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## Written contribution to JPSG Reporting on Europol Activities March- September 2020 with special focus on Covid-19 crisis

### **Introduction**

This report provides an update on Europol activities from March to September 2020 with a special focus on the activities from June until now, as the last comprehensive update was provided on 28 May 2020, under the Croatian Presidency.

The COVID-19 pandemic and the related restrictions that followed had a significant impact on Europol's work. However Europol reacted swiftly and implemented several new actions in order to manage this unprecedented crisis with as little impact on the agency's work as possible, while keeping health and safety as the number one priority.

Since 2016 the agency has in place a Crisis Management Team (CMT), a governance structure that ensures that response to crises such as the COVID-19 are effectively managed. As of February 2020, the CMT has ensured a first response to COVID-19 by implementing a pandemic plan, a COVID-19 exit strategy, the de-escalation plan and scenarios in light of new waves.

From the beginning of the pandemic, Europol started monitoring changes in organised crime and supported Member States' and partner countries' investigations in all these areas. As already mentioned in the written contribution shared at the end of May, Europol has produced a number of strategic and operational thematic assessments (more information below).

Due to the lockdown, and the restrictions to access the Headquarters, Europol provided Operations Directorate staff with appropriate devices (mobile offices) to enable teleworking. Likewise, Europol took measures to provide additional logistical support to guest officers in the hotspots; they remained active and fully able to provide support by performing Secondary Security Checks.

Additionally, Europol and Italy are co-chairing a working group on COVID-19 crime threats and law enforcement responses (more information below).

### **Operational Overview**

The **European Serious and Organised Crime Centre (ESOCC)** supported 533 operations and produced 2,516 reports by the end of Q2.

The **European Cybercrime Centre (EC3)** provided operational support to 296 operations and produced 1,531 operational reports during the first half of 2020. By the end of first half (H1) of 2020, the Europol Malware Analysis Solution (EMAS) counted almost 1,400 users. The EU MS submitted more than 32,000 files via the solution, out of which almost 3,000 were identified as malicious.

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The **European Counter Terrorism Centre (ECTC)** supported 369 operations and prepared 1,143 operational reports. The cooperation with Eurojust in the context of SIRIUS continued.

The new **European Financial and Economic Crime Centre (EFECC)** has provided support to 117 operational cases in Q2, including to OTF EMMA.

A total of **617,172 messages were exchanged via SIENA during H1 2020**, while **the number of SIENA cases initiated reached 40,356**. The number of objects in Europol Information System (EIS) and EIS searches increased compared to the same period last year and reached 1,500,536 and 1,582,059, respectively.

### **Implementation of Europol's Strategy 2020+**

The Strategy Implementation Steering Committee (SISC) continued to monitor the implementation of the organisational changes and developments stemming from the Europol Strategy 2020+. 3 main developments to highlight: the set-up of the European Financial and Economic Crime Centre (EFECC) in June and the Europol Innovation Lab (GDIL) in the Governance Directorate which received overall support at the COSI meeting of 15 May 2020. Additionally an Information Management Secretariat was created and tasked with the elaboration of an overall strategic approach for information management at Europol.

### **Strategic developments and thematic reports**

Here below summarized some of the most relevant strategic developments and thematic reports by Europol since May 2020.

- **European Economic and Financial Crime Centre - EFECC:** On 5th June 2020, the new EFECC at Europol was launched. EFECC is Europol's initiative in the fight against economic and financial crime. It is an operational platform to support Member States in ongoing cases in the areas of tax crime (MTIC and excise), fraud, corruption, money laundering, asset recovery, euro counterfeiting and intellectual property crime.
- **The Terrorism Situation and Trend (TE-SAT) report 2020** was published on 23th June 2020. TESAT pulls together facts and figures on terrorist attacks and arrests in the EU in 2019:
  - A total of 119 foiled, failed and completed terrorist attacks were reported by a total of 13 EU Member States;
  - 1 004 individuals were arrested on suspicion of terrorism-related offences in 19 EU Member States, with Belgium, France, Italy, Spain and the UK reporting the highest numbers;
  - Ten people died because of terrorist attacks in the EU and 27 people were injured.
- **Informal meeting of the Heads of the Justice and Home affairs Agencies (9 July 2020)**, the discussion focused on the experiences regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, lessons learned, expected longer-term impact on the future opportunities for joint investigations.
- **Working group on COVID-19 crime threats and law enforcement responses:** The working group has so far convened two meetings:
  - 16<sup>th</sup> June 2020 (videoconference). Focus on identified and projected COVID-19 related crime threats and organisational and operational challenges.
  - 15<sup>th</sup> September 2020 (physical/videoconference). Focus on preparedness of law enforcement agencies to respond to crises and exploitation of the

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COVID-19 related economic crisis by organised crime groups to infiltrate the legal economy.

