

330 ARRESTS DURING EU-WIDE JOINT ACTION DAYS

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[Press Release](#)

The joint activities targeted the trafficking of drugs and weapons and the facilitation of illegal immigration in Southeast Europe



Spain, supported by Europol, coordinated Europe-wide joint action days targeting facilitation of illegal immigration, drug trafficking and trafficking of firearms. The operation took place between 15 and 18 September 2021. The operational activities involving 27 countries (17 EU Member States and 10 non-EU countries) were also supported by Eurojust, Frontex, INTERPOL and other international organisation.*

The intelligence-led and multidisciplinary approach of these EMPACT Joint Action Days contributed to the results of this successful cooperation between a wide range of law enforcement authorities including police, immigration agencies and border control agencies.

330 ARRESTS AND 37 NEW INVESTIGATIONS

The operational activities took place mainly in Southeast Europe, while other countries from across Europe participated by sharing intelligence and conducting

operational actions at the national level. The actions, involving almost 11 000 officers on the ground, led to 330 arrests related to different crimes including drug trafficking, the facilitation of illegal immigration, document fraud and the trafficking of firearms. The investigated activities also led to the detection of a number of offences related to the facilitation of illegal immigration and related crimes and legal violations such as visa fraud. Following the concerted actions, law enforcement authorities initiated 37 new investigations.

Overall results:

- › 33 418 people checked
- › 724 locations searched
- › 22 605 vehicles inspected
- › Seizures including 154 firearms (65 pistols, 86 rifles and assault rifles, 3 gas alarms), 57 hand grenades and explosives, 2125 pieces of ammunition, 719 kg of cannabis and 920 marijuana plants)

WHERE THERE ARE DRUGS, THERE ARE WEAPONS

The Western Balkans region is a key hub for the trafficking of firearms into the EU. Multi-national criminal groups source the weapons predominantly from countries from the Western Balkans, where human resources with expertise in firearms are widely available. The firearms are then trafficked to the EU, mainly to Belgium, France, Germany, Spain and the Netherlands. The illegal trade in weapons is closely connected to the trafficking of drugs, specifically to cocaine trafficking. In some cases, criminal networks exchange weapons for drugs. They also use the weapons to gain and maintain control over the lucrative drugs markets.

Weapons traffickers offer high quantities and a wide range of firearms, including old and new military grade weapons. Some of the firearms are converted blank-firing weapons, imported from Turkey. Weapons are often smuggled as part of multi-commodity shipments or hidden in vehicles. Their prices in the Western Balkan are currently on the rise, though they are still a lot cheaper than in Western Europe.

COORDINATION CENTRE SET UP AT EUROPOL

Europol supported the coordination of the action days and facilitated the exchange of information between the participating countries. During the course of the operation, Europol set up an operational centre to enable the swift exchange of operational information between the participants and provide live analytical support to field operatives. During the action week, Europol also deployed two experts to Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina to facilitate the real-time exchange of communication between the participating authorities.

*Participants

EU Member States: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden.

Non-EU Countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, North Macedonia, Serbia, Moldova, Montenegro, Kosovo*, Switzerland, Ukraine, USA.

EU Agencies: Europol, Eurojust, Frontex

International and institutional partners: Customs Cooperation Working Party (CCWP) CCWP, IPA/2019 (Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance) countering serious and organised crime in the Western Balkans, INTERPOL, PCC-SEE (Police Cooperation Convention For Southeast Europe Secretariat), SEESAC (The South Eastern and Eastern Europe Clearinghouse for the Control of Small Arms and Light Weapons), UNODC.

** This designation is without prejudice to positions on status and is in line with UNSCR 1244/1999 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo declaration of independence.*

Headquartered in The Hague, the Netherlands, Europol supports the 27 EU Member States in their fight against terrorism, cybercrime, and other serious and organized crime forms. Europol also works with many non-EU partner states and international organisations. From its various threat assessments to its intelligence-gathering and operational activities, Europol has the tools and resources it needs to do its part in making Europe safer.



In 2017 the Council of the EU decided to continue the EU Policy Cycle for the 2018 - 2021 period. It aims to tackle the most significant threats posed by organised and serious international crime to the EU. This is achieved by improving and strengthening cooperation between the relevant services of EU Member States, institutions and agencies, as well as non-EU countries and organisations, including the private sector where relevant. Facilitation of illegal immigration, drug trafficking and trafficking of firearms are among the priorities for the Policy Cycle. From 2022, the mechanism becomes permanent under the name [EMPACT 2022+](#).

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