

## EUROPOL'S 20 MOST NOTEWORTHY OPERATIONS



Over the past 20 years, Europol has supported many thousands of criminal investigations. We dug deep in the collective memory of our staff and asked them about their 20 most noteworthy operations.

2002

### THE EUROPEAN JOINT UNIT ON PRECURSORS (EJUP)

First ever 'Joint Investigation Team' in Europe

Crime field:



Drug trafficking

Participating countries: Belgium, France, Netherlands, Germany and United Kingdom

The EJUP was a multi-national operational unit based at Europol, part funded by the European Commission. Its focus was on combatting the flow of precursor chemicals used in the illicit production of drugs (all drugs). EJUP collected, developed and provided tactical intelligence to directly assist in the ID of suspects active in this field and this led to numerous arrest and disruptions of criminal operations. Its initiation and development was overseen by Rob Wainwright, former Director at Europol, in his then position as Head of the International Division at the NCIS.

2005

### OPERATION PACHTOU

First international operation on such a scale supported by Europol

Crime field:



Facilitation of illegal immigration

Participating countries: France, Italy, United Kingdom, Greece and Turkey

More than 30 addresses of a wide range of people, suspected of being involved in the clandestine smuggling of thousands of illegal immigrants into the EU, were searched yesterday morning. In total, 53 main suspects were arrested in France (22), Italy (18) the United Kingdom (7), Greece (3) and Turkey (3). Subsequently, 56 illegal immigrants were arrested in France, mainly in the region of Calais but also in Paris. The United Kingdom was the main destination country, although immigrants were also smuggled to the Scandinavian countries, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany. Europol supported the exchange of information, provided intelligence analysis and assisted with operational support in Paris, France during this day of action.

2007

## OPERATION KOALA

First press conference organised in The Hague

Crime field:



Child sexual exploitation

**Participating countries:** Australia, Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden, United Kingdom.

The case began in 2006 when a child sexual abuse video was discovered in Australia. This particular video had been produced in Belgium. A Belgian perpetrator and two victims were identified. Consequently, the sole producer of the material – a 42-year-old Italian national, was arrested by the Italian national police in Bologna. After his arrest, the Italian authorities forwarded all digitalised material, including customer details to Europol. The material was analysed and disseminated to the 19 countries in which some 2 500 'customers' were identified.

2010

## OPERATION SHOVEL

First ever mobile office deployment

Crime field:



Money laundering

**Participating countries:** Ireland, United Kingdom, Spain and Belgium

Operation SHOVEL focused on the activities of the extremely violent Irish-based Kinahan organised crime group involved in drugs and weapons trafficking across Europe. Europol assisted Ireland, the UK, Spain and Belgium to detect the criminal proceeds related to the group's criminal activities and to help the affected Member States in disrupting their money-laundering network. The operation took place in May 2010. Besides several analysis reports produced by Europol, which focused on the different roles within the criminal group as well as the assets at their disposal in the EU, the USA and Asia, Europol effectively supported the day of action by simultaneously deploying three mobile offices in Ireland, Spain and the UK. Over 700 investigators were involved and 38 arrests were executed in the three countries, in addition to numerous house searches.

2010

## OPERATION WATANI

First ever operational meeting funded by Europol (November 2010)

Crime field:



Drug trafficking

**Participating countries:** Germany, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Austria, Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria and United States

This was a far reaching investigation into the diversion and trafficking of a critical precursor chemical (acetic anhydride) necessary in the illicit production of heroin in Afghanistan). Vast quantities (over 80 tonnes) were diverted from the EU and shipped toward Afghanistan. Significant results accrued also arrests and there was much media attention.

2011

## OPERATION RESCUE

Crime field:



Child sexual exploitation

**Participating countries:** Australia, Belgium, Canada, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Italy, Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Romania, Spain, United Kingdom and United States

250 suspects were arrested and 252 children safeguarded following a sting against child sexual offenders member of the online forum – boylover.net – that promoted sexual relationships between adults and young boys. The website operated from a server based in the Netherlands and at its heights, boasted up to 70 000 members worldwide. Instrumental to the success was the unique role played by Europol in identifying the members of the child sex abuse network. In particular, it was the work of Europol analysts in cracking the security features of a key computer server at the centre of the network which uncovered the identity and activity of the suspected child sex offenders. Europol subsequently issued over 4 000 intelligence reports to police authorities in over 30 countries in Europe and elsewhere, which has led to the arrests of suspects and the safeguarding of children.

2011

## OPERATION OPSON

First operation of its kind

Crime field:



Intellectual property crime / Counterfeiting and Product Piracy / Food fraud

**Participating countries:** Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Romania, Spain, Turkey and United Kingdom.

Hundreds of tonnes of fake and substandard food and drink including champagne, cheese, olive oil and tea have been seized in this first joint INTERPOL-Europol coordinated operation across 10 countries, effectively disrupting the organised criminal gangs behind this activity. This was the first operation of its kind which has been running every year ever since, with a record number of 67 participating countries in 2018?. To this day,, over 38 million litres of counterfeit drinks and 27 000 tonnes of potentially harmful food have been removed in total from the consumer market in Europe and beyond as a result of Operation OPSON.

