

Written submission by Mr Oliver Rieß, Chairperson of the Europol
Management Board (MB) on the occasion of the 8th meeting of the Joint
Parliamentary Scrutiny Group on Europol (JPSG)

Introduction:

With a view to the 8th JPSG meeting (1 -2 February 2021) taking place remotely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the JPSG Co-Chairs have invited the MB Chairperson to submit a written contribution concerning the MB activities between September 2020 and February 2021.

In this context, the MB Chairperson is pleased to provide a brief overview of the outcome of the October and December 2020 MB meetings, and of the content of an upcoming short and topic-specific extraordinary meeting.

Since June 2020, to ensure the continuity of its activities, the Board has been meeting by videoconference due to the persistent limitations caused by the pandemic.

The MB Chairperson remains available for any additional information or clarification in response to possible questions or comments from the JPSG Members.

1. 116th MB Meeting (6th October 2020)

The MB commended Europol for its resilient approach in the face of the difficulties created by the COVID-19 pandemic and welcomed the measures taken by the Agency to ensure the provision of continued support to the Member States while protecting the safety of its staff and the Liaison Officers community by successfully developing a new digital working environment. Thanks to its dynamic response to the crisis, Europol had not only achieved impressive operational results but had also made significant further progress in the implementation of the priorities set out in its Strategy 2020+.

The MB welcomed at the meeting Mr Kris Peeters, Vice Co-Chair of the JPSG and Member of the European Parliament (EP). Mr Peeters attended for several items of strategic importance in an observer capacity and expressed the JPSG's appreciation of the fundamental role played by the Agency in countering serious organised crime and terrorism at the service of law enforcement authorities and citizens' security.

Looking to the future, the MB discussed the perspectives for Europol's annual and multiannual 2021-2027 financial outlook, reiterating the need for a sustainable budget that would enable the Agency to meet the increasing expectations of the Member States and the Union in a continuously evolving security environment, as well as to contribute to a crime-free EU recovery from the pandemic.

In this context, the MB expressed its gratitude to the JPSG and the EP's LIBE Committee for their continued support in advocating the necessary resources for Europol in the course of budgetary negotiations .

Continuing its forward-looking discussions, the MB delved into current preparations for the Europol Regulation recast , focusing on the specific areas identified by the Commission in its inception impact assessment . Given its importance for the future of the Agency , the Board decided to pay continued attention to this matter, including with regard to governance-related aspects .

Further, the Board welcomed the progress achieved by Europol in the implementation of its roadmap on EU Interoperability and endorsed the Member States' information management priorities for 2021, pertaining to Europol's core operational systems and developments, including with regard to EU Interoperability .

The MB also took note of the positive outcome of the latest auditing and discharge activities regarding Europol , which reflected the very high governance and accountability standards reached and consistently maintained by the Agency.

Further, the Board amended its Rules of Procedure to reflect the possibility for the MB to hold meetings by videoconference, in order to formalise the arrangements taken in the context of the pandemic .

2. 117th MB Meeting (9-10 December 2020)

At this final meeting for 2020 , MB took stock of the significant progress made by the Agency in the implementation of its Strategy 2020+, including in the areas of information management, crime analysis , and Innovation, to initiate the new Europol's programming cycle by holding a first exchange of views on the preliminary draft Programming Document 2022- 2024.

The Europol Regulation recast continued to be an important point on the MB agenda . In this context, the Board took note that the publication of the related legislative initiative was imminent and especially welcomed the Commission proposal to increase Europol's multiannual budget from 2022 (expected year of entry into force of the amended Europol Regulation) to 2027 to allow the Agency to sustain the envisioned reinforcement of its mandate and resulting capabilities. In this perspective, the Board underlined that the Work Programme 2022 would mark the first step of a long-term multi-annual programming in support to a 'new', stronger Europol .

With the end of the Brexit transition period nearing and the still uncertain outcome of the ongoing partnership negotiations , the Board considered further steps to ensure the continuity of the operational cooperation between Europol and the United Kingdom as of 1 January 2021, in the interest of European citizens' security .

The MB discussed the new concept of Europol's guest experts , designed to ensure agile and specific operational support to Member States, in line with the Strategy 2020 +. Further, the MB considered the evaluation of the deployment of Europol liaison officers in the Western Balkans and consequently agreed to the partial continuation of the project until its final termination in December 2021 . The MB also updated the yearly list of Europol's priority partners and approved working arrangements with third parties.

Additionally, the MB endorsed the new Europol Information Management strategy and took a number of other decisions, such as the adoption of a reasoned opinion on the appointment of the Deputy Executive Director for Operations for submission to the Council , and the revised Europol Security Rules .

Finally, the Board was presented with the priorities of the incoming Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the EU, with a focus on Home Affairs.

3. Extraordinary 11th MB Meeting (27 January 2021)

The main goal of this extraordinary meeting is to allow the MB to fulfil its core planning functions and obligations in the best possible conditions, and timely enough to comply - where possible - with the timetable set out for the subsequent steps.

In particular, the MB will discuss the draft Programming Document (PD) 2021- 2023 for final adoption and the preliminary draft PD 2022 -2024 for endorsement.

As a next step, on behalf of the MB, the MB Chairperson will transmit the PD 2021- 2023 and the multiannual programming component of the PD 2022- 2024 to the JPSG , as applicable in accordance with the Europol 's legal framework .
