

EIGHTEEN ARRESTED IN SPAIN IN A STING AGAINST MIGRANT SMUGGLERS OPERATING OVERSEAS

12 Jul 2021

[Press Release](#)

The criminal networks facilitated the illegal entry of more than 400 Albanian nationals to the United Kingdom and the United States





An investigation led by the Spanish National Police, with close cooperation with the Albanian Police and law enforcement and immigration authorities in Austria, France, Italy, Slovenia, Kosovo*, Portugal, the United Kingdom and the United States and supported by Europol, led officers to dismantle an organised crime group involved in migrant smuggling and document fraud.

Results from the action day on 29 June 2021, Tarragona, Spain

- 18 arrests
- 2 house searches
- Seizures include: counterfeit documents, financial documentation, records of the illegal activities, electronic equipment, cash and various drugs (cannabis, cocaine and synthetic drugs)

Since 2019, the investigation has examined the growing use of specific types of falsified documents by Western Balkan immigrants. Previous phases of the investigation led to the dismantling of a group of criminals identified on the Caribbean island of Saint Maarten who smuggled Albanian immigrants with falsified documents to the United States. Couriers travelling to Kosovo and Albania to distribute the falsified documents were also arrested in December 2020. Four print shops for forged documents in Kosovo were dismantled in March 2021. So far, the investigation has led to 46 arrests, more than 400 migrants identified at airports and 1 000 false documents seized.

Eventually, the investigation targeted a criminal network based in the United Kingdom and Ireland, which managed the flights and the reception of the migrants into those countries. Intelligence shared by the US Department of Homeland Security, Homeland Security Investigations (HSI) led to the identification of a high-value target in Spain. From there, the suspect and his accomplices facilitated the illegal entry of migrants through various airports in Spain and Portugal into the United Kingdom, while providing them with forged French identity cards. The operation in Europe is also connected to three ongoing criminal investigations in the

United States.

Europol coordinated the investigation, facilitated the exchange of information, and provided analytical and forensic support. On the action day, Europol deployed a virtual command post to enable the real-time exchange of information between investigators and deployed an expert to Spain to cross-check operational information against Europol's databases and provide leads to investigators in the field. Europol also financed the deployment of officers from the Albanian State Police who took part in the action day in Spain.

* UN Security Council Resolution 1244.



In 2010 the European Union set up a [four-year Policy Cycle](#) to ensure greater continuity in the fight against serious international and organised crime. 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](#) is one of the priorities of the Policy Cycle.

CRIME AREAS

[Facilitation of Illegal Immigration](#)

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