2012

## OPERATION OAKLEAF

First ever operation to crash our secure communication network due to the high volume of contributions received

Crime field:



Organised property crime

**Participating countries:** Austria, Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden,

Operation OAKLEAF started in November 2010 on the initiative of Ireland, to target the activities of the Rathkeale Rovers, a mobile organised crime group of Irish origin specialised in the theft and illegal trade of rhino horn. As part of their criminal enterprise, this highly organised group is establishing companies all over Europe in an attempt to legitimise and cover their illegal activities. After EU and non-EU law enforcement authorities agreed that a coordinated approach was vital to tackle this group, several operational meetings were organised at Europol. The meetings highlighted how dozens of 'minor' cases that have occurred all over the EU are ascribable to this group. 31 members of this organised crime group were arrested, and 69 cases of thefts identified, including 58 related to rhino horn (95 horns stolen)..

## 2013

### OPERATION VETO

Highest international media attention

Crime field:



Sports corruption

**Participating countries:** Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Moldova, Netherlands, Slovakia, Slovenia, and United Kingdom

An international criminal network was involved in widespread football match-fixing. The network's activities took the form of a sophisticated organised crime operation, which generated huge illicit profits estimated in the hundreds of millions by gambling on fixed matches in the Asian betting markets. Illegal operations were run out of Singapore with bribes up to EUR 100 000 paid per match. 14 persons were convicted and sentenced to a total of 39 years of prison in Germany, 425 match officials, club officials and players investigated and 380 suspicious matches identified.

## 2014

### OPERATION ONYMOUS

First cyber takedown of that scale

Crime field:



Cybercrime

**Participating countries:** Bulgaria, Czechia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and United Kingdom.

On 6 November, law enforcement and judicial agencies around the globe undertook a joint action against dark markets running as hidden services on Tor network. The action aimed to stop the sale, distribution and promotion of illegal and harmful items, including weapons and drugs, which were being sold on online 'dark' marketplaces. Operation ONYMOUS, coordinated by Europol's European Cybercrime Centre (EC3), the FBI, the U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE), Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) and Eurojust, resulted in 17 arrests of vendors and administrators running these online marketplaces and more than 410 hidden services being taken down. In addition, bitcoins worth approximately USD 1 million, EUR 180 000 euro in cash, drugs, gold and silver were seized. The dark market Silk Road 2.0 was taken down by the FBI and the U.S. ICE HSI, and the operator was arrested.

## 2014

## OPERATION ARCHIMEDES

Biggest ever coordination centre set up at Europol

Crime field:



Serious and organised crime

Participating countries: All 28 EU Member States + Australia, Colombia, Norway, United States, Serbia and Switzerland.

Between 15 and 23 September, law enforcement authorities from 34 countries, joined forces in Operation ARCHIMEDES. The operation targeted organised crime groups and their infrastructures across the EU in a series of actions in hundreds of locations. Europol played a central role in coordinating and directing the overall operation from a 24/7 operational coordination centre in The Hague, manned by Europol officials, liaison officers from all involved countries and colleagues from international law enforcement partners.

2015

## OPERATION VERTIGO

Scale and complexity of this €300 million carousel fraud

Crime field:



Economic Crime, MTIC (Missing Trader Intra Community) fraud

Participating countries: Czechia, Germany, Netherlands and Poland

In this carousel fraud case, the organised crime group behind the criminal activity used a sophisticated infrastructure (buffer companies, missing traders, companies functioning as 'alternative payment platforms' to facilitate money laundering and crime-related money transfers) spread over various Member States and a number of third States, defrauding EU citizens of approximately EUR 320 million in tax revenues. Several coordination between November 2013 and October 2015. Czechia, Germany, Poland and the Netherlands established a JIT. Europol provided extensive analytical support and intelligence sharing.

2016

## OPERATION AUSTRIAN LORRY

EMSC operation with highest media impact

Crime field:



Facilitation of illegal immigration

Participating countries: Austria and Hungary.

On 27 August 2015, 71 irregular migrants were found dead in a lorry that had been abandoned close the Hungarian-Austrian border. Fearing they might be spotted by law enforcement authorities along their journey, the smugglers did not allow the migrants to open the back doors of the vehicle. Also no ventilation alternatives whatsoever were provided. This eventually led to the asphyxiation and death of all migrants. The lorry crossed the border into Austria, where it was abandoned on the motorway. Police officers who arrived later on to tow away the abandoned vehicle, discovered the dead bodies. In a very short period of time, Europol was able to identify four suspects by cross-checking the information received against its databases. Austrian authorities issued European arrest warrants under the names of the suspects, which eventually led to the immediate arrest of the key facilitators in Hungary.

2016

## JOINT OPERATIONAL TEAM ROSE OF THE WINDS

Biggest operation in this crime field

Crime field:



Drug trafficking

Participating countries: France, Greece, Italy and Spain.

