NOTE
from: incoming French Presidency
To: CIREFI
Subject: CIREFI work programme

I – STATEMENT OF REASONS

The purpose of CIREFI is to collect, exchange and forward information and to collate documentation on all matters relating to crossing frontiers and immigration. These information exchanges should enable more extensive informal consultations between Member States within CIREFI, thus facilitating coordination between the competent bodies and the harmonisation of practices, policies and legislation in this field. CIREFI’s remit covers illegal immigration and networks.

Several attempts have been made to streamline and review the practices and working methods of the Working Party in order to make it more efficient. Indeed, the criticisms most frequently levelled at this body relate to a lack of constructive work, with discussions often being confined to purely descriptive observations with no genuine analysis or practical recommendations.
Thus, at the Council meeting on 30 November 1994 (the conclusions of which were published in the OJEC on 19 September 1996), the decision was taken to circulate to other Working Parties the information collated and analysed by CIREFI so that its discussions could serve as a basis for initiatives by the appropriate Working Parties.

Moreover, with a view to enhancing the collection of statistical data on illegal migratory flows and assessing the situation in a uniform manner, a decision was taken at the JHA Council meeting on 19 March 1998 to make the Commission's statistical service, EUROSTAT, responsible for collecting and processing data on behalf of CIREFI.

In addition, in order to improve and speed up the exchange of information on the new types and means of illegal migration so that the competent departments receive advance warning of the risks and dangers in store and so that they may better prepare suitable counter-measures, an early warning system was created within CIREFI (Council Decision of 11 May 1999).

Lastly, one of the latest developments in CIREFI, bearing in mind the extension of Europol's remit to cover illegal immigration, has been the intensified cooperation between these two structures in the field of illegal immigration.

While significant improvements have been made to the operation of CIREFI, the extent of these is, however, limited in practice and further progress must be made if this Working Party is to contribute more effectively to the implementation of the guidelines laid down at the Tampere European Council.
Recommendations in the light of the existing situation:

The Presidency wishes to further the discussion underway regarding how to optimise CIREFI in three main areas relating to its work methodology within its current remit:

- improving the exchange of statistical and factual information on the situation of illegal immigration and its networks,
- launching a permanent tool for real-time information on and reaction to immigration risks at external borders,
- keeping a scoreboard of pre-frontier assignments carried out by Member States in countries which are the source of immigration or used for transit, and gradually pooling the potential offered by officers permanently or temporarily posted in those countries.

To achieve these goals, all Member State delegations should be composed as far as possible of practitioners of immigration controls and departments responsible for policing frontiers, so as to make discussions more fruitful.

II – FRENCH PRESIDENCY PROGRAMME

1. Improving the exchange of information on the current situation of illegal immigration and on illegal immigration networks

Observation:

The presentations currently made by each Member State, at each meeting, concerning the illegal migration pressures at its frontiers are difficult to utilise, as they are too disparate to be summarised and to indicate any major trends.
Proposal:

The proposal is for a standard type of report containing indicative figures, comparing data from the same period in the previous year and from previous months in order to establish a "trend" (stability, increase or decrease), but also qualitative factual data.

At each meeting, therefore, every delegation should make a summary – following a uniform model – and submit a written document.

This would, therefore, make it easier for the Presidency to present an analysis at the meeting, with the General Secretariat of the Council being responsible for the subsequent written summary.

2. Launching a permanent tool for real-time information on and reaction to immigration risks at external frontiers by adaptation of the early warning system

Observation:

Networks are increasingly using complex and fast changing operating methods, adapting very quickly to the measures taken by Member States (by changes of itinerary, use of complicit travel agencies, use of false documents, fraudulent visa requests to Schengen consulates irrespective of whether or not they are involved in the final destination, use of weak spots at the external frontier, etc.).

It is necessary that all European partners concerned can receive in real time this operational information requiring a high level of reaction by Member States. However, it seems that the early warning system and the CIREFI contact points are currently being either scarcely or poorly used.
Proposal:

It is necessary to launch, on the basis of the early warning system, a centralised mechanism for collection, daily circulation, analysis and handling of factual information relating to stemming migratory flows.

If this mechanism is to be able to play its role to the full, the information needs to be collected and recirculated to Member States in real time, to enable, where appropriate, spontaneous and immediate reaction on their part.

This task – simple adaptation of the current early warning system – could be entrusted to the General Secretariat, in liaison with the Presidency.

This information, once centralised, will be made digestible by conducting analytical work on the facts observed, their causes and consequences, so that the CIREFI's reports may serve as a means of warning and proposal for the bodies to which they are addressed.

3. Keeping a scoreboard of pre-frontier assignments conducted by Member States in countries which are sources of immigration or used for transit and promoting the pooling of resources

Continuing the considerable work carried out under the Portuguese Presidency, there is a need to design a tool making it possible to obtain a real-time picture of the situation of the network of Member State staff in the source or transit countries and to pool this resource, in accordance with the Joint Action of 14 October 1996 providing for a "common framework for the initiatives of the Member States concerning liaison officers".
It is above all a matter of keeping up-to-date and comprehensive details of permanent and temporary assignments either being conducted or planned in the countries which are sources of immigration.

The aim is to ensure informal and non-binding coordination of the mechanism, enabling each Member State to have a complete overview of the overall network in each of the third countries, so as to streamline the posting of Member State officers by avoiding superfluous representation in some countries or, alternatively, harmful gaps.

It is also necessary to boost the exchange of information and complementarity between different staff posted in the same third country.

The second aim is gradually to pool the greater part of this resource for the benefit of all Member States using a wide variety of methods, taking into consideration local needs, the nature of air links and the means available.

In addition to these three priorities, the dialogue with the USA and Canada and with the applicant countries in preparation for enlargement will also be continued.

Lastly, the French Presidency will endeavour to implement the action plans based on the remit resulting from the High Level Working Party (8939/00 JAI 60 AG 46), and the conclusions of the Feira European Council on illegal immigration.

It will in particular be a question of taking forward the conclusions of the high-level seminar on 20 and 21 July on illegal immigration networks, by attempting to draw up recommendations on best operational practices in this field.
III – MEETING SCHEDULE

By way of indication, the schedule for CIREFI meetings under the French Presidency is as follows:

- 12 July 2000
- 23 and 24 October 2000

The first meeting will be devoted to presentation of the programme and preliminary discussions on the Presidency's three priority areas.

The second meeting, over two days, will provide an opportunity for further discussions on the above areas and to define with the applicant countries recommendations on best operational practices in the fight against illegal immigration networks.

The final meeting should provide an opportunity to pursue the transatlantic dialogue and to decide on a series of proposals based on CIREFI's work.