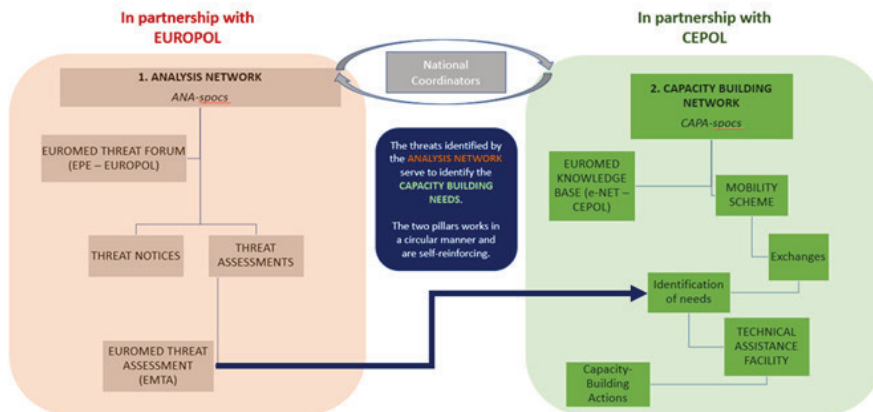
**Figure 5.** Evaluation outcome of the Euromed capacity building activities related to the detection of foreign terrorist fighters taking place in Algeria in November 2018 (Source: Euromed Police IV Project Team)



upload and access relevant materials for police practitioners on the *Euromed Knowledge Base (EKB)*. This online platform is hosted on the CEPOL secured electronic network, providing a platform for the Euromed Capacity Building Network for the ongoing exchange of information and experience, as well as for the development of training materials to be uploaded on the EKB. Therefore, the principal objective of the EKB has been to facilitate

the development of educational packages that may be used for training purposes, including educational packages developed after the capacity building actions, including manuals, guidelines and best practices, as well as other vital documents. The platform is managed by the Euromed Capacity-Building Network's points of contact in the South Partner Countries. This ensures that the outcomes of the Euromed capacity-building activities are stored sustainably and contribute to building longstanding networks. To give an example of the training materials, the Euromed Manual on Digital Evidence aimed to focus on taking practical measures that could help to mitigate the use of the Internet. The manual created a standard guideline for the law enforcement agencies and judicial authorities to address the requests (LEJR) for digital evidence to the service providers. Counting on the support of the UN-CTED, and other partners, that law enforcement services and judicial authorities will obtain and use evidence successfully that can facilitate the conviction of criminals. To produce the guidelines manual to request internet-related data and content within the framework of counter terrorism and accessory crimes investigations, prosecution and trials Euromed Police and Justice described the types of requests (judicial and non-judicial), the content and the procedure for each one of the information claims, to be correctly processed by the US Justice. Finally, INTERPOL also provided significant support to the capacity building pillar of the Euromed Police IV project, while enhancing the use of Interpol's databases in the ENI partner countries of the project.

**Figure 6.** Mechanisms established by Euromed Police IV in cooperation with Europol and CEPOL (Source: Euromed Police IV Project Team)



## Conclusion

The longstanding partnerships, training activities and the number of functioning tools and mechanisms fostered by Euromed Police during the four phases of the project have rendered this EU-project an acknowledged regional actor in the Euro-Mediterranean law enforcement cooperation. The achievements of the recently completed Euromed Police IV project lie mainly in its particular approach. As set out beforehand, Euromed Police IV was a capacity-building project with a flexible geographical scope that was based on the identification of operational needs and addressing specific operational issues. It was aimed at the law enforcement community and intended to foster cooperation through working towards the establishment of a friendly and trustful environment for law enforcement cooperation. This model allowed for mutual trust and equal partnership based on commonly identified shared interests. The diversity of political regimes, working methods, cultural values and the ENP countries' strong will to remain masters of their own choices, pushed the EU to rebuild partnerships that are more tailor-made to the needs of those states. Also, South partner countries, in particular, should not only be seen as project beneficiaries, for instance of capacity building activities, but rather as strategic partners in maintaining the security of European countries. The project framework thus allowed for flexible cooperation arrangements that enabled each partner to engage in project activities to the extent they wish, taking into account their political priorities and capacities. This approach provided an opportunity for partners who wanted to deepen their cooperation with the EU while allowing other partners who wanted to be less involved to remain part of expert discussions without any compromise. The project thus enabled partnerships to be more tailor-made and differentiated to reflect better on the different security ambitions, abilities and interests of the partner countries. Furthermore, the structures established by the project allowed for flexible cooperation at different levels of governance, from the technical level to higher levels of representation, granting varying degrees of collaboration in terms of geographical area, from the country, sub-regional to regional initiatives involving all South Partner countries.

Through the Euromed activities and processes, the project did not only improve dialogue progressively but in the contexts of technical, operational and strategic cooperation as well. Euromed Police IV offered South Partner Countries the possibility to engage in the creation of permanent structures that will help them to cooperate with EU agencies such as Europol and CEPOL in a structured way and on an equal footing with EU countries. Thus, Euromed Police IV proposed a unique and integrated model for cooperation where South Partner Countries contributed to shape and build their model for collaboration and thereby a "cooperative regional order" for security in the Euro-Mediterranean area. From an EU point of view, the project helped to implement the European Agenda on Security committed to extend the work of the EU Policy Cycle to neighbouring coun-

tries to enhance the prevalence of human rights, legal approximation and administrative reforms through a better targeted, more dynamic, functionalist and sectorial approach. (European Parliament and the Council, 2016) To uphold the sustainability of the capacity-building efforts of Euromed Police IV, the continuation of the project shall be essential. While the future may bring other approaches in the coming years, the established strategic partnerships, strong institutional and inter-agency synergies, as well as the growing security need for more rapid information exchange have paved the way for the project to become an operational cooperation platform

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