

Management Board activities between March and September 2020

Written submission by Mr Oliver Rüb, Chairperson of the Europol Management Board (MB) on the occasion of the 7th meeting of the Joint Parliamentary Scrutiny Group on Europol (JPSG)

Introduction:

On the occasion of the 7th JPSG meeting (28-29 September 2020), taking place by videoconference due to the current pandemic-related limitations, the JPSG Co-Chairs have invited the MB Chairperson to submit a written contribution concerning the MB activities between March and September 2020, with a special focus on the COVID-19 crisis.

The MB Chairperson is pleased to provide a concise overview of the main activities performed by the MB during that period, and remains available for any additional information or clarification in response to possible questions or comments from the JPSG Members.

I. 115th MB Meeting (9-10 June 2020)

In June, due to the exceptional circumstances caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the MB meeting was held by videoconference, for the first time ever in the MB history.

From the outset, the MB congratulated Europol on its response to the crisis and its continued operational and analytical support to the Member States in spite of an unprecedented situation.

Nonetheless, the COVID crisis and its consequences on the Agency and the Member States were at the heart of the discussions on many of the MB agenda items.

In particular, the MB discussed the Agency multiannual financial perspectives and its planning for the 2021-2023 cycle with a focus on the impact of the COVID crisis on Europol's activities and resources. In this context, the Board reiterated its call to the EU budgetary authority for providing the Agency with a long-term sustainable budget, not only to meet increasing demands from law enforcement authorities, but also to safeguard the Recovery Plan against the threats posed by criminals potentially thriving on the funding opportunities offered by the EU to the Member States.

The upcoming Europol Regulation recast was another important point of the June MB agenda. The MB was updated by the European Commission on the preparation of its legislative proposal for the strengthening of Europol's mandate. The Board welcomed the upcoming announced consultations with national law enforcement authorities, as it is essential to revisit the Europol's legal framework, also from a practitioner's perspective, to ensure that Europol is best suited to continue providing its unique operational support.

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In addition, the MB discussed: the implementation of the Europol Roadmap on EU Interoperability; ongoing preparations for the streamlining of Europol's Information Management organisational setup; and the annual reports 2019 submitted by the Internal Audit Function and the Data Protection Officer. Moreover, the Board took note of the positive outcome of latest auditing and discharge activities and Europol's response thereof.

Finally, the MB welcomed the Home Affairs priorities of the incoming German EU Presidency, which also included concrete initiatives to shape Europol's future.

The MB took the following decisions:

- The MB elected its Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson for the period 1 July 2020 to 31 December 2021 and appointed the new Chairpersons of the MB Working Groups on Corporate Matters and on Information Management for the same period.
- The MB adopted the Europol Consolidated Annual Activity Report 2019, with the related MB analysis and assessment, as well as a positive MB opinion on Europol's final accounts for the financial year 2019.
- Pertaining to operational matters, the MB adopted a new grant scheme aimed to enhancing national investigations on High Value Targets and to supporting Operational Task Forces in priority cases.
- The MB adopted the new Europol External Strategy 2021-2024, subsequently updating the draft Programming Document (PD) 2021-2023 and launching the relevant consultation with the JPSG with a view to the adoption of this planning document by 30 November 2020, approved working arrangements with third parties, and launched an evaluation of Europol Liaison Officers' deployments to Western Balkans.

II. Europol and COVID-19

Activities

Since the start of the outbreak, in spite of an unprecedented crisis, the Agency has made a significant effort to not only ensure business continuity in the interest of the Member States, but also the health and safety of its staff and the Liaison Officers community. The MB welcomes the prompt measures taken by the Agency to enable telework on a large scale and its constructive approach towards redefining the parameters of its working environment.

Europol has continued providing national authorities with operational and analytical support of a high standard, while paying special attention to a brand new issue of crucial importance: the consequences of the COVID-19 crisis on serious organised crime and terrorism. As a result, since the beginning of the pandemic, Europol has been issuing specialised reports on this matter on a regular basis, and is planning the release of a more general "COVID-19 and crime – Six-month report" shortly.

Europol has consistently pursued the implementation of its Strategy 2020+, thereby achieving tangible results, such as the launching the European Financial and Economic Crime Centre on 5 June 2020 or the steadily increasing activities performed by the European Serious and Organised Crime Centre.

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Planning

As mentioned, notwithstanding the aforementioned achievements, the COVID crisis cannot but impact on the Agency pre-pandemic annual and multiannual planning. At its upcoming 6 - 7 October meeting, the MB will thus assess the Europol six-month Activity Report for 2020 and discuss the Agency's forecast concerning the second semester.

For future years, Europol will need to adjust its planning to the new security landscape arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. As highlighted by the MB at its June meeting, the impact of the multi-billion EU recovery plan on the Security Union will be one major aspect of this foresight exercise.

While, in the fulfilment of its scrutiny responsibilities, the JPSG is contributing to strengthening Europol's accountability, it is also becoming progressively familiar with the Agency's activities in support of national law enforcement authorities and, ultimately, EU citizens. The MB relies on the unique JPSG constituency, embracing both the European Parliament and the national parliaments, to continue promoting support at all levels towards the budgetary and human resources needs of the Agency, including from a multiannual perspective, thus helping it become yet more efficient in carrying out its mission.

MB meetings

As mentioned, the impact of COVID-19 has also affected the organisation of the MB meetings.

Due to the containment measures taken by the EU and its Member States, and with a view to protecting the safety of delegations and of Europol staff, it was necessary to cancel the 10-11 March 2020 MB meeting. Since then, to ensure the continuity of the MB work, the one Board meeting – as well as two of its Working Groups – have taken place through videoconference.

Holding MB meetings through videoconference and the resulting technical and logistical requirements make it necessary to adapt the MB rules of procedure (RoP) to reflect the new situation, as the current rules do not specifically foresee a 'virtual' format. An amended version of the RoP will be tabled for MB approval in October.

Notwithstanding videoconferencing limitations, the MB looks forward to resuming the fruitful cooperation established with the JPSG prior to the pandemic.

The MB Chairperson is therefore pleased to invite a JPSG representative to attend the upcoming October videoconference for specific items. An invitation letter and further practical information will be provided to the JPSG in due course.