

25 ARRESTS IN SERIES OF POLICE ACTIONS AGAINST AN ALBANIAN DRUG TRAFFICKING GANG

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[Press Release](#)





Today, 25 suspects tied to an Albanian-speaking organised crime network were arrested during a simultaneous operation carried out in Belgium, Spain, the Netherlands, Germany and France which saw the involvement of over 600 police officers on the ground.

This cross-border sting follows a complex investigation initiated in 2017 by the Belgian Antwerp Local Police (Politiezone Antwerpen), in cooperation with the Belgian Federal Police (Federale Politie), Spanish Civil Guard (Guardia Civil), the Dutch Police (Politie), the French Judicial Police (Police Judiciaire) and the German Federal Criminal Police Office (Bundeskriminalamt), Sachsen-

Anhalt State Police (Landespolizei Sachsen-Anhalt) and the Joint Drugs Investigation Group of the State Criminal Police Office of Saxony-Anhalt and the Customs Office of Hannover (Gemeinsame Ermittlungsgruppe Rauschgift des Landeskriminalamtes Sachsen-Anhalt und des Zollfahndungsamtes Hannover).

The investigation led by the Antwerp Local Police uncovered that the drugs were being smuggled hidden in containers into Belgium before being distributed further throughout Europe by using vehicles equipped with sophisticated hidden compartments.

The same criminal group is also believed to have been managing [cannabis](#) plantations in Spain and Germany where they cultivated and processed the marijuana, before it was transferred to other European countries for further sale and distribution.


To this day, this operation has resulted in:

- 9 arrests in Belgium, 6 arrests in Spain, 3 arrests in the Netherlands, 6 arrests in Germany and a further one arrest in France, bringing the total number of arrests to 25;
- Some 30 house searches;
- 6 marijuana plantations dismantled;
- the seizure of €60 000 in cash, mobile phones, handguns and ammunition.

The alleged mastermind of this network features among those arrested in Belgium by a tactical squad of the Antwerp Local Police.

This clan-based organised crime group was hierarchically structured, with branches operating internationally. Some of its members arrested today have a history of [drug trafficking](#) in different countries.

Europol supported this investigation by providing tailored expertise and extensive analysis support and facilitating the exchange of information through its secure channels. A number of operational meetings were organised by Europol all over Europe with a view to filling the investigative gaps at the international level and coordinating the simultaneous actions aimed at dismantling the entire structure of this criminal group.

On the action day, two Europol experts were deployed on the spot in Belgium and one in Spain to allow for the real-time exchange of information and crosschecks of the data gathered in the course of the action against Europol's databases. [Eurojust](#)  assisted in the execution of European Investigation Orders and Letters of Request among the involved parties.

This investigation is part of the Italian Direzione Investigativa Antimafia (DIA) Project @ON network,

an initiative to tackle mafia-type organised crime groups active in Europe. The project was launched at Europol's headquarters in 2018 and comprises 15 Member States and Europol. The @ON network, with its EU-funded Project ONNET which aims to finance the relevant operational activities, targets the mafia-type structured criminal groups in their entirety, rather than one or more of their specific criminal activities. Within the framework of this project, three Italian antimafia experts were deployed to the command centre in Belgium for this particular operation to support the various operations happening in the field.

Such operational achievements as the one today follow the increasing engagement of European law enforcement authorities to tackle Albanian-speaking organised crime. Back in November 2019, in the framework of the @ON Project, experts on this type of criminality convened in Antwerp, Belgium, to discuss how to better tackle these poly-criminal mafia-type clans.



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