Several international investigations against organised crime networks active in large scale drug trafficking were launched as early as 2013 between Italy, France, Greece, Spain and France in the framework of the Joint Operational Team (JOT) ROSE OF THE WINDS. In 2015, four cargo ships carrying over 61 tonnes of cannabis resin were interdicted in Palermo, Malaga, Cagliari and again Palermo, and 46 crew members arrested. In the framework of this same JOT, a major Moroccan drug kingpin, who had acted at the peak of the hashish supply chain was arrested in Italy in December 2016.

2017

## OPERATION ALPHABAY/HANSA

Most sophisticated cyber takedown

Crime field:



Cybercrime

Participating countries: United States, Canada, Thailand, the Netherlands, Germany and Lithuania.

In summer 2017, two joint operations led by the US FBI and the Dutch National Police, with the support of Europol and other law enforcement partners, shut down AlphasBay and Hansa, two of the largest marketplaces responsible for the trading of over 350 000 illicit goods like drugs, firearms and cybercrime tools, such as malware. AlphaBay's servers were seized with the help of authorities in Thailand, Lithuania, Canada, Britain and France. The operation included the arrest of suspected AlphaBay founder, a Canadian citizen detained on behalf of the US in Thailand. The Dutch National Police took control of Hansa on 20 June, seizing servers in Lithuania, the Netherlands and Germany. The action permitted surveillance of criminal activities on the marketplace before it was shut down in July.

2017

## OPERATION GAZEL

Crime field:



Intellectual property crime / Counterfeiting and Product Piracy / Food fraud

Participating countries: Spain, Belgium, France, Italy, Portugal, Romania, Switzerland and United Kingdom.

The Spanish Guardia Civil, in coordination with Europol, dismantled an organised crime group that was trading horsemeat in Europe that was unfit for human consumption. In 2013, Irish authorities detected beefburgers containing horsemeat. Meat companies, frozen food companies and fast-food companies were affected by the investigation, which led to the identification of a Dutch citizen known in the horsemeat world, although his whereabouts were then unknown. In 2016, the Spanish Guardia Civil was able to locate the Dutch suspect in Calpe, Alicante. From there he led the activities of the organisation, putting his most trusted men in charge in every country affected by the scam. The arrest of the leader of the criminal group was subsequently carried out in Belgium. 65 other members of the organisation were arrested in Spain. Different police actions were simultaneously carried out in France, Portugal, Italy, Romania, Switzerland and the United Kingdom.

2018

## OPERATION CARBANAK

Highest performing press release of last year

Crime field:



Cybercrime

Participating countries: Spain, United States, Romania, Moldova, Belarus and Taiwan.

The leader of the crime gang behind the Carbanak and Cobalt malware attacks targeting over a 100 financial institutions worldwide was arrested in Alicante, Spain, after a complex investigation led by the Spanish National Police. The criminal operation has struck banks in more than 40 countries and has resulted in cumulative losses of over EUR 1 billion for the financial industry. The magnitude of the losses is significant: the Cobalt malware alone allowed criminals to steal up to EUR 10 million per heist.

2018

## OPERATION AMAQ

Crime field:



Terrorism

Participating countries: Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, France, Netherlands, Romania, United Kingdom and United States.

On 25 April 2018 law enforcement authorities of the European Union Member States, Canada and the USA launched a joint action against the so-called Islamic State propaganda machine in order to severely disrupt their propaganda flow. The takedown operation was coordinated by the European Union Internet Referral Unit (EU IRU) within the European Counter Terrorism Centre at Europol's headquarters. With this takedown action, targeting major IS-branded media outlets like Amaq, but also al-Bayan radio, Halumu and Nashir news, IS's capability to broadcast and publicise terrorist material has been compromised.

2018

## OPERATION POLLINO

Largest coordinated action against Italian organised crime

Crime field:



### Mafia-Structured Organised Crime Groups

Participating countries: Netherlands, Italy, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg.

During a joint action day on 5 December 2018, judicial and law enforcement authorities in the Netherlands, Italy, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg have taken coordinated and decisive action against the 'Ndrangheta. The operation, code-named 'Pollino', is the biggest of its kind to date in Europe. Several hundred police, including special intervention units, were engaged in today's action, together with prosecutors and investigative officers. As a result of close cooperation, almost 4,000 kg of cocaine and hundreds of kilos of other drugs have been detected across Europe during the course of the investigation. By 12.00 on the action day, 84 suspects have been reported arrested, including high-ranking members of the mafia network.

2019

## OPERATION EAST RIVER

Second largest darknet market taken down by law enforcement

Crime field:



Cybercrime

Participating countries: Germany, Netherlands and United States.

This Europol-coordinated police operation resulted in the arrest of 3 individuals suspected of running the Wall Street Market, the world's second-largest dark web marketplace. Close to its takedown, a total of 63 000 sales offers were placed on the online illegal marketplace, and more than 1 115 000 customer accounts and 5 400 sellers registered. Authorities also seized the site's servers and more than €550 000 in cash. The arrests were coordinated by Europol's Dark Web Team which works together with EU partners and law enforcement across the globe to reduce the size of this underground illegal economy.

TARGET GROUPS:

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