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**Statement Prepared for Session I on Threat Convergence at the Trans-Atlantic
Symposium on Dismantling Transnational Illicit Networks**

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Building on key themes of the opening plenary keynotes, Session I on Threat Convergence will focus on how governments across the Atlantic are confronted by a myriad of security challenges – and key areas of focus of the symposium – such as narcotics trafficking, trafficking in persons, migrant smuggling, fire arms trafficking, cash smuggling, money laundering, corruption, and related crime-terror nexus.

Of particular concern is the inter-regional and interconnected ways in which these threats are developing. When criminal and illicit actors and networks converge, they expose their memberships and operating procedures to greater scrutiny, and potential vulnerability. At the intersection of illicit nodes, we can better follow the leads, track financial flows, uncover corrupt channels, and understand the interconnected links between organized crime and other threats, and to unravel the web of criminality and corruption that often runs through the illicit underworld.

Transnational crime and corruption threaten many of our mutually-shared interests globally. They undermine security and stability, the rule of law, core democratic values, poverty alleviation efforts, and the creation of a level playing field for lawful business activities. Corrupt practices contribute to the spread of organized crime and terrorism, weaken government and market institutions, cast shadows of lawlessness that erode the public trust, and destabilize entire communities and economies. Unmitigated and without strong cooperative law enforcement partnerships, transnational criminal syndicates and networks will continue to undermine the stability and security of all nations through their illicit enterprises.

Law enforcement officials from across the trans-Atlantic region are increasingly encountering the growing sophistication of illicit organizations such as Latin cartels, Eurasian organized criminal syndicates and West Africa gangs. These groups demonstrate a global reach that corresponds with increasing levels of violence. Collectively, these enterprising illicit networks manipulate weak border

controls and lax enforcement to traffick and smuggle tens of billions of euros of narcotics and illegal goods across our borders. They foster insecurity, costing our economies jobs and tax revenue, endangering the welfare and safety of our families and communities, and effectively bypassing law enforcement countermeasures.

Although they are operationally local, such insecurity respects no borders and its spillover effects ripple across many regions. In weakly governed economies or fragile states, criminal groups and illicit power structures can subvert the remaining vestiges of law enforcement and security and help fuel widespread destabilization and insecurity.

In many parts of the world, illicit actors will capitalize on lawlessness, chaos, political unrest, and economic turmoil to amass illicit wealth and create safe havens in ungoverned spaces. As criminal networks weaken law enforcement institutions, fragile states struggling to maintain the rule of law or provide basic services for their populations can not only foster corruption but can also become magnets for terrorist activities; hubs for trafficking in people, drugs, and weapons; and launching pads for exporting violence far beyond their borders.

The confluence of illicit networks and corruption in an enabling environment could facilitate not only the movement of drugs, arms, stolen or pirated goods, and trafficked persons, but also smuggling of terrorists, weapons of mass destruction (WMDs), WMD materials, and other dangerous weapons and technologies that threaten global security. This is true in places like West Africa and Latin America where we now see how increased drug flows, kidnappings, and other crimes can produce “partnerships of convenience” for criminal groups that might sympathize with terrorist groups to tap into the wealth generated by narcotics trafficking and other illicit activities to fund their operations.

Collective Action (Fighting Networks with Networks): A committed network of law enforcement and security officials must focus on the convergence of criminal activities at the critical nodes where illicit networks intersect, where corruption eases criminal transactions, and where illicit actors and their networked communities cross international borders. Faced with the pressing challenges of today’s converging criminal threats, we must take the fight directly to these threats, continue to take more effective steps to understand our adversaries and to strengthen our capabilities to deter, disrupt and dismantle their networks, not only at the end of their efforts, when they carry out acts of violence, but at every step along the way.

This panel will examine more in-depth the threat environment across the Atlantic including how some of these threats are evolving; outline the trends and conditions that allow international organized criminal networks to threaten the collective interests of jurisdictions across the Atlantic by leveraging the global illicit hubs and routes to advance their criminal enterprises; explore the latest strategic mapping of how some of today’s criminal groups operate and how some of the fault-lines are being exploited to bring together criminals, facilitators, black market profiteers, and other illicit actors from across the globe; and discuss how some jurisdictions are responding to combat these converging threats by effective investigations, prosecutions, and regional intelligence-based policing.