**Upcoming developments:** The official launch of the Internet Organised Crime Threat Assessment (IOCTA) 2020 is planned for October.

### **Europol response to COVID 19**

As mentioned in the previous Europol written contribution, Europol has produced several reports on the changing EU criminal landscape due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Since June, Europol published three new reports:

- **Joint EMCDDA- Europol report on EU Drugs Market Impacts of COVID-19 (29/05/2020).** Key findings: Drug markets are resilient and adaptable and the movement of bulk quantities of drugs between EU MS has continued despite of border controls. Cocaine trafficking using maritime shipping containers has continued at levels comparable to or even possibly higher than in 2019.
- **Enterprising criminals- Europol's fight against the global network of financial and economic crime (05/06/2020).** Key findings: Economic and financial crime is particularly threatening during times of economic crisis. During the COVID-19 pandemic, various types of online fraud have been among the most visible criminal activities. These crimes undermine our economy and the financial sector, which deprives us of prosperity, economic growth and employment.
- **Exploiting isolation: offenders and victims of online child sexual abuse during the COVID-19 pandemic. (19/06/2020).** Key findings: There are an increase in the number of child sexual abuse cases and referrals from industry and third party countries have reached record highs. Europol was monitoring the threat and providing continuous support to Member States to identify offenders and victims.
- **Migrant smuggling to the EU during the COVID-19 pandemic (11/06/2020).** Key findings: In the first weeks of the crisis, smuggling networks were exploiting misinformation to Constraints in air travel led to an apparent diversion of routes. However, smuggling networks may see an increase in demand to overcome enhanced border security measures introduced throughout the EU.

## **Annex: Highlights**

### **OPERATION EMMA**

- Operation EMMA has been the major operational success during lockdown, and one of the most significant law enforcement operations in Europe over the last years.
- Europol supported a joint Dutch and French investigation, which made possible to intercept, share and analyse millions of messages that were exchanged between criminals to plan serious crimes.
- This operation has been possible due to the coincidence of an exceptional set of circumstances. To highlight the role of Europol:
  - Providing cyber- experts to extract the information,
  - Ensuring real time information exchange and the cross check against Europol's databases,
  - Acting as the international coordinator
  - And providing the tool for the detection of threat to life situations.
- More than 500 investigations initiated or supported, more than 23 tons of drugs seized, more than 900 suspects arrested, nearly 90 million Euro (equivalent) seized.
- The case was initiated by France. A Joint Investigation Team was created with the Netherlands, in association with Eurojust and Europol.
- The investigation has so far led to the arrest of more than 100 suspects, the seizure of drugs (more than 8 000 kilo cocaine and 1 200 kilo crystal meth), the dismantling of 19 synthetic drugs labs, the seizure of dozens of (automatic) fire weapons, expensive watches and 25 cars, including vehicles with hidden compartments, and almost EUR 20 million in cash. The expectation is that information will be made available in more than 300 investigations. In a number of cases, more arrests are very likely to follow in the coming period.

### **OPERATION NERONE**

- Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, Europol supported a significant number of cases such as Operation Nerone. Law enforcement authorities from Italy, Belgium and France, supported by Europol, dismantled an organised crime network involved in euro counterfeiting.
- The criminal network dismantled in Italy produced 25% of all counterfeit euro banknotes in circulation
- On the action day on 15 July 2020, officers from the Italian Carabinieri Corps (Carabinieri) and its specialised Anti-Counterfeit Currency Unit arrested 44 suspects and froze criminal assets worth €8 million in Italy.
- The criminal network is believed to have produced and distributed over the years more than three million counterfeit banknotes for a total face value of over €233 million;
- The mastermind behind has been involved in for more than 20 years.
- Europol supported the operation by facilitating the exchange of information, providing analytical support and coordinating joint actions in three Member States. During the raid, Europol deployed an expert to Italy to cross-check operational information against Europol's databases in real time and provide specialised knowledge in euro counterfeiting on-the-spot.

### **OPERATION LOS BLANCOS**

- An unprecedented international operation involving judicial and law enforcement authorities, (with the support of Europol ) in 10 countries has resulted in the complete takedown of the Albanian-speaking 'KOMPANIA BELLO' criminal group, one of the most active cocaine-trafficking networks in Europe.
- As a result of this joint action, 20 individuals were arrested in Italy (5), the Netherlands (2), Germany (2), Greece (2), Romania (1), Hungary (1), Spain (1), Albania (5) and the Emirate of Dubai (1).